

# *Study on Henan Undergraduates' Intercultural Competence under the "One Belt One Road" Initiative*

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**Abstract:** The “One Belt One Road” initiative has brought opportunities and challenges to the cultivation of intercultural communication talents in China. Taking the implementation of the “One Belt One Road” initiative as the background, based on the investigation of the current situation of undergraduates' intercultural competence in Henan Province, this paper analyses the existing state of the intercultural communication competence of undergraduates in Henan Province and puts forward some countermeasures and suggestions for the improvement of undergraduates intercultural communication competence, with a view to enlightening the cultivation of intercultural communication talents in Henan and serving the overall development of “One Belt One Road”.

## 1. Introduction

The “One Belt One Road” initiative aims to actively develop economic cooperation with countries along the “One Belt One Road”, and jointly build a community of interests, a community of shared future and a community of responsibility featuring political mutual trust, economic integration and cultural inclusion. There exist great differences in historical traditions, languages, social systems and religious beliefs among countries along the “One Belt One Road”. The construction of “One Belt One Road” has encountered many problems and challenges. Facing the great changes in history, Henan is increasingly moving towards the world. Henan undergraduates are shouldering the important task of serving the national “One Belt One Road” initiative. It is the important mission of undergraduates to go into international organizations, go to the international stage, tell Chinese stories and spread the voice of China. The importance of improving the intercultural communication competence of Henan undergraduates is becoming increasingly prominent.

## 2. Literature Review

In the context of globalization, intercultural competence is the ability and qualification that all citizens should have today [1]. The concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) can be

traced back to the 1970s when Hymes, Ruben, Hammer et al. and other scholars put forward theories about intercultural communicative competence. Ruben (1976) believed that intercultural competence includes attitude, role, empathy, interaction, respect, etc., and expounded in detail the importance of effective and appropriate communication in intercultural communication. In terms of promoting intercultural competence [2], Hammer et al (1978) divided the effectiveness of intercultural communication into three dimensions, namely, trying to solve psychological stress, effective communication and establishing relationships [3]. The early studies of these scholars provided preliminary research data for the connotation and components of intercultural competence, and provided a theoretical basis for the further development of the concept of intercultural competence. In the past four decades, foreign scholars have put forward many different terms and definitions of intercultural competence, such as intercultural competence, intercultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity [4-6]. Most scholars state that knowledge, attitude, skills and awareness are the core elements of intercultural competence.

The study of intercultural communication was introduced into China in the early 1980s. Since the 21st century, many Chinese scholars have conducted in-depth research on ICC. The related research can be summarized as the following aspects. First of all, scholars study the contents and cultivation of ICC. Some scholars combined the cultivation of ICC with foreign language education, and study how to cultivate undergraduates' ICC from the aspects of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, and some scholars explored the factors affecting the cultivation of undergraduates' ICC from the perspective of motivation, attitude, cultural sensitivity and other ability dimensions [7]; some scholars tried to find the paths to cultivate students' ICC from the perspective of international talent training [8]. Secondly, some scholars conduct research from the perspective of teachers. For example, Gu Xiaole (2017) constructed two cultivation models, theory and practice [9]. Thirdly, some scholars have studied the ICC measurement. For example, Sun Youzhong (2016) proposed that ICC included respect for the cultural diversity of the world from the perspective of foreign language professional education [10]. Wu Weiping, et. al (2013), created a model review of Chinese undergraduates' intercultural competence. The scale covered four dimensions: knowledge, attitude, skills and awareness [11]. Peng Renzhong and Wu Weiping (2017) investigated the development of students' ICC in 10 universities in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Wuhan, which had high reliability and validity [12].

To sum up, most domestic scholars put the cultivation of ICC on foreign language teaching, but the empirical research on ICC is far from enough. So far, few scholars have studied the undergraduates' ICC in Henan Province. Therefore, based on the ICC scale of Wu Weiping, this study aims to answer the following three questions: 1) What is the current situation of undergraduates' ICC in Henan Province? 2) Are there differences in the dimensions of intercultural competence among undergraduates from different backgrounds in Henan? 3) What are the implications of the results of the survey for undergraduates' ICC in Henan Province? The paper intends to propose some corresponding countermeasures from the perspectives of society, schools, teachers and students, with a view to bringing enlightenment to the cultivation of undergraduates' ICC in Henan Province.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

This study adopted the method of questionnaire and interviews. The participants of this questionnaire and interviews were undergraduates in Henan Province. However, due to the limited time and energy of the investigation, it is not possible to investigate all undergraduates in Henan Province. Therefore, on the premise that the survey samples can basically cover the whole range of Henan Province, we divided Henan Province into five regions, and selected two representative

universities in each region to release the questionnaire. We took Zhengzhou City as the center, and North China University of Water Resources and Electric Power and Zhengzhou University were selected to survey. In the south of Zhengzhou, Nanyang Institute of technology and Xinyang Normal University were selected. In the north of Zhengzhou, Anyang Normal University and Henan University of Technology were selected. In the west of Zhengzhou, Henan University of Science and Technology and Luoyang Normal University were selected; In the east of Zhengzhou City, Henan University and Shangqiu Normal University were selected. In the survey, 980 participants completed the questionnaire, 956 of which were valid, with an effective recovery rate of 97.55%. Table 1 shows the background information of effective questionnaire of participants.

Table 1: Background information of participants

gender		grades				majors	
male	female	freshmen	sophomores	juniors	seniors	arts	science & engineering
454	502	401	418	43	94	444	512
47.5%	52.5%	41.9%	43.7%	4.5%	9.8%	46.4%	53.6%

### 3.2 Methods

Based on the Chinese undergraduates' ICC assessment scale compiled by Wu Weiping et. al., we designed the ICC assessment questionnaire for undergraduates in Henan Province, which covered six dimensions: native cultural knowledge, foreign cultural knowledge, attitude, intercultural communication skills, intercultural cognitive skills and awareness. The scale is in the form of the 5-degree scale, and the score is recorded according to the specific number selected by the subject in the scale. The larger the number is, the higher the score of the participants in this item will be.

### 3.3 Procedure

We began to conduct the questionnaire survey in early February 2022, and basically completed data collection and interview in the end of March 2022. SPSS 23.0 was introduced for data analysis.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Reliability Test of Scale

In order to test whether the scale has strong stability and integrity, we applied L.J. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient. When Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient is greater than 0.7, it indicates that the scale has high reliability. When Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient is between 0.6 and 0.7, it means that the scale is within the acceptable range. If Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient is lower than 0.6, the scale shall be modified. After the stability test of the effective questionnaire by SPSS23.0, we got Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of the native culture, foreign culture, attitude, intercultural communication skills, intercultural cognitive skills and awareness, which were .856, .942, .887, .943, .926 and .932 respectively, indicating that the scale has high reliability, that is, the scale is acceptable. The details can be shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability of Henan undergraduates' ICC scale

items	overall ICC	native culture	foreign culture	attitude	intercultural communication skills	intercultural cognitive skills	awareness
Cronbach' $\alpha$	.863	.856	.942	.887	.943	.926	.932
item number	28	3	7	3	9	3	3

## 4.2 The Overall Level and Each Dimension Level of ICC of Henan Undergraduates

Table 3 shows that Henan undergraduates' ICC is in a fairly good state. The overall mean value of ICC is 3.66. Among six dimensions, the mean value of attitude is the highest (4.19) and the mean value of foreign cultural knowledge is the lowest (2.74). The differences in the six dimensions show that although Henan undergraduates have ideal native cultural knowledge, intercultural attitude and awareness, there is a lot of room for improvement in intercultural communication skills and intercultural cognitive skills, and there is a great lack of foreign cultural knowledge. The following facts maybe account for this result.

First of all, with the in-depth development of "One Belt One Road" construction, Henan is moving towards a new height of internationalization, which puts forward new requirements for contemporary undergraduates in Henan. The ICC cultivation has become an important task of higher education in Henan Province. Therefore, many universities in Henan have put forward the development plan of internationalization of higher education. To a certain extent, this has driven undergraduates to lay more emphasis on their ICC, so that the scores of Henan undergraduates are generally high in the dimensions of attitude and awareness. However, apart from English majors, there are few in-depth introductions of foreign cultural knowledge in other majors' courses, leading to the lack of foreign cultural knowledge among students. At the same time, there are few language output opportunities and training in intercultural communication in English for the postgraduates, so students' intercultural communication and cognitive skills cannot be improved.

Table 3: The overall level and each dimension level of Henan undergraduates' ICC

	mean value	standard deviation
M	3.66	0.74
M1	4.18	0.80
M2	2.74	0.98
M3	4.19	0.95
M4	3.57	0.95
M5	3.39	1.09
M6	3.86	1.01

Notes: M stands for the overall level of ICC; M1 represent native culture; M2 is foreign culture; M3 denotes attitudes; M4 is intercultural communication skills; M5 is intercultural cognitive skills; M6 stands for awareness

## 4.3 Undergraduates' ICC in Henan in Different Contexts

### 4.3.1 Genders

Among the 956 effective participants in the survey, 454 are male and 502 are female. The mean value and standard deviation of the overall and various ICC dimensions of undergraduates of different genders can be seen in Table 4. The overall level of female students' ICC is higher than that of male students. The mean value of male native cultural knowledge, foreign cultural knowledge and intercultural cognitive skills is slightly higher than that of females, while female have advantages in the remaining dimensions. Among them, although the scores of male students are higher than those of female students in the dimension of foreign cultural knowledge, they are not ideal, with an average of 2.81, indicating that male and female students are insufficient in foreign cultural knowledge. Independent sample t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the overall ICC level between males and females. In six dimensions, foreign cultural knowledge, attitude, intercultural communication skills and awareness are significantly different between male and female students,

while there are no significant differences between male and female students in other dimensions.

There are great differences in the physiological and psychological characteristics and behavior standards between boys and girls. Compared with boys, girls are generally considered to be subtle and euphemistic, while boys are sharp and competitive. To some extent, this can explain the significant differences between male and female students in terms of attitudes, intercultural communication skills and awareness. However, due to the lack of systematic learning of foreign cultural knowledge, both male and female students have a low level of foreign cultural knowledge.

Table 4: Henan undergraduates' ICC in different genders

	M	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
male	3.61±0.83	4.19±0.87	2.81±1.07	3.96±1.04	3.51±1.04	3.43±1.17	3.77±1.07
female	3.70±0.65	4.18±0.73	2.67±0.87	4.40±0.79	3.63±0.87	3.34±1.01	3.93±0.93
t value	-1.73	0.14	2.09	-7.24	-2.00	1.22	-2.58
p value	.085	.890	.037	.000	.046	.223	.010

### 4.3.2 Grades

Among the undergraduates in Henan Province who participated in the survey, they were freshmen (401), sophomores (418), and some junior students (43) and senior students (94). Although the number of participants in each grade is asymmetric, we can still draw some useful information from Table 5. The overall ICC level of senior students is the highest among the four grades, with an average of 3.82, which indicates that senior students have relatively ideal intercultural competence. The scores of native culture knowledge, foreign culture knowledge, intercultural communication skills, intercultural cognitive skills and awareness of senior students are higher than those of other grades. In the attitude dimension, freshmen score the highest. But on the whole, no matter which grade they are in, the score of foreign cultural knowledge has not reached a high level. Through f-test, there is no significant difference in attitude, intercultural communication skills and awareness among students of different grades, while there is a significant difference in their native culture, foreign culture and intercultural cognitive skills.

The attitude and awareness of students in all grades towards ICC are stable. Once an individual forms a kind of attitude and awareness, it is difficult to change in a short period of time. Therefore, the grade has no significant impact on their attitude and awareness. At the same time, because they have few opportunities to receive professional intercultural communication training during their undergraduate studies, they are unable to integrate what they learned into the specific communication environment, so their intercultural communication skills have not improved. This is why there is no significant difference among the four grades in their intercultural communication skills.

Table 5: Henan undergraduates' ICC in different grades

	M	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
freshmen	3.72±0.79	4.24±0.81	2.82±1.01	4.26±0.95	3.63±0.98	3.49±1.10	3.86±1.03
sophomores	3.56±0.71	4.08±0.82	2.61±0.94	4.15±0.94	3.49±0.94	3.24±1.10	3.82±1.00
juniors	3.61±0.51	4.12±0.75	2.64±0.74	4.01±0.76	3.63±0.64	3.38±0.76	3.90±0.82
seniors	3.82±0.75	4.43±0.68	3.00±1.00	4.19±1.05	3.69±1.00	3.59±1.07	4.01±0.98
f	4.59	6.03	5.76	1.55	1.89	5.03	1.03
p	.003	.000	.001	.199	.129	.002	.379

### 4.3.3 Majors

Among the 956 participants, 444 are liberal arts students, accounting for 46.44%, and 512 are

science students, accounting for 53.56%. Table 6 shows the mean value and standard deviation of the overall and various dimensions of Henan undergraduates' ICC in different majors. From Table 6, it can be seen that liberal arts students have higher scores in the overall ICC and all dimensions than science and engineering students. According to the f-test, there are no significant differences in the dimensions of native cultural knowledge and intercultural cognitive skills, but there are significant differences in other dimensions.

On the one hand, the undergraduates of science and engineering pay attention to the cultivation of logical thinking and they have hardly received systematic training in language, which directly leads to the lack of intercultural communication skills. On the other hand, the acquisition of intercultural knowledge is more difficult than that of liberal arts students, and their intercultural attitude and awareness hardly tend to be improved over time. This can also explain why the overall and all dimensions of ICC of liberal arts students are generally higher than those of science and engineering majors.

Table 6: Henan undergraduates' ICC in different majors

	M	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
arts	3.74±0.66	4.22±0.77	2.81±0.89	4.35±0.85	3.66±0.87	3.45±0.99	3.97±0.92
science & engineering	3.58±0.80	4.15±0.83	2.67±1.04	4.06±1.01	3.50±1.02	3.33±1.16	3.76±1.06
t	3.48	1.32	2.21	4.81	2.76	1.62	3.3
p	.001	.187	.027	.000	.006	.106	.001

#### 4.3.4 Contact Frequencies

Among the subjects, 52.2% of the undergraduates had little experience of contacting people from different cultures, and only 4.4% of the undergraduates contacted once a day or more. It can be seen from Table 7 that the overall ICC level of undergraduates who have the experience of contacting people from different cultures is higher than that of undergraduates who have no such experience. f-test shows that the frequency of people contacting different cultures makes the difference in other dimensions reach a significant level except for the dimension of native cultural knowledge.

Table 7: Henan undergraduates' ICC in different contact frequencies

	M	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
once / day or over	3.87±0.97	4.08±1.00	3.39±1.19	4.19±1.06	3.85±1.08	3.73±1.16	3.99±1.17
once/ week or over	3.79±0.64	4.21±0.79	2.88±0.88	4.39±0.77	3.73±0.84	3.58±0.95	3.96±0.92
once / month or over	3.78±0.59	4.29±0.79	2.82±0.82	4.26±0.76	3.69±0.74	3.54±0.90	4.07±0.82
once / month or over	3.84±0.63	4.32±0.68	2.91±0.87	4.37±0.78	3.77±0.87	3.58±0.96	4.06±0.87
no	3.51±0.78	4.13±0.82	2.56±1.00	4.05±1.04	3.41±1.00	3.20±1.16	3.72±1.06
f	10.4	2.24	11.98	6.95	7.95	8.07	5.15
p	.000	.063	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

When students get into contact with people from different cultures and directly put them in intercultural communication, it is beneficial for them to realize their differences in communication and intuitively understand the history, culture and traditional customs of other countries. Therefore, undergraduates with intercultural contact experience have obvious advantages in their foreign cultural knowledge. At the same time, the more contacts they make, the more they realize the importance of intercultural competence, thus promoting the change of their attitude and awareness. In addition,

through language and body expression in specific situations, students can understand their own problems in communication, so as to promote their adjustment of intercultural communication strategies and help them exercise intercultural communication and cognitive skills.

## 5. Conclusions

The paper analyzes Henan undergraduates' ICC in different contexts, and the results show that there is a lot of room for them to improve their ICC. The paper will provide corresponding countermeasures for Henan universities to improve students' ICC from the four perspectives of students, teachers, universities and society.

Firstly, students should seize the opportunity of "One Belt One Road" to improve their initiative and enthusiasm in learning to promote their ICC. In the process of cultivating ICC, students are the absolute subjects, and their ICC promotion depends on themselves. Social support, universities, teachers and other factors play an auxiliary role. Nowadays, the current in-depth development of the "One Belt One Road" construction has greatly increased the demand for talents with ICC. As Henan undergraduates, they should grasp this opportunity, clearly understand the importance of ICC for personal and social development, and consciously and actively participate in the study of relevant fields, so as to fundamentally improve ICC. Outside the classroom, students can also develop ICC through autonomous learning, make use of the advanced network to contact foreign films, periodicals and books, understand the history, culture and social customs of other countries, and improve cultural literacy.

Secondly, teachers should improve their own cultural accomplishment and reform the classroom teaching mode. College teachers play an important role in cultivating students' ICC. Therefore, qualified college teachers must constantly gain the relevant knowledge, broaden their horizons, understand and adapt to cultural differences, improve their cultural accomplishment and strengthen their ICC. At the same time, in the classroom, through the combination of explicit and implicit direction, teachers try to cultivate students' ICC.

Thirdly, universities should set up intercultural courses and integrate relevant cultural elements of "One Belt One Road". At present, in universities along the "One Belt One Road", except for the foreign language majors, which have specialized courses in intercultural communication, few majors basically have such training. The lack of curriculum directly leads to less immersion of students in intercultural knowledge. Therefore, universities should take intercultural courses as a regular part of the curriculum system, and offer intercultural courses for students as compulsory or optional. In addition, in response to China's initiative to promote the construction of "One Belt One Road", universities in Henan should also set targeted cultural elective courses as characteristic courses around the cultures of countries along the "One Belt One Road", systematically introduce the languages and cultures of countries along "One Belt One Road", broaden students' horizons and enhance their perception and understanding of multiculturalism.

Finally, the society should properly handle the relationship between local culture and foreign culture, and encourage and promote intercultural exchanges under the "One Belt One Road" construction. In today's fierce collision of various cultures, the relevant departments should seek a balance between native culture and foreign culture. On the one hand, they should continue to develop the cultural industry, deeply tap the value of Chinese traditional culture, and let students enhance their cultural confidence and establish a correct value orientation. On the other hand, they should selectively absorb and introduce world excellent culture through various channels according to our own development needs. Building a harmonious social and cultural atmosphere helps students maintain their national feelings and national confidence in the collision of different cultures, and treat cultural differences with an open and inclusive attitude, so as to carry out effective intercultural

communication. Universities are encouraged to introduce high-quality education resources from the “One Belt One Road” countries, carry out Sino foreign cooperation in running schools, provide students with opportunities to communicate with foreign teachers, promote the exchange and interaction, and help cultivate students' global vision. Enterprises with cooperation projects with countries along “One Belt One Road” are encouraged to provide overseas internship opportunities for students, so that students can be exposed to foreign cultures and exercise their ability to solve practical intercultural communication problems.

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