

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Cognition and Levels of Integration among Chinese EFL Teachers

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Abstract: The study describes the personal profiles of the respondents, including gender, age, teaching experience, language teaching level, and overseas experience to determine teachers' cognition of intercultural communicative competence, including their cognition of language teaching objectives, their cognition of cultural teaching objectives and their views on the intercultural dimension of foreign language teaching. This study assesses teachers' level of ICC integration in syllabus design, teaching materials, topics and themes; determine the ICC teaching practice of teachers, including the practice of teaching objectives and the practice of teaching activities to examine the significant relationship between teachers' cognition and integration level in intercultural communication teaching and their intercultural communication teaching practice. It also puts forward some intervention measures to strengthen English teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

The world today is currently becoming a globalized society as the results of increasingly cultural migrations, the widespread usage of English worldwide, the technological age, and the greater need of an international communication. This necessitates that global citizens should possess the specific competencies to establish the intercultural relationships. They also should develop the intercultural awareness to enable them to discover and understand variously cultural manifestations around the world. Becoming fluent in English as a second language is one proficiency relevant today in order to forge the intercultural communication with purposeful knowledge exchange between different groups and communities worldwide. Thus, making sure their children are getting a quality English education is vital for families raising their children in China. This will not only provide them the skills they need to pursue higher education, but it will also give them a significant advantage in the workforce.

The ability of understanding different cultures and using this it to communicate with people from different cultural context successfully and efficiently was termed as intercultural communicative competence(ICC). For example, Americans usually adopt the direct communicative style in the

professional setting to behave like more business-like and transparent, while Chinese communicative style is so contrasted, their ideas tend to be expressed in an indirect way in order to protect others' feelings and try to diminish the confrontation between each other. ICC is related to the capability to communicate appropriately and effectively with others from diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. While we have no fixed definition of intercultural communicative competence, four dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors are generally considered to be included.

As an EFL teacher, the researcher conducted this study of intercultural communication competence to own certain theoretical and practical significance for the reform of English teaching. In intercultural communication teaching, new demand and high requirement of English teachers have been placed highly, that's the main reason for choosing this study. In the past, they main invest ICC of university English teachers from large cities or rich provinces, no study on the series of English teachers from the primary to the top ones in the common areas of China which is the main part of EFL teachers in China. Meanwhile, the research results that can provide practical guidance and operability for the intercultural education and teaching of front-line teachers are relatively insufficient. So this study focused on these Chinese English teachers' intercultural communication competence teaching cognition and levels of integration.

2. Methodology

In order to ascertain the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) cognition and levels of integration among Chinese EFL teachers, this study used the descriptive methodology. Descriptive methods are employed to describe the phenomena and explain their trends. In the current study, we use this approach to analyze the current situation in the global context. In addition, correlation analysis is used to explore and examine the relationships between the three variables, as well as to test and analyze response differences. The researcher also used quantitative analysis to obtain information and assess the answers of the respondents.

The participants in this study are 305 English teachers from 9 local universities, vocational colleges and middle schools of A province in the centre of China. Particularly, they are middle school English teachers from No 1, No 3, No 4 Middle Schools in B City, college English teachers from three vocational colleges in B City, C City, D City, university English teachers from B University, C University, D University.

3. Results

The percentage distribution of the respondents' profile is displayed in Table 1 in terms of sex, age, teaching experience, levels of language taught, and overseas experience. As for these English teachers' demographic information in details, there are 90 male English teachers, accounting for 29.5%, while the female English teachers are 215, accounting for 70.5% of the group. The proportion of female English teachers is higher than that of the males, which is in accordance with a larger group of female English learners and teachers in China.

Most of the respondents (57.4%) are between 36 and 45 age ranges, up to 175 in all, then another large group of 46 years old (29.5%) and above are 90, and very fewer English teachers are 26-35 years old (11.8%) and 25 years old and below (1.3%). Most English teachers in China must obtain their bachelor's degree if their students are the beginners in lower secondary school or the intermediates in upper secondary school. They must get their masters or doctors degrees if they can teach non-English majors or English majors in the college or university. Therefore, they must spend more than ten or twenty years on professional English learning before they become an English teacher in China.

Regarding the teaching experience of the respondents, only 12.8% of these teachers have the experience of 9 years and below, 15.1% have 10-15 years of experience. In contrast, 41.6% of the teachers have the experience of 16-21 years, 30.5% have experience of 22- years and above.

In terms of overseas experience, 242 teachers (79.3%) have no learning or visiting experience in foreign countries so far. The statistical correlation between ICC and overseas experience was also tested by Zhang Yechun, and the relationship between ICC and contacting frequency with foreigners was examined in the study. It is found that English teachers with certain overseas experience were more competent than those who didn't have any foreign contacting experience[1]. Staying in a foreign country is also a kind of intercultural experience which would significantly promote the language skills, cultural knowledge and situational competence in the authentic intercultural communication.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents Profile

Sex	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	90	29.5
Female	215	70.5
Age		
25 years old and below	4	1.3
26-35 years old	36	11.8
36-45 years old	175	57.4
46 years old and above	90	29.5
Teaching Experience		
9 years and below	39	12.8
10-15 years	46	15.1
16-21 years	127	41.6
22- years and above	93	30.5
Levels of Language Taught		
Beginner (lower secondary school)	71	23.3
Intermediate (upper secondary school)	38	12.5
Upper-intermediate (college, non-English majors)	101	33.1
Advanced (college/university English majors)	95	31.1
With Overseas Experience		
Yes	63	20.7
No	242	79.3

Considering the relationship between ICC and studying abroad, Arif Saricoban and Huseyin Oz aimed on testing the levels of ICC of a group of pre-service EFL teachers in Turkish educational background in order to find out any differences for the factors as gender and overseas experience to be showed in these EFL teachers' ICC. The findings of this study indicated that there were no correlational differences between the participants' ICC with the gender and academic success, but these English teachers' ICC knowledge, skills, and attitudes were strongly influenced by their studying or visiting abroad experiences[2]. The positive association between ICC and overseas experiences was also tested and proved in the other studies.

Table 2 presents the assessment on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) teaching cognition as to perceptions on culture teaching objectives. The composite mean of 3.57 indicates that the teachers respondents strongly agreed with these items in general. Among the items cited, promoting increased understanding of students' own home culture got the highest mean score of 3.70, followed by providing background information about daily life and customs in the foreign culture with mean score of 3.61 and promoting the ability to deal with intercultural contact situations with mean score of 3.60. It shows the greatest concern about the home culture in new era for Chinese EFL learners and also continuous emphasis of acquiring the daily communication

abilities in the target culture.

Table 2: Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Teaching Cognition as to Perceptions of Culture Teaching Objectives

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Providing certain information about common values and beliefs in the target culture.	3.48	Agree	8
4. Promoting the students' ability to deal with intercultural contact situations.	3.60	Strongly Agree	4
3. Providing certain information about history, geography, social and political systems of the target culture.	3.54	Strongly Agree	6.5
4. Developing the students' open and tolerant attitudes towards other peoples and cultures.	3.55	Strongly Agree	4.5
12. Providing experiences and contacts with a variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.)	3.54	Strongly Agree	6.5
5. Providing certain background information about daily life and customs in the target culture.	3.61	Strongly Agree	3
6. Promoting the students' increasing understanding of their own home culture.	3.70	Strongly Agree	1
7. Promoting the students' ability of empathizing with people living in other cultures.	3.55	Strongly Agree	4.5
Composite Mean	3.57	Strongly Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Han Xiaohui and Song Li conducted the similar survey among university English teachers through a questionnaire. There was vague' conceptualization of ICC for most of university English teachers in China and so was its relationship with English language teaching, though they have perceived clear teaching goals and strong desire of developing their students' ICC. In this study, respondents suggested that the most important goal of cultural teaching was to provide some information about shared values and beliefs in the target culture, but items related to cultural learning goals were ranked last in the responses [3]. It was authentic reflection of Chinese university English teachers' conception of ICC with English teaching more than ten years ago. Target culture has been only emphasized in the traditional English classroom since English teaching was widely introduced in Chinese educational system. Our home culture has been long neglected when we were eager to make known with the western languages and cultures back to its very beginning.

In fact, culture has never been separated from foreign language teaching, but it is present in different ways in different historical stages of English language teaching[4]. In the early stages of English teaching, the main purpose is to read, appreciate and translate some literary, philosophical, historical, and religious works, so cultural teaching in English classroom is mainly to introduce background cultural information in order to clear the barriers for English learners to understand these texts. There was no need and awareness of intercultural communication in English language teaching and learning then.

Culture is unique and irreplaceable, and intercultural communication needs to be built based on equality. Only by understanding the two cultures can the learners communicate equally and respect each other. We should not only emphasize the import of Western culture, but also attach importance to the out-port of Chinese culture to achieve the purpose of effective and sufficient intercultural communication[3]. To help English learners increase their understanding of Chinese culture and

strengthen their awareness of local cultures is the most urgent task for EFL learning and teaching, especially after China became the second power in the world and totally involved in the international affairs. This is not only the demand for improving English language learners' intercultural communication competences, but also the demand of cultural complementarity and integration under the general trend of globalization nowadays.

Meanwhile, providing certain information about common values and beliefs in the foreign culture obtained the lowest mean value of 3.48, followed by the items of providing certain information about the history, geography, social and political systems of the target culture and providing experiences and contacts with a variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.) with the same lower mean value of 3.54. All of them indicate the least concern about the cultural background information for the EFL teachers in the new era.

As intercultural awareness and ICC have already become an inseparable content of English teaching and learning[5]. According to the learning and teaching practices, the external part of cultural cluster like art, literature, music, games, lifestyles and other parts that can be easily contacted or heard and understood, named explicit culture, while passion, modesty or tolerance that cannot be easily contacted or heard and understood, represent implicitly learned culture. For the same views of inner and outer parts of culture iceberg, it is also suggested that the deeper hidden part of the culture is the essential that can govern the behavior. That is to say, the easily sensed and performed part of the culture is concerning about the behaviors, but the more profound and abstruse is about the beliefs and opinions. Therefore, it's normal to find in the study that providing students certain information about common values and beliefs in the target culture got the lowest mean value, because most people can't sense out the hidden cultural differences like the values, beliefs, the most inexplicable parts, during the intercultural interactions and communications, then less attention has been paid. On the contrary, history, geography, social and political conditions, literature, music, theatre, film and other explicit parts of the target culture(s) could attract more attention from the target language learners and teachers.

Table 3 displays the level of integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) on teaching in terms of instructional materials. The composite mean of 2.90 indicates that the respondents agreed generally. Among the items cited, item 1 using audio-visual materials such as films, slides, and podcasts to introduce linguistic and cultural varieties in relation to communication got the highest mean score of 2.96, followed by utilizing printed resources like textbooks, magazines, newspapers and academic readings as instructional materials to develop students' critical understanding of different cultural perspectives with mean score of 2.90.

The order of the ranked items in this study justified the perception that English learners of varying levels of language proficiency all prefer the audio-visual instructional materials such as films, songs, and speeches in introducing language and cultural information related with intercultural communication, then the traditional teaching materials, printed resources like textbooks, magazines, newspapers and other academic readings that can promote students' critical understanding of different cultural perspectives. The findings support Jamaica Vizcarra Garcia's study that using audio-visual materials such as films, songs and videos obtained the highest mean as high integration, because audio-visual materials with images and other figures can help teachers better introduce ICC and present cultural differences in relation to intercultural communication, in particular, English movies and songs[6]. It is a difficult task to cultivate intercultural communication ability in foreign language classroom, because intercultural communication is often closely related to foreigners and their cultures, so the most effective teaching method is to introduce authenticity in the classroom.

Table 3: Level of Integrating Intercultural Communicative competence (ICC) on Teaching in terms of Instructional Materials

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. I use audio-visual materials such as films, slides, and podcasts to introduce linguistic and cultural varieties in relation to communication.	2.96	Agree	1
2. I use ICT-based resources such as social media sites and web browsers that increase students different cultural and communicative experiences in order to aid the teaching process.	2.83	Agree	3
2. I utilize printed resources like textbooks, magazines, newspapers and academic readings as instructional materials to develop students' critical understanding of different cultural perspectives.	2.90	Agree	2
Composite Mean	2.90	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Reid argued that with the help of computers and the internet, the teachers can use various advanced techniques and materials in teaching ICC, and these authentic communicative materials connected with multimedia would be a rich source. Audio material is the authentic materials, such as TV and radio programmes, commercials, news and weather reports, films, adverts, music, etc; visual materials such as photographs, paintings and drawings, street signs, posters, stamps, coins, picture books, etc; printed material such as books, newspapers, magazines, catalogs, lyrics to songs, restaurant menus, product labels, maps, letters, etc[7]. If English learners can be regularly exposed to these authentic materials in and out of the classroom, they could get more used to them and confident in the future to be able to intentionally handle the cultural differences, conflicts or misinterpretations.

Similarly, Lin conducted the research to apply three basic examples of songs, films and game s in the teaching methodology for exploring Taiwanese university students' cognitive consequences. It was implied that the students' language proficiency levels could be contributed to alternative devices and computer assisted language learning methods[8]. The media applications are associated with the enjoyable methods of English learning since students' learning motivation has been motivated and mobilized for these holistic language abilities. The same is true for English teachers, as Estaji and Rahimi pinpointed that 75% participants (111 non-native Iranian EFL teachers) found themselves interculturally competent by gaining through watching English films and 42% by reading English books[9].

Meanwhile, the respondents in this study ranked the audio-visual materials and printed resources as the highest utilized instructional materials, using ICT-based resources such as social media sites and web browsers that increase students different cultural and communicative experiences in order to aid the teaching process. as the lowest used materials. However, the use of printed materials acquired the lowest mean, but it was described as high integration for the teachers in Jamaica Vizcarra Garcia's study[6], because teachers in the study expressed their preference and tendency to use audio-visual materials in the classroom teaching. For the students, the utilizing of the printed materials like textbooks, newspapers, magazines and other academic readings acquired the highest mean, while the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) - based resources such as social media and web browsers got the lowest mean score. Students observed that the textbooks

and other reading materials about intercultural communication were so often used by language teachers in the teaching process. The student respondents' perceptions of ICT-based resources are similar with the results of teacher respondents in this study, which are mainly resulted from limited internet connection, limited facilities and insufficient technological resources and communicative techniques availability or other realistic obstacles in different levels of educational constitutions in this study.

As there is no textbook fitting for all students with appropriate intercultural communicative activities for learners of different educational contexts, Chau and Truong noted that coursebook teaching made no meaningful differences to teachers' intercultural communicative teaching practices[10]. Makhmudov conducted the survey to identify the limitations and drawbacks in English textbooks that may impede the development of intercultural communication skills. This study found that 60% of the teachers surveyed lack of emphasis on intercultural communication competence. 40% reported limitations of a lack of culturally diverse content, 30% reported a lack of opportunities for cultural exchange[11]. Han and Song found that many teachers did not use the textbooks which include more organized skill-training procedures[3]. Textbooks are not always satisfactory that are mainly focused on exams and language proficiency, contained limited and outdated information. Most of English teachers preferred to use added materials in the teaching classrooms, like audio, video and printed materials. These authentic, colorful, and fresh materials can attract students' attention, add more necessary contents of the textbook, and a useful complement to what the teachers could not present in the class. According to Zhou, no sufficient materials or activities designed to explicitly raise learners' intercultural competence were included in the English textbooks published in China that mainly represented the target English cultures, which required students to understand from the western perspective and decrease teachers' and students' exposures of learning Chinese and home cultures[12]. So topics and themes about more other cultures, especially Chinese culture should be supplemented in English textbooks in a certain extent.

Table 4 indicates the summary of the level of integrating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) on teaching and three specific dimensions (Syllabus design, Instructional materials, Topics, and themes). The composite mean of 2.83 indicates that the respondents conformed on all the indicators of the level of integrating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) on teaching. Among these items cited, the level of integrating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) on instructional materials got the highest weighted mean score of 2.90, followed by syllabus design with weighted mean score of 2.88. The respondents mainly concentrate on instructional materials and syllabus design in integrating of ICC with the classroom teaching, though most of Chinese EFL teachers have equipped with clear abundant ICC cognition and competence. In the new era, people no longer expect foreign language teachers to pass on detailed cultural information to learners in the classroom teaching. Instead, they should facilitate and guide the learning process which can actively involve all the learners into exploring, discovering, analyzing, and evaluating meaningful cultural information through first-hand and authentic texts, audio and video materials, and multimedia [13].

Table 4: Summary Table on the Level of integrating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) on teaching

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Syllabus design	2.88	Agree	2
2. Instructional materials	2.90	Agree	1
3. Topics and themes	2.71	Agree	3
Composite Mean	2.83	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The existing textbooks are always unsatisfactory which fail to include some essential teaching materials, most limited and outdated teaching information in textbooks. Because of the unavoidable deficiencies of the current existing textbooks, more and more English teachers prefer to use some additional materials in their teaching classrooms. As for the types of additional materials used in the teaching, video materials are most frequently used, followed by printed resources and audio materials.

Among the items, audio-visual materials such as films, songs, and videos aimed to introduce linguistic and cultural varieties were highlighted by the respondents despite the obvious advantages. However, Mede and Gunes pointed out that there were also some difficulties for English teachers. The biggest difficulty was about the speaking speed of the videos. It is observed that the speeds were too fast for some students, so they had troubles in keeping up with and catching ideas [14]. Young and Sachdev maintained that EFL teachers were not so willing to integrate intercultural content into their classroom practices mainly resulting from short of curricular support and suitable teaching textbooks, lack of authentic ICC assessment and teacher training programs in teaching intercultural communicative competence [15]. Ho and Ton also discussed the common obstacles hindering teachers' integrating ICC into their FLT teaching. English teachers had so limited ICC knowledge and ICC awareness, also lack of feasible ICC teaching pedagogy and classroom time. There were no clear intercultural objectives in the curricular and inadequate cultural content in the teaching material. Students had so low foreign language proficiency [16].

It was found in this study that there was no great significant difference in responses from the grouped profile, the minor difference lied on more teaching experience and oversea experience. The majority of participants acknowledged the importance and necessity of integrating ICC into their classroom teaching practices, their pedagogical practices on the implementation of ICC were not adequately developed and taught. EFL teachers should be provided with more professional development programs intended to strengthen their ICC knowledge and teaching. The syllabus content and testing policies are linguistically oriented, which are unfavorable for teaching ICC. Therefore, the respondents in our study agree in general that developing students' intercultural awareness and sensitivity is one of the crucial goals of the course/lessons, and language varieties and cultural diversity should be the major topics or themes. EFL teachers need a suitable curriculum and teaching materials that will support cultural teaching practices and assist them in cultural integration as for the instructional pedagogy and cultural content.

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