

Intercultural Education in China: Background and Literature Review

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Abstract: The paper attempts to illustrate “intercultural education” historically as well as its current state in China with background overview and literature review to existing research and to analyze the intercultural competence within Chinese teachers and students, China’s intercultural education policy and practice in foreign languages teaching etc.

1. Introduction

The paper attempt to locate the place of “intercultural education” in both the historical as well as current state of affairs in some field of education in China with literature review to existing research so as to analyze the intercultural competence of teachers and students, intercultural competence in foreign languages teaching, intercultural competence in international education administration, and propose the direction we believe the field of education should move.

1.1 Background Overview

1.1.1 Intercultural Competence Listed in China National Teaching Guideline

There is a worldwide demand for the graduates of our education institutions to be “global citizens,” “world minded,” “globally engaged,” and “inter-culturally competent,” and China is no exception. China seems to recognize the importance of intercultural competency as both latest China National Standards for Undergraduate Teaching Quality of Foreign Language Majors in Higher Education and College English Teaching Guide (hereinafter referred to as “the Guide”) take the cultivation of intercultural competence as an important educational and teaching objective. The guidelines clearly state that college English teaching should increasingly strengthen students' intercultural communication awareness and communication ability, and improve students' comprehensive cultural literacy(Wang Shouren,2016). The guide also points out the importance of cross-cultural education: “helping students understand the different world views and values of China and foreign countries”.

1.1.2 Evolution of Foreign Languages Education in China

The aims and purposes of foreign language education have changed in the past few decades, with the much stronger emphasis on communication, inseparable cultural teaching and intercultural competence.

Communicative teaching became the mainstream after the focus of foreign language teaching turned to communicative competence from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, when culture has been applied to the communication functions and occasions covering all aspects of the society. Cultural teaching has changed from high and elegant culture to popular culture, and foreign language learners have gradually shifted their focus to social activities and daily life that are highly related to language communicative competence.

In 21st century, foreign language teaching has quietly undergone great changes that the implementation of cross-cultural education has been inseparable from foreign language teaching. It is widely accepted that teachers of language need to become teachers of language and culture. The relationship between intercultural education and language teaching should be a sustainable

combination, rather than a relationship between subordination and affiliation.

The successful integration of foreign language teaching into intercultural education not only makes it more meaningful and interesting, but also helps to achieve the goal of social and cultural goals of foreign language teaching and learning, realize the dual training objectives of intercultural teaching, and create international high-end talents with intercultural communication ability.

1.1.3 Teacher Education & Intercultural Competence of Teachers

The development of student intercultural competence is increasingly being viewed as an important role for international education professionals. However, China, like most other countries, had no teacher certification requirements necessitating training in diversity specific certification in areas related to intercultural education for all teachers.

In addition, in China, there is no exact blueprint for building intercultural competence. Despite the ironic fact that concepts of culture and intercultural interaction naturally exist in and permeate all aspects of education, introducing the concept of intercultural education in schools is a particularly slow and complex process.

Teachers tend to be relatively cross culturally inexperienced, with most living within community of where they were born and receiving education domestically. Grossman and Yuen's (2006) survey of 107 teachers in schools in Hong Kong found 55% of this group in denial or defense and 43% in minimization, with only 2% in the acceptance or adaptation stages. Research from studies suggests that today's teachers may not have the requisite disposition to be effective intercultural educators or the skills to guide young people to develop intercultural competence. (Zhang Hongling, 2007).

1.2 Literature Overview:

1.2.1 Literature That Defining the Concept of Intercultural Education.

There is a literature that defining the concept of *intercultural education*. Chinese scholars such as Lu Ziwen, Tu Dongqiong and Zhu Xiuzhen have defined cross-cultural education from different perspectives, among which there are many studies on "cross-cultural communicative competence". The concept of intercultural education was first literally introduced to China in 2007 (Zhang Hongling, 2007). The purpose of defining the intercultural competences is, above all, to ensure that those teaching foreign languages can take this into consideration in a systematically planned approach to teaching and learning.

1.2.2 Literature That Addresses the Importance of Approaching Student Intercultural Competence

There is a literature that addresses the importance of approaching student intercultural competence (and language acquisition) through a culture-learning lens (J. M. Bennett, M. J. Bennett, & Allen, 2003; Engle & Engle, 2004; Paige et al., 2004; Paige & Kippa, 2006). The differences in values, ways of thinking and other aspects can cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness, improve students' social language ability and cross-cultural communication and "International ability" (Wang Shouren, 2016). Foreign language teaching has stepped into an important stage of implementing intercultural education and cultivating students' intercultural ability... Cross-cultural teaching methods are crucial (Zhang Hongling et al. 2018). Davis et al. (2005) are writing an introduction to articles on teacher training, where the requirement put on trainee teachers to make their objectives explicit should include intercultural competence objectives. The requirement might be for each lesson planned and also for a course of study, as illustrated in Byram (1997).

1.2.3 Literature That Focuses on Classroom Practice and Students Feedback.

Some language teachers and researchers have started their classroom intercultural teaching and have learned some fundamental feedback from students. With multimedia and modern network technology, different and appropriate teaching methods, such as group discussion, films, student report, role playing, group report, are explored to improve the attractiveness of the classroom and boost students' learning achievements (Liu Fang, 2014, 2015). Language teachers should plan their

teaching to include objectives, materials, and methods that develop the specific elements of intercultural competence. Teachers should be encouraged to analyze the commonness and difference of multicultural student groups, explore diversified evaluation methods, and accommodate and respect the diversified needs of students(Liu Fang,2017). Language teachers have also attempted to explore the practice of intercultural education by integrating intercultural competence cultivation into the English newspaper course, cultural reading and IELTS Listening.(Yan Jinglan,2018) These have identified examples of the relationship between intercultural education and the courses teaching,clarified the teaching objectives and principles of the course,and discussed the design and employment of teaching activities based on the teaching model of SIIN. The above teaching practice demonstrates that appropriate use of language material can help students raise their intercultural awareness and sensitivity,and enhance their intercultural competence.

1.2.4 Literature Also Discussed the Approaches to Improve Teachers Training on Intercultural Competence.

The principle of “understanding, evaluation and application” should be followed to cultivate teachers' intercultural awareness and sensitivity.”Understanding” means teachers should study extensively and be familiar with knowledge of different cultures, understand the core values of different cultural knowledge.”Evaluation” means teachers correctly evaluate the differences of different cultures on the basis of deep thinking.” Application” means that teachers can flexibly use what they have learned to deal with cross-cultural communication problems. A cross-cultural communication workshop should be encouraged, with an international information sharing platform, multiple languages in use for self-introduction and contacts, forum to discuss issues concerned and foreign staffs sharing overseas study and life experience, so as to provide cross-cultural learning and practice opportunities for teachers and increase their cross-cultural experience. Teachers should be encouraged to actively participate in activities such as international cultural festivals and international competitions, so as to gain more cross-cultural practical experience through personal participation.

1.2.5 Literature on Related Courses and Curriculum Design.

It was recently discussed that General English course group can be made up by five courses, Intercultural Communication, Globalization and Contemporary Society, Cross-cultural Conflict and Communication, World History and Human Civilization,Cross-cultural Cooperative Action. These courses integrate intercultural education goals and course group goals, all with English as a language carrier, with varied course objectives, curriculum, teaching methods and assessment methods(Huang Huihui,2018).

2. Summary of Cross-Cultural Research in China

China is still in the primary stage of cross-cultural research and lacks of major breakthroughs, though concept introduced, practice tried in recent years. To a large extent, cross-cultural studies remain in the stage of borrowing or copying experiences from others with little own views, let alone the combination with domestic culture. There is a lack of systematic, in-depth research and practical suggestions on cross-cultural consciousness in China. Therefore, it has caused a phenomenon that scholars are enthusiastic about the research, whereas the social response is silent.

3. Conclusion

It is a hope that future research will contribute to the ongoing intercultural education in China, including building up intercultural competence of students (current research and practice),training teachers for professional development(guidelines and strategies) of and will support more systematic, deliberate, and effective cultural education.

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