



Faculty of Education, Language and Communication

**The Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence Using
Performed Culture Approach for English Majors in China**

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The Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence Using
Performed Culture Approach for English Majors in China

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Except where due acknowledgements have been made, the works is that of the author alone. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

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Thanks to all the experiences in these four years. Each experience is a growth, converging into the width of life. The road ahead will be long and I will be gentle and firm, contented and progressive.

ABSTRACT

With the increasing frequency of intercultural exchanges, there is a significant rise in social demand for talents with intercultural communication competence (ICC) . However, due to their lack of experience in intercultural language teaching (ICLT), English major teachers in China struggle to effectively develop this core competence in students during their teaching. This issue causes students to easily develop misunderstandings and encounter communication barriers in intercultural interactions, thereby restricting the quality of talent cultivation for English majors. The Performed Culture Approach (PCA) is a new kind of ICLT approach that aims to cultivate students' ICC. The aim of the present study is to explore the cultivation of ICC using PCA among English majors in China from the perspectives of both the students and teachers concerned. It was achieved by investigating students' ICC level, comparing the perceived impact of PCA on ICC cultivation between teacher and student participants, and examining teachers' intention to use PCA. The present study employs an interpretivist case study approach, utilizing the Three-Dimensional Theory of ICC, the Context, Input, Process and Product (CIPP) evaluation model, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as its theoretical framework. Data was drawn from individual interviews with eight teachers and 12 students, and was analyzed using the thematic analysis method. The findings reveal that students' ICC is at a moderate level, showing an imbalance developmental pattern characterized as "knowledge-attitude-skill". Both teachers and students affirm the positive impact of the PCA on ICC. PCA enhances students' language proficiency, improves their intercultural behavior skills, and boosts students' classroom participation and learning motivation. The learning facilitation factors of PCA include performance evaluation, performance activities,

and pre-class tasks. However, there were notable variations in teachers' intention to use PCA. Perceived behavioral control, attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and teachers' cognition of ICLT influenced their intention to use PCA. Teachers' intention to use PCA was determined by internal factors more than external factors. A cross-analysis of sub-cases from the perspectives of divergence and convergence yielded three themes: students' developmental needs for ICC, the consistency between the PCA and students' ICC developmental needs, and teachers' ambivalence towards using PCA. An ICC cultivation model in the context of EFL in China was proposed based on students' ICC development needs and facilitation factors of PCA. These findings have implications for policy and practice for the implementation of PCA in ICC cultivation among English majors in the EFL context of China.

Keywords: ICC cultivation, impact of PCA; teachers' intention to use PCA; teachers and students' perspectives

Pembinaan Kecekapan Komunikasi Antara Budaya Menggunakan Pendekatan Budaya yang Dilakukan bagi Pelajar Jurusan Bahasa Inggeris di China

ABSTRAK

Dengan peningkatan kekerapan pertukaran antara budaya, terdapat peningkatan yang ketara dalam permintaan sosial China terhadap bakat yang mempunyai kecekapan komunikasi antara budaya (ICC). Walau bagaimanapun, kerana kekurangan pengalaman dalam pengajaran bahasa antara budaya (ICLT), guru-guru jurusan Bahasa Inggeris di China menghadapi kesukaran untuk membangunkan kecekapan teras ini secara berkesan dalam kalangan pelajar semasa amalan pengajaran mereka. Masalah ini menyebabkan pelajar mudah mengalami kesalahpahaman dan menghadapi halangan komunikasi dalam interaksi antara budaya, dengan itu menghadkan kualiti pembinaan bakat untuk jurusan Bahasa Inggeris. Approach performed culture (PCA) adalah sejenis pendekatan ICLT baru yang bertujuan untuk memupuk ICC pelajar. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka pembinaan ICC menggunakan PCA dalam kalangan jurusan Bahasa Inggeris di China dari perspektif kedua-dua pelajar dan guru yang terlibat. Ia dicapai dengan menyiasat tahap ICC pelajar, membandingkan kesan yang dirasai PCA terhadap pembinaan ICC antara peserta guru dan pelajar, serta meneliti niat guru untuk menggunakan PCA. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kajian kes interpretivist dengan menggunakan model teori Tiga Dimensi, model penilaian CIPP dan teori TPB sebagai rangka kerja teorinya. Data telah diambil daripada temu bual individu dengan lapan guru dan 12 pelajar, dan telah dianalisis menggunakan kaedah analisis tematik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa ICC pelajar berada pada tahap sederhana, menunjukkan corak perkembangan yang tidak simetri yang dicirikan sebagai “pengetahuan-sikap-kemahiran”. Kedua-dua guru dan pelajar mengesahkan kesan positif PCA terhadap ICC. PCA meningkatkan kecekapan

bahasa pelajar, memperbaiki kemahiran tingkah laku antara budaya mereka, dan meningkatkan penyertaan kelas pelajar serta motivasi pembelajaran mereka. Faktor-faktor pemudah pembelajaran PCA termasuk penilaian prestasi, aktiviti prestasi, dan tugas pra-kelas. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat variasi yang ketara dalam niat guru untuk menggunakan PCA. Kawalan tingkah laku yang dirasai, sikap terhadap tingkah laku, norma subjektif, dan kognisi guru terhadap ICLT mempengaruhi niat mereka untuk menggunakan PCA. Niat guru untuk menggunakan PCA lebih ditentukan oleh faktor dalaman berbanding faktor luaran. Analisis silang sub-kes dari perspektif perbezaan dan penumpuan menghasilkan tiga tema: keperluan perkembangan pelajar untuk ICC, konsistensi antara PCA dan keperluan perkembangan ICC pelajar, serta kekecewaan guru terhadap penggunaan PCA. Model pembinaan ICC dalam konteks EFL di China telah dicadangkan berdasarkan keperluan perkembangan ICC pelajar dan faktor-faktor pemudah PCA. Hasil kajian ini mempunyai implikasi untuk dasar dan amalan bagi pelaksanaan PCA dalam pembinaan ICC dalam kalangan jurusan Bahasa Inggeris dalam konteks EFL China.

Kata kunci: *Pembinaan ICC, kesan PCA; niat guru untuk menggunakan PCA; perspektif guru dan pelajar*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFL	Chinese as foreign language
CLT	Communication language teaching
EFL	English as foreign language
ICC	Intercultural communication competence
ICLT	Intercultural language teaching
PCA	Performed Culture Approach
TPB	Theory of Planned Behavior

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

With the development of globalization, communication between different cultures has become increasingly frequent. During cultural exchange, integration, and even assimilation, cultural collisions often occur due to cultural differences (Fantini, 2000; Sun, 2016; Toomey & Chuang, 2005). The ability to carry out effective intercultural communication in a multicultural environment while maintaining one's cultural identity largely depends on the communicator's intercultural communication competence (hereinafter referred to as ICC) (Byram, 2020). Intercultural perspectives on diversity and globalization are expanding the body of knowledge in both theory and practice in the 21st century (Kim & Bhawuk, 2008). This expansion has led to a growing interest in intercultural communication between nations and an increase in intercultural studies (Peng et al., 2020).

As the global lingua franca, English has evolved into a bridge for intercultural communication (Phuong, 2017). Over the past decade, language teaching policies in many countries, including the U.S., European nations, and Malaysia, have placed a greater emphasis on the cultivation of ICC. The Council of Europe emphasizes the importance of ICC by incorporating an intercultural dimension into language teaching objectives, aiming to equip learners to engage with speakers of other languages on an equal footing (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001). In Malaysia, the country's multiethnic society and the pressures of globalization have heightened educators'

awareness of ICC in higher education (Mahmud et al., 2010). This focus on ICC in language education reflects broader concerns about fostering global citizenship in an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, as ICC is indispensable for meaningful intercultural dialogue (Byram, 2020).

As for China, in the process of globalization, the implementation of “One Belt and One Road” policy will undoubtedly make China a more open and culturally diverse society. It is a major strategic measure and the top-level design of China’s economic diplomacy, which aims to further open China to the outside world. The intercultural exchanges and cooperation between China and the nations along the “One Belt and One Road” initiative will deepen under the guidance of the strategy. Additionally, at the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese government introduced the “cultural output” strategy. It emphasizes the need for China to actively disseminate Chinese culture in foreign exchanges and enhance the international influence of Chinese culture.

In China, English majors represent one of the key professional groups facilitating intercultural exchanges. Driven by globalization, internationalization pressures, and the nation’s ambition to foster shared global development while expanding its influence in international competition, China has prioritized the cultivation of ICC in English language education. As early as 2004, the Ministry of Education initiated reforms in English teaching to align with the demands of global communication. Since then, the ministry has implemented a series of policies aimed at systematically integrating ICC development into the English curricula.

In 2004, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued *The Requirements for Teaching English in University Programs*, which pointed out that the nature of university English

teaching is based on the knowledge of the English language and application skills, with learning strategies at the core, and ICC as the main content (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2004). This requirement has drawn widespread attention to ICC cultivation in the English education sector.

The Quality Standards for College English Teaching, promulgated in 2018, further institutionalized the ICC and set specific goals, including cultivating students' cultural empathy and critical analysis awareness. In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued *The Guiding Opinions on the Teaching of English Majors*, providing specific guidance for the ICC training of undergraduate English majors in terms of concepts, goals, practices, and quality. Regarding quality requirements, the guideline suggests that students retain their Chinese cultural identity and possess an international perspective.

As evidenced by policies issued by China's Ministry of Education over the years, ICC cultivation has become a key mission for English majors (Wen, 2022). In response to the needs of the national talent strategy, China's English education community is actively promoting the cultivation of ICC in English teaching and exploring new intercultural language teaching (ICLT) models (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2022).

1.2 Problem Statement

1.2.1 Intercultural Communication Competence Cultivation

However, the current state of English language teaching in China has yet to fully align with national policy expectations (Wang & Pan, 2019). The integration of ICC cultivation into EFL teaching remains a significant challenge, and its implementation in practice remains far from satisfactory (Mu & Yu, 2023).

For a long time, China's English major education has been predominantly shaped by traditional pedagogical approaches, examination systems, and teachers' competencies, resulting in a persistent focus on linguistic symbols and communicative language teaching (CLT). The teaching of linguistic symbols follows the traditional teaching concepts centered on the linguistic knowledge system, which focuses on learning to correctly use the components of the language system and the ability to communicate as the primary teaching goal. This overemphasis on language proficiency is frequently associated with dominant language learning methodologies, which tend to prioritize linguistic accuracy and fluency over cultural understanding (Khan et al., 2023). Meanwhile, CLT often neglects intercultural contexts, rendering it insufficient for fostering students' ICC (Dai, 2019).

Firstly, there is an apparent disconnect between the theoretical models of ICC and teaching practice, and ICLT has not yet developed an operable implementation path. While scholars have developed numerous theoretical frameworks for ICC development (Baker & Fang, 2021), these models often remain overly abstract, confined to conceptual levels without specifying concrete pedagogical practices aligned with each theoretical dimension. Consequently, teachers struggle to translate these frameworks into effective classroom instruction (Zhang & Yao, 2020), which significantly hinders the practical application of ICLT. Existing research on ICLT and ICC cultivation is hindered by methodological limitations and insufficient empirical depth. Current studies remain predominantly theoretical (Wang & Pan, 2019), with empirical work largely restricted to quantitative approaches and controlled experiments. Crucially, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative investigations into classroom dynamics, teacher-student interactions, and contextual factors (Wen, 2023). This narrow methodological focus fails to provide robust empirical foundations for refining ICLT practices.

Secondly, there is a significant one-sidedness in the content of teachers' teaching practices. Teachers predominantly focus on transmitting factual cultural knowledge (e.g., festivals and customs) while largely neglecting critical dimensions of ICC development, including intercultural conflict management and training in local culture dissemination (Gao, 2016; Hu, 2019). This narrow approach fails to foster the comprehensive development of students' ICC competencies (Liu et al., 2016; Wang, 2016).

Thirdly, current research on ICLT methodology predominantly employs quantitative experiments to assess teaching effectiveness, while largely neglecting qualitative investigations into how teachers comprehend, adapt, and implement these approaches across diverse instructional contexts (Wen, 2023). This methodological imbalance has resulted in a limited understanding of the contextualized mechanisms underlying ICC cultivation, consequently failing to address the practical challenges encountered by frontline educators.

Insufficient scholarly attention has been paid to the challenges and needs of teachers, who are the primary implementers of ICLT. Current research has failed to systematically examine the key barriers to ICLT implementation, including institutional constraints, resource limitations, and teachers' cognitive biases (Samovar & Paulsrud, 2020). The lack of understanding of the teachers' perspective has significantly hindered the effective integration of ICLT into actual classroom practice.

It can be seen that due to the lack of effective methods to guide the teaching of the ICC behavioral system, teachers feel at a loss in teaching (Zhang & Yao, 2020). The fundamental challenge stems from the current ICLT research's failure to construct a comprehensive teacher support system—one that bridges theoretical models with practical

teaching strategies. This critical gap ultimately explains the persistent disconnect between policy objectives and classroom implementation.

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1.2.2 Performed Culture Approach

Performed Culture Approach (PCA) represents an innovative ICLT methodology developed by Galal Walker's research team at the Ohio State University. This pedagogical framework reconceptualizes language acquisition as a process of cultural behavior acquisition. Through carefully designed intercultural communication scenarios, PCA facilitates experiential learning by enabling students to engage in simulated intercultural interactions within classroom settings actively. This dual-focused approach simultaneously develops both linguistic proficiency and intercultural behavioral skills.

The method's emphasis on immersive scenario practice effectively bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical intercultural behavior. This teaching method aligns precisely with the essential requirements for developing ICC (Gong & Zhang, 2025; Walker, 2010). As Byram (2008) emphasizes, authentic ICC can only be fully developed through experiential learning in simulated or real-world contexts. Studies have shown that in the context of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), PCA can significantly enhance learners' ICC by creating immersive interaction scenarios and facilitating practical

application of cultural knowledge (Gong & Zhang, 2025; Jiang, 2021; Yu, 2020).

Over the past decade, some Chinese teachers have begun applying PCA to EFL teaching in China. However, adoption patterns have revealed significant divergence: some teachers have successfully sustained PCA-based ICLT practices, while others have returned to a traditional approach after a period of implementation. The new ICLT approach is, in fact, a proposal for a revolutionary shift and challenges traditional practice in China. Teaching reform is a complex process that is influenced by various factors (Fullan, 2001; Thurlings et al., 2015), and reforms are not consistently implemented as expected (Maass et al., 2019).

Notably, existing research on PCA in EFL contexts still has limitations that hinder a comprehensive understanding of its implementation and impact. Regarding research content, most studies focus on the effect of PCA on improving students' academic performance in English. At the same time, there is a lack of research on its impact on ICC cultivation. Comparative experiments are mainly adopted in terms of research methodology, with a shortage of qualitative case studies. Regarding research subjects, insufficient attention has been paid to teachers' and students' perceptions of PCA.

Numerous studies show that the sustainable implementation of a new approach depends on how it is perceived by stakeholders rather than how effective it is reported. Their knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions play a fundamental role in understanding the teaching reforms (Blignaut, 2007). As the primary designers, facilitators, and assessors of instructional processes, teachers play a central role in determining the success of pedagogical innovations. Their perceptions and attitudes toward PCA constitute critical factors in its effective implementation. However, while teachers are undeniably the key

practitioners in this educational reform, the significance of their role has not been adequately recognized or investigated in current research (Le, 2020).

Similarly, student perceptions are crucial in approach change. In essence, the impact of pedagogy should be explored by the actual situation of attainment of cultivation goals and students' perceptions (Guo, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a case study on the implementation of PCA in English majors teaching in China to understand students' ICC level and their development needs, the impact of PCA on students' ICC development, and the factors affecting teachers' intention to use PCA. When educational leaders identify the key factors shaping teacher and student perceptions of pedagogical reform, they can strategically allocate resources to address these influences and optimize the implementation process (Jeff & Harold, 2002).

Against the above background, this study takes the implementation of PCA in cultivating ICC among English majors in China as a case study. Firstly, it examines students' ICC levels from teachers' perspectives to identify students' developmental needs for ICC. Secondly, starting from the perceptions of teachers and students, it explores the impact of PCA in ICC cultivation to determine whether PCA can meet students' developmental needs for ICC. Thirdly, it investigates teachers' intention to use PCA and the factors influencing their intention. Finally, based on the results of data analysis, it puts forward suggestions for applying PCA in ICC cultivation and proposes a cultivation model.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to explore the cultivation of ICC using PCA among English majors in China from the perspectives of both the students and teachers concerned. The