The Practice and Exploration of College Students' Intercultural Communication Ability Cultivation—A Case Study of HIT

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Abstract. The author focused on modern college students' intercultural communication ability cultivation, learnt from domestic and foreign related theories, concepts and models, relied on existing international education resources and support policies of Harbin Institute of Technology, to analyze the integration of college international students through the perspective of international students’ culture needs, and analyze the situation of university and college internationalization cultivation through the perspective of Chinese students’ international cultivation needs. The author aims to explore the construction of the “Trinity Platform” - intercultural communication ability improvement platform based on culture exchange needed by individuals, academic research and practice perception, to cultivate high-quality talents with intercultural communication ability and international competitiveness.

Introduction

At present, globalization has become a key theme and trend of education development. According to the development process of internationalization of higher education in various countries, since globalization became a worldwide transition driver in early 1990s, countries have been widely interested in internationalization. The core quality of international talents is intercultural competence. It is increasingly important to cultivate a large number of international talents with intercultural perspective, knowledge and communication ability.

By the end of 2015, Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT in short) had 2,299 international students from 115 countries in the world. Both the scale and level of international students realized leaping growth. The participation in international conferences and the international exchange programs of Chinese students has increased instantly. The scale of studying abroad after graduation has been enlarged. Students are eager to improve their internationalization capabilities. In this context, the Division of Student Affairs of HIT actively integrates resources, and builds the platform to set up intercultural communication service center. It has been exploring the path of intercultural communication service of universities and colleges by improving and strengthening intercultural platform construction and systematization.

The Status and Trends of Foreign Research

Colton, David, the President of Cornell University, believes that there are three objectives to broaden students' international horizons, which include learning to listen, understanding the different forms of communication, and achieving advanced international level in their professional fields. Harari believes that international education should cover the international communication among courses, scholars and students, the collaboration programs with community, training, and a wide
range of management services. Meanwhile, it should stress and support intercultural and international perspectives to form a spirit and cultural atmosphere in universities and colleges [1].

Like Harvard University requiring "all students should have international experience during their study in Harvard", each year, more than 35,000 college students and graduates in US will participate in overseas work plans, including summer internship and The Peace Corps (the American global volunteer service organization, recruiting large numbers of college students to volunteer abroad), with credits or without credits. Michigan State University has established the International Students Association and implemented the activities of Community Volunteers for International Programs [2]. Australia recently hit a record of highest proportion of international students in OECD countries (19.3% in 2005) [3]. Internationalization of the curriculum is the important element of Australian international education. “Comprehensive international education” has been carried out through various forms of international courses [4].

The international education processes of the world-renowned universities have been very mature, especially the American first-class education models, which have been referenced by many Asian universities. However, universities must also have its own innovation, because simple copying Western means can hardly obtain considerable development.

The Status and Trends of Domestic Research

In China, due to historical, cultural and economic factors, the studies of international vision of students were few until 1990s. The studies of the college students’ international theory and practice then are increasing rapidly. The author learnt some international cultivation practices of well-known universities at home through accessing to information from their websites.

Tsinghua University launched the "open to international" practice, which takes the international mobility of students as one of the important indicators of the internationalization of universities, and provides students with multi-level channels to study abroad. The number of students studying abroad grows at an annual rate of 24.5%. Peking University each year receives more than 5,000 international students, invites a large number of foreign experts and friendly people to do academic and cultural exchanges, and launches the international exchange activities of various brands, such as the "Tutor Program for International Students." To integrate excellent overseas (international) resources, Zhejiang University has organized "Overseas Famous Teacher Forum." It regularly invites internationally renowned people to give series of public lectures for faculty and students. Huazhong University of Science and Technology focus on training students to become "leader talents who are able to compete on the international stage." It establishes over 40 various special scholarships, to support student participation in various national and international scientific and technological innovation projects and competitions.

In general, the majority of universities and colleges values students' cultivation of intercultural communication ability, and has proposed appropriate countermeasures or formed typical experience. It can also be seen that most of the universities’ intercultural communication trainings are carried out in one or several special activities, which is the "point"-like structure, or through the "International Festival," which is the "line"-like structure. The training system is not perfect.

The Exploration of Construction of College Students' Intercultural Communication Service System

The Establishment of Specialized Management Services. The Division of Student Affairs of HIT can select tutors with international exchange experience and extensive student management experience and teachers of the International Student Center to set up Intercultural Communication Service Center. Teachers of the center select Chinese and foreign outstanding students to compose the governing body of the center. Chinese and foreign students' actual needs should be listened to, and their characteristics should be analyzed to improve the relevance of the work. Teachers of the center should guide the student governing body to formulate center’s work system, set identification, design and monitor the specific activities. Learning needs feedback collection department should be
established to modify the services and activities on a regular basis according to the needs of the students.

The Survey Results of Intercultural Communication Services Based on Individual Needs. The Status Survey of HIT International Students Integration. In order to better serve the international students, allow students to better learning and living in a foreign country, and help them adapt school life, students’ basic needs questionnaires were issued to international students at HIT. This study defined international student needs as four major areas, namely, life, psychological, social, and academic needs.

A total of 130 questionnaires were issued, 95 valid questionnaires were returned. The survey results are as follows. Firstly, in life needs, international students prefer to cook in dormitories or eat at restaurants outside, and they think that the canteen food tastes not so good. They currently live in international student apartments, and are satisfied with the living conditions. Secondly, their present mental state is good. Thirdly is about social needs. They tend to internal communication, and it is noteworthy that there are 11% international students basically contact with nobody at HIT. Meanwhile, currently less international students are familiar with Chinese students. They lack effective interaction and only have single channel to communicate. Whether to the international student clubs or the Chinese student clubs, participation and enthusiasm of the international students are not high. Therefore, universities should pay attention to the integration of international students and Chinese students in various aspects, and the common development by learning from each other. Finally are the academic needs. Currently, international students at HIT are taught in Chinese. The analysis of the survey results shows that the use of Chinese in teaching causes some understanding difficulties for international students. Appropriate measures need to be taken to promote students' learning and better understanding. International students say that they have suffered pressure mainly from examination and graduation design. Finally, most students want to stay at HIT for further studies, which accounts for 56.52%.

The Status Survey of HIT Students' Internationalization Needs. In order to allow more students to participate in intercultural communication practice, and better understand students’ intention to study abroad and their information access about studying abroad, HIT issued overseas exchange study intention questionnaires to undergraduate students. The study defined the exchange intention into two aspects, that is, the situation that students know about HIT's resources of studying abroad and their intention and direction of studying abroad.

A total of 130 questionnaires were issued, 95 valid questionnaires were returned. The research shows that students do not have unified clear understanding about the requirements of studying abroad. In study abroad programs, students are most familiar with CSC outstanding undergraduate international exchange programs. In terms of consulting on the study abroad, more than half of the students (57%) firstly consult their tutors. The author recommends that HIT should clear the specialized function of study abroad consulting department, so that students can clearly know which department can provide specialized guidance.

Those who do not desire firmly to study abroad are a majority. Those who have a strong willingness to study abroad and who do not want to study abroad separately account for one-fourth. The motivation of studying abroad is to achieve a higher level of self-realization (quality education, freedom, and more chances). The stronger their will to study abroad, the more actively they would make plans; in contract, without a strong will, students will not have an incentive plan. Most students tend to study abroad through the CSC programs. DIY applications are the second choice. In terms of the countries, students prefer countries in North America, followed by Europe, and the third in Asia. The primary consideration about choosing universities is the rankings of majors. When choosing the country, students will greatly consider the costs. The reasons students do not want to study abroad include the primary cause of economic factors, the second cause of language ability, and the third cause of unfamiliar environment.

Countermeasures of the Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Ability of College Students. The Project Implementation of Lower Grade International Students Integrating into Small Classes. International students in the lower grades can join small classes by professional to enhance
their communication and connection with the small classes. Therefore, international students can get more support in their study and life. The classes can also create the atmosphere of intercultural communication. The project selects new international students (undergraduates) and the class representatives (monitor or league branch secretary) to form teams, and organizes activities including quality development, visiting to museums and Harbin Planning Exhibition Hall, and Harbin Laodaowai food experience to promote their integration. The project also encourages small classes to organize variety of intercultural exchange activities with international students.

The Establishment of “Trinity” Intercultural Communication Ability Promotion Platform, Which Includes Cultural Exchange, Academic Research and Practical Sense. It is important to develop international academic thinking for training students' ability of intercultural communication. Thus, students can actively accept academic achievements among different cultures and stand on a broader platform to think about academic research. This platform achieves high-end leading through the "Overseas Famous Teacher Forum," which invites overseas celebrities or distinguished experts to give lectures. It achieves low-end coverage through "Overseas Academic Exchange Salon," which invites visiting returned teachers or students participating in international exchanges to share research experience or learning experience abroad.

Cultivating students' intercultural communication ability can start from the international cultural enlightenment to create an environment, expand the coverage, and encourage all schools (departments) and the international students from various countries and regions to carry out cultural activities with the carriers of international etiquette, international regulations, various culture and customs.

The most important way to cultivate students' intercultural communication ability is to build the practice platform, which allows students to understand the world. HIT should increase students' "going out" opportunities by short-term study tour and other forms, and allow students situational, experiential perceiving foreign cultures and foreign environment of education and teaching mode in colleges and universities. Provisions including Short-term Study Tour Protocol of Division of Student Affairs of HIT and Foreign-related Emergency Plans should be improved to make short-term study tour projects more standardized. HIT should actively explore the platforms like international commercial exhibition in the province to expand students’ international social practice channels by guiding them to visit or serve as volunteers.

The Construction of the Work System of HIT Intercultural Communication Service Center. Intercultural communication service system with four aspects should be constructed, which includes the establishment and management of Intercultural Communication Service Center, the survey based on individual needs, the measures to strengthen the integration of international students, and the establishment of “Trinity” intercultural communication ability promotion platform. This is drew based on literature research and the study of domestic well-known universities’ international cultivation classic projects, combining with the actual situation of HIT, and in the aim of "promoting integration, constructing platform, creating atmosphere, and improving capacity." The work system is shown in Figure 1, and validated and optimized in the specific work.
Summary

With the growing international exchange activities, colleges and universities should create a good and multicultural campus environment for international students. Meanwhile, the cultivation of international students’ intercultural communication ability plays an important role in effective communication and integration between Chinese and international students. Building a variety of platforms and creating the intercultural atmosphere are conducive to promote students’ communication of different cultures, different backgrounds, and different majors. Colleges and universities should help international students adjust to domestic life, integrate into campus, and better know about Chinese. It can guide and help students broaden their global vision and promote international competitiveness and intercultural communication ability.

References


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