

# Research on Enhancing Students' Intercultural Awareness and Competence in English Teaching

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**Abstract:** With the deepening of globalization, intercultural communication has become an important part of people's daily lives and work. English, as an international language, plays a vital role in intercultural communication. However, simple language knowledge can no longer meet the needs of modern society. Students need to have intercultural awareness and competence to better adapt to the development of globalization. Therefore, it is particularly important to improve students' intercultural awareness and competence in English teaching. This paper will discuss how to improve students' intercultural awareness and competence in English teaching, which includes three parts. The first part introduces the definition of intercultural awareness and competence. The second part explores the importance of intercultural awareness and competence to students, which can help students better understand and respect different cultures, stimulate students' innovative thinking and creativity, and cultivate critical thinking skills, and is also of great significance to students' professional development, personal growth, and social responsibility. The third part discusses the effective methods and strategies to improve students' intercultural awareness and competence in teaching, including carrying out cultural discussion and debate, introducing diverse materials, creating intercultural experience teaching activities, and using virtual learning tools. To a certain extent, this study can enrich the theoretical research in the field of intercultural awareness and competence, help to improve students' intercultural awareness and competence, and provide certain practical guidance for educators to teach intercultural courses.

**Keywords:** Intercultural awareness; Intercultural competence; English teaching

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## 1. Introduction

Language and culture are inseparable, which means that culture affects language and language reflects culture<sup>[1]</sup>. In today's globalization, cultural and intercultural communication are becoming more and more important. English, as an international language, is a bridge connecting different countries and cultures. As one of the main goals of English teaching, improving students' intercultural awareness and competence has become a common concern in the educational field. Intercultural awareness and competence refer to the ability of students to understand and respect different cultural backgrounds and values, adapt to different cultural environments, and communicate

with foreign people. Improving students' intercultural awareness and competence is not only conducive to cultivating their global vision and intercultural communication skills but is also the basic requirement of modern society for talent. Educators need to help students cultivate intercultural awareness and competence through effective teaching methods and strategies. This paper discusses how to improve students' intercultural awareness and competence in English teaching, including introducing the definition of intercultural awareness and competence, exploring the importance of intercultural awareness and competence to students, and the methods to effectively improve students' intercultural awareness and competence.

## **2. Definition of intercultural awareness and competence**

Interculture refers to communicating and interacting in different cultural environments. English plays an important communication function in the process of globalization and is the main tool for people to carry out "cross-language communication" [2]. In the era of modern globalization, intercultural communication is becoming increasingly common. People need intercultural awareness and competence to better adapt to different cultural environments and communicate and cooperate. Improving foreign language skills, communication skills, cultural intelligence, and other aspects can help individuals improve their ability of intercultural communication and cooperation.

Intercultural awareness can also be called cultural intuition [3]. Intercultural awareness refers to people recognizing the differences between different cultures, and understanding and respecting cultural backgrounds, values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and behavioral norms. This awareness enables individuals to realize the differences between themselves and others, so as to better understand and appreciate the uniqueness of different cultures. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to recognize different cultural characteristics and symbol systems and to communicate, cooperate, and interact between different cultures, including the ability to understand, respect, and accept other cultures, as well as the ability to respond flexibly and adapt to intercultural environments. Intercultural competence enables individuals to transcend their cultural background and communicate and cooperate effectively with people from different cultures.

In short, intercultural awareness is an individual's keen awareness of the differences between different cultures, while intercultural competence is an individual's ability to cope with different cultural environments. Through intercultural competence and awareness, people can better adapt to different cultural environments and promote intercultural communication and understanding. Intercultural awareness and competence are very important qualities in modern society and their importance in English teaching is self-evident. By developing students' intercultural competence and awareness, we can help them better adapt to a globalized environment, understand and appreciate other cultures, and become citizens with a global perspective and international understanding.

## **3. The importance of intercultural awareness and competence for students**

The importance of intercultural awareness and competence for students is self-evident. Kluckhohn [4] emphasized that having intercultural awareness requires people to be able to understand a "cultural map," which is the unity of values, customs, norms, and systems of a particular society. With the acceleration of globalization, students need to have intercultural awareness and competence to adapt to and integrate into different cultural environments.

First of all, intercultural awareness and competence can help students better understand and respect different cultures. Under the background of transnational communication and internationalization, students

are likely to meet people from different countries and regions, and understanding their cultural differences becomes a necessary competence. Facing different cultural environments, students with intercultural awareness and competence can better adapt to and integrate into the new cultural environment, reducing the troubles and pressures caused by cultural differences. Only with sufficient intercultural awareness and competence can we establish harmonious interpersonal relationships and avoid misunderstandings and contradictions caused by cultural conflicts.

Secondly, intercultural awareness and competence can stimulate students' innovative thinking and creativity and cultivate critical thinking skills. Exposure to and understanding of different cultures can stimulate students' innovative thinking and creativity. In a diverse cultural environment, students can look at problems from different perspectives and come up with more creative and practical solutions. In addition, on the basis of understanding and respecting different cultures, Students are able to critically think and analyze differences and similarities between cultures, resulting in a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding.

In addition, intercultural awareness and competence are crucial for students' career development. Today's workplace is no longer limited to local competition but faces global competition. Employers often value candidates' good intercultural awareness and competence in interviews and jobs. This not only reflects a person's openness and adaptability but also means that they can better adapt to an international work environment, and communicate and collaborate with people from different cultural backgrounds. Students with intercultural awareness and competence can better understand and respect other countries and cultures, thus developing a more global perspective. This helps them better adapt and develop in a global society.

Lastly, intercultural awareness and competence are also important for students' personal growth and sense of social responsibility. By communicating and interacting with people of different cultures, students can broaden their horizons and improve their self-cognition and self-awareness. They can better understand the advantages and disadvantages of their own culture, and better reflect on and improve their behavior and values. At the same time, intercultural awareness and competence can also help to cultivate students' sense of social responsibility, so that they can pay attention to and care about global issues, and actively participate in social welfare undertakings.

To sum up, the importance of intercultural competence and awareness to students cannot be ignored. It not only helps students to better understand and respect different cultures and stimulates students' creative thinking and critical thinking skills but also has a positive impact on students' career development, personal growth, and social responsibility. Therefore, educators should pay attention to cultivating students' intercultural competence and awareness in English teaching.

#### **4. Effective methods and strategies for improving students' intercultural awareness and competence in English teaching**

In today's globalized world, intercultural awareness and competence are becoming more and more important to students. Through English teaching, students can improve their intercultural awareness and competence and understand and adapt to different cultural environments better. In order to cultivate students' intercultural awareness and competence, we should adhere to the principles of practicality, ideology, and flexibility in English teaching <sup>[5]</sup>. In the process of teaching English, educators should pay attention to the cultivation of students' intercultural awareness and competence. The specific methods and strategies are as follows.

##### **4.1. Carrying out cultural discussion and debate activities**

Through cultural discussion and debate activities, students can learn to respect different cultural views and

customs and enhance their cultural sensitivity. Teachers can organize cultural discussion and debate activities in the classroom to enable students to learn intercultural communication and solve intercultural conflicts. (1) Selecting relevant topics: Teachers select topics related to different cultures, such as customs, traditional festivals, social etiquette, etc., ensuring these topics relate to different cultural backgrounds and provide students with intercultural learning opportunities. (2) Providing relevant background knowledge and related materials: Before the discussion and debate begin, teachers provide students with some basic background knowledge and historical background. This will help them better understand the backgrounds and characteristics of different cultures. Teachers need to prepare some articles, video clips, or pictures that are relevant to the topic and make sure that the material shows the differences and similarities between different cultures. Students can have a discussion after reading the materials or watching the videos. (3) Arranging group discussions: Teachers divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss and share their opinions on the topic. Students are encouraged to discuss the strengths and challenges of different cultures and how to increase understanding and communication between cultures. (4) Organizing debate activity: Teachers organize debate activities to allow students to debate on behalf of different cultural positions. This will help them understand the views and values of other cultures, while improving their debate skills and intercultural communication skills. (5) Leading students to compare and reflect: At the end of the discussion and debate, teachers lead students to compare and reflect. Students are asked to think about the commonalities and differences between different cultures and reflect on their views and prejudices.

Through cultural discussion and debate, students will have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the differences and similarities between different cultures. This will help improve their intercultural awareness and competence and develop their intercultural communication skills. It will also promote the development of students' critical thinking and debate skills.

## **4.2. Introducing diverse materials**

Introducing diverse materials is an important way to enhance students' intercultural awareness and competence. Teachers can use articles, music, movies, pictures, etc. from various countries and cultures to introduce students to other cultures and to stimulate their thinking and discussion. (1) Selecting representative textbooks and materials: Teachers choose textbooks and materials covering different countries and cultures to expose students to different cultural perspectives and ways of expression. For example, English textbooks that include different cultural backgrounds such as British and American culture, Asian culture, African culture, etc. are chosen (2) Using multimedia resources: Using multimedia resources such as movies, television series, and documentaries, students can intuitively understand the customs, historical backgrounds, and values of different cultures. The content of many movies or videos itself is a microcosm of a certain aspect of a culture<sup>[6]</sup>. These resources can help students better understand intercultural differences and similarities. (3) Introducing literary works: Literature is a window to understanding different cultures. By reading literary works of different cultures, students can gain a deeper understanding of language expression and thinking methods of different cultures. Teachers can guide students to analyze and compare literary works of different cultures and deepen their understanding of interculture. (4) Using Internet resources: The Internet is an important source of access to diverse materials. Teachers can guide students through social media, news websites, cultural exchange platforms, etc. to understand cultural dynamics, social phenomena, and people's lifestyles in different countries. This helps students broaden their horizons and improve intercultural awareness. (5) Organizing classroom discussions and activities: Teachers organize regular classroom discussions and activities to allow students to share their observations and feelings about different cultures. This can stimulate students to think and express their desires

and promote their initiative and creativity in intercultural learning. (6) Developing language practice skills: Students are encouraged to participate in English corners, cultural festivals, language exchange, and other activities, so that they can practice their intercultural communication skills. By communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, students can better master language knowledge and improve intercultural awareness and competence.

In short, English teachers can effectively improve students' intercultural awareness and competence by introducing diversified materials. When selecting materials, they should pay attention to the representativeness and diversity of materials and also combine them with the actual situation of students and hobbies for guidance and teaching.

### **4.3. Creating intercultural experience teaching activities**

According to the psychological changes and development of individuals in dealing with cultural differences, Bennett <sup>[7]</sup> divided this dynamic process into six stages, namely denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration of differences. By creating intercultural experiences, students can experience and understand the customs, traditions, and practices of other cultures. (1) Simulating the real situation: Teachers simulate real intercultural communication situations in class, allowing students to role-play from different cultural backgrounds and communicate with each other. This can help students experience and understand different cultural values and communication methods. (2) Carrying out cultural comparison activities: Teachers organize cultural comparison activities for students to explore the characteristics, customs, traditions, etc. of different countries and cultures. Through comparative analysis, students can better understand the differences and similarities between cultures. (3) Using language exchange programs: Students are encouraged to participate in language exchange programs and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. This can help students understand the language expressions and communication methods of different cultures, while improving their language skills. (4) Taking advantage of international festivals: Teachers take advantage of international festivals to organize celebrations and introduce the backgrounds and traditions of different cultures. For example, during Christmas, teachers can introduce the origin and celebration of Christmas in the West, while comparing similar festivals in other cultures. (5) Providing an immersive learning environment: Teachers create an immersive learning environment, so that students can experience different cultures in an English language environment. For example, English Corner, English drama performances, English summer camps, and other activities can be organized, so that students have the opportunity to experience the charm of different cultures. (6) Encouraging independent learning: Teachers guide students to look for and learn materials and information about different cultures independently. For example, teachers can recommend relevant websites, books, movies, and other resources, so that students can explore the characteristics and values of different cultures independently. (7) Reflecting and summarizing: After the intercultural experience, English teachers organize reflection and summarization sessions for students, and let them share their feelings and learning achievements. This will help students deepen their intercultural knowledge and understanding, and cultivate their critical thinking and expression skills.

By creating intercultural experience, English teachers can help students better understand and adapt to different cultures, and improve their intercultural awareness and competence. In the process of teaching, teachers should pay attention to students' actual situation and needs and flexibly use different teaching methods and means to guide students to actively participate in intercultural experience activities.

### **4.4. Using virtual learning tools**

Zhang <sup>[8]</sup> believed that teachers should make full use of information technology to cultivate students' cultural

awareness. Using virtual learning tools such as online platforms and cultural information websites, students can understand and study the cultures of other countries through the network. (1) Using virtual reality technology: Virtual reality technology can simulate real intercultural communication scenarios, allowing students to experience different cultural customs, social customs, and values. This immersive experience can deepen students' understanding and understanding of intercultural. (2) Using online learning platforms: The online learning platform can provide diversified intercultural learning resources, including videos, audio, pictures, texts, etc. Students can choose learning materials independently on the platform for personalized learning. (3) Using social media: Social media is an important form of virtual learning tool. Through social media, students can communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds online, and learn about their culture and lifestyle. This communication can improve students' intercultural awareness and competence, while promoting their language learning. (4) Using online games and simulation software: Online games and simulation software can help students understand the history, cultural traditions, and social phenomena of different cultures. Through interactive experiences of games and simulation software, students can improve intercultural awareness and competence in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. (5) Making use of online resources: Through network resources, students can be guided to independently find and learn materials and information about different cultures. For example, relevant cultural websites, blogs, forums, and other resources can be recommended to allow students to independently learn and explore intercultural issues. (6) Organizing online discussions and activities: Teachers organize regular online discussions and activities to allow students to share their observations and feelings about different cultures. This can stimulate students to think and express their desires and promote their initiative and creativity in intercultural learning. Note that when using virtual learning tools to improve students' intercultural awareness and competence, the following points need to be noted: choose the virtual learning tools suitable for students, and consider their age, interest, language level, and other factors; ensure the safety and reliability of virtual learning tools to avoid problems or adverse effects in the use of students; guide students to use virtual learning tools correctly, and cultivate their autonomous learning ability and critical thinking ability; combine with traditional teaching methods, give full play to the advantages of virtual learning tools; teachers should evaluate and summarize the effectiveness of virtual learning tools regularly, and improve and adjust them according to feedback and suggestions.

In a word, teachers can effectively cultivate students' intercultural awareness and competence by using virtual learning tools, and make these tools better serve students' learning. However, in the process of using these tools, we should pay attention to their appropriateness, safety, reliability, and practicality, so as to avoid the negative impact of these tools on students.

## 5. Conclusion

It is a long-term and arduous task to improve students' intercultural awareness and competence in English teaching <sup>[9]</sup>. Teachers need to constantly update their teaching concepts and methods, help students truly understand and respect different cultural backgrounds and values through effective teaching methods and strategies, cultivate students' ability to adapt to different cultural environments and communicate with foreigners, and improve students' intercultural awareness and competence. Meanwhile, students need to actively participate in classroom activities and strive to improve their language and intercultural communication skills. In the face of international cultural exchange, it is necessary to build good English lessons and improve English communication practice, so as to truly improve students' intercultural communication skills <sup>[10]</sup>. Only by joint efforts of teachers and students can we cultivate excellent talents with global vision and intercultural communication skills and contribute to the promotion of globalization.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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