

# Analysis of Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Education

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## Abstract

Telling the story of China effectively and amplifying the voice of China have raised new demands for cultivating foreign language talents in China. Globalization, as a significant factor influencing the Chinese economy, also indirectly impacts China's education system. Under the backdrop of globalization, culture is no longer a singular model centered on a specific culture but rather a diversified model. However, traditional English education, which is teacher-centered, has some drawbacks and cannot adapt to these new requirements. Cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence has gradually gained public attention and become a more significant objective of English education. For enhancing the current state of English teaching, this article is grounded in Byram's intercultural communicative competence model and suggests pertinent strategies for intercultural communicative competence across four dimensions: attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. At the same time, English teachers should also enhance their language skills and cross-cultural communication competence.

## Keywords

English education, Byram's Intercultural communicative competence model, Intercultural communicative competence

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, globalization, as a new phenomenon, has had a profound impact on the development of education and culture. Just as Korean education is affected by its social and cultural traditions (Shin, 2012), Western university models, and economic development, Chinese education is inevitably influenced by these factors. Globalization not only puts China's culture in a stage of high integration with other countries around the world but also enhances cultural interaction between different countries, such as the increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad in various countries and the increase in the number of Confucius Institutes built overseas in China. This also shows that under the background of globalization, culture is no longer a single model centered on a certain culture, but a diversified model. With the advancement of world integration, it is particularly important to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence. And China's cultural and educational traditions have their own characteristics (Dai Yuncai, 2019). More and more foreign language teachers are also realizing that the main goal of foreign language teaching should be to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence rather than get good grades. Of course, what we mean by cross-cultural communication cannot be simply understood as understanding another culture based on one's own culture. In Chinese education, traditional English teaching mainly adopts the audio-lingual method and the grammar-translation method, both of which emphasize students' grasping of the basic knowledge of English. Students achieve the goal of mastering English knowledge through repeated practice, which can play a certain role in the early stages of learning English. However, in

the increasingly complex international situation and social environment, this practice is of no help in cultivating students' cross-cultural communicative competence. In order to better promote communication between different cultures, it is crucial to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence.

## 2. Intercultural communicative competence

As an important concept in the field of cross-cultural communication, the meaning of cross-cultural communicative competence is abundant. And there are some variations in scholars' interpretations of cross-cultural communicative competence. In the field of linguistics, cross-cultural communicative competence mainly refers to language ability and socio-cultural ability. Language ability can be considered as people's ability to understand vocabulary, constitute sentences, and use grammatical structures. Social and cultural abilities are composed of people's ability to conduct affairs, their knowledge systems, their ability to use language, and their communication skills in interpersonal communication. People's ability to conduct affairs mainly refers to the ability to abandon egocentrism when people communicate with groups from different cultures. Knowledge system refers to a system that can reflect culture, such as politics, economy, customs, and habits. The application ability refers to the integrated use of the other three abilities. The Chinese scholar Gao Yihong (2001) proposed that intercultural refers to the acquisition of knowledge and communication skills in the target culture, as well as the transfer of one's stance, emotions, and behavior patterns from the native culture to the target culture in cross-cultural communication. This kind of crossing also has certain prerequisites, and the two cultures involved in cross-cultural communication must have fixed boundaries. However, this crossing is not the ultimate goal of cultivating cross-cultural communication skills. The ultimate goal of cultivating cross-cultural communicative competence is to "transcend", that is, to first realize the existence of cultural differences, but not be bound by such differences. Secondly, being able to communicate in an open and flexible manner. Finally, in cross-cultural communication, self-identification is carried out productively. And this kind of transcendence is the goal of cross-cultural communication that is higher than crossing culture. Foreign scholar Deardoff (2006) defined cross-cultural communicative ability as an effective and appropriate communication ability based on cross-cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes in cross-cultural communication practice. Effectiveness and appropriateness have become the core standards of cross-cultural communicative ability. Effectiveness refers to the effective communication achieved through cultural communication, while appropriateness for successfully achieving personal goals refers to the utterance and behavior of the communicator meeting the expectations and requirements of a specific context. This needs the communicator to fully understand the expression habits and behavior styles that the other party can accept in the intercultural communicative context and the communicator should also avoid using behaviors that violate etiquette standards which are thought to be impolite. The existing cross-cultural communicative models include three categories: constituent elements, developmental stages, and dialogue and interaction. The constituent elements of Byram have had a significant impact on the field of foreign language education and have been unanimously recognized by many scholars (1997). Therefore, this article mainly introduces Byram's intercultural communicative competence model.

Byram's intercultural communicative competence model divides intercultural communicative competence into five different abilities from four aspects: knowledge, attitude, skills, and critical thinking (1997). They are attitude, knowledge, ability to articulate and connect, discovery and communicative skills, and critical cultural awareness. Attitude refers to curiosity and an open mindset, which means not making positive judgments about one's own culture or immediately making negative judgments about others' culture. Attitude requires the communicator to hold a reserved view of their own culture. Knowledge is the understanding of a certain social group and its related things, the behavior and etiquette habits of one's own country and other countries, and the process of social and personal interaction. The ability to interpret and connect refers to the ability to connect relevant events of one's own culture to explain events of other cultures in cross-cultural communication. Discovery and communication skills refer to the ability to discover and acquire new knowledge from other cultures and to apply this knowledge to practical communication. Critical cultural awareness and political education mainly refer to the ability to rely on clear standards to make correct judgments about one's own culture and other cultures, as well as the views and behaviors of other countries. Among these five elements, Byram places critical cultural awareness and political education in the middle of its model. This is because Byram believes that the purpose of education is not to change the values of the educated, but to hope that they can put their own position correctly before criticizing other cultures and expressing any opinions. Secondly, the importance of political education lies in its universality of democracy, human rights, peace, and civic education, which can make more reasonable judgments and consultations on culture and intercultural communication. In other words, he advocates for the evaluation of different cultures and intercultural communication based on universal values (Byram & Feng, 2004). However, the value of universality still requires more theoretical research. In addition, Byram has constructed a theoretical model of cross-cultural

communicative ability in the context of foreign language teaching, highlighting the importance of cultivating communicative language skills for second language learners, which plays an important guiding role in foreign language teaching and practice.

In summary, Byram's intercultural communicative competence model integrates language and culture, and this model particularly emphasizes the fundamental role of communicative language ability and the importance of critical thinking and political education.

### 3. Current situation of English teaching

The current higher foreign language education has problems such as a binary structure, one-way teaching mode, excessive emphasis on the instrumental nature of foreign languages, and serious cultural imbalance in foreign language education (Han Yonghui & Li Ziwen, 2019). There are four aspects which can reflect the current situation of English teaching in China. Firstly, the foreign language teaching mode in China is single. Although foreign language education in China has been ongoing for many years, traditional teaching methods are still used in foreign language classrooms, even in university classrooms. The traditional teaching model is teacher centered, which means that teachers impart knowledge in the classroom and students passively receive knowledge and are required to note important key points. There is less interaction between teachers and students, and students rarely participate in the classroom. The teacher requires students to memorize words and phrases after class and usually dictates in class the next day. If the dictation fails, they may be fined for copying words. Language is closely related to communication. If there is less communication between teachers and students, how can we improve our foreign language proficiency. Overall, the traditional education model neglects students' enthusiasm and initiative, resulting in low interest among students.

Secondly, the teaching content is not comprehensive enough. The main content of foreign language teaching in China is based on textbooks, and teaching objectives place greater emphasis on academic performance. Therefore, teachers excessively rely on textbooks during class, making it difficult to innovate teaching content. Developing students' cross-cultural communicative competence requires teachers to constantly create new contexts in the classroom so that students can intuitively experience the differences between cultures and thus improve their communication and language abilities. If excessive reliance is on textbooks, the teaching content is not only dull but also difficult to arouse students' interest. The teaching content should not be limited to the textbook, especially when learning a foreign language, one should also learn knowledge beyond the textbook, such as the rituals, customs, and expressions of other countries.

The third aspect is the impact of the social environment on English teaching classrooms. Due to the traditional examination system in China, schools and parents have to pay attention to students' exam scores. As one of the main subjects for students to pursue higher education, the importance of English is self-evident. The country has advocated learning English from the third grade, but some schools in certain regions offer English courses in the first grade. Some parents even require their children to attend English instruction after class during children's early childhood in order to prevent them from losing at the starting line. The negative competition of education in society not only increases the pressure on children, but also on parents and schools. Extracurricular tutoring classes do not enhance students' interest and will create more disgust about learning, increasing the difficulty of teaching for teachers.

The last one is the optimization of foreign language teacher resources. The new educational situation not only puts forward requirements for students but also for teachers. As a language skill, English places more emphasis on practicality. In situations where English is used, it not only values the user's expressive and language abilities, but also their communicative abilities. The cultivation of communicative ability is not something that teachers can accomplish solely based on the knowledge of the textbook. Therefore, teachers need to attach importance to interaction with students in the classroom and pay more attention to correcting students' misunderstandings in expression and to different cultures during communication. We as ICC scholars and educators should keep pursuing an agenda that is truly non-ethnocentric, multicultural and anti-racist (Ladegaard & Christopher, 2015).

### 4. Strategies for cultivating cross-cultural communicative competence based on Byram's ICC model

In the initial stage of learning English, teachers should guide students to express themselves through simple vocabulary and sentences, laying the foundation for deeper learning. However, the cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills is not achieved through simple sentences' use. As mentioned earlier, Byram's ICC model starts from four dimensions: attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness, and it divides cross-cultural communicative competence into five different abilities. According to Byram's theoretical model, the following also explains the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication skills from four aspects: attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness.

Attitude mainly refers to curiosity and an open mindset, which means maintaining curiosity and full respect for the culture of another country, as well as being tolerant and understanding of different cultures. In the process of learning culture, it is necessary to tell students to learn to view different cultures rationally, and at the same time, to establish confidence in their own country's culture, not blindly follow a certain country's culture, nor randomly criticizing a country's culture. Language and culture are inseparable, and when learning a new language, one will inevitably come into contact with the relevant culture. A good attitude determines whether students can accept a new culture, and they cannot accept a new culture, let alone learn and understand it. Therefore, it is very important to correct students' attitudes in learning. Of course, a positive attitude encourages students to maintain curiosity about language and culture learning and it can also help them to better overcome cultural differences. At the beginning of students' learning, teachers should help them establish a correct attitude.

Knowledge is the understanding of a certain social group and its related things, the behavior and etiquette habits of one's own country and other countries, and the process of social and personal interaction. When teachers teach some sentence patterns and expressions in the classroom, they can show students the differences in expression between the two countries and explain the reasons for the differences. At the same time, they need to inform students what expressions are more colloquial and more in line with the speaking habits of other countries. For example, the word "dragon" is one of the twelve zodiac signs in China, and Chinese people are also regarded themselves as the descendants of dragons. Ancient rulers were also known as the "true dragon emperor". The image of the dragon in China is just, and the dragon is a symbol of power and auspiciousness. In Western culture, dragons are often described as winged, spun, and fire-breathing monsters, and the word is used to describe evil things or other bad meanings. Therefore, when teaching, it is not only necessary to teach students how to read, write, and use this word in sentences, but also to see the deep cultural differences through this word. Before and after class, students can be urged to read some interesting books to understand the culture of other countries. In class, some sharing activities can be done to cultivate students' interest in learning. Many scholars propose some beneficial methods to promote English learning. In order to meet the efficiency needs of foreign language teaching in China, Wen Qiufang (2018) proposed the output-oriented approach and continuously revised it.

Skills mainly include two aspects: the ability to explain and connect, as well as the ability to discover and communicate. The ability to interpret and connect refers to the ability to connect relevant events of one's own culture in cross-cultural communication to explain events of other cultures. Discovery and communication skills refer to the ability to discover and acquire new knowledge from other cultures and to apply this knowledge to practical communication. This requires students not only to consolidate their basic language knowledge but also to have the ability to communicate across cultures. Language learning requires a solid foundation in language skills, which puts forward requirements for students' vocabulary, grammar, and expression abilities. Secondly, cross-cultural communicative skills require students to have an understanding and mastery of the knowledge behind language, and also need them to be able to apply knowledge from other cultures to solve problems and troubles encountered in communication. Teachers need to help students improve these skills through regular exercises, such as conducting speech contests with the theme of protecting the Earth, allowing students to speak in English and express their views from different countries' perspectives. This requires students to learn the cultural background of the country they represent after class, and it needs them to have strong language organization skills and expression skills.

Critical cultural awareness mainly refers to the ability to rely on clear standards to make correct judgments about one's own culture and other cultures, as well as the views and behaviors of other countries. In cultivating students' cross-cultural communication skills, it is necessary to cultivate their critical thinking and cultural awareness. In the teaching process, teachers should guide students to learn how to analyze and compare cultural differences, thereby improving students' critical thinking. At the same time, encourage students to think in multiple ways, and cultivate their awareness and ability to think independently.

## 5. Conclusion

The cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability is closely related to English teaching. Reasonable strategies for cultivating cross-cultural communicative abilities can provide students with a good foreign language learning environment, cultivate students to establish correct cross-cultural communicative attitudes and critical cultural awareness. For example, intonation training can use explicit guidance and implicit training (Ji Xiaoli, 2023) and stress input can promote the output of English stress (Tian Fang, 2018). The improvement of English teaching is not only a requirement for students but also a challenge for English teachers. Teachers should focus on cultivating students' cross-cultural communicative abilities in teaching, not only emphasizing basic language knowledge, but also helping students enhance their cross-cultural communication abilities in diverse ways. At the same time, English teachers should also advance their language

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abilities and cross-cultural communicative competence. In course design, teachers should not only ensure clear teaching objectives but also enrich the content of the course. The cooperation between students and teachers is a powerful guarantee for cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence.

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