

# Study on intercultural teaching of English teaches in higher vocational colleges

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**Abstract:** Intercultural education is one important aspect of foreign language teachings nowadays. The ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is to improve intercultural communication abilities and realize cultural communication with foreigners. English teaching in higher vocational college hasn't payed enough attention on intercultural education. Teachers are lacking in cognition, knowledge and practice of intercultural teaching. Based on the current situation of intercultural English teaching in higher vocational education, the paper proposes that English teachers should strengthen the cognition of intercultural teaching, improve their cultural knowledge and practise more in intercultural teaching.

## 1. Introduction

Intercultural teaching is proposed in the context of intercultural education. It is an education that takes the national culture and foreign culture as the main educational content, and then develops people's intercultural ability. That carrying out intercultural teaching is the main way to realize intercultural education. College English teaching is designed to develop students' English language skills and cultural literacy, which has instrumental characteristics as language learning and humanistic characteristics as cultural learning. The process of developing intercultural communication skills can also contribute to all aspects of learning English.<sup>[1]</sup> English teaching in higher vocational education is not only the training of language skills, but also the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication ability through the learning of cultural knowledge. The cultivation of vocational college students' intercultural communication ability is mainly realized through English teachers' intercultural teaching activities.

## 2. Intercultural education and Intercultural communication skills

Language and culture are the relationship of carrier and content. Foreign language teaching in China has gone through a long historical period. Foreign language teaching has different forms of culture's presence in different periods. Currently, foreign language teaching has taken up the important task of intercultural education according to Zhang Hongling.<sup>[2]</sup> The goal of intercultural education for English teaching is to cultivate students' intercultural communication skills. In response to the development needs of English teaching, The National

Administration Committee on Teaching English Language in Higher Education under The Ministry of Education pointed out in the Guidelines for Teaching English in Universities (2020 edition) that the main contents of English teaching include "General English, English for Special Purposes, and Intercultural Communication".<sup>[3]</sup> Hu Wenzhong believes that the process of people with different cultural backgrounds engaging in communication is intercultural communication. And it can be a communication activity between countries, ethnic groups, and individuals. The content can involve policies, political views, values, customs, manners, appellations, etc.<sup>[4]</sup> Intercultural communication competence refers to people with good communication skills who engage in interactions while having in-depth knowledge of the politics, customs, and society of different countries.

## 3. Problems of English teaching in vocational colleges

In the face of the objective of "intercultural communication skills", English language teaching in vocational colleges still emphasizes that language training should be integrated with the profession and related to the future workplace, but does not focus on intercultural teaching. In this way, language exists in isolation from culture. Referring to the Guidelines on College English Teaching and the characteristics of public basic courses in higher vocational education, some vocational colleges take the Practical English Tests or the Vocational English Tests (VETS) as the teaching goal. Others take the school standards as a condition for graduation. In the existing teaching environment, the English teachers in higher vocational education have a biased understanding of intercultural education. They

generally believe that students of higher vocational education are relatively weak in English. Also in view of the limitation of reduced teaching time allocated, teaching methods are relatively simple. And under the shackle of traditional teaching philosophy, they are unwilling to try new teaching methods.

### **3.1 Low attention to intercultural teaching**

Studies show that English teachers have ambivalent feelings about the integration of cultural dimensions in language teaching. They have different interpretations of foreign language education policies, even some misunderstandings about intercultural competence. The teaching methods are still teacher-centered and focus on teaching knowledge and skills of the language and culture of the target language country, and still regard language competence as the main goal.<sup>[5]</sup> Teachers of higher vocational English have a vague view of the objectives of higher vocational education and the curriculum of higher vocational English. The teaching contents and methods are not well adapted to the objectives of higher vocational training and the curriculum functions of higher vocational English.<sup>[6]</sup> Teachers of higher vocational English either teach the content planned by the textbook or introduce some sporadic cultural background knowledge to students with their own understanding, and there is a problem of superficiality in cultural teaching.<sup>[7]</sup>

### **3.2 Insufficient knowledge for intercultural teaching**

In college English teaching, the evaluation of students who have completed intercultural courses shows that students' evaluation of their own cultural knowledge is significantly lower than their evaluation of communicative motivation and communicative skills. Students' knowledge of foreign culture is weak, and the mastery of Chinese culture as students' native culture is still low.<sup>[8]</sup> The reasons for the lack of students' intercultural knowledge have a lot to do with teachers' intercultural teaching. The current cultural literacy of English teachers in higher vocational education has some difficulties in carrying out intercultural teaching and developing students' intercultural communication skills.

### **3.3 Inadequate competence in intercultural teaching**

The existing research has ignored the stages and continuity of intercultural competence development, and cannot accurately grasp the development pattern of students' intercultural competence.<sup>[9]</sup> Intercultural teaching is different from the traditional teaching mode, which puts higher demands on teachers' teaching ability. The current teaching style is text-based, focusing on the explanation of English words, the translation of texts, and the analysis of grammatical knowledge points. Language practice is based on module training such as reading, speaking, writing, and listening.

## **4. Strategies of intercultural teaching**

To carry out intercultural education, teachers are the main body. It is necessary to focus on the cultivation of teachers' intercultural ability and help them improve their ability of intercultural teaching. Firstly, teachers themselves should have a high sense of identification with intercultural teaching. Secondly, it is vital to strengthen the training of teachers' intercultural teaching ability, increase their intercultural knowledge. Thirdly, vocational colleges should follow the developing trend of language teaching

### **4.1 Enhancement of conceptual recognition**

#### *4.1.1. Recognition of the identity*

Identification with intercultural teaching is a prerequisite for higher vocational English teachers to cultivate students' intercultural communication skills. They should contemplate about the necessity of intercultural teaching from the mission of higher vocational education, from the status and role of English teaching in higher vocational education, and from the characteristics of internationalization of vocational education. Intercultural teaching is the need of higher vocational teachers' self-growth, and also the mission of cultivating intercultural talents. Teachers should enhance their own identity. Through intercultural teaching, they can promote their own cultural level, so that their own teaching ability can be exercised and developed. Intercultural teaching is a need for students' growth. In today's highly internationalized world, English is used in all walks of life, so students have an objective need to learn English culture.

#### *4.1.2 Recognition of culture*

To carry out intercultural teaching, English teachers of higher vocational education must first identify with multiple cultures. Cultural identity is divided into two dimensions: internal and external. Internal cultural identity refers to identification with one's own culture. External cultural identity is the process of understanding and accepting other national cultures.<sup>[10]</sup> Cultural identity is a prerequisite for intercultural teaching. Otherwise intercultural teaching will not be possible. Some Chinese students have a negative attitude toward English learning, and even some teachers themselves are in the conflict of cultural identity. Cultural differences are bound to exist, and foreign language teachers should understand the background reasons for different cultural differences and identify with different cultures. They have the responsibility to spread the excellent Chinese and Western cultures so that they can take up the task of intercultural teaching. With the rapid development of global economic integration and the increasing international exchange, only on the basis of mutual equality, mutual understanding and mutual recognition

can intercultural communication be better realized between countries.

#### 4.2 Enrichment of intercultural knowledge

English teachers are the key to carry out intercultural English teaching in higher vocational colleges. First of all, English teachers should have profound knowledge of Chinese culture, which is the basic prerequisite for intercultural teaching. Meanwhile they should also have a good grasp of the English culture they are teaching. Only when teachers have rich cultural knowledge themselves can they integrate and better transmit cultural knowledge in intercultural teaching. English teachers should combine language teaching and cultural teaching, continuously learn to enrich their own cultural knowledge. Then they are able to cultivate students' language ability, communicative ability and cultural literacy through intercultural teaching.

#### 4.3 Intercultural teaching in practice

Ministry of Education promulgated the English Course Standards for Higher Vocational Education in 2021. According to the file, students in vocational college can choose Literacy Improvement English Module in the third semester. Some vocational colleges offered the culture courses. The teaching contents include museum, opera, lunch culture, sports, etc. In class, teachers can use various teaching methods like literature exhibition, culture comparison, literature appreciation, real cases of intercultural communication and intercultural seminars to integrate cultural knowledge into English teaching and develop students' intercultural communication skills. Teacher and students talk about the topics from different cultural aspects. They compare the differences between different cultures. Teachers set some mini-projects for students to practice which are mainly about situational comedy in close relation with cultural themes. Students can actively participate and perform. Finally, teachers make comments on students' performance and evaluate the teaching process.

### 5. Conclusion

All countries have to communicate with the outside world nowadays. Cultural exchange should be the first step. So the intercultural communication ability is very important in global activities. As the young generation, students in vocational colleges will exert great importance in the internationalization. In intercultural teaching, as English teachers in higher education institutions, they should have a deep understanding of intercultural education and the role they have to play in teaching. They must change the traditional classroom teaching model, innovate teaching methods, design each lesson carefully, integrate cultural knowledge into language teaching, and attract students' interest in learning cultural knowledge. In addition, English teachers should also master information technology

teaching techniques and be able to use network technology to carry out blended classroom teaching. Besides cultivation of teachers' teaching ability, intercultural teaching should create smart teaching environment, adopt common online teaching platform for instant access, use the cloud terminal to store rich resources, and finally evaluate the whole process.

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