

Exploring Methods of Improving Chinese Students' Intercultural Communication
Competence (ICC) Based on Their Experiences in English Speaking Countries

by

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Abstract

Chinese international students widely encounter difficult times when they are studying in English speaking countries. The large and gradually increasing populations of this group of students urgently need methods to improve their intercultural communication competence (ICC) and accelerate the process of integration. This paper begins with a literature review that studies students' difficult time experiences. It then studies the deficiencies of EFL teachings in universities in China. The students' experiences are looked at from the perspectives of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Deficiencies are studied from four aspects, including schools, teachers, parents, and students. In order to be more comprehensive, methods are also provided from these four aspects. This paper concludes with some of the limitations and personal future research interests.

Keywords: Chinese international students, challenges, difficult times, English speaking countries, intercultural communication competence, ICC, EFL teaching

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Motivation

Last year before I came to Canada for my graduate study, I was nervous and excited to experience both my study and daily life in a new environment, but also full of confidence because I thought I had the capability to handle everything as a graduate student. However, it was embarrassing when I spoke English for the first few times here. I did not know how to answer, “How are you doing” when I checked out of the market because few people would say “Fine, thank you, and you?” However, this answer was taught in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class in China. Furthermore, I did not know how to write an email in an appropriate format to teachers because I have never been taught about that during my English learning experience. All of these experiences caused me to have less confidence when I tried to use English. Apart from these, I had the feeling of isolation when I was alone because there was no family or close friends around me. I would also have a sense of loss when I got stuck in doing something, which things might be simple to me when I was in China. These emotions passively affected my adaptation and integration.

Some of my friends also shared with me their difficult times when we got together. Most of them mentioned that it was not easy to make Canadian friends and also hard to start conversations with locals. In the Chinese culture, we prefer to use sentences like “Did you eat?” or “What did you eat?” to start a conversation, but this is not as pragmatically appropriate in a Canadian context. In addition, some did not know how to cross the street when they first arrived to Canada. People have to press

the button first and the light for pedestrian would turn white instead of green, which is so different from China. Both my friends and I experienced similar culture shock in the first few months.

The lack of competence to communicate and the inadaptability to the new culture caused both my friends and I to struggle during our first few months in Canada. As an international student, intercultural communication happens every day. The communication is not only restricted to verbal conversation. It is a kind of communication that happens between cultures and countries. Higher intercultural communication competence (ICC) facilitates cultural adaptation, and lower ICC would impede the process of integration. However, as a Chinese international student, I was less educated on ICC domestically. Chinese EFL classes prefer linguistic knowledge to basic communication skills and cultural factors (Wang, 2012), which causes Chinese students' insufficient abilities in intercultural communication and thus harder times when Chinese students come to not only Canada, but also other English speaking countries.

Recently, the populations of Chinese international students have gradually increased. Statistics from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China shows that the number of Chinese overseas students increased dramatically from 400,000 to 550,000 in the last five years (2013; 2017). Furthermore, over 90% of these students went to English speaking countries including the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia, and some other countries which are close to China (2017).

While certain levels of IELTS and TOEFL are needed before students go abroad,

studies have shown that these tests are insufficient measures of students' abilities to cope both academically and socially in the new cultural environment (Holmes, 2010).

Undergoing intercultural adaptation (Gill, 2007) is an inevitable experience for international students. In general, Chinese international students often find they have a sense of loss in English speaking countries (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017; Gill, 2007; Gu, 2012; Windle *et al.* 2008; Young, 2017; Belford, 2017), which is caused by the insufficient preparation and less practical understanding of English cultures (Gill, 2007).

Because of the large population of Chinese international students, it is necessary to find ways to decrease the influence of culture shock on this group of students and improve their ICC in order to integrate them into the new cultures faster.

Significance of Present Studies

A great number of studies about Chinese students and their experiences in English speaking countries have been done in recent years (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017; Chen & Lewis, 2011; Gu, 2012; Zhao, 2013; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). Most of the Chinese researchers prefer to discuss the difficult times directly from three aspects: language, culture and communication (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017; Gu, 2012; Zhao, 2013). Few of the studies provide measures about what teachers in China should do to help students improve their capabilities (Gill, 2007; Xue, 2014; Zhao, 2013).

Researchers from English speaking countries prefer to explore the deep reason for the phenomenon of culture shock. Although there are differences, similarities also exist.

ICC is an unavoidable concept in most of the literature, which studies students'

international experiences.

Definitions of culture shock

“Culture” can be broadly defined as “a set of human-made objective and subjective elements” (Triandis, 1994, p. 22), which indicates that different individuals would have different understandings on cultures. People would be strongly aware of their own culture after going into another one (D'Souza *et al*, 2016; Flanja, 2009). The more differences that exist between cultures, the higher the awareness people will have of their home culture (Flanja, 2009).

Since the interaction of people from different cultures gradually increased, the phenomenon of culture shock appears frequently. Harry Triandis (1994) reproduced the definition of Kalervo Oberg, a famous Canadian anthropologist, as:

Culture shock occurs when people interact with members of a very different culture and experience a loss of control. This happens when they cannot understand the behavior of the people from the other culture. Then they feel confused and develop both physical (e.g., asthma, headaches) and psychological (e.g., depression) symptoms. (p. 31)

This demonstrates when we step out of our comfort zone and go into new cultures, culture shock can occur. Students can experience four stages in the new culture (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Flanja, 2009; Porter, 2014). First is the “honeymoon” stage (Flanja, 2009, p. 113). Excitement, fascination, and enthusiasm are the main feeling for international students at this stage. Differences between home culture and host culture evoke the curiosity of students and cause their ignorance to fear in the

new learning and living environment. Second is the “crisis” stage (Flanja, 2009, p. 113), which is the most challenging period. The sense of curiosity in the first stage can change to dissatisfaction. Strangeness makes students feel frustrated and anxious. The next stage is the coping period (Porter, 2014, p. 2), also called “recovery” or “gradual adjustment” (Flanja, 2009, p. 113). With enough language proficiency and living experience, students try to take measures to step out of the crisis and try to adapt to the new environment. Finally, international students complete their adjustment and integrate into the new culture, which is called “assimilation” stage (Porter, 2014, p. 2) or “biculturalism” stage (Flanja, 2009, p. 114).

Definitions of intercultural communication competence (ICC)

Studies on ICC were driven by practical needs such as immigration and sending personnel abroad to perform political and commercial tasks in America in the early 1960s (Jiao, 2014). Scholars of different fields, like sociologists, psychologists, and sociolinguists, would study and define ICC from different angles in the following years. Although several definitions exist, effectiveness and appropriateness are always the two vital concepts that capture the ability to interact with members of a host culture (Barker, 2015). These two concepts can be also defined as “grammatical correctness of speech act” and “social appropriateness of verbal behavior” (Sun, 2013, p. 2246). Effectiveness indicates the competence of achieving objectives through intercultural communication, and appropriateness refers to the competence to choose the most appropriate communication in a specific social environment or occasion (Wang, 2012).

In order to achieve the requirements of effectiveness and appropriateness, three dimensions of ICC are summarized, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Hunter *et al.*, 2006; Li, 2013; Meng *et al.*, 2017). Knowledge refers to the understanding of both the home culture in the global context and the target cultural background (Li, 2013), more specifically, history, geography, economic, political and other issues (Meng *et al.*, 2017). Skills refer to the capability of individuals such as second language proficiency, adapting to difficult situations, and handling stress (Hunter *et al.*, 2006; Li, 2013). Attitudes indicate awareness of cultural diversity and respect of differences (Meng *et al.*, 2017).

Relationship between culture shock and ICC

Three main factors may cause culture shock: lack of knowledge, lack of ability to adapt, and lack of willingness to adapt (Flanja, 2009). These three factors completely correspond to the three dimensions of ICC: knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Hunter *et al.*, 2006; Li, 2013; Meng *et al.*, 2017). Seldom of studies mentioned the relationship between culture shock and ICC explicitly, but the correspondence above indicates that these two concepts are closely related. Culture shock is the manifestation of ICC. Lower ICC would cause a strong sense of culture shock and vice versa. In order to improve ICC of international students, it is necessary for researchers to study culture shock and understand the concrete feelings and behaviors that students have in the abroad country.

Studies show the symptoms of culture shock including “homesickness,” “insomnia,” “nightmares,” “fatigue,” “feelings of helpless,” or any other physical

disorders like “stomachaches,” “headaches,” and so on (Flanja, 2009, p. 116-117; Young, 2017, p. 435). With regard to the symptoms that international students have, psychological adjustment (i.e., psychological wellbeing and satisfaction) and social-cultural adaptation (i.e., social skills and cultural learning) (Ward & Kennedy, 1993) are summarized. The methods of improving student' ICC will be presented from these two aspects.

Research Questions

As studies show above, culture shock can have great passive effects on international students. Working out methods to improve students ICC is vital.

The purpose of this paper is to study why Chinese international students have a strong sense of loss in the first few months when they come to English speaking countries. Additionally, a further purpose is to explore what can be done to effectively and appropriately prepare international students for the differences in the cultural and learning contexts and norms between their home and host country.

As Chinese international students who study outside of China, the lack of ICC would surely not only to attribute to the local context, factors from China should also be considered. In order to explore the research questions thoroughly, I will address the following aspects:

- a. Intercultural communication experiences of Chinese international students in English speaking countries (including Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States, for example);
- b. Similarities and differences of intercultural communication experiences in

- English speaking countries;
- c. Deficiencies of EFL teaching in China;
- d. Methods on how to improve ICC of Chinese international students.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Overview

Because of friends and personal experiences of studying and living in Canada, difficult times evoked my curiosity about what kinds of challenges Chinese international students encounter in the different cultural and learning contexts and norms. Furthermore, why would these difficult times happen? Studies show international students can encounter culture shock when they step into new cultures. It is can be gradually reduced through four stages, including the “honeymoon” stage, the “crisis” stage, the “recovery”/ “gradual adjustment” stage and “biculturalism” stage (Flanja, 2009, p. 113-114). According to studies, the reason why the phenomenon of culture shock can happen is because of the low degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC) (Sun, 2013). In another word, culture shock is the manifestation of poor ICC. Culture shock and ICC share with same determinants, which are knowledge, skills and attitude (Hunter *et al.*, 2006; Li, 2013; Meng *et al.*, 2017).

Since there is a great number of Chinese international students, especially students in English-speaking countries, helping them with their integration processes in the new country is vital. In order to figure out appropriate and effective measures to improve ICC of international students, three determinants of ICC are necessary to be

studied according to experiences of them.

This chapter will mainly focus on analyzing the difficult times that Chinese international students have experienced in English speaking countries, similarities and differences of intercultural communication experiences in English speaking countries, and deficiencies of EFL teaching. In order to enrich the findings, interview snippets from different studies will be used to support the idea of this paper.

Chinese International Students' Intercultural Communication Experiences in English Speaking Countries.

Interviews on the intercultural communication experiences of Chinese overseas students in English speaking countries in the literature are summarized according to three dimensions of ICC.

Knowledge

Knowledge refers to the understanding of both home culture in the global context and the target cultural background (Li, 2013), more specifically, history, geography, economic, political and other issues (Meng *et al*, 2017). Flanja (2009) indicates in her study that “people tend to be unaware of their own culture (p. 108)” unless when they step into a new culture and surprisingly find the home culture strongly influences their beliefs and behaviors.

Zhou, Xu, and Bayley (2011) looked at Chinese students' international (cultural) views from the perspective of cultural teaching in English class in China. The researchers interviewed twenty Chinese EFL teachers from different universities. The majorities of them were between 31 to 40 years old and had around ten years teaching

experience. All of had received their Master of Education degrees and were preparing for their doctoral programs in the universities outside of China. From the research, they found that a contradiction existed in the teachers between promoting students' interests in understanding English cultures and the focus of their teaching practice. Additionally, the effective and successful intercultural understanding and communication cannot be guaranteed by well-developed language skills alone.

One of the Chinese researchers introduced her personal experience on discussing the death of a family member with a Canadian friend in this literature:

It is, however, important in Chinese culture in which people believe that one's physical wellbeing depends heavily on one's emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Jack, on the other hand, interpreted the situation from the point of view of a human rights-based society in which an individual has the right to know the truth.

(Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2011, p. 139)

Cultural values strongly influenced the thinking mode and language impression of individuals. A well-educated learner, as well as an experienced English teacher with high language proficiency, can still feel culture shock. That is not because of the language barrier, but the thinking mode and value differences. Another interview in this research also indicates this difference:

When he (an interviewee) was a visiting scholar in a North American city, he found a cell phone and informed the owner to pick it up. Before he returned the cell phone to its owner, he asked the person what she knew about the cell phone in terms of its color and brand name to make sure that she was indeed the owner.

The woman was very upset. CT2 (the interviewee) was puzzled why the woman was angry rather than grateful when he returned her lost cell phone. He reflected that in Chinese culture responsibilities are valued; in a Western culture, trust is more important in this context. (Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2011, p. 139)

Interviews and statistics in this research show that the average ICC score of these experienced English teachers in China is just beyond the Average of the standard score. Besides, their ICC positively correlates with the frequency of applying cultural teaching activities in class. This means both teachers and students can benefit from cultural cultivating in class. However, although some of the teachers are aware of the importance of teaching cultures of English speaking countries, they refuse to apply them in their teaching practice because of the exam orientation system in China.

Apart from the “gaps” that culture factor brings to international students in the daily communications, academic context is also influenced by it. Chinese students are sometimes labeled as “quiet,” and “passive” in their learning in the overseas schools (Huang & Cowden, 2009, p. 78). Research (Jackson, 2013; Radice, 2017; Young, 2017) that studies the deep reason of this phenomenon is from different aspects, and this part will analyze it from the perspective of Chinese culture (the dimension of knowledge).

For example, “Li” is a concept that comes from Confucianism, which is often recognized as “ritual,” “propriety,” “ritual propriety,” or “etiquette” (Radice, 2017, p. 1). People who lose ritual are considered as lose “li,” or can be called “lose face” (Young, 2017, p. 436). Chinese students are deeply influenced by Confucianism.

In the study of Engin (2016), she interviewed 11 full-time university students in the UK, including one Spanish, one Italian, one Vietnamese, one Uzbekistan, one Kurdistan and six Chinese. The researcher tried to figure out the reason why international students prefer to keep silent in academic talk, and what would make them comfortable about sharing. One of the Chinese students explained in the interview:

T: What makes you so comfortable and confident about sharing?

A: Because I am sure what I am saying. If I'm don't [sic] sure or something I doubt of course I keep silent. (Engin, 2016, p. 82)

Only when the Chinese students are sure about the topic, will they express their opinion in the class. Making mistakes in public means losing face to Chinese students in the cultural setting. Therefore, remaining silent in class and sharing with others only when they are sure about the ideas are actions to prevent students themselves from being embarrassed and losing face.

Interviews in Jackson's (2009) research also explained some of the reasons. She did research from the perspective of Chinese international students' in-class communication and discussion. The research was conducted by interviewing 23 university students with an average age of 21.9 years. The study showed students' learning attitudes in the English speaking countries (the U.S., Singapore and New Zealand) was the most challenging to adjust to. Class activities like group/class discussion, presentation, asking questions are hard for students to participate into.

The local students were very eager to ask questions but I couldn't think of any to

ask, which made me wonder if there was some problems with me.... Maybe the reason is that I was taught like this for many years. While taking the HKCEE [the exam for university entrance], it was enough to succeed by studying the textbooks and getting to know the forms of assessment in the exams. You didn't need to discuss with others and you could even skip all the lessons and still get an A grade ... (Jackson, 2013, p. 245)

The educational system in China focused too much on the score of exams, which impedes the formation and development of ICC and critical thinking. This restriction makes Chinese international students perform silent in class activities.

Skills

Skills refer to the capability of individuals to “collect and process the information in a cross-cultural environment (Meng *et al*, 2017, p. 161)” such as second language proficiency, adapting to difficult situations and handling stress (Hunter *et al*, 2006; Li, 2013).

Lacking English language proficiency is the problem that many Chinese international students have mentioned in the interviews in different literature, which directly influences the ICC of international students. Zhang & Beck (2014) looked at the Chinese students' international experience from the perspective of past expectations, current experience, learning outcomes and approaches to the host culture and communication. The researchers interviewed three students, two come for their undergraduate studies and one for graduate study. From the research, they found all these three students were motivated by the capital of foreign qualifications and

English proficiency in terms of job seeking or securing. All of them expressed their strong desire for communication engagement and cultural acquisition while learning English. A student mentioned in the interview:

I didn't expect that I would take one year learning English. I thought I would make very rapid progress in English...[because] I would be in an English environment. I wouldn't have any problem in language since I had to communicate with English-speakers. But it turns out language is my biggest headache. (Zhang & Beck, 2014, p. 8)

This student didn't attend the college entrance examination (Gaokao) in China, neither International English Language Test System (IELTS). She came to Canada for her undergraduate study and has to get a 6.5 in IELTS in order to get the qualify from the university. Although she has studied English in China for years, the English proficiency still cannot meet the needs of both IELTS and communication requirements in Canada. Other studies and interviews also showed the disconnections between the requirements of language tests and the real needs in English speaking countries.

Parris and Barnett (2011) interviewed the Chinese international students from the perspectives of previous learning experiences, intentions and expectations and also the initial impressions of studying in Australia. Three university students were interviewed in the study. From the research they found the social distance and academic distance between Chinese culture and Australia culture could have a great influence on psychological distance. One student expressed her feelings on the

language test in the interview:

My IELTS test is listening 6.5, reading 6, speaking 6 and writing 4. But when I got here I can't understand a lot of things and even though I try my speak is not very good, it's normal but not a 6. I think in here really my speaking point would be 4 and listen point maybe 4.5 or 5, which is not good ... I think I get lots of trouble because my speaking, so I was feel very uncomfortable because IELTS test was 6, but nothing. I feel very bad. (Parris-Kidd, & Barnett, 2011, p. 174)

Although international students meet the language requirements of the universities, contents of courses are still hard for them to understand. This fact forces them to be confused on their language proficiency and question the test results they received.

Since the variation of language, international students need to develop ICC to meet different contexts in English speaking countries, including Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Lin, 2016, p. 11). Apart from the disconnection between students' low language proficiency in the CALP context and the high ICC requirement of universities, the disconnection also appears in the BICS context.

Ding (2009) studied on Chinese students making sense of their cultural identity in London according to four Chinese postgraduate students' experiences. From the research, she found the Chinese students would feel more independent and autonomic in the thinking process. Their human nature would no longer be repressed since all kinds of opinions are valued. An interviewee recalled her experience in the first few months when she arrived in London:

I discovered that the English language that I had acquired mainly from classroom teaching and textbook was far from adequate to fulfill both social and academic purpose. I was frustrated by the loss of spontaneity and articulation, and acutely aware that language was not only learnt to read and understand literally, but to speak and communicate appropriately, for the sheer sake of survival and harmony.

(Ding, 2009, p. 313)

Despite almost all of the Chinese students have had the English language learning experience in China, students who go abroad for studying or living would still meet language barrier frequently. For example, they do not know what should respond if others greet them by using “How are you?” (Apart from the “set answer” that students are taught in China: “Fine, thank you, and you?”). Many of the contents of English courses in China mainly focus on exam requirements but ignore communication needs (Lu & Hsu, 2008).

Accordingly, both EFL teaching in China and the requirement of English language tests cannot completely satisfy the language needs of English speaking countries. Measures should be taken into account by educators to improve Chinese students' English language proficiency effectively, so that the ICC of international students could be improved and the symptoms of culture shock could be relieved.

Attitudes

Attitude is described as “the awareness of global diversity and cultural complexity and the respect of cultural differences” (Meng *et al*, 2017, p. 161), which has the impact on ICC subjectively. Different with the dimensions of knowledge and

skills, attitude is a concept of personal feelings on surroundings, which is more implicit and hard to be studied. Therefore, most of the researchers focus on the manifestations of attitude, which can be summarized as “the attitude to make local friends” and “the attitude to participate in the class activities.”

The attitude of making local friends

Studies show it is hard for most of the international students to communicate with locals and make local friends, including Chinese students (Belford, 2017; Imamura & Zhang, 2014).

Gu (2011) researched on Chinese international students from the perspective of changes and developments that happened to these students during the process of studying and living in the UK. Several samples of Chinese university students were interviewed. The researcher found the identities of these students, including cultural identities, social values, norms, and behaviors were all negotiated and reconstructed while studying abroad. “Friendship patterns” was especially discussed in the research. One of the students mentioned in the interview:

I realized my weaknesses when I had to independently deal with everything in life, things like communicating with people and solving problems. When I was in China, I had my parents, relatives and good friends with me ... When I came here, I strongly felt that this country was a strange place to me. So naturally I had made some Chinese friends. I was a little worried that staying with my Chinese friends all the time might not help me to improve my English quickly. But then I found it rather difficult to communicate with English people. (Gu, 2011, p. 226)

Cultural and value differences have a great influence on the thinking mode; for example, greeting methods, different attitudes and views on the same thing, and so on.

These ideas would strongly influence the cross-cultural friendship making. The experience of keeping international friendships was also introduced in Gu's paper:

She retained friendships with the Japanese and French students whom she met on her pre-session English course. In order to keep the friendships, she went to the campus student club with her Japanese friend regularly, despite the fact that she did not like clubbing: 'I sometimes feel lonely when everyone is dancing.'

Towards the end of her first academic year, she began to feel strongly that she wanted to have a close Chinese friend – someone who would have a deep understanding of her cultural values. (Gu, 2011, p. 225)

In order to keep friendships with international friends, especially those of English speaking countries, Chinese students have to change their values on something or force themselves to accept the things they cannot accept. These kinds of change would aggravate the sense of loss and passively influence students' attitude on integration.

Imamura and Zhang (2014) looked at the international friendships from the perspective of American students. They interviewed 284 university students of European Americans and studied on their attitudes about whether they were willing to communicate and make friends with Chinese students. Statistics showed they were more willing to communicate and make friends with the assimilated and integrated Chinese international friends, since this group of Chinese students was more socially

attracted and cause their less anxious in communicating (Imamura & Zhang, 2014).

Accordingly, it is necessary for Chinese international student to hold a positive attitude on improving ICC and integrating into English cultures, which would positively influence the possibility of making local friends.

The attitude of participating in the class activities

The willingness to participate in the class activities is another manifestation of attitude of Chinese students, which would deeply impact their ICC.

Jackson's research (2013) is introduced in the previous section. Apart from the knowledge factor, attitude is the other factor that causes Chinese students' passive and silent images. A student expressed his feeling about in class activities in the interview:

I used to sit and listen to a lecture quietly in China, but students there always ask questions and I felt bad when I didn't have one to ask. I was forced to generate questions as class participation counted for the grade, much more than in Hong Kong. (Jackson, 2013, p. 243)

Students are used to play the role of "listener" in China, but the classrooms in English speaking countries require them to change the role and perform actively in class. The fact that the participation takes up a large proportion of the grade compels Chinese to change their leaning mode. However, their attitudes determine the degree of changing and integration. Students who are willing to change are easier to integrate, but those who refuse to cope with the new learning mode could passively influence the process of integration.

Similarities and Differences of Intercultural Communication Experiences in the

English Speaking Countries

Three dimensions of ICC, knowledge, skills and attitudes (Hunter *et al.*, 2006; Li, 2013; Meng *et al.*, 2017), are explored according to Chinese students' international experiences in English speaking countries specifically above. However, cultures of English speaking countries are also different. In order to provide suggestions on cultivating ICC more effectively and concretely, it is still necessary to study different English countries respectively and summarize the similarities and differences.

Similarities

Among interviews in the studies, similarities can be summarized from three aspects: language, specific academic tasks, and psychological adjustment. These three aspects could completely correspond to the three dimensions of ICC respectively.

Language

As studies showed in the previous section, English language proficiency is the most basic and frequently mentioned barrier that impedes the integration of international students. Since the traditional education system in China, the correctness of grammar is always the highlight in English education, rather than the skills of speaking and listening (Parris & Barnett, 2011). However, these two branches would be the most important tools when international students step into English speaking countries. Difficulty understanding the point of native speakers and difficulty expressing themselves make these students lack confidence in communicating. Naturally, a lack of confidence would negatively influence their frequency of communication (Gu, 2011). This pattern restricts the improvement of ICC in both

social and academic contexts, and this phenomenon appears in all four English speaking countries, as demonstrated from examples in the previous section.

Specific academic tasks

Different from the class mode in China, “student-centered” (Windle et al, 2008; Parris & Barnett, 2011; Belford, 2017; Beres & Woloshyn, 2017) is the similar character of the class mode in four English countries. This similarity causes in-class activities of university courses as varied as each other. Activities like oral presentation, discussion, group projects, etc. enrich the classes, but bring Chinese international students difficult times as well because they used to play the role of “listener” and “note-taker.” With being “student-centered,” students are asked to make decisions and control their own progress. The capabilities of independence and autonomy of students are challenged, as discussed in examples provided in the previous section.

Psychological adjustments

The lacking of “sense of belonging,” “sense of loneliness,” and “homesick” are psychological issues that most of the studies involved in (Gu, 2011; Belford, 2017; Young, 2017). Gu (2011) summarized the psychological challenges that international students have to face in her paper:

a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation in regard to “friends, status, profession and possessions,” “being rejected by, or rejecting, members of the new culture,” and “feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment.” (Oberg, 1960, cited in Gu, 2011, p. 225)

It is normal for international students to undergo psychological challenges because of

the culture shock and their new social identities. However, these challenges strongly influence students' attitudes on improving ICC and the process of integration. Hence, it is necessary to work out measures to accelerate the process of psychological adjustment.

Differences

Although all four countries speak English, there are still differences in intercultural communication since these four countries have different cultures. The two main differences are presented in the following: social relationships and discrimination.

Social relationships

Intercultural friendship is vital to international students in both social and cultural adjustment in the host society (Gu, 2011). Making friends with local people could accelerate the integration process. As mentioned in the previous section, ideas like "hard to make local friends," and "hard to communicate with local people" are mentioned by many international students in different English countries. However, the student-faculty relationship is seldom studied. Two Canadian researchers study this relationship in their paper.

Beres and Woloshyn (2017) looked at Chinese students' international experience from educators' perspective, documenting teachers' considerations and education methods in the classroom. Two researchers, working as university faculty members in Canada, teach students enrolled in M.ED international students program. They explained the improving and developing process of their teaching methods according

to 48 Chinese international students' class performance and reactions. Student-faculty relationship in their paper indicates roles that faculties and students play in teaching and learning process. Researchers found that Chinese students needed more guidance in both learning and practicing process, and that their English efficiency would increase once they had interest in class activities.

I have to watch how I say those things ...because in a domestic class you can say... 'hold that thought,' you know what I mean, but to tell anyone [here] that their point is wrong, I have to be a little more sensitive. (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017, p. 740)

In order to have a positive influence to Chinese students' interests on courses and their integration, faculties pay more attention on their vocabularies and activities applying to Chinese international students. The goal of education is no longer "what should be taught," but "how should students learn effectively." Beres and Woloshyn indicated that the internationalization of university environments and the diverse student populations (2017, p. 733) drove them to study this topic. Moreover, the diversity of Canadian culture and the specifics of international student cohort would motivate more educators to research this topic more deeply. However, few studies on the topic of student-faculty relationship have been done from other English speaking countries.

Discrimination

With the development of the interrelation and interaction of different cultures, discrimination is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. Studies from both Britain and the United States mentioned this topic.

Ding (2009) attached an interview of one student in her study:

Indeed, sometimes I don't know how to explain to them, for example, when they talk about Taiwan, Tibet or the cliché topic of human rights... Anyway, I don't know about the feelings of previous generations of Chinese overseas students in Britain. Personally, I don't feel as a Chinese I am inferior in any sense. But since coming here I find people, including some academic staff, still possess some kind of a deep embedded sense of superiority. (Ding, 2009, p. 317)

The incomplete and biased understandings of Chinese and Chinese culture would cause discrimination to happen. Additionally, perceived discrimination by these international students would passively influence the overall satisfaction of their lives in the local country (Ye, 2005), strike at their self-esteem (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003) and cause higher level of anxiety, loneliness, etc. (Young, 2017). It is necessary for students to prepare for this, and their courage and with the courage and determination to succeed even in the face of discrimination.

Deficiencies of EFL Teaching in China

According to the difficult times that Chinese international students have experienced in English speaking countries, it is necessary for Chinese universities to reconsider the English education in China. Every difficulty that these international students meet reveals one single insufficiency. The large populations of international students urge EFL teaching in China to be improved both in values and methods.

History of EFL teaching in China

Because of the influence of Chinese history, college EFL teaching got recovered

from the Cultural Revolution between the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, after the polity of Resumption of College Entrance Examination System. The first *College English Curriculum Requirements* was published, in which there were no concrete requirements on English listening, speaking and writing skills (Wei, 2009). College EFL teaching was developed between the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, when the second version of *College English Curriculum Requirements* was published. It indicated that college students should have a high reading skill and basic listening, speaking and writing skills (Wei, 2009). In the 1990s, the standard of college EFL teaching was improved. The awareness of being autonomous in studying came into being (Wei, 2009). After the 2000s, college EFL teaching in China improved dramatically and came to the stage of reformation. The new version of *College English Curriculum Requirements* was published in 2004, and it made requirements from many aspects. English reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills were required to develop together. Traditional teacher-centered class mode should be transferred to student-centered. Furthermore, summative assessment on students should gradually transfer to formative assessment (Wei, 2009). Six worldwide ESL teaching methods, including grammar–translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method, audio-visual method and communicative language teaching and cognitive approach (Wang, 2009) were later introduced into China. Scholars and teachers started to do research on EFL theories and practices for Chinese students accordingly. With the development and the improvement of college EFL teaching requirements and teaching methods, four main factors that could improve English

language competence are summarized, including “emphasis on non-cognitive factors,” “curriculum integration, flexibility and diversification,” “the reform in teaching methodologies,” and “strengthen research and experiments in teaching mode” (Wang, 2009, p. 151-152). Additionally, how to cultivate ICC was also briefly mentioned in the study: university curriculum may then consider setting up courses like English literature, western cultures, secretary English, business English, etc. (Wang, 2009). However, although theories and requirements were worked out by researchers, there were no concrete instructions for teachers to apply to their teaching practice.

Status quo of cultivating ICC in China

The Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China published two teaching standards: *Syllabus for English Major at Universities and Colleges* (2000) and *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2004). College EFL teaching was totally based on the instruction of these two documents. As for English major students, reading courses take up 6/15 among all of the required courses. The other 9/15 courses include listening, speaking, writing, applied linguistics, translating, and cultural learning (history, geography, economic, political and other issues) (*Syllabus for English Major at Universities and Colleges*, 2000). The cultivation of reading skill still plays the most important role in EFL teaching, whereas others are less important. There are two speaking courses (English speaking and English pronunciation) and one listening course only in the first two years of university studies. Furthermore, all the courses are developed with the lecture form, including the speaking course, which is usually taught by teachers whose first language is English. Intercultural

communication competence needs cultural interaction, as well as constant practice.

Although all the courses could improve students' ICC, the large proportion of reading courses in some degree passively impacts ICC practice. In addition, teacher-centered class restricts the initiative of students, especially in the speaking and cultural learning courses. Non-English major students have less opportunity to receive ICC cultivation. Two years of Basic English class is all the English related courses they get to study.

Both of the two documents that are mentioned above indicate the importance of cultivating ICC. However, there are no concrete descriptions and instructions in these documents for teachers to refer to. The gap between the requirements of cultivating ICC in the EFL classes and lacking of standards for ICC education complicate the cultivation of it.

Windle, Hamilton, Zeng and Yang (2008) looked at Chinese students' international experience and difficult times from three perspectives in their studies: parental influence, the exam system and independent work. The researchers interviewed two Chinese-born and two Canadian-born graduate students in order to compare their study experience. They finally concluded that teachers, students themselves, and families and friends all worked together as main characters towards improving the ICC of international students.

Chinese EFL teachers' understandings of ICC

Because of the gap between the curriculum requirement and the teaching practice, it is necessary for teachers to formulate concrete and effective syllabuses for their EFL teaching. However, studies (Gu, 2015; Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2011) show that they

still need time to incorporate ICC into EFL teaching practice.

Gu (2015) did research on the awareness of cultivating ICC from a university EFL teachers' perspective. 1044 English teachers from thirty universities across different provinces of China participated. The researcher found although these English teachers would like to incorporate ICC into their EFL teaching and assessment, most of them have a limited understanding on the components of ICC. One tenth of participants even refused to list the elements of ICC that they would like to teach because of this reason. Over 400 teachers had the experience of cultivating and assessing ICC. Knowledge of cultural fact and values in English-speaking countries are the two aspects that most of them emphasized. Also, they are two elements that other teachers without ICC cultivation experience would like to try to integrate into their teachings. However, deep learning aspects, including the skill dimension, such as "abilities to analyze and interpret their own and target culture, to deal with cultural conflicts, and to operate knowledge" (Gu, 2015, p. 262), and attitude dimension, such as "students' understanding and tolerance of the values of other cultures, their curiosity and openness, and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about their own" (Gu, 2015, p. 262) were placed in a much lower position in ICC cultivation.

As far as the cultural cultivating practice, insufficiencies are mentioned by some experienced EFL teachers in the studies. In order to foster students' interests in language and cultures of English speaking countries, a completely positive image of western cultures and society is likely to be presented to students (Zhou, Xu & Bayley,

2011). Additionally, because of the limited class time, Chinese culture is seldom presented in English classes (Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2011). A critical framework for cultural comparison would be of great use and is sorely needed for Chinese students. Accordingly, students will have less critical thinking capability to evaluate western cultures (Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2011). This would passively influence their intercultural communication and integration in English speaking countries and cause severe culture shock.

Parents' understandings of international students and their ICC

Because of Chinese cultural background, parental influence is significant in all areas of their children's life; for example, continuously emphasizing the importance of education, "teaching their children" how to study, making the choice of the university career path on behalf of their children, and so on (Windle *et al*, 2008). Hence, it is inevitable that parental expectations of their children would have great influence on the improvement of international students' ICC and their whole international experiences. Relevant interviews are listed in different studies:

In China if you don't go to university that means that you are nothing. Our purpose of study is going to university ... and your parents will be happy to show you off to your friends. (Windle *et al*, 2008, p. 75)

Now in China many companies require quite a high level of English.... I wanted to improve my English in Canada. In addition, my father doesn't care too much about my degree. He thinks if I could learn English well that would be good enough. ...I do know that overseas credentials are worth more than Chinese ones.

(Zhang & Beck, 2014, p. 6)

Both of the interviews indicate the parental influence on students' decision makings, even on students' cognitions formation. The success of their children would become the motivation of every decision they make and the capital that they show off to friends. (Windle *et al*, 2008)

When talking about the impetus behind their decisions on going abroad for education, all the participants put emphasis on the capital of foreign qualifications and English proficiency in terms of job seeking or securing. (Zhang & Beck, 2014, p. 6)

International students are always recognized as people with high language proficiency and high working capability. Parents prefer to assume that international students are very good at studying and can always grade high in exams. Most teachers and friends in the host countries also think that international students are hardworking and good at studying. High expectations make these people ignore the gap between the high requirements of ICC in English speaking countries and the low ICC of international students. All the assumptions put tons of pressure on international students. Yamini and Behbahani (2011) introduced this phenomenon in their study, which is called Imposter Phenomenon (also known as Imposter Syndrome):

the persistent belief in one's lack of competence, skill or intelligence in the face of consistent objective data to the contrary; an internal experience of intellectual fraudulence, particularly among high-achievers; the belief that one does not deserve one's career success and that others have been deceived into thinking

otherwise; an intense subjective fear of the inability to repeat past success; a self-concept that one's record of accomplishments is not due to ability but rather only due to luck, fate, charm, attractiveness, or having manipulated other people's impressions; the secret conviction that one is truly less intelligent and competent than one appears; and an unrealistic sense of one's competence in which one downplays strengths and exaggerates or does not tolerate any deficiencies or weaknesses. (Yamini, & Behbahani, 2011, p. 71-72)

Many Chinese parents would like to view the experience of studying in English speaking countries as a stepping stone for their children's futures. However, emphasizing on the results but ignore the process (the efforts that students make to improve their ICC and integrate into local cultures and the enjoyments that students have in the process) would build a wall between parents and children.

Misunderstandings push international students to have a sense of being antagonistic when they communicate their lives with their families, and also increase their fear to communicate with and integrate into local cultures. Imposter phenomenon would also increase the distance between the home country, host country and students themselves, in order to keep themselves safe or get minimal harm from "high expectations."

Motivation of international students themselves on ICC

International students, as the main subject of international studies, their cognition and motivation for ICC are as vital as other subjects'. Intrinsic motivation is closely related to participating behavior and leads to the activation of efficient cognitive strategies (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, in the interviews, many Chinese students

hold the view that it is irrelevant for them to improve their ICC if they have no plan to study abroad (Meng & Zhu, 2017).

Most Chinese students only relate ICC to the intention of going abroad. The weak motivation of improving their ICC might narrow the understanding on ICC and globalization (Meng & Zhu, 2017). Studies showed more companies and organizations would employ people with high ICC in the 21st century, both in China and abroad (Roth *et al.*, 2008).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, Chinese students' intercultural communication experiences are studied from branches of knowledge, skills, and attitude. EFL teaching in China and cognitions of teachers, parents, and students themselves on ICC is also analyzed. The deficiencies from all these aspects provide directions on working out methods to improve ICC. In the next chapter, methods would try to be presented from perspectives of schools, teachers, parents, and students themselves.

Chapter 3 Findings

Overview

Because of the socialization and acculturation, more Chinese students choose to continue their studies overseas, especially to English-speaking countries. Both my friends and I have experienced difficult times because of lacking ICC when we came to Canada. This motivated me to try to find out what are the insufficiencies, why do they exist and how to improve our ICC both in the home country and host country.

Three main branches of adaptations are summarized by literature: knowledge

adaptation (cultures of both home country and host country), skills adaptation (language: academic language and everyday discourse; in class activities), and attitudes adaptation (attitude to make local friends and attitude to participate in class activities). Chinese international students have to cope with all of these main adaptations in order to integrate into a new culture.

Not only students in Canada have experienced the cultural shock, those who go to other English speaking countries have also met with the disconnections between the required ICC of the local country and the insufficient ICC of Chinese students. Comparing with the literature about difficulties Chinese international students have experienced when they were studying in UK, Australia, the United States and Canada, I found that both similarities and differences exist. Language, psychological adjustment (loneliness, hard to make local friends), educational values (exam system, academic tasks) (Belford, 2017; Beres & Woloshyn, 2017; Gu, 2012; Windle *et al.* 2008; Young, 2017) are all mentioned by studies of these four countries. However, the factor of student-faculty relationship was only involved in the study of Chinese international student in Canada (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017); also the issue of racism and discrimination were just mentioned in the study of international students in the United States (Young, 2017) and Britain (Ding, 2009).

Since international students have to experience all these adaptations when they step into new cultures, it is necessary for teachers (in both the home country and host country) and families to be aware of the importance of ICC and make preparations with students. The status quo of cultivating ICC in China has not been taken into

account. Two college English curriculum documents, *Syllabus for English Major at Universities and Colleges* (2000) and *College English Curriculum Requirements* (2004), indicate the importance of English education and ICC cultivation. However, there is no concrete description on teaching methods or methods of assessment. Specific English courses are set in the documents, but reading courses take up a high proportion, much higher than listening, speaking and writing courses. Most English teachers in Chinese universities are accustomed to teaching key contents of examinations and almost all of these key contents focus on the English language, but less relevant to English cultures and much less to the competence of integrating into English cultures. As characters that may have great influence on international students, most families focus too much on the achievements their children will have or even look highly of their children so that possibly they would fail to give their children a positive influence.

Knowing the difficult times that Chinese international students have experienced in English speaking countries and the status quo of English education in China, some methods on how to improve ICC of Chinese international students would be proposed in the following part from different subjects.

Methods of How to Improve ICC of Chinese International Students

Since the obstacles Chinese international students have experienced and the deficiencies of English education on ICC in China have been mentioned above, methods on how to improve Chinese international students ICC is necessary to be explored.

Studies on methods

Much of the literature and studies have been aware of the importance of cultivating ICC in universities and colleges. ICC can be categorized into three dimensions: knowledge, skills and attitudes (Hunter *et al.*, 2006; Li, 2013; Meng *et al.*, 2017). Measures on how to cultivate ICC are usually explored from these three aspects. Firstly, the development of socio-cultural competence is required by ICC, which refers to the knowledge of target language that native speakers use (Zhou, Xu, & Bayley, 2011). Secondly, intercultural understanding and mediation (Corbett, 2003) is also an equally important ability. International students work as the bridge between the home culture and the local culture (Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2011). Cultures from both sides can have great impact on them. Therefore, two kinds of cultural consciousness should be developed in college English learning: cultural understanding and cultural equality (Sun, 2013). It is necessary to jump out of the values of home culture, respect other cultures and treat them objectively (Sun, 2013). Thirdly, some students who transfer to a new international environment will be much more open-minded but some others prefer to retreat to the safety of their home culture (Jackson, 2015). Different attitudes on ICC cause these international students to live their lives in the host country differently.

Above all the studies, only a few of them explored methods on cultivating ICC, and teachers' perspectives take up the most of these methods. Culture education is mentioned frequently. For example, teachers should be equipped with enough knowledge of other countries like history, social system and values, and teach students

about literature and these cultures (Xue, 2014; Zhao, 2013; Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2011).

It is necessary for teachers to have the right to choose textbooks for students, which should be close to daily life and daily communication of students (Zhao, 2013). In order to help international students effectively, following would propose methods from different perspectives.

Findings

Many characters besides teacher are involved in the process of teaching and learning: schools, families, students and friends. Therefore, methods should also be considered from these different angles.

Methods from school's perspective

Firstly, courses relevant to English knowledge should be set for all university students, not only for English majors. Most of the courses about cultures of English speaking countries, like “American/British Literatures and English Speaking Countries: A Survey,” are set only for English major students. Non-English major students nearly have no chance to both learn and use English after the first two years in the university. However, because of globalization and the strong influence of English speaking countries, English knowledge, including language and culture, is important to every student, not only English majors. After all, it is not only English major students who have the chance to go abroad or work in a transnational corporation. It is necessary for schools in China to set specific courses which are related to language and cultures of English speaking countries to meet the needs and interests of all students.

Secondly, more courses on practicing listening, speaking and writing skills should be set to English major students. As the studies shown above, reading courses take up 9/15 of total courses in English major curriculum setting. The improvements of other skills are restricted because of the setting. Listening and Speaking, two of the most basic skills for international students when stepping into English speaking countries, are less concentrated on. It could become the significant obstacle in intercultural communication. Moreover, it is important for schools to present the idea in these curricula: ICC is crucial to all students in this globalized world, not only to those who are preparing to study abroad.

Thirdly, set curriculum for parental education. As I mentioned in Chapter two, imposter phenomenon (Yamini & Behbahani, 2011) and excessively high expectation from families can put tons of pressure on international students. Students' self-confidence would be underestimated by themselves and attitude towards ICC acquisition may become passively. Therefore, it is necessary for parents to be aware of the ICC of their children and the difficulties that their children would experience when they study and live alone in the foreign country.

Universities in China could set specific curriculum like preparation course for studying abroad to both parents and students. In the course, customs of English countries, differences between China and host countries, difficult times that students may encounter, such as language barrier, discrimination, difficulties in making local friends and so on should all be involved. Furthermore, students who have studied in English countries could be invited into the class and share their experience. On one

hand, this kind of course could provide students a brief introduction of their lives in English countries. On the other hand, parents could have a comprehensive understanding on difficulties.

Next, more intercultural activities should be carried out by universities. For example, invite international students to festival activities. International students could learn more about Chinese culture, and meanwhile, Chinese students could practice their ICC. Because of the influence of university's environment in China (international students study Chinese in a separate building), Chinese students have less chance to interact with international students. There is no place for students to practice the knowledge that they have learned from classes. It is necessary for universities to carry out or to support students' groups to carry out activities to interact with international students.

This suggestion also works for universities in English speaking countries. Take Canada for example. Due to the diversity of Canada, schools here have more experiences to support and help international students with their difficult times. The international student center and language courses that are set for this group of students and kinds of activities, like orientation, thesis communication, and so on, provide students more chances to communicate with locals. This fastens the improvement of ICC and integration of international students.

However, because of the quantity of international students, international cohorts are set specifically in some universities in English speaking countries. Several courses are designed for international students only in this cohort. Students in these courses

come from different countries, except the local country. Therefore, international students have great opportunities to know and understand different cultures with the exception of the local one. From my perspective, there is no conflict between studying and experiencing the culture. Canceling international cohort and encouraging students to work together would positively affect international students in their studies and accelerate the acquisition of ICC.

Methods from teacher's perspective

As the subject who influences students' ICC directly, teacher's teaching practice is necessary to be studied and improved.

Firstly, basic communication skills like greetings and writing an email should also be taught in universities, besides English literature and cultures. This is the most basic ability for students to live and study in abroad. Because of lacking language environment, English environment should be created in some specific course, like speaking class or listening class. Additionally, full immersion should not only be restricted in the classroom, but students outside the classroom can also follow the rules; for example: doing assignments by using English, asking questions face-to-face, or emailing teachers in English, etc. Students could learn more beyond the textbook by this way.

Secondly, it is important to apply different activities in class. Teachers are accustomed to working as the center of the class in Chinese education system, who stand in the front of the class and speak almost all the time. Students have to sit behind the desk, listen and take notes. Importing only but no exporting locks students

in the chair and passively influence their interests in English. Using activities in class could give students chances to become the center of the class; for example, group discussion, presentation, multiple choice assignments, and so on. These activities could stimulate students' motivation on exploring and understanding, and increase students' interests on the topics and strengthen their autonomy.

During the activities, ideas should be the focus rather than language fluency. An interview from Jackson (2013) mentioned:

The management course I took was case-based and students were willing to voice out their opinions in discussion. You had to at least raise your hand once in every lesson and write a participant card. At first, I was really frightened. The students could express themselves fluently but I wasn't able to express my thoughts clearly even though I had some ideas in my mind...Although I didn't improve a lot, I realized that people wouldn't reject you because of your poor English.

(Jackson, 2013, p. 244)

Comparing with English proficiency, teachers and students in English speaking countries care more about ideas and opinions of others. Fostering the capability of critical thinking and divergent thinking is much harder than improving English proficiency. Therefore, it is important for EFL teachers in China to help students to form the awareness that language is not the only barrier for them to study in English speaking countries. The attitude of expressing personal ideas is also vital.

To teachers in English speaking countries, providing international students more chances to communicate with local students is important. The classroom is one of few

places where they can listen and speak English for hours long to most of Chinese international students. Interacting with locals in class could improve ICC both in the academic context and daily communication context. Hence, teachers could invite students they have taught to share their experiences in class. Furthermore, teachers could also organize brunches or dinners, which is a great platform for international students to communicate and make friends.

Methods from parents' perspective

Apart from setting preparation curriculum for parents and students before students go abroad for studying, which is considered from university's perspective, methods from parents' perspective should also be studied.

First of all, in order to better understand their children, parents could try what students have to experience. It is impractical for parents to go into the EFL courses in China since the large size of the class. Neither is it realistic for them to contact with faculties of universities abroad frequently because of the language restriction. Whereas, parents could go to English countries with their children for several days. On one hand, parents could know the studying and learning environment well and experience some of the difficulties by themselves. On the other hand, the sense of loss of students would be slightly relieved because of the company.

Next, it is vital for parents to change the thinking mode from caring more about grades to children's health (both physical and mental) and their happiness. Parents could take the preparation course held by universities to understand difficult times that students would experience in English speaking countries. To reduce students'

pressure from families and help children keep being positive under so much other pressure. During the communication with children, parents could try to avoid sensitive topics like the final exam, grades, thesis and so on repeatedly at the end of semesters. As adults, university students have the capacities to face all of these.

Third, frequent contact with children is necessary. This would not only increase parents' understandings on students, but also ensure students to get counseling from parents in time when they encounter difficulties caused by poor ICC. However, it does not mean parents should ask everything about children. Giving students more space is also important. Studying abroad means students have to be independent.

Over-reliance would impede the process of integration and becoming independent, no matter children to parents or parents to children. Therefore, it is a good way for parents to listen to students and communicate about their stories that they would like to tell.

Methods from students' perspective

As the main character of studying overseas, and the receiver of all the measures, there are ways for international students to do to improve their ICC.

Firstly, create a parallel society with friends from home country. "Friend" is a vital element to international students who live and study abroad alone. It can be hard for students to make local friends because of different culture and values (Young, 2017; Meng *et al*, 2017). Therefore, it is important to create network society with friends from home nations and same regions. By creating this kind of network society, the intercultural communication would become simpler to students and the sense of

belonging and their identities would be easier to get in their own societies, which are brought by friends who are from home country or same regions, instead of domestic people. This network society can be called “parallel society” (Catherine, 2015, p. 523).

There are lots of ways to create a personal parallel society. For example, students could look for friends in the social media. Some apps even have the function to recommend people who have similar characteristics to each other. Taking the preparation courses held by universities is also a good way. Students might meet some others who are going to study in the same university abroad or go to the same region. Besides, students can also find agencies, which could help them with their university applications. Students in this kind of agencies are all preparing to study abroad. They would have more opportunities to make friends there. Moreover, there are more ways for students to create parallel society when they are in the English countries. Most importantly, join different existing societies positively and create personal one based on it.

Secondly, feel free to ask for help. The study show that Chinese international students prefer not to seek for help (Young, 2017). Yakunina and Weigold (2011) demonstrate their idea in their paper that Asian students prefer to hold negative attitudes toward counseling or seeking mental health support because of the influence of the traditional values. With the influence of Confucianism, Chinese students would not like to speak more about difficulties to their parents in order to avoid worries by them, neither to teachers or friends, which would cause a sense of “losing face”

(Beres & Woloshyn, 2017).

Next, taking the preparation courses held by schools. Students would be told what the cultural values of English speaking countries are, how the courses in English countries would be presented, what are the differences comparing with courses in Chinese universities, and so on. In order to integrate into the local society, adjusting the traditional cultural value is necessary. Seeking for help could not only fasten the process of understanding surroundings and integration, but also give faculties a positive impression in the academic context.

Students can also seek for help in the parallel society. Because of the language barrier and different cultural values, it might be hard for students to ask local people for help. People in the parallel society share the same or similar values and speak the same language. Students might feel comfortable to seek for help in this society.

Last but not the least, students should always keep positive. As experiences studied in the last chapter, students would meet many difficult times when studying abroad from three aspects including knowledge, skills and attitudes. All these difficult times would bring students great pressure. Students could communicate with families, friends, faculties about it frequently or find for psychological counseling. Physical and mental health should always be the foundation of study and life.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents methods to improve students' ICC from the perspectives of universities, teachers, parents, and students according to the summaries of difficult times studied in the Chapter 2. Methods show that schools play the most basic and

important role in cultivating and improving students' ICC because relevant curriculum settings would provide students more opportunities to experience intercultural communication. As characters who have the direct influence on students, methods of teachers and parents are also crucial. They would have great influences on the whole process of studying abroad. Methods from students' perspective are also involved. Although students cannot teach themselves to improve their ICC, however, they could make the choice on whether to learn or not, which directly lead to the degree of integration.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Overview

Because of friends' and personal experiences of studying in English speaking countries, students' difficult times (culture shock) like not knowing how to greet people, finding it hard to understand what the teacher is saying in class, not being able to express oneself clearly, and so on, this stimulates my interest in exploring the deep reason of these phenomenon and working out methods to reduce the difficult times.

The purpose of this paper is to study why Chinese international students would have a strong sense of loss in the first few months when they come to English speaking countries and what can be done to effectively and appropriately prepare international students for the difference in cultural and learning contexts and norms.

In order to find the deep reason of culture shock and work out measures to help international students, exploring students' experiences is necessary. This paper was

therefore developed from the following four aspects:

Firstly, intercultural communication experiences of Chinese international students in English speaking countries are studied. Interviews documented by different researchers are quoted in this paper. These interviews reflect Chinese students' international communication experiences from three branches: knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Hunter *et al.*, 2006; Li, 2013; Meng *et al.*, 2017), which are dimensions of ICC. The coincidence between culture shock and ICC indicates the relationship between them: culture shock is the manifestation of ICC, and a lack of ICC is the deep reason for Chinese international students to encounter culture shock in the first few months when they come to English speaking countries.

Secondly, the similarities and differences of difficult times that Chinese international students have experienced are summarized. The reviewed research reflects that Chinese international students can have less cultural knowledge about English speaking countries, like thinking mode and educational system. As for skills, language in both academic context and everyday discourse context works as the barrier to most of the students. Neither EFL teaching in China nor the requirement of English language tests can completely meet the language needs of many international students to live and study in English speaking countries. The attitude of intercultural communication also has a great impact on the integration of Chinese international students. Difficult to make local friends causes students to become unwilling to communicate with locals and vice versa. Besides, students become passive listeners in class influenced by both Chinese culture and educational system, which causes the

passive attitude to perform actively in class in English speaking countries.

As for differences, few of the researchers demonstrated student-faculty relationship and the phenomenon of discrimination in their papers. Student-faculty relationship indicates roles that faculties and students play in teaching and learning process (Beres & Woloshyn, 2017). Appropriate and effective teaching method can stimulate students' motivation on intercultural communication and activities participation. Discrimination is caused by the incomplete understanding of Chinese and Chinese culture. It can have great influence on the positivity of intercultural communication and integration.

The first two aspects study on the ICC from international students' perspective. Deficiencies of EFL teaching (ICC cultivation) in China are studied in the next section. This section consists of studying on the history of EFL teaching in China, status quo of cultivating ICC in China, Chinese EFL teachers' understandings on ICC, parents' understandings on international students and their ICC, and the motivation of international students themselves. The ICC awareness in Chinese context is studied from both time and space.

Study shows that university EFL curricula in China (English major) still emphasizes reading skill and underestimate other skills, and non-English majors have fewer opportunities to study in EFL courses. Teacher-centered classes and lecture mode teaching are still the dominance. The status quo reflects few attempts on cultivating ICC. Influenced by the curriculum, most teachers partially define intercultural communication from two aspects: knowledge and academic language.

Both BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and attitudes are ignored. The behaviors of most parents reflect the Imposter Phenomenon. The conflicts between high expectations from parents and the fact of lacking ICC bring students stress and make them lose confidence. As for university students themselves, most of them ignore the importance of ICC unless they decided to study in English speaking countries.

Lastly, the methods on how to improve students' ICC are explored. Methods are considered from four branches, including schools (Universities in China and in English countries), teachers (in China and in English countries), parents, and students themselves. Five suggestions are made for schools: expanding student groups; add courses on practicing listening, speaking and writing skills, setting curriculum for parent education, developing intercultural activities both in China and English speaking countries, and reconsidering the set up of the international cohorts. For teachers, there are four pieces of suggestions: integrating BICS cultivation in EFL teaching, applying different activities in class, valuing ideas rather than language proficiency, and providing opportunities for students to communicate with locals (as for teachers in English speaking countries). Methods for parents are also considered, which include experiencing difficult times by parents themselves, taking the preparation course held by universities, contacting with children frequently, and giving students more space. Meanwhile, three suggestions are presented to international students themselves: creating a parallel society with friends (create comfortable zones), feeling free to ask for help, and being positive both in society and

school.

Reflections

This paper reflects the gaps between the required ICC to study and live in English speaking countries and insufficient ICC that Chinese students have, and also between the curriculum requirements of cultivating ICC and fewer opportunities for university students to learn and practice it. The conflicts cause Chinese international students to experience culture shock and have a strong sense of loss in English speaking countries.

Additionally, this paper involves parents and students' thinking on ICC and measures for them to change their understandings, apart from school and teacher's perspectives. The influence from parents is usually ignored in studies. However, because of the Confucianism (Radice, 2017; Young, 2017), parents would have a great impact on students, like decision makings, psychological situation and so on. Making parents aware of the unbalance of ICC between their children and the requirements of universities in English speaking countries would have effects on the parent-child relationship and students' performances. Although working as the main character of studying abroad, students themselves are also usually ignored in studies. Changes from other subjects like schools and teachers would directly impact on students, but it is also necessary for students to change their awareness and improve ICC actively. The purpose to involve these two subjects in this paper is to evoke parents and students' awareness of their initiative on improving ICC in this globalized world. Furthermore, these two branches also complement and extend the thinking for other

researchers.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Limitations exist in this paper. Firstly, data of most of the studies this paper used are from a small sample of interviews. The small quantities might have some degree of influence on the accuracy of the data. Secondly, because of the influence of examination oriented educational system, it is hard for schools and teachers in China to change dramatically in EFL teaching.

To help students themselves overcome culture shock in English speaking countries, “create a parallel society” is suggested to students, which means students could live in a comfortable zone. However, living in the parallel society is not real integration. In order to help students integrate into English societies, how to step out of the parallel society when international students have gotten familiar with the new cultural environment can be explored in future research.

Additionally, the expressions of “passive learner” and “silent learner” evoke my interests in exploring reasons of it. This paper explains the reasons why Chinese students are considered as “passive” and “silent” from two aspects: language proficiency and cultural values, which restrict the motivation of Chinese students to express themselves in public. I would like to explore other factors that cause Chinese students’ “passive” and “silent” images. Additional, are there differences between these two definitions? Are Chinese students truly “passive” or “silent”? These are all worth to be studied in the future.

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