

# Research on College Students' Intercultural Communication Competence from the Perspective of Ecological Teaching

-- A case of foreign language students at Hubei Engineering University

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**Abstract:** In light of the significance of fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the context of globalisation, this study presents an analysis of the current level of ICC among college students and its influencing factors by the findings of student interviews. Based on the ecological view of teaching, recommendations are put forth with the aim of enhancing teachers' pedagogical approaches and facilitating the transition of English teaching towards an ecological model. This will, in turn, contribute to the enhancement of college students' ICC. This study provides valuable guidance for the development of an ecological model of English teaching and its practical implementation, as well as for the enhancement of ICC among college students.

**Keywords:** Ecological View of Teaching; Intercultural Communicative Competence; Cultivation Strategy.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the implementation of reform and opening-up, China has become increasingly integrated into the global economy and political landscape. As globalisation has gathered pace, there has been a notable increase in the frequency of contacts between China and the rest of the world in several areas, including foreign economic and trade, cultural exchanges and other fields. This has led to the emergence of intercultural communication as an indispensable mode of communication between China and the wider international community. Consequently, the cultivation of individuals with enhanced ICC represents a crucial avenue for the advancement of China's national economic growth and the enhancement of its international status. The fostering of such talents has thus become a pivotal objective within the realm of foreign language education in China. Nevertheless, the majority of foreign language teachers in China adhere to traditional pedagogical approaches, demonstrate a limited comprehension of the principles of ecological teaching, and frequently overlook the development of students' intercultural communicative awareness and competence due to the emphasis on academic progress.

This study will adopt a student-centred approach, conducting personal interviews to ascertain the level of ICC among college students and the factors influencing this ability. It will also examine the cultivation of ICC among college students, drawing upon the theoretical framework of the ecological view of teaching. Guided by the principles of the ecological approach to teaching, this study will offer valuable insights into the theoretical underpinnings of English language instruction and the development of ICC in learners. It aims to contribute to the evolution of English language teaching methodologies, establishing an ecological model for English language teaching that can be widely applied and offer guidance in the practical implementation of English language instruction and the enhancement of learners'

intercultural communicative abilities.

## 2. Literature Review

A substantial body of research on intercultural communication can be traced back to the 1950s, with Edward Hall (1959) publishing *The Silent Language*, which is widely acknowledged as the founding work of this academic field. [4] From the 1980s to the 1990s, the development of intercultural communication studies reached a significant milestone, with the publication of Gudykunst's (1983) seminal work, *Intercultural Communication Theory: Current Perspectives* marked the formal establishment of intercultural communication studies as an independent academic discipline. Subsequently, scholars from other countries have initiated research in the field of intercultural communication. In his definition of intercultural communication competence, Byram (1997) offers the following summary: This encompasses traditional cultural knowledge, national cultural knowledge, intercultural communication competence, linguistic communication competence, recognition knowledge and interaction competence, and an attitude of respect for the values, beliefs and behaviors of different cultures. [5] Based on an analysis of the constituent elements of intercultural communicative competence, foreign scholars have proposed a number of paradigms. Earlier models include Chen's (1989; 2010) four-dimensional model, which includes personal traits, communication skills, psychological adjustment and cultural awareness. Byram (1997) argues that ICC encompasses linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. [6] Furthermore, measurement scales for ICC have also emerged, providing a scientific basis and standardized tools for the assessment and improvement of ICC.

The study of intercultural communication in China is a relatively recent phenomenon, having commenced in the

1980s. Over the past decade, numerous scholars have advanced novel perspectives in the study of ICC. He Lin proposed the cultivation model of 'U-learning', which emphasises the integration of information technology in the process of developing ICC.[7] From an empirical perspective, Chen Yu takes the comprehensive English course as an example, integrates the CBI teaching method and carries out empirical study based on the requirements and characteristics of developing intercultural communication competence.[8] Jia Yujia employs a systemic functional linguistic perspective to examine the current state of intercultural communication competence among college students, identifying associated challenges and proposing strategies for addressing them.[9] Dong Dongdong, Chen Binbin, and Xie Junjun investigate the cultivation of Chinese college students' intercultural communication competence from the perspective of A community of shared future for mankind.[10] Zhang Qian, drawing on the theory of the interactional field of view, proposed a strategy for cultivating college students' cross-cultural communicative competence and highlighted the importance of enhancing cross-cultural communicative competence.[11] Wang Henglan, on the other hand, investigated the practical application of BOPPPS model in the English classroom teaching, and proposed an optimized approach to cross-cultural instruction.[12]

### 3. Methodology

Research Objectives:

- 1) To understand the level of ICC of English majors and its influencing factors;
- 2) To summarise the strategies for cultivating intercultural competence of college students based on ecological teaching theory.

Objects of the Study: The subjects of this study were six students, three of each gender, majoring in English in their junior year at the School of Foreign Languages of Hubei Engineering University. Among them, two students in the direction of commerce (Jindian A, Li Jixian B); two students in the direction of translation (Yang Jiao C, Wang Xinai D); and two students in the direction of teacher training (Huang Man E, Sun Zhipeng F).

Research method: Interview method (This study drew on the questions in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire on ICC for College Students compiled by Fantini and Wang Yanping, and set up interview questions in the four dimensions of intercultural awareness, intercultural attitudes, intercultural skills, and intercultural knowledge, a total of eight questions, two questions for each dimension).

### 4. Result

Following the collection of interview data from six students, the analysis revealed that, with regard to cross-cultural understanding, there were minor discrepancies in the responses. However, on the whole, those studying English demonstrated a greater awareness of Chinese culture. This may be attributed to the limited opportunities for the acceptance of foreign cultures and the lack of a local environment. In contrast, individual students exhibited a stronger familiarity with the cultures of English-speaking countries. With regard to content, students demonstrate greater familiarity with historical, social, and religious matters, while exhibiting comparatively limited knowledge of geography and culture. The discipline of intercultural

communication is more widely understood by English majors, due to the availability of related courses at the institution. With respect to intercultural awareness, English majors demonstrate a greater capacity to avoid cultural conflicts, to seek common ground while maintaining differences, and to avoid causing offence. In terms of fostering cultural sensitivity, the attitudes of the six students exhibit significant variation. It is evident that half of the students recognise the value of cultivating sensitivity to cultural differences in facilitating smooth communication between the two sides. However, the remaining half perceive that they have limited opportunities to engage in communication with the outside world, or that the act in question is of a high standard, and therefore, they are unlikely to cultivate such sensitivity. When considering their attitudes towards intercultural communication, the six students demonstrate a willingness to communicate with different cultures in English and exhibit positive attitudes towards the act of intercultural communication, perceiving it as a significant endeavour. In terms of intercultural attitudes, all six students are willing to communicate with different cultures in English and hold a positive attitude towards intercultural communication, considering it a meaningful endeavour. However, some of them are less inclined to actively seek communication due to their own oral proficiency limitation and the limited communication environment; As for intercultural skills, all six students have a certain degree of ability to feel the differences between cultures and are relatively sensitive to it, but this ability is limited to the cultures that they are familiar with. Most of the students were not quite able to look at domestic and foreign cultures objectively, as some of them held subjective opinions about Chinese culture due to the limitations of the cognitive environment and the profundness of Chinese culture.

### 5. Strategies

The concept of 'ecology' primarily concerns the interaction between organisms and their living environment. Subsequently, this concept has been introduced into the field of education[13], with many scholars proposing that education can also be regarded as an ecosystem. The entire education process comprises numerous factors, including interactions and co-operations between these factors, as well as between teachers, students and the main body of the teaching and learning environment. This constitutes the main ecosystem of education.

#### 5.1. Constructing an Immersive Intercultural Learning Environment

The ecological view of teaching posits that the learning environment exerts a profound influence on students' learning effectiveness. In order to enhance English majors' intercultural communication awareness and attitudes, educational institutions should endeavour to establish an immersive intercultural learning environment. For instance, the number of international student exchange programmes could be increased. Through such programmes and short-term study visits, students would be able to directly engage with the cultural environment of target language countries, thereby experiencing and learning local cultural customs and social etiquette. Furthermore, multimedia and network resources are employed to facilitate learning experiences for students situated in disparate geographical locations, thereby

broadening their international horizons. This is achieved through the utilisation of virtual reality (VR), online courses, international news and other pertinent resources.

## 5.2. Implementing Interdisciplinary Integrated Teaching

Intercultural communication is not merely the acquisition of language; it is also the attainment of a comprehensive understanding of the cultural history, society, religion, geography and other aspects of both parties. It is therefore recommended that the intercultural communication programme be taught in an interdisciplinary way with history, sociology, anthropology and other related disciplines in order to increase students' knowledge of intercultural communication. Furthermore, higher education teachers must take the initiative to introduce actual instances of cultural conflict and guide students through the process of analysing, discussing and proposing solutions, in order to cultivate their cultural sensitivity and critical thinking abilities.

## 5.3. Enhancing Critical Thinking Training

The eco-teaching concept encourages students to become active learners and thinkers. In the cultivation of intercultural communication skills, it is of vital importance to reinforce training in cultural reflection and critical thinking. It is therefore recommended that teachers in foreign language classrooms pay attention to the cultivation of students' intercultural communication strategies, teaching students how to communicate effectively in intercultural communication, including listening skills, non-verbal communication, conflict resolution, and so forth. Furthermore, educators may organise classroom debates or group discussions on cultural topics to facilitate the exchange of ideas, enhance understanding of and respect for diverse cultures, and simultaneously encourage the development of expressive and logical thinking skills.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ecological teaching model that is followed in English intercultural teaching consists of two key elements: firstly, the creation of an ecological environment and secondly, the creation of an ecological learning and teaching process. It is characterised by openness, interactivity, continuity and evaluation. This study offers new perspectives and ideas for the reform of English teaching and provides valuable references for future research and practice of intercultural communicative competence. Nevertheless, the study reveals that the analyses are not yet fully mature. By further promoting and applying the ecological teaching concept, it is anticipated that a more harmonious, efficient and dynamic educational ecosystem will be established, thereby contributing to the cultivation of high-calibre talents with an international outlook and intercultural communicative

competence.

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