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ВЛИЯНИЕ КОНТАКТОВ В МИРОВОЙ СЕТИ НА РАЗВИТИЕ КРОСС-КУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ СТУДЕНТОВ КИТАЙСКИХ ВУЗОВ

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: глобализация; кросс-культурная коммуникативная компетенция; образование по интернету.

АННОТАЦИЯ. В статье сделана попытка установить, помогает ли студентам китайских вузов общение с адресатами из США и Алжира повысить уровень своей кросс-культурной коммуникативной компетенции в современном мире глобализации культуры. Проанализированы 12 контактов, по 6 на каждую страну, продолжительностью 50 минут каждый. Для более полного понимания эффективности контактов в повышении уровня коммуникативных умений студентов авторы статьи использовали данные из доклада Т. Гольдштейна о кросс-культурной коммуникативной компетенции, журналы регистрации контактов студентами и преподавателями, а также записи, в которых отражены наблюдения за ходом эксперимента во время занятий. Результаты сравнительного изучения и текстологического анализа показали, что кросс-культурная коммуникативная компетенция студентов повысилась в области мотивации к изучению культурных различий навыков общения и слушания. В дальнейшем ученые наверняка смогут проанализировать более объемные данные и глубже изучить влияние контактов с людьми из других стран.

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EFFECTS OF GLOBAL LINKS ON CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS[1]

KEYWORDS: globalization; cross-cultural communicative competence; online education.

ABSTRACT. This paper tries to find out whether online contacts with foreign partners from the United States and Algeria help Chinese college students improve their cross-cultural communicative competence in the culturally globalized world. There were altogether 12 contacts, with 6 ones for each country and each session lasted 50 minutes. In order to fully understand the effectiveness of contacts in improving students' communication skills, the researchers collected data using T. Goldstein Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence Survey (CCCCS), used registers documented by both students and the researchers, and practiced classroom observations by the researchers during the session. The results from Paired Samples Test and text analysis indicated that after the contacts the students' communicative competence was enhanced in the sphere of motivation to learn about cultural differences and in communication/listening skills. In the future study, researchers might use more validated surveys and examine effects of contacts with people from different countries.

The term "communicate" contains various definitions, but they all share common roots from the Latin words communicare (meaning 'to share' or 'to impart'), so cross-cultural communicative competence refers to how well people from different cultures can understand and share with each other [1]. In the era of globalization, the contact between different cultures is getting closer and the flow of ideas and thoughts from one culture to another is accelerating. This phenomenon is called as cultural globalization by the United Nations [6]. In a culturally globalized world, there are many varieties of English and people talk and share in a more real-time manner [4]. That is to say, the communication

among different cultures is multi-dimensional but not bi-dimensional from the perspective of space, and flexible but not fixed from the perspective of time [7] [10]. Accordingly, people have to master the skill of communication with the tool of English language on one side, and possess some positive traits and attitudes on the other side. During the cross-cultural communication, people take the initiative and they are the subjects but not the objects [3] [5]. Since China carried out open and reform policy in 1978, EFL (English as Foreign Language) teaching has always emphasized the importance of cross-cultural communicative competence. However, the effects are not so satisfying as far as the time and money are concerned [8] [9]. The purpose of this research is going to find out whether Chinese college students will gain more cross-cultural communicative competence after one semester link with two global partners, the United States and Algeria.

Methods

This research used Global Understanding Course as a medium to cultivate Chinese students' cross-cultural competence. In this course, different cultures involved are in an equal position and the students talk and share in an interactive and constructive way. To test the effects of Global Understanding Course on Chinese college students' cross-cultural communicative competence, a simple nine-question survey proposed by Goldstein (2008) was used to examine the communicative competence in three aspects including traits, attitudes, and skills [2]. The participating students were also asked to keep a journal and to jot down their experiences of and feeling about the course. During the link, the researcher acting as a counselor and monitor, observed how the students behaved and communicated with their partners, and listened to what they talked about.

Participants

In the fall of 2015, the students from English Club of Beijing Union University (BUU) were invited to participate in this study. A total of 14 volunteer students were recruited. The students were chosen according to the principle of "first come, first served." Table1 shows the characteristics of 14 participants.

Procedure

Before the global link, the students were handed Chinese version of Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence Survey (CCCCS). The time spent on filling the survey was about 9 minutes. After students' self-assessing, the researcher offered each student a small journal notebook and asked them to jot down in Chinese whatever they would experience or feel about the global links.

During the global links, students talked about college life, traditional holidays, meaning of life, stereotypes, and anything else they felt interested in. They were divided into two groups: group A was for face-to-face group chatting and group B was for word-to-word pair chatting. Students had opportunities to do both. In the fall of 2015, Chinese students linked with their counterparts from two countries, the United States and Algeria. Each Chinese student was assigned one or two partners from each country. The paired partners could communicate not only during the link but also after the link through email, Skype, or Wechat. There were a total of 12 links during the semester. After each link, the students were asked to jot down what they have learned, felt, and experienced. The researcher frequently asked the students to hand in their journals to make sure that they wrote down everything link-related, and offered a reward for their good performance.

The second data collection using the same survey was conducted within one week after the link. The students also handed in their journals in person. Each student was awarded again for his or her cooperation.

During the whole process of linking, the researcher worked as an organizer, who directed all the activities students were supposed to carry out before, during and after the link; a counselor, who explained or answered all the questions students raised; and an observer and listener, who watched how students behaved and listened to what they talked or discussed (both in class or after class or even in Wechat). Researcher's thoughts and observations were also documented for data analysis.

Measures

Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence Survey (CCCCS)

Original CCCCS proposed by Goldstein is in English. The researcher translated it into Chinese to make the questions clear and easy to understand for Chinese college students. The back-translation technique was applied for assuring linguistic validity. On the CCCCS, there are three categories: traits, attitudes, and skills. Each category included three questions on a 7-point scale.

Data Analysis

Analyses were performed using SPSS version 23.0. Paired T tests were conducted to examine whether there was an improvement in cross-cultural communication competence among college students after global links.

The text analyses were used to examine what students have documented in their journals. Five steps were applied. First, the researcher went through all the journals to get key words from what students have jotted down. Second, the researcher coded the jour-

nals for those words (utterances) related with three categories of communicative competence by using letters and numbers, for example T1 for "tolerance for certainty", A1 for "motivation to learn about cultural differences", etc. Third, the researcher underlined those words (utterances) not related with three categories of communicative competence. Fourth, the researcher categorized those utterances underlined into different themes. Fifth, the researcher counted the frequency of all the utterances.

Results
Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence

Paired samples t tests were used to compare differences of communicative competence before and after the links. As shown in table 2, mean values of all nine questions after the links were higher than the ones before the links. There were significant differences found in motivation and communication competence ($ps < .05$). Students' motivations to learn about cultural differences and communication and listening skills have been improved.

Results of Journals

As shown in Table 3, the researcher counted all the utterances of three categories of communicative competence from each student's journal and added them up to get a total number. The highest number was related to "the knowledge of cultures that different from your own" in which students mentioned totally 72 times. The second highest number was associated with communication and listening skills: 25 times. The results are consistent with the findings from sample paired t tests.

From those competences that are not related to the three categories, three main themes were generated. 1. The students felt emotionally enjoyable after linking with Algeria (39 times). For example, students used a lot of words like "excited", "nice", "high", "happy" or "cherishing the memory" to express their emotions. 2. The students started to have deeper understanding of Chinese culture (20 times) --- many of them felt "proud" of Chinese culture. 3. The partners' attitudes affected students' experiences of the link (18 times) --- many students were "impressed" by Algerian students' attitudes and their communications were very "productive". 4. The quality of the network also affected the communication between partners (15 times). For example, each time when the network went down, the students felt "frustrated" and "a waste of time".

Results of Observations

Same data analysis strategies were used to analyze the observation data. Mainly five themes were found and each theme was mentioned six times. 1. Students expressed more favorable views to Algerian students than to American students. One of the female students said that she was very happy, because her partner called her princess and promised to take her around Algeria someday in the future; another student strongly complained that her American partners always left without saying goodbye. 2. Students showed very positive attitudes to the experience of the link, and almost none of them were absent or late for the link even if the participation was a voluntary. 3. Students often showed their interests in some aspects of other cultures, like American students' dormitory and Algerian students free education. 4. Students often had difficulties in telling the differences among various English words or interpreting nonstandard English accent. For instance, they often couldn't distinguish the word "holiday" from the word "break" or "vacation"; they complained that southern American English was hard to follow. 5. Students were able to manage their nervousness and shyness in front of camera and people. One female student overcame her shyness and seated herself where she originally refused to sit because it is too near to the camera. 6. The quality of the network greatly affected the students' experience of the linking. Each time when there was a problem with the internet connection, students got frustrated and lose attention. 7. Some topics, like religion and stereotype, were difficult for our students to get into the conversation. They often fell into silence and didn't know what to say. 8. Students really enjoyed the links. Some of them wanted to invite their friends to participate.

Discussion

The results from paired samples t tests are consistent with those from students' journals. Students reported improvement in motivation to learn about cultural differences and in communication and listening skills. Many students made use of other kinds of technologies, such as Skype or Wechat to keep communicating with their partners after class and they could find a very effective way to finish their collaborative projects.

Based on students' journals, their knowledge of different cultures has greatly expanded. However, the results of survey did not reflect this knowledge gain. The possible reason might be that the students overestimated their amount of knowledge of different cultures before the link. The same reason could also be applied to respect and stress. Apart from overestimating themselves, students might have also mistaken traits for other type of competence in the pre survey. In the journals, students hardly mentioned anything about what had happened to their traits. Besides, traits are some competences which could be very difficult to change in a very short time, 12 hours in this research.

In the journals, students also constructed several other communicative competences apart from the three competences mentioned in CCCCS. Students showed not only respects but appreciation for other cultures as well; students not only expanded the knowledge of other cultures but also the knowledge of Chinese culture. In addition, some other aspects of competence were also found in their journals, like stereotype changing, peers' influence, and altering of thinking habit. Students also pointed out some factors that might contribute to students' communicative competence. The most important factor is the attitude of the partner --- if he or she was not active enough or sometimes showed indifferences, our students in return would feel reluctant or too hurt to continue their interaction, which had certainly a very negative effect on students' communicative competence. Another very important factor that students repeatedly mentioned is the quality of the network. When linking with Algeria, there were several breakdowns of the network, which obviously affected students' experience with the link. The effects of partner's attitudes and quality of network on students' experiences were also noticed and captured by the researcher.

The findings from the researcher's observation are very comparable to those from survey and students' journals. It was very obvious in the classroom that students were highly motivated and emotionally involved during the link. However, it was difficult for researcher to observe such gains in communication skills and knowledge of Chinese culture because they are very personal and hidden, only obvious to the students themselves not to the outsiders. Researcher is an English teacher first. Therefore, the observation was much more sensitive to such factors as the amount of vocabulary, the choosing of the topics, the format of the linking, and the degree of satisfaction.

Conclusions

By collecting data from different sources, this study ha demonstrated that the effects of Global Understanding Course on cross-cultural competence in three dimensions and beyond. Students have improved their competence in motivation and communication skills. Besides, the research has also found other positive effects, like the gaining of emotional experience and the knowledge of Chinese culture. This suggests that future researcher could add more categories to measure the degree of competence and make the categories coherent and logical so that they could truly reflect students overall competence.

Because this is a just pilot study and global linking is very complex process, many factors were found to contribute to the effectiveness of the linking and these factors are sometimes uncontrollable. This brings challenges but also opportunities to Chinese students. By learning to cope with and solve the problems, students will gradually develop their communicative competence, and actually gain from the process. However, the teacher' role during the linking process should not be devalued, because he or she plays an important role in minimizing the negative influence and maximizing the positive ones, in providing more support for the students, and in helping them successfully become global citizens. Both students and researcher found that students had more positive experiences with students in English-outer-circle (Algeria) than with those in English-inner-circle (the U.S.). This might suggest that future study could compare different effects of the links with different countries and find out what factors lead to those differences.

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