

การตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาในประเทศไทย ที่มีไดเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นวิชาเอก

เจ้าจิง¹

งามพิพิชญ์ วิมลเกشم²

¹ ผู้นิพนธ์ประสานงาน อีเมล: jingzhao1209@qq.com หรือ 325869144@qq.com

รับเมื่อ 15 มีนาคม 2564 วันที่แก้ไขบทความ 7 พฤษภาคม 2564 ตอบรับเมื่อ 14 พฤษภาคม 2564

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาการตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของนักศึกษาในประเทศไทยที่มีไดเรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นวิชาเอกโดยสำรวจจากนักศึกษาจีน 98 คนในวิทยาลัย ในครุนหมิง ประเทศไทยเพื่อเป็นการยืนยันถึงปัญหาในเรื่องการตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของการศึกษาภาษาอังกฤษในประเทศไทย โดยใช้แบบสอบถาม Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) ของ Ang (2007) มาปรับปรุงเพื่อเก็บข้อมูล ผลการสำรวจพบว่าการรับรู้ของผู้เข้าร่วมงานวิจัยระหว่างวัฒนธรรมอยู่ในระดับต่ำซึ่งมีผลผลกระทบต่อการรับรู้คุณค่าของการเรียนรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมอันเป็นองค์ประกอบสำคัญของการศึกษา จากการวิจัยภาษา จากผลของการศึกษานี้มีข้อเสนอแนะคือ ในการนำเสนอผลการวิจัยนี้ควรตั้งให้มีการตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรมมีความจำเป็นอย่างยิ่งที่จะต้องมีการผสมผสานในการเรียนทั้งภาษาแม่และภาษาต่างประเทศทั้งยังจำเป็นต้องส่งเสริมสมรรถนะระหว่างวัฒนธรรมเพื่อการพัฒนาประสิทธิภาพในการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษด้วย

คำสำคัญ : ภาษา วัฒนธรรม การรับรู้ การตระหนักรู้ระหว่างวัฒนธรรม นักศึกษาจีน

¹ นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาเอก สาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ บัณฑิตวิทยาลัยคณะมนุษย์ศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยอัสสัมชัญ หัวหน้าสาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษและการวิจัย อาจารย์ประจำภาควิชาการศึกษาทั่วไป มหาวิทยาลัยการจัดการธุรกิจแห่งยูนาน ประเทศไทย

² ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร. ประจำสาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ บัณฑิตวิทยาลัยคณะมนุษย์ศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยอัสสัมชัญ

Perception on Intercultural Awareness of Non-English Major College Students in China

Jing Zhao ¹

Ngamthip Wimolkasem ²

¹ Corresponding author email: jingzhao1209@qq.com หรือ 325869144@qq.com

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Abstract

This research aims to examine non-English major Chinese college students' perceptions of intercultural awareness. The participants in this research were 98 students in Kunming, China. To explore the existing intercultural awareness problem in English language education in China, a Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) questionnaire developed by Ang (2007) was adapted for data collection. The findings revealed that the participants' perception of intercultural awareness was weak, resulting in low recognition of the value of intercultural learning which can stimulate their learning efficiency in language acquisition. The findings suggest that with rapid globalization, intercultural awareness cultivation needs to be integrated both into mother tongue education and foreign language education. Furthermore, intercultural competence should be developed in an effort to enhance linguistic learning efficiency after fostering intercultural awareness.

Keywords : language, culture, perception, intercultural awareness, Chinese students.

¹ PhD student in ELT, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University; Head of English Language Teaching and Research Section; lecturer in General Education Department, Yunnan University of Business Management, China.

² Asst. Prof. Dr., senior lecturer in ELT, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English as an international lingua franca has been utilized widely around the world in a variety of fields. It is generally known that our communication around the world is becoming closer and closer with the rapid development of science and technology (Peng, 2020). Thus, English has a significant and profound impact on language policies, pedagogical systems and patterns of language implementation in many countries (Gao et al, 2016; Rosen, 2018). Based on the national education plan, English is a compulsory subject in China, especially as in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed rebuilding the "New Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" respectively. In order to connect a community of interests, a community of destiny, and a community of responsibility featuring political mutual trust. English is regarded as the most significant bridge among different cultures (Wei, 2017; Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). However, much relevant research has shown that most non-English major college students' English proficiency is not at a satisfactory level to meet the requirements of the curriculum (Chen et al., 2013; Li 2013; Yan & Jia, 2018; Yang, 2018; Li, 2019). After many years learning, most Chinese students still cannot implement the target language in a coherent and appropriate way since all knowledge and skills they have obtained are mainly for passing exams. Years earlier, Tang and Biggs (1996) identified the phenomenon of College English education as "teaching to the test" because the teaching tends to train students how to pass exam instead of how to cultivate practical competence in English to implement the target language. Cheng and Wang (2012) vividly called this mode of education "shaping students to be "deaf and dumb" English learners. Martel et al (2015) noted that the grammar learning model still dominates a majority of college English language classrooms where teachers merely ignore other language competencies to focus on grammar. It causes foreign language education to become more stereotyped than is really the case. Hence, students lack intercultural awareness while learning the target language. They have no idea why they have to learn foreign languages and, therefore, are unable to apply the target language to communicate with others coherently and appropriately.

Besides, there are many reasons for such poor learning performance in English language education in China. Liu (2014) believed that the existing content of intercultural competence in target language in textbooks is inaccurate so it is necessary to develop learning materials based on intercultural awareness. Moreover, the activities and assignments in each unit are designed for the mastery in the four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) while intercultural knowledge is set in the cultural introduction part as a background introduced at the beginning of each unit. There are no exercises or any activities for checking intercultural competence at the conclusion of each unit. Hou (2017) found that the language education and intercultural competence cultivation are not balanced in college English education in China, according to the results from comparisons with experimental tests between intercultural tests and the language tests. During real communication with foreigners, students usually encounter misunderstandings of their messages.

In addition to the reasons listed above, I strongly believe that students' perceptions of intercultural awareness in foreign language acquisition could be one of the most vital factors that is worthy of being explored. Coffey et al (2013) indicated that intercultural awareness is considered to be of crucial importance in enhancing students' capability in target language application.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and Culture

The close relationship between language and culture was confirmed by many researchers (Sapir, 1956; Kramsch, 1998; Brown, 2000; Hall, 2005; Risager, 2007; Vooren et al., 2012; Sun, 2013; Moeller and Nugent, 2014; Badrkoohi, 2018). Recently, Rehman and Umar (2019) stated that culture can impact an individual's life (i.e., the way of living, social interacting, and behaviour). Similarly, Coombe et al (2020) revealed that language learning can be regarded as a transdisciplinary educational process integrating both linguistic learning and the exploration of different cultures (Peters, 2015; Sheraz et al, 2015). Therefore, cultural integration is imperative for target language teaching, otherwise, the ultimate goal of language education, communication with others by using the target language cannot be achieved.

Intercultural Awareness

According to the statement of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), intercultural awareness is initially mentioned as the foundation of an individual's intercultural competence. Quappe and Cantatore (2007) claimed that the development of intercultural awareness has begun when human beings have started to realize that problems plague them and they try to seek answers to the following questions: Why do we behave in that way? How do we perceive the world? Why do we react in that particular way? Consequently, intercultural awareness has been of interest since individuals were eager to integrate into other cultures. Byram et al (2002), stated that intercultural competence can be generally defined as the implementation of an individual's awareness to integrate with others' communicative context instead of blindly imitating both linguistic competence and social behavior from native speakers without a deeper understanding of the practical activities of the target language and its culture. Furthermore, a relationship was found between intercultural awareness cultivation and language implementation. Moreover, Peng (2006) found that qualified foreign language learning experience can positively impact intercultural awareness development as well. This discovery once again proved that intercultural awareness cultivation is imperative for effectiveness of language teaching.

Therefore, the cultivation of intercultural awareness should perform a pioneer role in the foundation which is built before the language acquisition learning system (Li, 2016). In addition, there were numerous studies which noted that intercultural awareness cultivation plays a vital part in language education and needs to be integrated into the acquisition process (Byram et al, 2013; Cheng, 2019; Mighani and Moghadam, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

Based on the topic of this research, this study aims at exploring the students' perception of intercultural awareness. A quantitative analysis was utilized to analyze the questionnaires on intercultural awareness. The participants of this research were 98 students randomly selected from the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Architecture who took College English in the second semester of academic year 2019-2020. They were not major in English, however, English is a compulsory course. The participants were 80 males and 18 females with the age ranging from 19-20 years old. They were native speakers of Chinese and had studied English for 12 years on average.

The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) presented by Ang (2007) as the questionnaires to explore the students' intercultural awareness consists of 15 items under the four dimensions as follows:

Question 1-3: Metacognition Category;

Question 4-10: Cognition Category;

Question 11: Behavior Category;

Question 12-15: Motivation Category.

All items are closed questions on which the target students were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale. The criteria scale ranges from 1 to 5 and 1 represents Never, 2 represents Rarely, 3 represents Sometimes, 4 represents Often, and 5 represents Always. Therefore, the evaluation criteria of this study is based on a range score of 0.80. The formula of evaluation criteria is as follows:

$$\text{Class interval} = \frac{\text{The highest width} - \text{The lowest width}}{\text{The width of class}} = \frac{5-1}{5} = 0.80$$

Table 1 illustrated the corresponding values for the 5-Likert scale, interpretation for the target students' levels of intercultural awareness of these values, and the data analysis scores were used for inferential statistics:

Table 1 Criteria Scale for the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)

Interpretation for the target students' cultural intelligence level	Scores	Range
Never	1	1.00 – 1.80
Rarely	2	1.81 – 2.60
Sometimes	3	2.61 – 3.40
Often	4	3.41 – 4.20
Always	5	4.21 – 5.00

The validity of the substance of this instrument was proved by its previous use by many researchers in previous studies (Borden, 2007; Sahin et al., 2013; Michelle et al., 2019; Sousa et al., 2019; Barzykowski et al., 2019; Li, 2020). Besides, the IOC and the pilot study ensured the validity of the adapted version at Cronbach's Alpha .756.

4. FINDINGS

After analyzing the data, the students' perception on intercultural awareness was based on four categories (Meta-cognition Category, Cognition Category, Behavior Category and Motivation Category) of Cultural Intelligence Scale as follows:

The Findings of the Students' Meta-cognition Category

The students' Meta-cognition in this research refers to the perceptions on intercultural awareness that the students can perceive when integrating the target language educational process and its implementation.

Table 2 The Students' Meta-cognition on the Cultural Intelligence Scale (N=98).

No.	A. CQ-Strategy (Meta-cognition Category)	Cultural Intelligence		
		Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.	2.80	0.73	Sometimes
2	I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a different culture.	2.58	0.73	Rarely
3	I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.	3.00	0.89	Sometimes
Grand Mean		2.79	0.78	Sometimes

Table 2 shows that the grand mean of Meta-cognition Category of the target students was $M=2.79$; $SD=0.78$. According to the criteria of CQS, the level shows that the target students' perception on this category was "Sometimes". They just perceived the differences of cultures occasionally. Specifically, among these 3 items, the lowest mean on this section showed that participants were lacking in capability in the adjustment of cultural knowledge when performing intercultural communication ($M=2.58$; $SD=0.73$). They barely noticed that they needed to adjust to cultural knowledge in intercultural communicative activities. However, the highest mean revealed that the target students were sometimes conscious of the accuracy of cultural knowledge ($M=3.00$, $SD=0.89$). The students probably noticed the differences between cultures, but they were not able to perceive and adjust to the differences in intercultural communication.

The Findings of the Students' Cognition Category

The students' Cognition in this research mainly focuses on cultural knowledge which particularly relates to holidays, weddings, body language, food, communication, landmarks and families.

Table 3 The Students' Cognition on the Cultural Intelligence Scale (N=98).

No.	B. CQ-Knowledge (Cognition Category)	Cultural Intelligence		
		Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
4	I know the customs of the holidays or special days of other cultures.	2.94	0.96	Sometimes
5	I know the wedding customs of some different cultures.	2.57	0.81	Rarely
6	I know the rules for expressing non-verbal behaviors in some different cultures.	2.63	0.79	Sometimes
7	I know the dietary habits of some different cultures.	2.93	0.92	Sometimes
8	I know the ways of how to start a small conversation in some different cultures.	2.45	0.79	Rarely
9	I know some famous landmarks of other counties.	2.83	1.05	Sometimes
10	I know the difference of family ties of some different cultures.	2.71	0.95	Sometimes
Grand Mean		2.72	0.90	Sometimes

For the Cognition Category, the grand mean of these 7 items was $M=2.72$; $SD=0.90$, which was not high. This means that the students' cognition was situated at the "Sometimes" level which can be interpreted as their perception being that their intercultural knowledge was insufficient. Among these items, two aspects were reported as "Rarely" meaning that the participants were not able to start a small conversation by using different cultural knowledge ($M=2.45$; $SD=0.79$). Also, they lacked knowledge of the different wedding customs. The highest mean was on their knowledge of holidays or special days of other cultures ($M=2.94$, $SD=0.96$). The reason for this may be because the young generation tends to enjoy popular festivals around the world so that they can look for more chances to celebrate and entertain. Therefore, they were particularly interested in, and familiar with, the different festivals or special days of other cultures.

The Findings of the Students' Behavior Category

The students' Behavior Category in this research reveals the students' perception and capability both of their verbal behavior (i.e., oral communication) and non-verbal behavior (i.e., body language, gestures, and facial expression, etc.).

Table 4 The Students' Behavior on the Cultural Intelligence Scale (N=98).

No.	C. CQ-Behavior (Behavior Category)	Cultural Intelligence		
		Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
11	I can change both my verbal behavior and non-verbal behavior when making an intercultural communication.	2.88	0.98	Sometimes
	Grand Mean	2.88	0.98	Sometimes

For the Behavior Category, Table 4 clearly shows that the mean of this aspect was 2.88 meaning that the students' behavior on cultural communication (verbal-behavior and non-verbal behavior) was regarded as "Sometimes". This can be interpreted to mean that the target students were not able to notice and change oral communicative expressions including their body language, gestures, and facial expressions when they interculturally communicated with others. Because of this, they felt uncomfortable and anxious when communicating using different languages as they were afraid of making mistakes.

The Results of the Students' Motivation Category

The students' Motivation Category in this research refers to the students' learning motivation on intercultural issues. In addition, the students' learning confidence and communicative confidence were also included into this category.

Table 5 The Students' Motivation on the Cultural Intelligence Scale (N=98).

No.	D. CQ-Motivation (Motivation Category)	Cultural Intelligence		
		Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
12	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	2.38	0.81	Rarely
13	I am confident that I can socialize with local people in a different culture.	1.99	0.91	Rarely
14	I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.	2.08	0.96	Rarely
15	I enjoy having chances to stay in different cultures.	2.43	1.08	Rarely
	Grand Mean	2.22	0.94	Rarely

The survey of the Motivation Category revealed rather concerning results with the grand mean of 2.22 which was the lowest score in this survey. Based on the scale of cultural intelligence, the grand result of Motivation belongs to the “Rarely” level. The target students’ motivation on intercultural learning and their confidence on intercultural communication were quite low. To be more specific, amongst these 4 items, the lowest mean indicated that the students felt anxiety when they had to communicate with foreigners by using different language and unfamiliar cultural knowledge ($M=1.99$; $SD=0.91$). The finding can show that they were undoubtedly lacking in confidence in social communication when using the target language. While the section that the target students enjoyed most was on having opportunities to stay in different cultures and ranked the highest ($M=2.43$, $SD=1.08$). It showed that although the target students had low confidence in intercultural communication, they were still willing to experience different cultures.

Table 6 The Cultural Intelligence Perception of Chinese Non-English Major Students

No.	Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1	Meta-cognition Category	2.79	0.78	Sometimes
2	Cognition Category	2.72	0.90	Sometimes
3	Behavior Category	2.88	0.98	Sometimes
4	Motivation Category	2.22	0.94	Rarely
Overall		2.65	0.90	Sometimes

As shown in Table 6, the means of overall cultural intelligence perceived by the Chinese non-English major students was quite low ($M=2.65$, $SD=0.90$). The highest category was in the behavioral aspect ($M=2.88$, $SD=0.98$) while the lowest category was in the motivational category ($M=2.20$, $SD=0.94$). This can be a reflection of the fact that, the English instruction for non-English major college students in China is mainly focused on examination success. Students have less opportunities to be exposed to intercultural knowledge. Based on the findings, it is now apparent that more attention must be paid to the cultural elements in every aspect of instruction i.e., teaching materials, instructional approach, and classroom activities including assessment. Most of all, language teachers should be aware that intercultural experiences are extremely important factors in acquiring the target language.

5. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

The present study attempted to investigate intercultural awareness of non-English major students in China. The findings suggested that the participants perceived lower levels of intercultural awareness ($M=2.65$, $SD=0.90$) particularly on motivational awareness ($M=2.22$, $SD=0.94$). However, the relationship between intercultural awareness and communication competence is positively and significantly correlated and could contribute to the effectiveness of foreign language education (Douglas and Rosvold, 2018). Moreover, Peng (2006) has found that intercultural awareness cultivation is imperative for the effectiveness of language teaching and learning. Besides, based on the findings of this survey, it appears necessary that students should be encouraged to develop their intercultural awareness while learning the target language. It is essential to improve students’ intercultural awareness which contributes to an improved communication competency. It is also proposed that making learners aware of the importance of intercultural awareness will help them improve their communication competence. In this regard,

integrating intercultural knowledge in meta-cognition, cognition, behavioral and motivation in students' English learning can be effective in strengthening students' ability to use English properly.

The Adapted Intercultural Teaching Model

A new instructional model which can assist intercultural awareness cultivation integrating the language education process could both enhance learner's intercultural competency and their linguistic proficiency. Therefore, new intercultural teaching material could be developed and applied based on Guidelines of Materials Development (Jolly & Bolitho, 1998), Modified Cultural Teaching Model (Taylor & Sorenson, 1961; Meade & Morain, 1973; Fiedler et al., 1971), Big C and small c (Tomalin and Stempleski, 1998), and Intercultural Competence (Byram, 1997).

The teaching objectives of the new model are as follows: after implementation, the students are able to 1) understand their own culture and the international cultures they are dealing with; 2) increase their intercultural awareness in the implementation; 3) collect and analyze the message effectively in both local and international social contexts; 4) be aware of international cultures, and to inspire to be empathetic with the people who live in different cultures.

The learning cycle of the new intercultural model can be designed for 16 teaching week courses and the instructional procedures could be separated by three main steps: 1) Let's Get Ready (pre-class) requires the completion of all tasks in this section before they attend the class. Relevant information on international cultures need to be discussed within their study group according to specific requirements; 2) Let's Read (pre-class) provides brief introductions to international cultures by using concise expressions with rich and impressive examples so that the students can grasp the intercultural teaching focus while their learning motivation on intercultural issues can be built; 3) Let's Do It (in-class & after-class), the pragmatic intercultural competence of the students can be implemented in the given cultural situations by accomplishing a variety of productive tasks both in class and after class. Therefore, three speaking tasks, two translation tasks, and two writing tasks will be integrated into the implementation of the new intercultural teaching model.

To conclude, due to the lack of focus on intercultural awareness cultivation, the students' perceptions on intercultural awareness are insufficient to support target language acquisition and its implementation. This finding was congruent with the research of intercultural awareness in China, as a number of empirical researches have been conducted in this field over recent years. The results of these surveys show that most Chinese college students' perceptions on intercultural awareness both of English majors and non-English majors were far from satisfactory while learning the target language (Peng, 2006; Zhou, 2007; Sun and Liu, 2012; Yang, 2013; Liu, 2014; Li, 2015; Xia and Han, 2015; Zhang et al, 2015; Huang, 2016). According to the findings of past research, their participants' level on intercultural awareness was on the range from low level to medium level. In short, the scores were not high. Consequently, Xia (2017) believed that intercultural awareness cultivation needed to be included in English curricula in order to motivate student's language acquisition and enhance their learning efficiency. Problems stem from the fact that the significance of intercultural awareness development has barely been emphasized in the classroom. Thus, except for some trendy factors, students have no perceptions and knowledge of other more important cultural elements. This argument had been mooted a couple of years ago, Jackson and Adarlo (2016) reported that most Chinese college students have an impressive amount of grammatical knowledge in every course that they learn, however, the knowledge they perceive and master is only for examination purposes. The traditional learning and teaching strategy commonly utilizes a variety of tests

preparations and rote memorization to urge students to learn. Thus, intercultural awareness issues become neglected. There is limited time for knowledge learning to cope with rigorous exam schedules, so where can students and teachers find time for intercultural issues?

In brief, for the effective and sustainable development of English language education in China, and to make English a useful tool that can benefit global economic, political and cultural exchange effectively, intercultural awareness education must be cultivated as an important component of language learning for the effective language acquisition.

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