

A Study on the Design of College English Courses for Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence and Global Competence

Rong Liu*

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou 571126, Hainan, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Copyright: © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Against the backdrop of accelerating globalization, intercultural communication competence and global competence have become increasingly essential attributes for university graduates entering an interconnected workforce. As a core component of general education in Chinese higher education, College English plays a dual role: it serves as a primary vehicle for language acquisition and as a critical platform for cultivating students' international perspectives, cultural inclusiveness, and intercultural communication skills. However, traditional College English curricula have predominantly emphasized linguistic knowledge and test preparation, while neglecting the systematic development of cultural literacy and global awareness. Focusing on the intersection of intercultural communication competence, global competence, College English, and curriculum design, this paper analyzes their intrinsic relationships, identifies existing pedagogical challenges, establishes design principles, and proposes optimization strategies, thereby offering both theoretical grounding and practical guidance for reforming College English curricula.

Keywords: Intercultural communication competence; Global competence; College English; Course design

Online publication: March 26, 2026

1. The intrinsic relationship between intercultural communication competence and global competence

1.1. Core components of intercultural communication competence

Intercultural communication competence is a comprehensive skill essential for effective communication in multicultural contexts. According to Byram's (1997) widely cited framework, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) comprises five interconnected dimensions: attitudes (curiosity, openness, and willingness to suspend disbelief regarding other cultures), knowledge (of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country), skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness (the ability to evaluate perspectives, practices, and products critically based on explicit criteria)^[1]. Building on Byram's framework while adapting it to the Chinese college English teaching context, this study identifies four core dimensions particularly relevant to curriculum design: language application ability (corresponding to the linguistic underpinning

of communicative competence), cultural cognition (related to Byram's knowledge dimension), pragmatic adaptation (related to skills of interpreting/relating and discovery/interaction), and cultural inclusiveness (related to attitudes and critical cultural awareness). Language application serves as the foundation, requiring students to possess proficient English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to accurately convey ideas and information. Cultural cognition focuses on understanding the values, cognitive frameworks, and social customs of different cultures, thereby minimizing cultural misunderstandings and communication barriers^[2-3]. Pragmatic adaptation emphasizes adherence to cross-cultural communication etiquette and expression norms, ensuring appropriate language usage across various contexts. Educational interventions play a critical role in cultivating these dimensions, as outlined in the Council of Europe's model^[4].

1.2. Definitions, dimensions, and key principles for cultivating global competence

Global competence, as defined by the OECD PISA 2018 Global Competence Framework, is a multidimensional, lifelong learning goal. Globally competent individuals can: (1) examine local, global and intercultural issues; (2) understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others; (3) engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions across cultures; and (4) take action for collective well-being and sustainable development (OECD, 2019). These four dimensions are supported by four inseparable factors: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Applying this framework to higher education, this study identifies four key principles for cultivating global competence in university students: global awareness, multicultural inclusivity, critical thinking and analysis, and international engagement. This competency requires students to transcend narrow local perspectives and adopt a holistic view of global development, multicultural integration, and international public affairs. In its cultivation, it is crucial not only to strengthen language communication skills but also to emphasize the development of critical thinking abilities, enabling students to critically evaluate diverse cultural trends and contemporary international issues.

1.3. The logical consistency of integrating both into university English courses

College English, by its very nature, integrates language instruction with cultural education, which positions it as an ideal platform for fostering both intercultural communication competence and global competence. As the international lingua franca, English serves as the core medium for intercultural communication and global exchange; thus, classroom instruction that incorporates cultural content naturally cultivates cultural awareness and broadens students' global perspectives. Furthermore, College English is a mandatory course spanning multiple semesters for all undergraduate students in China, offering an extended duration of instruction and broad coverage that provide optimal conditions for systematically developing these general competencies. In addition, established pedagogical approaches in College English, including text analysis, thematic discussions, and situational dialogues, can be readily adapted to integrate multicultural content and global issues, enabling the simultaneous development of language proficiency, cultural understanding, communicative competence, and global literacy. This alignment resonates with the strategic objectives of Chinese universities to cultivate internationally competent talent.

2. Current challenges in college English courses for developing intercultural communication competence and global competence

2.1. The course objectives focus excessively on language skills while neglecting literacy development

At present, the objectives of most College English courses remain disproportionately focused on the accumulation of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, the drilling of test-taking strategies, and the basic training of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. This overemphasis on the instrumental function of language has resulted in the systematic neglect of broader competencies such as intercultural communication awareness, multicultural identity, and global competence. Regarding assessment, course evaluation continues to rely predominantly on final written examinations and standardized proficiency test scores, failing to incorporate cultural literacy, intercultural communication skills, and global

perspectives into the evaluation framework. As Deardorff (2006) argues, the assessment of intercultural competence should go beyond knowledge-based testing and include attitudinal and skills-based outcomes ^[5].

2.2. Insufficient proportion and depth of the cultural component in course content

Current College English textbooks primarily feature general reading passages and topics related to everyday communication, with relatively limited coverage of international cultures, global governance, and cross-border exchanges. Most cultural content remains at the level of surface-level knowledge, confined to introductions of folk customs and daily habits, lacking in-depth analysis of underlying value systems, cognitive frameworks, and socio-cultural dynamics. Furthermore, the curriculum lacks supplementary materials such as systematic comparisons between Chinese and international cultures, foundational theories of intercultural communication, and explorations of critical global issues. Equally concerning is the scarcity of resources designed to equip students with the ability to present China's rich traditional culture and contemporary development to international audiences in English.

2.3. The course implementation model lacks intercultural contextual immersion

Traditional university English classrooms predominantly employ a rigid teaching model characterized by one-way lecturing by instructors, sentence-by-sentence textual analysis, and post-class exercise drills. The instructional approach is monotonous and closed, lacking immersive, contextualized intercultural communication practice scenarios. Teaching is confined to explaining theoretical knowledge from textbooks, with minimal inclusion of interactive components such as intercultural simulated dialogues, debates on international topics, or role-playing in foreign contexts. Consequently, students lack opportunities for authentic language practice and cultural immersion experiences. This neglects the fundamental understanding that language learning is itself a deeply cultural practice, and overlooks the demonstrated effectiveness of experiential intercultural language teaching ^[6-7].

3. Design principles for college English curriculum integrating intercultural communication and global competence

3.1. Principle of integrating linguistic competence with cultural literacy

The design of university English courses must adhere to the principle of advancing language skills training and intercultural literacy development in tandem, moving beyond the reductionist approach that privileges linguistic training at the expense of cultural cultivation. While strengthening students' foundational skills in vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, the curriculum should concurrently incorporate elements that foster cultural awareness, communicative etiquette, and a global perspective, ensuring that language acquisition and humanistic development proceed in parallel. Teaching activities should not only focus on concise explanations of language concepts and practical application exercises but also integrate modules such as cultural interpretation, intercultural critical thinking, and global perspective expansion. This enables students to master language tools while progressively building an intercultural mindset and a global cognitive framework, thereby achieving comprehensive improvement in their overall competencies.

3.2. Principle of two-way integration between local and international cultures

The curriculum design adheres to the core principle of bidirectional integration and mutual learning between local and international cultures, aiming not only to guide students in absorbing and drawing upon the outstanding achievements of global multiculturalism to broaden their international perspectives, but also to strengthen their confidence in local culture and their ability to communicate it internationally. The teaching content incorporates international cultural elements such as diverse cultural traditions, value systems, and global development trends, while also incorporating English-language materials on China's excellent traditional culture, contemporary China's social development, and regional cultural characteristics. By breaking away from a one-way model of foreign cultural input, the curriculum establishes a

content system that facilitates mutual integration and complementary coexistence of Chinese and foreign cultures. This bidirectional approach resonates with Kramsch's (1993) notion of the "third place," a symbolic space where language learners actively construct a new, hybrid cultural identity rather than simply switching between their native and target cultures. Through such a system, students are enabled to possess both an international outlook and a solid foundation in their national culture.

3.3. The integrated principle of knowledge transmission and competency development

The course design adheres to the integrated principle of knowledge transmission, critical thinking development, and competency cultivation, overcoming the traditional disconnect between theoretical learning and practical skill development. Throughout all stages, including curriculum objectives, content selection, classroom implementation, and comprehensive assessment, the program balances language instruction with intercultural awareness, critical thinking training, and communicative competence development. Through diverse approaches such as group discussions, intercultural scenario simulations, and self-directed inquiry learning, students acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge while simultaneously enhancing their intercultural communication skills, ability to analyze international issues, and engagement in global affairs, thereby creating a cohesive educational cycle that transitions from knowledge acquisition to holistic competency development.

4. Implementation pathways: An optimized framework for the college English curriculum system

4.1. Reconstructing a hierarchical and progressive curriculum education goal system

Based on college students' cognitive patterns and competency development stages, which align with the developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity proposed by Bennett (1993), this study establishes a tiered curriculum framework comprising foundational, advanced, and extended levels. The foundational level focuses on strengthening core English language skills and introducing basic knowledge of Chinese and international cultures; the advanced level emphasizes intercultural communication techniques, pragmatic expression abilities, and deep multicultural understanding; the extended level prioritizes global perspective development, critical thinking on international issues, and intercultural practical engagement. Intercultural communication competencies and global competence are broken down into measurable, teachable, and assessable indicators, which are systematically integrated into teaching tasks across all educational stages to meet the developmental needs of students with varying English proficiency levels, ensuring progressive cultivation of competencies.

4.2. Supplementary curriculum content on multiculturalism and a global perspective

The curriculum structure of university English courses has been revised. While retaining the core texts for general language instruction, essential components such as fundamental theories of intercultural communication, comparative studies of Chinese and international cultures, and international social etiquette have been systematically incorporated. Supplementary materials covering global governance, cross-border economic and trade cooperation, and diverse world cultures have been appropriately integrated, alongside specialized teaching modules including English translations of traditional Chinese culture and international dissemination of China's contemporary development. Leveraging online teaching platforms, resources such as global current affairs updates, classic intercultural texts, and practical foreign affairs materials have been added to broaden the curriculum's scope and deepen its intellectual depth, establishing a tripartite framework that integrates language, culture, and global perspective.

4.3. An innovative contextualized intercultural classroom teaching model

Moving beyond the traditional one-way lecture-based teaching model, this study proposes a new paradigm for university

English classroom instruction that is situational, interactive, and inquiry-based. By creating intercultural communication simulation scenarios and conducting classroom activities such as international role-playing, debates on global topics, and intercultural dialogue seminars, students gain immersive experiences of linguistic expression and communicative logic across diverse cultural contexts. Leveraging digital teaching tools, online platforms can be developed for intercultural exchange, expand extracurricular practice opportunities, and guide students to independently explore global issues and the complexities of multiculturalism.

5. Conclusion

Intercultural communication competence and global competence have become core competencies for cultivating internationally competitive talent and represent a key direction for reforming College English curricula in the new era. Current College English courses exhibit several significant shortcomings, including narrowly defined instructional objectives, insufficient integration of cultural content, and rigid, lecture-dominated pedagogical methods, all of which are inadequate for meeting the demands of talent development in an increasingly globalized context. To address these challenges, curriculum design should be guided by three fundamental principles: the synergistic development of language proficiency and cultural literacy, the bidirectional integration of local and international cultures, and the unified cultivation of knowledge and practical competence. These can be operationalized through the restructuring of tiered educational objectives (Bennett, 1993), the enrichment of multicultural course content, and the adoption of contextualized, interaction-oriented classroom teaching approaches.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence. Byram M, 1997, Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence. Multilingual Matters, 2nd ed., London.
- [2] PISA 2018 Global Competence Framework. OECD, 2019, PISA 2018 Global Competence Framework. In PISA 2018 Assessment and Analytical Framework. OECD Publishing, London.
- [3] Deardorff DK, 2006, Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3): 241–266.
- [4] Developing Intercultural Competence through Education. Barrett M, Byram M, Lázár I, et al., 2014, Developing Intercultural Competence through Education. Council of Europe Publishing, London.
- [5] Bennett MJ, 1993, Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In Paige RM (Ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience*: 21–71. Intercultural Press, New York.
- [6] Context and Culture in Language Teaching. Kramsch C, 1993, Context and Culture in Language Teaching. Oxford University Press.
- [7] Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning. Liddicoat AJ, Scarino A, 2013, Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning. Wiley-Blackwell, New York.

Publisher's note

Whoice Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.