The Research on Cross-culture Adaptation and Teaching Management System for Chinese Staff in Confucius Institute

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Abstract. In recent years, with the increasing demand for Chinese worldwide, the communication task of teaching Chinese becomes more and more arduous. In such a background, overseas Confucius Institutes will face more demanding requirements and tests in terms of size and teaching quality. By starting with the management and volunteers of German Confucius Institute, the research is designed to discuss how to help teaching staff as core teaching force eliminate cross-culture barriers, make them better adapt to life abroad and quickly get into the role. On this basis, it discusses the teaching management system of Confucius Institute to further improve the operation and teaching efficiency of the Confucius Institute and better play a role as a bridge in the international cross-cultural communication.

Research Overview of Confucius Institute and Cross-culture Adaptation

Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational organization hosted by Confucius Institute Headquarters (“Hanban”) and jointly established by China and foreign countries. It aims to promote Chinese teaching and carry out the exchange and cooperation of education and culture between China and foreign countries¹. Its main function includes teaching Chinese for the people from all walks of life, offering training to Chinese language teachers, organizing Chinese language tests and the qualification certification of Chinese language teachers, providing information consulting services in the field of China’s education, culture, economy and society, conducting research on contemporary China and etc. According to the official statistics from Hanban, 525 Confucius Institutes and 1,113 Confucius Classrooms have been established in 146 countries/regions as of December 31, 2017. There are 525 Confucius Institutes in 138 countries/regions, including 118 ones in 33 Asian countries/regions, 54 ones in 39 African countries, 173 ones in 41 European countries, 161 ones in 21 Americas and 19 ones in 4 four countries of Oceania. There are 1,113 Confucius Classrooms in 79 countries/regions (Comoros, Myanmar, Vanuatu, Grenada, Lesotho, Cook Islands, Andorra, the European Union only has classroom without institutes), of which 101 ones are in 21 Asian countries, 30 ones in 15 African countries, 307 ones in 30 European countries, 574 ones in 9 Americas, and 101 ones in four countries of Oceania¹. Its language teaching courses not only help to enhance the understanding of Chinese language and culture in the world, develop friendly relationship between China and foreign countries, but also help to promote the multi-cultural development and make contributions to building a harmonious world. In the meanwhile, it centrally embodies “going-out” strategy of Chinese culture and the leading strength of promoting The Belt and Road Initiative.

However, the working staff (including volunteers) responsible for promoting Chinese traditional culture is required to face different students and teaching environments in foreign countries, and strive to adapt to local culture and the pace of life. Therefore, it is particularly important to better accomplish the Chinese teaching task and have a thorough understanding of cross-culture adaptation of all related staff. According to Y.Y. Kim, the process of cross-culture adaptation is that communicators constantly make self-adjustments and gradually adapt to the new lifestyle under the pressure of unfamiliar cultural environment and finally recognize cross-cultural identity¹.
In terms of culture adaptation process and results, psychologist John W. Berry has proposed the theory of four-fold model of acculturation strategies, which discusses how the group and individuals positioning themselves during the cultural interactions and transformation; how to adapt to such process? What is cross-culture strategy for people? How to change individual’s experience and withstand the pressure that has finally achieved adaption? Through the research on the model, the culture acculturation strategies are divided into assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization.

We regard cross-culture adaptation affects all aspects of life and study, and its significance is particularly reflected in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language (“TCFL”) with obvious cross-cultural difference and the demand for two-way cross-cultural communication. This research will focus on related research by taking German Confucius Institute as an example and it is hoped to provide some references for teaching staff to eliminate cross-culture barriers and better adapt to life abroad and quickly get into the role, and thus improving the operation and teaching efficiency of the Confucius Institute and better play a role as a bridge in the international cross-cultural communication.

Research on the Volunteers’ Cross-culture Adaptation in German Confucius Institute

Cross-cultural Cognition and Adaption of Volunteers to Germany

Overview of Volunteers’ Background. The research objects in this article are mainly volunteers going to German Confucius Institute, and they have professional background of German or TCFL majors in well-known domestic colleges and universities. Some of them focus on short-term teaching exchange experience, and others decide to engage in TCFL for a long term. In terms of geography, they come from all provinces of China, with higher overall comprehensive quality.

The Cognition of Climate & Environment. In terms of the climate adaptation in Germany, the respondents generally believe that the adaption of climate is good, which is mainly based on the factors, such as warm climate, four distinct seasons, fresh air, high greening rate, pleasant natural environment and etc. Compared with Confucius Institutes set up in hot muggy Southeast Asian countries or extremely hot African countries, German’s comfortable temperature & environment and good air quality caters to Chinese people. In my opinion, this has a positive effect on Chinese volunteers’ cross-culture adaptation in Germany and enables them to rapidly enter the working state, and the initial climate sickness can be alleviated to a certain extent.

The Cognition of Behavior & Habits. Germans are objectively different from Chinese in personality, work and living habits, which are also widely recognized by the respondents. Apart from the existing stereotypes, the research shows that Chinese and Germans have significant differences in the way of speaking, behaviors and habits. However, although there are some differences between Chinese and Germans in mindset, behaviors and habits, volunteers generally agree that Germans do give great respects to teachers. This gives much help to the smooth operation of daily teaching. As a result, the vast majority of volunteers haven’t encountered the typical problems of adaptation in behaviors and habits. After the adaptation and acculturation for a certain period, the differences in personality, behaviors and habits of Chinese and Germans fail to affect normal teaching and interpersonal communication.

On the whole, these volunteers are not adapted to Germany at the beginning. Over time, after they gradually understand German culture, they are more accustomed to independent life, and their adaptability is gradually improved too. The overall adaptation level of volunteers is good and continuously in German intercultural life.

Volunteers’ Adaptation to Intercultural Teaching

Overview of Volunteers’ TCFL. According to the respondents, some of the volunteers have been engaged in TCFL in China, while some have not. Different experiences have certain impacts on the preparation and adaptation of intercultural teaching.
Professional background means that TCFL volunteers have ever engaged in teaching in China, with strong adaptability. For the volunteers without TCFL experience, they may encounter more difficulties at the beginning. However, the research also shows that Confucius Institute will provide detailed course training for volunteers before they take office, and volunteers express that cross-culture adaptation has a significant effect on both teaching and life.

**Analysis on Volunteers’ Personal Characteristics VS. Adaption.** According to the survey and interview results, male volunteers are relatively high in psychological stability, leading to their higher adaptability. At the beginning, TCFL volunteers can better get into working state and integrate into cross-cultural environment. Those who have good psychological quality, strong ability to resist pressure and outgoing nature have better performance in cross-culture adaptation.

**Suggestions and Countermeasures on Improving Volunteers’ Cross-culture Adaptability**

**Selection of Volunteers**

According to the analysis of the interviewed respondents, firstly of all, volunteers’ language proficiency and communication skills have a strong impact on their adaptability. Therefore, when selecting volunteers to Germany or other countries to engage in the promotion of Chinese culture, their performance of language proficiency is crucial.

Secondly, it should take volunteers’ character and willingness into consideration. Volunteers are more adaptable to foreign countries if they are outgoing, not reject strange environment and having good communicative skills. Accordingly, Confucius Institute will conduct detailed psychological tests when selecting volunteers.

It needs to be emphasized that individual willingness and motivation have a significant influence on volunteers’ cross-culture adaptation. If an individual loves teaching language and culture and is willing to work in this field, his/her adaptability is relatively strong too.

**Adaptability Training for the Volunteers to Germany**

The cultivation and improvement of cross-culture adaptability is a very important part for each overseas volunteer. We think, after volunteers come to Germany, targeted training should be provided to them, and the system of follow-up tracking and continuous follow-up/improvement should be established to foster volunteers’ adaptability to the life and teaching in Germany, eliminate the cross-cultural barriers and make them give full play to their own potential.

According to the current situation, the majors of volunteers are centered on foreign languages and TCFL. Among them, the advantages of volunteers from foreign language department are the strong skills of the designation country language, while professional teaching abilities are relatively poor. TCFL students are contrary to them. During the interview, I also found that some volunteers had both professional backgrounds of foreign languages and TCFL, and such volunteers are superior to others in adaptability.

Therefore, I believe that it should organize corresponding training based on the actual conditions of volunteers. For example, volunteers coming from foreign language department should receive the training of teaching capabilities and volunteers with poor language proficiency should be strengthened in language skills. Definitely, the training should include not only teaching capabilities and languages, but also the corresponding curriculum of cross-culture adaptation. By improving cross-culture adaptability and enhancing volunteers’ cultural transmission abilities, Chinese teaching will serve culture transmission and the cultural communication will be gradually raised.

In addition, special attention should be paid to volunteers’ living conditions and psychological state, so as to provide them with necessary help in foreign countries, such as residence permit, housing, tax declaration and other practical issues. Better living conditions helps to improve their adaptability.

In terms of time, the longer the volunteers stayed in Germany, the stronger adaptability they will have. If there is a long-term stable volunteer service system, volunteers can be engaged in teaching for a longer term, which is very helpful to their cross-culture adaptation.
Research on the Improvement of Teaching Management in the Context of Cross Culture

In the context of intercultural communication and integration, the teaching and management system of Confucius Institute should aim at eliminating intercultural barriers and helping volunteers better engage in intercultural communication and teaching.

Confucius Institutes are special in terms of teaching management, as they are often jointly held by Chinese and foreign deans. Both parties should try their best to eliminate the cross-cultural differences in cooperation to better promote their performance and work division during the cross-cultural communication. For example, take the Confucius Institute in Heidelberg as an example, Chinese Dean is mainly responsible for Chinese language teaching (including teaching training, HSK Chinese proficiency test, International Chinese Teacher Certificate tests and etc.) and cultural promotion (various cultural activities); foreign dean is mainly responsible for social active activities (research activities related to China's economy and society), academic research and cooperation. Of course, many matters need joint negotiation and cooperation. Schooling patterns featured by mutual respects and win-win cooperation is a strong guarantee for volunteers when adapting to the life in foreign countries and carrying out teaching smoothly.

The improvement of intercultural teaching is also worthy of continuous exploration. For example, volunteers centrally reflect the problem of textbooks. At present, the textbooks of Confucius Institute are backward, since these textbooks were put into use in 2006 and have not been updated since then. Textbooks are donated by Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, and their contents are outdated and backward, with 12 volumes in total. If they are official textbooks, emphasis may be put on students’ cross-cultural communication barriers.

Conclusion

Confucius Institute itself should vigorously promote the improvement and publication of textbooks that can eliminate barriers of cross-cultural communication.
In addition to the improvement of physical textbooks, it may give fully play to the strengths of internet and build “Internet plus Confucius Institute” by utilizing multimedia technology. For example, the increasingly popular MOOC and other online multimedia classrooms can expand the scale of target audience for Greater China culture.

References


