

Intercultural Competence of European Youth in the Context of SDGs Goals

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Abstract: Intercultural communication competence development is crucial for the successful achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This paper analyzes the strategies of intercultural communication competence development for youth in two regions of China and Europe by reviewing and collecting data. At the same time, a comparative study is conducted on the sustainable development of language and the development of intercultural communication skills. Finally, on the basis of the above analysis, the implications of Europe's strategic thinking on youth intercultural competence development for language development and youth intercultural competence development in China are discussed in the context of the national situation.

Keywords: Linguisticity; Sustainable development goals; Europe

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This study is based on the "14th Five-Year Plan" project of Jiangxi Provincial Education Science in 2021: "Comparative Study on Intercultural Competence Development of Chinese and European Youth in the Context of SDGs (Grant No. A1QN057)". United Nations has once again set out its vision for human development and prosperity (UN, 2015), namely the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The prerequisite for the successful realization of SDGs is a democratic and two-way dialogue and communication in a multilingual environment, and the establishment of a sustainable development communication model in a multilingual environment can ensure the smooth implementation of SDGs in three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social.

1. SDGs and intercultural communication skills development

The United Nations "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the prerequisite for the successful implementation of SDGs is a democratic, two-way dialogue and communication in a multilingual environment, and the establishment of a sustainable development communication model in a multilingual environment can ensure the smooth implementation of SDGs in three dimensions: economic, environmental and social.

The SDGs assessment uses language as a resource, arguing that the development of language skills ensures that all groups and individuals have access to advanced ideas and concepts, avoiding integration and marginalization, and is at the root of building a development model that is participatory for all. Building a sustainable development model of communication in a multilingual environment is indispensable for achieving universal access to education for all (Goal 4), reducing inequalities (Goals 5, 10), and building harmonious and inclusive societies (Goal 11); while promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth (Goal 8), sustainable industrialization and industrial innovation (Goal 9), and the adoption of responsible production and consumption patterns (Goal 12), intercultural competencies serve as important mediators. Developing intercultural competence among youth and making language a medium for the transmission of advanced cultural technologies, rather than a creator of prejudicial divides, are important prerequisites for building sustainable development models and ensuring the participation of all.

2. European youth intercultural competence development process

The history of intercultural competence research in the West dates back to the 1940s, when the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stated that the goal of education should be “to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups.” The earliest research on intercultural competence was conducted in the United States and has since emerged in Europe and around the world, and has received attention from important international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The term “intercultural competence” was formally introduced in the 1970s, and its conceptual content and components have been studied and explored.

In terms of the type of researcher, in addition to individual researchers, different international organizations, regional organizations and countries have paid active attention to intercultural competence, especially in continental Europe. The development of intercultural competence is given great importance on the European continent due to historical traditions, the challenges of the deepening European integration process, and the need to improve Europe’s international competitiveness. Intercultural competence” is included in strategic documents as an important strategic element.

In terms of practical actions, European countries actively promote intercultural education and intercultural learning to develop intercultural competence among young people under the guidance of strategic ideas and programs. However, the relevance of various policy documents issued by the Council of Europe and the European Union on various topics to intercultural competence and the discussion of intercultural competence by individual researchers in different research topics show that intercultural competence development in Europe is taught in all aspects. However, few researchers have systematically reviewed the overall European intercultural competence development strategies and policies, so it is difficult to see the whole picture of intercultural competence development in Europe. The author believes that, based on the gap between China’s current requirements for the cultivation of international talents and educational practices, the European experience in the cultivation of young people’s intercultural competence has positive significance for the cultivation of internationally competitive talents in China. Moreover, there is still more room to study the whole picture of intercultural competence training in Europe.

3. Strategies and Programs for Intercultural Competence Development of European Youth

3.1 Orientation and definition of intercultural competence

The Bulletin begins by clarifying the importance of intercultural competence for Europe: “Intercultural dialogue is a key path to addressing some of the most important challenges facing Europe today and it is one of the three strategic objectives of the European Agenda for Action on Culture. In order to foster an open and inclusive community based on European nuclear values and to promote active citizenship, European citizens need to be interculturally competent.” The Bulletin then briefly defines what intercultural competence is: “It is a key factor in strengthening intercultural dialogue, and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that have a particular relevance to intercultural competence are also related to the following core competencies: namely foreign language communication skills, social and civic competence, and cultural awareness and expression.”

3.2 Action deployment for intercultural competence development

In Europe, the field of youth is a specialized area of work. As young people are the main actors in the development of “European citizenship” in Europe, the development of intercultural competence among young people is particularly important. Therefore, the youth field is naturally the main area of work for the promotion of intercultural competence among young people. The “Public Policy Framework” indicates that relevant actions in the youth field for the promotion of intercultural competence should include: (1) considering young people as a resource for intercultural dialogue and making them part of an open and diverse community; (2) promoting, developing and recognizing young people’s intercultural competence through informal education; (3) developing more opportunities for young people to participate in society through various forms of social participation, such as volunteering, and giving them a greater sense of ownership; (4) encourage exposure to and promote the impact of culture, art, music, and sports in shaping young people’s identities and uniting them; (5) promote, develop, and recognize the intercultural competence of youth workers and leaders by increasing their mobility and educational and training opportunities.

3.3 Initiatives to promote intercultural competence of citizens in EU Member States

In addition to proposing the deployment of programs and actions for the development of intercultural competences in different fields, the Proclamation proposes initiatives to the Member States of the EU, calling on them to actively develop and promote the

intercultural competences of their citizens based on their respective spheres of competence: (1) through existing tools and actions in the fields of culture, education, youth and audiovisual policies, in particular by exploring how to further deepen and strengthen these measures to support (2) strengthen support for intercultural competence development through existing programmes in the fields of culture, education, youth and media communication policies, thereby creating opportunities for dialogue at the local, regional, national and EU levels; (3) foster an enabling environment for creativity and innovation, thereby fully exploiting their role in shaping intercultural competence and enhancing intercultural dialogue; (4) in the development of intercultural competencies, identify and share good practices. As a follow-up, particular attention should be paid to the actions implemented at national and Euromed level, which form part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

4. Summary

Currently, the “Belt and Road” Initiative and the sustainable development strategy both require us to train more talents who understand international rules, convey China’s voice to the international community, and promote mutual understanding and cooperation between China and other countries. Cross-cultural competence” includes the ability to understand oneself and other cultures in depth, critical thinking ability, and cross-cultural coordination ability, which are precisely the abilities needed to promote the implementation of national strategies. Europe’s strategic thinking on intercultural competence development of youth has strategic reference value for intercultural competence development of Chinese youth.

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