

Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching

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Abstract: This article discusses the relationship between linguistic competence and intercultural communication competence, and the functions of English language teaching in improving students' intercultural communication competence. Finally, it explores how to develop English language learners' intercultural communication competence in English language teaching and gives some useful suggestions, so as to realize the final objectives of English language teaching.

Keywords: Linguistic competence; Intercultural communication competence; English language teaching

1. Introduction

In this globalized world, intercultural awareness in foreign language teaching and learning has drawn Chinese scholars' attention since the end of last century, and particularly after China entered the World Trade Organisation in 2001. The shift in foreign language teaching and learning from the focus on learning just the language itself to emphasising intercultural awareness as well has been introduced to China's academic research fields ever since. "The primary function of language is for interaction and communication" (Richard and Rodgers, 1986). It reflects communicative uses of language. English language learners are required to converse with others in English fluently. Accordingly, intercultural communication competence has become more and more important in English language teaching. In this article, the author tries to discuss about the relationship between linguistic competence and intercultural communication competence and then about the functions of English language teaching in improving students' intercultural communication competence. Finally, the author explores how to develop English language students' intercultural communication competence in English language teaching and gives some useful suggestions, so as to really realize the final objective of English language teaching.

2. The relationship between linguistic competence and intercultural communication competence

Intercultural communication competence can be thus defined as a person's ability to engage in productive intercultural dialogues of meanings and relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds. To make the intercultural interaction productive, one needs to have the ability to construct meaning and rapport with people from different cultural backgrounds through appropriate and effective use of verbal and nonverbal language. (Song, 2009)

3. The functions of English language teaching in improving learners' intercultural communication competence

From the above analysis of relationship between linguistic competence and intercultural communication competence, we may easily know that English language teaching itself is the practice of not only improving learners' linguistic competence but also intercultural communication competence as the teaching of English language unavoidably involves the teaching of the cultures from English spoken countries. Moreover, English language teaching has a unique role to play in developing students' linguistic competence and to help students broaden their mind, to absorb in foreign cultural essence and to finally improve learners' intercultural communication competence.

3.1 English language teaching has a crucial role in cultivating English language learner' intercultural communication awareness

Because face-to-face contact among people of different cultural backgrounds has increased in recent years, the world has become a shrinking interdependent one. (Chen, 2010) This is the reason why (Chen, 2011) proclaimed that "all the people of the world should study intercultural communication."

3.2 English language teaching is an important channel for improvement of the students' intercultural communication competence

English language teaching can provide students with opportunities to contact other cultures and students in classrooms without going abroad, because the cultures in English-spoken countries are brought to the knowledge of students through various English language teaching materials, class activities and personal interaction with foreign teachers and students from English –spoken countries.

To some extent, the process of English language teaching and learning is a process of intercultural communication between the students' first linguaculture and the students' second linguacultures. Throughout the process, English language teachers and students are engaged in negotiation of definitions establishment or reestablishment of cultural identities in between their own linguaculture and that of others. English language teaching offers unique and important chances for the students' intercultural experience and also makes the students' necessary experience of their personal growth into an intercultural person.

In sum, English language teaching is the most effective means of cultivation for the students' intercultural communication competence. Especially, English language has become an international language and been most widely used for intercultural communication all over the world. At the same time, English language learning has been a compulsory course in colleges and universities for most countries, the improvement and cultivation of intercultural communication competence through English language teaching can really benefit the largest number of the students than any other language teaching or any other language learning. Moreover, the students who learn and use English language will obtain the fundamental knowledge and skills for effective intercultural communication and successful career in an intercultural communicative world.

4. Some suggestions

From the above discussions, English language teaching is recognized as the important functions such as a crucial role and an important channel in cultivation of the students' intercultural communication competence. Now. it is necessary for us to explore that English language teaching for intercultural communication competence requires some measures and practices of English language teaching be set for the development of the students' intercultural communication competence. Hence, the author gives some suggestions about how to improve the students' intercultural communication competence through English language teaching.

1) Different colleges and universities in our country should change old syllabus and curricula which combine English language teaching with the knowledge of intercultural communication, so that students may not only learn English language but also master some basic knowledge and skills needed in intercultural communication.

2) English language teachers should change their old traditional teaching concepts and methods and adopt new teaching concepts and methods such as teaching modes of MOOC, Mini course and flipped class. Especially, the teachers should organize different seminars or group discussions among teachers and students on the various cultural characteristics of different English-spoken countries in the world.

3) English language teachers should change their teaching contents and provide the students with more information resources in English language teaching materials on intercultural communication, give the students more different types of courses about literature, history, philosophy and sociology, art from English spoken countries.

5. Conclusion

English language teaching cultivates students' linguistic competence, but also intercultural communication competence. As a result, English language teachers should know the relationship between linguistic competence and intercultural communication competence and understand English language teaching itself is the practice of not only improving students' linguistic competence but also intercultural communication competence as the teaching of English language unavoidably involves the teaching of cultures from the English spoken countries.

Moreover, the English language teachers should adopt some effective measures to cultivate the students' basic knowledge and skills of intercultural communication, enhance the students' intercultural communication awareness through various teaching modes, so as to realize the goal of English language teaching to cultivate the students' intercultural communication competence.

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