The Relationship between Foreign Literary Work Reading and Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students

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Abstract. This study constructs a scale to investigate Chinese college students' foreign literary work reading situation, and to explore the correlation between foreign literary work reading and six dimensions of intercultural competence. Firstly, the basic situation description of foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence development is conducted by Foreign Literary Work Reading Scale for Chinese College Students and Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS), which is proposed by Wu et al (2013) [1]. Then, combined with the Pearson Correlation of SPSS, the correlation analysis is performed and reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence. And it has the greatest effect on knowledge of others, the general effect on intercultural communicative and cognitive skills, and the minimal effect on knowledge of self, attitudes and awareness. This research can provide a theoretical reference for foreign language teaching.

Introduction

In the context of globalization, intercultural competence is regarded as a necessary quality of modern talents. So how to improve intercultural competence of students who are the major intercultural contact group has become a heated topic in research. Most of scholars discuss the importance of foreign literary work reading to the intercultural competence, and put forward the effective method of developing intercultural competence (Jiang, 2016) [2]. However, few of the scholars conduct the empirical study on the situation of foreign literary work reading in foreign language teaching. So based on the theory of foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence, this article designs the questionnaire, and then explores the influence of foreign literary work reading to the six dimensions of intercultural competence. It can give the guidance for colleges to implement teaching activities to improve intercultural competence of students.

Literature Review

Foreign Literary Work Reading

In the broadest sense, literature is the written record of man's spirit, thoughts, emotions and aspiration. It involves all aspects of social life, like geography, history, politics, economics, education and so on. And it can be divided into different genres: essay, fiction, poetry and drama. Reading literary works can make students know more about cultural background knowledge and improve their sociolinguistic competence. So it triggers the attention of scholars to research students' reading situation and reading difficulties of foreign literary work reading, especially in high school education stage (Cai, 2013) [3]. In addition, western scholars have investigated the dilemma of reading foreign literature works for second language learners (Urlaub, 2012) [4], and tested the benefits of reading foreign literary works in collegiate language education (Thoms et al., 2017; Raees et al., 2019) [5,6].
Intercultural Competence

For definition, Fantini (2006) defines it as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself”. Peng (2015) states that based on their intrinsic and external qualities, communicators can effectively and appropriately communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

For components, Byram (1997) proposes a widely accepted five-factor composition: attitudes, knowledge, skills, critical cultural awareness. Wu, Fan, and Peng (2015) find that ICC involve six main factors: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness in the Chinese context. And this article follows these dimensions to evaluate the intercultural competence of students.

Review on the Relationship between Foreign Literary Work Reading and Intercultural Competence

As a kind of rich teaching materials, foreign literary work plays an important role in second language teaching. It triggers a lot of scholars to explore the relationship between them. Some scholars discuss how foreign literature teaching should contribute to the development of students' intercultural competence in an intercultural context. More specially, most of the scholars pay attention to the issue of how to improve students' intercultural competence by British and American literature course teaching. And even more, scholars directly research on the media role of foreign literary works in intercultural communication.

Research Methodology

Research Questions

(1) How is the basic situation of foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence development for Chinese college students?

(2) What's the relationship between foreign literary work reading and Chinese college students' intercultural competence?

Participants

The participants of this study are undergraduate students who are chosen from eight universities in China. Among those participants, 76 (10.7%) have the oversea experience for periods ranging from 15 days to one year mainly in the four countries: Japan, USA, Thailand and Singapore; 390 (54.8%) have previous intercultural contact experience with native speakers of English.

Instruments

This study takes a quantitative method with questionnaire. And it mainly includes three parts: the first one is basic information for students, including gender, grade, major, English examination score, oversea experience and intercultural contact experience; the second part is foreign literary work reading situation scale; and the third part is the measurement scale of intercultural competence for Chinese college students by Wu et al. (2013).

Results and Discussion

Reliability Analysis

To test the internal consistency of Foreign Literary Work Reading Situation Scale with the 17 descriptive items, the reliability analysis is measured by Cronbach's alpha. And the results show that the values of Cronbach's alpha are high, ranging from 0.737 to 0.926, which are greater than the threshold value 0.7 that is considered to be criteria for demonstrating internal consistency of the established scale. So from the presentation of the Cronbach's alpha value, it can be seen that foreign
literary work reading situation scale for Chinese college students has a high degree of reliability. The detailed information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability analysis of foreign literary work reading situation scale.

| Factors          | Items | Cronbach’s α |
|------------------|-------|--------------|
|                  |       | Part         | Total   |
| foreign fiction  | 5     | 0.850        | 0.926   |
| foreign essay    | 3     | 0.880        |         |
| foreign poetry   | 3     | 0.737        |         |
| foreign drama    | 6     | 0.884        |         |

The Basic Situation for Foreign Literary Work Reading

As for the reading time, most of the students spend less than 30 minutes a day on reading literary works, as shown in figure 1. As for the reading pathway, most students tend to buy books on their own and to read books through digital ways, as seen in figure 2.

![Figure 1. Foreign literary work reading time.](image1)

![Figure 2. Foreign literary work reading pathway.](image2)

As for the main reading types, it can be divided into four dimensions: foreign fiction (item1-5), foreign essay (item6-8), foreign poetry (item9-11) and foreign drama (item12-17). From the overall presentation, the frequency with which college students read literary works is generally low, with the mean are lower than 3, ranging from 1.57-2.62. Thereinto, college students tend to read foreign fictions and foreign poetry, since the mean of foreign fiction are higher than 2, and the mean of foreign poetry are close to 2. In comparison, the mean of reading essay and drama are lower than 2, except reading Shakespearean comedy and tragedy.

Table 2. The reading situation of foreign literary works.

| Descriptive items                        | Number | Min | Max | Mean  | SD  |
|------------------------------------------|--------|-----|-----|-------|-----|
| Item1 reading western love fiction        | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.31  | 1.08|
| Item2 reading western satirical fiction   | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.18  | 1.06|
| Item3 reading western magical fiction     | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.36  | 1.14|
| Item4 reading western speculative fiction | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.52  | 1.23|
| Item5 reading western classic fiction     | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.62  | 1.13|
| Item6 reading western lyric essay         | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.79  | 0.92|
| Item7 reading western philosophic essay   | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.73  | 0.89|
| Item8 reading western love essay          | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.83  | 0.95|
| Item9 reading western fairy tale poetry   | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.33  | 1.20|
| Item10 reading western love poetry        | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.97  | 1.07|
| Item11 reading western fable poetry       | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.01  | 1.10|
| Item12 reading western moral drama        | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.68  | 0.89|
| Item13 reading western miracle drama      | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.62  | 0.86|
| Item14 reading western religious drama     | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.57  | 0.85|
| Item15 reading western mystery drama       | 712    | 1   | 5   | 1.60  | 0.86|
| Item16 reading Shakespearean comedy        | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.13  | 1.08|
| Item17 reading Shakespearean tragedy       | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.17  | 1.10|
The Basic Situation for Intercultural Competence

In general, Chinese college students’ intercultural competence is in the medium level, as shown in table 3. The main reason is that college students have fewer opportunities to participate in the intercultural communicative activities. As for the six main dimensions, the three abilities (knowledge of self, attitude and awareness) of college students are at the higher level, with the mean 3.79, 3.84 and 3.55 respectively. By contrast, college students are at the lower level in the aspect of knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills. Thereinto, the ability of knowing knowledge of others is the worst, since the time and quantity of reading foreign literary works are not enough.

| Factors                                             | Number | Min | Max | Mean  | SD   |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------|-----|-----|-------|------|
| knowledge of self (KN1)                             | 712    | 1   | 5   | 3.79  | 0.74 |
| knowledge of others (KN2)                           | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.44  | 0.74 |
| attitudes (AT)                                      | 712    | 1   | 5   | 3.84  | 0.87 |
| intercultural communicative skills (SK1)           | 712    | 1   | 5   | 3.17  | 0.78 |
| intercultural cognitive skills (SK2)                | 712    | 1   | 5   | 2.89  | 0.88 |
| awareness (AW)                                      | 712    | 1   | 5   | 3.55  | 0.89 |
| intercultural competence (ICC)                      | 712    | 1   | 5   | 3.15  | 0.61 |

The Correlation Analysis between Foreign Literary Work Reading and Intercultural Competence

The correlation between foreign literary work reading situation and intercultural competence is analyzed through Pearson Correlation. As the results show that there is a significant positive relationship among them \( r=0.410, p<0.05 \).

As for the foreign fiction, all of the descriptive items and intercultural competence have the significant positive relationship, which can be seen in table 4. For the knowledge of others, there is a high correlation with all of the correlation index greater than 0.3. It mainly benefits from the reading of foreign fictions, knowing something about western historical knowledge, geographical knowledge, traditional custom, traditional value, cultural taboos and so on.

| Foreign fiction                        | SK1   | SK2   | AT    | SK1   | SK2   | AW    |
|----------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Item1 reading western love fiction     | 0.196**| 0.322**| 0.206**| 0.300**| 0.252**| 0.224**|
| Item2 reading western satirical fiction| 0.176**| 0.319**| 0.143**| 0.249**| 0.222**| 0.166**|
| Item3 reading western magical fiction  | 0.171**| 0.325**| 0.175**| 0.267**| 0.215**| 0.212**|
| Item4 reading western speculative fiction| 0.225**| 0.375**| 0.180**| 0.306**| 0.270**| 0.201**|
| Item5 reading western classic fiction  | 0.225**| 0.322**| 0.230**| 0.341**| 0.279**| 0.241**|

As for foreign essay, it can be seen in table 5 that the three descriptive items all have significant positive relationship with the knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills and awareness. Besides, reading western lyric essay also has a significant positive relationship with knowledge of self. However, there is a positive relationship between reading western love essay and knowledge of self. And there is no significant relationship between reading western philosophic essay and knowledge of self.

| Foreign essay                        | KN1   | KN2   | AT    | SK1   | SK2   | AW    |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Item6 reading western lyric essay    | 0.108**| 0.292**| 0.127**| 0.220**| 0.248**| 0.187**|
| Item7 reading western philosophic essay| 0.069 | 0.282**| 0.116**| 0.157**| 0.222**| 0.111**|
| Item8 reading western love essay     | 0.077* | 0.282**| 0.154**| 0.198**| 0.252**| 0.170**|

* p<0.05  ** p<0.01
As for foreign poetry, the three descriptive items all have significant positive relationship with the six dimensions of intercultural competence, as shown in table 6. Similar with foreign fiction, reading foreign poetry has more influence on the knowledge of others since students can strengthen the accumulation of western cultural knowledge through the knowing of creative backgrounds.

Table 6. The correlation analysis between foreign poetry and intercultural competence.

| Item     | KN1    | KN2    | AT     | SK1    | SK2    | AW     |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Item9    | 0.111**| 0.240**| 0.151**| 0.224**| 0.228**| 0.180**|
| Item10   | 0.103**| 0.312**| 0.123**| 0.250**| 0.269**| 0.197**|
| Item11   | 0.166**| 0.276**| 0.120**| 0.222**| 0.207**| 0.169**|

* p<0.05  ** p<0.01

As for foreign drama, the correlation analysis is presented in table 7. There is a significant positive relationship between six descriptive items and knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills. However, the correlation with the knowledge of self, attitudes and awareness is relatively weak. And the detailed analysis are as follows. In knowledge of self and attitudes, only the two items reading Shakespearean comedy and tragedy can have a significant positive effect on students' knowledge of self. Nevertheless, reading western moral drama, miracle drama, religious drama and mystery drama all have no correlation with them. In awareness, there is a significant positive relationship between Shakespearean comedy, tragedy and awareness. For reading western moral drama and reading western religious drama, the correlation is relatively low. For reading western miracle drama and reading western mystery drama, there is no correlation.

Table 7. The correlation analysis between foreign drama and intercultural competence.

| Item       | KN1    | KN2    | AT     | SK1    | SK2    | AW     |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Item12     | 0.030  | 0.287**| 0.031  | 0.160**| 0.210**| 0.090* |
| Item13     | 0.047  | 0.270**| 0.025  | 0.117**| 0.179**| 0.070  |
| Item14     | 0.027  | 0.251**| 0.023  | 0.116**| 0.198**| 0.081* |
| Item15     | 0.002  | 0.252**| 0.010  | 0.113**| 0.217**| 0.055  |
| Item16     | 0.179**| 0.338**| 0.147**| 0.312**| 0.298**| 0.237**|
| Item17     | 0.202**| 0.358**| 0.145**| 0.322**| 0.309**| 0.237**|

* p<0.05  ** p<0.01

From the above presentation, the correlation analysis between foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence development can be concluded as the following. Firstly, foreign literary work reading has a high significant positive relationship with knowledge of others, with the correlation index ranging from 0.240 to 0.375. However, it has a low correlation or even no correlation with knowledge of self. The main reason is that the foreign literary work reading can enhance the accumulation of western cultural knowledge. Secondly, foreign literary work reading has a significant positive effect on intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills, with the correlation index ranging from 0.113 to 0.341. The reason is that reading literary works can help students to acquire the western cultural knowledge, cultural taboos, non-verbal behavioral knowledge and so on, and apply these knowledge and skills in actual intercultural communication. Thirdly, there is a low correlation or no correlation between reading foreign literary works and attitudes, awareness. The reason is that the cultivation of intercultural attitudes and awareness mainly relies on the actual intercultural communicative activities, not just book learning.

**Conclusion**

As an important kind of intercultural contact pathway, foreign literary work can effectively improve students’ intercultural competence. However, the relative studies mainly rely on teachers’ and researchers’ qualitative observation. So based on college students’ actual reading situation and intercultural competence development situation, this research proves their relevance and
effectiveness by the questionnaire data analysis. And the investigation results show that the literary work reading time and quantity are not enough for college students, and their intercultural competence generally are at the medium level. So in order to improve college students' intercultural competence, teachers should encourage students to read more literary works in their spare time.

Through the discussion above, it is of great significance to provide theoretical references for intercultural competence research. And also provide the references for colleges in setting school curriculum to improve college students' intercultural competence development. However, some limitations are also exist. Firstly, this study does not control the variable for regional difference because some regional differences may occur in the respondents, so the correlation index between the two variables may vary in some ways. Secondly, it must be better that the qualitative research method is applied for supplementary those questions that questionnaire cannot cover. So future research on this area can be further explored from these perspectives to make up the researching gap.

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