

The Application of Case Teaching Method in Intercultural Communication Course

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ABSTRACT. *With the constant development of the global economy, cross-cultural communication courses for undergraduates are becoming more and more important for business English major. Intercultural communication course is a practical and applicable course, so the traditional teaching method is difficult to help teachers achieve the ideal teaching effect. The author finds that case teaching method is very consistent with the characteristics of cross-cultural communication course and conducive to the implementation of the teaching reform of intercultural communication course. This thesis defines the contents and concepts of case teaching method and intercultural communication, and expounds the characteristics of case teaching method. In addition, this thesis discusses the present situation of intercultural communication teaching in colleges and universities, further explores the implementation of the current case teaching method in intercultural communication course, and points out the specific problems and causes. Based on these, some corresponding suggestions are brought up to ameliorate the teaching effect.*

KEYWORDS: *Case Teaching Method; intercultural communication course; business English teaching*

1. Introduction

As the international communicating frequently, people with diverse cultural backgrounds have growing opportunities to contact each other. With the help of “The Belt and Road” strategy, more and more business talents are sent to work and live abroad, and the significance of cross-cultural communication ability is increasingly prominent. The phenomenon of cultural blending encourages business English teaching to speed up the cultivation of compound business talents, which impels them to master not only the professional knowledge, but also the ability of intercultural communication. In business English teaching, it has become a common understanding to put the development of cross-cultural communicative ability in a prominent position. Intercultural communication course is a highly practical subject. However, many teachers in universities still take conventional and single teaching methods in the course, focusing on theoretical teaching while ignoring students’

subjectivity, which is difficult to cultivate students' ability of solving practical problems.

Under the current background, case teaching, as an effective and novel teaching method, is of fairly significance in cultivating students' comprehensive analysis ability as well as intercultural communication accomplishment. The research shows that case teaching can stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, deepen students' understanding of the complexity of teaching, and enable students to connect theory with practice [1]. Using appropriate cases in cross-cultural communication course will make students more actively involved in the classroom, have more profound cross-cultural experience, improve students' learning initiative, cultivate their consciousness of exploring problems, and stimulate their interest in learning.

After reviewing the literature, the author found that the case teaching method is mostly applied in the fields of law, economics and management in foreign countries, while there are few studies on the application of case teaching method in cross-cultural communication courses. Fortunately, the domestic teaching circle has made some attempts in this area. On the basis of previous theories, this thesis proposes to combine case teaching method with intercultural communication course, which contributes to the studies of cross-cultural teaching in China.

2. Case Teaching Method

2.1 The Concept of Case Teaching Method

Based on various theories and relevant practices, people have different definitions of case teaching method. Kowalski holds that case teaching method bases on case and discussion, in addition to teaching information, concepts and theories, it can also train students in reasoning, critical thinking, problem solving [2]. According to Merseeth, case teaching involves discussion in large classes and small groups, role playing in cases, or writing cases[3]. However, in pedagogy, case teaching method is defined as a method to deal with situations in real life and turn them into typical cases, let students think and make decisions through independent research and mutual discussion. In short, case teaching method is a teaching method that utilize cases as the medium to conduct interactions between teachers and students to achieve students' learning objectives.

2.2 Characteristics of Case Teaching Method

Situational. Situationality is the essential feature of case teaching method. Case teaching method is to introduce practical examples to strengthen the communication between teaching and real situation, its most distinctive characteristic lies in the logic of knowledge excavation, that is, to analyze the knowledge contained in cases through the exploration of particular circumstances, so that students can reasonably use cases to carry out positive exploratory knowledge learning, and give full play to their creative potential and internal learning motivation.

Enlightening. Case teaching method takes the possible problems in the case as the starting point and the solution of the problems as the final goal. Its ultimate purpose is to find out the problems and then to play the initiative and enthusiasm of students to take various effective measures to solve the problems. Different people can find problems from different perspectives. Naturally, there will be great differences in their views and solutions to problems. Therefore, it is problem-oriented and focuses on guiding and inspiring students' train of thought through problem setting.

Student-centered. Case teaching is a kind of teaching that encourages students to partake in. Teachers are facilitators and coaches of students learning. Students are no longer receivers, but active thinkers of learning and practical solvers of cases. Students take the initiative to form a preliminary solution based on the case and verify it. Students are preliminary investigators of cases before class, participants of peer review in class, and writers of case solutions after class. Students' learning effect can be timely tested in class, and this method motivates students to explore learning with effective cases that are moderately challenging.

2.3 The Theoretical Basis of Case Teaching Method

Discovery learning theory. Bruner proposed that "the method of cognitive discovery learning, stressing that students' learning should be a process of active discovery, rather than passive acceptance of knowledge." Discovery learning theory gives priority to the stimulation of internal motivation, urge students to explore the hidden principles, laws, methods and skills under the confusing appearance. In a word, discovery learning is "learner-centered". Teachers let students discover principles and rules through observation, analysis, inference and other critical thinking activities to cultivate their ability of analyzing and solving problems independently. It can be said that the case teaching method inherits and develops Bruner's discovery learning theory, which in turn provides psychological basis for the case teaching method.

Constructivism learning theory. Constructivism learning theory advocates student-centered learning under the guidance of teachers. Piaget, a famous psychologist, proposed constructivism. He believed that knowledge is not merely explained by teachers, but acquired by the learners in a specific situation, using necessary learning materials, with the help of teachers and classmates, positively participating in activities [4]. The four elements of constructivism are "situation", "collaboration", "conversation" and "meaning construction". Modern case teaching is that teachers select cases, create appropriate situations, set up problems, encourage students' study interest and thus form cross-cultural communication thinking. This coincides with the four elements of constructivism.

Humanistic learning theory. Humanism lay stress on the subject status and role of students, promotes inner learning and meaningful learning, underlines the establishment of democratic and equal relationship between teachers and students. The cases are real situations, and the questions raised can arouse students'

enthusiasm to explore. Therefore, compared with cramming method, the case teaching method accentuates the prevailing position and function of students. In addition, building a classroom where students can debate freely is also significant to case teaching. In this sense, humanistic psychology has laid a profound theoretical foundation for the implementation of the case teaching method.

3. Intercultural communication course

3.1 The concept and main content of intercultural communication

Intercultural communication refers to the communication between native speakers and non-native speakers, and also to any communication between people with different cultural backgrounds. In 1959, Edward Hall published *The Silent Language*, which firstly utilized the concept of cross-cultural communication [5]. And this book became the beginning work of intercultural communication. Since then, Kohls, Michael Byram, Gudykunst, Kim and many other scholars have continued to explore in this field. Over the course of half a century, the theoretical framework of cross-cultural communication has become more and more distinct and complete, and has gradually become an independent subject. Since the 1980s, China introduced cross-cultural communication, and domestic universities have offered intercultural communication courses in succession for more than 20 years. The main contents of the course are: the basic definition of culture, communication and cross-cultural communication, the comparison of different cultural values and faith, cross-cultural management as well as how to cultivate and improve cross-cultural communicative competence.

3.2 The advantages of case teaching method in intercultural communication course compared with traditional teaching

The difference between case teaching and conventional teaching lies not only in methods, but also in the depth of teachers' grasp of the course's essence, which leads to a large gap in teaching content, teaching process, evaluation system and other aspects.

In terms of teaching content, conventional teaching methods lay emphasis on the introduction of meanings, concepts, principles and other relatively rigid theoretical knowledg. However, considering the development of the times, the acceleration of the pace of knowledge updating, the improvement of information development and other factors, in order to truly understand, experience and master the principles and skills of intercultural communication. Many young teachers seldom have the opportunities to experience business practice and lack keen judgment of cross-cultural communication, resulting in a large number of scripted situations. Hence, the teacher should enrich the teaching s with cases, and guarantee that the content of the case includes a wide range of subjects and genres.

In terms of teaching process, traditional teaching stresses the main role of teachers and highlight the central position of teachers, while students are passive and obedient. For intercultural communication courses, cases can serve as a link between teachers , students, teaching materials and intercultural communication practice. Under the organization, coordination and guidance of teachers, students find solutions through teamwork, rather than just listen to teachers' analysis or answers. Teachers help and inspire students, promote their in-depth thinking, bringing full play to their initiative and creativity.

In terms of evaluation system, the traditional teaching tends to the static standard examination with a single method, standard question type and obvious exam-oriented. Students' level and ability are assessed only by a test paper, whereas the usual process and attitude of learning are ignored. Some students only focus on the final score while seriously lack the ability of independent thinking. The case teaching evaluation system is a systematic, dynamic, comprehensive and diverse evaluation system. Such an evaluation system no longer simply accentuates students' memory capacity, but empowers students to take part in discussion, thinking, cooperation, coordination, negotiation and even compromise, paying full attention to the integration of theory and practice, so as to realize immersive effect.

3.3 The implementation strategies of case teaching method in intercultural communication course

The process of case teaching is a complex educational system and is carried out in several stages: preparation, discussion , evaluation and consolidation [6].

Before class, the teacher should select a suitable case according to the substance of the course, arrange preview tasks for students and raise thinking questions, ask the students to learn pertinent theoretic knowledge by reading chapters of the textbook combined with cases.

In class, the teacher focuses on explaining and discussing cases. The teacher should first try to mobilize the initiative of the students, uses multiple discussion methods, guides the students to closely discuss around the case. Firstly, the teacher asks questions to check the effect of students' preview before class. Then, the whole class will be partitioned into several groups to carry out discussion. Studies have shown that working in groups during completion of case studies significantly improves student perceptions of learning and may increase performance on assessment questions [7]. In the process of discussion, teachers should conduct classroom tour, grasp the students' discussion rhythm, solve the problems encountered by students on time to improve the effect of group discussion.

After the discussion, the teacher shall ask each group to select a representative to speak on these issues, and select the group with the best discussion effect. At the end of the students' statements, the teacher will summarize and make a proper evaluation including not only confirmation about good analysis, but also suggestions on the shortcomings, so as to improve the quality of the case discussion. In addition, the teacher also needs to give detailed explanations to the places where the

discussion is not deep enough and accurate enough, so that the students can fully grasp the knowledge points.

4. The problems and their causes of case teaching method in intercultural communication course

4.1 Difficulty in case selection

In intercultural communication teaching, in order to seek more realistic and timely cases, teachers will consult the literature, classic works and news reports. Despite there are so many sources of cases, the needs of teaching and learning still cannot be satisfied. With the lapse of time and the progress of society, some cases are not real-time but with a certain lag. Due to the cultural differences between the oriental and the occidental countries, students' sense of substitution is not strong, which often leads to the disconnection between case compilation and the actual teaching purpose and plan.

4.2 The lack of professional quality

Teachers of intercultural communication courses should have certain experience in intercultural communication and master theories of it. In addition, case teaching requires teachers to find, select and compile appropriate cases and be good at organizing interactive teaching, which needs high quality of teachers. In the light of the results of many questionnaire surveys, the better part of the students feel dissatisfied with the teacher's case teaching, and some students have absorbed less than one third of the cross-cultural knowledge, which indicates that some teachers are of insufficient professional quality. They lack real and deep intercultural communication experience and their teaching is limited to text, which cannot help students improve their cross-cultural sensitivity.

4.3 The neglect of the individuality of students

It is hard for teachers to give consideration to all individual differences of students when assessing the performance of them in class. There are considerable disparities in students' comprehension and adaptation to intercultural communication case teaching, as well as in students' intercultural knowledge base. In fact, students' solutions to cases are limited by various factors such as gender, knowledge base and personality. Some students who are introverted or have social anxiety cannot quickly integrate into the atmosphere. Owing to the objective discrepancies in these aspects, students would eventually have distinctive problems in the acceptance degree of cases, the analysis angle of problems, the adaptability degree of case teaching method and other aspects. However, teachers tend to ignore these factors when setting classroom problems, and it is unfair to measure all students with a single standard.

5. Suggestions on the application of case teaching method in cross-cultural communication

5.1 Reasonably select and compile cases

First of all, in the process of language teaching, teachers should take notice of the updating of cases. Besides that, they should also keep in step with the development of the time, focus on social hot spots, alter the cases at any time according to the changes of reality, so as to keep the cases up-to-date and forward-looking.

Secondly, teachers should notice cross-cultural cases in life and sort them out, and then quote them into teaching, so as to make the cases as close to students' life as possible. Moreover, teachers do need to tap the cultural background knowledge involved in the teaching materials and carry out certain extension, combine domestic and foreign cases, and try to let students analyze problems in relatively familiar situations.

Additionally, colleges and universities need to build up a full cross-cultural communication case database as soon as possible. Establish a perfect case repository can free teachers from the textbook. They can select real-time and meaningful cases in the resource platform for teaching according to various requirements of educating objects, which provides great convenience for teachers and promotes the rapid development of cross-cultural teaching.

5.2 Improve teachers' professional quality through multiple channels

The quality of teachers decides the quality of teaching, and it also affects students' learning level and learning efficiency. Therefore, teachers need to improve their professional quality. First of all, teachers can apply for overseas study, and carry out investigations, consultations or activities in foreign enterprises, so as to increase direct or indirect cross-cultural communication experience and enrich their cross-cultural literacy. Moreover, on the one hand, teachers should be able to write standardized and representative cases, on the other hand, they should can flexibly choose international cases, reasonably arrange the time of case teaching, and integrate case learning with theoretical study. Finally, teachers should also strengthen their own educational and teaching knowledge through mutual communication with other excellent teachers.

5.3 Lay emphasis on individual differences and perfect evaluation methods

In group discussions, teachers should also give appropriate opportunities to other members to express their ideas besides group members' speeches. Furthermore, when evaluating students' performance, teachers should realize that the conclusions drawn from the case study are diverse and open, and there is no so-called standard answer. Different students have different ways to deal with a same problem. As long

as the goal of solving the problem can be achieved, any method that does not violate the principles of education is desirable. What's more, teachers can assign teaching tasks in advance, and require students to consult materials after class and prepare for case teaching before class. Teachers can make grading evaluation on students according to their completion, and change the evaluation method based on conclusive evaluation, so as to encourage students' ardour to accept education.

6. Conclusion

It is generally known that European and American countries have a deep foundation in studying the use case teaching method, and foreign countries also have mature operation methods in various fields, but how to introduce this advanced teaching method to intercultural communication course to play its best role remains to be studied.

This thesis further analyzes the application of case teaching method in intercultural communication course, points out the problems such as the difficulty in case selection, the need of professional quality of teachers, the trouble in carrying out class discussion and the ignorance of the individuality of students, and brings forth some specific solutions and suggestions.

Because the author's theoretical level is restricted and the practical skill and scientific testing capacity need to be enhanced, the study and analysis still have a few deficiencies, therefore, there are still some problems to be talk over in the follow-up research, and the author will proceed to these problems in the future research, so as to contribute to the cultivation of business English talents.

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