

Study on the Cultivation of Intercultural Awareness of College Students under the Ideological and Political Background of Curriculum

-- Take Understanding Contemporary China: A Reading and Writing Course as an Example

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Abstract

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that to “tell Chinese stories well, spread the voice of China well”, and comprehensively promote the ideological and political construction of the curriculum are the key measures for foreign language and literature majors to answer the question of the times “to build a strong country, what can foreign language learners do”, among which cross-cultural awareness is particularly important. Based on Baker’s framework of intercultural awareness, this study takes English majors of Southwest University as the research objects, adopts a hybrid design method combining quantitative and qualitative methods, that is, through questionnaire survey, classroom observation, teacher-student interviews and other methods, and takes the textbook Understanding Contemporary China: A Reading and Writing Course as an example. It focuses on how English reading and writing course can effectively improve students’ intercultural awareness. Through analyzing the results, it is concluded that the course is of great help to students’ intercultural awareness. The development of this course is helpful for students to expand cultural knowledge, improve intercultural awareness and ability, and promote the implementation of the fundamental task of moral cultivation, improve the effectiveness of education and the core competitiveness.

Keywords

Intercultural Awareness; Understanding Contemporary China: A Reading And Writing Course; English Reading and Writing Course.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, with the deepening of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become the key to promote international understanding and cultural integration. As a key stage to cultivate future pillars of society, higher education shoulders the strategic mission of cultivating new people for the Party and the country who are well-developed and worthy of national rejuvenation (Chen and Liu, 2023). It has become an urgent problem to be solved that how to integrate cross-cultural awareness into college English teaching under the background of curriculum ideology and politics. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring how English reading and writing courses can effectively improve students’ intercultural awareness, aiming at improving English majors’ intercultural communicative competence.

2. Literature Review and Research Status

2.1. Intercultural Awareness Concept Definition

Intercultural Awareness (ICA) has been widely concerned and popularized in the field of language learning since the 1980s. Regarding the definition of ICA, there are various perspectives in academic circles.

Some scholars regard it as the core component of Intercultural Communication (ICC), emphasizing deep understanding of self and others' cultural customs, as well as the ability to identify cultural commonalities and differences (Gudykunst, 1979; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Byram, 1997). Chen and Starosta (1998) further refined ICA into three levels, from surface cultural characteristics to deep cultural feelings. On the other hand, researchers such as Shao and Zhong (2012) and Chen (2019) focused ICA on learners' acculturation and integration ability, emphasizing the dual accumulation of tolerant attitude and language and expression ability.

It is worth noting that Baker (2011) proposed a more comprehensive and independent concept of ICA, arguing that it is a conscious understanding of the role of cultural forms, practices and reference frames in cross-cultural communication, and can be flexibly applied to practical communication. Baker further distinguishes between conceptual ICA, which focuses on cultural attitudes, knowledge, and expressive skills, and practice-oriented ICA, which emphasizes the ability to apply such knowledge in real-time communication. This definition comprehensively describes ICA from the three aspects of cross-cultural knowledge, cross-cultural attitude and cross-cultural communication skills, which has a high comprehensiveness and practicability. Therefore, this study chooses to adopt this definition to explore the ICA development of English majors in cross-cultural learning. This not only helps to understand the connotation of ICA deeply, but also provides theoretical support and practical guidance for improving students' intercultural communication ability.

2.2. Intercultural Awareness under the Ideological and Political Background of Curriculum

In recent years, the ideological and political concept of curriculum has been widely promoted and practiced in the field of higher education, emphasizing the integration of ideological and political philosophy into the whole process of education and teaching, aiming to achieve the goal of educating people in the whole process and in all aspects. However, in the study of foreign language curriculum, especially in the cultivation of intercultural awareness (ICA), there are still deficiencies. The existing researches mainly focus on the theoretical discussion, such as the definition, connotation and implementation path of ICA. Yue, Zhuang (2024) and other scholars put forward strategies such as telling Chinese stories well and analyzing cultural representations of English texts, while Wu (2022) discussed the application of teaching concepts, contents, methods and evaluation in ideological and political teaching of intercultural communication courses from the perspective of teachers. However, at the practical level, the feasibility and effectiveness of these studies in actual operation still need to be further verified and deepened, and there is still a lack of systematic and operable guidance on how to effectively integrate cross-cultural awareness with curriculum ideology and politics in specific courses.

2.3. Summary

To sum up, intercultural awareness (ICA) is a complex cognitive concept, and scholars have various definitions of ICA. Some regard it as an integral part of cross-cultural communication (ICC), emphasizing the understanding of the cultural customs of self and others, as well as reducing ambiguity and uncertainty in cross-cultural communication. Others see it as a closely related but separate concept of ICC, focusing on the flexible application of cultural knowledge,

attitudes, and skills in real-time communication. Among the various definitions, Baker's was adopted in this study because of its comprehensiveness and inclusiveness to explore the development of ICA in intercultural learning for English majors.

Under the background of curriculum ideology and politics, the cultivation of cross-cultural consciousness has become a new focus in the field of higher education. The proposal and practice of the ideological and political idea of the curriculum aims to run ideological and political work through the whole process of education and teaching, and realize the whole process of education and all-round education. However, there are still some problems in the study of curriculum ideology and politics of foreign language courses, such as the lack of close combination of theory and practice and the lack of operability. In response to these problems, scholars have put forward different paths and methods, which provide new ideas and directions for cultivating English majors' intercultural awareness under the background of curriculum ideology and politics.

It can be seen that the cultivation of intercultural awareness (ICA) is of great significance to English majors. It can not only help students better understand and adapt to different cultural backgrounds, reduce barriers and misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication, but also improve their international perspective and cross-cultural communication skills, laying a solid foundation for them to achieve greater success in the era of globalization. At the same time, under the background of ideological and political education in the curriculum, combining the cultivation of cross-cultural consciousness with ideological and political education will help to cultivate talents in the new era who have both national feelings and global vision, which is of great significance for promoting the connotative development of higher education and improving the quality of talents' independent training.

Although the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness has received extensive attention and research in the field of language learning, there are relatively few relevant studies in the context of curriculum ideology and politics. Most of the existing studies focus on the theoretical level, and there is a lack of effective guidance and case support on how to combine the cultivation of cross-cultural consciousness with curriculum ideology and politics in practice. In addition, for English majors, how to develop their ICA in intercultural learning and integrate it with the philosophy of curriculum politics is also an urgent problem to be solved. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap and explore the cultivation path and practical strategies of English majors' cross-cultural awareness under the background of curriculum ideology and politics.

3. Theory Basis

Baker's intercultural awareness (ICA) model consists of three elements (cultural knowledge, cultural attitude and intercultural communication skills) and three levels (basic, advanced and intercultural awareness). Based on this model, this study focuses on the development of ICA in one-semester cross-cultural learning for English majors. Through in-depth analysis of students' growth in cultural knowledge, attitudes and communication skills, as well as how to understand their own culture and its influence at the basic level, they can demonstrate an understanding of cultural complexity and relativity at the advanced level, and finally communicate effectively across cultural boundaries at the intercultural awareness level. Based on the intercultural learning path of cultural knowledge in teaching materials, it analyzes the influence of intercultural learning on various elements and levels of students' intercultural awareness.

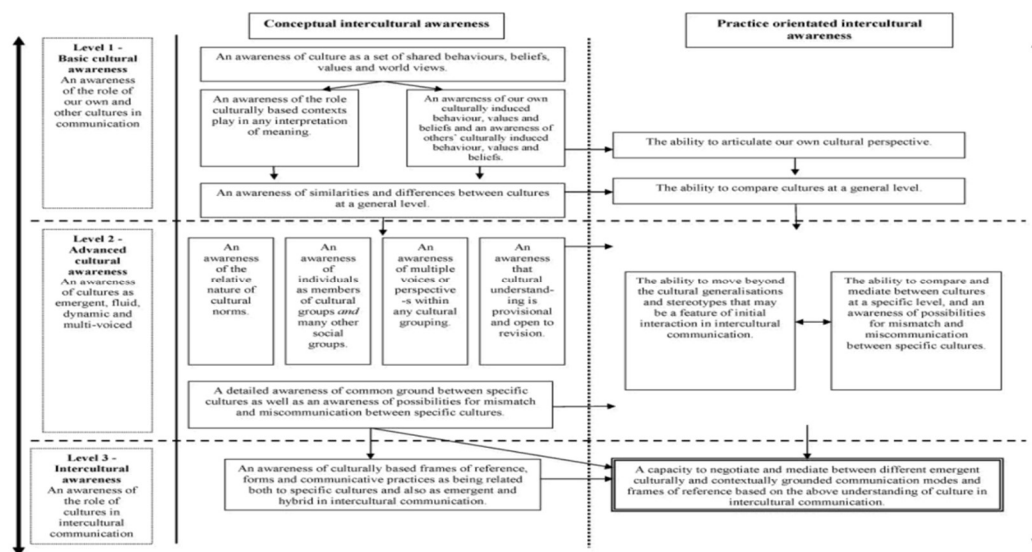


Figure 1. Baker's intercultural awareness (ICA) model

4. Research Process

4.1. Research Questions

This study adopts the intercultural awareness (ICA) framework proposed by Baker (2011) and divides intercultural awareness into three elements: cultural knowledge, cultural attitude and intercultural communication skills, as well as three levels: basic cultural awareness, advanced cultural awareness and intercultural awareness. This paper analyzes the influence of cross-cultural learning on various elements and levels of students' cross-cultural consciousness. The study explores two main questions:

- (1) In the process of intercultural learning based on the cultural knowledge of the textbook, in what aspects have students' cross-cultural awareness been developed?
- (2) How does the intercultural awareness of students develop in English reading and writing courses?

The answers to the above questions can test Stier's (2006) hypothesis that targeted teaching can effectively promote the improvement of students' intercultural awareness and intercultural competence and Nguyen's hypothesis (2021) that the development of intercultural awareness is conducive to the improvement of students' intercultural competence, the enhancement of problem-solving ability, and the positive impact on critical thinking and learning motivation.

4.2. Research Object

In this study, English majors of Grade 2022 in the School of Foreign Languages of Southwest University are selected as the research objects. There are 13 classes of teacher training and 3 classes of non-teacher training, with 20 students in each class, 320 people in total. The placement system is systematic and random, so that students in different classes within the same professional category are nearly equal in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and teacher ability.

4.3. Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire is designed to investigate students' cross-cultural awareness. The questionnaire design follows the principles of effectiveness, simplicity, science and innovation, and uses the Likert scale to set the answers to each statement as "strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree". The questionnaire is divided into two parts: the pre-test before the

course and the post-test after the course, respectively, to investigate their cross-cultural consciousness.

Zhang(2007) divides the intercultural quality of teachers and students into three first-level dimensions: intercultural knowledge, intercultural ability, and intercultural attitude. At the same time, based on the description of the relevant content in the National Standard for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in General Colleges and Universities (Foreign Language and Literature), the research establishes the second-level dimensions of knowledge, ability and attitude and the test questions. The first part is personal information, including school, college, grade, major and class; The second part is the cultural knowledge test, the content of which is the translation of ten Chinese-English phrases selected in the textbook; The third part is about students' cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, cross-cultural awareness and ability, and their views on teachers' teaching. This part includes 20 questions. So there are 34 questions in the questionnaire.

4.4. Classroom Observation

Classroom observation refers to a research method in which researchers perceive, record and analyze educational phenomena in classroom situations in a purposeful and planned way to obtain factual data (Wang and Li, 2014). The classroom observation in this study mainly refers to the LICC paradigm of classroom observation proposed by Cui (2010), and selects some observation points for classroom observation, that is, students' pre-class preparation, listening concentration and duration, and participation in classroom activities are observed and recorded. The teaching process and teaching behavior of teachers in the classroom, the use and presentation of teaching materials by teachers, the application of curriculum learning objectives and resources, and the overall classroom atmosphere, etc.

4.5. Interviews with Teachers and Students

After the end of all experiments, the researchers interviewed 16 students and 4 substitute teachers in different classes in the form of one-to-half structured interviews. The students were selected by random sampling, and the interviews focused on the research content in the following aspects.

(1) Contents of student interview:

- ① What have you learned after learning English reading and writing course?
- ② What do you think about the use of the textbook Understanding Contemporary China: A Reading and Writing Course?
- ③ Do you think the curriculum and teaching materials can effectively raise intercultural awareness?

(2) Contents of teacher interview:

- ① Do you think it is reasonable to offer English reading and writing courses and use the teaching material Understanding Contemporary China: A Reading and Writing Course?
- ② How do you evaluate students' enthusiasm and participation in class?
- ③ How do you think students' intercultural awareness is improved after they participate in the course and use the textbooks?

5. Results and Analysis

5.1. Questionnaire Survey Results and Analysis

According to the survey data, compared with the results of the pre-test questionnaire, the accuracy of the post-test questionnaire in the second part of English-Chinese translation is significantly improved, and the proportion of "strongly agree" in the third part is significantly increased in terms of students' cultural knowledge, cultural understanding, cross-cultural

awareness and ability, and their views on teachers' teaching. It shows that students have greatly improved their cross-cultural knowledge, ability and attitude after participating in English reading and writing courses.

5.2. Analysis of Classroom Observation Results

In terms of student learning, students will prepare for class according to the tasks assigned by the teacher, and the degree of preparation will decrease with the progress of the teaching week, but will reach an obvious peak when there is a definite test or other detection forms. In class, 90% of the students can reach 80% or more of the class time in the state of listening attentively. The overall participation of students in class is high, and the participation in class activities and class discussions can reach 100%.

In terms of teachers' teaching, the classroom is basically composed of pre-class introduction, background introduction, textbook content explanation, teacher-student interaction and other aspects, which are reasonable around the set teaching objectives, and reasonable time allocation in each link. In the classroom, teachers make full use of teaching resources to mobilize students' enthusiasm and increase the richness of the classroom.

In terms of the nature of the course, the pre-set learning objectives of each course combine the content of the textbook to be mastered with the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness, highlighting the characteristics and purpose of the course. In the aspect of curriculum culture, teachers make the whole curriculum very distinctive through novel teaching design, situation creation and rich use of resources.

5.3. Analysis of Teacher and Student Interview Results

According to the results of interviews with teachers and students, the teaching material Understanding Contemporary Chinese: A Reading and Writing Course and the course have been unanimously recognized and praised by teachers and students. Students have not only greatly improved the knowledge needed for cross-cultural communication, but also enhanced their recognition of the necessity and importance of cross-cultural awareness in terms of attitude, and acquired certain communication skills needed for cross-cultural communication.

5.3.1. Enrichment of Cultural Knowledge

Students are in the first stage of cross-cultural learning. In the process of learning, they acquire a lot of cultural knowledge and provide them with cross-cultural knowledge background. At the same time, they realize that cultural differences are reflected in various cultural phenomena. The cultural knowledge they acquire mainly focuses on the different cultural phenomena between China and the west. One interviewed student mentioned that, for example, in the opening sentence of a meeting, Chinese people usually use "Have you eaten yet?" to greet with each other, while the west people use "What's the weather like?" to say hello. The cultural knowledge acquired in class is in all aspects, which strengthens the intercultural foundation of students.

5.3.2. Openness to Cultural Diversity

In the process of continuously understanding cultural phenomena, students gradually learn to be open to culture-induced behaviors, beliefs, and values, and to decentralize from their own language and cultural context to the language and cultural context of others. That is, students can understand the role of language and culture in intercultural communication by analyzing different cultures and reflecting on communication in an increasingly complex intercultural context. They can thus be more receptive to other cultures and open to cultural diversity. One interviewed student was quite convinced that after learning the root causes of different modern cultural phenomena in class, such as Chinese collectivism and Western individualism, which influence the different political systems of China and the West, it is easier to adopt an integrated attitude towards diverse cultures after understanding the cultural root causes behind them.

5.3.3. Improvement of Communication Skills

Communication skills are indispensable and crucial in the process of intercultural communication. Intercultural learning is the process of understanding human communication and interaction. Therefore, when explaining and sharing different cultures, communication skills are the direct driving force to reduce misunderstandings and increase mutual understanding. Interviewees mentioned that in the practice of oral communication in class, they can continuously improve their communication skills. At the same time, they also realized that when communicating with people with different cultural backgrounds, they must understand each other's cultural background or communication methods in advance to avoid unnecessary friction.

6. Conclusion

Based on the Intercultural awareness (ICA) model proposed by Baker (2011), this study explores the effect of the course on the cultivation of intercultural awareness of students in the School of Foreign Languages of Southwest University by using Understanding Contemporary China: A Reading and Writing Course under the background of curriculum ideology and politics. This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to comprehensively understand the development of intercultural awareness of students after participating in English reading and writing courses through questionnaires, classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students. In addition, this study also reveals some challenges and shortcomings in the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness. Although most students have significantly improved their cultural knowledge and attitudes, some students still show some anxiety and lack of confidence in their actual intercultural communication skills. This indicates that in the future teaching, it is necessary to further strengthen the practical link, through more simulation and real cross-cultural communication activities, to help students better apply what they have learned and improve their practical communicative ability.

All in all, this study not only provides an empirical basis for the curriculum thinking and politics in foreign language teaching, but also provides valuable experience and enlightenment for the cultivation of cross-cultural consciousness in higher education. The cultivation of cross-cultural consciousness under the ideological and political background of curriculum should connect with the society trend; In the teaching process, teachers should pay attention to cultivating students' cultural sensitivity and critical thinking ability. Schools and educational institutions should actively build platforms for cross-cultural communication to help students exercise and improve their communicative skills in real cross-cultural situations. Future studies can further explore the cultivation path of cross-cultural awareness under different disciplinary and professional backgrounds, and contribute more wisdom and strength to the construction of a cross-cultural education system with Chinese characteristics. Cultivating interdisciplinary talents with global vision and cultural confidence will become an important mission and responsibility of higher education in the new era.

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