

The Cultivation of Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence in High School English Reading

Lingling Kong

School of Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu 610000, China

Abstract: This study aims to clarify the importance and challenge of cultivating high school students' intercultural communication ability by combining the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence and explaining the elements of intercultural communication, such as cultural awareness, cross-cultural knowledge, communication skills, and intercultural adaptability. Based on this, this paper takes reading fragments from senior high school English textbooks published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (2019) as an example to explore teaching strategies for cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence in senior high school reading classes.

Keywords: English Reading Teaching; Intercultural Communication Ability; Teaching Strategy.

1. Introduction

Intercultural Communicative Competence has long been regarded as one of the most important educational objectives in the new curriculum reform. The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision) (hereinafter referred to as the "New Curriculum Standards") emphasizes: English courses for senior high schools should, based on compulsory education, help students to further learn and use basic English knowledge and skills, develop cross-cultural communication skills, create good conditions for them to learn other disciplines, absorb the essence of world culture, spread Chinese culture, and provide more opportunities for them to continue to learn English or choose employment in the future (Ministry of Education, 2020). In recent years, the new curriculum reforms have emphasized the importance of developing students' Intercultural Communicative Competence. Because the multicultural and global challenges in the era of globalization require students to be equipped with corresponding skills. Social pluralism and cultural diversity are increasingly becoming a reality, so individuals of different cultural backgrounds live and learn together. Intercultural competence is therefore essential for promoting social integration, eliminating discrimination and building shared values and identities. In senior high school English teaching, reading class is a relatively large part of English teaching. It can be integrated with the educational goal of cross-cultural communication competence to help students understand and respect different cultures, cultivate their cultural awareness and communication skills, and cultivate students' global competence so that they are better to adapt to future social changes and meet the requirements of talents.

2. Some Important Concepts

2.1. Intercultural Communication

When mentioned about "intercultural communication", Chen and Starosta (1998) believed that the communication between people from two different cultures. Lustig and Koester (2007) noted that intercultural communication is a

symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings. Arasaratnam (2013) viewed it as communication that unfolds in symbolic intercultural spaces. These are moments when a communication exchange has been affected by cultural differences. From the viewpoint of psychology, Jia Yuxin (1997) stated that intercultural communication is the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds (information sender and information recipient). It is the compilation and decoding of information and is the communication carried out by people from different cultural backgrounds. It is noticed that there must be some interactions between people with different cultural backgrounds when "intercultural communication" is taking place.

2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram (1997) defined Intercultural Communicative Competence as the ability to interact effectively with people from other cultural backgrounds based on knowledge, skills, attitude, and critical cultural awareness. Adler focused on cultural awareness and sensitivity in intercultural communication. Berson emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding different perspectives. In this study, Intercultural Communicative Competence can be understood as the skills, knowledge, and awareness that people exhibit in effectively communicating and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. It is the ability to adapt to a multicultural environment and to understand and respect various cultures.

According to Lustig and Koester, cross-cultural competence consists of sufficient knowledge, appropriate motivations, and well-trained actions, and none of the three elements alone is not enough to form cross-cultural competence. Yang Ying and Zhuang Enping pointed out that the global consciousness system, the cultural adaptation ability system, the knowledgeability system, and the communicative practice ability system constitute intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence encompasses various elements that contribute to individuals' ability to effectively communicate and interact across cultures. These elements have been defined and

discussed by different scholars in the field. (Brislin, 1976; Bennett, 1986; Byram, 1997; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Deardorff, D.K., 2006)

Cultural awareness: Cultural awareness refers to having knowledge and understanding of different cultures, including their customs, traditions, values, beliefs, and practices. It involves recognizing and respecting the diversity of cultures and being aware of how cultural factors can influence perceptions, behaviors, and communication styles. **Cross-cultural knowledge:** Cross-cultural knowledge refers to the understanding and familiarity with multiple cultures and the ability to compare and contrast them. It involves acquiring knowledge about different cultural norms, values, communication styles, and worldviews to navigate intercultural interactions effectively. (Paige, R. M. , 1993)

Communication skills: Communication skills refer to the ability to convey information, thoughts, and ideas effectively and clearly to others. It involves both verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, empathy, adaptability, and the capacity to understand and respond appropriately to different cultural and social contexts. To understand and use non-verbal elements, such as posture, facial expression, body language and spatial distance, to improve the accuracy and effect of cross-cultural communication.

Intercultural adaptability: Intercultural adaptability is the capacity to adjust, thrive, and effectively interact in diverse cultural environments. It involves being open-minded, flexible, and responsive to cultural differences, and possessing the skills to navigate and adapt to different cultural contexts. (Deardorff, D. K. , 2006)

It's important to note that these elements are often interrelated and overlapping, and different scholars may emphasize different aspects of Intercultural Communicative Competence. Nonetheless, these elements collectively contribute to individuals' Intercultural Communicative Competence and have been widely recognized and discussed within the field of intercultural communication.

3. The Significance and Challenges of Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Reading Teaching

3.1. The Significance of Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural Communicative Competence is of great significance in the era of globalization. It promotes transnational cooperation, international exchanges, and cultural integration while providing individuals with broader development opportunities and rich interpersonal experiences. In the global society, intercultural communicative competence is played a crucial role in promoting peace, cooperation, and harmony among nations and communities. By bridging cultural gaps and promoting dialogue, it is contributed to the resolution of conflicts, the eradication of stereotypes and prejudices, and the development of inclusive societies.

It helps individuals develop empathy for people from different cultural backgrounds, leading to tolerance, respect, and harmony. More importantly, for students in senior high school, developing their intercultural communicative competence can broaden their horizons, expand their knowledge, and foster a more open and inclusive mindset. It

encourages students to embrace diversity, challenge their assumptions and biases, and engage in lifelong learning. This personal growth leads to better cultural enrichment and a deeper appreciation of the complexity of the world where we live in. Those are closely related to the requirement of "the new curriculum" and meet the need for educational aims in the new era.

3.2. The Challenges of Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence

Comparing to other subjects, foreign language class is an effective way to improve students cultural awareness and broad their horizon based on the understanding of different cultures. But there are still challenges existing in the process of fostering students intercultural competence, such as cultural barriers and stereotypes, language proficiency and cultural understanding, and the lack of exposure to diverse cultures.

Cultural barriers and stereotypes cause obstacles to effective intercultural communication by perpetuating biases and misunderstandings. These biases and prejudices can lead to racial discrimination and prejudice during intercultural interactions. For instance, when Westerners discuss Asian people, some may envision stereotypes such as short figures with small, flat eyes. This stereotype hinders effective communication and creates barriers between people. Moreover, differences in values, customs, and communication styles further complicate intercultural communication. For example, when students approach a foreign teacher with questions in English, their lack of awareness of cultural norms may cause them to unintentionally use a Chinese thinking pattern. They may say, "Mr. Smith, I have a question," which could be impolite for the teacher. In contrast, the appropriate way to seek information or permission should follow English communication norms, such as using phrases like "May I ask you a question?" or "Could you please ?" In an English class, it is crucial for teachers to not only teach proper language usage but also help students recognize and understand cultural differences.

Language proficiency and cultural understanding are crucial for meaningful cross-cultural interactions, but limited language skills and a lack of knowledge about different cultures can impede communication. Limited proficiency in a second language, such as English, can pose a significant challenge to students in cultivating their intercultural communicative competence. It hampers their ability to express themselves accurately and comprehend others effectively. Certain English vocabulary and idioms carry historical and cultural meanings that are difficult to grasp solely based on literal interpretations. In such cases, teachers play a crucial role in explaining and illustrating these cultural nuances to students. For instance, the phrase "golden apple" symbolizes something attractive but potentially problematic, derived from Greek mythology. However, students who are unfamiliar with the myth may interpret it as a literal golden-colored or gold-made apple.

Insufficient cultural understanding of diverse norms and communication styles also contributes to misinterpretations and communication breakdowns. Non-verbal language, in particular, varies across countries and carries different meanings. For instance, the gesture of forming a "V" with one's fingers symbolizes victory in many Western cultures. However, in certain countries, such as the United Kingdom or

Australia, this same gesture may convey an offensive or obscene meaning. These cultural differences in non-verbal communication underscore the importance of cultural awareness and understanding for effective intercultural communication.

Limited exposure to diverse cultures can pose a significant obstacle to students' understanding and appreciation of different perspectives and ways of life. In the case of many Chinese students, they often learn English in an environment that lacks authentic cultural immersion. As a result, their language learning experience may be limited to textbooks and examinations, such as the Gaokao (the entrance examination for college in China). Consequently, some students may develop a linguistic phenomenon known as "Chinglish" characterized by grammatical errors and a sentence structure influenced by Chinese patterns. For instance, the phrase "good good study, day day up!" is commonly used to convey the importance of academic effort. However, such "Chinglish" expressions can lead to confusion and misunderstandings when communicating with native English speakers.

Furthermore, the lack of opportunities for intercultural interactions and experiences can hinder students' ability to develop empathy and cross-cultural competence. Without a deeper understanding of the history and struggles of American black people in their fight for equal rights and respect, students may unknowingly display unfriendly or discriminatory behavior when encountering individuals from this cultural background. This lack of cultural awareness can impede effective intercultural communication and limit students' ability to form meaningful connections with people from different cultures.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to promote multicultural education, organize cultural exchange programs, and incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum. By integrating cultural elements from various societies and encouraging interactions with individuals from different backgrounds, students can expand their horizons and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the world. For example, schools can invite guest speakers from diverse cultures to share their experiences and insights, organize field trips to culturally significant sites, or establish partnerships with schools abroad to facilitate cross-cultural exchanges.

3.3. The Effectiveness of Cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Reading Teaching

By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, educators can design effective teaching strategies and create a supportive learning environment that promotes intercultural understanding, empathy, and effective communication among senior high students. Teachers can introduce literature, films, and other forms of media that highlight different cultures, traditions, and viewpoints. This exposure allows students to be gained a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and promotes empathy and respect for others. With an inclusive and culturally rich learning environment, students can develop the necessary skills and competencies to engage in effective intercultural communication. Since English class is an efficient way to foster students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural competence, teachers shall take advantage of English class, especially reading class type, to help students understand and identify different cultures and improve their cultural sensitivity and tolerance. By reading authentic

English materials from different cultures, such as literary works, historical stories, news reports, etc., students can understand the values, traditions, and perspectives of diverse cultures. These are helpful to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness and cultural background knowledge and provide a foundation for cross-cultural communication.

English reading can be provided students with the opportunity to contact and understand texts from different cultural backgrounds. And this help students learn and apply cross-cultural communication skills, improve their language use and comprehension, and cultivate students acculturation ability.

English reading teaching can help students learn and apply cross-cultural communication skills. Reading texts from different cultural backgrounds, students need to understand and explain cultural differences, which encourages them to develop the ability to listen, observe, and reason. At the same time, students can also learn how to adapt and respond appropriately to readers from different cultural backgrounds, which helps to improve their intercultural communication skills.

English reading teaching helps students improve their language use and comprehension by providing rich language input and reading materials. Cross-cultural communication requires fluent and accurate language skills in order to communicate with different people. By reading and understanding texts from different cultural backgrounds, students can improve their vocabulary, grammar comprehension, and reading comprehension skills, so as to better apply them in cross-cultural communication.

English reading teaching can cultivate students' acculturation ability so that they can better adapt to various environments and communicate effectively with others. By reading and studying texts and materials from different cultures, students can understand and respect the customs, values, and codes of conduct of other cultures, thereby enhancing their cultural sensitivity and adaptability.

In general, English reading teaching provides students with the cultivation of language skills, cultural understanding, and communication skills needed for cross-cultural communication. It provides a foundation for students to better understand, respect, and connect with others in cross-cultural communication.

4. Teaching Strategies of Fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence in Reading Class

4.1. Incorporating Authentic Multicultural Texts

Incorporating authentic multicultural texts into English teaching materials and lessons are played a crucial role in fostering students' intercultural communicative competence. English textbooks and classes serve as the primary channels that students learn both the language and the associated cultures. To maximize the educational value of these resources, teachers should carefully design and implement teaching activities aligned with the "new curriculum standard" and the textbook.

Teachers can fully utilize the texts in English textbooks by conducting in-depth research while exploring the thematic meanings within and beyond the text. By doing so, teachers can leverage the content to achieve educational goals beyond

mere language proficiency. For instance, the reading passage *"A Child of Two Cuisines"* in Book 2 of Compulsory English Courses in Senior High School, published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2019, maybe a simple introduction to two different cuisines within a family. However, its underlying purpose is to promote student cultural understanding and respect for differences by exploring the cultural connections and differences surrounding food. So the teaching aims for this reading class shall be set up as the following:

1. Obtain factual information about the author and his parents' experiences in trying different Chinese and English cuisines.

2. Summarize the author's family's preferences and reasons for different Chinese and English foods, and then verbally describe their reactions or feelings.

3. Understand and analyze the author's attitude towards intercultural food life and the reasons for it.

4. Express your own views and opinions on "cross-cultural cuisine" based on your personal experience.

5. In addition to cross-cultural food, having a broader and deeper thinking about cross-cultural communication and holding a positive attitude towards it.

After engaging in reading activities based on this passage, students can promote an appreciation for diverse cultures and enhance their cultural awareness.

In addition to textbook materials, it is essential for teachers to introduce students to other authentic multicultural texts, such as classical foreign literature and newspapers. By exposing students to a wide range of authentic texts, teachers provide them with valuable opportunities to explore different cultural contexts, traditions, and perspectives. For example, studying renowned works of literature like Shakespeare's plays or reading articles from international newspapers allows students to gain insights into diverse cultures and develop a broader worldview. These authentic materials are given students a richer and more nuanced understanding of various cultures, enabling them to engage in intercultural communication with greater sensitivity and empathy.

Incorporating authentic multicultural texts into English teaching materials and lessons is vital for cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence. By utilizing the texts in English textbooks, and introducing additional authentic materials, teachers can create meaningful learning experiences that foster cultural understanding, respect for differences. Through these efforts, students can broaden their horizons, embrace cultural diversity, and become proficient communicators in intercultural contexts.

4.2. Promoting Critical Thinking and Perspective-taking

In the classroom, teachers can incorporate activities that prompt students to critically analyze cultural practices and challenge their own assumptions. For example, students can be presented with real-life scenarios or case studies that involve cultural differences and are asked to consider multiple viewpoints. This encourages them to question their own biases, examine the root causes of cultural misunderstandings, and seek alternative solutions. By engaging in such activities, students not only enhance their critical thinking skills but also develop a more open-minded and empathetic approach to intercultural interactions.

Question sequence refers to "a series of related combinations of questions presenting the thinking process,

generally consisting of two or more questions forming a thinking path." In actual teaching, teachers can rely on the unit theme, create real situations, activate the process of students and the relevant factors of thinking development, use question sequences, promote the dialogue between teachers and students, and realize the processing of thinking. (Zheng, 2022) For instance, during the step of "led-in" in the reading class for *"A Child of Two Cuisines"*, the teacher can use the question sequences of "Focus-Brainstorm-Categorize-Connect" to activate students' previous experience, structuralize the knowledge by categorizing and connecting, and finally led-in the new knowledge. The question sequences are displayed in the following way in the step of led-in:

1. "What is your favorite food?"

2. "Which culture does the food belong to?"

3. "Why Chinese food is your favorite food?"

The question sequence in the dialogues between teachers and students is significant. It is an efficient method of fostering critical thinking and deep learning, which is needed during intercultural communication.

During the step of post-reading, the teacher can design learning activities such as interviewing, discussing, or debating to make students engage in thinking about similar art forms in different countries and learn to respect and appreciate their differences.

4.3. Providing Opportunities for Real-world Interactions

One effective way to provide real-world interactions is through cultural exchange programs and partnerships. Schools can collaborate with educational institutions or organizations from different countries to facilitate exchanges between students. This allows students to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds, engage in meaningful conversations, and gain firsthand insights into their cultures. For instance, organizing student exchange programs where students from different countries stay with host families and attend school together can provide a rich environment for intercultural learning and communication.

Another avenue for real-world interactions is through community engagement and service-learning projects. Students can actively participate in community initiatives that involve working with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This could include volunteering at local cultural festivals, participating in community outreach programs, or engaging in projects that address social issues. Through these experiences, students not only interact with people from different cultures but also develop empathy, cultural sensitivity, and a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by different communities.

Additionally, leveraging technology can provide virtual opportunities for real-world interactions. Students can engage in online platforms, and language exchange programs, or participate in global collaborative projects. These digital platforms enable students to communicate with peers from around the world, share ideas, collaborate on projects, and gain insights into different cultures. For example, video conferencing tools can facilitate virtual discussions between students from different countries, allowing them to engage in intercultural dialogues and broaden their perspectives.

Moreover, incorporating field trips and cultural excursions can expose students to diverse cultural environments. Visiting museums, and cultural heritage sites, or attending cultural events immerses students in different cultural contexts and

provides opportunities for firsthand experiences. These experiences allow students to observe cultural practices, interact with locals, and deepen their understanding of different cultural traditions and perspectives.

Providing opportunities for real-world interactions is instrumental in developing students' intercultural communicative competence. Through cultural exchange programs, community engagement, technology-enabled connections, and field trips, students can actively engage with diverse cultural contexts, apply their language skills, and develop a genuine appreciation for different cultures. These real-world interactions empower students to become effective intercultural communicators and navigate the complexities of our interconnected world.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, fostering intercultural communication abilities among students is of great significance yet presents various challenges. The importance lies in promoting cultural understanding, challenging stereotypes, and fostering empathy and respect for diverse cultures. However, challenges such as cultural barriers, limited language proficiency, and lack of exposure to foreign cultures hinder the development of intercultural communicative competence.

To address these challenges, effective teaching strategies can be implemented in reading classes. Incorporating authentic multicultural texts, promoting critical thinking and perspective-taking, providing opportunities for real-world interactions, and utilizing technology can enhance students' intercultural communicative skills. These strategies encourage students to engage with different cultures, analyze texts from multiple perspectives, actively interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds, and apply their language skills in practical settings.

By employing these strategies, educators can create a conducive learning environment that fosters cultural sensitivity, empathy, and effective intercultural communication. It equips students with the necessary skills to navigate intercultural interactions, break down barriers, and build connections with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Ultimately, students' intercultural communicative competence is essential for fostering a global mindset, promoting mutual understanding, and preparing students to thrive in a multicultural world. By embracing effective teaching strategies and acknowledging the significance of intercultural communication, educators can empower students to become competent and confident communicators in diverse cultural contexts.

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