The Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Consciousness and Capability in College English Teaching under the Background of “The Belt and Road”

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ABSTRACT

China's international influence keeps growing, which urgently needs talents who are good at intercultural communication. However, the phenomenon of “Chinese culture aphasia” is very serious in college English teaching in China, not conducive to cultivating college students' consciousness and capability of intercultural communication. How to enhance the infiltration and dissemination of Chinese culture in college English teaching so as to cultivate more versatile talents with high English quality, intercultural communication skills, as well as Chinese feelings and international vision is an important issue that English teachers in colleges and universities need to consider and solve. Based on “The Belt and Road” background, this paper focuses on the cultivation of students’ intercultural communication consciousness and capability in college English teaching.\(^1,^2,^3\)

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KEYWORDS

“The Belt and Road”; intercultural communication; consciousness and capability; college English teaching; Chinese culture infiltration.

INTRODUCTION

Facing the opportunity and challenge since entering the new century, in the process of promoting national rejuvenation and deepening international cooperation, China put forward the grand national strategy of "The Belt and Road" in 2013, which not only demonstrated China’s responsibility to the world, but also proposed a new topic for the spread of Chinese culture across countries and regions.

“The Belt and Road” is one of the most important strategic deployments in China. "People-to-people connectivity" is arguably the most important part and the basis of “The Belt and Road” initiative, which can be achieved by overcoming language and cultural barriers. Combining two different cultures effectively and expressing the native language culture in a way that is easier for the other party to understand are important requirements for today's people. Therefore, it is very important for “The Belt and Road” initiative to cultivate talents with intercultural communication consciousness and capability.

Since there are many countries along “The Belt and Road” line, it is very important to strengthen language and culture integration because language communication is a bridge for people to communicate with each other in the era of globalization, and cultural communication is the link between the people in a pluralistic era. As the most popular language at present, English plays a vital role among languages in the world, and serves as a channel for countries and regions along “The Belt and Road” line to develop in cooperation. In “The Belt and Road” environment, college English teaching is facing many opportunities and great challenges. College English teaching must be centered on the construction of “The Belt and Road” and its function as an intercultural communication media should be continuously expanded. Knowing this, a large number of high-quality English talents can be trained, and language support and language talents can be served for “The Belt and Road” initiative [1].

REALISTIC PROBLEMS

American linguist Kramsch has pointed out in his book Language and Culture that language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes culture [2]. The two sides are inseparable. Therefore, cultural education is also widely recognized in the English teaching community. English teaching in China has gone through the reform process from emphasizing English knowledge teaching and English skills training to emphasizing intercultural consciousness and capability training. The intercultural
consciousness and capability of teachers and students are also gradually increasing. But for a long time, in the teaching process, cultural education mainly focuses on the introduction and understanding of western culture. A large amount of western cultural knowledge, like vocabularies and customs, are input to students, but the important role of Chinese culture in intercultural communication is neglected. Students' learning and output of native language culture are underappreciated, causing a serious "Chinese culture aphasia" phenomenon. In intercultural communication, students can understand foreigners' words but they cannot explain Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories well in English to foreigners. The spread of Chinese culture has been impeded, forming a "deficit" in intercultural communication.

PHENOMENON AND CAUSES OF “CHINESE CULTURE APHASIA”

Some studies show that the bidirectional nature of cultural dissemination in college English teaching has not attracted enough attention. The content of cultural dissemination is unidirectional and outdated. When cultivating students’ capability of intercultural communication, the unidirectional cultural input of western culture is focused, but Chinese culture output is neglected, leading to the phenomenon of “Chinese cultural aphasia”. The detailed reasons are mainly as follows:

The Understanding Deviation about Intercultural Communication and Dissemination

At present, even though college English teaching theoretically emphasizes on improving students' intercultural communication consciousness and capability, students are mainly fed with the knowledge of western culture in practice. Actually, equal intercultural communication and dissemination should ensure two-way rather than one-way approach. True intercultural communication should not only be reflected in the operation of target language, but also in the language expression of the native language culture. Communicators are expected to be able to compare two cultures and accept different cultures in communication. Unfortunately, the bidirectional nature of cultural communication and dissemination is not fully recognized at present; therefore, Chinese culture education is almost missing in college English class in China.

Loopholes in Functional Orientation in College English Teaching

Currently, the improvement of college English teaching methods, contents and evaluation methods is lagging behind, focusing only on the communicative function of language but not paying enough attention to the capability of cultural communication and dissemination. It still emphasizes the understanding and cognition of language phenomenon itself like vocabulary, sentence patterns, etc., but the cultural information that language contains is ignored, not to mention bilingual
or multilingual cultural comparisons. As a result, students have little perception of the deep cultural connotation as well as the cultural similarities and differences imbedded in language, which is not beneficial to building their international vision and intercultural communication consciousness and capability.

**Chinese Culture Default in College English Teaching Contents and Means**

At present, the contents of college English textbooks mostly come from the original English publications. Texts explain a lot about western culture, reflecting the mainstream values of western society. The proportion of Chinese and western culture is seriously unbalanced; so Chinese culture is marginalized. To achieve teaching objectives, teachers spend most of the class hour introducing and expanding western culture and customs in order to help students understand the text more deeply. They seldom introduce Chinese culture, not to mention cultural comparison, thus leading to Chinese culture default in college English teaching contents and means and bringing much difficulty for Chinese culture infiltration.

**Curriculum Setting**

In order to connect students with the international community and improve their humanistic quality, some colleges and universities offer a lot courses on British and American culture to further enhance students' attention to and interest in British and American culture. But there are few courses on Chinese culture, leaving little space for Chinese culture infiltration. Intercultural communication degenerates into one-way communication. Students lack the consciousness and perception of cultural diversity. Therefore, their development prospect of intercultural communication consciousness and capability is worrying.

**STRATEGIES AND METHODS FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS**

Aiming to meet the strategic needs of China, college English teaching should undertake the mission of spreading Chinese culture and cultivate students with international vision, who have both the ability to understand and absorb the excellent essence of foreign cultures, and the ability to promote Chinese culture. Under the background of "The Belt and Road", to cultivate students' intercultural communication consciousness and capability through college English teaching and then further improve the phenomenon of "Chinese cultural aphasia", the following suggestions are proposed:

**Formulate Corresponding Policies**

The Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) put forward the strategy of Chinese culture "Going Out" for
the first time. The Decision of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of CP Con again proposed to strengthen the cultivation of international communication capacity and the construction of publicity discourse system, and to build the image of China as a cultural power. In view of the lack of Chinese culture in college English teaching, The Outline of the State Medium-and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020), issued by the Central Committee of CPC and the State Council in March 2010, clearly put forward that institutions of higher education should enhance the education of international understanding and students' understanding of different countries and cultures, so as to promote intercultural communication and train qualified international talents with an international vision, good knowledge of international rules, and the capability to participate in international affairs and competition. The above policy documents indicate the direction for promoting the development of students' intercultural communication capability and guiding the foreign language teaching practice.

Change the Cognition about Intercultural Communication

In the 1950s, American anthropologist Edward T. Hall first proposed the concept of intercultural communication [3]. In the 1980s, the study of intercultural communication has been introduced into China by the foreign language community. One of the many interpretations on the connotation of intercultural communication is that intercultural communication combines theory and practices together to make communicators consciously use intercultural knowledge. Intercultural communication is conducive to the training of all-around excellent international talents. On the premise of intercultural communication and in the context of “The Belt and Road”, college English teaching should no longer focus on the training of language knowledge, skills and expressing ability. Instead, more attention should be paid to communicative competence, including language competence, social language competence and pragmatic competence.

Improve English Teachers' Consciousness and Capability about Chinese Culture Dissemination

Many college English teachers are familiar with western culture, but their study and research on Chinese culture are few; therefore, Chinese culture cannot be well infiltrated into the classroom. To cultivate excellent cultural communicators and disseminators, English teachers should improve their own cultural quality and consciousness of cultural diversity, study deeply about Chinese culture, and build the consciousness and ability to spread Chinese culture. Then it would be possible and promising for them to infiltrate Chinese culture into English teaching, cultivate students' consciousness of Chinese culture, arouse patriotic feeling and develop the sense of mission of Chinese culture among students, thus making students study Chinese culture consciously and improving their expression level of Chinese culture naturally.
Add Chinese Cultural Elements to College English Teaching Content and Diversify Teaching Methods

In the era of network information, it is convenient for teachers to get some English articles or videos about Chinese culture. They can absorb these materials into college English teaching content to raise students' consciousness of learning Chinese culture in English class and develop students’ perception of cultural diversity. In the pre-course preparation, teachers should be fully prepared for the cultural content, excavate the cultural connotation, and disseminate Chinese culture at the same time. In the process of cultural teaching, teachers should be on the global cultural scene and fully understand the feelings of people in other countries to prevent cultural conflict and reduce problems caused by cultural differences, thus building an effective link between people in “The Belt and Road” environment.

Also, traditional teaching methods should be innovated. For various topics such as traditional festivals, customs, poetry and operas, architectural styles, tourist attractions, etc., and different types of communication functions, such as invitations, phone calls, ordering meals, etc., teachers can use lectures, comparison, discussion, report, debate, problem-based learning (PBL) and so on to carry out profound analysis on the cultures of China and other countries along “The Belt and Road” line. Students should be encouraged to play active roles in different activities so that they can expand the understanding of cultural connotation and difference to a certain extent.

Reform the Curriculum and Evaluation System

It is necessary to innovate the traditional curriculum and evaluation system. Cultural courses about countries along “The Belt and Road” line (especially China) are better to be added to the current curriculum. More importantly, bilingual courses should be reasonably set up in accordance with the actual development needs of talents so as to carry out the construction of “The Belt and Road” smoothly. At the same time, since most students’ ability to express Chinese culture in English is still very weak, it is suggested that universities integrate Chinese culture into the testing and evaluation system in bilingual course, and take students’ mastery as an important reference to measure their learning situation and level so as to improve the motivation of students to learn Chinese culture. The test format may include noun interpretation, translation, cultural comparison, point of view interpretation and so on. In doing so, it is hoped to improve students’ humanistic quality, consolidate their knowledge of cultural information, enlarge their vocabularies about Chinese culture, and finally improve their ability to describe Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories in English correctly and appropriately.

Deepen the Development of Practical Teaching

It is quite significant to strengthen the practice of cultural communication, set up the training link according to the ability standard of cultural communication, and
effectively combine classroom teaching and extracurricular culture activities so as to integrate classroom teaching with practice, thus equipping students with intercultural communication capability. For example, students can establish pen friends in friend colleges and universities along “The Belt and Road” line. In addition, students should be encouraged to read more culture-oriented books, and literary activities like singing and recitation of poetry from countries along “The Belt and Road” line are expected to be regularly organized. Teachers should try hard to build a multicultural learning atmosphere so as to enhance students' interest and ability in intercultural communication and dissemination.

CONCLUSIONS

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have repeatedly stressed the importance of cultural diversity in the world. With the implementation of the national “The Belt and Road” initiative, it is significant to carry out cultural output simultaneously with economic output and let the world know more about China. Learning to live together in the context of “The Belt and Road” means that everyone has to have cross-cultural skills and be able to handle conflicts in a pluralistic and complex modern society on the basis of understanding cultural diversity and mutual tolerance. Therefore, in college English teaching, students' cultural consciousness and capability are expected to be developed so that they can use English to express the connotation and characteristics of Chinese culture, tell Chinese stories well in English, and ultimately spread Chinese culture abroad. Students should be guided to view Chinese cultural traditions from a multicultural perspective, eliminate the phenomenon of "Chinese cultural aphasia", enhance cultural confidence, and strengthen the infiltration of Chinese culture, thus promoting international communication, and further promoting the revival of Chinese traditional culture and national development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by the fund from Sichuan Foreign Language and Literature Research Center (No. SCWYH17-05).

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