Original Paper

Construction of Blended Teaching Model Integrating Intercultural Competence Training

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Abstract

Under the international background of economic globalization and cultural diversity, it is an important task for current higher education to cultivate international talents with intercultural competence. In the field of foreign language teaching, more and more scholars pay attention to the integration of English education and intercultural education in English curriculum system, but there are relatively insufficient researches that can provide practical and operable guidance for front-line teachers to implement intercultural education. Nowadays blended teaching is recognized as an effective teaching model. This study intends to construct a blended teaching model which can integrate intercultural competence training into English courses, so as to help front-line teachers know how to carry out intercultural teaching design and implementation with the ultimate goal of improving college students' foreign language ability and intercultural competence together.

Keywords

intercultural competence, intercultural competence training, blended teaching model

1. Introduction

The international background of economic globalization and cultural diversity has brought new challenges to English teaching in China. It is an important task to cultivate international talents with intercultural competence in Chinese higher education. Just like The Outline of the National Medium-and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) puts forward that higher education should "cultivate international talents with international vision, knowledge of

international rules and ability to participate in international affairs and international competition". Correspondingly, in the field of foreign language teaching, some Chinese foreign language teaching policies at the national level emphasize the importance and urgency of cultivating students' intercultural competence. Such as The National Standards for Teaching Quality of Foreign Languages and Literature promulgated in 2018 regards "intercultural competence" as one of the core competence indicators of foreign language majors, and claims that "intercultural competence training should be particularly emphasized". In 2020, the Teaching Guide for Foreign Language and Literature Majors in Colleges and Universities stresses to pay attention to international vision, cooperation ability, intercultural understanding and expression ability, and the ability to analyze and solve problems. Besides, College English Teaching Guide (2020 edition) emphasizes the need to enhance students' intercultural awareness and ability to improve their comprehensive cultural literacy. Seeing from these policies, we can say that English teachers in colleges and universities should not only focus on training students' language abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, but also cultivate their intercultural competence.

In foreign language teaching field, scholars at home and abroad have discussed the objectives, principles, approaches and strategies of intercultural competence training from the theoretical level (for example, Byram et al., 2002; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Ge & Wang, 2016), and made a preliminary exploration and reflection on the cultivation of intercultural competence in different foreign language courses through empirical researches (such as Fu & Zhang, 2017; Yang & Li, 2017; Zhang & Zhao, 2018). However, there are relatively insufficient researches that can provide practical and operable guidance for the front-line teachers to implement intercultural education (Zhang & Yao, 2020). In addition, although blended teaching is widely used in teaching field, there is still little research on how to cultivate college students' intercultural competence by combining blended teaching model in China. Therefore, this study intends to construct a blended teaching model integrating intercultural competence training in hopes of helping teachers know how to carry out the intercultural teaching design and implementation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Intercultural Competence Training

Scholars generally believe that intercultural competence is a relatively complex concept, and scholars from different backgrounds have defined it from different angles. As to the definition of intercultural competence, one of which commonly acknowledged is that intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people with different language and cultural backgrounds, and its connotation mainly includes intercultural communication situation, appropriateness and effectiveness (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Wu et al., 2013; Peng et al., 2015). Owing to the different perspectives and different emphases on the definition of intercultural

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competence, the models of intercultural competence developed are numerous and complicated. This study only lists some well-known intercultural competence models in the field of foreign language education. The most authoritative model of intercultural communication competence given by Michael Byram (1997) includes four sub-competencies, that is, language competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence, among which intercultural competence includes four elements: skills (interpretation/relevance skills, discovery/interaction skills), knowledge, attitude and critical cultural awareness. In China, Wen Qiufang (2004) believes that intercultural competence includes communicative competence and intercultural competence. The former includes linguistic competence, pragmatic competence and flexibility, while the latter includes sensitivity, tolerance and flexibility in dealing with cultural differences. Later Zhong Hua (2013) puts forward the intercultural competence model of college students in China by summarizing the main factors of both Byram's model of ICC and Wen Qiufang's model of ICC, which consists of communicative competence and intercultural competence, in which communicative competence covers four sub-competencies, that is, language competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence, while intercultural competence covers four components: skills, knowledge, attitude and awareness. In this model, communicative competence focuses on the cultivation of foreign language competence, while intercultural competence focuses on the development of emotional factors (attitude), behavioral factors (skills) and cognitive factors (knowledge and consciousness). Zhang and Yao (2020) construct an integrated model of students' intercultural competence development in China, which holds that intercultural competence includes cognitive understanding, emotional attitude and behavioral skills. Although scholars at home and abroad have different views on the elements of intercultural competence, they have reached a general consensus on the core elements of intercultural competence, including cognition, emotion and behavior. (Li, 2021; Hu, 2013). Thus, regardless of the different models at home and overseas, English teachers can cultivate students' intercultural competence from cognition, emotion and behavior dimensions.

As for the cultivation of intercultural competence, it can be divided into two categories in the field of foreign language teaching. The first category is basic research, including the discussion of the definition, training objectives, and the construction of relevant theoretical models and practical models. Xu and Sun (2013) built a "progressive-interactive intercultural competence training model" with globalization as the context and intercultural personality as the training goal, integrating five elements of knowledge, motivation, skills, context and effect. Peng et al. (2020) established the theoretical model and practical model of intercultural foreign language teaching in the new era. The theoretical model consists of platform layer (foreign language courses), form layer (experiential, speculative and interactive learning) and ability layer (intercultural ability). The practice model covers six aspects: teaching objectives, teaching principles, teaching strategies, teaching links, teaching activities and teaching evaluation. Gu (2019) constructed the "third space" intercultural communication ability

training model, which includes theoretical model and practical model. The theoretical model includes three macro dimensions: attitude, knowledge and skills, while the practical model includes three levels: content, link and activity. The second category is applied research, that is, empirical research on intercultural teaching based on English courses. Chang and Zhao (2012) conducted action research aimed at improving students' intercultural competence based on the comprehensive college English course. Their teaching steps included "describing cultural information", "analyzing cases", "participating in communication activities" and "reflecting on cultural differences". The intercultural teaching activities in this research revolved around the theme of each unit of the course. Fu and Zhang (2017) applied intercultural training method, and Zhang and Zhao (2018) applied ethnography teaching method. Suo and Chi (2018) carried out a blended intercultural foreign language teaching experiment based on massive open online course. Dai (2020) did research on the cultivation of intercultural awareness in Content-based Teaching. Bi and Xu (2021) cultivated English majors' intercultural competence based on blended teaching. From these numerous literatures, we can see little researches focusing on cultivating the intercultural competence by adapting the blended teaching, not to mention constructing a blended teaching model integrated with the cultivation of intercultural competence.

2.2 Blended Teaching Model

Blended teaching can be divided into broad sense and narrow sense. In a broad sense, blended teaching refers to mixing a variety of learning theories, teaching media and teaching models, so as to achieve the best teaching effect. In a narrow sense, blended teaching is a mixture of face-to-face teaching and online learning.

The construction of blended teaching model has always been the focus in the field of blended teaching, and different people have different ideas about the design of blended teaching model. For example, Garrison's Community of Inquiry model includes social telepresence, teaching telepresence and cognitive telepresence. It is considered as the most influential teaching theory in the field of mixed teaching at present and has been widely used to guide the design of blended teaching model. Li (2004), on the other hand, formulated eight steps of blended teaching design, including determining the goal of blended teaching, defining the expected performance, selecting information transmission channels and media, learning design, supporting strategies, action observation of planned implementation, learning evaluation, and revised learning. Huang et al. (2009) constructed a design framework of three-stage blended teaching model including front-end analysis, activity and resource design, teaching evaluation design in the article "Curriculum design theory based on blended learning". This study will select the blended teaching model of Huang et al. to construct a blended teaching model integrated with the cultivation of intercultural competence.

3. The Construction of Blended Teaching Model Integrated with the Cultivation of Intercultural Competence

Nowadays big data and information technology provide strong technical support for the development of teaching activities such as teaching interaction, teaching evaluation and teaching information collection. Online and offline blended teaching in the information age makes up for the shortcomings of traditional teaching and improves teaching efficiency. With the help of three-stage blended teaching model put forward by Huang et al., this study takes the cultivation of college students' intercultural competence as the research theme, constructs a blended teaching model of English course integrating intercultural competence training (Figure 1), which can train students' language ability as well as runs through the cultivation of students' intercultural competence before class, during class and after class.
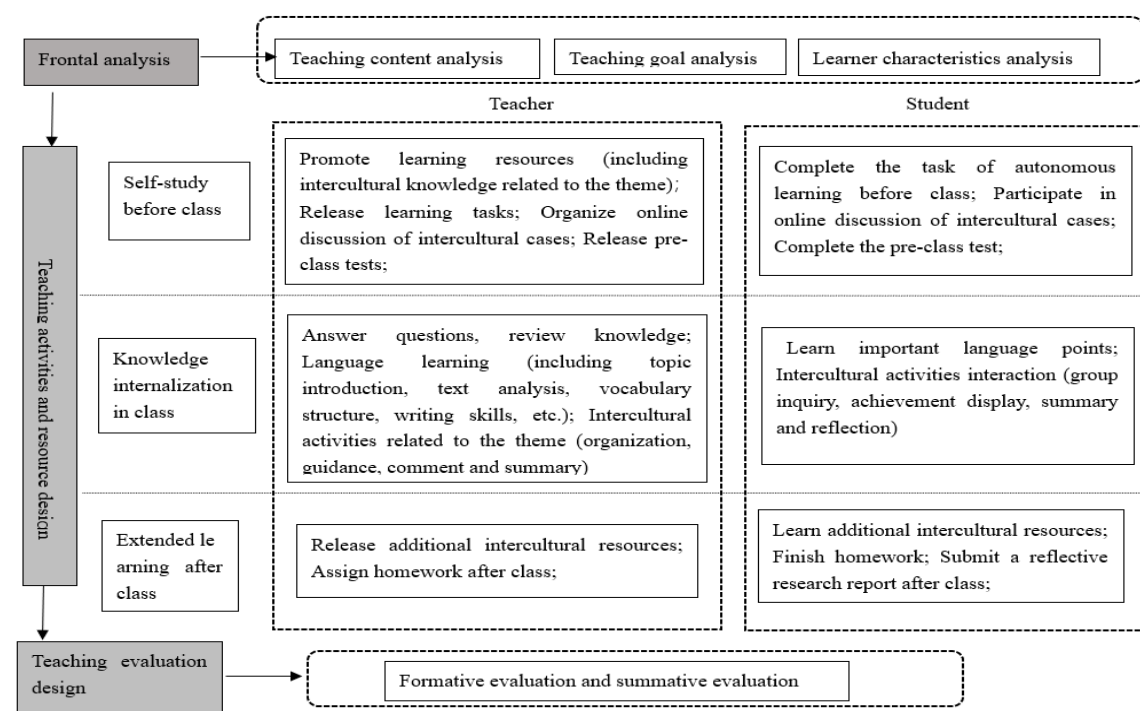

Figure 1. Blended Teaching Model Integrating Intercultural Competence Training

Totally speaking, there are three-stages in this model including Frontal analysis, Teaching activities and resource design, Teaching evaluation design. The frontal analysis is the stage of learning situation analysis that mainly covers learner characteristics analysis, learning content analysis and learning environment analysis. The second stage is the learning activities and resource design, including determining learning objectives, selecting learning content, designing learning activities etc. Teaching evaluation is to evaluate the learning process, activity organization and course assessment results. While the cultivation of students' intercultural competence will be integrated into the classes before class, during class and after class. The details will be shown as follows.

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Before class, under the guidance of teachers, students preview new lessons through online teaching resources and textbooks so as to prepare for the study of new knowledge. The specific methods are as follows: In the pre-class stage, teachers analyze learner characteristics, the students' needs, learning materials, knowledge already known, and learning environment etc. Then, after giving students a "learning task list", teachers collect, design, develop and post learning resources to the intelligent teaching platform. These learning resources involving online intercultural resources related to the theme and the texts. What's more, students are asked to finish the self-study before class according to the "learning task list", discuss typical intercultural cases in the discussion area and complete online tests. The teaching purpose in the pre-class stage is to improve students' intercultural knowledge and awareness, and test the effect of autonomous learning.

In class, in order to help students absorb new knowledge, especially the intercultural knowledge, teachers use a variety of teaching methods to help students master what they have learned. The specific process are as follows: teachers give feedbacks on online tests and answer the difficult questions raised by students. As to the text, only important and difficult points of the course will be explained according to different modular, such as topic introduction, text analysis, vocabulary structure, writing skills, etc., then to truly cultivate the students' intercultural competence, the intercultural activities related to the theme will be introduced through cultural comparison, cultural analysis, case discussion, role-play and other ways, stimulating students to explore intercultural activities within groups. Finally, teachers and students summarize and reflect the intercultural knowledge learned during this class. All in all, these steps will not only improve students' language knowledge but also their intercultural attitude, sensitivity and cultural skills.

After class, Teachers post homework, tests, and other tasks on the teaching platform. According to the platform data, teacher can know how to design the teaching plan for the next stage. In addition, more resources related to intercultural knowledge will be given to student after class. The intercultural outcomes are asked to upload to the platform. While our students should finish the homework, learn the resources released by teachers on the teaching platform, hand in a reflective intercultural research report by groups, and use the learned language knowledge for oral English, reading and writing training. Finally, teaching evaluation is to evaluate the learning process, activity organization and course assessment results given by both teachers and students.

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