

Online International Peer Interaction: An Exploration of Impacts on Comprehensive Competencies, Global Perspectives, and Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

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Abstract: With the increasing trend of globalization and the rapid advancement of information technology, online learning platforms such as Zoom are becoming increasingly influential in the field of education. The focus of this study was the online international peer interaction based on the Zoom platform, detailing how such interaction programs are conducted and exploring in depth the specific impacts of this interaction mode on students' comprehensive competencies, global perspectives, and cross-cultural communication skills. This research not only provides new practical references for online learning and international education but also offers new research perspectives and directions for educators and researchers.

Keywords: Zoom platform; International peer interaction; Comprehensive competencies; Global perspectives; Cross-cultural communication skills

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1. Introduction

Driven by globalization and information technology innovation, education is undergoing profound changes^[1]. Among them, the online learning mode is more and more prominent in its flexibility and interactivity^[2,3]. There is little doubt that the exponential growth in the use of the Internet and Web-based instruction continues to present educators with considerable opportunities and challenges^[4-6]. Especially in the context of the global epidemic, online communication platforms such as Zoom have become an indispensable part of education, providing opportunities for cross-regional and cross-time-zone learning and international exchange^[7,8]. In this trend, using online platforms to cultivate students' comprehensive competencies and cross-cultural communication skills, as well as broaden their global perspectives, has become a central issue of education. Based on the Zoom platform, this study explores the impact of online international peer interaction on students' comprehensive competence, global perspectives, and cross-cultural communication skills by using the method of case study. The following section details the specifics of the International Peer Interaction Program and its impact on students' three

competencies above.

2. International peer interaction program

The paper takes the online international peer interaction program that the author participated in during college as the research sample. Through practical experience, it is found that such programs have a profound impact on the three competencies of students. A detailed description of these programs is as follows.

2.1. Online international peer interaction

2.1.1. Program overview

In November 2021, Jinzhong College of Information, Prospect College received an invitation from the Honors Program at Northern Illinois University to jointly conduct an online Chinese learning partner program. Through a selection process, over 30 Chinese and foreign teachers and students organized and held the first Honorary Partner Matching Conference on the Zoom platform. The program aimed to improve students' global perspectives and cultural sensitivity through a regularized bilateral online learning partner program, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and respect between students from the two countries^[9].

2.1.2. Program content

First of all, a series of questions related to cross-cultural communication were posed by teachers, which was intended to guide students to understand the concepts, customs, and values of different cultural backgrounds better.

Secondly, Chinese and foreign students discussed these questions in one-on-one or small groups. Students, during these discussions, inevitably encountered cultural differences and conflicts. However, the opportunities provided by these differences were highly valuable learning opportunities. Through teacher guidance, students gradually acquired the ability to appreciate and respect multiculturalism and promote cross-cultural understanding and integration.

After a series of discussions and exchanges, the Chinese and foreign students worked together to sum up the cultural differences on the basis of discussions. This process was not merely a review and summary of the discussion content but also a deep reflection and understanding of cultural differences between China and other countries. Students attempted to view issues from multiple perspectives and understand viewpoints and positions from different cultural backgrounds, thereby gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the world.

The results were then presented by the students individually or in groups. This process provided an essential opportunity for students to demonstrate learning outcomes and thinking skills.

2.2. Online Chinese culture classes

2.2.1. Program overview

In January 2022, Jinzhong College of Information and Northern Illinois University jointly conducted a four-month series of Zoom online courses on Chinese culture. The program involved 24 Chinese and foreign teachers and students. This program combined teacher-led instruction and peer-assisted learning, aiming to deepen the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures among teachers and students from both schools, enhance students' comprehensive competencies and cross-cultural communication skills, and lay a solid foundation for future international exchange and cooperation.

2.2.2. Program content

Five experienced Chinese teachers from Jinzhong College of Information's Prospect College led the program and were deeply integrated with Northern Illinois University's Chinese Language and Business Practices course. The course was carefully planned, covering 12 themes, such as the analysis of traditional Chinese culture, appreciation of Chinese poetry, etc., aiming at allowing students to experience Chinese culture comprehensively and deeply.

In terms of the teaching process, Chinese teachers first gave fascinating lectures on each topic, introducing the relevant knowledge clearly and understandably.

Later, the foreign teachers used their unique international perspective to compare and analyze cultural differences, put forward thought-provoking questions, and trigger in-depth thinking and discussion between Chinese and foreign teachers and students.

For assessment, Chinese students were required to conduct an all-English classroom presentation at the end of the course, with the theme "China in My Eyes." For American students, a Chinese Proficiency Test was administered at the end of the course to assess their language progress and achievement throughout the course.

3. Impact on comprehensive competencies

3.1. Enhancement of critical thinking skills

Online international peer interaction provided students with a platform for diverse discussions. On this platform, students were exposed to a variety of views and opinions, prompting them to conduct in-depth thinking and analysis.

For example, in the online Chinese learning partner program, Chinese and American students often encounter cultural differences and conflicts in their discussions. In order to communicate effectively, students need to carefully analyze the other person's point of view, put forward strong arguments to support their position, and carry out logical reasoning and debate. This process greatly improves students' critical thinking skills and enables them to think more rationally and comprehensively when faced with complex problems.

3.2. Improvement of problem-solving skills

Students can work together to solve complex problems in collaborative projects and problem-oriented learning activities in online international peer interactions. In the process, not only is student autonomy strengthened, but critical thinking is also fostered^[10-12], and it is also effective in knowledge integration^[12,13].

3.3. Development of teamwork and leadership skills

The online international peer interaction program was divided into two parts—a team project and a group discussion. In addition, through the online group form, it can also reduce the loneliness of students learning and promote their exchanges^[14]. It gave students the chance to showcase their leadership skills as well as their capacity for teamwork. Through cross-cultural exchanges, students picked up essential pointers on effective communication and collaboration in varied settings. Learning these can be invaluable.

Consider the case of an online Chinese learning partner program where students engaged in collaborative tasks that demanded professional knowledge as well as communication and coordination skills. Participation in such tasks contributed significantly to the development of students' teamwork and leadership skills.

4. Impact on global perspectives

4.1. Enhancement of cross-cultural understanding

Through online international peer interaction, students have the opportunity to engage in in-depth discussions with peers from different cultures. Through discussion, students learn about the culture, history, social system, and values of other countries. More importantly, they are still reflecting and re-recognizing their own culture. It is evident that intercultural communication enables students to look at issues from multiple perspectives and to understand and respect different cultural perspectives and customs.

For example, in the online Chinese Learning Partner Program, Chinese and American students discussed cultural differences and similarities to deepen their understanding of each other's cultures so that students could perform better in class and practical communication^[15]. This process is not only a process of transferring knowledge but also a method of promoting students' tolerance and acceptance of multiculturalism.

4.2. Expansion of international perspectives

In the online Chinese culture class taught by Chinese and foreign teachers, teachers compared and analyzed Eastern and Western cultures through cases and guided students to think about cultural integration and conflict in the context of globalization. In doing so, students build a foundation of knowledge and develop the ability to think globally.

4.3. Inspiration of international cooperation spirit

The cooperative spirit of students from both countries was enhanced in the online learning international peer interaction program. Through participation in intercultural group discussions and project collaborations, students learned how to communicate and collaborate effectively in a multicultural environment. The process lays the foundation for their future participation in international cooperation.

Chinese and American students collaborated on course assignments and presentations during team activities for the online Chinese culture course. This is not only the embodiment of their teamwork spirit, but also the practice of cross-cultural communication skills.

5. Impact on cross-cultural communication skills

5.1. Promotion of cultural awareness

It is well known that cultures are unique and diverse. In the online Chinese language learning partner program, Chinese and American students discussed cultural habits in daily life and ways to celebrate festivals. They gained a deeper understanding of each other's cultures. Through the online platform Zoom, students from both countries increase their awareness of each other's cultural uniqueness and diversity in active communication.

5.2. Enhancement of cultural adaptability

Through joint participation in courses and projects, Chinese and American students gradually adapt to each other's communication methods and thinking patterns. In cross-cultural interactions, Chinese and American students deeply feel the different ways of thinking in various cultural environments. More importantly, it also fosters practical communication skills and a sense of boundaries in cross-cultural contexts.

5.3. Cultivation of cultural empathy

The online learning international peer interaction program had its own set of challenges, cultural conflicts, and misunderstandings between students during discussion sessions. However, through teacher guidance and peer

interaction, students learned to listen to different opinions, find cultural commonalities, and resolve conflicts. Aimed to cultivate cultural empathy in students, this process promotes appreciation and understanding of various cultural backgrounds.

5.4. Improvement of cultural communication skills

Cross-cultural communication imposes two requirements on students. On the one hand, it requires students to have proficient language skills. Secondly, it requires students to have the ability to understand and respect cultural differences. The implementation of the online international peer interaction program provided students with numerous opportunities to practice intercultural communication and helped them improve their cultural communication skills.

In the online Chinese culture class, Chinese and American students had frequent cross-cultural exchanges through group discussions and collaborative projects. In this process, students initially master how to communicate in appropriate languages in a cross-cultural environment, which enables them to communicate more smoothly and effectively.

6. Conclusion

This paper explores Zoom platform-based online peer interaction and reveals the significant effect of this interaction model on enhancing students' comprehensive competencies, expanding global perspectives, and improving cross-cultural communication skills. These findings not only provide new practical references for online learning and international education but also provide new research perspectives and thinking directions for educators and researchers.

In the future, research can further explore the impact of different types of online interaction patterns on student development and explore how to optimize these interaction patterns to maximize students' comprehensive competencies, global perspectives, and cross-cultural communication skills. Through continuous improvement and innovation of online international peer interaction, we can better meet the challenges of education under the background of globalization and provide strong support for students' all-round development.

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