Task-driven and College English Curriculum Based Intercultural Competence Cultivation in Police University

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Keywords: College English; Intercultural competence; Action research.

Abstract. Globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative motivate police cadets to improve intercultural competence. In the meantime it’s very difficult for Chinese College English teachers to focus solely on cultures while students facing the task of improving language skills. It is more practical for teachers to integrate cultural instruction and normal curriculum, improving both linguistic and cultural competence to achieve the multiple objectives at the same time. This paper provides some practical ways to enrich the current curriculum. Three-step action research is used in the paper. Step one: intercultural knowledge accumulation. Teachers use explicit and implicit ways, including reading assignment, video-clip, WeChat essays in law enforcement and police fields, to improve cultural diversity awareness and to appreciate dynamic intercultural communication. Step two: task-driven intercultural skills training. Step three: reflection. These procedures form a spiral cycle which recurs to enhance the effect of continuous improvement.

Introduction

Globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative provide more chances of intercultural communication with countries around the world. In the meantime, the number of international policing cooperation and policing affairs concerning foreigners is increasing greatly. It is very vital to foster intercultural competence in police cadets to adapt to the new trend.

In China, as well as in most part of the world, police students (cadets) are busy in coping with exams and improving their foreign language competence. Given drive for success in standardized tests, heavy school work, diverse foreign language learning needs, higher physical training criteria, etc. all those requirements make it difficult for English teachers to focus entirely on cultures. However, lacking of intercultural awareness leads to difficulties in their future police work. It is more practical for teachers to integrate cultural instruction and normal curriculum, improving both linguistic and cultural competence to achieve the multiple objectives at the same time.

For a long time college English teaching and learning pay more attention to language skills and less attention to intercultural communication. A good case in point is the content of College English textbooks. Take the most popular textbooks, College English Intensive Reading, 3rd edition (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press), as an example. In every book there are ten texts and ten reading articles in total. Western main stream ideas dominate the whole book and Chinese traditional ideology is marginalized. Liu Yanhong et al. (2015) studied textbooks included in the national “Twelfth Five-Year Plan” and found that most of the textbooks overwhelmingly featured American and British cultures, but marginalized the cultures of the rest of the world (e.g. Chinese culture). This imbalance in textbooks is showed in other Asian countries, too. Lee (2009) found American culture dominated South Korean English textbooks. Japanese scholar Schneer (2007) found sharp imbalance between Japanese culture and Western culture in English textbooks in Japan. This situation has negative effect on cultivating learners’ cultural exchange and developing learners’ language competence in international communication.

According to “Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics” the term action research means “teacher-initiated classroom research which seeks to increase the teacher’s understanding of classroom teaching and learning and to bring about improvements in classroom
practices.” Action research was first put forward by Kurt Lewin, an American social psychologist, in 1940s but it was applied in tertiary English teaching for just a short period. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), action research involves 4 phases (planning, action, observation and reflection) in a cycle of research. These cycles are spiral cycles and they interact with each other until a better result is achieved. Elliot (1991) thinks action research is the study of a social situation with the view to improving the quality of the action in it. Action research matches theory and classroom reality, promoting teachers to be researchers.

Research Methods

To cultivate police cadets’ intercultural competence, a one-year action research was carried out in one class of grade two. The detailed information of this study is given in this part.

Subjects

One non-English major class from 2017, that meant they were grade two, was chosen as subjects. It was a big class. In 2017 they had received an English placement test before any academic course. Based on their test scores they all belonged to intermediate B level students.

Procedures

The research began in September, 2018 and ended in June, 2019. The textbooks used are *College English Intensive Reading, 3rd edition* (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press), book III and book IV. In the third semester there were 64 College English classes in total, while in the fourth semester, we had 48 classes in total. The aim of the research is that based on the College English textbooks and topics of each unit, teachers integrated intercultural elements into each unit by giving students different tasks to accomplish, in order to cultivate students’ intercultural competence. In each unit, we follow the cycle of observation-reflection-modification-instruction-observation. We modify our teaching designs according to reflections from teachers and students each time in order to achieve better teaching results.

Before we began the action research, we tested students’ language skills. The types of test questions included listening, reading, translation, and writing. The test results showed their English level was still medium after a year’s learning. We designed a questionnaire on intercultural competence based on some concerned questionnaires, especially the questionnaire of Fan Weiwei et al. (2013). The questionnaire contained two parts. Part one included some basic information on the subjects, e.g. name, major, grade, etc. The second part was multiple choice questions on intercultural attitude. The results from questionnaire showed that most of them paid too much attention to vocabulary, reading and listening, however paid little attention to culture. Only a few of them wanted to know culture and hoped teachers could teach them more on that aspect. The results also showed that their main purpose of learning English was passing the final exams. Some of them wanted to use English as a tool to benefit their future careers. From the questionnaire we drew the conclusion that students’ intercultural awareness was low.

A Teaching Case

Take Unit 6 from book III as an example to illustrate the intercultural cultivation. The topic of the Unit 6 is courage when people face death. It is a story, entitled “A Day’s Wait” written by Ernest Hemingway. A small boy had a high fever one day and his father sent for a doctor. After examination, the doctor took the boy’s temperature and prescribed some medicine, and then the doctor left. The boy thought he was going to die because he got one hundred and two, but his parents did not know his feelings. The boy held tight to himself and refused anyone to enter his room. “He had been waiting to die all day, ever since 9 o’clock in the morning.” Finally the boy got to know his mistake and became relaxed.
Step One, Intercultural Knowledge Accumulation

There are many ways to accumulate intercultural knowledge. Teachers used explicit and implicit methods, including reading assignment, video-clip, WeChat essays in law enforcement and police fields to improve cultural diversity awareness and to appreciate dynamic intercultural communication. First a teacher handed out some reading materials about Hemingway through WeChat to students’ smartphones, asking them to read the materials before class. In the meantime, the teacher assigned one group to illustrate Hemingway in the form of giving a 5-minute presentation on class. The teacher also asked two other groups to collect materials and prepare a discussion on comparison Western attitude towards death with Chinese attitude towards death. All the tasks were distributed before we began the unit.

In the first class, the teacher invited the student who had made a preparation to give a brief introduction about Hemingway to give a presentation and the student had to answer some questions given by other students. Then the teacher played a video-clip to have a further understanding of Hemingway and his time. An excerpt from the novel “A moving feast” is read to have a better understanding of Hemingway’s Paris life. These were done before the illustration of the text.

The teacher and students began to learn the text based on curriculum requirements. In dealing with language, there were also some culture notes, for instance hunting in winter, quail, Howard Pyle, and so on. If the word had a history, the teacher also would give a full explanation on it. After learning the text in details, a discussion on death was held. In this way students could appreciate the beauty of language while improving their exotic cultural awareness.

Step Two: Task-driven Intercultural Skills Training

On the basis of a perfect understanding of the text, it’s time to practice intercultural knowledge. Role-play is a good way to do that. In small groups, students would play the role of father, the boy, mother, doctor respectively. The teacher would give some advice. Because they were police cadets, the teacher should link college English with policing practice to benefit their future career. In the text the boy lied to his parents. If his parents had observed the boy carefully, they would have found the truth. This time the teacher showed some methods to analyze micro-expression in order to discover truth among lies. A micro-expression is an involuntary facial expression shown on the face of humans based on his emotions experienced. First the teacher divided students into groups. The teacher gave each group some facial photos to analyze their meanings. A discussion was carried out to discuss the methods of analyzing micro-expression. After that, the teacher made a summary. Later the teacher used an episode from “Lie to me” to show the importance of micro-expression in investigation and interrogation.

Step Three: Reflection

After each period of instruction, teachers reflected the teaching details and tried to improve them next time. Teachers used teaching diaries and camera to recall the teaching process. Teachers read the record and discussed with colleagues the advantages and disadvantages of the teaching. Teachers could also have a discussion with students to collect their ideas on teaching. Based on the reflections, the teachers revised and designed next period activity.

The three steps form one spiral cycle. Inside each cycle, the process of observation-reflection-modification-instruction-observation will continue until the end the semester.

Conclusion

The research results show that intercultural communication activity not only improve teachers’ cognition and emphasis on culture but also promote students’ cultural awareness. Students began to realize that cultural knowledge and cultural skills were the base of intercultural competence. They began to adjust their learning habits to intercultural knowledge accumulation and intercultural skills. They reflected that English learning was much more fun due to cultural elements.
This study has raised some points for consideration. The results of this study may not be generalizable to other classrooms. But we do hope that the study provide other teachers with ideas that within the limitation of curriculum they can use different ways to improve students’ intercultural competence.

Acknowledgement

This study is a result of the research project entitled “Intercultural Competence Cultivation in Police University under Visual Threshold of the Belt and Road Initiative” (No.ZQN2018021 ) supported by 2018 “Young and Middle-aged Teachers Scientific Research Innovation Plan” for Chinese People’s Armed Police Forces Academy.

References


