Journal of Education and Educational Research
ISSN: 2957-9465 | Vol. 21, No. 2, 2026

Developing Middle School Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Teaching

Xinchen Man *

Department of General Education, Chongqing Finance and Economics College, Chongqing, 400000, China
*** Corresponding author Email:** xinchenman@163.com

Abstract: Against the background of globalisation and the increasing frequency of cross-cultural exchanges, English teaching not only undertakes the task of language knowledge transfer, but also needs to cultivate students' ability to understand cultural differences, use language appropriately and effectively carry out cross-cultural communication. At present, some English classes still have shortcomings in terms of cultural resource integration, communication situation creation and learning evaluation, and students' cultural understanding and language practice ability have not been fully connected. In response to the above problems, this article analyses the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability of English students, explores the specific implementation path from different aspects, and emphasises the role of teachers' teaching literacy improvement and teaching practice, in order to promote the integrated development of language knowledge, cultural awareness and communication ability, and provide a reference for English teaching reform.

Keywords: English Teaching; Intercultural Communicative Competence; Cultural Awareness; Language Use; Teaching Reform.

1. Introduction

Language is an important carrier of cultural exchange. The smooth development of communication activities depends not only on the accurate application of language knowledge, but also on factors such as cultural background, communication habits and ways of thinking. With the continuous expansion of international communication channels, students need to gradually form a comprehensive ability to understand multiculturalism, identify communication differences and flexibly deal with communication problems in the process of learning English [1-3]. However, at present, some English teaching still pays more attention to vocabulary, grammar and test-taking ability, and insufficient attention to the systematic integration of cultural knowledge and the training of real communication ability, which leads to students prone to inaccurate context judgement and inappropriate expression in actual communication. Based on this, this article analyses the problems faced by students in the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability in combination with the actual characteristics of English teaching, and puts forward corresponding paths from different aspects to provide ideas for improving the practical and comprehensive educational effect of English teaching.

2. Significance of Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence

2.1. Understanding Chinese and Other Cultural Perspectives

Cultural background will affect people's understanding of language meaning, communication etiquette and social behaviour. Students can only reduce misreading in cross-cultural communication by recognising that there are commonalities between different cultures and their own expression habits and value orientations. intercultural communication deeply enhances cultural interaction, and communication is a central feature. No one is left behind or unchanged in this kind of communication since everyone learns and grows in a consolidated interactive society. English textbooks contain a variety of cultural information such as festival customs, family relationships, campus life, social etiquette, etc., which provides learning materials for students to understand the lifestyles of different countries. Teachers can guide students to analyse the cultural reasons behind specific behaviours around topics such as greetings, the use of titles, the concept of time and table manners, and avoid simply attributing individual phenomena to national character or fixed labels. In the process of cultural comparison, Chinese cultural content should also be appropriately introduced to help students understand the expression characteristics of local culture, and try to use English to introduce traditional festivals, local customs and contemporary social life, so as to lay a cognitive foundation for cross-cultural exchanges.

2.2. Improving the Practical Use of English

English language knowledge can only fully reflect its application value when entering into specific communication situations. Vocabulary explanation, grammar analysis and sentence pattern practice in traditional classrooms help students build a language foundation, but if teaching stays at the level of standard answers and mechanical imitation for a long time, students are prone to recognise language forms but find it difficult to express their actual needs flexibly. Cross-cultural communication ability training emphasises the connection between language form and communication purpose, and requires students to choose appropriate ways of expression according to the object of communication, the characteristics of the occasion and the communication task. For example, when making requests, expressing different opinions, apologising or responding to praise, students need to adjust the tone and wording according to the context to understand the different effects that direct and euphemistic

expressions may have. Teachers can integrate these communication functions into role-playing, situational dialogue and task-based activities to guide students to comprehensively apply language knowledge when completing realistic communication tasks. After continuous training, students can gradually get rid of dependence on fixed sentence patterns and improve the flexibility, accuracy and appropriateness of language expression.

2.3. Developing Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Thinking

The cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills not only requires students to accumulate Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge, but also should pay attention to the development of cultural discrimination, perspective thinking and rational judgement ability. In the face of social phenomena in different cultural backgrounds, students tend to make judgements based on their own experience and ignore the social environment and cultural factors behind their behaviour. English teaching can be combined with the content of textbooks to guide students to understand the reasons for the formation of different communication behaviours through cultural case analysis, text discussion and situational simulation[4]. As shown in Table 1, teachers can design teaching activities around cultural difference discrimination, social background understanding, communication situation analysis, multi-view exchange and cultural cognitive reflection, and combine cultural knowledge learning with thinking training. For example, for topics such as personal space, privacy boundaries and daily communication etiquette, organise students to conduct group discussions, compare expression habits in different situations, and explain the basis for judgement in combination with specific cases. In the teaching process, teachers should avoid simply generalising cultural differences into fixed patterns, and encourage students to respect diverse views and reflect on their own cognition. By continuously carrying out relevant activities, students can gradually improve their cultural understanding and context judgement ability, and form an open and inclusive cross-cultural communication attitude.

Table 1. Teaching Activities for Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Thinking

Teaching focus	Instructional approach	Learning objective
Recognising cultural differences	Compare social phenomena and behavioural practices across cultural contexts.	Improve the ability to recognise cultural differences.
Understanding social contexts	Use cultural cases to explore the historical and social factors shaping behaviour.	Develop a deeper understanding of culture.
Analysing communicative situations	Discuss scenarios involving personal space, privacy boundaries and related issues.	Strengthen contextual judgement.
Exploring multiple perspectives	Organise group discussions, presentations of viewpoints and case analyses.	Develop perspective-taking skills.
Reflecting on cultural understanding	Guide students to analyse issues using specific evidence and reflect on their assumptions.	Develop reasoned and inclusive attitudes towards cultural diversity.

3. Challenges in Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence

3.1. Insufficient Selection and Integration of Cultural Content

The quality of cross-cultural teaching content directly affects the depth of students' understanding of different cultures, but in actual teaching, some cultural materials have scattered content, repeated themes or lack of hierarchy. Some classes mainly introduce Western festivals, eating habits, celebrity stories and other knowledge. Although they can stimulate students' interest in learning, they may not be able to directly respond to the difficulties of understanding in actual communication. Some teaching materials simplify the presentation of cultural differences, and it is easy for students to understand certain social behaviours as habits shared by all English users. In addition, the proportion and relevance of Chinese and foreign cultural content also need to be further coordinated. If the teaching focusses too much on the introduction of foreign culture, students may lack the opportunity to use English to express Chinese culture; if only a simple comparison of Chinese and foreign phenomena is carried out, the historical background and social conditions of cultural formation may be ignored. Teachers should systematically screen and classify cultural materials according to students' age characteristics, language level and curriculum goals, organically link topics such as daily communication, campus life, social customs, values and cultural communication, and present the internal diversity of culture in combination with real corpus and specific cases to enhance the relevance and coherence of the teaching content[5].

3.2. Limited Communicative Situations and Practical Activities

Cross-cultural communication ability needs to be gradually formed in language input, meaning negotiation and practical expression. It is difficult to fully meet the practical needs of students by relying only on text reading and teacher explanation. Although some classrooms set up dialogue exercises, the content of the activity often revolves around the sentence pattern of the textbook. Communication tasks lack information differences, role changes and problem-solving requirements. Students only need to reproduce the preset content to complete the learning tasks, and experience less understanding deviations and expression adjustments that may occur in real communication. Affected by factors such as class schedule, class size and teaching resources, it is difficult for some teachers to organise continuous discussions,

simulated exchanges or cross-cultural cooperation activities, and students lack the opportunity to use English on different occasions. For example, in the face of cultural issues raised by overseas visitors, students not only need to organise language, but also need to judge the other party's concerns, choose appropriate information to explain, and supplement the explanation according to the other party's feedback. Without such comprehensive tasks in the classroom, it will be difficult for students to fully exercise their communication strategies. English teaching should appropriately increase practical activities with clear goals and real communication needs, so that students can learn to listen, clarify, explain and negotiate in the process of interaction.

3.3. Inadequate Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Teaching evaluation will affect the direction of students' learning, and also determine whether teachers can accurately grasp the development of cross-cultural ability. At present, some English teaching evaluations are still based on knowledge indicators such as vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing, and the examination of cultural understanding, context judgement, communication strategies and communication effects is relatively limited. Even if students can accurately answer cultural knowledge questions, they may not be able to use relevant knowledge reasonably in specific communication. On the contrary, although some students' language expression is not fluent enough, they can actively listen, respect differences, and effectively complete communication tasks through questioning and explanation. If the evaluation only focusses on the accuracy of the language form, it is easy to ignore the use of strategies and cultural attitudes of students in the process of communication. In addition, cross-cultural communication skills are comprehensive and situational, and it is difficult for a single test to fully reflect its changes. Teachers need to establish a more diverse evaluation method, combine classroom observation, situational tasks, learning files, peer evaluation and students' self-evaluation, and collect evidence from the dimensions of cultural understanding, language appropriateness, interactive participation and problem handling to provide a basis for subsequent teaching adjustments.

4. Strategies for Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence

4.1. Integrating Cultural Resources from Textbooks

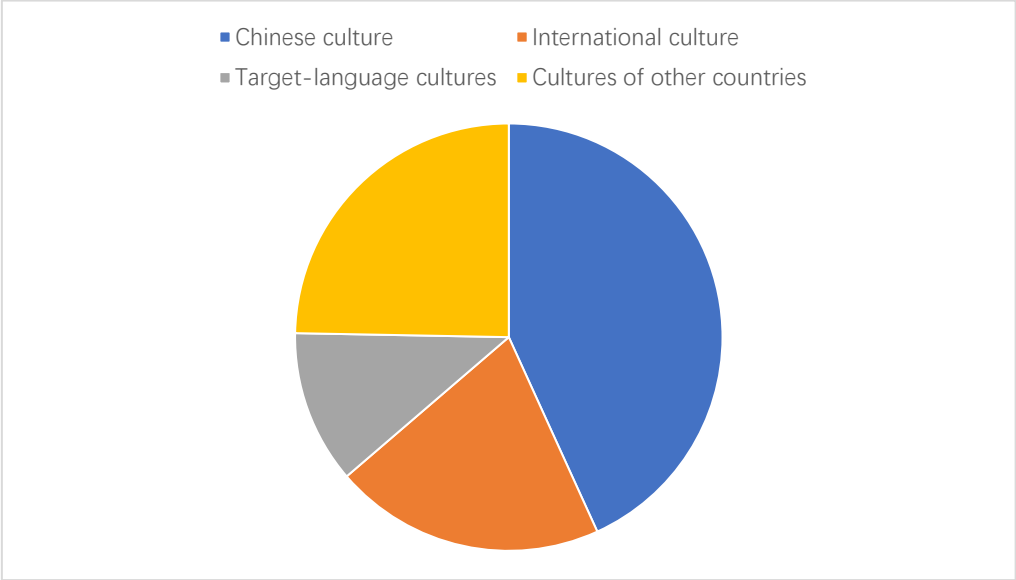


Figure 1. Representation of Regional Cultures in English Textbooks

Textbooks are an important support for cultural teaching in English classes. Teachers should combine curriculum standards with students' learning needs to explore the cultural information in the text and transform it into learning content with communicative value. Taking the Grade 7 English textbook of the People's Education Edition as an example, the relevant research has calculated the presentation of different regional cultures. As shown in Figure 1, the cultural content in the textbook has the characteristics of diverse composition. Teachers can expand teaching around the themes of festival customs, family life, campus communication and social etiquette, and combine cultural background, language expression and communication rules to help students understand the connection between text information and real life. During the teaching process, we should also pay attention to the English expression of Chinese culture, guide students to introduce traditional festivals, local food and history and culture, and deepen students' understanding of different communication habits through Chinese and foreign culture comparison. Teachers can also supplement materials such as news reports, short interviews and life dialogues to enrich cultural learning scenarios and promote students to improve their cultural understanding ability and cross-cultural communication level in language practice.

4.2. Creating Authentic Communicative Situations

Real or close to real communication situations can turn language learning from formal practice to meaning expression, so that students can understand the relationship between language choice and cultural context under clear communication goals. Teachers can design tasks around themes such as travel consultation, campus communication, cultural introduction, business reception and daily socialising,

and provide students with specific communication objects, scenario conditions and question requirements, so that they can complete information transmission and meaning negotiation in interaction[6]. For example, in the classroom activity of simulating the reception of foreign exchange students, students need to introduce campus facilities, explain the curriculum, answer questions about life, and adjust the expression according to the other party's understanding. The activity design should not only stipulate the content of the dialogue, but also set up temporary questions or information differences appropriately to encourage students to take the initiative to ask questions, clarify misunderstandings and supplement explanations. Teachers can observe students' performance in tone selection, polite expression, information organisation and response style, and organise a review after the activity to analyse the communication effects that may be brought about by different expressions. Through continuous situational training, students can accumulate diversified communication experience and improve their ability to cope with unfamiliar communication tasks.

4.3. Diversifying Classroom Interaction

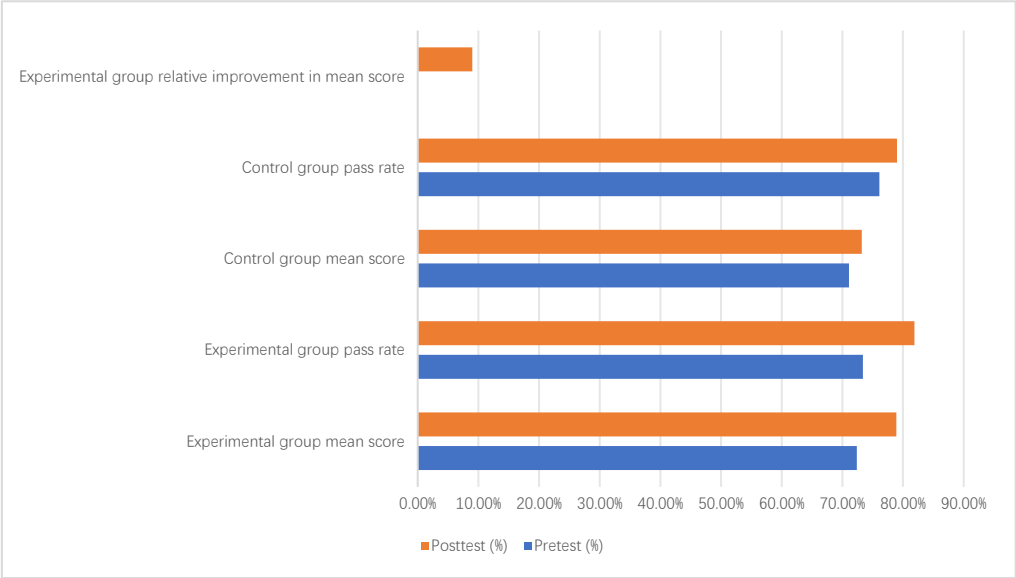


Figure 2. Pretest and Posttest Results of an Intercultural English Teaching Experiment

The improvement of cross-cultural communication ability cannot be separated from continuous classroom interaction. Teachers can enhance students' language practice experience through activities such as group cooperation, role swapping, situational debate and cooperative display. Taking the cross-cultural English teaching experiment as an example, the researchers analysed the impact of cultural teaching on students' learning performance through the pre- and post-test data of the experimental group and the control group. As shown in Figure 2, there were changes in the average score and pass rate of the experimental group and the control group. Teachers can draw on such teaching ideas to design campus cultural activity simulation tasks, let students play the role of activity organisers, international students and volunteers respectively, and negotiate on activity arrangements, cultural habits and participation methods. During the interaction process, teachers should pay attention to whether students can accurately understand the intentions of others, appropriately express their personal views, and resolve communication differences through questions and explanations. After the activity, peer evaluation and teacher comments can be organised to help students summarise effective communication strategies and find shortcomings in expression. Through diversified interactive training, students can accumulate cross-cultural communication experience and gradually improve their communication and coordination ability and cultural adaptation awareness.

4.4. Improving Multidimensional Assessment

The formation of cross-cultural communication ability is gradual, and teaching evaluation needs to shift from a single result judgement to continuous observation of the learning process and actual performance. Teachers can formulate evaluation standards around cultural knowledge understanding, context judgement, appropriateness of language expression, interactive cooperation and communication problem handling, and combine written tests with oral presentation, role-playing, case analysis and project results. For the same task, the evaluation should not only focus on the number of grammatical errors, but also check whether students accurately understand the communication goal, respect the communication object, adjust the expression according to the feedback, and effectively solve the problems arising in the communication. For example, in English cultural introduction activities, students' performance can be comprehensively evaluated from the dimensions of content accuracy, clarity of cultural interpretation, language organisation ability and on-site response ability [7-8]. Learning files can record students' works, reflection records and teachers' feedback in different periods, which is convenient for observing their ability changes; peer evaluation and self-evaluation help students discover their own shortcomings in communication strategies and cultural cognition. Teachers should adjust the teaching content and the difficulty of activities according to the evaluation results, so that the evaluation can really play the role of diagnosis, feedback and improvement, and promote the gradual improvement of students' cross-cultural communication skills [9-10].

5. Conclusion

The cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication ability is a systematic task that integrates language learning,

cultural understanding and practical application, which needs to run through all aspects of English teaching. In response to problems such as insufficient integration of cultural content, limited opportunities for communication practice and relatively single evaluation methods, teachers should fully explore the cultural resources in textbooks, create communication situations close to real life, enhance students' communication experience with the help of diversified interactive activities, and provide timely feedback on learning effectiveness through ongoing and diversified assessment. Schools should also strengthen the professional development of teachers and the construction of teaching resources, and promote the effective connection between classroom teaching and extracurricular practice. In the future, English teaching should pay more attention to students' cultural understanding, language expression and communication coordination ability in the real context, so that the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability can gradually shift from knowledge transfer to comprehensive practice, and promote students to form an open and inclusive cultural attitude and the ability to adapt to diverse communication environments.

References

[1] Baker, W. (2012). From cultural awareness to intercultural awareness: Culture in ELT. ELT Journal, 66(1), 62–70. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr017.

[2] Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. Journal of Studies in International Education, 10(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002.

[3] Sercu, L. (2006). The foreign language and intercultural competence teacher: The acquisition of a new professional identity. Intercultural Education, 17(1), 55–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980500502321.

[4] Wang, H.-C. (2023). Facilitating English L2 learners' intercultural competence and learning of English in a Taiwanese university. Language Teaching Research, 27(4), 1032–1048. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820969359.

[5] Young, T. J., & Sachdev, I. (2011). Intercultural communicative competence: Exploring English language teachers' beliefs and practices. Language Awareness, 20(2), 81–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2010.540328.

[6] Heggernes, S. L. (2021). A critical review of the role of texts in fostering intercultural communicative competence in the English language classroom. Educational Research Review, 33, 100390. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100390.

[7] Huang, L.-J. D. (2021). Developing intercultural communicative competence in foreign language classrooms – A study of EFL learners in Taiwan. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 83, 55–66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.04.015.

[8] Liao, H., & Li, L. (2023). Facilitating EFL learners' intercultural competence through culturally responsive teaching in oral English classrooms. System, 115, 103070. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103070.

[9] Scarino, A. (2009). Assessing intercultural capability in learning languages: Some issues and considerations. Language Teaching, 42(1), 67–80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444808005417.

[10] Scarino, A. (2010). Assessing intercultural capability in learning languages: A renewed understanding of language, culture, learning, and the nature of assessment. The Modern Language Journal, 94(2), 324–329. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01026.x.