

Research on the Development of Intercultural Communication Skills of College Students

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With the advancement of globalization, the interactions among various ethnicities domestically getting deeper, and the cultural contacts are getting more diversified. In this paper, we conducted an empirical analysis through a web-based questionnaire to investigate the current situation of intercultural communication ability of college students in China and to find out the problems in the process of intercultural communication among college students. The results of the study show that the intercultural communication ability of the survey respondents is in the middle to upper level. The main problems of intercultural communication among college students are they are lacking intercultural knowledge, skills and awareness. Based on the results of the survey, this study proposes strategies to improve the intercultural communication ability of college students, hoping that it can provide reference suggestions for the implementation of intercultural communication education in higher education institutions in China.

Keywords: college students, intercultural communication ability, status quo, strategy

Introduction

Globalization has become a new feature of our era. In the context of globalization, exchanges between countries (Hu, 2011) and nations are becoming increasingly frequent. This has brought more opportunities (Wu & Meng, 2008) for mutual understanding and learning between different cultures, and forced us to confront more cross-cultural contacts and collisions, and the problems in the process of intercultural communication have been gradually exposed. The differences between different ethnic groups due to their regional history and other differences, and the strengthening of intercultural communication can help different ethnic groups to better seek common ground while preserving differences. It also deepens the inclusiveness of other ethnic groups' cultures based on the understanding and application of their own cultures. Therefore, in order to better adapt to international cultural development, we must accurately understand and evaluate the current level of intercultural communication skills of college students, and help them improve their intercultural communication skills on this basis.

Survey

In this paper, we designed and developed a questionnaire to measure the intercultural communication skills of college students, taking into account the actual situation of college students, by referring to Byram's intercultural communication skills model (Byram & Michael, 1997). After the questionnaires were collected, the data were

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sorted and analyzed by using SPSS data analysis software and Excel table statistics. In addition to personal information, there were forty descriptive items in the questionnaire, including four dimensions (Li, 2020) of knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness, which were distributed online. Students were involved in various disciplines of arts and sciences. A total of 126 questionnaires were collected, and the return rate was 100%. The basic background information of the survey respondents is shown in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1

Basic Background Information of Survey Respondents

Information	Gender		Ethnicity		Nature of discipline	
	male	female	Han Chinese	Ethnic minority	Arts	Sciences
Quantity	54	72	91	35	77	49
Proportion	42.9%	57.1%	72.2%	27.8%	61.1%	38.9%

The questionnaire is divided into four dimensions: intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, intercultural skills, and intercultural awareness, each dimension with 10 questions. Each question is divided into five different levels: “not compliant at all”, “not that compliant”, “somewhere in between”, “somewhat compliant”, and “fully compliant”, and is scored on a five-point Likert scale (Qi, 2006) from 1 to 5. The scores were calculated in the order of 1 to 5. The overall reliability (Cronbach’s α) coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.812, as shown in Table 2-2.

Table 1-2

Reliability Statistics of Intercultural Communication Skills Questionnaire for College Students

Name	Cronbach’s α	Item number
Total survey questionnaire	0.812	40

Results

From the data in Table 2-1, we can see that the mean value of intercultural communication ability of 126 respondents is 3.47, the minimum value is 1, the maximum value is 5, and the standard deviation is 1.21. The respondents’ scores in intercultural attitude are outstanding, but the mean values of intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills and intercultural awareness are 3.46, 3.32 and 3.15 respectively, which need to be strengthened in these three dimensions.

Table 2-1

An Overview of Intercultural Communication Skills

Title	Minimum (M)	Maximum (X)	Average (E)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Order
Total survey questionnaire	1	5	3.47	1.21	/
Intercultural knowledge module	1	5	3.46	1.32	2
Intercultural attitudes module	2	5	3.89	0.97	1
Intercultural skills module	1	5	3.32	1.05	3
Intercultural awareness module	1	5	3.15	0.83	4

There are differences in cross-cultural attitudes and awareness among students of different genders. Female students are more tolerant in cultural differences such as values, food habits and even taboos. Male students are more likely to have a strong interest in certain cultural elements.

There were no significant differences in intercultural communication skills in terms of scores gained among students of different ethnic groups, with minority ethnic students being slightly more likely than Han Chinese

students. Students majoring in liberal arts scored slightly higher than science students in intercultural communication skills, especially in the area of intercultural knowledge and skills. In terms of reading, compared with liberal arts students, science students read less literature, and if they do read, it is mainly for pleasure and relaxation (Han, Lin, Jia & Tang, 2010). Science students tend to be rational and calm in their social style, and have relatively weak cross-cultural awareness and low motivation.

Table 2-2

Comparison of Differences in Intercultural Communication Competence Score Indicators by Gender, Ethnicity, and Nature of Discipline

	Average (E)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sex	3.34	0.99
	3.68	0.92
Ethnicity	3.46	1.05
	3.61	1.01
Subject nature	3.69	1.17
	3.32	1.01

Findings

From Figure 1, we can see that compared with mastery of the local culture and social etiquette of their own countries, students generally have insufficient knowledge of foreign cultures. This is especially true for the knowledge of world history, geography and culture, and the least knowledge of foreign communication taboos and religious etiquette, which reflects the lack of foreign culture education in foreign language teaching in higher education institutions at present.

Cross-cultural knowledge dimension

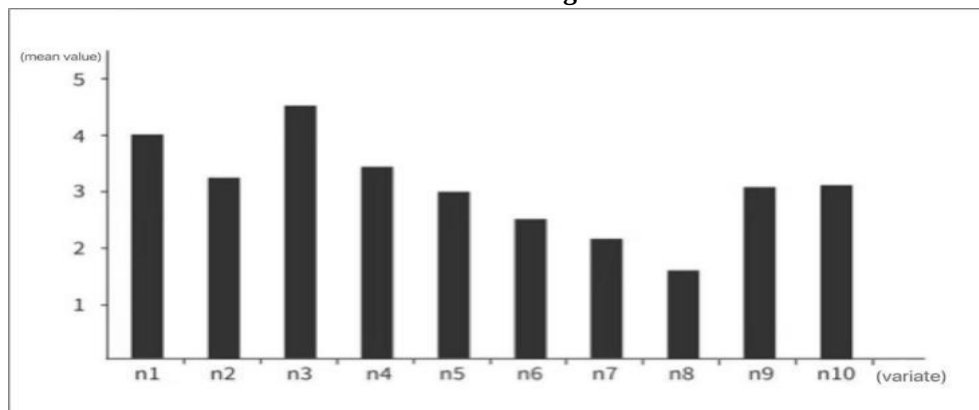


Figure 1. Cross-cultural knowledge evaluation form n1 = what culture is; n2 = what intercultural communication is; n3 = basic social etiquette; n4 = Chinese history and geography; n5 = Chinese lifestyle and values; n6 = world history and geography; n7 = some foreign communication taboos; n8 = some religious etiquette; n9 = proficient in at least one foreign language; n10 = read books on intercultural communication or have experience in intercultural communication.

Figure 2 shows that students have high scores on the dimension of intercultural attitude, and most of them are willing to communicate with and learn from people from different cultures, and can objectively evaluate foreigners and different cultures. This indicates that the students have a strong tolerance and openness to different cultures, and most of them are willing to learn and empathize. However, the survey shows that college students show little initiative in cross-cultural communication. This is mainly due to the students' fear of being embarrassed

or embarrassed by imperfect or inappropriate behaviors in intercultural communication. On the other hand, some students have low confidence in their own language proficiency, which will also greatly reduce their willingness to initiate intercultural communication.

Dimensions of cross-cultural attitudes

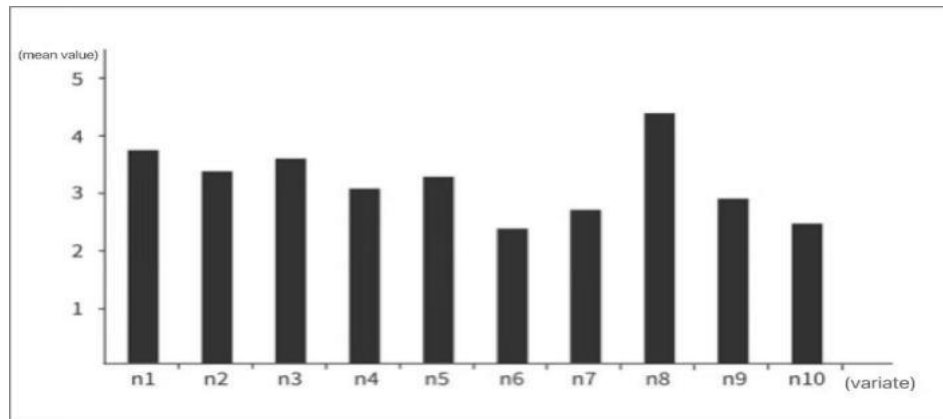


Figure 2. Cross-cultural attitude evaluation form n1 = communicate with people from different cultures; n2 = learn foreign languages and understand different cultures; n3 = learn from people from different cultures in the process of intercultural communication; n4 = tolerate values, food habits and even taboos from different cultures; n5 = certain cultural elements of other countries; n6 = adjust my behavior appropriately so that I can communicate more effectively with foreigners; n7 = take advantage of various opportunities to communicate with foreigners; n8 = evaluate foreigners and different cultures; n9 = not be frustrated when communicating with foreigners; n10 = actively learn about the differences between cultures.

Cross-cultural skills dimension

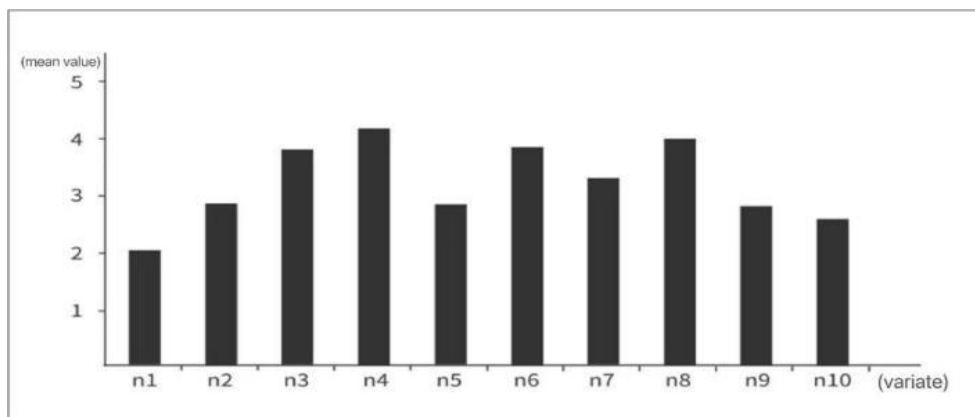


Figure 3. Cross-cultural skills evaluation form n1 = communicate with people in a foreign language that I am good at; n2 = learn foreign languages and cultures; n3 = use body language or other means of communication when communication in a foreign language is impaired; n4 = communicate politely with people from different cultures; n5 = a multi-perspective view of cultural events that occur in other countries; n6 = avoid offending foreigners with my language or behavior when communicating with them; n7 = avoid talking about private or taboo topics when communicating with foreigners; n8 = use social etiquette in intercultural communication; n9 = actively seek ways to resolve intercultural conflicts or misunderstandings when they arise; n10 = acquire knowledge about intercultural communication through contact with foreigners.

From Figure 3, it is easy to see that students generally believe that they can communicate politely with people from different cultures and have sufficient confidence in using social etiquette in cross-cultural communication. This indicates that college students have good social behavior, behave appropriately, and know how to use social etiquette. At the same time, the data also show that most students are not confident enough to talk about

“communicating with people in a foreign language that I am good at” and “the ability to learn foreign languages and cultures”. The reason for this is that most students lack the ability to practice speaking in their daily lives (Tian, 2007) and have little opportunity to interact with foreigners, so they rarely have the opportunity to train in real intercultural situations. On the other hand, the large proportion of midterm and final exam results in the foreign language learning process at university has to some extent made students focus more on their own written exam skills than on their intercultural communication skills.

As can be seen in Figure 4, students’ intercultural awareness ratings were generally low, at the lowest mean of the four-dimensional model of intercultural communication. It is difficult for students to recognize the reasons why different cultural circles are biased against their views and to be aware of potential cultural conflicts in communication and take effective measures to avoid them. The fundamental reason for this phenomenon is that the campus life is relatively detached from the real intercultural communication environment, and their role in communication cannot be truly felt.

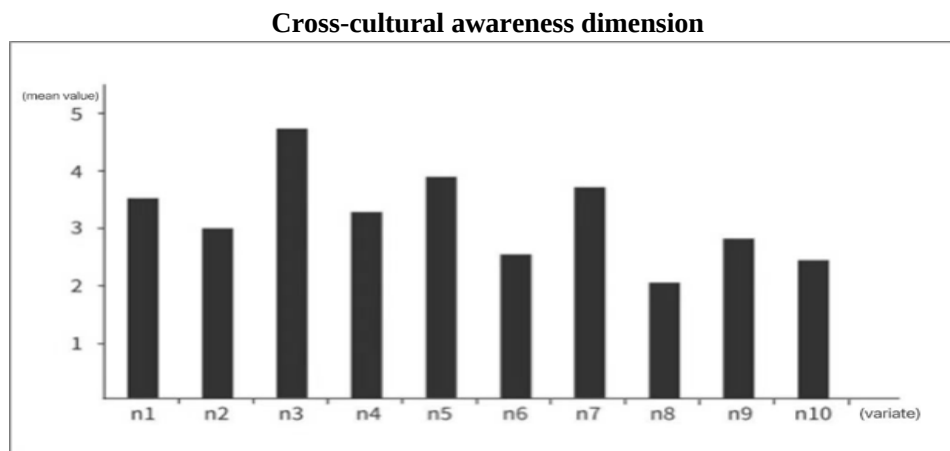


Figure 4. Cross-cultural Awareness Evaluation Form n1 = the cultural differences between the two sides of a communication; n2 = my own cultural identity; n3 = each culture has strengths and weaknesses; n4 = the need to adapt culturally diverse communication strategies to specific situations; n5 = my personal habits and preferences are shaped by the culture of a particular situation; n6 = potential cultural conflicts in communication and take steps to avoid them; n7 = an objective attitude toward my own culture; n8 = the perceptions of different cultural circles and the reasons for stereotypes; n9 = my own values influence my response to a communication; n10 = the influence of the language environment on my language and behavior in intercultural communication.

Recommendations

Enrich the Content and Form of Teaching to Spread Cross-cultural Knowledge

Teachers should explore some new and diversified teaching contents, when encounter a chapter or topic about culture, should diffuse the lecture based on textbook knowledge and cultural comparison.

In the process of teaching intercultural knowledge, we make full use of visual aids such as pictures, slides, movies, dramas. songs and movies combine visual and auditory senses to improve the learning effect compared to verbal expressions alone.

Create Intercultural Communicative Scenarios and Enhance Intercultural Skills

Virtual reality (VR) technology not only enhances the experimental practicality of teaching, but also provides a good solution to the problem of the difficulty of face-to-face communication. That is, it provides an authentic interactive environment for cross-cultural communication and creates personalized communicative situations for

students. In addition, we can set up several scenarios such as negotiation, modal association, daily restaurant, etc., and instruct students to flexibly apply business language, daily speaking and other multilingual modes so that they can learn and communicate in an immersive way.

In addition to daily life communication, modern science and technology can solve some problems that are difficult to solve in ordinary teaching. Chinese, as a tonal language, is a major difficulty for non-vocalic languages. Since the Pinyin Scheme does not mark the specific phonetic value of the symbols, some small difference, the relative position of the resonance peaks can only be clearly seen through the speech diagram listed by Praat.

Cultivating a Sense of Cultural Self-awareness and Raising Cross-cultural Awareness

Foreign language teaching in China's higher education institutions should consciously take up the contemporary task of cultivating students' cultural consciousness of perception, organically combining cultural heritage with the cultivation of intercultural communication skills (YAN, 2013) so that national culture has the opportunity to go to the world stage, truly awakening self-cultural identity among intercultural awareness and realizing cultural multilateral dialogue in intercultural communication..

On the basis of our own cultural identity, we need to make everyone learn to respect the cultures of different countries and nationalities, and we need to eliminate ethnocentrism. In the face of politically non-friendly countries, one should also remain objective and calm enough not to view cultural differences with personal feelings.

Cultivating students' ability to think from multiple perspectives to help them develop the habit of empathy and tolerance is also an important way to improve cross-cultural awareness. Teachers should encourage students to consider innovative points and new perspectives as much as possible when researching topics, to cultivate students' tolerance and understanding ability to accept different perspectives.

Conclusions

In this paper, we use questionnaires and experimental analysis to find out that Chinese college students have different degrees of deficiencies in intercultural attitudes, intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills, and intercultural awareness. At the same time, they need to adhere to their own traditions so as not to imitate foreign cultures blindly. However, there is still a long way to go before these strategies can be applied in the classroom, since VR technology is not yet popular. However, human-computer interaction, and online software can be fully applied to the classroom, and changing classroom content can be applied as soon as possible after teaching and research. In future research, we can expand the sample according to different cities with different economic conditions and improve the above teaching design according to the specific characteristics of different students to improve the overall intercultural competence of our students.

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