

Research on Cross-Cultural Competence and Training Strategies of Foreign Language Learners in Minority University*

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This paper takes 360 college students from a foreign language college in a national university as the research object. Through cross-cultural understanding, cross-cultural attitude and cross-cultural communication, the current situation and influencing factors of minority college students' cross-cultural ability training are investigated. First, minority college students have positive cross-cultural attitudes, however, due to the lack of media literacy and cross-cultural understanding education, there are certain conflicts and preconceived notions about the cognition of different cultures. Secondly, minority college students' self-confidence in language communicative competence actively promotes the formation of cross-cultural self-confidence. Thirdly, the current focus of foreign language teaching is still on the cultivation of language communicative competence. Students are confused about language communicative competence and inter-cultural competence. Moreover, due to the inconsistency of cross-cultural courses, minority college students' ability to understand their own cross-cultural knowledge only involves the accumulation of superficial cultural knowledge. Therefore, minority colleges and universities should give full play to their multi-cultural background, improve teachers' cross-cultural literacy, set up a systematic cross-cultural curriculum, support rich cross-cultural practice, and construct a multi-cultural and national characteristic cross-cultural education.

Keywords: minority, foreign language learners, attitude, cognition, communication

Since the Belt and Road Initiative, China has signed cooperation documents with more than 100 countries and international organizations, and achieved remarkable results. In the context of building a community with a shared future for mankind, foreign language education shoulders the historical responsibility of cultivating international talents with good cross-cultural skills for the China and the world. There are many challenges and opportunities for the reform of foreign language education in colleges and universities to optimize the talent training model and transform the classroom teaching model. In 2018, the Ministry of Education of China promulgated the "National Standards for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Ordinary Colleges and Universities", which clearly positioned cross-cultural competence as an important training goal of foreign language education, aiming to cultivate Chinese international talents with international vision and cross-cultural communication skills. China is rich in multi-cultural resources, diverse nationalities, and multi-cultural integration, which provides a solid platform for China to build cross-cultural education. The Belt and Road

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Initiative has brought new opportunities for the socio-economic development of ethnic minority areas. Minority areas are to deepen exchanges and cooperation between China and Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia and other countries. It forms an important transportation hub of the Silk Road Economic Belt, and is a center for promoting business logistics and promoting culture, science and education. It is the core area of the Silk Road Economic Belt. As the main force of cross-cultural exchanges between ethnic minority areas and countries and regions along the “Belt and Road”, ethnic minority college students play an extremely important role in diplomatic, economic and cultural exchanges. Cultivating minority college students’ good inter-cultural ability is an important subject of foreign language education in ethnic colleges and universities.

The Development of Cross-Cultural Education in China

The development of inter-cultural competence originated in the United States. After World War II, the United States took the promotion of the European Recovery Plan as an opportunity to send peace troops, diplomats, experts and scholars in various fields to the developing countries it supports. At the same time, the ethnic issues in the United States, the sharp increase of immigrants and international students, and the cultivation of cross-cultural competence came into being under the historical opportunity. With the advancement of the depth and breadth of China’s reform and opening up, the reform of foreign language education in colleges and universities has experienced from language ability to communication ability, from communication ability to cross-cultural communication ability, and from cross-cultural communication ability to cross-cultural ability.

The goal of cultivating foreign language talents in China has gone through the progressive development of “speaking, reading, writing and translating” language ability to communicative ability, and from cross-cultural communication ability to cross-cultural ability. Under the background that foreign languages mainly serve economic development, cross-cultural research focuses on foreign language teaching, language and culture relations, and comparative studies of Chinese and Western cultures. In the field of research on cultivating inter-cultural competence, the theoretical discussions on the connotation of inter-cultural competence in the Chinese research community have been mostly a review of foreign theories, and empirical research has been less (Hu, 2005; Peng, 2005; Pan, 2008). Pan Yaling (2008) put forward a development model of inter-cultural competence through empirical research. It focuses on cultural empathy, tolerance, openness, flexibility and other factors in personality characteristics, and pays attention to the dynamic and developmental nature of cross-cultural ability training. On this basis, Cong Mingcai (2014) took culture, cross-culture and the relationship between language and culture as the theoretical basis. Combined with the teaching situation and foreign language teaching rules of foreign language majors in colleges and universities in China, the cross-cultural ability training mode of foreign language majors in colleges and universities is discussed, emphasizing that the realization of cross-cultural communication requires three conditions: cross-cultural knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, and cross-cultural competence. It is pointed out that cultivating inter-cultural competence is a dynamic, endless and open long-term learning process. In terms of long-term development, Xu Lisheng and other scholars put forward a “progressive-interactive training model” for cross-cultural competence based on the existing cross-cultural competence training model and the new requirements of the global context for cross-cultural competence. The model takes the cross-cultural personality as the training goal, and incorporates the five elements of knowledge, motivation, skills, context, and effect. In

the context of globalization, the cross-cultural competence of learners is cultivated in a step-by-step way of knowledge acquisition, motivation training, and skill training. It pays attention to the important role of communication and interaction between the two sides of communication in achieving communicative effects and cultivating cross-cultural competence (Xu, 2011; Xu & Sun, 2013). In general, the research on the development of cross-cultural competence in China is based on the awareness, attitude, skills and effective communication of traditional theories, and the acquisition of cross-cultural knowledge, the dynamics and locality of cross-cultural competence are highly valued. In recent years, Chinese scholars generally advocate that the cultivation of cross-cultural competence in foreign language education must proceed from the actual situation in China (Pan, 2008; Sun, 2016; Xu, 2018; Zhang, Yu, & Shen, 2018). Sun Youzhong (2016) advocated that the foreign language community should attach great importance to the cultivation of cross-cultural competence in the new round of education and teaching reform, and actively explore new paths for the cultivation of international talents in foreign language majors. Xu Jia (2018) proposed a framework that reflects the characteristics of local culture, such as cross-cultural empathy. The cultivation of inter-cultural competence requires not only theoretical research and teaching practice, but also foreign language learners' perception of inter-cultural education, providing intuitive feedback for the development of inter-cultural education. At present, there is still insufficient research on the cross-cultural competence of ethnic minority college students. In this paper, ethnic minority college students are taken as the research object, and the cross-cultural competence and its influencing factors of ethnic minority college students are investigated through three dimensions, such as cross-cultural understanding, cross-cultural attitude, and cross-cultural communication. It provides a certain reference for exploring the construction of cross-cultural education with ethnic characteristics in minority colleges and universities.

Study Design and Findings

Investigation Method

This study adopts quantitative research method. The research objects are foreign language learners in a national university. By coordinating with teachers and counselors, the questionnaires are distributed during class time to ensure the recovery rate of the questionnaires. Based on the theory of inter-cultural competence proposed by Byram (1997), a self-assessment questionnaire on inter-cultural competence of foreign language learners was designed. The contents include: (1) the acquisition of cross-cultural knowledge; (2) cross-cultural attitude (evaluation of other countries); and (3) self-assessment of cross-cultural competence (language communication ability, cultural understanding ability).

Survey on the Status Quo of Inter-cultural Competence

(1) Inter-cultural understanding ability

In the existing foreign language teaching, both compulsory courses and elective courses have relevant cultural courses, such as “~Cultural Overview”, “~Literature Elective Reading” and other courses. In this survey, 66.1% of students have taken foreign cultural knowledge courses, and 62.5% of students have taken national culture courses. However, only 28.6% of the students have studied relevant knowledge of international practices and regulations. In foreign language teaching, courses related to the cultural knowledge of the target country have certain settings. More than 60% of the students also actively learn the knowledge of their own and foreign cultures in the elective courses. It can be said that foreign language learners are highly motivated to

acquire cross-cultural knowledge. Culture consists of the obvious surface culture and the unaware deep culture. In this survey, the average acquisition of foreign language learners' knowledge of national geography, life style, social structure, history, politics, literature and art and other fields of the language countries they are learning is not high. In particular, it represents the social composition of the target country's ideology, behavior and values, and the degree of knowledge acquisition in the fields of politics and literature and art is low. It can be said that foreign language learners are interested in the superficial cultural knowledge of other cultures and have a good grasp of them. The lack of knowledge and understanding of deep culture, that is, cross-cultural cognitive ability needs to be further improved.

(2) Cross-cultural attitude

Cross-cultural attitude is an important factor affecting the effect of cross-cultural communication. Among the respondents of this survey, first of all, 86.7% of the students expressed interest in foreign cultural knowledge, and nearly 70% of the students actively purchased books and actively acquired relevant knowledge through various channels including classroom teaching. In the statistics of the way students obtain information from the target country, the top five among the domestic media are Chinese TV programs (64.7%), Chinese teachers (64.4%), Chinese online news (64.0%), Chinese textbooks (55.7%), and Chinese magazines (49.9%). The top five foreign language media are foreign language movies (78.4%), foreign teachers (51.7%), foreign language TV programs (38.0%), foreign language textbooks (37.8%), and foreign language literary works (29.0%). The media and teachers have a very important influence on the way foreign language learners acquire information from other countries. Secondly, in the question and answer of "Do students have a country they hate?", 37.5% of the students clearly have a country they hate, such as Japan, South Korea and India, as well as African countries that are far apart. However, 70% of the students and country haters have no experience of any form of contact. It can be seen that foreign language learners have certain resistance and preconceived notions that do not necessarily come from cross-cultural practice.

(3) Inter-cultural communication skills

Is there a direct relationship between foreign language proficiency and inter-cultural competence? Among the questions, 33.3% of the students strongly agree, 35.8% of the students somewhat agree, 22.5% of the students neither agree nor disagree, 6.7% of the students slightly agree with this point of view, and 1.7% of the students disagree with this point of view. It can be seen that most foreign language learners equate foreign language proficiency with cross-cultural competence, which is also the current situation of difficulty in constructing cross-cultural education in foreign language teaching in our country. In addition, in the question and answer on whether they can understand the meaning expressed by the other party in cross-cultural communication, 21.7% of the students said they can fully understand, 36.9% of the students said they can understand it somewhat, and 33.3% of the students said they generally understand. Students have high confidence in their own inter-cultural communication skills.

Investigation and Conclusions

First of all, foreign language learners in ethnic colleges and universities are highly motivated to learn the cultural knowledge of other countries. Ethnic minority college students themselves have a multi-cultural life and study background. In the process of the fusion of minority culture and Chinese culture, they have a positive attitude towards different cultures. However, due to the influence of mass media, it is inevitable that students

will have a certain positive or negative attitude in the process of cognition of unknown culture. Cultivating critical cross-cultural awareness and good media literacy are important components of developing cross-cultural competence. Secondly, in the current curriculum setting, culture-related courses are mostly concentrated in grades 2-3. It is incoherent and is not conducive to the systematic development of students' cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, teachers play an important role in cross-cultural education. Cultivating teachers' international vision and inter-cultural competence is the key to constructing inter-cultural education.

Minority colleges and universities shoulder the burden of cultivating international talents with good cross-cultural skills for the Belt and Road Initiative. The optimization and reform of curriculum setting is an important practice in the cultivation of cross-cultural competence. Therefore, in the setting of cultural knowledge courses, more attention should be paid to the continuity of grades and the asymptotic nature of course content. In a broad sense, cross-cultural understanding refers to cultural understanding between countries, and in a narrow sense, it also includes cultural understanding between ethnic groups and regions. The practice of cross-cultural exchange should not be limited to exchanges between countries, and should give play to the characteristics of multi-ethnic learning in minority colleges and universities. It can overcome the lack of cross-cultural communication practice limited by geographical space, and can also strengthen national unity, national understanding, and enhance national cultural confidence. In the development of cross-cultural communication skills, on the basis of the courses that cultivate language communication skills, setting up comprehensive practical courses to develop cross-cultural competence, making students aware of the non-equivalence and complementarity of foreign language competence and inter-cultural competence. The cultivation of inter-cultural competence has the characteristics of long-term, diverse, and dynamic. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously explore a compound and open curriculum model on the basis of theoretical discussion to construct an educational environment for cross-cultural competence training.

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