

# *Survey and Analysis of the Current Situation of English Majors' Intercultural Communication Competence —Taking the Example of the Lower Grade English Majors in Ningxia University*

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**Abstract:** Contemporary college students majoring in English not only need to have proficient foreign language ability and broad international vision, but also need to have good intercultural communicative competence. The Intercultural Communication Competence Scale was used to investigate and study the current situation of intercultural communication competence of 161 students in the lower grades of English majors in Ningxia University. The results of the study show that the overall level of intercultural communication of the English majors in the lower grades of Ningxia University is in a relatively satisfactory state. The author analyzes the reasons for this phenomenon and proposes corresponding measures for schools, teachers and students to help students improve their intercultural communicative competence in four dimensions: knowledge, skills, awareness and attitude.

## 1. Introduction

Intercultural communication competence has a very rich connotation, and many scholars have put forward different interpretations of it. As a representative figure in the field of global intercultural communication, Michael Byram does not think that intercultural competence is equivalent to intercultural communication competence. In his proposed ICC model, intercultural competence is divided into four dimensions: knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness (Byram 1997:70-73)[1]. Intercultural communication studies has achieved long-lasting development since its introduction to China in the 1980s. Wang Shouren, a famous scholar, believes that intercultural communicative competence is the ability and level of communication with people from different cultural backgrounds under the influence of culture and values (Wang Shouren 2015)[2]. Wen Qiufang believes that intercultural communicative competence is composed of communicative competence and intercultural competence together (Wen Qiufang, 1999)[4]. Gao Yongchen believes that the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence cannot be separated from the understanding of customs, lifestyles and ways of thinking of different cultures, etc., because in intercultural communication, misunderstandings and communication barriers can easily occur in the process of communication between two parties with different cultural backgrounds when they lack

such knowledge (Gao Yongchen, 2006)[5].

The Teaching Requirements for College English Courses issued by the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education in January 2004 put forward higher requirements for contemporary English majors, who not only need to have proficient foreign language ability and broad international vision, but also need to have good cross-cultural communicative competence. However, from the research on intercultural communication competence at home and abroad, the research on intercultural communication competence mainly focuses on theories, and relevant empirical research and action research are still relatively lacking. The current research status in China is not able to meet the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence of college students, and there are problems such as not knowing at which stage the intercultural competence of English majors is and how to cultivate intercultural communicative competence effectively. In this regard, it is necessary to investigate the intercultural communicative competence of English majors in the lower grades of Ningxia University and put forward some countermeasures on this basis.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Participants

The questionnaire survey was taken by the English majors of Ningxia University in the classes of 2021 and 2022, when the subjects were in the freshmen and sophomore stages, in the lower grades of consolidating the basic knowledge of English and not yet carrying out the "intercultural communication course". A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed, 165 were recovered, and 161 were valid, with an effective recovery rate of 97.5%.

### 2.2 Measurement scales

The questionnaire method was used in this study. The assessment scale is mainly based on the theoretical foundation of the cross-cultural competence model proposed by Byram, and based on the ICC Evaluation Scale for Chinese College Students (Wu Weiping, 2013)[3] designed by Wu Weiping as the fundamental, combined with the characteristics of the online questionnaire, the questionnaire was divided into four modules: knowledge, skills, awareness and attitude. Thirty-three questions from the ICC Evaluation Scale for Chinese College Students were selected, of which 26 questions were in the form of a four-point scale. The overall reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) of the scale measurement was 0.915, and the validity (KMO value) was 0.869, which indicated that each dimension question item could effectively reflect its factor constructs, and that the scale had good reliability and validity. The details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale reliability and validity

Name	Cronbach's alpha coefficient	KMO value	Number of questions
summary table	0.915	0.869	33
Skills module	0.921	0.909	14
Attitude module	0.605	0.596	5
knowledge module	0.489	0.620	7
Consciousness module	0.911	0.906	6

## 2.3 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaires will be distributed in January 2022 and the collection of the questionnaires will be completed in the middle of March. The data were processed after the questionnaire collection and the data were analyzed using SPSSAU. The data related to the subjects were entered into SPSSAU and one-sample t-test, ANOVA and descriptive statistics were performed to analyze the current status of intercultural communicative competence of junior English majors at Ningxia University.

## 3. Findings

Subjects' intercultural communicative competence is mainly composed of four modules. In the following, the overall status of the subjects' intercultural communication competence and the modules of awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes will be analyzed.

### 3.1 Overall Situation of Intercultural Communication Competence of Lower Level English Majors at Ningxia University

Overall, the intercultural communicative competence of English majors in the lower grades of Ningxia University is better. From Table 2 it can be seen that the mean values of each module in the scale are higher, and the mean value of the total scale (14.11) is also higher. Specifically, among the 4 modules of skills, attitudes, knowledge and awareness, the highest mean value was found in the skills module (24.53), followed by the awareness module (12.05) > attitudes module (10.60) > knowledge module (9.24). The result of ANOVA indicated that there was a significant difference between the 4 modules.

Table 2: Levels of intercultural communication skills in general and by module

	average value	(statistics) standard deviation	F	P
Skills module	24.53	6.70	461.183	0.000
Attitude module	10.60	3.00		
knowledge module	9.24	1.31		
Consciousness module	12.05	3.71		
summary table	14.11	7.38		

The current situation of intercultural communicative competence of English majors in the lower grades of Ningxia University is generally better, reflecting the achievements of foreign language teaching reform in China in recent years. Although the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is deeply inland, and English majors have fewer opportunities to contact other cultures, the results of the scale show that through the study of specialized courses, students have mastered basic cross-cultural knowledge and skills, and likewise cultivated a relatively good sense of cross-cultural communication. Although there are not many opportunities to communicate with other cultures, students are able to make good and correct responses to the cross-cultural communication scenarios in which they are expected to be in through the knowledge taught by the teachers.

In the questionnaire, the students' average in the knowledge module is relatively lower than the other modules, but in the case of the skills module, the students' average is higher. It shows that students are not averse to intercultural communication and have a positive attitude towards it. The low mean value of the knowledge module reflects that the students do not have a solid grasp of some general knowledge of intercultural communication and do not know about countries other than the United Kingdom and the United States. Moreover, in the knowledge modules of the questionnaire, the accuracy rate of the questions containing knowledge of national culture is generally higher than that of the questions involving knowledge of other cultures, which indicates that the lower-level English learners in Ningxia University have a slightly higher level of knowledge of national culture than that of other cultures. However, in the questions about other cultures, the accuracy rates of the questions about the cultural knowledge of countries where English is a common language are mostly higher than those of countries of other languages, which indicates that lower-level English learners know more about English-speaking countries than about countries of other languages.

### 3.2 Overall intercultural communication competence of students in different grades

In order to be able to understand the intercultural communicative competence of the younger students so as to propose appropriate improvement measures, most of the English majors in the freshmen and sophomore classes were included in the questionnaire survey stage. Among the valid questionnaires, 73 freshmen and 88 sophomores were included. From Table 3 it can be seen that there is no significant difference between freshmen and sophomores, but sophomores' intercultural communicative competence is lower than that of freshmen in the module of skills, attitudes, knowledge and awareness as well as in the total module.

Table 3: Intercultural communication competence of students in different grades in general and by module

	What grade are you in (mean $\pm$ standard deviation)		T	P
	Freshman year (n=73)	Sophomore (n=88)		
Skills module	24.97 $\pm$ 6.63	24.17 $\pm$ 6.77	0.756	0.451
Attitude module	10.74 $\pm$ 2.96	10.49 $\pm$ 3.04	0.528	0.598
knowledge module	9.34 $\pm$ 1.28	9.16 $\pm$ 1.34	0.882	0.379
Consciousness module	12.25 $\pm$ 3.69	11.89 $\pm$ 3.75	0.612	0.542
assembly module	57.30 $\pm$ 11.29	55.70 $\pm$ 12.20	0.855	0.394

It is in line with the objective law that the intercultural communication competence of sophomore students is higher than that of freshmen students, but through the one-sample t-test, it is found that it is the freshmen English majors who are higher than that of the sophomore English majors. From the students' point of view, freshmen students have just entered the university and are in the stage of unfamiliarity with everything, especially for students from different provinces, they are not clear about their own level of orientation, so it will stimulate the motivation of freshmen students to study. In the second year of college, some students will focus on the improvement of test-taking skills and neglect the cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills because of the TEM-4 or other exams, and some students will slacken off because of the lack of goals, and their motivation will gradually become weaker. From the point of view of the content of teaching in the

first and second years of college, due to the weak foundation of students, the teaching content focuses on book knowledge, emphasizes on the mastery of basic listening, reading, writing and speaking knowledge, and prepares for the second year of TEM4. And students are mostly focus on the related knowledge and culture of the United Kingdom and the United States, and less on other countries. In terms of teaching style, the teacher tends to teach the knowledge points, and the students have fewer opportunities to express themselves. Although there will be display sessions, due to the limited class time and the number of students, students' language expression is often not well practiced, but students will slacken off and their level will decline.

#### **4. Basic Countermeasures to Improve English Majors' Intercultural Communication Skills**

Based on these results, the author proposes the following countermeasures for schools, teachers and students in terms of four dimensions: knowledge, attitude, emotion and awareness:

In the knowledge dimension, schools should strengthen appropriate training and guidance to improve teachers' ability to teach intercultural communication. Teachers should pay attention to improving their cultural cultivation and ability to teach intercultural communication knowledge, consciously teach intercultural communication knowledge in the process of teaching, interweave language teaching and culture teaching, consciously discover the drawbacks of the traditional teaching mode, adhere to the student-oriented teaching method, focus on the cultivation of students' intercultural communication ability and pay attention to the testing and reflecting on their own teaching results. Lower grade students should realize the importance of cross-cultural communication, actively and proactively learn knowledge related to cross-cultural communication through various channels, constantly improve and enrich themselves, and lay a solid foundation for telling Chinese stories and conveying Chinese voices.

In the attitudinal dimension, schools need to strengthen the construction of teachers according to the connotation and requirements of quality education and provide corresponding platforms for intercultural communication activities to increase the communication opportunities between students and foreign students and foreigners, so as to enhance students' self-confidence and enthusiasm in intercultural communication in practice. Teachers need to pay attention to teaching the connotation of intercultural communication, promote students to form a comprehensive understanding of intercultural communication in both macro and micro aspects, and encourage students to carry out intercultural communication in a more positive and tolerant attitude. Students should face the conflicts and difficulties in intercultural communication with a positive, optimistic, open and tolerant mindset and bravely meet the challenges. They should also treat different cultures in a scientific manner, maintain a high level of self-confidence in the excellent local cultures and take a respectful attitude towards other cultures, promoting their strengths and avoiding their shortcomings, and neither be blindly self-confident nor revere foreign cultures.

In the skills dimension, schools need to carry out educational reforms to change from focusing on reading comprehension to focusing on listening and speaking for practical intercultural communication and comprehensively improving comprehensive application skills, so that the original focus on final grades will gradually shift to monitoring and evaluating the whole process of teaching and learning as a whole (Gao Yongchen, 2006)[5]. Teachers should encourage students to express themselves in English in class, practice their oral expression skills, cultivate and stimulate students' confidence and courage to speak in public, and motivate students to explain advanced vocabulary with their existing knowledge and difficult English words with simple sentences in order to minimize the trouble caused by vocabulary shortage in communication. Students should pay attention to the accumulation of vocabulary and learn to express themselves in English consciously in their daily study and life, actively exercise their oral expression ability, insist on

cultural self-confidence, and graciously show and spread the excellent culture of their own nation in cross-cultural communication.

In the awareness dimension, schools need to create an intercultural language environment to help teachers and students enhance intercultural communication awareness in the process of diverse cultural exchanges. Teachers should attach great importance to intercultural communication, capture the differences between different cultures in their teaching and life, and utilize the comparative method of teaching to cultivate students' international perspectives. Students should pay more attention to different cultural concepts and phenomena, values, language styles, etc. and consciously adjust their communication language and behavior in time.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Main findings

Through the questionnaire, the intercultural communicative competence of English majors in the lower grades of Ningxia University is generally good, and there are significant differences in the four modules of knowledge, skills, awareness and attitude. There is a difference between the intercultural communicative competence of freshmen and sophomores, and the intercultural communicative competence of sophomores is lower than the intercultural communicative competence of freshmen. Aiming at such a phenomenon, the author analyzes the reasons and proposes corresponding countermeasures for schools, teachers and students from the four dimensions of knowledge, skills, awareness and attitude to help students improve their intercultural communicative competence.

### 5.2 Deficiencies

This study has gained a basic understanding of the situation of English majors in the lower grades at Ningxia University and has analyzed the reasons for this. But the sample size of students and schools needs to be further increased.

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