

A Study on the Influencing Factors of Cross-cultural Communication Skills of English Majors in Domestic Universities

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Abstract

In recent years, English occupies a central position in facilitating cross-cultural exchanges. Students majoring in English at domestic universities represent the primary cohort for future cross-cultural engagement; thus, the development of their cross-cultural communication abilities is of paramount importance. Nevertheless, current deficiencies persist among these students, including limited comprehension of diverse cultural contexts and the inadequate application of cross-cultural communication strategies. Such shortcomings not only impede students' capacity for effective international communication but also constrain China's cultural dissemination and the enhancement of its global influence within the framework of globalization.

Keywords

Cross-cultural communication ability, English major, Second foreign language, Education.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid advancement of globalization has rendered cross-cultural communication skills an essential and critical competency in international interactions. English, as a global lingua franca, occupies a central position in facilitating cross-cultural exchanges. English major students at domestic universities, who constitute the primary cohort for future cross-cultural engagement, require focused development of their cross-cultural communication abilities. Nevertheless, current observations indicate notable deficiencies among these students, including limited comprehension of diverse cultural contexts and a rigid application of cross-cultural communication strategies. Such shortcomings not only impede students' capacity for effective international communication but also constrain China's cultural dissemination and the enhancement of its global influence amid globalization. This study seeks to systematically investigate the factors influencing the cross-cultural communication skills of English major students in domestic universities. The findings aim to enrich and refine the theoretical framework surrounding the cultivation of cross-cultural communication competencies, introduce novel group-based perspectives, and contribute to the advancement of a more comprehensive and systematic theoretical model. Ultimately, this research endeavors to support the localized development of cross-cultural communication skills theory.

2. Literature Review

Research on cross-cultural communication competence has achieved considerable advancement on an international scale. Studies conducted abroad predominantly concentrate on international students and immigrants, emphasizing their adaptation processes and the development of their abilities within cross-cultural settings. In recent years, foreign scholarship has increasingly focused on specific dimensions of cross-cultural competence, such as cross-cultural anxiety and empathy, leading to the creation of various evaluative instruments. These

tools have been extensively utilized among international student populations, offering critical methodological support for investigations into cross-cultural communication skills. Nonetheless, the applicability of these instruments across diverse cultural contexts remains limited. Several existing assessment scales are heavily grounded in Western cultural paradigms, thereby failing to accurately capture the cross-cultural communication competencies of students situated in non-Western cultural environments.

Within China, research on cross-cultural communication competence has evolved from an initial uncritical adoption of Western models toward the development of indigenous frameworks. Early domestic scholarship largely relied on foreign theoretical constructs and empirical findings. However, with the deepening of localized research efforts, a cultivation model for cross-cultural competence centered on college students has gradually emerged. More recently, Chinese scholars have formulated a framework for fostering cross-cultural communication competence that reflects Chinese cultural characteristics and have developed corresponding assessment instruments. These contributions have provided significant theoretical foundations for English language education in Chinese universities. Despite these advances, domestic research still requires closer integration with local pedagogical practices and the exploration of more effective instructional methods and strategies. Presently, English language teaching in Chinese higher education faces numerous challenges in cultivating cross-cultural communication competence, including a disconnect between curricular content and practical needs, as well as a lack of diversity in teaching approaches. Consequently, further inquiry into the integration of theory and practice to enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills remains a critical focus for ongoing domestic research.

In summary, although prior studies have made substantial progress in examining the influence of individual, educational, and environmental factors on cross-cultural communication competence, certain limitations persist. Notably, there is a need for more extensive investigation into the contextual applicability of existing models, particularly within the Chinese educational milieu, where localized research remains relatively sparse[1]. Moreover, future research should prioritize the effective synthesis of theoretical frameworks and practical applications to develop an intercultural communicative competence (ICC) assessment system and a culturally adapted cultivation pathway tailored to Chinese English learners [2]. Subsequent studies may also explore the interactive mechanisms among these influencing factors and seek to optimize pedagogical models and environmental supports to better foster students' cross-cultural communication abilities. Such efforts would contribute comprehensive theoretical and practical guidance to the ongoing reform of university-level English education.

In terms of personal factors, research shows that students' language ability, cognitive ability, emotional attitude, and motivation level have a significant impact on their cross-cultural communication ability. For instance, language, as the basic tool for cross-cultural communication, its mastery level directly affects students' expression and comprehension abilities in cross-cultural situations[3]. At the same time, students' cross-cultural cognitive ability, including sensitivity to cultural differences, cultural adaptability, and cultural empathy, are also important factors influencing their cross-cultural communication ability[4]. In terms of emotional attitude, cross-cultural anxiety and interest in different cultures have a significant impact on students' performance in cross-cultural situations[5]. Moreover, motivational factors, especially intrinsic motivation, such as love for cross-cultural communication and desire to explore different cultures, can significantly enhance students' cross-cultural communication ability [6].

In terms of educational factors, teaching methods, course content, and teacher quality play a crucial role in cultivating students' cross-cultural communication ability. Task-based teaching methods and cooperative learning, through providing real-life language tasks and group cooperation opportunities, help students improve their cross-cultural communication ability in

practice[7]. In terms of course content, the integration of cross-cultural communication courses and cultural experience activities can help students systematically understand the communication patterns and values in different cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural cognition and practical ability [8]. The cross-cultural literacy and teaching attitude of teachers also have a significant impact on students' learning outcomes, and teachers with higher cross-cultural literacy can better guide students to understand and adapt to the communication needs in different cultural backgrounds[1].

Environmental factors also have a profound impact on students' cross-cultural communication ability. Cultural environments such as family culture, school culture, and social culture provide students with rich cross-cultural learning resources and practical opportunities. For example, the inclusive attitude towards different cultures in families and the cross-cultural communication activities organized by schools can help students build positive cross-cultural emotional attitudes and enhance their cross-cultural practical ability[9]. International exchange opportunities in the social environment, such as international student exchange programs and international cultural festivals, also provide valuable cross-cultural practice platforms for students [10]. Moreover, with the development of information technology, the technological environment such as the Internet and social media provides students with more opportunities for cross-cultural learning and communication, further expanding their cross-cultural horizons [11]. However, although significant progress has been made in these aspects, current research still has shortcomings, such as issues of applicability in different cultural backgrounds and how to better combine theory with practice, which still need to be further explored in future research.

3. Research Methods

The questionnaire consists of 11 questions focusing on "Factors Affecting Cross-Cultural Communication Skills". It systematically collected six types of variables: Firstly, there are cognitive variables. Question 1 measures students' subjective evaluation of the importance of cross-cultural skills; Secondly, there are emotional variables. Question 5 captures cultural interest and prejudice, and Question 6 focuses on communication anxiety and difficulty types; Thirdly, there are behavioral experience variables. Questions 2 and 9 record the frequency of confusion and the frequency of direct communication with foreigners; Fourthly, there are learning environment variables. Question 7 assesses the practical opportunities provided by the school, and Question 3 uses multiple-choice to outline the multiple channels through which students acquire cross-cultural knowledge outside of school; Fifthly, there are teaching preference variables. Question 4 selects to reveal the classroom method that students most approve of, and Question 10 uses multiple-choice to present the expected improvement paths for the future; Sixthly, there are evaluation orientation variables. Question 8 determines whether students believe that assessment should focus on cultural knowledge, actual performance, or emotional attitude. Additionally, Question 11 is an open-ended blank-filling question, collecting students' free suggestions for course improvement to supplement the qualitative perspective. Thus, the questionnaire forms a complete data chain from cognition to emotion, from experience to environment, from teaching to evaluation, providing support for subsequent description and analysis.

The interview will establish a multi-dimensional assessment framework. In the questionnaire, various aspects of cross-cultural communication ability will be incorporated, including cultural knowledge, language proficiency, communication skills, cultural awareness, and attitudes. The interview will consist of open-ended questions and closed-ended questions.

3.1. Open-ended Questions

3.1.1. "Can you describe an experience in a classroom or extracurricular activity where you truly felt the value of cross-cultural communication? What was the scene like and how did you feel at that time?"

In my freshman year, I participated in an international cultural festival. One of the activities was to prepare and showcase the traditional cuisine of our respective countries with international students from different countries. At that time, I was assigned to a group with members from South Korea and Brazil. The South Korean student introduced the cooking methods and table manners of Korean cuisine, while the Brazilian student told the cultural story behind Brazilian barbecue. During this process, I deeply realized the value of cross-cultural communication. Although we come from different cultural backgrounds, through communication and cooperation, we not only learned how to cook the food, but also enhanced our understanding and respect for each other's cultures.

I remember participating in a classroom group jointly organized by Chinese and foreign students in my sophomore year. That experience made me truly realize the value of cross-cultural communication. During a discussion about the activity plan, we planned to organize a community publicity event on the weekend. However, a student from Italy raised objections, saying that weekends are times for family reunions and forcibly disturbing them would make the locals resentful. At first, I thought he was being a bit picky. Later, after researching, I discovered that in Italian culture, personal time is indeed highly valued. After that discussion, we adjusted the plan and changed it to an evening visit on a weekday for the publicity.

In my second year of university, I participated in the "Global Cafe" event organized by SEIS (the School International Students' Organization). Every week, students from different countries were invited to share their cultures. That time, it was my turn to represent the Chinese group and showcase tea art. I prepared Longjing tea, a covered bowl, and a tea tray, and planned to demonstrate the traditional process - warming the cup, adding tea, brewing, and distributing tea. When I was pouring the tea and used the "hand-knocking gesture" (lightly tapping the table to express gratitude), a Brazilian student suddenly raised his hand and asked: "Why are you tapping the table? What's the special meaning behind this?" I explained that this was the Chinese tea table etiquette, indicating gratitude to the person pouring the tea, especially when the other person was an elder or of a higher status. A German student smiled and said: "When we drink coffee, if the spoon makes a sound when it touches the cup, it is actually impolite. Maybe this is a cultural difference."

3.1.2. "When you are communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, what is the most difficult obstacle you encounter? What methods have you tried to deal with it?"

For me, the most difficult obstacle to overcome is cultural misunderstandings and differences in non-verbal communication. During a group assignment, when I was communicating with a Japanese friend, I noticed that he kept nodding his head. I thought he was fully agreeing with my point of view, but later I realized that nodding in Japanese culture does not necessarily mean complete agreement; it is more of a polite way of listening. This misunderstanding made me realize that non-verbal communication is very important in cross-cultural communication, but it is also easily overlooked.

The most difficult obstacle should be "implicit cultural differences", which refer to those unwritten habits and ways of thinking. For instance, when working with an Indian classmate before, other classmates always submitted their work early, while he always handed in his materials just a few minutes before the deadline. I was extremely anxious and directly told him, "Could you submit it a little earlier next time?" However, he became a little distant from me as

a result. Later, I learned that in his culture, submitting before the deadline is reasonable. He doesn't have our idea of excessive competition.

3.1.3. "If you were to design a cross-cultural communication course, what specific contents or activities would you incorporate? And why?" This question can stimulate students' imagination of an ideal teaching method and reflect the unmet learning needs in the learning process.

If I were to design a course on cross-cultural communication, I would specifically incorporate the following elements and activities:

Firstly, I would include cross-cultural case studies. By analyzing real-life cross-cultural conflict cases, students would gain an understanding of the misunderstandings and problems that can arise from different cultural backgrounds, and I would guide them to think about how to solve these issues.

I will design some cross-cultural role-playing activities to simulate international business negotiations and international travel. Through these activities, students can experience the communication methods and behavioral norms in different cultural backgrounds in practice.

I will design activities where participants will analyze the silences and physical distances in different cultural film segments. I will also invite immigrants to share the "most confusing things they encountered when first arriving in a foreign country".

3.2. Closed-ended Questions

3.2.1. "Do you think the proportion of cross-cultural communication-related content in the current professional courses is sufficient?"

- Options:

- A. Completely insufficient
- B. Slightly lacking
- C. Basically adequate
- D. Excessively abundant

Among them, 1 person chose option A: Completely insufficient. Currently, the content of cross-cultural communication in professional courses is very limited and can almost be ignored. We mainly study language knowledge and grammar, and rarely have the opportunity to come into contact with the theory and practice of cross-cultural communication. I mainly hope to have some practical activities. 2 people chose option B. Slightly lacking. I think although there are some cross-cultural communication contents in the courses, the overall proportion is still insufficient. The teachers may provide us with some materials, but there is no place for practice. 2 people chose: Basically sufficient. Although it cannot be perfect, there are some school activities, and the teachers will also teach us some skills in class. Regarding improvement, I hope foreign students can have online communication or participate in international exchange programs.

3.2.2. "Which of the following methods do you prefer to use for enhancing cross-cultural competence? (Single choice)"

- Options:

- A. Theoretical lectures (cultural knowledge, case studies, etc.)
- B. Practical simulations (role-playing, scenario drills, etc.)
- C. Real interactions (international exchanges, foreign language socializing, etc.)
- D. Self-study (films, reading, online resources, etc.)

Two people chose B.

During the practice simulation, such as role-playing conversations in different cultural contexts, it allows me to make mistakes in a safe environment and adapt to those possible cultural

differences in advance. The practice simulation, like role-playing, enables me to immerse myself in the specific scenario and feel the tension.

The practice simulation is a very good transitional method, allowing me to accumulate some experience before entering the real cross-cultural scenarios.

Three people chose C.

Real interaction is the most effective way to enhance cross-cultural competence. "Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth." Although theoretical knowledge and simulation exercises are important, only by engaging in real communication and interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds can one truly understand cultural differences and learn how to handle problems in actual situations.

I prefer the C option, which is the "dynamic" approach. Chatting with foreign classmates or participating in international exchange activities allows one to truly experience their way of thinking and habits. This kind of firsthand experience is much more memorable than just listening to theories.

4. Research Results

This study employed questionnaire and interview methods. It investigated from various aspects such as students' actual experiences, encountered difficulties, suggestions for course design, and preferences for existing courses and learning methods. The interviewees were students majoring in English at a domestic university. A total of 287 questionnaires and several valid interview responses were collected. Through the analysis of these responses, the main factors influencing students' cross-cultural communication ability were identified.

4.1. Positive Influencing Factors

Firstly, the promoting effect of practical experience. Research has found that students' cross-cultural awareness is triggered through specific interactive scenarios rather than through mere theoretical learning. In cultural display activities, when students explain the details of their own culture to others, they become aware of the "universal nature of cultural differences" due to the questions raised by foreign participants. Conflicts in collaborative tasks allow students to deeply understand what cultural value differences are in practice. This experience forces students to adjust their original plans and enables them to understand that "there is no superiority or inferiority in cultural rules, only differences", which also has a significant impact on the students. These experiences directly influence the students' subsequent cooperative strategies, prompting them to actively inquire about cultural taboos or preferences. Such activities provide a two-way opportunity for cultural output and input; however, the lack of a unified, post-event review led by teachers or organizers prevents students from going beyond the "interesting" level and failing to deepen it into skills.

4.2. Negative Influencing Factors

The research reveals that the most difficult obstacles for students in cross-cultural communication mainly lie in non-verbal misunderstandings, such as mistaking a polite nod in Japanese culture as an expression of agreement. There are also implicit cultural rules, differences in time concepts, and value conflicts, such as the clash between efficiency-oriented and relationship-oriented approaches. The root cause of these obstacles lies in the "invisibility" of cultural differences - students often only become aware of the problems after they occur. To address these challenges, students have spontaneously adopted cultural comparison methods, buffering mechanisms, and role reversal exercises to simulate the cultural positions of the other party, etc. However, these methods mostly rely on accumulated experience and lack systematic guidance. In closed-ended questions, some students believe that the proportion of cross-cultural communication content in current professional courses is completely insufficient or

slightly lacking, mainly focusing on language knowledge and grammar learning, and lacking systematic cross-cultural theory and practical teaching. This course setting is difficult to meet students' needs for cultivating cross-cultural communication skills. Even if the courses include some cross-cultural knowledge, but lack practical venues and real interaction opportunities, students find it difficult to convert theoretical knowledge into practical abilities, resulting in slow improvement of cross-cultural communication skills.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This study, through interviews, discovered that the improvement of cross-cultural communication skills among English major students in domestic universities is influenced by multiple factors. Positive factors include abundant practical experience and reasonable course design, which can effectively promote the awakening of students' cross-cultural awareness and the enhancement of their skills; negative factors mainly focus on cultural misunderstandings, non-verbal communication differences, and insufficient course settings, which restrict the development of students' cross-cultural communication skills. Students' demands for the improvement of cross-cultural courses show a clear practical orientation, emphasizing the deepening of learning through interactive forms such as role-playing, real case analysis, and immigration interviews, and particularly focusing on the exploration of cultural values. This demand contrasts sharply with the current situation of the courses, which "emphasize theory but neglect practice" - 60% of the students believe that cross-cultural content is insufficient, mainly manifested as fragmented cultural knowledge points that have not been transformed into actual communication skills.

Furthermore, this study conducted a questionnaire survey on the influencing factors of cross-cultural communication competence (ICC) among 287 domestic college students majoring in English. The main results are as follows:

Cognitively and emotionally, 63.8% of the surveyed students consider cross-cultural competence "very important/relatively important", while 18.1% hold a "moderate" attitude, and 13.9% consider it "not very important". 56.1% express "great interest and willingness to actively learn", 22.3% "maintain respect but will not actively explore", and 8.0% admit "having prejudice or exclusion". Most students want to cultivate their cross-cultural communication skills. In terms of difficulties, emotional anxiety ranks first (34.15%), followed by "lack of understanding of the other culture" (31.01%), and language barriers account for only 23%. This indicates that the "non-verbal - emotional - cultural knowledge" chain is more crucial than a single language issue.

In terms of practical experience, the frequency of interaction shows a significant polarization. 50.5% of the students "often" have direct communication with foreigners, 29.97% "occasionally", and 19.5% "rarely or never", presenting a clear two-sided trend. Regarding the support provided by the school, 40.4% believe that the practical opportunities are "very sufficient", 41.8% consider them "average", and 17.8% think they are "less or completely absent". Cross-analysis reveals that students who perceive insufficient opportunities have significantly higher levels of emotional anxiety, and the opportunities provided by different schools also vary. In terms of the practical paths, students mainly acquire cross-cultural knowledge through "communicating with foreign friends" (52.6%), "classroom learning" (51.6%), "extracurricular reading" (62.0%), and "film, television, and social media" (47.0%), but the systematicness and depth are insufficient.

In the research on teaching methods, the most widely recognized teaching methods are in the following order: "Case Analysis" (32.4%), "Teacher's Presentation of Cultural Knowledge" (31.7%), "Group Discussion/Cooperative Learning" (20.9%), and "Task-Based Teaching"

(13.6%). However, the variance analysis indicates that there are no significant differences in the self-perceived "improvement of ability" among the four teaching methods. This proves that the current classroom design has not yet formed a differentiated advantage. Students also have demands for improvement: 65.2% of the students most hope to "participate in international exchange programs", 55.8% hope to "read cross-cultural books", 44.6% call for "increasing cross-cultural courses", and 45.3% are willing to "interact through social media". The demands are mainly divided into two categories: the desire to provide real scenarios and multiple channels.

Finally, there is the assessment orientation. 31.7% believe that the assessment should focus on "performance in actual communication", 29.6% emphasize "emotional attitude", and only 19.9% choose "cultural knowledge acquisition". This confirms that students place more emphasis on the process evaluation of the "behavior + emotion" dimension.

In conclusion, although domestic English major students generally recognize the importance of cross-cultural communication skills at the conceptual level, they encounter difficulties at the practical level, such as "high emotional anxiety, insufficient real interaction, disconnection between course practice and theory, and single assessment methods". On one hand, more than one-third of the respondents experience significant emotional anxiety due to "fear of making mistakes", which leads them to set limits for themselves in real scenarios. On the other hand, nearly one-fifth of the respondents "rarely or never" communicate directly with foreigners, and the cross-cultural practice opportunities provided by the school show a polarized trend, making it difficult to form a sustainable practical environment. At the same time, the classroom still mainly focuses on fragmented knowledge teaching and case analysis, with a low proportion of task-based, project-based, and immersive teaching designs, and students lack a bridge of connection between learning and practice. To break this deadlock, efforts must be made at the cognitive, experiential, and application levels.

5.2. Suggestions

The optimization direction should focus on the cognitive and application levels. At the cognitive level, by leveraging cultural psychology and cross-cultural communication theories, help students deconstruct the root causes of differences and reduce anxiety caused by the unknown. At the experiential level, through international exchange programs, school-enterprise joint construction of practice bases, cross-cultural role-playing and conflict simulation, allow students to repeatedly connect in a safe environment where mistakes are allowed and reflection is possible. Increase the proportion of cross-cultural communication courses, combine cross-cultural theories with practice, and offer specialized cross-cultural communication course modules covering cultural difference analysis, cross-cultural communication skills, etc. Introduce diversified teaching methods such as case analysis, role-playing, and cultural film analysis. Through simulating real scenarios, enable students to accumulate experience and enhance cross-cultural communication skills. In addition, the course design can also strengthen communication and cooperation with international students. Through on-campus international activities and online exchange projects, create more real interaction opportunities for students, helping them better adapt to the cross-cultural environment.

At the application level, practical teaching should be strengthened. Encourage students to actively participate in international cultural festivals, cooperation projects between Chinese and foreign students, etc. Through personal experience, they can feel cultural differences and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. Establish cross-cultural practice bases or platforms to provide students with more practical opportunities, such as international volunteer services, internships in multinational enterprises, etc., allowing them to practice cross-cultural communication skills in real scenarios. In terms of improving teachers' qualities,

strengthen the training of teachers' cross-cultural communication skills, enhance their own cross-cultural awareness and teaching level, so that they can better guide students to understand and deal with cross-cultural differences. In addition, encourage teachers to conduct cross-cultural communication teaching research, explore teaching methods and course systems suitable for English major students, and provide theoretical support for improving students' cross-cultural communication skills.

6. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, cross-cultural communication skills have become an important part of the core competitiveness of English major students. The fragmented picture presented by this study reminds us that students highly recognize the value of these skills, but they are generally facing practical difficulties. Only by breaking the separation between theory and experience and constructing a diverse, real and continuous learning loop can cross-cultural education become the basic support for students' abilities. In the future, universities should further integrate international resources, technical platforms and course architectures, and embed the cultivation of cross-cultural skills in the entire process of talent development; teachers need to transform from explainers to guides, leading students to continuously grow in each collision, reflection and transfer.

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