

# A Review of Participation in the Intercultural Competence Contest

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**Abstract:** Guided by the Belief Theory and the Action Research Theory, this study explores a practical path of “promoting learning through contests and facilitating teaching via contests” by reviewing the preparation, training, participation, and reflection of teachers and students in three intercultural competence contests in 2023, 2024, and 2025. The promotion of students’ participation in the SFLEP Cup National College Students’ Intercultural Competence Contest on personal development and the improvement of teachers’ teaching cannot be ignored. The review plays an important role of “taking a point to drive a face” and “throwing a stone to stir up a thousand waves.”

**Keywords:** Action research; Belief theory; Intercultural competence contest

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## 1. Introduction

Various English contests that students have participated in during their school years are a niche improvement link in the teaching process, which can play a role of “taking a point to drive a face” and “throwing a stone to stir up a thousand waves.” In the teaching process, teachers have always adhered to the concept of encouraging students to participate in various English contests. The preparation process is the process of improvement. If every link is carefully prepared from the start to the end of the contest, both teachers and students will gain inspiration and harvest in the preparation process. Professionally, it has enhanced the theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication, promoted the in-depth exploration of Chinese and Western cultures, improved intercultural communication skills, and comprehensively promoted the English listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. In terms of overall quality, it can improve students’ ability to understand questions, promote the cultivation of psychological quality, and develop students’ team spirit. Promote teaching through contests and promote learning through contests! The promotion of students’ participation in the intercultural competence contest on personal development and the improvement of teachers’ teaching cannot be ignored.

## 2. Preparation, training, participation, and reflection of intercultural competence contests

We sampled three contests in Jilin Province in 2023, 2024, and 2025. This article covers receiving the document, forming a team, studying the document, organizing training, to the final participation in the contest, and the final summary of the contest. It is hoped that everyone will be inspired.

### 2.1. Research theories: Belief Theory [1] and Action Research Theory (K. Lewin's Action Research)<sup>[2]</sup>

Action research refers to research activities that focus on the impact of certain actions on organizational systems. Action research emphasizes that practitioners participate in planned, step-by-step, and reflective research to solve their own problems in action. Lewin<sup>[3]</sup> believed that action research is a research method to solve practical problems through practical actions. This method emphasizes the cooperation between researchers and practitioners, and realizes the unity of theory and practice through the cyclic process of “planning-action-observation-reflection”<sup>[4,5]</sup>. Lewin proposed action research in the 1930s, advocating the application of social psychology theories to solve practical problems, such as community conflict mediation and organizational change. Lewin's action research theory has been widely applied in education, management, social work, and other fields. This study is based on the goal of students participating in the intercultural competence contest, and the training plan and implementation are established to study the role of this belief cultivation concept, its promoting role in practical teaching, or its application in the training of other contest projects. In the preparation for English contests, action research is used to solve the problems in the training process of participating students and improve training methods through teacher-student cooperation.

### 2.2. Plan of SFLEP Cup National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contests

Clarify the educational practice problems to be solved: Summarize relevant experience through students' training for contest ability, and use it to improve students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities in actual classrooms. Formulate an action plan including goals, methods, and evaluation indicators.

Our practical problem is that, according to the document requirements, participating students need to form a team of three to participate in the intercultural competence contest, including case development, presentation, and analysis. Problem: Select three contestants to participate in the intercultural competence contest; select, present, and analyze a case. Evaluation indicators: Participate in the contest and be judged by the contest judges.

Step 1: Send the contest document to the class representative and notify the classmates. Interested students can sign up with the class representative. This step selects students who take the initiative to participate.

2023: A total of seven students signed up. Note: All registered students are taught by the same teacher; some signed up actively, and some were informed by the teacher and participated actively.

2024: Three students signed up initially, and more students signed up later. The total was 22. Several were actively prompted by the teacher to participate, and several took the initiative after hearing about it.

2025: Nine students signed up initially.

Step 2:

Organize gatherings: the purpose is to help students get familiar with each other and break through themselves; develop cases: to exercise problem-solving ability, improve the manuscript while familiarizing themselves with it, and enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities; train to ask and answer questions: to practice listening and the ability to organize and output language immediately. Details are as follows:

The first gathering before the contest: Organize students to discuss the document and determine the preparation aspects. Through the research on that day, students were made aware of the team's tasks: (1) Need to develop a case; (2) Need to enrich the relevant theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication skills; (3) Need to know the number of team members. Students who were hesitant or lacked confidence were mentally prepared that day.

### **2.2.1. SFLEP Cup National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contest in 2023**

After the gathering, several students participated in the research on that day. A student was very active in participation, although there were no substantive cases at that time. Another one organized the development of a case that night, and later all of them studied and researched the theories of intercultural communication skills separately. There are three roles that students choose to play and cooperate with each other. Each role is performed by multiple people, and finally, whoever is competent will play the role.

In addition to reciting the case and organizing the language, problems arose in the actual training process: some students were not in the same class, did not know each other, and naturally felt restrained, especially shy students. In addition, they could not express themselves smoothly, so the first performance was very problematic. Moreover, students from different classes had different courses and class times. It is also a challenge to train at the same time.

To address the actual problems of students, we adopted the following plans: (1) In addition to students familiarizing themselves with the manuscript independently, we added a link for them to ask their own questions; (2) Gather everyone every night to practice for a while (this link was held in the classroom or meeting room) to make the practice vivid, pay attention to intonation, and emphasize that the purpose of the speech is to be passionate and infectious. They presented the case, asked questions, answered questions, recorded time, and controlled time, practicing every day.

After more than 30 days of training, the contest day arrived in 2023. The day before the contest, they visited the venue and walked through it twice. They participated in the contest the next day. During the waiting period on the contest day, one student was so nervous that her hands shook, and another girl took her to walk in the corridor to relieve the tension. On the contest day, the process of presentation and analysis went smoothly. In the link to answering the judges' questions, the first student did not hear the question clearly, so the judge asked again. As a result, the student who was prepared to answer the interpretation of famous quotes understood it and answered the question about case analysis. In the subsequent interpreting of famous quotes, the remaining third student had to answer this part but failed, because the student was very nervous and scored over 60 points.

Summary and analysis: Most of the students told by the teacher did not persist in the training until the end. Those who persisted were those who took the initiative to participate. In addition, after receiving the task of participating in the contest training, they began to pay attention to practicing expression, dared to show themselves in class, practiced a relaxed attitude, and finally coped with the waiting room easily on the contest day and performed freely during the contest. A small imperfection is that the order of answering questions on the contest day did not work according to the plan, resulting in a poor connection. All students who participated in the contest preparation improved their listening, speaking, problem-solving, and team cooperation abilities.

From the perspective of participating in the contest, there are several points to note in selecting personnel: voluntary participation, good English foundation, strong action ability, strong presentation ability, and willingness to invest time and energy in the contest.

From receiving the document in August, organizing case development, training, to participating in the

contest, the whole process took 30 more days, which was all done by the students themselves.

### **2.2.2. SFLEP Cup National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contest in 2024**

Based on the experience in 2023, there were two improvements in 2024. First, the selection of candidates was still the contest mechanism, with attendance checks for each gathering of training. Second, in the training process, the importance of immediate oral output ability was emphasized, which was highlighted at the initial stage of formulating the training plan. In this training, we learned from the experience and lessons of 2023, that is, from the beginning of the contest preparation, we focused on practicing students' hard-working spirit, sentence-making ability, and most importantly, psychological endurance.

Details are as follows: When forming a team for the 2024 intercultural Competence contest, there were five students. Then, as time went by, the teacher continuously notified the classmates, so new members were added one after another, and some students also withdrew in this process.

Organize gatherings and check attendance every time. Familiarize with the document and personnel, and establish team awareness. Develop a case according to the document. The first gathering before the contest: Organize students to discuss the document, let them understand the team's tasks: (1) Need to develop a case; (2) Need to enrich the relevant theoretical knowledge of intercultural communication skills; (3) Need to know a team of three. Everyone was mentally prepared. With clear goals, they performed their duties when acting separately.

The development and analysis of the case were all done by the students themselves. Then the teacher trained them on relevant theoretical books on intercultural communication ability and methods to improve oral English and listening. The training plan is combined with the preparation of some students for the CET-4 and CET-6 exams. That is, students practiced the roles in the case, and each student chose their own role (there are three roles in total; there are many students for the three roles, so each role is performed by several people). After each performance, students asked each other questions to prepare for the subsequent case presentation, analysis, and questioning links. At first, students did not really know what to ask. Combining with the vocabulary and analysis prepared for CET-4 and CET-6, they practiced both sentences and oral sentence-making ability. At the beginning of this process, there were no results, and they felt embarrassed to show it, but as time went by, students became more and more confident.

The final candidates were determined only the night before the contest. The three students were selected before the contest. During this period, the students showed the team spirit of "friendship first, contest second," with modesty and contest, showing the high quality of the students participating in the training and cultivating their comprehensive psychological quality and extraordinary abilities.

The day before the contest, they went to the designated venue to visit the scene and walked through it twice on the stage. After returning to school that night, they conducted another rehearsal. The students calculated the time by themselves, and the PPT was made by the students themselves with the guidance of instructors. On the contest day, the students did not show much tension and brought their own performance props, arriving 50 minutes in advance. The day, the presentation, analysis, questioning, and answering went smoothly, and the interpretation of famous quotes was also perfectly explained. The whole performance ended smoothly according to the previous rehearsal.

Post-contest summary: The personnel were not fixed at the beginning. New members were continuously added in the process of training. The students were enthusiastic, confident, and in high spirits, and the candidates were determined only at the end. For most students participating in the training, this training process greatly

improved their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities and cultivated their psychological quality. For a few students who lacked confidence and could not invest time and energy, the gains were relatively small. Overall, each link of the contest presentation, analysis, and answering questions was well presented.

**Problem:** The biggest problem is that from the perspective of award reputation, the participating students and teachers have put in efforts, but some teachers and students have not received corresponding certificates and rewards. Whether applying to the organizing committee to replace candidates before the contest the next day can be solved every time.

### **2.2.3. SFLEP Cup National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contest in 2025**

The 2025 intercultural contest had a tight schedule and heavy tasks, with less than two weeks from receiving the document to the on-site presentation. We directly determined the candidates and the case as soon as possible. Familiarize with the document, understand the goals, and act separately. Formulate a training plan, familiarize the personnel, and practice impromptu speeches. Students with another contest experience who can speak smoothly familiarized with the case, and have practiced interpreting famous quotes and analyzing the case. A shy student with poor language rarely speaks in class practices speaking in front of others while practicing the manuscript.

The case was still developed by the students themselves. To familiarize themselves as soon as possible, the students gathered to practice several times. They visited the scene the day before the contest and walked through it once on the stage. They also discussed whether to sit or stand at the scene. On the contest day, the students arrived at the dining room early (later learned that it was for rehearsal and did not eat anything).

**Summary:** finished the process of intercultural contest.

For some reason, whether it was personality, unfamiliarity with the manuscript, or being predetermined to participate in the contest, they did not stand up to practice during the rehearsal. Since the candidates were determined in advance without alternative forces, this was a tricky problem. During the training, one person proposed to withdraw from the contest three times (of course, he did not tell the other students, and this student still considered the overall situation; the team contest could be absent if one person was missing). The student who proposed to withdraw did not go all out, and because of this, it was inevitable to delay the training quality, and a state of passive work appeared in the training process.

In this training for the contest, the students sat there as if they did not know anyone, and did not work even when the teacher told them to. The teacher suggested singing to break through, but no one did it; reciting a poem, but no one did it. "I don't know if it was due to lack of competitive awareness or shyness?" Each training did not achieve a state of doing their best at that time.

Although we do not necessarily have to win awards or achieve excellent results in participating in the contest, we should do our best. The necessary professional spirit should be possessed. Is there still room for improvement under competitive training? Introducing a contest mechanism will lead to elimination of the last place, but is it unfair to other students and teachers who do not participate in the contest?

## **2.3. Reflection on intercultural competence contests**

We analyzed the personnel training of these three intercultural competence contests, from receiving the official document at the very beginning to the final participation in the contest, as well as the psychological state of the students and teachers throughout the process. From these three trainings, in the first two times, from the students' perspective, because there were many participants, each role was displayed by different people, and

everyone had a sense of crisis. In this way, there was actually a contest for each role. Every time we trained, the students also tried their best to do their best, because each training was also a selection. After each training, a relatively good effect was presented, that is, progress was made a little bit each time.

### 3. Conclusion

Through a review of the above three experiences of guiding students to participate in the Intercultural Competence Contest, it is concluded that all students who prepared for and received training for the Contest, regardless of whether they finally took the stage or not, have achieved improvements in various aspects and to different degrees: they have gained a deeper understanding of the theories and practices of intercultural communication, and their exploration of Chinese and Western cultures has been further enhanced; their English listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities have been improved. Promoting learning through contests is worthy of persistence, and promoting teaching through contests is worthy of further exploration by teachers.

### Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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