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Problems and Routes in Cultivations of Intercultural Perspective of English Education in China

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Abstract. Nowadays, as globalization becomes an inevitable tendency, the connections between cultures have also become increasingly close. To cultivate the global citizens that can adapt to the requirements of times, it is necessary to make corresponding improvements in education. Among the components of whole education system, teaching objective serves as the campus provide directions for the whole system. Therefore, it is necessary to make adjustments in teaching objectives. In current system of teaching objectives about intercultural perspective cultivation in China, there are still some drawbacks in different aspects. This thesis firstly introduces the current setting of teaching objectives about intercultural perspective cultivation in three major stages in Chinese education system. Then, the detailed drawbacks include loss of consistency, absence of diversity, vague description in actual implementations and misalignment of objectives are put forward based on the introduction. Besides, to make refinements, relevant solutions include setting up evaluation standards with consistency, adopting scenario-based teaching methods, ensuring the diversity of culture are also put forward.

Keywords: culture, intercultural perspective, teaching objective, current setting

1. Introduction

As human society marches into the future comprehensively and dramatically, education gains a considerable amount of attention as well. Correspondingly, the teaching objectives, which serve as an indispensable compass in guiding the directions of teaching, change to meet the needs of the marching of human society and civilizations. The fact that cannot be ignored is that human society has come into the stage of globalization and interconnection, therefore, communication between different cultures and civilizations becomes an inevitable trend in current age as well. According to Adili et al., intercultural education is an important dimension for both teachers and students in their personal and professional development [1]. Under such circumstances, it is essential for education to put an emphasis on intercultural awareness to prepare more students for their future needs.

Among the symbolizations that can represent the culture, language could be the most effective to reflect both the traditions as well as the people's life just like Ranabhat put forward that language and culture are interrelated in such a way that the existence of one may not be possible in the absence of another [2]. When people come to the age of globalization, the cultivation of intercultural awareness can realize its maximum value through language education. According to Byram et al.,

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what learners need are not only static knowledge about language such as grammar, but also the ability to use language in both socially and culturally appropriate ways [3]. Since teaching objectives can guide the whole process of language teaching, it is significant to pay more attention to the addition about intercultural awareness in teaching objectives. Therefore, the teaching objectives can serve as a guide and bring out the consequent changes in other components of the teaching process. To be specific, teaching objectives should be designed in the way that can contribute greatly to the cultivation of intercultural awareness in foreign language teaching classrooms.

Today, in the whole system of teaching objectives of English education of China, even though there are certain amount of emphasis on intercultural education, the connection between the teaching objectives between different stages of education are insufficient to cultivate the students with intercultural awareness in an effective and efficient way. In such a case, it is of great need to conduct research about the teaching objectives to put forward practical techniques to address the issue.

2. Literature review

2.1. Intercultural education

In the age of globalization, human societies interconnect with each other. As for education, it also changes correspondingly to meet the requirements of cultivating the global citizens. According to Holm and Zilliacus, intercultural education aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialogue between the different cultural groups [4]. Thus, the cultural content in education should be diversified rather than focused on only one culture and intercultural competence starts playing its role in language education aims to cultivate global citizens.

Mentioned by Wang et al., intercultural competence has become one of the important goals of foreign language education [5]. However, it is insufficient to talk about intercultural competence itself since intercultural competence needs its carrier in education, that is intercultural education. Intercultural education focused more than one dimension as intercultural competence, but as a comprehensive system which requires innovations in several aspects related to education such as pedagogy, moral education, teaching materials, just like Oberste-Berghaus mentioned, intercultural competence goes far beyond language proficiency and incorporates a comprehension of sociocultural norms and values [6]. Additionally, intercultural education also serves as an effective teaching form in forming students' intercultural perspectives, which is required in the standard of talent cultivation nowadays and should be adopted as a vital part of today's education, specifically, foreign language education such as English language teaching.

2.2. Teaching objectives

For the upcoming formation of a whole comprehensive system of intercultural education, it is essential to set up concise and effective teaching goals to guide directions of the consequent positive changes as proposed by Widdowson, it is one thing to specify a destination but quite another to work out the best routes for getting there [7]. Setting effective teaching objectives can help teachers design their teaching process and teaching content in ways that are more suitable for current requirements of intercultural education. Currently, the overall objectives of intercultural perspectives cultivation in China are put into practice in two aspects, which are cultural consciousness and global

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competence. Through these two directions, the current education system in China is expected to cultivate diversified global citizens, which is not only promising in dissemination of Chinese culture to the world, but also effective in enhancing students' confidence in Chinese culture. Besides, the most frequently adopted forms among teachers in cultivating students' intercultural perspective are subject-based education of English and extracurricular activities about intercultural perspectives. By incorporating intercultural education, the diversity of cultures in today's education can be naturally brought about by the comprehensive setting of teaching objectives. Since intercultural education is largely achieved through language teaching, it is necessary to assess the current settings of teaching objectives in foreign language teaching and make corresponding improvements. For education in China, such assessments and improvements should be carried out for English subjects.

3. The issues in cultivations of intercultural perspective

To get a comprehensive understanding of the issues in cultivations of intercultural perspective as well as the issues in intercultural education, it is essential to start with teaching objectives in that the objectives serve as the guide of the operation of whole system.

3.1. Introduction of current setting of teaching goals in different stages

Intercultural education takes place in three main stages, that is elementary education, secondary education as well as university education. Having a basic investigation on teaching objectives about intercultural perspectives on these three stages of education can provide vital assistance in understanding the whole system.

3.1.1. Elementary education

According to English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) in China, in the stage of elementary education, students' intercultural perspectives should be cultivated through acquiring certain basic greetings and some knowledge about English-speaking countries' cultural symbols such as food and important festivals and make a brief comparison with Chinese culture to enhance their cultural identification and cultural confidence. By doing so, students are able to establish an excellent foundation of intercultural perspectives. The main objective of intercultural perspective cultivation is to help students have a primary perception towards the differences between different cultures.

3.1.2. Secondary education

Based on the Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition), students are required to understand the connotations of cultures of English-speaking countries and to develop critical thinking abilities through the comparisons between these cultures with Chinese culture. Furthermore, students are also required to acquire abilities to disseminate Chinese culture globally through the tasks such as the presentations about some symbols in Chinese culture. At this stage, students' intercultural perspectives can be further constructed through the actual intercultural activities in their English lessons.

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3.1.3. University education

Vromans et al. once mentioned, higher education institutions have the potential to significantly contribute to students' intercultural competence development through internationalization at home [8]. As for university education, according to University English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition), students should be able to use English effectively in several professional settings for various purposes rather than limited to academic purpose only. On this basis, they are also required to contribute to solutions from a global perspective. For the objectives of intercultural education in university, there is an evident tendency towards global identity, which is a promising sign of future intercultural education development.

3.2. Drawbacks exist in the current setting of teaching objectives

Beyond evident progress can be found in teaching objectives in different stages of education, the whole system of the objectives of intercultural education also reflects certain drawbacks.

3.2.1. Loss of consistency

Among the objectives of intercultural education in all these three stages, it can be observed that there are explorations on different aspects of intercultural education, but the loss of consistency is also revealed in such system of objectives. For elementary education, students are helped to establish the primary intercultural perspectives through simple and basic comparisons between certain exact symbols such as festivals and cultural artifacts. When students start receiving secondary school education, they are just required to understand connotations of different cultures such as the contrasts between individualism and collectivism. It can be evidently found that there's no scaffolding to help them bridge the gap between the sensory towards exact things to abstract connotations behind.

The same phenomenon can also be found between secondary education and university education when students are asked to transform from the critical mind in comparing cultures to using English effectively in various professional settings for different purposes. From a broader view, these three objectives are actually three individual aspects of one's intercultural competence, which means there's no evident relevance between three objectives to help construct students' intercultural perspectives in a gradual process. Therefore, students may have a considerable amount of knowledge both in linguistic and cultural aspects, but they still cannot establish a comprehensive intercultural perspective because the cultivation of such perspectives tends to be fragmented without consistency.

3.2.2. Absence of diversity

Intercultural education is an approach to education that promotes understanding, mutual respect, and collaboration among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds according to UNESCO [9]. To construct encompassing intercultural perspectives of students, a considerable number of interactions between different cultures should be advocated both in teaching objectives as well as the teaching content. Observed from all these objectives in three stages of education, there's a strong tendency to equate intercultural education with the simple comparisons between Chinese culture and the cultures of English-speaking countries, which cause the absence of diversity in culture that is required in intercultural education.

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From a long-term perspective, students may automatically follow the western framework when talking about global issues as they receive university education. Owing to the loss of diversity, it is unlikely for students to establish a critical mindset that is essential in learning how to respond to intercultural contexts since they only engage in the intercultural interactions between two major types of culture. What's worse, in students' limited intercultural perspectives, they are unlikely to understand the historical basis behind intercultural interactions, which means the objectives of intercultural education are also insufficient to help establish the intercultural perspective.

3.2.3. Vague description in actual implementations

Although there are descriptions about the objectives of intercultural education, these descriptions are focused on broad view, which means they lack sufficient quantitative criteria to evaluate both students' learning outcomes and teachers' teaching results. In fact, this kind of quantitative criteria is of great significance in teaching objectives system since they are often adopted to see whether the objectives are achieved. For example, in elementary education, students are supposed to be able to make a comparison between Chinese culture and the cultures of English-speaking countries, but such objective tend to be superficial since there's no clear requirements on the dimensions and forms that could be assessed to check the implementation of intercultural teaching objectives. Besides, due to the lack of clear standard of evaluation forms, teachers will still adopt examinations with pencil-and-paper form for evaluation on most occasions. Such adoption will actually cause students to memorize those cultural facts for utilitarian purposes of getting good grades, rather than forming their intercultural perspectives. What's worse, students may start losing their interests in learning English as well owing to the burden of memorizing cultural facts, which undermines students' motivation in learning English from a long-term perspective.

The same problem can also be observed in the requirement about developing a critical thinking ability for secondary school students. According to Song et al., in the domain of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), the cultivation of critical thinking skills (CTSs) and language skills (LSs) is imperative for the academic development of learners [10]. Evidently, there are no clear clarifications on several criteria in both students' forming of critical thinking ability and how this ability can relate to the forming of critical thinking ability. As for university students, there are also no specifications on effectiveness on students' using of English such as solving cultural shocks or conducting comparative research on culture-related issues. Therefore, from a broader view, the descriptions in actual implementations of objectives of intercultural education among all these three stages are actually vague.

3.2.4. Misalignment of objectives

Even though the requirements of intercultural perspectives cultivation in different stages have certain degree in specifications, there is still a certain degree of misalignment in details that can be improved especially in secondary school education and education in university. As mentioned by Wuthnow et al., culture has larger connotations as it: "consists primarily of thoughts, moods, feelings, beliefs, and values." [11]. Barnes et al. also put forward that culture is defined as a set of meanings shared by people in a given place and time [12]. for secondary school students, they are not likely to understand the connotations of cultures of different English-speaking countries without long-term and sufficient exposure. That is to say, it is too hard for them to understand the core of such a system of multiple aspects as they are required in the objectives.

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In the intercultural perspectives cultivation for university students, objectives could be highly demanding for students. In fact, except students major in English, who are supposed to have a sound demand of English, it could be highly demanding for students are conversant in other fields to use English effectively for various purposes.

4. Implications

After having a thorough investigation on teaching objectives of intercultural perspective cultivation in three stages of Chinese education, it is also necessary to put forward certain solutions to solve the main problems existing in the current system of intercultural teaching objectives.

4.1. Setting up evaluation standards with consistency

In the whole teaching process, evaluation standards and teaching objectives are complementary to each other in fact. Thus, it is essential to set up clear evaluation standards to assess the degree of achievements of objectives in intercultural education classroom, just like Fuentealba have mentioned, assessment is a powerful learning tool that can enhance learning and education, and it is reasonable to set up effective evaluation standards with consistency since it can help enhance both learning of students and education of teachers [13].

For elementary education, students' learning outcomes should be expressed through their own design of greetings in the setting of both Chinese culture and the culture of English-speaking countries. By doing so, not only will students establish primary foundations of their intercultural perspectives but also motivate their interest in exploring the intercultural contents. Such motivations can be naturally associated with further investigations in connotations of English-speaking countries in secondary education. In this section, students can display their learning results such as stereotypes and fables in different cultures through the investigations they made based on intercultural content. Such presentations of the results of investigation can be adopted to evaluate students' learning results. Based on connotations students understand in intercultural education in secondary school, teachers can take advantage to enhance students' cultural identity. In that case, students can enhance their cultural confidence while developing correct attitude towards other cultures, and in such process, students' critical thinking skills are developed as well. With such foundation, students will be able to avoid the tendency to western framework when they are discussing global issues, which can also be a clear evaluation standard for intercultural perspectives cultivation in university.

Consequently, a clear evaluation standard for the achievement of objectives in Chinese intercultural education can be automatically established while containing consistency. Establishing clear standards can help with achievement of teaching objectives and thus improving efficiency of intercultural perspectives cultivation.

4.2. Adopting scenario-based teaching methods

Language and culture learning is in great need of contexts since learners need scenarios to use language and culture knowledge that they have learnt to address the possible issues they are likely to encounter. Through the adoption of scenario-based teaching methods, teachers can make use of simulated scenarios to help students get used to intercultural contexts. Besides, since students in China mainly perceive intercultural education in English lessons, the accommodations towards intercultural contexts while using English as an instrument is essential for intercultural education and it is owing to various reasons.

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For one thing, students' motivation will be activated because they can obtain positive feedback from using English to solve the problems arise in stimulated intercultural contexts, and they also have a basic understanding of the necessity of knowledge they learn in real life. For another, students are likely to experience direct impacts of contrasts between different cultures in the simulated scenarios created by teachers, and this can really foster intercultural education. Therefore, adopting scenario-based teaching methods can help achieve objectives of intercultural perspective cultivation by providing useful contexts rather than solely depend on teachers' explanations.

4.3. Ensuring the diversity of culture

McKay once contended that culture influences language teaching in two ways: linguistic and pedagogical. Thus, culture is in great significance in ordinary English teaching [14]. Even more so in classrooms of intercultural educations. For current objectives system of intercultural perspective cultivation in different stages of education in China, most contents of intercultural education are restricted on the intercultural interactions between Chinese culture and the cultures of English-speaking countries. Such restrictions tend to mislead students in intercultural education since they roughly equate other cultures with the cultures of English-speaking countries. However, there are also other cultures like Arab culture as well as Latin American culture, which can also serve as vital teaching resources for the cultivation of intercultural perspective.

Therefore, to avoid the inappropriate equation between other cultures and English-speaking countries' cultures, it is advisable for teachers to ensure the diversity of cultures and make use of other cultures as essential resources for intercultural educations. Adoptions of other different cultures can not only enrich the contents of intercultural perspectives cultivations in elementary school, but also help secondary school students perceive varied cultural resources to develop critical thinking ability and eventually form comprehensive global and intercultural perspectives when they enroll in university.

5. Conclusions

In this thesis, the existing problems in the current system of teaching objectives in cultivations of intercultural perspective have been revealed from both micro perspective as well as macro perspective. In addition, the possible solutions are also put forward to provide inspiration to solve the common problems in the objectives of three stages of education. However, this research only focused on the aspects of teaching objectives, the future research can be based on teaching objectives to investigate the cultivation of intercultural perspectives in pedagogical way to fill the paucity in this field.

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