

# Strategies for Cultivating Students' Intercultural Communication Skills in Higher Vocational English Education



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**Abstracts:** Under the background of globalization and the informationization era, higher vocational English education is facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The cultivation of intercultural communicative competence has become a hot topic in the field of education, especially for higher vocational students, this competence is not only related to the effect of language learning but also directly affects the competitiveness and adaptability in the internationalized workplace in the future. At present, the following major problems exist in the cultivation of students' intercultural communication competence in higher vocational English education, the disconnection between teaching materials and actual intercultural communication requirements, the limitations of teachers' intercultural teaching awareness and methods, the insufficiency of students' intercultural experience and awareness, and the insufficiency of the school's educational resources and platforms. Based on this, this paper aims to discuss how to effectively improve students' intercultural communication competence in higher vocational English education, analyze the problems existing in the current educational practice, and propose corresponding improvement strategies.

**Keywords:** higher vocational; English education; students' intercultural communicative competence; cultivation strategy

## Introduction

Higher vocational education plays a crucial role in today's society, providing students with professional skills and knowledge to adapt to the rapidly changing job market. Higher vocational English education is not only a platform to improve students' language skills, but also an important way to broaden their international perspective and improve their global competitiveness. With the deepening of global economic integration and international exchanges, cross-cultural communication skills have become one of the core competencies necessary for higher vocational students, which enable them to communicate effectively in a multicultural context, understand the values and behaviors of different cultures, and thus

become more comfortable in the international arena. It can be said that good intercultural communication skills are the key ability to realize success, whether in business, science and technology, or education.

## 1. The Significance of Cultivating Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence in Higher Vocational English Education

### 1.1 Enhancement of international perspective and cultural sensitivity

Higher vocational students can better understand global diversity by learning English from different cultural backgrounds, which is not only limited to the language itself but also includes learning about the history, social customs, arts, religions, and lifestyles of different countries and regions. In this way, students learn how to avoid

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cultural biases and stereotypes when communicating, thus creating more effective communication (Xiong, 2023). By understanding the communicative habits and etiquette of different cultures, students are also able to express themselves more confidently and appropriately in a multicultural environment. By cultivating students with an international outlook and cultural sensitivity, higher vocational colleges and universities can help them better adapt and compete in an internationalized work environment.

### **1.2 Enhance vocational competitiveness and employ ability**

In a globalized economy, enterprises increasingly need employees who can communicate across cultures. It is especially important for students seeking international career opportunities to master intercultural communication skills so that they can better adapt to a multicultural work environment. The development of intercultural communication skills helps students to demonstrate greater sensitivity and adaptability in handling interactions with people from different cultures, a skill that is essential for jobs that require teamwork, customer service, or managerial positions. In addition, the study of intercultural communication not only enhances English language skills but also includes understanding and utilizing effective non-verbal communication styles, which can help to improve communication effectiveness in the workplace and reduce misunderstandings and conflicts. Understanding the ways of thinking and problem-solving in different cultures can also promote innovative thinking, and multicultural perspectives can help to come up with novel solutions in the workplace and increase work creativity.

### **1.3 Enhance the depth and breadth of language learning**

Through intercultural communication learning, students not only learn the language itself but also learn how to use the language in real situations, understand the application of the language in different cultural contexts, and improve the practicality of the language and communication efficiency. The development of intercultural communicative competence involves the

understanding of various cultural backgrounds, customs, and contexts, which not only increases the interest in learning English but also helps students to understand the implicit meanings and cultural details of the language more comprehensively. For example, learning about the communication styles of different cultures requires students to compare, criticize, and analyze, which helps them develop critical thinking. By analyzing communication patterns in different cultures, students can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of language and culture. Intercultural communication also includes the comprehensive use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and other multifaceted skills and the multidimensional learning approach promotes the comprehensive development of language skills and improves the flexibility and creativity of language use (Lu, 2019).

### **1.4 Promote students' international communication and understanding**

Under the trend of globalization, cross-border cooperation is becoming more and more frequent, and students with intercultural communication skills are better able to adapt to international cooperation projects, which makes them perform better in teamwork, project management, and international business. This is because by learning how different cultures communicate, students not only learn languages, but also gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures, and this understanding and respect is the cornerstone of building harmonious international relations and promoting global peace. Through international exchange, students not only acquire new knowledge and skills but also improve their personal maturity and self-confidence, which is very important for personal career development and personal qualities. With the continuous expansion of international education and job markets, students with intercultural communication skills are more likely to get international study and work opportunities.

## **2. The Current Situation of Cultivating Students' Intercultural Communication Skills in Higher Vocational English Education**

### **2.1 Disconnection between curriculum content and intercultural communication requirements**

The current curriculum in higher vocational English education often focuses on the teaching of basic language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary listening, etc. Although these contents are important for language learning, they lack content involving intercultural communication skills, such as cultural differences, international etiquette, and cultural background knowledge. Most higher vocational English education adopts a teacher-led, passive student-acceptance teaching model, which makes it difficult to stimulate students' active learning and interest in exploring different cultures. In language learning, practice is a very important part, especially in the cultivation of intercultural communication skills (Du, 2023). However, the lack of opportunities for students to communicate and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds limits the development of practical application skills.

### **2.2 Limitations of teachers' intercultural teaching awareness**

Many higher vocational English teachers are not fully aware of the importance of intercultural communicative competence in the current context of globalization, and the reason for this phenomenon mainly stems from the lack of intercultural education in the process of teachers' education and training. Some teachers do not have the experience of working or studying in a multicultural environment, and this lack of experience can limit their understanding and application of different cultures in the teaching process. In addition, most teachers still rely on traditional teaching methods that are not appropriate for developing students' intercultural communication skills. For example, over-reliance on book knowledge ignores the importance of interactive and contextualized teaching. Most importantly, most teachers lack the opportunity to participate in professional development on intercultural teaching, and without continuous professional training and learning, it is difficult to enhance teachers' intercultural teaching awareness and competence.

### **2.3 Lack of students' intercultural experience as well as awareness**

Many higher education students do not have the opportunity to directly contact or immerse themselves in different cultural environments, which in turn limits the opportunity to learn and understand different cultures from experience. In addition, the lack of international travel, exchange programs, or opportunities to interact with foreign students also contributes to the lack of cross-cultural experiences for students. Due to the lack of opportunities to learn about different cultures in depth, students hold stereotypes and prejudices about other cultures, which affects their ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds (Chen & Pan, 2023). Although higher education students have improved their language skills, they do not know how to apply these skills in cross-cultural situations. And the lack of practice in integrating language skills with actual cultural situations can limit students' communicative competence. Some students focus only on completing the learning tasks set by the teacher and do not have enough opportunities to explore and understand their own culture, which can also have an impact when developing intercultural communicative competence.

### **2.4 Insufficiency of existing educational resources and platforms in schools**

Many higher vocational institutions lack sufficient resources to support the development of intercultural communicative competence, such as internationalized teaching materials and multimedia teaching resources, etc. Insufficient resources will limit students' opportunities to contact and understand different cultures in the learning process. Although modern technologies provide abundant opportunities to promote intercultural learning, many higher vocational institutions do not make full use of these technologies. The lack of online learning platforms, virtual exchanges, and international cooperation programs makes students' learning more homogeneous. In addition, schools fail to effectively integrate off-campus educational resources, such as cooperation with international schools and community multicultural activities. Practice is an important part of learning intercultural communicative competence, but many higher vocational schools fail to provide sufficient practice

opportunities, such as internships, community service, or study abroad programs, these experiences are crucial for students to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice.

### **3. Measures to Cultivate Students' Intercultural Communication Skills in Higher Vocational English Education**

#### **3.1 Emphasize the learning and application of English knowledge and compare the cultural differences between China and the west**

Language is not only a tool for communication, but also a carrier of culture. Understanding the cultural background can deepen the understanding of language. By learning and comparing Chinese and Western cultures, students can better understand the cultural meanings in the language and avoid cultural misunderstandings in communication. When learning about cultural differences between China and the West, teachers should be careful to avoid forming or reinforcing cultural stereotypes, but should instead recognize that diversity and complexity exist even within the same cultural circle (Hou, 2023). When necessary, cultural learning is combined with practical language application, focusing on the cultivation of students' practical communication skills.

In Western culture, receiving a compliment is usually responded to directly and positively. For example, if someone praises a Westerner's job performance, they will reply, "Thank you! I worked hard on it.) This response reflects the Western culture's values of recognizing personal achievement and self-affirmation. This response reflects the traditional virtues of modesty and understatement in Chinese culture. In higher English education, teachers can use such cases to teach students how to express and understand praise appropriately in cross-cultural communication. By learning these differences, students can better adapt to the cultural diversity in English communication and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills.

#### **3.2 Carefully understand the characteristics of textbook content arrangement and choose diversified teaching modes**

Through rational selection and use of teaching materials, knowledge can be taught more effectively and students' interest in learning can be stimulated. Different students have different learning styles and needs, and flexible teaching modes can help to meet these diversities. Diversified teaching modes can help students understand and apply English from different perspectives and improve their intercultural communication skills. When choosing a teaching mode, teachers should consider students' backgrounds, interests, and learning abilities to ensure the applicability of teaching methods (Zhao, 2022).

Taking Business English as an example, teachers can utilize role-playing and simulated business scenarios to let students practice the application of Business English. For example, to simulate business negotiation, customer meeting, or product introduction scenarios, students are divided into two groups, one group plays the representative of company A and the other group plays the representative of company B. The two companies are planning to reach a cooperation agreement, and the students need to discuss the terms of the cooperation in business English, solve the potential disagreements, and try to reach a consensus, the simulation not only helps students practice business English communication skills, but also develops their negotiation skills and teamwork abilities. In addition, teachers can also help students learn how to apply English in real business environments by analyzing real business cases, through which students can understand the actual use of business English and its changes in different business situations. As well as cooperative learning, student group discussions, and collaborative projects promote communication and cooperation among students to improve their ability to solve real-world problems, an approach that encourages students to actively participate and share their ideas and strategies. Teachers utilize video, audio, and online resources to demonstrate practical applications of business English, tools that provide a more vivid and interactive learning experience.

### **3.3 Schools organize teachers and students to participate in practical activities to expand students' learning horizons**

By participating in practical activities, students will take the initiative to explore and apply knowledge and enhance their motivation and initiative in learning. Practical activities enable students to apply English in real contexts and enhance their communication and problem-solving skills. Activities should be designed to encourage students to actively participate and reflect after the activities to deepen their learning experience, and teachers should provide a variety of activity choices to meet the interests and learning needs of different students (Hou, 2021). For example, students should be organized to participate in international exchange programs such as student exchange, international conferences or overseas study camps, multicultural festivals or international days should be held on campus for students to participate in showcasing the cultures and customs of different countries, and students should be involved in multicultural community activities such as community services, cultural exhibitions or international food festivals.

In teaching English for tourism, teachers should emphasize the combination of theory and practice. Firstly, they should clarify the objectives of the activities, such as enhancing students' practical ability to use tourism English, improving cross-cultural communication skills, and understanding the basic knowledge of the tourism industry. Then design a specific activity program, including the type of activity (e.g., simulated tour guide, field trip, interaction with tourism experts, etc.), schedule, participants, required resources, and budget. Teachers can utilize school resources, local tourism resources, or industry contacts to provide students with real-world learning and experiential opportunities to ensure that students are well prepared, including language preparation and a basic understanding of the tourism industry. Students improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in tourism English through practical activities, especially fluency and accuracy in real-world applications. Students gain a deeper understanding of the workflow, service standards,

and customer needs in the tourism industry. Most importantly, students gain a variety of practical work experience, thus enhancing their competitiveness in employment.

### **3.4 Teachers actively develop a sense of lifelong learning and participate in interdisciplinary training activities**

The teaching of intercultural communicative competence requires teachers to possess a wide range of knowledge and skills, including up-to-date teaching strategies, cultural sensitivity, language skills, and so on. By participating in training, teachers can improve their professional skills to better meet students' learning needs. And teachers' lifelong learning helps develop students' intercultural communication skills and prepares them for their future careers. Teachers should choose appropriate training programs according to their own teaching needs and career development plans, and apply the theoretical knowledge learned in the training to practical teaching to ensure the transformation of learning outcomes (Han, 2021). It should be noted that lifelong learning is not a one-time task, but a continuous process, which requires teachers to constantly look for new learning opportunities.

Higher vocational colleges and universities should establish and improve the teacher training mechanism, regularly organize cross-cultural and interdisciplinary training courses, and invite experts and scholars to teach the latest educational concepts, teaching methods, and cross-cultural communication skills. They should also provide teachers with necessary learning resources, such as online courses, seminars, workshops, and opportunities to participate in academic conferences, and actively encourage teachers to use libraries and online resources to learn new teaching methods and concepts. Teachers should actively participate in the training provided by higher education institutions and other organizations, take the initiative to learn new teaching concepts and methods, use online resources for self-study, and constantly update their knowledge and skills. They should also practice the intercultural and interdisciplinary knowledge they have learned in classroom teaching, and test and enhance their teaching methods through practical application.

Regular reflection on teaching is conducted to assess the effectiveness of teaching, and adjustments and improvements are made based on student feedback and personal experience. Local education departments should formulate policies to support teachers' intercultural and interdisciplinary training, provide guidelines and standards, and offer policy support for teachers' participation in training, such as financial subsidies, time schedules, and professional development certification. Establish cooperation networks with universities, research institutes, enterprises, and international organizations to provide teachers with diversified learning and exchange platforms, and ensure that the quality of training meets the needs of educational development through regular evaluation of the effectiveness of training. Supervise and support the work of tertiary institutions in teacher training to ensure the effective implementation of the policy. Through the implementation of these measures, higher vocational English teachers can be provided with more comprehensive intercultural and interdisciplinary training opportunities, thus effectively enhancing their teaching ability and students' intercultural communication skills.

### Summation

To sum up, this study aims to explore and analyze the current situation of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence in higher vocational English education, identify existing problems, and propose practical and effective cultivation strategies. It is found that intercultural communicative competence has become the key to students' personal development and professional success. Higher vocational colleges and universities should pay attention to this and provide students with a comprehensive and effective intercultural communicative learning environment by improving teaching content, methods, and resources. Only in this way can students be more competitive and adaptable in the future international arena.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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