

A Study on the Status Quo of Chinese College Students' Intercultural Communication Competence

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Abstract

Intercultural encounters have become a fact of daily life in so many cities as well as towns in China, yet English learning is far from enough for cultivating talents with international vision and research on ICC has stepped on agenda. This paper is aimed at investigating the ICC stat quo of Chinese college students. The questionnaire is designed based on Byram's YOGA including four aspects—intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills, intercultural attitude, and critical intercultural awareness. Research is done with data from the teacher-questionnaire for finding one focus of the four aspects for further research of influencing factors of ICC and with data from the student-questionnaire, on the presumed potential related factors of ICC like major, gender, cultural curriculums, and experience abroad for finding out Chinese college students' ICC stat quo. 10 (half science and half literary arts) are interviewed to find out how the results come into being. Through the analysis of teacher-questionnaire data, the author gets that intercultural attitude is of the most importance to ICC. The results come out possibly because the acquiring of intercultural awareness, intercultural skills and intercultural knowledge are decided by intercultural attitude.

Keywords

Chinese College Students, Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), Intercultural Attitude, Influencing Factors of ICC

1. Introduction

In China, English has become a compulsory course from primary on and gains equal weight in College Entrance Examination. Non-English major students in

college have to pass CET4 and English major students TEM4, if they want to get the bachelor degree. However, many college graduates who have passed CET4 or TEM4 remain deficient in their daily communication with foreigners and often come into awkwardness or even conflict in intercultural communication. This phenomenon of intercultural breaking-down attracts many educators' attention and they point out that, with further or in-depth intercultural communication and expansion of the scope of cooperation among different countries, mutual understanding requires more cultural knowledge like awareness or cognition of customs, values, beliefs, and etc. in addition to the English language. Therefore, the concept of intercultural communication competence (ICC) steps on agenda.

This study is aimed at investigating the current situation of Chinese college students' ICC and finding out that intercultural attitude, followed by intercultural awareness, intercultural skills and intercultural knowledge, is the most important to ICC. The results come out possibly because the acquiring of intercultural awareness, intercultural skills and intercultural knowledge are decided by intercultural attitude. However, small sample size and subjects' limited exposure to international exchange experience have both constituted limitations to this research.

2. Literature Review

Researches on ICC can date back to 1970s, ever since when, ICC has been the focus in academic research for cultivating talents with international vision. Then, what is ICC, what is the nature of ICC and what has been done on ICC? To make sense of those questions, we should first know about culture, communication and intercultural communication.

2.1. Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

As for the definition of ICC, different people voice different ideas, among which, the most simple and general one given by Spitzberg (Samovar & Porter, 2004) is that, ICC is "behavior that is appropriate and effective in a given context". It is simple but not easy to understand. Kim's (Samovar & Porter, 2004) definition is much more detailed—ICC is "the overall internal capability of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication: namely, cultural differences and unfamiliarity, inter-group posture, and the accompanying experience of stress. "Many other scholars has also defined it, like Chen & Starosta (1997), who noted that ICC was "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a specific environment", and Byram, who viewed ICC as the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own.

According to Hymes (1971), communicative competence comprises four degrees: 1) possibility (knowledge of and ability to use the generative base of language); 2) feasibility (knowledge of whether and to what extent something is possible, and the ability to be practical or feasible); 3) appropriateness (knowledge of language behaviors and its contextual features and the ability to use language appropriately); 4) performance (knowledge of whether and to what extent action is

taken with language and the ability to use language to take such action).

Scholars like Gudykunst (1991), did further research on the components of ICC and proposed that ICC should involve affective or relational competence apart from cognitive and behavioral competence. Kohls & Brussow (1995) offered another three-dimension model for cross-cultural training: attitude, knowledge and skills, while Byram et al. added awareness to Kohl's model and suggested that ICC include five "Savoirs": intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness (Corbett, 2003).

Kim (1991) regards ICC as internal to a person—"should be located within a person as his or her overall capacity or capability to facilitate the communication process between people from differing cultural backgrounds and contribute to successful interaction outcomes.

2.2. Byram's Model for Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

None of the previous researches have conducted an in-depth research of ICC status quo of Chinese college students by utilizing Byram's Model. According to Byram (1997), learners should master cultural knowledge, acquire communicative skills, develop positive attitude towards foreign cultures and cultivate critical cultural awareness to communicate interculturally. Therefore, ICC can be evaluated and cultivated in the four aspects of intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills, intercultural attitude, and critical intercultural awareness.

Intercultural knowledge relates to two aspects: one is the knowledge about social groups and cultures in one's own country as well as that in the target countries or areas and the other is the knowledge about the intercultural interaction process, both of which are important and also the prerequisite for successful intercommunication.

Intercultural skills can also be divided into two categories. The first is the "ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own". The second is the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction". In his opinion, knowing another culture is important, but acquiring skills of analysis and interpretation are more important.

Intercultural attitudes refer to the attitude of openness to the otherness and curiosity about the other cultures, which are crucial to ICC. People need to be willing and active to appreciate and accept other cultures and at the same time, they need to have a right understanding of their own culture, that is to say, to keep their own cultural identity. Neither complete rejection nor total accept is right.

This study is supposed to research on the ICC status quo of Chinese college students through student-questionnaire, and at the same time probe into the related factors of ICC by connecting student- and teacher-questionnaire and analyze how the results come into being based on the face-to-face interview.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

This study is supposed to research on the ICC stat quo of Chinese college students through student-questionnaire, and at the same time probe into the related factors of ICC by connecting student- and teacher-questionnaire and analyze how the results come into being based on the face-to-face interview.

So the research questions can be the following four:

- 1) What is the stat quo of Chinese university students' ICC?
- 2) Among the four, intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitude, intercultural skills and intercultural awareness, which is most related to ICC?
- 3) Whether major, cultural class, gender and experience abroad are related to ICC? If yes, then how?
- 4) What are the possible reasons of the results?

3.2. Research Subjects and Procedures

Both the teacher-questionnaire and the student-questionnaire are based on Byram's YOGA. The questionnaire is designed from four aspects-intercultural awareness, intercultural attitude, intercultural skills and intercultural knowledge, and each of the four aspects including 10 detailed items to help examine people's intercultural communication competence. The face-to-face interview mainly center on four points: 1) their own understanding towards ICC; 2) whether and how their experiences affect their ICC; 3) their opinion on whether major, cultural class, gender and experience abroad are related to ICC; 4) their ideas for on the possible reasons of the results.

The questionnaires are mostly done during the break time and about a third of the student-questionnaires are done by senior students in their dormitory. The face-to-face interview is done in different places including the classroom, the dormitory, the canteen and the playground.

The teacher-questionnaire is executed to 35 teachers from 7 schools. 35 pieces are taken back and 32 pieces are valid. The student-questionnaire is executed to 149 (142 valid) students of 9 majors covering both science and literary arts in a University in central China 147 pieces are retrieved and 142 pieces are valid. 10 students participated in the face-to-face interview, among which, half are science students and half are literary arts students.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Results from Student-Questionnaire

Through descriptive analysis of data collected from students, the author gets the stat quo of Chinese college students.

It can be concluded from **Table 1** that students' intercultural awareness vary greatly because each item gets the minimum point 0 and the maximum point 5. However, the mean vales reflecting most students' intercultural awareness falls

on 3 to 4, which means they can only realize the cultural differences but cannot keep in mind those cultural differences while communicating with people from a different background.

It can be concluded from **Table 2** that most students' intercultural attitude is not negative because most item get the minimum point 1 and all get the maximum point 5. At the same time, seven of the ten mean vales reflecting most students' intercultural attitude fall on 3.5 to 4, two are 4.11 and 4.10 and only one is

Table 1. ICC stat quo of Chinese college students reflected from the aspect of intercultural awareness.

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Awareness 1	142	0	5	3.41	1.278
Awareness 2	142	0	5	3.26	1.165
Awareness 3	142	0	5	4.12	1.062
Awareness 4	142	0	5	3.54	1.115
Awareness 5	142	0	5	3.35	1.045
Awareness 6	142	0	5	3.31	1.125
Awareness 7	142	0	5	3.63	1.042
Awareness 8	142	0	5	2.85	1.142
Awareness 9	142	0	5	3.52	1.115
Awareness 10	142	0	5	3.48	1.128
Valid N (State of List)	142				

Table 2. ICC stat quo of Chinese college students reflected from the aspect of intercultural attitude.

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Attitude 11	142	1	5	4.06	1.005
Attitude 12	142	1	5	4.11	1.070
Attitude 13	142	1	5	4.10	1.100
Attitude 14	142	1	5	3.54	1.063
Attitude 15	142	0	5	3.94	1.135
Attitude 16	142	0	5	3.51	1.070
Attitude 17	142	0	5	3.27	1.154
Attitude 18	142	1	5	3.39	1.047
Attitude 19	142	1	5	3.82	1.067
Attitude 20	142	0	5	3.86	1.152
Valid N (State of List)	142				

3.27, which means most of them are positive or active in intercultural communication.

It can be concluded from **Table 3** that students' intercultural skills also vary greatly because eight items get the minimum point 0 and all items get the maximum point 5. Additionally, nine of the ten mean values reflecting most students' intercultural skills fall on 3 to 4, and only one is 2.99, which means most of the students can handle cultural conflicts in intercultural communications but not very properly.

It can be concluded from **Table 4** that students' intercultural knowledge also varies greatly. The mean values reflecting most students' intercultural knowledge fall on 2.5 to 4, which means students' cultural knowledge is very limited-neither detailed nor complete.

4.1.2. Results from Teacher-Questionnaire

Through descriptive analysis of data collected from teachers, the author gets teachers' evaluation on the significance of each aspect to ICC.

It can be concluded from **Table 5** that most teachers do not think intercultural awareness very important to ICC because most of the mean values reflecting the significance of intercultural awareness to ICC fall on 3 - 3.5, and only one is 4.1250.

It can be concluded from **Table 6** that most teachers attach great significance of intercultural attitude to ICC because most of the mean values reflecting the significance of intercultural awareness to ICC fall on 3.5 - 4.5, and only two are

Table 3. ICC stat quo of Chinese college students reflected from the aspect of intercultural skills.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Skills 21	142	0	5	3.82	1.100
Skills 22	142	0	5	3.42	1.198
Skills 23	142	0	5	3.94	.998
Skills 24	142	0	5	3.93	1.140
Skills 25	142	1	5	3.65	1.085
Skills 26	142	0	5	3.29	1.241
Skills 27	142	0	5	3.78	1.025
Skills 28	142	1	5	3.94	1.125
Skills 29	142	0	5	3.45	1.212
Skills 30	142	0	5	2.99	1.214
Valid N (State of List)	142				

Table 4. ICC stat quo of Chinese college students reflected from the aspect of intercultural knowledge.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Knowledge 31	142	1	5	3.49	.980
Knowledge 32	142	0	5	3.58	1.081
Knowledge 33	142	2	5	3.78	.852
Knowledge 34	142	0	5	2.69	1.174
Knowledge 35	142	0	5	2.68	1.087
Knowledge 36	142	0	5	2.82	1.036
Knowledge 37	142	1	5	2.77	1.128
Knowledge 38	142	0	5	2.40	1.161
Knowledge 39	142	0	5	3.17	1.249
Knowledge 40	142	0	5	3.22	1.233
Valid N (State of List)	142				

Table 5. The significance of intercultural awareness to ICC.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Awareness 1	32	1	5	3.5625	.94826
Awareness 2	32	2	5	3.6875	.85901
Awareness 3	32	1	5	4.1250	.94186
Awareness 4	32	2	5	3.5938	1.01153
Awareness 5	32	1	5	3.2500	1.01600
Awareness 6	32	1	5	3.3125	1.25563
Awareness 7	32	1	5	3.2813	1.08462
Awareness 8	32	1	5	3.0312	.89747
Awareness 9	32	1	5	3.1250	1.12880
Awareness 10	32	1	5	3.5312	1.04679
Valid N (State of List)	32				

3.1875 and 3.2500. Moreover, the result that the minimum point of each item gets no 0, three items get 2 and two items get 3 also reflects the importance of intercultural attitude to ICC.

Table 6. The significance of intercultural attitude to ICC.

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Attitude 11	32	2	5	4.0313	.99950
Attitude 12	32	3	5	4.5312	.62136
Attitude 13	32	2	5	4.1563	.72332
Attitude 14	32	1	5	3.1875	1.09065
Attitude 15	32	2	5	3.9375	.75935
Attitude 16	32	1	5	3.4687	1.21773
Attitude 17	32	1	5	3.6250	1.07012
Attitude 18	32	1	5	3.2500	1.13592
Attitude 19	32	1	5	3.9063	.89296
Attitude 20	32	3	5	4.0938	.64053
Valid N (State of List)	32				

It can be concluded from **Table 7** that most teachers think the significance of intercultural skills to ICC is relatively great because most of the mean values reflecting the significance of intercultural skills to ICC fall on 3.3 - 4.0, and only one is 2.9688.

It can be concluded from **Table 8** that most teachers think the significance of intercultural skills to ICC is not great because most of the mean values reflecting the significance of intercultural skills to ICC fall on 2.5 - 3.5.

Therefore, it can be inferred from the results of the descriptive analysis of teachers' evaluation that intercultural attitude is of the most importance to ICC. So analysis on the possible factors of students' ICC will concentrate on the aspect of intercultural attitude.

5. Conclusion

Through the data analysis and face-to-face interview, the status quo of Chinese college students' ICC can be concluded as the following: Chinese college students are active in intercultural communication, but they often fail because of their limited intercultural knowledge or skills or just avoid such contacts because of their previous failures or having no confidence in their oral and speaking English. 7 - 10 years of English learning do not make them qualified in intercultural communication and ICC should be stressed when teaching them to be the talents of international vision for the 21st century.

Through the analysis of teacher-questionnaire data, the author gets that intercultural attitude is of the most importance to ICC. The results come out possibly because the acquiring of intercultural awareness, intercultural skills and intercultural knowledge are decided by intercultural attitude.

Table 7. The significance of intercultural skills to ICC.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Skills 21	32	0	5	3.4688	1.13548
Skills 22	32	0	5	3.4063	1.29164
Skills 23	32	0	5	3.8750	1.12880
Skills 24	32	0	5	3.8125	1.20315
Skills 25	32	1	5	3.3438	1.06587
Skills 26	32	1	5	3.3750	1.07012
Skills 27	32	1	5	3.5625	.94826
Skills 28	32	0	5	3.8125	.96512
Skills 29	32	1	5	3.5938	1.13192
Skills 30	32	0	5	2.9688	.93272
Valid N (State of List)	32				

Table 8. The significance of intercultural knowledge to ICC.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min. Value	Max. Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Knowledge 31	32	2	5	3.3125	.73780
Knowledge 32	32	1	5	3.5938	.94560
Knowledge 33	32	0	5	3.4687	1.07716
Knowledge 34	32	1	5	2.8750	1.07012
Knowledge 35	32	0	5	3.0313	1.20441
Knowledge 36	32	2	5	3.0625	0.94826
Knowledge 37	32	1	5	3.4375	1.10534
Knowledge 38	32	0	5	2.5937	1.26642
Knowledge 39	32	0	5	3.0938	1.27910
Knowledge 40	32	1	5	3.0313	1.14960
Valid N (State of List)	32				

For those who have the opportunity to participate in an exchange program in a foreign university, they usually stay abroad for less than two months and do not have time for in-depth communication or cultural exchange. We suggest that the university administration expands the length of such programs.

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