

# Cultivation of Students' Intercultural Communication Competence Based on Situational Teaching Method in the Context of Key Competence

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**Abstract:** At the beginning of the 21st century, the European Union, in response to the wave of globalisation and the challenges of a knowledge-based economy, has vigorously promoted a lifelong learning strategy in the field of education and training, and has proposed key competence. The importance of intercultural communication has become increasingly evident in the process of globalization. English language teaching plays an important role in facilitating students' intercultural communication skills. In English classroom teaching, we should not only attach significance to the language knowledge, but also integrate cultural concepts into English teaching and learning, so that students can perceive and experience the differences between Chinese and Western cultural practices. Situational teaching method is a lively and interesting method that integrates knowledge with context and can provide methodological guidance and implications for the cultivation of intercultural communication competence of high school students. This paper attempts to combine situational teaching method and intercultural communication skills development, and to investigate the effect of situational teaching method on the development of intercultural communication skills of high school students, so as to provide an effective method for the development of intercultural communication competence of high school students.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communication competence, Situational teaching, Core competence, English teaching in senior high school.

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## 1. Introduction

For half a century, the concept of intercultural (communicative) competence has been studied widely in different fields where interacting with other cultures is a central concern. Intercultural communication competence encompasses attitudes, knowledge and skills at the interface between several cultural areas, including the students' own values and worldviews and those of a target language country[1]. Intercultural communication and exchange, international cooperation and communication require people to express themselves effectively through languages. Intercultural communication competence (ICC), although variously interpreted by different theorists, is characterized by an underlying assumption that it helps to understand and overcome cultural discrepancies[2]. With so many opportunities the EU gives its citizens, the ability to communicate effectively in a common language seems of paramount importance. In the age of economic globalization and information technology, the ability to use English effectively and communicate with people from different cultures is a fundamental quality for citizens. While the goal of English language teaching has undergone changes from imitating "native speakers" to becoming an intercultural communicator, pedagogical implementations have not been fully realized in classrooms, especially the ones that enable students to communicate globally while at the same time help them maintaining their native/traditional languages and cultures[3].

In most schools, however, some teachers are still using the traditional indoctrination mode of teaching in a modern teaching environment, which is teacher-centred teaching. Rigid teaching can't make students fully understand the history, customs, religious culture and cultural background of

countries where English is their mother tongue. The cultivation of intercultural communication ability can't be achieved simply by rote memorization, but needs to be infiltrated into the practice and expression of different contexts through the explanation of knowledge in the process of English application. The lack of real-life situations and contexts for intercultural learning is a major difficulty to the development of intercultural communication skills. As an practical teaching method, situational teaching method has attracted some middle school teachers' attention for mobilizing students' classroom initiative and developing students' core competence. Teachers should guide students to pay attention to cultural factors in the process of language use, and to gradually increase their awareness of the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures. Besides, teachers should create as realistic a context for intercultural communication according to the level of Chinese language development of different learners and students' cognitive abilities and real-life experiences, so as to help students learn in the process of experiencing the intercultural communication environment. Within the basic framework of core competence in English, helping students to develop good cultural awareness is conducive to expand and complement the theory of core competence in the subject of cultural awareness.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Related Study of Intercultural Communication Competence

Theoretical research on intercultural communication began in the USA in the early 1950s. The United States is a country with multi-ethnic immigrants, where cultures of different origins have constantly collided and intertwined to form a

diverse social and cultural environment. Hall (1959) is a pioneer in cross-cultural studies, and his classic works have greatly promoted the development of this field of study. According to him, the survival and reproduction of human beings cannot be separated from the support of culture, and human beings are always under the influence of culture. At the same time, they are also playing a reverse role in influencing culture. Therefore, language and culture are closely linked, and if you want to learn or master a language, you must understand the cultural connotation behind the language[4].

Tannen and broadened the term to include communication between people from different social classes, groups and of different gender. Tannen argues that “communication between men and women can be like cross cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles”. Lustig and Koester described communication as “a symbolic process in which people create shared meanings”. Obviously, communication is culture specific, and therefore people from different parts of the world, with different beliefs and values, will communicate differently. Communication theory can be divided into various schools of thought, or traditions, but for the purpose of this work let us consider the following three: semiotic, sociocultural and phenomenological, as they seem most relevant for further discussion[5].

Bryam (1997) hold that intercultural communication competence is concerning about three aspects, including knowledge, attitudes and skills. Attitudes refer to the ability to be open to other cultures rather than sticking to one’s own. Knowledge refers to having the knowledge of one’s own knowledge of social groups and their cultural products and behaviors in one’s own culture as well as in the culture of the people one is interacting with, and knowledge of the general process of interpersonal and social interaction. Skills is about the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge or the ability to manage knowledge, attitudes and skills in the context of real exchange and communication[6].

Above all, two conclusions can be drawn. For communication to succeed one must be aware of the cultural background, values, beliefs, and manner of communication of the interlocutor. meaning is subjective as it is formed by individuals, and individuals from different cultures may assign different meaning to the same phenomenon.

## **2.2. Situational Teaching Method**

### **2.2.1. Definition**

Situational teaching was first introduced in the UK in the 1920s by Brown, Collins & Duguid (1989), who argued that knowledge is best learned in context and that context-independent learning is meaningless[7]. Although different scholars have defined the concept of situational teaching method differently, a review of the relevant literature shows that they have mostly emphasized two aspects of situational teaching method: teachers create contexts according to the content of teaching; and they aim at understanding knowledge and developing abilities. The purpose is to understand knowledge and develop ability.

### **2.2.2. Related Study of Situational Teaching Method**

In the 1920s, situational teaching method was adopted as an important teaching theory in the UK. In the 1950s, France enriched the application of situational teaching method by using multimedia and other means. Through slides, films and other auxiliary tools to create a situation, strengthen the visual, auditory and other sensory stimulation, so that the learners in

a lively situation for language learning[8]. At the turn of the 21st century, plenty of theoretical and practical studies on situational teaching and learning have been conducted in several US universities in order to address practical issues for students in learning. Jayne Moon (2005) stressed the importance of contextual creation and puts forward five factors needed for good contextual creation: firstly, a good teacher-student relationship and teaching atmosphere; secondly, attractive teaching materials or resources; thirdly, students should be equipped with sufficient background knowledge; fourthly, effective supervision and management of teaching resources by the teachers; and finally, positive communication and interaction among learners[9].

Situational teaching method in China focuses mainly on the study of the application of strategies in the classroom, providing a large number of measures to be followed, but the theory of situational teaching method is still immature and needs further research. In the West, the focus is mainly on the study of theory, which continues to develop and improve, but is not closely integrated with the classroom, so the theory and the development of the discipline are disconnected from each other. Their research and development methods are also different. However, they share the same view that contextual teaching methods are important for the classroom, and that teachers must create situations for students to perceive and think about problems, not only to acquire knowledge, but also to improve their ability to promote overall development. However, these are only at the conceptual level and are not practically applied in the classroom.

## **2.3. Theoretical Basis**

### **2.3.1. Intercultural Communication Theory**

In today’s global context, intercultural communication skills have become the essential quality of talents, and how to cultivate qualified talents is an issue that should be considered at all stages of school education. The English classroom, as the main position for the cultivation of intercultural communication ability, should undertake the task of cultivating 21st century talents with high intercultural communication competence. Language teaching cannot be separated from the penetration of cultural knowledge[10]. English teaching should appropriately introduce corresponding cultural background knowledge, so as to help students better acquire cross-cultural knowledge. In addition, the choice of teaching methods in the intercultural communication classroom is crucial. A good teaching method can both help teachers’ teaching and promote students’ learning.

### **2.3.2. Constructivism**

Constructivist theory suggests that learners construct themselves by enriching and refining their own cognition in “context”, and that knowledge acquisition is a process in which students obtain new knowledge on the basis of their existing background knowledge and previous experience. Constructivists emphasize the student’s subjective body and believe that learning involve students actively experience and obtain knowledge rather than teachers instilling it. The teacher’s task is to provide an environment that is appropriate for students to explore knowledge. The constructivists hold that the teaching process is one in which the teacher creates an environment and assigns classroom tasks to motivate students to acquire knowledge through self-exploration and collaborative exchanges, thus accomplishing the classroom teaching objectives. Constructivist theory has important

theoretical implications for this study. On the one hand, constructivism attaches importance to the factor of “context”, which is similar to the “context” in the contextual teaching method adopted in this paper, and both emphasize the promotion of students’ learning through the creation of context; on the other hand, constructivism plays a guiding role in the cultivation of students’ cross-cultural communication competence.

### **3. The Significance of Situational Teaching Method in Enhancing Intercultural Communication in High School**

Lifelong learning and competence or skill development are key notions in international efforts to meet the demands and challenges of a globalized, rapidly changing and increasingly complex world, and to promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development[10]. It’s important to create as realistic a context for intercultural communication according to the level of Chinese language development of different learners and students’ cognitive abilities and real-life experiences, so as to help students learn in the process of experiencing the intercultural communication environment. Within the basic framework of core competence in English, helping students to develop good cultural awareness is conducive to expand and complement the theory of core competence in the subject of cultural awareness.

The application of situational teaching method is conducive to enriching students’ intercultural knowledge. Starting from the content of the textbook, teachers can create a lively and vivid cross-cultural communication situation close to the students’ real life through the situational teaching method. Teachers can promote students’ understanding and acquisition of language knowledge by teaching language knowledge in concrete and vivid contexts. In addition, foreign customs, social practices, values, history and culture, ways of thinking and behaviour and other cultural knowledge can be taught by teachers in the teaching context. It can not only enhance students’ sense of cultural experience and arouse their interest in learning, but also enrich their cultural knowledge. Therefore, the application of situational teaching method is conducive to increasing the accumulation of students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge, and provides a knowledge reserve.

The application of situational teaching method is conducive to students’ intercultural communication skills. Situational teaching method can effectively solve the problem of “separation of learning and use” in traditional teaching, through the situational teaching method to practice intercultural communication situations, can provide students with opportunities to apply what they have learned previously in some specific communicative situations. The creation of situations by the situational teaching method can prompt students to practice intercultural communication in real or near-real environments by applying the intercultural communication knowledge they have learned. Students’ language use ability and communication ability can be exercised and improved. Therefore, students transferring situations that they have drilled in the classroom to similar real-life situations promotes both the application of knowledge and the smooth running of real-life communicative activities.

The application of situational teaching method is

conducive to the development of intercultural awareness among students. The development of intercultural communicative competence in senior high school should be centred on cultural awareness. Unlike the traditional English classroom which ignores the disadvantages of cultural teaching, the teacher’s cultural knowledge and classroom contextual exercises under the situational teaching method is helpful for the enhancement of their knowledge of the cultural values concerning their own country and other countries. Intercultural teaching for students under the situational teaching method is conducive for students to compare their own culture with other cultures, to improve cultural sensitivity, develop correct cultural values and good cross-cultural awareness and attitudes in a subtle way. Thus, students can become qualified intercultural communicators.

### **4. The Current Status of the Application of Situational Teaching Method in the Cultivation of Intercultural Teaching in High School in the Context of Core Competence**

There is a lack of awareness of intercultural teaching and situational teaching method on the part of teachers. Many teachers do not have a clear concept of what intercultural communicative competence is. It is difficult for teachers to teach interculturalism without clarifying the meaning of intercultural communicative competence. Secondly, teachers do not have a deep enough understanding of the purpose and significance of intercultural teaching. A small proportion of teachers think that intercultural teaching is helpful for students to understand the cultural knowledge of the target language, to develop a positive and open attitude towards the target language culture, to recognize and be able to accept cultural differences between China and the West. Both views affirm the significance of intercultural teaching, but they have not yet clarified the essence. Since English has become an international lingua franca, it carries not the culture of a particular nation, but different cultures from all over the world[10]. Therefore, the real purpose of intercultural teaching should be to enable students to obtain basic cultural knowledge and acquire competence to explore culture, so that when they communicate with people of different cultures in English, they can flexibly adjust their communicative behaviors in real time and continuously improve their intercultural communicative competence.

Students’ lack of initiative in intercultural communication learning. Another problem of high school students’ insufficient intercultural communication skills is the lack of initiative in learning intercultural knowledge. Students are now in a society where information technology is widespread, and under the influence of various online resources, students’ access to knowledge has increased, and their acceptance of new things should have been improved as well[11]. Some students think that it is not important to develop their intercultural communication skills in high school, and that it is only useful when they go abroad to study or choose a specific career, and they hope that their teachers will teach them more about exam answering skills and knowledge to get good results in the exams in the course of their study. Nowadays, the atmosphere in English education classrooms in senior secondary schools has not become particularly

positive and active, and there are not many opportunities for students to use their own language to express their views throughout the course of the class. Students are not motivated when it comes to self-expression, and in the long run, they can develop a habit of not wanting to express themselves and not wanting to express themselves.

Intercultural teaching activities based on situational teaching method lack of novelty. The most important problem that exists when setting up teaching situations is that teachers do not take into account all the factors in creating teaching situations, which is mainly manifested in the following ways: firstly, the teaching situations created by teachers are not adapted to the objectives of the teaching; secondly, the teaching situations are not closely connected with the teaching content; thirdly, the teaching situations do not match with the cognitive characteristics and interests of the students; fourthly, the teaching situations are not closely connected with the real life, which making the stimulation of the students' interest in learning quite difficult. Teachers often teach intercultural knowledge by showing relevant films or music, using text and pictures to illustrate, asking students to discuss comparisons, making oral presentations themselves, and quoting literature work. Accordingly, the teacher arranged student activities such as having students watch videos, read outside of class, and role-play. Teachers have three main ways of teaching intercultural communication: the first is to supplement relevant cultural knowledge based on classroom content; the second is to set up relevant situations for students to learn cultural knowledge through pair and group activities; and the third is to inspire students to think about acquiring cultural knowledge through the string of questions. When teachers develop their intercultural communication competence, they mostly adopt their own oral narration and questioning, and at the same time, they use visual materials such as videos and pictures, so the teaching activities are relatively single and lack of novelty.

## **5. Strategies of Core Competence Based the Situational Method in the Cultivation of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

### **5.1. Developing students' intercultural communication awareness**

Western countries differ greatly from our country in terms of worldview, values, social etiquette, religious beliefs, modes of thinking and lifestyles. Culture is expressed through language, so that cultural differences can be clearly perceived cultural differences. For high school students at this stage, they have been imbued with Chinese culture since childhood. In the process of learning English, they are easily affected by the negative transfer of mother tongue and ethnocentrism, and then view the culture of English-speaking countries on the basis of their own country's cultural background to view the culture of English-speaking countries. As a result, some of the content will be more difficult to understand for certain learning elements. English teachers can teach by way of cultural comparison between the East and the West by creating some real-life situation, so that students can more intuitively feel the cultural differences, remove the cultural barriers encountered by students in the learning process, and correctly understand the knowledge they have learned.

### **5.2. Making Use of Textbook to Activate Students' Background Knowledge**

Teachers can make full use of the information provided by the textbooks. And it important for teachers to study the textbooks carefully, understand the teaching purpose of the textbooks, ponder the intention of the writers of the textbooks, and think about how to convert the knowledge of the textbooks into visualized scenarios with a complete understanding of the textbooks. Before the teacher formally begins to explain the new module, the students can be shown the relevant cultural background first. Secondly, multimedia such as video and audio to experience the cultural content of a foreign country. Teaching in this way facilitates the creation of more authentic contexts.

In the discourse reading materials of high school English textbooks, there are many words and sentences that contain information about the culture of western nations, such as geography, history, values, time and space, concepts of interpersonal interactions, folk customs and other words and sentences. Taking an example of Christmas, When teaching this topic, teachers can inform students the origin of Christmas. Teachers introduce students to the West how to celebrate Christmas, teachers can not only display some related vocabulary in different ways, such as: Christmas Eve, Christmas tree, Santa Claus , Christmas Card, etc., but also to let the students listen to some Christmas songs, watch some videos, tell some interesting stories about the festival, making them feel the strong atmosphere of the Western Christmas.

### **5.3. Applying Modern Multimedia to English Classroom Teaching**

Multimedia provides vivid, realistic and joyful foreign language learning environments for foreign language teaching in various forms of graphics, text, sound and images, songs and so forth, which can deepen students' knowledge of the language through exposure and deepen their intuitive experience of intercultural communicative activities or tasks in the target language, and then they are immersed in it[12]. At present, multimedia-assisted teaching methods have been developed rapidly, and the contextual materials can be derived from textbooks, multimedia network, teaching aids, teachers' experience, real life and so on. When the modern network information technology is better applied to the teaching process of college English subject-related knowledge content, the relevant on-the-job instructors must also better play their own educational leaders who can play in the education and teaching classroom. Multimedia modernization teaching tools are the most advantageous teaching tools that relevant in-service instructors can use to create teaching scenarios for students[13].

Make good use of multimedia networks. The current network is developing rapidly, the network can find a variety of resources, teachers can search for relevant films, music, pictures in the network. Teachers need to screen useful resources in advance and change them to create a series of teaching contexts in combination with the teaching objectives. Teachers can also search for excellent English contextual teaching open classes on the Internet, and use them to form their own classroom teaching contexts under the premise of borrowing them and combining them with their students and their own situations. Teachers can make full use of multimedia equipment to let students watch classic films in English. Students can also be selectively made to listen to

speeches by world dignitaries, business tycoons, and so on. By watching and listening to these materials, students can familiarise themselves with traditional customs, standards of behaviour and values in Western countries, and understand and learn various methods and means of linguistic communication linked to the culture of the target language. At the same time, students can also communicate across culture on the Internet. For, instance, they can find pen pals on international websites, communicate with them by e-mail and take part in online communication activities in English language through some apps to apply what they have learned in a specific context and experience different culture.

#### 5.4. Organizing Interesting Activities in the Classroom

Before formally starting the study, different contexts need to be created according to the theme of the unit, so that know more about the relevant linguistic and cultural background knowledge. Because the communicative scene is not fixed, teachers' conscious creation of relevant contexts in lectures can largely improve students' intercultural communication level in different contexts. Situational teaching method is applied in our teaching and learning activities in the relocation and creation category, where students are faced with situations outside the classroom and are able to apply what they have learned, express their views and attitudes, and achieve effective communication. When creating situations, teachers are required to choose the materials for teaching situations, to fully integrate the content of the textbook itself, highlight the focus of the situation teaching. When designing teaching contexts, it is important to focus on the integration of the teaching context with the content of the textbook, and to bring the content to the fore. In order to stimulate students' interest in learning and improve their concentration, teachers should create new and interesting teaching situations as much as possible.

Role play encourages new ways of thinking and interacting with things and people of our personal environment. This technique uses a variety of dramatic instruments derived from sociodrama and psychodrama, such as replaying a scene or a part of a scene, role reversal, making asides, mirror and double[14]. Role-playing is more prevalent in the English classroom, where students are able to revel in simulated environments, such as phone calls and various daily conversations, etc. Games are a great way to stimulate students' interest in teacher-student and student-student interaction, which not only helps students perceive cultural differences between different regions and experience various cultural values. For example, teachers can use performance-based classroom activities to simulate real-life scenarios in the classroom, allowing students to play roles and engage in activities such as greeting each other, making phone calls, and giving birthday gifts; having students simulate a British person receiving a guest people. This can be done outside of the classroom or improvised and then commented on to see if the performance is in keeping with the British way of life. These activities can not only create a learning-friendly classroom atmosphere, but also activate students' learning enthusiasm for the participation and engagement of

intercultural activities, so that students can accumulate communicative experience, improve their ability to adapt to the culture.

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