

# The Application of Foreign Open Online Courses in Intercultural Communication Learning

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**Abstract:** *With the economic globalization and the increasing exchanges between the outside world and China, effective communication becomes an important topic in intercultural communication. Foreign language education is not only the teaching of language, but also developing of the ability to communicate in different cultural backgrounds. Foreign open online course, which is the inevitable trend of globalization, is a combination of internet technology and education resources. The learning of foreign open online course is an effective way for the input and output of culture. This paper will focus on foreign open online course used as a learning tool to improve college students' intercultural communication ability, and discuss the way that language learning and culture learning improve students' intercultural communicative competence. And apply the foreign open online course to the intercultural communication learning.*

**Keywords:** *foreign open online course, intercultural communication, English learning, study*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In the 20th century, human science and technology had made a breakthrough, which greatly changed the pattern of the world and human life. The world has been connected as a whole. Cross cultural communication refers to the different communication in different culture. This requires people to understand the difference in social structure, role relationships. And cultural differences include different ethnic customs, spirit, language rules etc. Students must study different communication conditions in the way of communication.

The foreign open online course, is a kind of online classroom video provided by well-known universities like Yale, Harvard, MIT etc, for the world of knowledge. The world famous university foreign open online courses, are the gifts of the advantage of educational resources for personal study.

In the traditional English learning, people often pay more attention to the language form and grammar structure, not enough for the cultural background of the language, especially the cultural differences, this results in many problems in actual communication. With the popularity of foreign open online course, students begin to understand foreign language and culture through video course. Some foreign open online courses spread the rich history and culture, which will be of great help to students in the future in intercultural communication.[1]

This paper will do research on the cultivation of students' intercultural communication learning ability, and discusses how the foreign open online course combines the study of culture and language learning in the study of intercultural communication. And how to apply the foreign open online courses to the classroom for students to learn about social history, culture, to improve students' intercultural communicative competence.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

Globalization gives people of different cultural backgrounds more chances to communicate with each other. English is widespread as the world's most important language, the intellects with fluent English are seriously in need.

However, under the current educational system, most students can not reach the average communication level. The first reason is the currently prevailing grammar-translation pedagogy. The

second reason is lacking intercultural communication awareness. They regard tests as their only goal. However, the final goal of English teaching should be improving intercultural communication competence of students. So how to improve students' intercultural communication competence becomes very important.[2]

Through the new form of teaching, foreign open online courses can give messages to students which will affect the students' intercultural ability. Applying foreign open online courses in classroom teaching can gradually make students understand target language and the culture of the country. And improve their comprehension of English at the same time. Finally, this will improve their intercultural communication ability.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Previous Studies on Foreign Open Online Course***

From the beginning of 2012, the online course as the core of the Internet Co had gained a rapid development, foreign open online course became a new way for people to learn in the network era. In Wikipedia foreign open online course is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web. It is a recent and widely researched development in distance education which was first introduced in 2008 and emerged as a popular mode of learning in 2012.[3]

Kop and Sara Ibn El Ahrache(2011)thought foreign open online course consists of five elements: teachers, learners, theme, learning materials and circumstances. foreign open online course include the humanities, social sciences, physics and biology which are put in the form of video and can upload on the internet. It is also free and open to the public. And in fact, “free”, “open” is the core concept of modern open education online. Further more, the rise of foreign open online course is aimed at breaking the learning threshold, and promoting knowledge free.

Fan Qiang thought that foreign open online course has the following characteristics: Based on social media interactive learning, unstructured curriculum content, learning channel establishment, learner autonomy and learning with spontaneous characteristics. Downes summed up the four basic principle of foreign open online course: convergence, mixing, conversion, to share. And he believes that these principles also reflects the characteristics of foreign open online course.

Panchenko L. F.(2013) on the basis of his own experience and the analysis of related research, thought foreign open online course had many advantages for students: let learners access to well-known university teaching style of distance; the development of intercultural competence; English listening, reading, and writing skills; the establishment of a new professional contact.

In China, Wang Tao and Li Qing(2012) do research on the mode of teaching activities on famous overseas foreign open online course. They thought traditional classroom teaching is an important means of teaching, but with the continuous development of education information sharing and network movement. The internet continuously provide open teaching resources for us and provide some enlightenment for the teaching to carry out daily.[4]

### ***2.2 Previous Studies on intercultural communication***

With the rapid development of society, the ability of effective intercultural communication becomes more and more important. Spitzberg(2000) defined the intercultural communication ability as follows: “intercultural communicative competence can be broadly understood as such an impression, that this behavior is appropriate and effective in a certain context”. Imahori and Lanigan(1989) thought: “intercultural communicative competence refers to the outsiders and local people have proper motivation, knowledge and skills in their communication”.

Perry and Southwell(2011) pointed out that many scholars had made definition of intercultural communicative competence.

Although the definition and theory of scholars is not a generally accepted definition, but it is the recognition of ' people from different cultural backgrounds can communicate effectively and appropriately '.

Hu Wenzhong(1999) emphasized, language and culture play the same role in the intercultural communication, and both of them are indispensable. Culture differences play an important role in

intercultural communication. Brown said culture is a sum of beliefs, habits, lifestyle and behavior belongs to people who live in specific geographical location. In order to communicate effectively, students should have rich culture knowledge. Byram(1997) give an definition of cross cultural knowledge “the knowledge possessed and used in intercultural communication”, including “knowledge about their own country and other country’s social and culture knowledge”, “ knowledge about the process of personal and social aspects”. [5]

Zhang Hongling(2007) thought the development of intercultural communicative competence should be regarded as “senior goal of foreign language teaching”. And Wang Zhenya (2005) put forward the same view, In the eighties of the last century, culture teaching has been established its theory position in foreign language teaching, the cultivation of learners' intercultural communicative competence has become the goal of foreign language teaching.

Bi Jiwan(2005) thought intercultural communication competence is the necessary comprehensive ability made up of communicative language ability, non language communicative competence, the rules of the language and communication rules transforming cultural competence.

### **3. Foreign Open Online Courses as a Learning Tool to Improve Students' Intercultural Communication Competence**

#### ***3.1 The Characteristics of Foreign Open Online Courses***

Foreign open online course is a big revolution of English learning methods. The development of economy, the progress of science and technology bring about the progress of the learning methods. Here are some characteristics of foreign open online courses raised by He Bin(2014).

##### ***2.1.1 Openness to everybody***

Students all over the world can get access to the foreign open online courses. They can choose what they want to learn, and what they are interest in. This means no matter what major, grade they are, they can get access to the foreign open online course.

##### ***2.1.2 Abundant resources***

Many famous universities take part in the foreign open online courses, they provide various kinds of classes which include history, culture, philosophy, and society which mean students can choose any kinds of classes if they want.

##### ***2.1.3 Excellent teachers***

Teachers often prepare well when they begin an opening online class. As a result, the foreign open online course is very attractive and always of high quality. This means students will get more knowledge from the class.

#### ***3.2 The Advantages of Using Foreign Open Online Course as a Learning Tool to Improve Students' Intercultural Communication Competence***

##### ***3.2.1 Improving language skills***

When talking about intercultural communication, language is an important part that cannot be ignored. Only if they learn language well, can they do well in intercultural communication. Foreign open online courses can improve students' knowledge of culture. Most English teachers in China are Chinese, as a result, they cannot speak native English. This makes Chinese students' pronunciation always incorrect. However, foreign open online course is taught by foreign teachers which means English is their mother tongue, which help students correct their pronunciation.

##### ***3.2.2 Improving culture knowledge***

Different people may have different backgrounds of culture. There is variety of foreign open online courses on the Internet, students can choose which they want to learn about. Take the Justice Course as an example, it is a course of Harvard University, which gives us a view of different values and freedom in America and this is different from the traditional view in China.

### ***3.3 Problems in Intercultural Communication Learning***

The difference between second language and mother tongue are very large, so it is tricky for Chinese students to fully master a foreign language. Learners may face many difficulties in the process of learning English, such as different grammatical systems, spelling, pronunciation, culture etc. Among these difficulties, the last one culture is the most difficult to overcome. And the biggest difference between Chinese and English is the culture difference. Here are three major culture problems during their intercultural communication learning.

#### ***3.3.1 Problems in social customs and traditions***

Different countries and races have different social customs, this will have influences on their language use and lead to barriers. For example, in western countries, people think the number '13' unlucky. Foreigners love to boast their own; Chinese love boast their ancestors.

#### ***3.3.2 Problems in different religious belief***

Religious belief is an important part in culture. Most westerners are Christians, but most Chinese believe in Buddhism. So people in different religious beliefs have a very different style in their daily life.

#### ***3.3.3 Problems in different value***

Different culture may lead to the distinguish of value. This means people in different culture may have different taste for color, beauty.

#### ***3.3.4 Problems of different thinking modes***

Different individuals have different thinking modes, let alone people of different nations. It can affect people's response to the same thing in the outside world. Therefore, the west and the east have different ways of thinking. Chinese people focus on the symbolic meaning and connotation of language, while westerners focus on language analysis and construction form. For example, Chinese people think more about past, but most Americans think more about future. Because Chinese cherish their history and splendid culture while American think that future is always expected to be better.

### ***3.4 Strategies to Solve the Problems***

As there are many problems in intercultural communication learning, it is possible to make some strategies to solve the problems.

Students should take the culture class seriously, and read some books about foreign culture after class. Apart from paying attention to the basic learning of knowledge, they should take part in the intercultural communication activities to improve their ability at the same time.

College should set up special class of social culture, such as the history of Chinese culture, the history of western culture etc.[6]

### ***3.5 Implementing of Foreign Open Online Courses***

#### ***3.5.1 Selection of Foreign Open Online Courses***

No doubt that not all the foreign open online courses are suitable for classroom. Teachers and students should pay more attention to the choose of classes. There are some ways to help students and teachers choose the right foreign open online courses:

The content of the foreign open online courses should include culture, history, religion etc.

The teaching methods should be new and original.

The professors should be charming and dedicated to the classes.

When students choose which kinds of the foreign open online course to learn, they can choose what they are interested. As the saying goes: interests are the best teacher of learning.

Students can also choose from the popularity lists, in a sense, the popularity may depends on the quality of foreign open online course.

### ***3.5.2 Implementing of Foreign Open Online Courses From the Perspective of the School***

Schools can bring the foreign open online courses into the existing campus system, which needs to be registered and logged into platform. Teachers can track the progress of students. The assessment can establish a forum and learning circle which can give proper credit, senior support and guidance. And the campus network is always free of charge, schools can also build some wireless stations which convenient for students to learn whenever and wherever possible. With the rapid development of technology, now the mobile phone, ipad can make students learn more conveniently. And the Internet is very popular portable devices, as long as the network can learn.[7]

Schools can also fit the foreign open online courses into the training program and teaching plan, at the same time develop effect evaluation methods and degree of online courses and. Schools should encourage students on the premise of ensuring the quality of teaching.

First of all, teachers should choose the right foreign open online course. In order to improve students intercultural communication ability, teachers should choose the course about culture.

Secondly, teachers should improve students' reading and writing ability through after-class reading and writing practices.

Thirdly, they should teach students some slang and oral expressions, in order to benefit students' spoken English.

Teachers can also design large response and interactive teaching activities to deal with students' interaction and response, and use examination to check the results of learners in learning. Furthermore, give feedback to students in time, so that learners to adjust their own learning behavior.

### ***3.5.3 Implementing of Foreign Open Online Courses From the Perspective of the Student***

On the one hand, students can follow their teachers guide to learn from the open online class in schools.

On the other hand, students can spend their spare time to learning from the foreign open online courses, and establish independent communication circle. This means students can learn with their friends and classmates. They can learn in groups, after watching a foreign open online course, they can discuss the culture and value they have learned from it.

Students can take notes when they learn from a foreign open online course. They can choose what they are interested in. When facing the problems they don't understand, they can ask their teachers the next day.

When learning about intercultural communication, students can find some foreign open online courses of the target countries. As is known to all, the foreign open online courses have abundant resources. After class, they can choose a course related to their class.

In order to implement the foreign open online course well, students should do some preparation:

- 1) Learning should depend on their own motivation;
- 2) They should make their learning objectives clear;
- 3) To develop the habit of autonomous learning and collaborative learning;
- 4) To develop efficient time management skills of self-motivation and self-discipline.

However, before learning a class, students should know some background and supplement of the relevant information, and to make sure they can accept some framework to facilitate the improvement of their learning.

## **4. Conclusion**

With the trend of economic globalization increasingly strengthened, intercultural communication has become an unavoidable activity, the problems brought by cultural differences can not be ignored. There are many reasons.

It is well acknowledged that the purpose of foreign language learning is to use it for intercultural communication. Therefore, the fundamental task of foreign language learning is to improve learners' intercultural communication competence. And the purpose of intercultural communication is not only

language skills but also culture accomplishment.

Many methods and approaches have been proposed to carry out culture teaching and learning, and foreign open online course is one of them.

Foreign open online course, which includes much cultural information, is a good resource for culture learning.

This article discusses reasons why to choose foreign open online course as a cultural resource to improve students' intercultural communication ability. This article explains how foreign open online course improves learners' intercultural communication ability theoretically.

On the one hand, it is necessary to improve language skills to meet the requirements of the society, on the other hand, to improve culture awareness through the learning of foreign open online courses.

The selection of high quality class is the premise of foreign open online course learning. Further more foreign open online course is a program of obtaining the knowledge of intercultural communication. This process is not careless cursory, only brand in the subconscious cultural background and cultural differences can make this process more effectively.

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