

RESEARCH ON BLENDED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING STRATEGIES INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE CULTIVATION

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Abstract: To coexist and connect with each country in this globalized world, intercultural competence becomes a requisite, which calls for all countries in the world that can lay great emphasis on cultivating intercultural competence. In China, intercultural education gradually gains more attention in foreign language teaching field. However, the current situation of cultivating intercultural competence is not satisfactory in Chinese blended foreign language teaching. Numerous teachers often face many difficulties in the actual classroom, especially they don't know how to effectively incorporate intercultural education into foreign language teaching. Thus, this research tries to propose some effective measures to guide teachers how to incorporate intercultural education into the language teaching by adapting the blended teaching method, which is of great practical significance in the actual teaching.

Keywords: Blended foreign language teaching; Teaching strategies; Blended foreign language teaching

1 INTRODUCTION

China's Education Modernization 2035 calls for more intercultural exchange and proposes to cultivate international talents with international vision who are able to participate in international affairs and international competition. However, many researches show that Chinese students' intercultural competence is still in a poor situation [1], and the intercultural competence of Chinese students lags far behind their linguistic competence [2-3]. Chinese students, who are in the global community, will shoulder the heavy responsibilities entrusted to them by the times and go to the world stage. Thus, it is urgent and necessary to improve college students' intercultural competence, especially the English majors' intercultural competence.

The "Intercultural Education Guide" [4] issued by UNESCO clearly points out that intercultural education is not an independent and newly added school curriculum. Its concept should be integrated into the school education system and the teaching of various courses, especially foreign language teaching plays a very important role in it. So it is a good way to integrate intercultural competence cultivation into English course. Moreover, as for the English majors, except the intercultural communication course to acquire intercultural competence, most of them have no overseas experience, and have little intercultural communication opportunities which mainly come from on-campus and extracurricular activities [1]. Nowadays, more and more English teachers have the awareness to cultivate students' intercultural competence. However, in English classroom teaching practice, numerous teachers often face many difficulties in actual classroom, especially they don't know how to incorporate intercultural education into foreign language teaching effectively. What's more, in recent years, the integration of teaching and teaching technology has become the mainstream of today's educational reform. MOOC, flipped classroom and other emerging media have been applied to teaching. Thus, based on the English Course, in order to cultivate the intercultural competence and the language competence, this research tries to propose some effective measures to guide teacher to incorporate intercultural education into the language teaching by adapting the blended teaching method, which is of great practical significance in the actual teaching.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 A Review of Research on Intercultural Competence Cultivation

The related researches on the intercultural competence cultivation mainly focus on the concept, models, assessment tools and ways, etc., at home and abroad. Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. Its connotation mainly includes three elements: intercultural communication situation, effectiveness and appropriateness [5-7]. In the study of intercultural competence models, the most influential model is Byram constructed a five-dimensional model of intercultural competence, including attitude, knowledge, interpretation and contact skills, discovery and interaction skills, critical cultural awareness, etc. [5]. Zhang Hongling proposed a three-dimensional framework, including attitudes, knowledge and behavior, with fourteen items in total [8]. Hua et al. & Zhong Hua et al. came up with a new model of intercultural communication competence for Chinese college students by summarizing the main factors of both Byram's model of ICC and Wen Qiufang's model of ICC, separating intercultural communicative competence into two aspects, namely communicative competence and intercultural competence. Each aspect consists of four elements respectively [9].

There are other models, such as Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) [10], Byram's models of intercultural communicative competence, Deardorff's Pyramid Model and Process Model [7], Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural communication competence, etc [11]. Besides, there are more than 100 kinds of assessment tools for intercultural competence in the academic field. The mainstream intercultural assessment scales with great influence and high recognition mainly include: Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQ), Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), etc. [12]. Generally speaking, scholars have carried out fruitful research on topics, such as what intercultural competence is, and how to evaluate intercultural competence. However, there are relatively insufficient research on how to cultivate intercultural competence, front-line teachers need more practical guidance in intercultural education. Later more and more scholars and researchers are engaged in the discussion about proper ways to cultivate the intercultural competence.

There are many ways for developing intercultural competence within school education. From the theoretical perspective, New Zealand and Australian government education departments report on intercultural "third space" [13]. Houghton proposed Intercultural Dialogue Model with a five-step method for improving students' intercultural competence in foreign language education, focusing on the investigation of students' value system and personal identity development in the process of intercultural communication [14]. Moeller and Osborn put forward the principles of intercultural teaching goals and classroom activities based on the review and evaluation of Byram, Deardorff and Borghetti's theoretical model of intercultural teaching [15]. Zhang Hongling and Yao Chunyu constructed an integrated model of Chinese students' intercultural ability development based on the analysis of the actual needs of Chinese students' intercultural ability development [16]. Gu put forward a model of cultivating intercultural communicative competence, which is divided into theoretical model and practice model [19]. From the practical perspective, they probe into the multiple aspects of teaching practice, teaching principles [18], teaching methods [19-20], teaching models [21], etc. Some scholars carry out in college English courses intercultural teaching action research, such as Chang Xiaomei and Zhao Yushan conducted the intercultural teaching based on "Cultural Knowings" model [19], Yang Hua and Li Liwen proposed output-oriented language and culture integration teaching, etc. There are also scholars who try to carry out the intercultural teaching in some English courses [22]. For example, Huang Wenhong implemented a process-based cultural teaching model, Fu Xiaoqiu and Zhang Hongling applied intercultural training method [20], Zhang Hongling and Zhao Han using ethnographic pedagogy [23]. Suo Gefei and Chi Ruobing carried out a blended intercultural foreign language teaching experiment based on MOOCs [24]. Dai Yifan cultivate the intercultural awareness by applying content-based teaching [25]. Bi Chenhui (2021) cultivate the intercultural competence of English majors based on blended teaching [26].

2.2 A Review of Research on Blended Foreign Language Teaching

Blended teaching refers to the combination of traditional classroom teaching and online teaching [27]. Blended teaching can take many models, among which replacement modality and supplement modality are very common [28]. The former refers to reducing classroom teaching time and using the corresponding time for extracurricular online teaching while the latter refers to keeping the original classroom teaching time and using extracurricular time to carry out online teaching. Many scholars have discussed the concept and method of blended foreign language teaching which is based on massive open online course, micro-class, intelligent education platform, flip classroom and other forms. Chen Jianlin believes that only watching online video courses can't achieve the best results, and reasonably integrating online and offline teaching content and using the concept of flipping classrooms will be the main way to achieve efficient learning [29]. Wu Wenquan and Zhou Wenjuan advocated the application of ESP teaching concept combined with massive open online course to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability and cooperative learning consciousness [30]. Sun Hui and Fangfang Wei proposed a mixed teaching model of college English based on massive open online course and corpus [31]. In foreign countries, cross-cultural foreign language teaching based on "digital education" [32] has appeared one after another (such as [33-34]).

To sum up, how to attach importance to and develop intercultural education and cultivate intercultural competence in foreign language teaching has become a topic of widespread concern in foreign language circles. Through literature review, there are many related studies on blended teaching and intercultural competence, but there are few studies on how to integrate intercultural competence training into English courses through blended teaching model to achieve the dual goals of improving college students' foreign language application ability and intercultural competence. Therefore, this research is based on the English teaching in higher education, and puts forward some strategies to integrate intercultural competence training into English teaching based on the blended teaching model, so as to achieve the common improvement of students' intercultural competence and language application skills.

3 BLENDED FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING STRATEGIES INTEGRATING WITH INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE CULTIVATION

Blended foreign language teaching activities that integrate intercultural competence training use online and offline platforms to run through before, during and after class. It mainly adopts the complementary mixed teaching model, that is, to retain the original classroom teaching time and use the extracurricular time to carry out online teaching. The online course focuses on two links before and after class, mainly putting emphasis on increasing students' intercultural communication knowledge, language knowledge, and cultivate students' independent self-learning ability. Before class,

students are required to use online courses to preview in advance so as to discuss and answer questions in class. After class, online activities are mainly to complete topic discussion, homework, chapter test and supplementary materials to consolidate the content learned in class. Offline courses focus on improving intercultural attitude, cultivating intercultural sensitivity and improving intercultural skills. The specific teaching strategies are as follows.

First, integrate into the teaching goal of improving intercultural ability. The traditional Chinese foreign language teaching only focuses on the instrumentality of foreign language learning, such as the explanation of words and grammar, and the improvement of basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. In contrast, the blended foreign language teaching with intercultural competence training focus on the dual goals of language learning and intercultural competence promotion. First of all, teachers can make a preliminary analysis of the English courses, just like Comprehensive English and College English, by studying the teaching objectives, teaching materials and learners' characteristics, etc.. In addition to the language learning objectives, the overall and unit objectives of intercultural competence improvement of the course should be set from the three levels of intercultural cognitive understanding, emotional attitude and behavioral skills.

Second, integrate multi-cultural related resources. After analyzing the intercultural contents involved in textbooks such as Comprehensive English and College English, foreign language teachers determine the intercultural teaching theme of this unit, then supplement the intercultural materials related to the theme of the text by means of massive open online course, pictures, videos, cases, projects, platforms, film appreciation, masterpiece reading, etc., and reconstruct and design the teaching content. It can be send to students before, during and after class, so that students can subtly enhance intercultural competence through these daily accumulations for a long time.

Third, carry out typical intercultural communication activities. Under the blended teaching model, teachers can design various intercultural activities, such as role-playing, simulated interview, essay writing, case collection, case analysis and so on, and guide students to carry out group cooperative learning, so that students can understand how to apply theoretical knowledge in the actual intercultural scene. For example, when introducing intercultural knowledge, teachers can combine knowledge with cases by discussing typical intercultural communication cases related to the theme of the text in class, exploring the causes of intercultural conflicts, explaining and summarizing potential ways of thinking or values, and coping strategies to help students experience intercultural indirectly.

Fourth, intercultural outcomes display and evaluation. Before class, teachers can post the task list and assign the intercultural output tasks beforehand. Students are required to learn independently online and try to complete the intercultural output tasks initially. In class, through the interaction between teachers and students, or group cooperation, students can show their outcomes in class or post their outcomes to the teaching platform after class. After the results are displayed, teachers should organize evaluation in different ways. In the process of evaluation, students are encouraged to think differently and express their opinions.

Fifth, the second classroom activities are expanded. In addition to online and offline blended teaching, teachers can also encourage students to actively participate in the second class. The activities in the second class can be like these, such as intercultural sitcom competitions, national cultural knowledge competitions, intercultural competitions, English corners and other activities after class, to further increase students' intercultural experience. In addition, we can make full use of school-enterprise cooperation, so that students can go out of the classroom and enter into the enterprise, put theory into practice and test their learning results.

Blended foreign language teaching with intercultural competence training aims at cultivating intercultural skills, promoting students' acquisition of intercultural knowledge, and gradually improving students' intercultural attitudes (such as openness and tolerance). This strategies can be helpful to implement the blended foreign language teaching with intercultural competence training to reach the dual goal of improving college students' intercultural competence and language proficiency together.

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