The Impact of Cultural Differences on International Chinese Volunteer Teachers and Strategies for Improvement

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Abstract. Nowadays, with the accelerating process of globalization and the development of international Chinese education, the impact of cultural differences on international Chinese education has become more and more prominent and has received a lot of attention. However, the research about the influence of cultural differences on international Chinese education is still not enough. This paper analyzed the impact of international Chinese volunteer teachers under cultural differences. By analyzing it, this paper found the problem in the pre-assignment training for international Chinese volunteer teachers before they go to other countries to teach Chinese, as well as the factors affecting cultural differences in Chinese teaching, by analyzing the cases from Thailand. Based on these, this paper makes some suggestions: optimize the form and content of pre-assignment training for international Chinese volunteer teachers, and relevant organizations should encourage and provide the conditions for teachers so that teachers can cooperate and communicate together to improve teaching methods. Moreover, teachers should prepare and enrich teaching methods and approaches before class. Teachers need to establish correct teaching objectives and encourage students to communicate and engage with different cultures with an open mind.

Keywords: International Chinese Volunteer Teachers, Culture Differences, International Chinese Education.

1. Introduction

The current trend of globalization is continuously deepening, cultural exchanges between different countries are gradually increasing, and China's influence is continuously increasing worldwide. More and more people from other countries want to understand China by learning Chinese. In the meantime, China is developing international Chinese education causes, including organizing international Chinese volunteer teachers to go abroad to teach Chinese and promote Chinese culture. The Center for Language Education and Cooperation organizes exams each year in order to select and train international Chinese volunteer teachers, dispatch them to countries of assignment to engage in Chinese language teaching.

In that case, international Chinese volunteer teachers need to enter a different cultural environment and teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds; teachers and students all come from different cultural backgrounds. So cultural conflicts between teachers and students are unavoidable. Currently, scholars are researching the impact of cultural differences faced by international Chinese volunteer teachers in the classroom. Ren Yili conducts research on classroom management in Thailand from a cross-cultural perspective. Cong Xu pointed out that novice international Chinese teachers in Laos face difficulties in classroom management because of language barriers and cultural differences through his research, which affects teaching efficiency and the effectiveness of Chinese culture dissemination [1]. Ma Pengcheng studied the cross-cultural adaptation of teachers by conducting participatory observations and in-depth interviews with Chinese teachers who go to Arab countries, from the perspectives of 'education concepts conflicts ' and 'Arab-Islamic socioculture'. Overall, it is important to study the impact of cultural differences on the teaching of international Chinese volunteer teachers and to make recommendations.

2. The Significance and Current Development of International Chinese Education Cause

2.1. The Significance of International Chinese Education Cause

For China, the international Chinese education cause can enhance China's soft power, help transmit Chinese culture all over the world, reduce cultural gaps between nations, strengthen cultural exchanges, and develop friendly relations between countries. China sending international Chinese volunteer teachers overseas to teach Chinese is an important way for Chinese culture to communicate with other cultures internationally. The core responsibility is not only to teach Chinese, but also to convey the essence of Chinese culture through Chinese teaching activities. More people from different cultures around the world can understand China's history, culture, values, and social development process by learning Chinese. It can reduce misunderstandings and prejudices caused by cultural differences, so it can establish friendly and developmental relationships between China and other countries.

In the international Chinese education cause, international Chinese volunteer teachers play an important role in promoting the development of the international Chinese education cause. International Chinese volunteer teachers go abroad to teach Chinese. They need to apply the linguistics and education theories that they have learned to teach Chinese to learners. The experience and methods they have accumulated in teaching can help subsequent international Chinese volunteer teachers, and it is beneficial to the long-term development of the international Chinese education cause. At the same time, international Chinese volunteer teachers are one of the bridges for cultural exchange and serve as 'ambassadors' for China's image. During the teaching process, international Chinese volunteer teachers not only teach Chinese but also need to convey Chinese culture through classroom activities and set an example. In this process, international Chinese volunteer teachers also need to learn the local culture, help students communicate with Chinese culture, and improve students' intercultural communication skills. What is more, it enhances the appeal and influence of Chinese culture, so more and more people are willing to learn Chinese, understand Chinese culture, and promote the development of international Chinese education.

2.2. Current Development of International Chinese Education Cause

Currently, the Chinese government has established relatively comprehensive systems and policies for international Chinese volunteer teachers, and there are relevant regulations to ensure their living conditions and development. As early as 2008, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the "Management Measures for Volunteer Chinese Language Teachers", which made clear regulations for international Chinese volunteer teachers in selection, training, dispatch, and management [2]. The training of international Chinese volunteer teachers is directly organized by Center for Language Education and Cooperation or entrusted selected institutions, refer to the "Standards for International Chinese Teachers" and the "Training Outline for Chinese Teacher Volunteers" formulated by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation, and develop specific implementation plans according to the actual situation in the countries where teachers are sent. China has also issued relevant regulations regarding the living conditions and benefits of teachers during their assignment, which are to be implemented in accordance with the "Administrative Measures for the Living Allowances of Chinese Teacher Volunteers". These can be seen that the field of international Chinese education is an organized and standardized endeavor that can motivate international Chinese volunteer teachers.

Under China's strong drive to develop the international Chinese education cause, the international Chinese education cause has become stronger and stronger. According to GuangMing Daily, reported in July 2024, since the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China launched the 'International Chinese Teachers China Volunteer Program' in 2004, China has sent more than 69,000 international Chinese volunteer teachers to over 150 countries and regions [3]. According to the Overseas Edition of People's Daily, by the end of 2023, nearly 4,000 international Chinese volunteer

teachers were actively teaching [4]. This demonstrates the large number of volunteer teachers involved and the wide range of participating countries. They can see that international Chinese education is flourishing.

3. Questions

3.1. Problems in the Pre-assignment Training of International Chinese Volunteer Teachers

The training content has some outdated and disconnected elements from the actual teaching situation. International Chinese volunteer teachers have to face cultural differences, which is a major and unavoidable challenge. The aim of the pre-assignment training of international Chinese volunteer teachers is to enable teachers who is lack of extensive teaching experience and cross-cultural experience to acquire some teaching skills, professional knowledge, and an understanding of the cultural patterns of the country they will assign to, ensuring that they can face with various challenges during their assignment and live and work normally in the host country. Currently, some scholars have researched the current training form and content for international Chinese volunteer teachers, reflecting that the current training forms and content are relatively diverse. For example, Wang Jing concluded that the focus of the training is on Chinese language teaching knowledge and skills, classroom management, the language of the country of assignment, and Chinese cultural talents by analyzing 'Training Outline for Chinese Teacher Volunteers' [5]. Liu Hong analyzed one of the main courses of Fujian Normal University's training for international Chinese volunteer teachers in teaching: the Chinese trial lecture small class [6]. The main role in this course is international Chinese volunteer teachers. In this way, these teachers can improve their teaching skills through practice in class.

However, the training form and content at present have some shortcomings. One of the shortcomings is that 'Training Outline for Chinese Teacher Volunteers' pays a lot of attention to teaching teachers teaching knowledge, but the impact of cultural differences has not been noticed. Therefore, cultural differences have not been integrated with teaching in the training of international Chinese volunteer teachers. These teachers will go to the front line of international Chinese teaching, enter into a different cultural environment, to convey Chinese culture. Therefore, learning knowledge and methods to face the impact of cultural differences in teaching can prepare one for future practical teaching positions. As a result, the relevant knowledge and skills to face cultural differences are essential for teachers. The other of shortcoming of training for international Chinese volunteer teachers is that although the course like the Chinese trial lecture small class enrich the study forms of international Chinese volunteer teachers, provide an opportunity to develop their teaching skills for teachers, but this kind of teaching practice does not represent the real teaching situations that future teachers will face when they take up teaching positions. In this practice, there are no real students. Teachers cannot receive real feedback from students. The entire teaching process is predetermined. In reality of teaching situation, students and classrooms in the actual teaching environment are complex. Teachers find it difficult to fully prepare before class. This teaching practice provides limited help to teachers. Similarly, Liu Huining pointed out that a shortcoming of the training is that when international Chinese volunteer teachers engage in classroom practice during the training, the classroom situations they face are not reflective of the actual conditions they will face in their future teaching. It leads to a disconnect between real teaching and practice teaching [7]. Overall, pre-assignment training for international Chinese volunteer teachers before going to teaching positions is meaningful, but there are still some shortcomings that need to be improved in the future.

3.2. Analysis of Factors Influencing Cultural Differences in Chinese Teaching in Thailand Based on Case Studies

In recent years, the Ministry of Education Thailand has attached great importance to Chinese language teaching and has taken it into the Thai national education system. By analyzing relevant data in recent years, it can be concluded that Thailand is one of the countries sending the largest

number of international Chinese volunteer teachers. Therefore, this part takes international Chinese volunteer teachers going to Thailand as an example and analyzes the cases provided by other scholars. Finally, the factors because to cultural differences affecting teaching can be divided into the following aspects:

One of the cultural differences that impacts the teaching process arises from teaching aids. For example, a case mentions that due to the differences between Chinese and Thailand food cultures, the teacher failed to achieve the goal of allowing students to experience the Chinese culture in class [8]. A teacher prepared a series of lessons themed around blue and white porcelain, using Jay Chou's song 'Blue and White Porcelain' to assist students in learning blue and white porcelain. This song in Chinese is difficult for Thai students to understand. The teacher flexibly used a Thai version of 'Blue and White Porcelain' that matched Thai students' understanding, making it easier for the students to understand its meaning and start studying seriously [8].

One of the cultural differences that impacts the teaching process arises from different cultures and values. For example, a teacher originally wants to design activities of a personal nature, while Thai culture emphasizes collectivism, so it is easier lead to classroom disorder [8]. Additionally, because of Thailand's values of humility and politeness, and the Buddhist teachings of gratitude and tolerance, students tend to use 'thank you' more often rather than 'you're welcome' or 'no problem' when responding to thanks during learning Chinese [8]. This affects Thai students' learning and using 'you're welcome' or 'no problem' in Chinese. Besides, Thai culture has a more relaxed sense of time, and classroom behavior is more open and less strictly controlled compared with China. Even if students being late for class is not considered a serious mistake, that will affect the quality and progress of teaching for international Chinese volunteer teachers [8].

One of the cultural differences that impacts the teaching process arises from different educational systems. For example, in Thailand schools, students have an additional week to submit assignments or earn credits through extra assessments after the final exam week [8]. Color-coded sports events in Thai schools receive great attention from students, school authorities, and teachers. They think a Color-coded sports event is an important educational form to cultivate students' team spirit and competitive awareness. As a result, it affects the priority of knowledge learning and influences Chinese teaching progress [8]. For final exams, teachers from Thailand trend to design a paper with easier and less questions for test. It will impact teachers from China to obtain authentic feedback from students [8].

4. Suggestion

4.1. Suggestions Based on the Organizations Related to International Chinese Education Cause

First of all, combined with the theory of implementing cross-cultural education in the context of educational internationalization, the organizations related to international Chinese education need to create conditions, encourage a wide range of international Chinese volunteer teachers to work closely with other teachers who are working on the front line, too. Encourage them to actively seek suitable and develop new teaching methods. Chen Siruo pointed out that, under the background of education internationalization, the implementation strategies of intercultural education need to start from multiple aspects, including curriculum design, teaching methods, teacher professional development, international exchange and cooperation, technology application, as well as policy support and resource assurance [9]. Frontline international Chinese volunteer teachers can identify problems during the teaching process for the first time, so they need to actively seek solutions to ensure the quality and effectiveness of Chinese teaching activities. So the relevant organizations need to provide support to teachers to communicate. For example, the relevant organizations can organize seminars for frontline teachers regularly, provide a platform for teachers to raise current teaching issues, and discuss and share their methods together, enriching their teaching approaches. What is more, the

relevant organizations can invite relevant experts and teachers with full experience to listen to the problems that teachers have faced recently and find a good way to resolve them.

As for the issue of the disconnect between training and actual teaching situations for international Chinese volunteer teachers, the organizations related to international Chinese education need to pay attention to the reality of the teaching environment and other situations during the training. Make international Chinese volunteer teachers learn the ability to handle a real teaching environment and challenges in training. The organizations related to international Chinese education could add an internship period in a real teaching environment for international Chinese volunteer teachers, using a mentorship system to help these teachers adapt to their future teaching environment and life in advance. The internship period for international Chinese volunteer teachers can follow the internship tasks of domestic normal university students in China, allowing teachers to gain practical experience by following current international Chinese volunteer teachers. Through this internship period, international Chinese volunteer teachers can become familiar with various aspects of the country they will work in, prepare for their future work and living.

International Chinese volunteer teachers who have already worked in their position can also provide suggestions for these new teachers based on their daily performance. Solve the questions from new teachers, and offer some advice based on their own teaching experience.

4.2. Suggestions Based on the International Chinese Volunteer Teachers' Preparation and Self-improvement

For the international Chinese volunteer teachers, they should make full preparation before class, such as preparing various forms and methods for teaching. From the cases, it can be seen that teaching aids are one of the factors that cause cultural differences and impact the quality of teaching. The teaching process needs teaching aids. So teachers need to prepare fully before class, understand the cultural background of students, and prepare appropriate and rich teaching aids carefully. If they use inappropriate teaching aids, teachers should use other teaching aids or other teaching methods in class to help students study Chinese, ensuring teaching activities are ongoing with good quality and quantity. At this time, teachers should cultivate students' respect and tolerance for different cultures, ensuring the conduct of students' cultural experiences.

As for the impact on teaching caused by different cultures, values, and educational systems, international Chinese volunteer teachers should establish intercultural awareness and cultivate students' intercultural communication awareness and abilities. In the 2007 report of the AdHoc Committee on Foreign Languages of the American Modern Language Association, the goals of foreign language education at the college level are redefined: It fully utilizes the unique educational value of learning foreign languages and cultures, helping students enhance their intellect and imagination, cultivate the ability to reflect deeply and comprehensively on their place in the world, and understand how culture and society are constructed through language [10]. This type of foreign language education systematically teaches the differences between American English and the target language in terms of meaning, ways of thinking, and worldview [11]. The theory of cultural diversity in intercultural education pointed out cultivating students' respect and tolerance for different cultures through education, enhancing their intercultural understanding [12]. Yao Ling thinks that, guided by intercultural communication theory, educators can help students gain the skills of intercultural communication and cultivate their communication abilities and adaptability in different cultural environments [13]. Therefore, international Chinese volunteer teachers also need to establish teaching goals for teaching Chinese and facilitating cultural exchange in this cross-cultural environment. When international Chinese volunteer teachers face cultural differences that impact their teaching, they need to use appropriate teaching methods and technology to help students understand and learn a different culture with an open and equal mind, cultivating students' intercultural communication ability. At the same time, international Chinese volunteer teachers should actively learn about the culture of the students and set a good example for cross-cultural communication.

5. Conclusion

According to this paper, some conclusions can be seen:

First of all, regarding the organizations related to international Chinese education training for international Chinese volunteer teachers, they have a significant meaning and important role, but their shortcomings should be acknowledged. Therefore, it is necessary to optimize the form and content of training. Adopt a 'mentorship system' to help prospective international Chinese volunteer teachers accumulate real classroom experience, assisting them in quickly adapting to work and teaching overseas. Encourage teachers who are teaching to collaborate with each other. The organizations related to international Chinese education need to create conditions for international Chinese volunteer teachers to organize teacher seminars to share problems and develop new teaching methods, and make up for the shortcomings caused by the lag in training.

What is more, for international Chinese volunteer teachers, the impact of cultural differences during teaching is normal. So international Chinese volunteer teachers need to do full preparations before class, enrich teaching techniques and methods to ensure the conduct of teaching activities, and maintain teaching quality. Also, international Chinese volunteer teachers should set up correct and comprehensive teaching aims. While teaching Chinese in class, international Chinese volunteer teachers need to cultivate students' intercultural awareness, encouraging them to engage with different cultures with an open and equal mind, and develop their ability for intercultural communication.

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