

# **A Strategic Study on Cultivating Business Students' Intercultural Competence from the Perspective of AOL**

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## **Abstract**

With the development of economic globalization and education internationalization, cross-cultural business communication activities are increased rapidly, and cross-cultural competence has become a basic quality necessary for modern international business talents. On the basis of exploring the connotation of cross-cultural competence, this study focuses on the cultivation of students' cross-cultural competence in College English teaching from the perspective of AOL (Assurance of Learning). This paper elaborates on the approaches of cultivating students' intercultural competence from three aspects: setting training goal, designing cultivating plan and selecting performance evaluation observation points. At the same time, some feasible suggestions and strategies are put forward.

Key words: AOL; Intercultural competence; Business talent; Implementing measures

## **1. Introduction**

With the advent of the era of economic globalization, business contacts between people with different cultural backgrounds are becoming more frequent. Intercultural communication competence plays an important role in the international business activities. Cultivating international business talents with intercultural communication skills has become an important and urgent task for business education. For English teachers in business colleges and universities, it is worth studying and exploring how to make teaching plans and improve curriculum, teaching mode and teaching content based on the requirements of learning quality assurance system, so as to cultivate students' intercultural awareness and eventually make them adapt to the needs of international competition and become high-quality talents with global vision and knowledge of international rules.

## **2. The Concept Definition and Related Research at Home and Abroad**

In the past three decades, the academic circles have conducted extensive research and repeated discussion on intercultural competence. Martin & Hammer (1989) explained it from the perspective of social skills, while Kim (1992) explained it from the perspective of psychology. Michael Byram (1997) proposed a model of intercultural competence in which knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness were interdependent. Darla Deardorff (2006) proposed a pyramid model of intercultural competence, which included attitude, knowledge, skills at the individual level and internal and external outcomes at the interaction level. Combined with the context of foreign language education in China in the new era, Sun Youzhong (2016) proposed that intercultural competence included: respecting the cultural diversity of the world, having intercultural empathy and critical cultural awareness; mastering basic theoretical knowledge and analytical

methods of intercultural research; being familiar with the history and current situation of the target country, and understanding the basic characteristics and similarities and differences of Chinese and foreign cultures; being able to interpret and evaluate different cultural phenomena, texts and products; helping people with different linguistic and cultural background to have intercultural communication appropriately and effectively.

To sum up, Chinese and foreign scholars have different perspectives on the research and definition of intercultural competence, but there are many similarities, which can be summarized as follows: intercultural competence refers to the ability of communicators to communicate effectively, appropriately and smoothly with people from different cultural backgrounds. The connotation of intercultural competence includes three levels: (1) Knowledge level, including specific cultural values, value standards and cultural differences; (2) Skill level, including learning ability and executive ability; (3) Attitude level, including communication management ability (emotion control), cognitive ability (openness, innovative thinking and attention to differences) and emotional strength (intrinsic motivation and spirit of pursuit).

### 3. The Path Design and Implementation of Intercultural Competence

#### Training Based on AOL

##### 3.1 Path Design of Intercultural Competence Training Based on AOL

AOL is the abbreviation of “Assurance of Learning”, also the teaching quality assurance standard formulated by Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Its connotation is to design a curriculum system based on projects and implement a teaching process, which mainly consists of the following parts: (1) The curriculum should meet the learning objectives; (2) Undergraduate education should equip students with basic business knowledge, and also general skills, such as intercultural communication skills, critical thinking ability, leadership ability and teamwork; (3) The curriculum should be designed to achieve a balance between academics and practice, and promote interaction between students and students, students and teacher (Li Yuelin & Liang Na, 2014, p.7); (4) High priority shall be given to performance accountability and continuous improvement; discover the main problems of teaching and learning when collecting, analyzing and publicizing course evaluation information, formulate improvement plans for teaching, propose new learning objectives, and continuously improve the quality of course teaching.

Based on the requirements of Assurance of Learning (AOL), the pathway for the development of student’ intercultural competence shall be designed by combining the three levels of intercultural competence development (knowledge, skills and attitudes), focusing on setting training goals, developing implementation measures and selecting performance evaluation modes (see Figure 1)

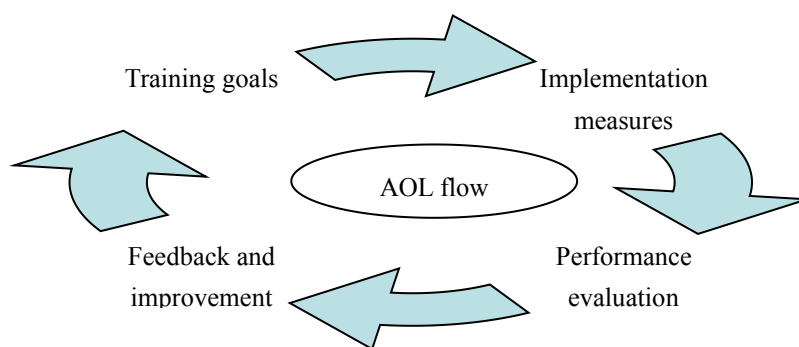


Figure 1 AOL Flow Chart

## 3.2 Specific Implementation of Intercultural Competence Training

Combined with the connotation of intercultural competence, this paper specifically analyzes and designs the three dimensions of knowledge, skills and attitudes of intercultural communicative competence at three levels, namely, goal, implementation measures and performance evaluation, according to the specific requirements of Assurance of Learning (AOL).

### 3.2.1 Knowledge Level

In the cultivation of intercultural competence, knowledge acquisition comes first. It includes the acquisition of language knowledge and cultural knowledge, as well as the improvement of cultural understanding. Language knowledge refers to the individual independent knowledge of language system, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and so on. Cultural knowledge includes superficial cultural knowledge such as diet, daily life and artistic creation, as well as deep cultural knowledge such as belief, faith and values.

First of all, the training goal should be set: the study of language knowledge and cultural knowledge should be carried out simultaneously, never doing one and neglecting the other. In addition, students' understanding of mother tongue culture and heterogeneous culture should be strengthened, especially the similarities and differences between the two cultures, in order to lay a solid foundation for cultivating positive communicative motivation and realizing the transformation of knowledge into practical ability. Secondly, the following measures should be taken: (1) to adjust the curriculum and carry out intercultural teaching: the purpose of basic level teaching is to enrich students' knowledge of Chinese and foreign cultures and cultivate their awareness of cultural differences. Specific Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge can be appropriately introduced into the English curriculum, with implicit teaching as the main form, or independent courses can be set up to teach students the basic knowledge related to Chinese culture. To improve the students' level, courses can be offered on the basis of language and cultural knowledge, mainly including cultural and intercultural communication courses, so as to help students enhance their cultural and intercultural awareness and improve their intercultural communication skills. (2) To make use of network resources to offer authentic context: the multimedia network environment has created extremely favorable conditions for the cultivation of university students' intercultural communication skills, which can make the teaching content more vivid. The network not only has huge language and cultural learning resources, but also provides a good communication platform. Network broadcasting, film and television programs, electronic newspapers and magazines, tourism and catering business are all based on texts, audio and video as the media, presenting vivid, original and authentic materials. Students can easily put themselves in the situation, which maximizes their understanding and accumulation of foreign culture, customs and other aspects of knowledge, enhancing their cultural understanding ability. (3) To select the mode of performance evaluation: the knowledge level evaluation is mainly carried out from the dimension of cognitive ability, and is carried out in the form of final assignment. Students should choose a topic from the ones provided by the teacher and complete a thesis of about 800 words with their group members (2-3 students / group).

### 3.2.2 Skill Level

The skill training includes language communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, and non-verbal communication skills such as body language, paralanguage, object language and environmental language, as well as the ability to use communication strategies.

(1) Setting training goals. Learners are able to describe and explain the mother culture, foreign culture and intercultural process, and reflect the ability of self-regulation, teamwork, criticism, tolerance, decision-making and speculation in the specific intercultural context. (2) Formulating the implementation measures. An authentic language environment is provided so that learners can observe and participate personally. Through the effective combination of cognitive learning and experiential learning, knowledge can be transformed into skills. For

example, the activities such as Chinese and foreign cultural forums, global understanding courses and short-term exchange programs can be held. Through a variety of international exchanges, students can experience intercultural experience, feel the culture, local conditions and customs of the target language countries, improve their awareness of intercultural communication. (3) Selecting the mode of performance evaluation. The skill level evaluation starts from two dimensions: learning ability and executive ability, which can be carried out in the form of scenario simulation. Students need to choose a role from the scene provided by the teacher. 3-4 students per group design and perform an activity involving intercultural content. Alternatively, teachers can give objective evaluation by observing students' overall performance in courses such as global understanding.

### **3.2.3 Attitude and emotion level**

Attitude and emotion specifically refer to the self-consciousness, cultural relative consciousness and communicative will.

(1) Setting the training goal. Successful intercultural communication requires participants to have a sense of cultural relative consciousness, learn to recognize and accept different cultures, eliminate cultural prejudice, tolerate cultural differences, and cultivate positive communication motivation. (2) Formulating the implementation measures: (i) Carrying out case analysis, group discussion, seminars, etc. Guiding learners to actively explore and discover the differences between cultures. Case analysis is a comprehensive training process of intercultural knowledge, consciousness, thinking and communicative competence. There are many cases of intercultural context, including daily communication, foreign cultural experience, success or failure of intercultural communication and so on. Students should be encouraged to analyze and explain typical cases reflecting business culture conflicts, and discuss them in groups to explore the differences between foreign culture and native culture. Let students develop their creative thinking, accumulate intercultural knowledge and experience, and improve their intercultural communication skills by assigning special tasks, group discussion and report, or role playing. (ii) Organizing cultural lectures. As an effective means of imparting knowledge, lectures are essential for the cultivation of intercultural competence. Relevant cultural knowledge, such as the essential characteristics and functions of culture, the contents and categories contained in culture, the values and customs and norms of different cultures, etc., can be imparted to students through lectures. A series of lectures on cultural knowledge constituted by different cultural themes is also conducive to the accumulation of systematic cultural knowledge. (iii) Having students read the classics to broaden their cultural vision. Reading the classics is an important way for students to improve their cultural taste and aesthetic taste, cultivate moral quality, develop healthy personality, develop sound personality and enrich their spiritual world. For students, reading is the most reliable and abundant source of cultural knowledge. Extensive reading helps to improve their sensitivity to cultural differences and form a rational intercultural attitude and an open, inclusive and objective intercultural mind. (3) Selecting the mode of performance evaluation. The evaluation of attitude can start from the three dimensions: communication management ability, cognitive ability and emotional strength, and be carried out in the form of case analysis and discussion. Each group (3-5 students) is required to draw conclusions on the basis of reading cases, analyzing cases and group discussion, and explain the validity of the conclusions.

## **4. Conclusion**

As China's global economic status and international influence continue to rise, the cultivation of composite business talents with solid business expertise and intercultural competence has become an important task for colleges and universities to carry out the sacred mission of "educating people for the Party and cultivating talents for the country". The cultivation of intercultural competence is a systematic project, which is fundamentally the cultivation of students' comprehensive cultural literacy. In the new historical period, it is

necessary to respect the cultural diversity of the world, have intercultural empathy and critical cultural awareness, understand and analyze the value standards and cultural differences of specific cultures objectively, at the same time take into account the excellent culture of our own country and nation, firmly establish cultural self-confidence, and cultivate students' national security consciousness and profound national sentiment.

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