

Study on the Application of Intercultural Psychology in TCSOL

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Abstract: As a new discipline that has emerged in recent years, intercultural psychology not only focuses on the differences between various cultural groups, but also builds the universality of psychology. Nowadays, with the increasing trend of globalization as well as the deepening of the interaction and communication between cultures, the application value of intercultural psychology has become more prominent. After decades of development, TCSOL has achieved fruitful research results in terms of discipline status, refined its discipline research and internationalized its discipline system. With the continuous strengthening of China's national strength and international influence, TCSOL has become increasingly prominent as a practice field for the cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Therefore, teachers in the field of TCSOL should grasp the basic knowledge of intercultural psychology and apply it to the process of teaching, so as to improve the class quality and promote the intercommunication and reciprocity between Chinese and western cultures at a deep level.

Intercultural psychology is a science that studies how culture affects people's psychology in a critical and comparative way. In the broad field of psychological research, intercultural psychology is a new research direction only emerging in the 21st century. Its emergence and rapid development are inseparable from the trend of globalization in the world today. Nowadays, people's perceptions of space, time, culture have been changing dramatically, and people are travelling, migrating and communicating at a speed and on a scale never seen before. Cross-culture has become an objective fact that is within reach and cannot be avoided. Therefore, the following issues have become urgent problems to be solved. Do people from different cultures share certain customs, ideas and aspirations? Do people from different cultures have significant differences in certain customs, ideas, and aspirations? How should we recognize and deal with these differences so as to achieve the common goal or the ideal effect of intercultural communication? Thinking about the above problems has given the birth of a series of new disciplines around cross-cultural issues, including intercultural psychology.

TCSOL refers to the teaching of the Chinese language to people of countries or nationalities whose mother tongues are other languages. In recent years, with China's growing comprehensive strength and international influence, the number of people learning Chinese is increasing. The development of TCSOL and related studies have become a new and important directions in the field of world language teaching. How to improve the class performance of TCSOL? How to understand and deal with cultural differences and even cultural conflicts in TCSOL? How to integrate cultural communication into the teaching process of language? To solve the above problems, teachers engaging in TCSOL need not only professional knowledge such as pedagogy and linguistics, but also basic knowledge of intercultural psychology.

1. Basic Concept, Knowledge Composition and Research Methods of Intercultural Psychology

1.1 Basic Concept

Intercultural psychology is a science that studies how culture affects people's psychology in a comparative and critical way. There are two elements in this definition that need special attention – “comparative” and “critical” “Comparative” means that any study of intercultural psychology

reaches its conclusion by studying at least two samples representing different cultural groups. “Critical” means that the above comparison requires the researcher to have certain critical skills. Intercultural psychology studies the diversity of psychology, its causes, and cultural interaction, etc., and it also constructs the universality of psychology (Eric, 2010). On the basis of understanding the above basic concepts, it is necessary to make a distinction between intercultural psychology and cultural psychology. Cultural psychology studies the meaningful connections between culture and the psychological activities of individuals who live in it, and it claims that human behavior only makes sense in sociocultural context. Obviously, the research scope of intercultural psychology is larger than that of cultural psychology.

1.2 Knowledge Composition

There are at least four types of knowledge in the field of intercultural psychology. 1. Scientific knowledge, which is accumulated through the study of a large number of psychological phenomena; 2. Popular knowledge, that is, daily assumptions about psychological phenomena, whether from common sense or personal perspective; 3. Ideological knowledge, that is, a fixed view of the world, the nature of good and evil, right and wrong, and the meaning of life; 4. Legal knowledge, which is related to individual psychological function, derived from law and embodied in official rules (Eric, 2010:6). For researchers of intercultural psychology, it is essential and necessary to treat the above knowledge with sensitivity, understanding and respect.

1.3 Research Method

Generally, the research methods of intercultural psychology can be classified into two categories: quantitative research and qualitative research (Eric, 2010). Quantitative research refers to the measurement of a certain aspect of human behaviors in culture from a comparative perspective. The research variables are mainly empirically studied through observation, rather than resorting to intuition, belief or superstition. Since intercultural psychology studies variables in at least two cultures and pays attention to the similarity or difference of these variables, the most common datum in the quantitative research of this discipline is the measurement of central tendency. In the quantitative study of intercultural psychology, there are four most common measurement metrics: nominal, sequential, isometric and proportional measurement. For instance, 1. Nominal measurement -- “What is your native language? English, Japanese or Spanish?” 2. Sequential measurement -- “Please select the best qualities you think your lover has and give order: loyalty, tolerance, gentleness, self-confidence, excellence”. 3. Isometric measurement -- “Are you interested in Chinese folklore? Very interested (+2), interested (+1), uncertain (0), not interested (-2)” 4. Proportional measurement -- “How long does it take you to learn Chinese each day?”

Unlike quantitative research, which is usually conducted in a research environment, qualitative research in intercultural psychology is usually carried out in a natural environment. In the process of qualitative research, the subjects perform daily activities in the non-research environment, while the experimenter observes and records the above activities. It should be pointed out that in qualitative research, it is inevitable to bring into the subjective component of the experimenter, thus producing positive or negative results. However, in some cases where quantitative research cannot be used, qualitative research is an indispensable means of research. For example, it is difficult to measure the research phenomenon, and to apply the standardized measurement to the subjects. In the qualitative research of intercultural psychology, psycho biographical research approach is one of the most common forms. The subjects of study applying this research method are usually outstanding people, celebrities and leaders representing different countries or cultures. The research process is often collecting materials related to the subjects, such as diaries, speeches, letters, autobiographies, interviews, etc., so as to draw a personality sketch of the subjects.

2. The Application of Intercultural Psychology in TCSOL

The main purpose of TCSOL is to impart knowledge of the Chinese language and to promote cultural exchanges. Solid knowledge reserve of language and appropriate teaching methods are the

basis for ensuring the process goes smoothly. However, the biggest difference between TCSOL and ordinary Chinese teaching (i.e. Chinese language teaching in primary schools, secondary schools and universities) is that the process of TCSOL is a kind of intercultural communication. The classroom where Chinese is taught to speakers of other languages is the first spot of intercultural communication. Therefore, teachers who engage in TCSOL need to acquire certain knowledge of intercultural psychology and have basic intercultural psychology literacy, so as to ensure the efficient and orderly teaching process.

2.1 The Core Competence of Intercultural Communication for Teachers Engaging in TCSOL: Intercultural Sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity (ICS) is one of the core competences of intercultural communication. According to the study of intercultural psychology, the lack of ICS will lead to decline in work efficiency and satisfaction and a series of psychological problems in cultural adaptation. Individuals with high intercultural sensitivity have the following characteristics: 1. Open mind, which is willing to accept the views of others; 2. Flexibility, namely appropriate adjustment of their behaviors according to cultural contexts; 3. The attitude of appreciation and optimism, which is to appreciate the thinking patterns or behaviors of heterogeneous cultures, while maintaining optimism about the uniqueness and creativity of their own cultures. The above three characteristics are the professional qualities that educators engaging in TCSOL should possess. First of all, the quality of having open minds and being willing to accept different perspectives from students of different cultures helps to create a pleasant class environment and stimulate students' interest and initiative in learning. Secondly, the ability to maintain flexibility contributes to resolving misunderstandings and even cultural conflicts among students and teachers caused by cultural differences in the classroom, thus ensuring harmonious and orderly teaching process (Shupe, 2007). Finally, with the attitude of appreciation and optimism, on the one hand, teachers can broaden their mind and vision through contact with other cultures during the teaching process, and have the pleasure of breaking through themselves; on the other hand, they can enjoy the pride and sense of responsibility brought about by cultural confidence in the process of promoting cultural exchange, so as to achieve the progress and growth of both learners and teachers.

2.2 Intercultural Psychology Literacy of Teachers Engaging in TCSOL: A Prior Inspection of Culture & Consciousness of Cultural Integration

The intercultural psychologists build and conceptualize the characteristics of mainstream culture with culture dichotomy which includes high and low power distance, high and low uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, and collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 1980). Taking low uncertainty avoidance as an example, students from cultures of high uncertainty avoidance often require certain answers to questions such as study plans, classroom questions, and exam arrangements, etc., and are more inclined to seek institutional and prescribed guidance. On the contrary, students from cultures of low uncertainty avoidance are accustomed to accepting open questions and different answers, and also ask more questions and enjoy challenges. With the ability to conduct a prior inspection of culture, teachers can better understand and accept the above phenomena and develop teaching strategies in a targeted manner. However, teachers engaging in TCSOL must make it clear that modern culture is not fixed, but constantly flowing. Especially, the classroom of TCSOL is a fresh cultural contact zone where different cultures meet and exchange. Although prior inspection of culture helps to understand the learning behavior in different cultural backgrounds, it must not develop into a stereotype of culture. In the process of TCSOL, teachers should always maintain the consciousness of cultural integration and actively create an environment of communication and integration of different cultures, thus promoting the exchange and reciprocity of Chinese culture and other cultures at a deep level.

2.3 Problems that Teachers Engaging in TCSOL Should Pay Attention to When Engaging in Intercultural Psychology Research

Among the teachers engaging in TCSOL, quite a few are college teachers, which means they are also engaged in scientific research. Thanks to the particularity and convenience of the work environment, these researchers have begun to conduct research on intercultural psychology, and have achieved gratifying results. However, it is precisely because of the particularity and convenience of the work environment that some researchers have some common misunderstandings when studying intercultural psychology. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the following issues.

1. Selection of samples. A significant deficiency of teachers engaging in TCSOL in intercultural psychology-related research is that they rely too much on student-based sample groups. In many cases, the representativeness of students is not strong, because the student group is highly educated, low-aged and often represents the “elite” class of a country or culture and not typical and persuasive in representing an entire culture.
2. Choice of survey method. Surveys are often data collection method most commonly used intercultural researchers. When teaching Chinese as a second language, inviting international students to fill out various questionnaires has become a common phenomenon in colleges and universities. Such questionnaires often consist of a number of open questions and more multiple-choice questions. However, due to the lack of professional training in the design of psychological questionnaires, questionnaires engaging in TCSOL are often not rigorous enough and lack logic and coherence. Even a relatively scientific questionnaire has inevitable shortcomings because although open questions give the subjects more freedom of expression, it is difficult to conduct quantitative analysis; although choice question is easy to be analyzed, it limits the answer of the subjects. Therefore, the conclusions of intercultural psychological research that rely solely on questionnaires are not universal and persuasive.
3. Estimation of the validity of the survey results. In most cultural contexts, teachers are the masters of power and belong to the absolute powerful group. As the vulnerable group, when filling out questionnaires or receiving interviews, students often cannot express their true opinions because of various concerns, which will cause partial distortion or complete invalidity of the survey results.

3. Conclusion

With the continuous expansion of the influence of the Chinese language and the constant development of TCSOL, grasping the basic knowledge and research methods of intercultural psychology is an essential professional quality for educators engaging in TCSOL. At the same time, TCSOL practice also provides a convenient condition and a good environment for the study of intercultural psychology. Educators engaging in TCSOL should carefully choose research samples and scientifically select research methods when engaging in intercultural psychology research to ensure the objectivity and credibility of the research results.

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