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Reflections on College English Teaching and Cross-cultural Communication under the Theory of Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract. With the continuous advancement of the globalization process and the continuous expansion of China's degree of opening up to the outside world, English, as an important language in international communication, has become increasingly prominent in university teaching. This article focuses on enhancing college students' comprehensive English proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills through the application of second language acquisition theory in university English teaching. Firstly, it elaborates on the basic concepts and main viewpoints of second language acquisition theory through in-depth research. Secondly, it analyzes the specific application strategies of second language acquisition theory in the teaching of listening, speaking, reading and writing in university English. It also discusses how to enhance college students' cross-cultural awareness and ability through second language acquisition theory. Finally, it proposes a series of application strategies to improve the level of university English teaching and enhance college students' comprehensive English proficiency.

Keywords: College English Teaching, Second Language Acquisition, Cross-Cultural Communication, Input theory

1. Introduction

In the context of economic globalization and increasingly frequent international exchanges, possessing good cross-cultural communication skills has become an essential quality for college students to adapt to social development. As future professionals, they will be expected to navigate complex international environments, collaborate with individuals from varied cultural backgrounds, and contribute to global initiatives. Consequently, possessing excellent cross-cultural communication skills is no longer a mere advantage but an essential quality for adapting to and thriving in the ever-evolving social environment.

Against this backdrop, college English teaching occupies a vital position in shaping students' cross-cultural competencies. Traditionally, English education has often placed a disproportionate emphasis on language knowledge acquisition, such as grammar rules, vocabulary building, and reading comprehension. While these fundamental language skills are undoubtedly important, they are insufficient in isolation. The true essence of language learning lies in its application for effective

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communication, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Therefore, modern college English teaching must undergo a paradigm shift, moving beyond the mere transmission of linguistic knowledge to a more holistic approach that prioritizes the cultivation of students' ability to use English as a tool for meaningful cross-cultural interactions.

This shift in teaching focus necessitates a solid theoretical foundation to guide educators in their pedagogical practices. Second language acquisition (SLA) theories offer precisely such a scientific theoretical basis. By understanding the mechanisms underlying language acquisition, teachers can gain helpful information about students' learning behaviors, preferences, and challenges. This understanding, in turn, enables them to adopt more effective and targeted teaching methods that are tailored to students' individual needs and learning styles.

This article focuses on how to improve college students’ skills, such as their comprehensive English proficiency and cross-cultural communication, by learning the application of second language acquisition theory in university English teaching. This paper first offers an overview of second language acquisition theories, laying the groundwork. Then it explores the Influence Mechanism of these theories on language learning, revealing underlying processes. In the following, it conducts an analysis of the current situation in college English teaching regarding cross-cultural communication cultivation. Based on the above, it proposes University English Teaching Improvement Strategies. And then, it presents practical cases to show how these theories enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills. Finally, it concludes the main idea and significance of this article.

2. Overview of second language acquisition theories

2.1. Main contents of second language acquisition theories

Second language acquisition theories encompass several important hypotheses, among which Krashen's Monitor Theory has wide influence. This theory consists of five hypotheses: the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, which emphasizes that language acquisition is a subconscious process, similar to how children acquire their native language, while language learning is conscious knowledge acquisition; the Natural Order Hypothesis, which states that learners acquire language rules in a certain natural order; the Monitor Hypothesis, which explains that learners use consciously acquired language knowledge to monitor and correct their language output, but the use of monitoring is constrained by various factors; the Input Hypothesis, which holds that language acquisition occurs only when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current language level (i+1); and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which indicates that learners' emotional factors, such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety, act as a filter on language input, affecting the effectiveness of language acquisition.

In addition, sociocultural theory emphasizes that language learning is a social interaction process, where learners construct language knowledge and skills through communication and cooperation with others in a specific sociocultural environment [1]. Cognitive theory focuses on the role of learners' cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and thinking, in second language acquisition, viewing language learning as a process of processing, storing, and retrieving language information [2].

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2.2. The influence mechanism of second language acquisition theories on language learning

Second language acquisition theories suggest that language learning is a complex psychological and cognitive process as well as a social interaction process. In this process, learners' internal language acquisition mechanisms and external learning environments interact. Comprehensible input provides learners with materials for language learning. Through continuous exposure and understanding of this input, learners gradually establish a language rule system. At the same time, social interaction offers learners opportunities to use language. In communication, learners can not only test their language knowledge but also receive feedback, thereby further adjusting and improving their language expression. Emotional factors play a regulatory role throughout the learning process. Positive emotional states help learners more effectively absorb language input and improve learning outcomes [3].

Learners often have a misconception regarding second language acquisition: equating acquisition with learning. According to Krashen's Monitor Model [4], language exists in two forms: acquisition and learning. Acquisition takes place in a natural language environment and is subconscious, facilitating smooth and fluent communication. Learning, conversely, is the conscious knowledge of language rules, derived from formal and traditional grammar instruction. In Krashen's perspective, learning is not acquisition; its sole function is to act as a monitor and editor for the learner's output. Hence, learning contributes minimally to the development of language proficiency. Although Krashen does distinguish between acquisition and learning, in this discourse, it is challenging to clearly delineate between subconscious learning and conscious learning. However, one certainty is that learners are permitted to make mistakes during the learning process. If learners remain in a second language environment constantly, their second language will invariably progress. Therefore, compared to learning, acquisition holds a particular significance for language learners. Learners can adjust their learning pace and goals in accordance with certain influences and appropriately employ certain factors to better acquire a second language (English). Second language learners successfully enter new discourse communities through various communicative activities, acquire second language skills, and become familiar with the contexts of language usage [5]. Simultaneously, internal and external factors can modify the learning patterns of second language learners, making them more consistent with their actual experiences. This process also has referential significance for transforming classroom language teaching forms, methods, course structures, and textbook selection [6].

3. Analysis of the current situation of cross-cultural communication cultivation in college english teaching

3.1. The gap between teaching objectives and actual needs

Currently, the teaching objectives of some college English courses still focus on imparting language knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar, with insufficient emphasis on the cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills. Although the teaching syllabus mentions cross-cultural communication, it lacks clear and specific teaching objectives and evaluation standards. As a result, in actual teaching, the cultivation of cross-cultural communication often remains superficial and fails to meet students' actual needs in international exchanges [7].

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3.2. Limitations of teaching methods and content

In terms of teaching methods, the traditional teacher-centered lecture-based teaching still dominates. This teaching method emphasizes knowledge transmission and neglects students' subject status and the cultivation of their practical language application abilities. In terms of cross-cultural communication teaching, teachers often adopt a simple approach to imparting cultural knowledge without creating real cross-cultural communication scenarios. As a result, students find it difficult to truly understand and experience the differences between different cultures [8].

In terms of teaching content, the cross-cultural content in textbooks is relatively scarce and not updated in a timely manner, failing to reflect the current trend of multicultural development. Moreover, the content is mainly focused on Western culture, with insufficient coverage of other countries and regions, leading to a narrow cultural perspective among students [9].

3.3. Insufficiency of students' cross-cultural awareness and ability

Due to the lack of cross-cultural communication training in teaching, many students have a weak sense of cross-cultural awareness. When learning English, they often focus only on the language itself and neglect the cultural connotations behind it. In actual communication, students are prone to cultural misunderstandings and pragmatic errors, such as in greetings, thanks, and addressing, due to their lack of understanding of the cultural customs of the other party, which hinders the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication [10].

4. University English teaching improvement strategies based on second language acquisition theory

4.1. Optimize teaching objectives and strengthen the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability

University English teaching should explicitly incorporate the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability into the teaching objective system and formulate specific, operational teaching objectives and evaluation standards. For instance, set the ability goal for students to accurately understand the cultural background of the other party, express their own views, and avoid cultural misunderstandings in specific cross-cultural communication scenarios. At the same time, integrate the assessment of cross-cultural communication ability into regular grades, exams, and course assignments to prompt both teachers and students to attach importance to the improvement of cross-cultural communication ability [11].

4.2. Innovate teaching methods and create real cross-cultural communication scenarios

Based on the input hypothesis and sociocultural theory in second language acquisition, teachers should adopt diverse teaching methods to provide students with rich comprehensible input and real language communication environments.

Employ task-based teaching methods and design tasks related to cross-cultural communication, such as simulating international business negotiations and cultural exchange event planning. In the process of completing these tasks, students need to use English for information collection, analysis, and communication, while also understanding business etiquette and communication methods in different cultural contexts, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural communication ability [12].

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Utilize multimedia teaching tools to introduce real cross-cultural communication materials, such as English movies, documentaries, and news reports. These materials not only provide rich language input but also vividly showcase the characteristics and differences of various cultures, helping students enhance their cross-cultural awareness.

In addition, actively carry out classroom interaction activities, such as group discussions and role-playing, to encourage cross-cultural communication among students. During these interactions, students can share their understanding and experiences of different cultures, learn from each other, and improve together [13].

4.3. Enrich teaching content and broaden students' cultural horizons

In terms of textbook selection, choose materials that contain rich cross-cultural content, covering cultures from different countries and regions, such as those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to enable students to understand the diversity of world cultures. At the same time, teachers can supplement the latest cross-cultural communication cases and cultural hot topics based on teaching needs, such as cultural integration and conflicts in the context of globalization, to keep students informed of the current cultural developments [14].

Offer specialized cross-cultural communication courses or lectures to systematically introduce the theories, principles, and skills of cross-cultural communication, as well as the differences and coping strategies among different cultures. Through these courses and lectures, students can deeply learn cross-cultural communication knowledge and enhance their cross-cultural communication ability.

5. Practical cases of enhancing students' cross-cultural communication skills based on second language acquisition theory

In the reform of college English teaching, a certain university, based on second language acquisition theory, carried out a series of practical activities aimed at improving students' cross-cultural communication skills. The university selected some non-English major classes as experimental subjects and implemented new teaching methods and content in the teaching process.

Teachers adopted project-based learning as their teaching method. Teachers assigned a "cross-cultural communication project," requiring students to form groups and choose a country or region of interest to conduct in-depth research on its culture, customs, language features, etc., and then make multimedia presentation materials. During the project implementation, students needed to obtain information through methods such as consulting materials, interviewing international students, communicating with foreign teachers, and then organizing and reporting in English.

In terms of teaching contents, in addition to the textbooks, teachers arranged a certain amount of time each week to play English documentaries and movie clips related to the selected country or region and organized students to discuss them. At the same time, foreign teachers from different countries were invited to hold cultural lectures to introduce the cultural characteristics and social etiquette of their countries.

The experimental class students' cross-cultural communication skills significantly improved after one semester of teaching practice. In the cross-cultural communication ability test at the end of the term, the scores of the experimental class students were significantly higher than those of the control class. Students became more confident in oral expression, could accurately apply the cross-cultural knowledge they had learned for communication, and the situations of cultural misunderstandings and pragmatic errors were significantly reduced. In addition, students' interest and enthusiasm for English learning also increased significantly, and their learning attitude became more proactive.

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6. Conclusion

The research significance of this study can be divided into two aspects: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study aims to validate the applicability of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory in the context of college English education and extend its application, particularly in fostering cross-cultural communication. Practically, it seeks to enhance the quality of college English instruction by applying SLA principles, thereby strengthening students' cross-cultural communication skills and better preparing them for a globalized environment.

Improving college English teaching based on second language acquisition theory is of great significance for cultivating students' cross-cultural communication skills. By improving teaching goals, trying new teaching methods, and adding more diverse content, we can create a better learning environment and more chances for students to practice cross-cultural communication. This will help them become more aware of different cultures and improve their communication skills, making it easier for them to meet the demands of a globalized world. In the future of college English teaching, further in-depth research and application of second language acquisition theory should be carried out, and continuous exploration and improvement of teaching models should be made to lay a solid foundation for cultivating high-quality talents with international vision and cross-cultural communication skills.

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