Development of an EFL Curriculum Components to Promote Intercultural Communicative Competence for Chinese College Students

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Abstract
This study aims to develop a curriculum based on production-oriented approach (POA) and third space theory to enhance intercultural communicative competence for college students and study the results of the implementation. Intercultural Competence Test (ICT) was administered to collect data. A total of 35 respondents were recruited from Nanfang College, Guangzhou, China. Descriptive statistics were applied to test any significant difference between pretest and post-test. The results showed that the respondents in the participating curriculum demonstrated preferences for certain strategies and significant differences were founded between pre-test and post-test. Yet, these findings are compromised to due to the small sample size, and a large-scale survey is needed to verify the results.

Keywords: Curriculum development; production-oriented approach; third space theory; intercultural communicative competence

Introduction

As the process of globalization moves on, intercultural communicative communication (ICC) has become a part of people's daily lives. Chinese College English Teaching Guidelines

(2020) clarifies that the college English curriculum includes three categories of curriculum: English for general purpose, English for specific purpose and intercultural communication.

In this study, the focus of the researcher was to investigate intercultural education based on production-oriented approach (POA). As suggested by Liddicoat (2008), when we consider language as communication, language cannot be separated from the cultural frame of reference in which communication takes place. Without cultural knowledge, it is difficult to understand the meaning of a language.

It is necessary and important to integrate cultural teaching in second and foreign language (L2) education implementing the production-oriented approach. Therefore, there are two main questions to answer in this study. (1) What are the characteristics of the developed curriculum based on POA to promote intercultural communicative competence for university students in Nanfang College, Guangzhou, China? (2) What are the results of the implementation of the developed curriculum? The objective of this study is to develop and implement a curriculum based on POA to promote intercultural communicative competence for university students in Nanfang College, Guangzhou, China.

While existing literature extensively discusses the importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the context of globalized education, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive, empirically-based curriculum models tailored to the specific linguistic and cultural needs of Chinese college students. Current studies often focus on theoretical aspects of ICC or offer general guidelines for curriculum development, but there is a scarcity of research that bridges these theories with practical, classroom-applicable strategies, particularly using the production-oriented approach (POA) in the Chinese educational context. This study aims to fill this gap by developing and implementing a curriculum that integrates intercultural teaching with language education, specifically designed for Chinese college students to enhance their ICC in a manner that is both pedagogically sound and culturally relevant.

Literature review
Curriculum development

Only a few curriculum models—the Taba Model, Tyler Model, Oliva Model, Saylor Alexander & Lewis Model, Wheeler Model, Tanner & Tanner Model, Beauchamp's Managerial Model, and Demirel Model—are well-known despite the fact that there are more in the literature (Demirel, 2013; Erişen, 1998; Lunenburg, 2011; Oliva, 2005; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009).

In contrast to the more prevalent deductive models, the Taba model is thought of as one of the inductive curricular models (Oliva, 2005; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009). Taba Model was consideration in developing the curriculum in this study.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become a focal point in language education, especially in multicultural settings like Nanfang College, Guangzhou, China (Yuan & Li, 2021). ICC represents the ability to effectively and appropriately communicate across cultures, transcending mere language proficiency.

ICC encompasses various components, including cultural awareness, empathy, adaptability, and intercultural sensitivity. Educators recognize that language learners, particularly those studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), must go beyond grammar and vocabulary acquisition. They need to develop the skills to navigate real-world, intercultural interactions with confidence and respect (Dolan & Kawamura, 2015).

For EFL students at Nanfang College, ICC is especially crucial (Yuan & Li, 2021). The diverse cultural backgrounds of students present a unique opportunity for fostering ICC. By embracing ICC in the curriculum, educators can empower students to appreciate and engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges. Furthermore, ICC equips students with essential life skills, as global communication and collaboration have become integral aspects of today's interconnected world. (Kovalainen, 2022).

Production-oriented approach (POA)

The theoretical system of production-oriented approach (POA) is one of the important components of foreign language teaching theory with Chinese characteristics. It's a pedagogical innovation in university English teaching in China Its goal is to promote the realization of foreign language classroom teaching objectives and the occurrence of effective learning. It's constructed by Wen Qiufang (Wen, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020).

POA draws on the excellent achievements of second language learning theory and explores a way to improve the effect of college foreign language teaching. Before the 1990s, English teaching in China was close to the 'comprehensive teaching method' (Long, 2015), focusing on the teaching of explicit language forms (focus on forms). Usually, texts or dialogues containing language forms are used as input materials, and intensive exercises are carried out by the task of practicing language forms. The use of language is often put at the end. In the 1990s, communicative teaching method was introduced into China, which once set off a wave of foreign language teaching reform. Communicative teaching method belongs to 'analytical teaching method' (Long, 2015), which focuses on the teaching of language meaning. It generally uses real materials, puts students in natural and real target language communication, and takes oral and written communication activities as the main content of teaching. Compared with comprehensive teaching method and analytical teaching method, POA has the potential advantage of optimizing classroom teaching effect in theory (Zhang, 2020).

Third space theory

The concept of third space theory, introduced by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), has gained significant attention in the field of intercultural communication and language education. It provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of intercultural interactions and the development of intercultural communicative competence.

Third space theory posits that individuals inhabiting this "third space" are not merely the products of their native cultures (first space) or the dominant foreign cultures (second space). Instead, they negotiate a unique, hybrid cultural identity in the process of intercultural communication. In the context of EFL education, this theory suggests that students should not be confined to replicating native English-speaking norms or adopting foreign cultural behaviors wholesale. Rather, it encourages the exploration of a middle ground where students can synthesize elements from their own culture, the English-speaking culture, and the emergent culture of their intercultural interactions

Research method

Research design

In this study, a mixed methods approach was employed as conceptualized by John W. Creswell (2014), integrating both quantitative and qualitative research strategies. Creswell's framework advocates for a holistic view of research questions, allowing for a more comprehensive

understanding through diverse data sources. Specifically, this study adopted an explanatory sequential design, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data gathering to further interpret the quantitative results. This method was particularly suited for this complex research questions, enabling a deeper exploration of the patterns observed in the quantitative phase. By following Creswell's mixed methods approach, nuanced insights were able to be gained that would not have been possible through a single method of inquiry.

This study was divided into two phases, including the development of the curriculum and the implementation of the developed curriculum. In phase one, the framework of the curriculum was determined through relevant document, and the draft of the curriculum was designed and affirmed by five experts in relevant area. In phase two, twenty hours of teaching and learning activities were used in this study.

Participants

In phase one, there were five experts who recommended and evaluated the developed curriculum, including one expert in research and evaluation, one expert in educational evaluation, one expert in intercultural education, one expert in English literature, and one expert in English language education.

Table 1. Experts in the study

Participents	Age	Sex	Educational background	Position in a university
Participant 1	50s	M	PhD	Deputy Dean for Academics
Participant 2	40s	F	PhD	Associate Professor
Participant 3	40s	M	PhD	Associate Professor
Participant 4	30s	F	PhD	Associate Professor
Participant 5	30s	F	Master	Associate Professor

In phase two, 35 Chinese college students comprising 10 male and 25 female, who are non-English major students from Nanfang College, Guangzhou in Guangdong province, China, participated in this study. The participants are from diverse academic disciplines and cultural backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 19 to 21, representing the typical age group for college students in Nanfang College, Guangzhou, China.

Instruments

There were two main instruments used in the study to illustrate: 10 lesson plans within 20 hours of 10 weeks and Intercultural Competence Test (ICT) as a pre-test and a post-test with the developed curriculum. The duration of each subtopic lasted 2 hours based on the contents.

The separation index of ICT items are 11.93, and the internal reliability coefficient is 0.99, both of which are within the reference range, indicating that there are multiple levels of difficulty distinction between the test items (Bond & Fox 2013). These results show that the measurement results of the ICT primary test paper are highly reliable. It can more comprehensively measure candidates' intercultural abilities, and can effectively differentiate candidates' abilities (Peng, Zhu & Wu, 2022).

Semi-structured interviews with a select group of students provided deeper insights into the experiences and effectiveness of the curriculum. The interview allowed for exploration of individual perspectives and detailed feedback.

Procedures

This study was mainly divided into two phases: development and implementation. Phase one consisted of two stages of the curriculum design and evaluation. Phase two included three stages of the intercultural communicative competence (ICT) pre-test, teaching implementation, and ICT post-test.

The phase of curriculum development was divided into three stages. First, the theories, principles, and relevant factors for the development of a curriculum based on production-oriented approach (POA) to promote intercultural communicative competence for college students in Nanfang College, Guangzhou, China were studied. Then, the draft of the curriculum syllabus was designed and affirmed by five experts in the related areas. After that, the curriculum was modified based on the recommendations from the experts. The phase of curriculum implementation was divided into three stages. First, the intercultural communicative test (ICT) was used as a pre-test before the developed curriculum implementation. Then, lesson plans for 10 lessons were designed according to the developed curriculum, revised, and used in teaching and learning for 35 non-English major students from Nanafang College, Guangzhou. After that, the intercultural communicative test (ICT) was used as a post-test after the developed curriculum implementation. Finally, the results were analyzed and reported.

Table 2. Time series of the curriculum design

Topics	Duration
Pretest	
1. Defining culture & Cultural concepts	1
2. Core barrier to cross-culture communication	3
2.1 Verbal & Nonverbal Communication	
2.2 Sociocultural	
2.3 Psychological	
3. Overview of Lingnan	1
4. Architecture	1
5. Culinary Culture	1
6. Traditional Arts and Crafts	1
7. Lingnan Celebrities	1
8. Intangible Culture Heritage	1
Posttest	

Data analysis

The data analysis in this study involved a mixed method approach, tailored to assess the effectiveness of the developed curriculum in enhancing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among Chinese college students.

Quantitative data were also collected through pre- and post-test, designed to measure the students' intercultural communicative competence. The test includes four dimensions: skills, attitude, awareness and knowledge.

The analysis involved comparing pre- and post-tests data to identify any significant changes in students' ICC. Statistical methods, such as t-test, were employed to determine the significance of these changes. Additionally, content analysis was applied to the qualitative data to uncover common patterns and themes, providing a deeper understanding of the students' learning experiences and the impact of curriculum.

This blended approach to data analysis ensured a comprehensive evaluation of effectiveness of the curriculum, combining quantitative measures of competence with qualitative insights into the students' learning procedure.

Results

In this section, the results of this study is presented on development and implementation of the curriculum aimed at promoting intercultural communicative competence among Chinese college students. The study encompassed a diverse range of participants and utilized various assessment methods to gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Results to examine the effectiveness and feasibility of the developed curriculum

To verify the accuracy and feasibility of the draft curriculum to promote intercultural communicative competence, 5 experts evaluated the appropriateness of the curriculum based on a framework of 5 indicators. It includes 1. Principles 2. Objectives 3. Structure Content 4. Learning Management and 5. Assessment.

Table 3. Results of evaluation of curriculum suitability by experts

Indicator	M	S.D.	Appropriate level
1. Principles	4.6	0.54	High Applicability Level
2. Objectives	4.4	0.89	Moderate to High Applicability Level
3. Structure Content	4.6	0.54	High Applicability Level
4. Learning Management	4.8	0.45	High Applicability Level
5. Assessment	4.4	0.89	Moderate to High Applicability Level
Total average	4.56	0.60	High Applicability Level

As can be seen from Table 3, the curriculum developed by the college students' EFL components to promote intercultural communicative competence are generally at the highest level (4.56).

Pre- and post-test of intercultural communicative competence

To assess the impact of the curriculum, pre- and post-tests of intercultural communicative competence was conducted by using a standardized measurement tool. The tool comprised multiple-choice questions, essay responses, and simulated intercultural communication scenarios. Participants completed the pre-test before beginning the curriculum and the post-test upon implementation.

From the result in Table 4, it can be concluded that students' intercultural communicative competence has been improved in the process of learning with the curriculum.

Table 4. The students' learning achievement (n=59)

	n	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	t-value
Pre-test	35	71.70	5.46	4.280**
Post-test	35	76.75	6.69	

Note. **$p<.01$.

It can be concluded that the t-test showed a significant difference in the score between pre- and post-tests. This means H0 was rejected and H1 accepted. Therefore, production-oriented

approach and the third space theory involved in the EFL curriculum components are more effective in improving the college students' intercultural communicative competence.

Increased cultural sensitivity

Participants expressed a deeper appreciation and understanding of various cultural perspectives. Many students noted learning about the subtleties of different cultural norms and values. This enhanced sensitivity led to more respectful and mindful communication in intercultural settings.

Improved communicative skills

Students reported better fluency and accuracy in using language appropriate for intercultural interactions. They also mentioned an improved ability to read and interpret non-verbal cues in different cultural contexts. Enhanced listening skills were frequently mentioned, allowing better understanding and response to cultural nuances.

Personal growth

A number of students highlighted personal development, including increased confidence in interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. They also noted a greater openness to diverse perspectives and a willingness to engage in complex cultural discussions. Several participants mentioned how the course impacted their personal views on global issues and multiculturalism.

Curriculum feedback

Generally, the feedback on the curriculum was positive, with students appreciating its practical and interactive nature. Suggestions for improvement included incorporating more real-life scenarios and diverse cultural examples. Some students expressed a desire for more opportunities for direct interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Discussion

The development and implementation of a curriculum aimed at promoting intercultural communicative competence among Chinese college students represent a crucial endeavor in the context of a rapidly globalizing world.

Our curriculum design has shown promising results in enhancing the intercultural communicative competence of Chinese college students. Through a combination of theoretical frameworks, practical exercises, and experiential learning opportunities, participants demonstrated a significant improvement in their competence to navigate intercultural interactions. This was evident in their increased cultural awareness, improved communicative competence, and greater openness to diverse perspectives. This result ties well with previous studies wherein Gu (2019) highlight the humanity of language teaching and help students form an international perspective and intercultural personality.

The results of this study significantly reinforce the production-oriented approach (POA), particularly in enhancing intercultural communicative competence. Following Wen Qiufang's foundational work on POA, which emphasizes the importance of production and practical application in language learning (Zhang, 2020), this study demonstrates similar effectiveness. The curriculum, designed by using POA, notably improved students' abilities to apply communicative skills in real-world and intercultural contexts. This aligns with Wen's assertion that language

output, more than input, drives competence (Wen, 2016). Such practical application is crucial for developing ICC, as it provides students with real-life scenarios to navigate cultural nuances effectively. The findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting applicability of POA in diverse educational settings, highlighting its potential in fostering not just language proficiency, but also cultural adaptability and sensitivity.

The concept of 'third space', as articulated by Homi Bhabha (1994), offers a valuable lens through which to interpret findings of this study on intercultural communicative competence. Bhabha's theory, which emphasizes the creation of new cultural identities and meanings in the intersection of different cultures, resonates with the observed outcomes in the study. Students engaging with the curriculum appeared to navigate and construct a 'third space' where linguistic and cultural elements from both their native and foreign cultures were blended. This aligning with Wang & Flory's (2021) view on the role of language education in forming a third culture. The manifestation of third space in this study suggests a dynamic process of cultural negotiation and identity formation, affirming the critical role of language education in facilitating intercultural understanding and competence.

Furthermore, the incorporation of the target language culture and local culture proved to be effective in bridging the gap between theory and practice. The findings are in accord with recent studies indicating that Lv (2021) pointed out that the two-way cultural teaching that considers and balances the target language culture and local culture is a good solution to improve the current symptoms of local cultural aphasia of foreign language learners, and it is also an effective way to deal with the current difficulties in cultivating comprehensive intercultural communicative competence.

These findings emphasize the importance of integrating real-world scenarios into the curriculum to facilitate a deeper understanding of intercultural dynamics.

Conclusion
Implications

The successful development of this curriculum has several important implications. Firstly, it underscores the necessity of intercultural communicative competence in higher education, as it equips students with the skills needed to engage effectively in a globalized society. This curriculum can serve as a model for other educational institutions seeking to enhance their students' intercultural competence.

Secondly, the curriculum focuses on experiential learning and authentic cultural immersion and highlights the value of production-oriented in cultivating intercultural communicative competence. This approach can be adapted and applied in various educational settings to foster cultural sensitivity and effective intercultural communication. Results of the study highlight potential of POA in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application, offering a valuable pedagogical strategy for educators aiming to cultivate comprehensive intercultural communicative competence in a diverse student population.

This study has important implications for language education, particularly in developing intercultural communicative competence. Drawing from third space theory, it suggests that language classrooms should be designed as spaces where cultural identities and meanings are not just exchanged but also transformed. Educators are encouraged to create environments that foster this dynamic interplay, allowing students to navigate and construct their own 'third spaces'. This approach could facilitate a more profound and authentic understanding of intercultural communication, moving beyond mere acquisition of cultural knowledge to the creation of new,

hybrid cultural understandings. Such an approach aligns with contemporary global realities and prepares students for more effective intercultural interactions in diverse settings.

Limitations

Despite the positive outcomes, this study has some limitations. The sample size may not fully represent the diversity of Chinese college students, and the generalizability of the results to other populations should be approached with caution. Additionally, effectiveness of the curriculum may vary depending on the instructors' expertise and the resources available in different educational institutions.

Furthermore, the long-term impact of this curriculum on students' intercultural competence beyond the scope of this study remains an area for further investigation. Continuous evaluation and refinement of the curriculum are essential to ensure its sustainability and relevance.

Future directions

To build upon this study, future studies could explore the long-term effects of the curriculum on participants' intercultural communicative competence. Additionally, comparative studies could investigate the effectiveness of this curriculum in different cultural contexts and educational settings. Further research could also focus on the development of assessment tools and metrics to measure intercultural competence more comprehensively.

In conclusion, the development of a curriculum to promote intercultural communicative competence for Chinese college students represents a significant step towards equipping the next generation with the skills necessary to thrive in an interconnected world. This curriculum offers valuable insights into effective intercultural education and lays the foundation for continued research and refinement in this critical field.

Declaration of conflicting interest

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