

Investigation and Analysis of Intercultural Sensitivity of Non-English Majors

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Abstract: *In the increasingly globalized world, the intercultural competence is of great importance. Intercultural sensitivity is one of the important contents of intercultural competence. This study uses the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale developed by Chen & Starosta among 132 undergraduates who are non-English majors in Hunan Institute of Technology in an attempt to understand the current situation of their intercultural sensitivity and the correlation between the five major dimensions of intercultural sensitivity. This study finds that the levels of five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity of non-English majors in Hunan Institute of Technology are relatively average. Specifically, the level of respect for cultural differences is the highest, followed by interaction engagement, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness and interaction confidence. Pearson correlation analysis shows there is significant positive correlation between the five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity except that there is no significant correlation between interaction attentiveness and interaction enjoyment. Among them, the correlation between interaction engagement and interaction attentiveness is the strongest, and the correlation between respects for cultural differences, interaction enjoyment and interaction confidence is also strong. This study can provide certain guidance for further improving the intercultural communication of college students in Hunan Institute of Technology and promoting intercultural teaching of college English and enriching intercultural research in the future.*

Keywords: *Intercultural Sensitivity; College English Teaching; Intercultural Competence*

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication means that people with different cultural backgrounds communicate with each other. At present, the cost for college students to contact with different cultures is decreasing day by day, and they can intuitively feel the differences in ways of thinking and values between different cultures through a range of different digital devices such as smart phones and notebooks. Therefore, how to cultivate college students to face differences with a more objective and open mind, to eliminate cultural prejudice and misunderstanding, and thus to improve intercultural communication ability is an important part of college education. College English Curriculum Requirements (2020 Edition) also points out that one of the important tasks of college English teaching is intercultural competence.

Language is the basic tool for human beings to express their thoughts, acquire knowledge and communicate with each other. It contains a nation's historical tradition and cultural genes, and language itself is also an integral part of culture. While learning to master English as a communication tool, college students should also be educated to have an international perspective, to understand different societies and cultures, to be aware of the similarities and differences between native and foreign cultures, so as to cultivate their intercultural competence. Intercultural sensitivity is one of the components of intercultural competence, which directly affects the effective of intercultural communication.

2. Intercultural Sensitivity and Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Chen & Starosta provided a working definition by conceptualizing intercultural sensitivity as our ability to “develop a positive emotion toward understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promote an appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication” [1]. They argued that

the components of intercultural sensitivity examined include: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment. They believed that intercultural sensitivity is treated as one of the necessary elements for a successful communication in intercultural settings.

Chen & Starosta later designed the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale on the basis of previous research [2]. The scale includes five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, and interaction enjoyment and interaction attentiveness. The validity and reliability of this intercultural sensitivity scale have been verified by Fritz, Mollenberg and Chen [3]. In addition, the applicability of the scale has also been proved by Fritz et al [4]. Therefore, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale can be used for the current study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Objective

To understand the overall intercultural sensitivity level of non-English majors in Hunan Institute of Technology and correlation among five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity.

3.2 Setting and Participants

The author invites 132 non-English majors from Hunan Institute of Technology to fill out the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale questionnaire. These students are sophomores who have undergone their first year of college when the cultivation of intercultural awareness is involved. Understanding their intercultural sensitivity is helpful to know the effect of the previous efforts into cultivation of their intercultural competence and to provide clues for further adjustment of the teaching plans.

3.3. Research Instrument

This study adopts Chen & Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. The scale consists of 24 closed-ended questions, including five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity: interaction enjoyment (questions 9, 12 and 15), interaction confidence (questions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10), interaction engagement (questions 1, 11, 13, 21, 22, 23 and 24), respect for cultural differences (questions 2, 7, 8, 16, 18 and 20), and interaction attentiveness (questions 14, 17 and 19). Using Likert's five-degree scoring method, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", the scores are 5 to 1 respectively, among which 9 questions (2,4,7,9,12,15,18,20,22) should be scored reversely. The highest score of the scale is 120, and the average score is 72.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

The intelligent online statistical analysis platform SPSSAU is used to analyze the research results.

Table 1 Overall level of intercultural sensitivity

| Elements | Number | Minimum value | Maximum value | Average value | Standard deviation |
|----------------------------------|--------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Interaction enjoyment | 132 | 1 | 5 | 3.563 | 0.951 |
| Interaction confidence | 132 | 1.8 | 5 | 3.164 | 0.618 |
| Interaction engagement | 132 | 1.571 | 5 | 3.69 | 0.591 |
| Respect for cultural differences | 132 | 2.167 | 5 | 3.832 | 0.698 |
| Interaction attentiveness | 132 | 1 | 5 | 3.515 | 0.72 |

From Table 1, we can see that the five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity of the participants are relatively average ranging from 3.164 to 3.832. Relatively speaking, the participants have the strongest degree of respect for cultural differences (3.832), followed by interaction engagement (3.69), interaction enjoyment (3.563) and interaction attentiveness (3.515), while interaction confidence (3.164) is relatively weak. The participating students have the highest degree of respect for cultural differences, which shows that most students can identify and appreciate the differences between different cultures. The relatively high degree of engagement, enjoyment and attentiveness in intercultural communication shows that most students are willing to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, and they can maintain a positive and open attitude during the process of communication. They show

respect, understanding and tolerance toward the diverse customs and values of people from different cultures, and eventually they can feel a sense of accomplishment and pleasure in the process of intercultural communication. This may be due to the fact that the reform of college English teaching in recent years has focused on the developing students' intercultural competence. Besides, the nature and vision of Generation Z also contributes to this. Generation Z is the generation of people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Students that participated in the author's study are exactly the Generation Z who can make full use of advancement of new technology to know the "bigger world". They have already got more information and greater vision than their parents did back then. The fact that their parents attach greater importance to developing their versatility also contributes to their open-mindedness toward diverse cultures. This is also consistent with the author's observation on the students she has taught in recent years. Even though some students come from rural areas, the development of new technology has enabled them to learn more about diverse cultures. They have their own interests and hobbies, and they are much more tolerant toward different things than their parents. They are also more precocious and rational in their cognition of themselves and others.

However, the level of interaction confidence is relatively low, which indicates that the some of the students may lack confidence and they may be anxious and nervous, even though they get the sense of enjoyment and satisfaction in communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the standard deviation can reflect the degree of dispersion of a data set. In terms of intercultural enjoyment, the standard deviation is 0.951, the highest among the five dimensions, which indicates that the degree of separation and dispersion of the participants' intercultural enjoyment is large. It can be estimated that there is a large gap between different participants' sense of satisfaction in the intercultural communication, which may be related to students' personal experience, foreign language level and personality.

Table 2 Correlation of five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity

| | Intercultural enjoyment | Intercultural confidence | Intercultural attentiveness | Intercultural engagement | Respect for cultural differences |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Intercultural enjoyment | 1.000** | 0.273** | 0.1 | 0.224** | 0.653** |
| Intercultural confidence | 0.273** | 1.000** | 0.588** | 0.585** | 0.612** |
| Intercultural attentiveness | 0.1 | 0.588** | 1.000** | 0.672** | 0.492** |
| Intercultural engagement | 0.224** | 0.585** | 0.672** | 1.000** | 0.547** |
| Respect for cultural differences | 0.653** | 0.612** | 0.492** | 0.547** | 1.000** |

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Note: * indicates significant correlation at 5% level (bilateral);

** means significant correlation at 1% level (bilateral)

As shown in Table 2, Pearson correlation analysis shows that there are significant positive correlations among the five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity in except that there is no significant correlation between intercultural attentiveness and intercultural enjoyment. Among them, the correlation between intercultural attentiveness and intercultural engagement is the highest, which is 0.672. This shows that the more students focus on intercultural communication, the higher degree they involve in the intercultural communication. The correlation between the respect for cultural differences and interaction enjoyment is also high, which is 0.653. This shows that the more students accept and respect different cultures, the more pleasure and satisfaction they experience in intercultural communication.

At the same time, respect for cultural differences is positively correlated with interaction confidence, interaction attentiveness and interaction engagement. This shows that the more students understand and respect cultural differences, the more confident, more active and more attentive students are when they engage in intercultural communication and vice visa. The students' respect for cultural differences, intercultural attentiveness, intercultural enjoyment and intercultural confident are positively correlate with intercultural engagement. This shows the former four dimensions will also directly affect students' willingness to take part in intercultural communication. Those students who understand and accept cultural differences better, who are more attentive in intercultural communication, and who have stronger intercultural confidence and satisfaction are often more tolerant and open toward foreign

cultures and more willing to participate in all kinds of intercultural communication activities. This reflects a virtuous circle.

5. Conclusion

After analysis, we find that the five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity of non-English majors in Hunan Institute of Technology are relatively average. Specifically, the level of respect for cultural differences is the highest, followed by interaction engagement, interaction enjoyment, interaction attentiveness and interaction confidence. Pearson correlation analysis shows there is significant positive correlation between the five dimensions of intercultural sensitivity except that there is no significant correlation between interaction attentiveness and interaction enjoyment. Among them, the correlation between interaction engagement and interaction attentiveness is the strongest, and the correlation between respects for cultural differences, interaction enjoyment and interaction confidence is also strong.

Therefore, in the intercultural teaching of college English, we should build a teaching system with inclusive, equal and open cultural outlook for students. College English Curriculum Requirements (2020 Edition) regards intercultural teaching as one of the primary tasks, which also highlights the country's demand for talents with high level of intercultural competence.

This study can provide the following suggestions for intercultural teaching of college English: from the university's perspective, firstly, the university should train teachers in a regular and systematic way to improve their intercultural competence. If permitted, universities should provide more opportunities for foreign language teachers to study abroad. Or, the university should provide overseas training programs held online considering the fact that the world has been affected Covid-19 pandemic so as to facilitate teachers' effective interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds. The improvement of teachers' intercultural competence will directly affect students' cultural awareness and intercultural communication. Secondly, intercultural teaching should be clarified in syllabus and the effectiveness of intercultural teaching should be assessed and evaluated and be related to the teachers' performance appraisal system.

From the teacher's perspective, teachers should "create a culturally diverse classroom environment by taking full advantage of technology to provide high quality authentic learning materials and design activities for experiential learning" [5]. Teacher should try their utmost to sustain students' interest in diverse cultures, and encourage students to understand and appreciate different world views advocated by other cultures.

From the student's perspective, students can take full advantage of resources such as smartphone apps and social media to befriend some English users and watch various multicultural such as foreign movies, TV series, reality shows, novels and magazines. They can participate in intercultural activities through internet if real intercultural settings are not available, such as online English corners, online dubbing events, etc., so as to improve intercultural competence and enhance intercultural enjoyment and confidence.

The limitation of this study is that the sample is not representative enough, and it is limited to the non-English majors taught by the author. It lacks horizontal and vertical comparison. Genders, places of origin, English abilities of different students are not taken into consideration for correlation analysis. All of those can be regarded as the direction for future research.

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