Exploring Foreign Language Teaching Model for Improving English Majors' Intercultural Competence

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Abstract
With the increasing influence of globalization and internationalization, the importance of cultivating intercultural competence in higher education has become widely acknowledged. As key participants in global communication, English majors in China are uniquely positioned to foster intercultural understanding. Foreign language teaching, therefore, serves as a crucial platform for promoting intercultural education and remains a primary channel through which intercultural competence is developed. However, a noticeable gap exists in established theoretical frameworks designed to enhance intercultural competence in foreign language teaching. This study aims to address this gap by proposing a foreign language teaching model tailored to improve the intercultural competence of English majors. Drawing on existing research regarding the factors that influence intercultural competence and the current state of intercultural teaching, the model is built around three foundational dimensions: knowledge, attitude, and skills. Furthermore, it outlines a three-phase approach to foreign language instruction, input, intake, and output, that serves to progressively enhance intercultural competence. This theoretical model offers valuable insights into how curriculum objectives related to intercultural competence can be effectively achieved, providing a framework for advancing intercultural foreign language teaching in the contemporary educational landscape.
Keywords: Foreign Language Teaching Model, English Majors, Intercultural Competence

Introduction
With the increasing number of intercultural communications, intercultural competence has been put in a vital position (Tan, 2017). The importance of developing IC is also emphasized by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in China. In addition, intercultural competence is also one of the goals of English majors' talent training in China. Liu (2012) believes that cultivating interdisciplinary talents in English majors should take intercultural competence as the core. In addition to foreign language knowledge and skills, the target culture, native culture, global awareness, international vision, and psychological adjustment ability will also be included.

The cultivation of intercultural awareness, the establishment of an intercultural knowledge framework, and the exercise of intercultural skills need to be carried out simultaneously. In this way, English majors can develop good intercultural competence (Zhuang, 2006).

Over the past ten years, teachers at Hengshui University have tried to apply three models: the integration of the "Knowing and Doing" model, the ADDIE model and Wen's model for developing students' intercultural competence in the current English class. According to Gao's "Knowing and Doing" model (2014), "knowing" refers to the knowledge aspect, and "doing" is a behavioural aspect. It consists of a knowing system and a doing system. Each contains three dimensions: knowledge, awareness, speculating in the knowing system, and attitude, skill, and strategy in the doing system (Gao, 2014). Peterson (2003), proclaims that adopting the ADDIE model in a course is beneficial as it is more learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. For the teachers adopting this model at this university, it would improve students' knowledge and skills. In Wen's model (1999), IC consists of communicative competence and intercultural competence. As for communicative competence, three sub-competences are involved: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and strategic competence. For intercultural competence, it includes sensitivity, tolerance, and flexibility. However, although models have been adopted in the English teaching class at Hengshui University, they are random, not systematic, and comprehensive. In addition, there is still a lack of representative and applicable foreign language teaching models based on improving English majors' intercultural competence. Given this, this study constructs a theoretical model and practical model of foreign language teaching based on improving intercultural competence that is suitable for English major foreign language courses based on Deardorff's (2006) Pyramid model of intercultural competence and Zhang's Integrated Model for Chinese Students' Intercultural Competence Development (IMCSICD). This study aims to provide a reference for the foreign language teaching practice of English majors in colleges and universities.

Literature Review

To construct a theoretical model and practical model of foreign language teaching based on improving intercultural competence, we need to understand the definition of intercultural competence, the dimensions that compose it and the method of cultivating. Therefore, this section introduces the current definitions and composing dimensions of intercultural competence and reviews the existing models of intercultural competence. To guide the design of the theoretical model and practical model of foreign language teaching based on improving intercultural competence, we highlight Deardorff's (2006) Pyramid model of intercultural competence and Zhang's IMCSICD (2020) and framework of reference for intercultural competence teaching in Chinese foreign language education (2022).

Definitions of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is comprehensive and has richer connotations than intercultural communication competence (Jiang, 2013). Although Western scholars have been working on intercultural competence for about 50 years, there needs to be more consensus on the concept of this terminology (Deardorff, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 2007; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Its conceptualization, instead, depends on how scholars intend to use it for their interests and fields (Chao, 2016). Byram (2020) proposes that intercultural competence is the communicators' ability to coordinate different language and cultural systems, covering four components: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Similarly,

Fantini (2009) believes that intercultural communication skills include four components: knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness. All four dimensions apply to the target culture in the same way that they apply to one's native culture. According to Deardorff (2009), intercultural competence comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills. Deardorff developed the "pyramid model" of intercultural competence, which includes four steps depending on five dimensions: attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills, and internal and external outcomes. Hence, attitudes, knowledge, and skills are necessary parts of intercultural competence.

Asian scholars describe the concept of intercultural competence from different perspectives. Wen (1999) believes that intercultural communicative competence includes communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence. Communicative competence includes language competence, pragmatic competence, and strategic competence. Intercultural communicative competence includes sensibility and tolerance to cultural differences and flexibility to deal with cultural differences. Yang and Zhuang (2007) propose that intercultural competence comprises global awareness, cultural adaptation, knowledge, and communicative practice. Global awareness is the foundation, cultural adaptation, and knowledge are the intermediate components, and communicative practice is the goal. Gao (2014) draws on Chinese and foreign ideas and puts forward a model of "integration of theory and practice" (p. 80). She believes that the intercultural competence system consists of knowledge and behaviour systems. The knowledge system includes cultural knowledge, awareness, and speculation. Moreover, the behaviour system includes attitudes, skills, and strategies. Dai (2019) integrates Chinese and Western value orientations and proposes a theoretical model from cross-culturalism. They believe that in addition to Western scholars' emotions, cognitions, and behaviours, intercultural competence should also include moral aspects; the more significant the cultural difference, the more critical the role of moral regulations will be. Thus, knowledge, competence and attitude are also the keywords of intercultural competence based on Asian scholars' research.

To find a widely agreed-upon definition of intercultural competence, Deardorff conducts a survey that documents consensus among American university administrators and well-known scholars in intercultural communication based on the data generated from a Delphi study. The results found that the most popular definition of intercultural competence is: "The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in the practice of cultural communication based on intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills" (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). In this study, we adopted Deardorff's definition and dimensions of intercultural competence.

Models of Intercultural Competence
Research on the model of intercultural competence at home and abroad also varies. Existing models of intercultural competence can be broadly divided into the following types: compositional models, developmental models, and causal process models. Compositional models identify the hypothesized components of competence without specifying the relations among those components (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The critical compositional models include Byram's (1997) model, Howard Hamilton's (1998) Intercultural Competence Components Model and Deardorff's (2006) Pyramid Model of IC. Developmental models outline the progression of intercultural competence from low to high levels, such as Bennett's (1993) model of intercultural sensitivity development and King & Baxter Magolda's (2005)

model of intercultural maturity. Causal process models attempt to represent intercultural competence as a theoretical linear system (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). These kinds of models include Griffith and Harvey's (2000) Intercultural Communication Model of Relationship Quality and Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence.

In addition to the models raised by scholars abroad, Chinese scholars explore intercultural competence from two aspects: firstly, constructing models of intercultural competence from a theoretical perspective (Xu, 2000; Zhang, 2007). For example, proposing the framework of intercultural competence from the perspective of foreign language teaching, such as Chen's intercultural communication competence model, Gao's Dao and Qi in intercultural competence, Wen's model (1999), Gao's "Knowing and Doing" model (2014), Xu and Sun's Progressive-Interactive Model for Intercultural Competence Development (2013). Among these models, Gao (1998) interpreted the connotation of intercultural communication and elaborated on the cultivation of intercultural communication competence in terms of "Dao" and "Qi" in Chinese culture. Yang and Zhuang (2007) suggest that intercultural communication competence consists of four parts: global awareness, cultural adjustment, knowledge, and communication practice. Secondly, cultivating intercultural competence in foreign language education from a practical perspective. Scholars in China discuss the cultivation of intercultural competence from the dimensions of intercultural syllabus and teaching content (Hu, 2006; Zhang, 2007), curriculum and teaching principles (Song, 2008), teaching materials (Zheng, 2012) and teaching methods (Chang & Zhao, 2012). In addition, Sun (2016) puts forward the basic principles of classroom teaching in foreign language majors oriented to cultivate intercultural competence: critiquing, reflecting, exploring, empathizing, and doing. Furthermore, Zhang and Yao (2020) constructed an Integrated Model for Chinese Students' Intercultural Competence Development (IMCSICD) to analyze intercultural competence more precisely and in line with Chinese college English education.

In summary, research in China and abroad has not yet formed the systematic theoretical model and practical model for foreign language teaching suitable for improving English majors' intercultural competence. There is also a lack of discussion of specific teaching strategies and methods. Therefore, this study aims to construct a theoretical model and practical model of foreign language teaching based on improving intercultural competence suitable for English major foreign language courses, hoping to provide a reference for improving English majors' intercultural competence through foreign language teaching.

Constructing Theoretical Model of Foreign Language Teaching for Improving Intercultural Competence
Foreign language courses are the primary platform for cultivating English majors' intercultural competence. However, intercultural communication courses are the focus of this study. Figure 1 shows that the theoretical model contains three macro dimensions: knowledge, attitude, and skills. In addition, there are three steps in foreign language teaching for improving English majors' intercultural competence: input, intake, and output.
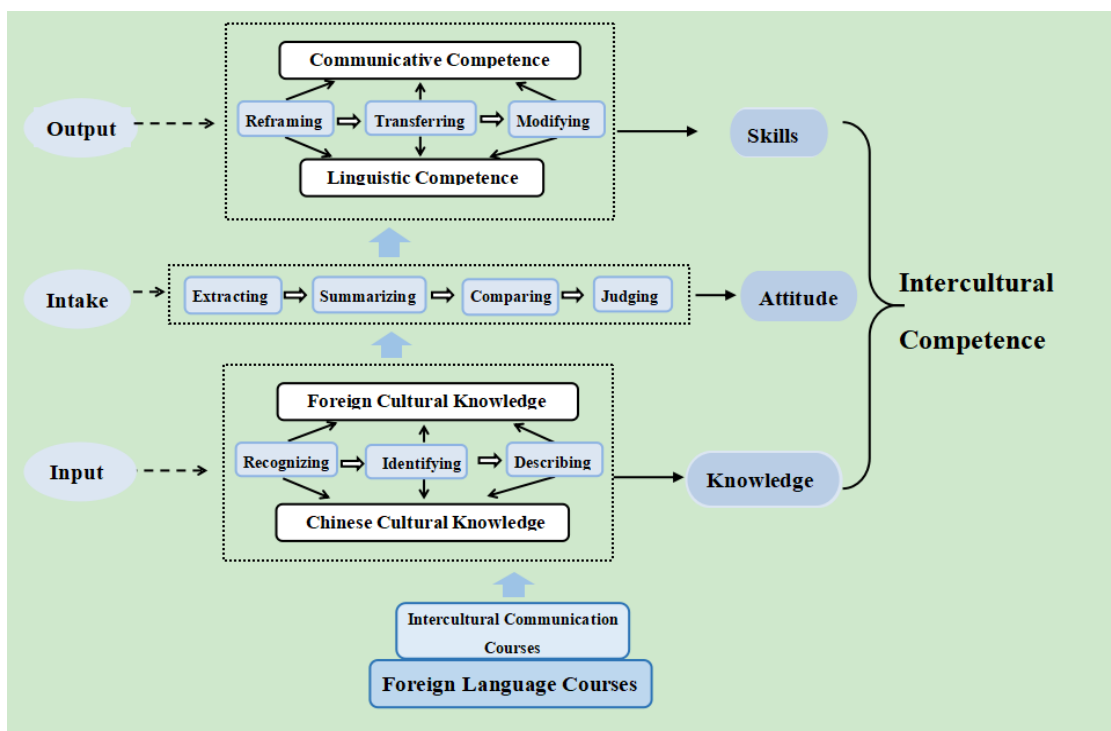
Figure 1: Theoretical Model of Foreign Language Teaching for Improving Intercultural Competence

Foreign language courses are one of the most effective platforms for implementing intercultural teaching (Zhang, 2012). In modern education, foreign language courses consist of online and offline courses. For Hengshui University, English majors' foreign language courses, including basic courses (Comprehensive English, English Viewing, listening, Oral English and English Reading, etc.) and core curriculum (English-Chinese/Chinese-English Translation, Intercultural Communication, British Literature, American Literature and Second Foreign Language, etc.). Previous research (Kong & Luan, 2012; Xu & Sun, 2013; Huang, 2015; Wu, 2020; Mu & Yu, 2021) verified that reforming the teaching methods can improve learners' intercultural competence.

Online foreign language courses are also an essential platform for intercultural teaching. Most of the online foreign language courses come from the three online platforms of Smart Education of China (Higher Education): Chinese University MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), Wisdom Tree and Xuetang Online. Chinese University MOOC carries 369 foreign language courses, the highest proportion. Among them are 40 intercultural communication courses, for example, *Encounter of Different Cultures: China and the West* from Central South University, *Intercultural Communication* from Huazhong Normal University, Beijing Union University, Northeastern University, etc. Online intercultural communication courses provide learners with more opportunities to be exposed to different intercultural perspectives and situations, enhance intercultural experience and improve the effectiveness of intercultural teaching.

The previous quantitative analysis found that the most dominant factors affecting Chinese college English majors' intercultural competence are foreign cultural knowledge, Chinese cultural knowledge, attitudes, linguistic competence, and communicative competence. In other words, cultivating intercultural competence requires higher requirements for foreign

language teaching: Students need to have basic language knowledge and cultural knowledge, have a good attitude toward other countries' cultures, and master specific communicative competencies.

Samovar and Porter (1997) stated that culture is closely and inseparably related to language. Cultivating learners' intercultural competence by teaching the target culture has become indispensable content in foreign language teaching. In the current study, foreign cultural knowledge refers to foreign countries' history, geography, social culture, literature, and political knowledge; lifestyles, communication styles, ways of thinking and values; social etiquette, religious culture, and their cultural taboos. Moreover, Samovar (2004) argued that being aware of oneself and understanding one's culture are prerequisites for successful intercultural communication. Like foreign cultural knowledge, Chinese cultural knowledge consists of China's history, geography, social culture, literature and political knowledge, lifestyles, communication styles, ways of thinking and values, social etiquette, and religious culture. Native culture provides a solid foundation for learning the target culture, which means that Chinese culture is the basis for learning Western culture in this study. Attitudes include respect and tolerance in intercultural communication. Okayama, Furuto and Edmondson (2001) noted that to develop new knowledge, comprehension and skills in intercultural communication, attitudes must serve as the basis of the model. Moreover, Chen and Wang (2018) suggest that attitude is the most important factor affecting students' intercultural competence. Furthermore, Byram (1997) emphasized the importance of linguistic competence in intercultural competence. Linguistic competence includes expressing themselves appropriately and naturally, clearly understanding foreigners' words and intentions, applying English to describe, compare, and analyze the similarities and differences of different cultures, and negotiating and explaining Chinese culture when misunderstandings arise in intercultural communication. Xu (2000) pointed out that in addition to cultivating students' linguistic competence, cultivating their communicative competence in specific cultural situations is also essential.

Mitchell et al. (2019) stated that input is language directed towards the learner in the surrounding environment. According to Ellis (2015), input frequency and comprehensible input are the two aspects of input that influence second language acquisition. Although many complicated factors influence second language acquisition, the more input learners receive, the better second language acquisition will be. In other words, the more input learners receive, the more they appear in the output (Ellis, 2015; Mitchell & Myles, 2019). In this theoretical model, English majors will recognize, identify, and describe the foreign cultural knowledge and Chinese cultural knowledge they have input. Moreover, not all input can become intake. According to Ying 1995, intake is the "processed" and "internalized" input (p. 175). Hedge (2000) suggested that intake "refers to how learners process input and assimilate language" (p. 12). In this study, after English majors input the cultural knowledge, they will internalize it through "extracting" and "summarizing" and process them through "comparing" and "value." Gradually, English majors will form attitudes towards different cultures. Swain (1985) stated that learners must produce output to develop their communicative competence fully in second language acquisition. According to Swain (2000), output is an important process in learning a second language as it activates the knowledge obtained and encourages learners to analyze language on a deeper level. Mitchell et al. (2019) defined output as "all the language produced by the learner" (p. 69). In the current study, English majors may

produce and develop their linguistic competence and communicative competence by way of "reframing", "transferring", and "modifying". As discussed, input, intake, and output are important for second language acquisition and cultivating intercultural competence. This theoretical model incorporates knowledge, attitudes and skills with a focus on cultivating English majors' intercultural competence. In this theoretical model of foreign language teaching for improving intercultural competence, foreign language courses are the basis for implementing intercultural teaching. Input, intake and output are three major step to make learners acquire knowledge, form attitudes and develop competence. The model is comprehensive and systematic. It combines the need for developing English majors' intercultural competence and the current situation of college intercultural teaching. Moreover, this model highlights the dynamic learning process of input, intake and output. It is conducive to cultivating English majors' intercultural competence through knowledge acquisition, attitude formation and skill improvement step by step.

In conclusion, this study has proposed a theoretical model of foreign language teaching aimed at enhancing the intercultural competence of English majors. By integrating the dimensions of knowledge, attitude, and skills with a three-phase approach of input, intake, and output, the model offers a structured framework for effectively achieving intercultural competence-related curriculum objectives. This model not only addresses the existing gap in the theoretical frameworks for intercultural education in foreign language teaching but also provides valuable insights for the development of practical teaching strategies. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of a well-rounded foreign language education that goes beyond linguistic proficiency to encompass cultural awareness, respect, and effective communication skills. As globalization continues to shape the educational landscape, this model holds the potential to guide the future development of intercultural foreign language teaching, enabling English majors to become more competent and confident participants in intercultural interactions.

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