

Selected Chinese University Teachers' Understanding of Intercultural Competence

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to understand how the Chinese understand intercultural competence from the Chinese perspective to help improve it among Chinese university teachers. Twenty-six conveniently sampled male and female university teachers of 20 higher learning institutions in China with ages from 29 to 55 years old, and mostly with international travel experience and graduate degrees participated in an in-depth interview with the researcher (Jie) in China. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis, involving the generation of open codes, axial codes (categories), and themes. Results showed the factors influencing cross-cultural communication, emphasizing the importance of intercultural knowledge. They identified two crucial aspects of intercultural knowledge: understanding foreign cultures and comprehending their own culture. This encompassed various elements like history, religion, politics, values, geography, and social customs. Additionally, participants highlighted the need to share fundamental cultural knowledge with others to facilitate effective cross-cultural communication. Lastly, the participants recognized the importance of economic development in cross-cultural interactions.

Keywords: Intercultural competence; Chinese university teachers; Knowledge; Culture; Communication

I. INTRODUCTION

In the report titled *China's Emergence as a Super Power: A Graphic Comparison of the United States, Russia, China, and Other Major Powers*, Cordesman (2023) revealed that China's position as a global economic superpower fuels the intensification of rivalries, and rise of potential conflicts with other equally powerful countries. However, Dobbins, Gompert, Shlapak, and Scobell (2012) observed 10 years ago that "China does not appear interested in matching U.S. military expenditures, achieving a comparable global reach, or assuming defense commitments beyond its immediate sphere" (para. 1). This claim is now challenged by tensions in the Western Philippine Sea or South China Sea (the term depends on who is making a claim over it) (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). COVID-19, on the other hand, has only worsened anti-China sentiments globally (Widianto & VU, 2020).

Intercultural competence is seen as a means to solve conflicts or potential ones (Pimonova, 2017). However, intercultural competence has been mostly studied in the West and, as such, will only be able to measure the intercultural competence of the Chinese with the Western bias (Chong & Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2015). Jie (2022) saw the need to understand how the Chinese understand intercultural competence from the Chinese perspective to help improve it among Chinese university teachers, to help achieve greater cultural understanding, nonetheless. Economically, such a study is warranted since there is "increased Chinese investments throughout the world... (and) the results could be used as a guiding operational scheme to prepare business" (Chong & Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2015). The increased internationalization of Chinese education (Bantugan, 2022), meanwhile, requires that Chinese students are able to study abroad successfully with the help of better intercultural competence. One of the major concerns when it comes to the rise of artificial intelligence

is that it is likely to reinforce human biases, if left unchecked (Larkin, 2022). Intercultural competence, a British Council survey in 2012 revealed (Corporate English Solutions, 2022), can help counter cultural biases and stereotyping that are likely brought to work in artificial intelligence algorithms.

II. Literature Review

Intercultural competence encompasses the skill to engage in efficient interactions and communication with people hailing from various cultural backgrounds (De Guzman, Durden, Taylor, Guzman, & Puthoff, 2016). It involves a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable individuals to navigate and adapt to different cultural contexts. A survey of available literature resulted in the different areas of scholarship below that are closely related to intercultural competence.

Cultural Awareness. The foundation of intercultural competence lies in recognizing one's own cultural identity and gaining an understanding of the distinctions and commonalities between one's own culture and others (Lumen Learning, n.d.). This entails acknowledging potential biases and stereotypes that may influence interactions. Research on cultural awareness has advanced but continues to exhibit gaps necessitating further exploration. These gaps encompass challenges in measuring and assessing cultural awareness comprehensively, understanding its development over time through longitudinal studies, examining its tangible impact on interactions in diverse settings, promoting cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary research, and assessing the efficacy of educational programs aimed at enhancing cultural awareness. Additionally, there is a need to investigate how technology influences cultural awareness, the role of cognitive biases in shaping it, and its relevance in conflict resolution, leadership, policy-making, and the cultivation of global citizenship skills. Addressing these gaps can deepen comprehension of cultural awareness and inform strategies to bolster it, facilitating more effective cross-cultural interactions and global cooperation.

Cultural Knowledge. Understanding various cultures, encompassing their customs, values, traditions, and communication norms, is crucial (University of Kansas, 2023). This awareness can enable individuals to steer clear of misinterpretations and adeptly navigate the intricacies of cultural distinctions. Research on cultural knowledge has advanced but reveals several research gaps necessitating further exploration. These gaps encompass the need for deeper investigations into cultural knowledge, its adaptation to contemporary dynamics, and its role in social justice and education. Additionally, research is required to understand how cultural knowledge influences international relations, business, and technology, and how it intersects with other forms of knowledge. The development of standardized assessment tools and an exploration of cultural knowledge transfer and global perspectives are also key areas for future research. Addressing these gaps can enhance our understanding of cultural knowledge's impact on various aspects of society and global interactions, ultimately contributing to more effective cross-cultural collaboration in our interconnected world.

Communication Skills. Efficient cross-cultural communication constitutes a fundamental element of intercultural proficiency. It goes beyond linguistic abilities and encompasses the skill to decipher nonverbal signals, comprehend implicit communication, and modify one's communication approach to align with the specific cultural context (Olds College, n.d.). Although there has been extensive research on communication skills, there are noticeable gaps that demand further examination. These gaps involve the need for more thorough investigations into cross-cultural communication abilities, an understanding of how communication skills evolve in the digital era, and recognizing their crucial roles in healthcare and education. Furthermore, it is essential to delve into the influence of technology on communication, the significance of nonverbal communication aptitude, and effective communication in contexts like conflict resolution and leadership. The study of developmental aspects, the refinement of assessment tools, and the exploration of how communication skills intersect with cultural competence are also imperative. Addressing these gaps holds the potential to enhance our comprehension of communication skills and their relevance in diverse settings, ultimately leading to more proficient communication methods and improved interpersonal relationships.

Empathy and Open-Mindedness. Being empathetic and open-minded are critical aspects of intercultural competence. Empathy helps individuals understand and appreciate the perspectives and experiences of people from different cultures (De Guzman, Durden, Taylor, Guzman, & Puthoff, 2016), while an open-minded attitude allows for greater flexibility and adaptation (University of Bradford, 2023). Research on empathy and open-mindedness, critical for enhancing human interactions and fostering positive relationships, encounters several research gaps. These gaps encompass the need for precise measurement and assessment tools, exploration of cross-cultural manifestations, and the study of developmental aspects of these traits. Additionally, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and training programs, delve into the neuroscientific basis of empathy and open-mindedness, and investigate their impact on leadership. Understanding how these traits intersect with social justice issues, adapt in online interactions, and change over time through longitudinal studies is essential. Furthermore, research should aim to develop comprehensive measures for open-mindedness and explore strategies for cultivating it in educational settings. Addressing these gaps holds the promise of advancing comprehension of empathy and open-mindedness, their cultural dynamics, and their significance for individual and societal well-being, ultimately guiding the development of interventions to promote positive relationships and social progress.

Flexibility and Adaptability. Intercultural competence involves the ability to adapt to different cultural norms and expectations. This includes being flexible in one's behavior and attitudes to accommodate cultural differences (Sinicope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). Research in the realm of cultural flexibility and adaptability, which plays a pivotal role in fostering successful cross-cultural interactions, confronts a range of research gaps. These gaps encompass the complexities of crafting measurement tools that are sensitive to diverse cultural contexts, deciphering nuanced variations in different situations, evaluating the enduring impact of these skills, and scrutinizing their developmental trajectories. Furthermore, there is a need for research that investigates the infusion of cultural flexibility into educational curricula, the repercussions of technological advancements, the intricate interplay of multiple identity factors, and the implications of cultural flexibility in various domains such as conflict resolution, mental well-being, leadership, healthcare, and the assessment of cross-cultural training initiatives. Addressing these research gaps holds the potential to elevate understanding of cultural flexibility and adaptability, ultimately enabling the advancement of more effective cross-cultural interactions and collaboration through the refinement of strategies and interventions.

Conflict Resolution. Effectively addressing conflicts stemming from cultural disparities constitutes a noteworthy facet of intercultural competence, as noted by Williams in 1994. This encompasses the capacity to handle and resolve conflicts with cultural sensitivity. Exploring the field of conflict resolution through research is essential for nurturing peaceful and productive interactions. However, this endeavor reveals several research gaps that warrant further investigation. These gaps encompass areas such as how cultural factors shape conflict resolution styles, the relatively unexplored territory of online conflict resolution in our digital era, and the lasting impacts of different conflict resolution approaches on relationships and collaboration. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to decode context-specific strategies for effective conflict resolution across a spectrum of diverse environments. This includes delving into the intricate dynamics of power, emotions, and gender roles in shaping conflict resolution outcomes. Evaluating the effectiveness of training programs and innovative methods in addressing intricate conflicts is equally crucial. Additionally, understanding the influence of technology, advocating for cross-cultural conflict mediation, and embracing cultural sensitivity in conflict resolution represent pivotal frontiers. Addressing these research gaps holds the potential to enrich our understanding of conflict resolution, providing valuable insights into its multifaceted nature and facilitating the development of more adept strategies and interventions to promote constructive conflict management and harmonious interpersonal relationships across various scenarios.

Intercultural Sensitivity. Intercultural competence also entails developing sensitivity to the dynamics of power, privilege, and discrimination that can exist in cross-cultural interactions (Ratts, Singh, Butler, Nassar-

McMillan, & McCullough, 2016). Understanding these dynamics helps individuals address issues related to social justice and equity. The exploration of intercultural sensitivity in research, a fundamental aspect of fostering successful cross-cultural interactions, uncovers several significant research gaps. These gaps encompass challenges in the creation of culturally sensitive assessment tools, the lifelong development trajectory of intercultural sensitivity, and the investigation of how individuals adapt their intercultural competencies across varied settings. Additionally, there is a necessity to delve into the interplay between intercultural sensitivity and communication styles, the impact of technology on intercultural aptitude, and the incorporation of intercultural sensitivity within educational contexts. The assessment of the effectiveness of training programs, the examination of the intersection between intercultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence, and the comprehension of its role in realms like conflict resolution, leadership, and healthcare are also areas of paramount importance. Addressing these research gaps holds the potential to enrich our understanding of intercultural sensitivity, facilitating the development of strategies that can foster effective cross-cultural interactions and collaboration in our increasingly globalized world.

Cultural Self-Reflection. Individuals who possess a strong level of intercultural competence engage in ongoing self-examination to evaluate their own cultural prejudices and enhance their abilities to interact across cultures (National Association of Social Workers, 2015). This self-awareness plays a pivotal role in fostering personal development in this domain. Research into cultural self-reflection, which plays a pivotal role in enhancing intercultural competence, uncovers several gaps in knowledge and areas necessitating further investigation. These gaps encompass difficulties in crafting precise measurement tools, comprehending the developmental dimensions of cultural self-reflection, and gauging its real-world impact on interactions. Additionally, there is a requirement to delve into its integration within educational contexts, assess the effectiveness of training initiatives, and explore the influence of technology on cultural self-reflection. Examining its interplay with cognitive biases, its role in conflict resolution, leadership, and decision-making, particularly in diverse environments, constitutes critical research avenues. Addressing these gaps can enrich understanding of the significance of cultural self-reflection, ultimately fostering more efficient cross-cultural interactions and collaboration in our interconnected global landscape.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ). Cultural intelligence is a concept closely related to intercultural competence. It involves the ability to adapt to new cultural settings and learn from them quickly. CQ consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Blasco, Feldt, & Jakobsen, 2012). Research into cultural intelligence (CQ) has made significant headway, yet it confronts notable gaps that necessitate further exploration. These voids entail challenges in crafting precise measurement tools, comprehending the developmental dimensions of CQ, and evaluating its direct repercussions on interactions, relationships, and outcomes spanning diverse contexts. Furthermore, there is a demand to investigate the incorporation of CQ in educational frameworks, gauge the enduring efficacy of training initiatives, and scrutinize the role of technology in shaping CQ in the realm of virtual engagements. Gaining insights into how CQ influences leadership, conflict resolution, and decision-making in multicultural settings, along with its ramifications in healthcare and the dynamics of cross-cultural teams, is of paramount significance. Additionally, an inclusive exploration of the interplay between CQ and variables such as race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status is indispensable for a comprehensive comprehension of its implications for intercultural interactions and sensitivity. Effectively addressing these research gaps holds the potential to foster a more comprehensive understanding of CQ, its maturation, and its multifaceted repercussions across various domains of life, ultimately promoting productive cross-cultural interactions and cooperation in our interconnected global landscape.

Training and Education. The enhancement of intercultural competence can be achieved and refined via educational and training initiatives (Sinden, 2021). Numerous establishments and entities provide cultural competency training with the aim of improving the capabilities of their staff and learners. Research into intercultural competence training and education highlights numerous research gaps such as the necessity for

standardized evaluation tools to gauge training effectiveness, the scrutiny of long-term effects on learners' intercultural competence, and the customization of training to suit diverse cultural settings. Additionally, research should investigate the integration of training into educational curricula, the evaluation of the efficacy of training methods and strategies, and the consideration of trainers' cultural proficiency. The emergence of online training necessitates examination, as does the assessment of its impact on institutions and organizations. It is also essential to delve into the intersectionality of training outcomes, appraise training programs, assess their influence on the performance of cross-cultural teams, and scrutinize the role of cultural humility and sensitivity in the training process. Addressing these research gaps can substantially enhance the development of more efficient intercultural competence training and educational initiatives, ultimately fostering greater understanding and collaboration across diverse cultural contexts.

Globalization and Technology. In the contemporary globalized landscape, intercultural competence has gained heightened significance, primarily attributed to the effortless international travel, communication, and collaborative opportunities facilitated by technological advancements (Matthews & Thakkar, 2012). Consequently, individuals and organizations find themselves intricately linked with individuals hailing from a wide array of cultural backgrounds. Research into intercultural competence within the context of globalization and technology reveals that include the imperative to delve into how technology, such as digital communication and AI, shapes intercultural competence and communication. Additionally, it is crucial to comprehend the ramifications of globalization phenomena, such as heightened migration and international business, on the intercultural competence of individuals and organizations. The ascent of virtual teams and online education necessitates inquiries into the functioning of intercultural competence in digital work and learning milieus. The development of dependable tools for assessing digital intercultural competence, the resolution of ethical dilemmas arising from technology-mediated cross-cultural interactions, and the scrutiny of how digital disparities impact intercultural exchanges all represent pivotal areas demanding further exploration. Addressing these gaps promises to furnish valuable insights for fostering efficacious intercultural interactions and collaboration in our progressively globalized and technologically interwoven world.

The identified research gaps in intercultural competence exhibit several commonalities across different facets of the field. These shared themes encompass the necessity for standardized measurement and assessment tools, investigation into the lasting effects of training and education, examination of the influence of technology and online interactions, exploration of the intersectionality of identity factors, and the evaluation of training programs and interventions. These gaps underscore the significance of creating dependable assessment approaches, gaining insights into the developmental aspects of intercultural competence, adapting to technology-mediated interactions, and addressing matters related to diversity and inclusivity. Critical in the pursuit of these necessary actions is a more inclusive understanding of intercultural competence from the lens of antagonized communities.

Nevertheless, there are distinctions in the specific research gaps emphasized in each domain of intercultural competence. To illustrate, in the context of cultural flexibility and adaptability, the focal points encompass context-specific variations and the repercussions of technology. In contrast, within the domain of cultural self-reflection, the emphasis revolves around cognitive biases and the processes of decision-making. Similarly, the examination of cultural intelligence delves into leadership and conflict resolution, whereas intercultural competence training and education explore the integration of educational approaches and the cultural competence of educators. Despite these variations, all these domains contribute to a comprehensive comprehension of intercultural competence and its significance in an increasingly interconnected global context.

As societies grow increasingly diverse and interconnected, research in the realm of intercultural competence undergoes continual evolution, yielding fresh insights. Consequently, keeping abreast of the latest advancements

in this domain is imperative for adeptly maneuvering intercultural encounters and fostering cross-cultural comprehension.

III. Study Framework

The "Contextual Intelligence" (Sternberg, 2007) or "Situational Awareness" theory provides valuable insight into the necessity for a more context-specific comprehension of intercultural competence. This theory posits that individuals must tailor their intercultural competence to suit distinct contexts, scenarios, and surroundings.

In intercultural engagements, the dynamics and expectations associated with culture can undergo significant variations contingent upon the specific context. For example, how one interacts with colleagues in a multicultural workplace may contrast with their approach when engaging with local residents in a foreign market or when communicating with international counterparts during diplomatic negotiations. Consequently, a universal or uniform approach to intercultural competence may prove ineffective.

The Contextual Intelligence Theory underscores the paramount importance of recognizing and adjusting to the distinctive demands presented by each intercultural encounter. It places significant emphasis on the development of intercultural competence that is finely attuned to the particular cultural, social, and environmental elements that characterize a given situation. This theory underscores the acknowledgment that effective intercultural competence necessitates individuals to possess situational awareness, flexibility, and the ability to adapt their behavior, communication style, and strategies in alignment with the prevailing context.

Research Questions

This study aims to identify themes that Chinese university teachers associate with intercultural competence. As such, this study asked, "How do selected university teachers in Chinese universities understand intercultural competence?"

IV. METHODOLOGY

Twenty six conveniently sampled male and female university teachers of Xianyang Normal University, Tibet Nationalities University, Northwest University, Shaanxi University of Science and Technology, Beijing Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University, Northwest A&F University, Xi'an College of Arts and Sciences, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Tianjin University, Xijing College, Shan Dong University, Xi'an Foreign Studies University, Qingdao University, Jilin University, Peihua College, Xiamen University, Shanxi University, and Eurasian College, with ages from 29 to 55 years old, and mostly with international travel experience and graduate degrees participated in an in-depth interview with the researcher (Jie) in China. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis.

V. RESULTS

Chinese university educators who took part in the interviews disclosed a range of factors influencing cross-cultural communication. They achieved this by recounting their personal intercultural experiences and outlining the challenges, conflicts, and hurdles encountered in such interactions. Their aim was to elucidate the essential competencies and personality traits that should be incorporated into a model for intercultural competence tailored to Chinese university educators. To accomplish this, the interviews were used to extract insights into the knowledge of these educators.

Participants underscored the significance of possessing intercultural knowledge as the bedrock of intercultural competence. They emphasized that a comprehensive and accurate understanding of cultural phenomena, customs, and practices divergent from or in conflict with one's national culture, as well as the ability to accept and adapt to them with an inclusive mindset, hinged on having a certain level of cross-cultural knowledge. However, the definition of cross-cultural knowledge is multifaceted, with various scholars offering distinct perspectives. For instance, Byram (2014) posits that cross-cultural knowledge encompasses understanding other

cultures, recognizing personal deficiencies and biases, among other elements. Weiwei, Renzhong, and Weiping (2013) suggested that it encompasses domestic and foreign cultural knowledge, while Norton (2018) posited understanding it in terms of language and culture. Different groups involved in cross-cultural communication may possess varying forms of cross-cultural knowledge.

The Chinese college educators interviewed in the study asserted that intercultural knowledge primarily encompasses understanding culture on two fronts: comprehending the culture of other countries and comprehending one's own culture. Culture itself is a complex concept, encompassing aspects such as food, clothing, architecture, literature, music, history, social systems, customs, beliefs, and concepts. Some of these cultural elements are closely intertwined with cross-cultural communication, while others are not. Samovar, Porter & McDaniel (2010) contend that history, religion, social organization, language, and intercultural communication exhibit the strongest correlation with culture. On the other hand, Hofstede (2004) argued that cultural symbols, heroes, etiquette, and values are the aspects most closely linked to cross-cultural communication. The Chinese college educators involved in the interviews opined that comprehending a nation's culture necessitates understanding key elements such as its history, geographical setting, political landscape, economic conditions, religious practices, legal framework, social customs, value norms, and social milieu, as these are the facets most pertinent to cross-cultural communication.

"The spirit of a nation is reflected in its history, its religion, and the degree of its political freedom," Hegel (1793) wrote. This is reflected in the first three themes generated from the interviews.

Learning about the history. Many respondents expressed a strong interest in learning both their own history and the history of other nations. For instance, Participant 26 shared, "I enjoy exploring museums and libraries in Australia. The National Museum of Australia boasts an extensive collection of cultural artifacts spanning from ancient times to the present. I acquired insights into Australia's history through these exhibits, which proved highly engaging. I find that having knowledge of Australia's history makes it easier to connect with the locals... Understanding Australia's history not only enhances my grasp of its past but also serves as a foundation for my future endeavors in Australia."

Learning about religious beliefs. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of acquainting oneself with both their own religion and the religions practiced in other countries. Participant 2 recounted an experience, saying, "While we were searching for the parking lot exit, a Malaysian gentleman carried his shoes and asked us for directions to the prayer room... I later discovered that in Malaysia, there are dedicated prayer rooms in places such as study halls, libraries, and gyms... When we were studying or engaging in group discussions, some classmates would step out to pray and then return to continue. Initially, this seemed unfamiliar to me, as I hadn't encountered such practices in China. However, after spending time in Malaysia, I realized this behavior is entirely normal..."

Learning about the political situation. Some participants stressed the impact of politics on cross-cultural communication, highlighting that comprehending diverse political systems plays a crucial role in facilitating intercultural exchanges. Participant 2 articulated this perspective, stating, "I believe cross-cultural communication is greatly influenced by economic and political factors, especially the tangible economic and political conflicts between nations, which directly impact mutual recognition. Overcoming these economic and political factors can be challenging... To enhance cross-cultural communication, it's imperative to first grasp the economic and political landscape of the other party."

Participant 3 offered an anecdote that reflects the in legal culture that is subsumed in the political lives of people. Participant 3 shared, "I previously organized a Chinese food tasting event for international students in China, which was well-received. Upon arriving in the UK, I attempted to host a similar event. However, a local teacher informed me that such an event might pose food safety risks and potentially violate local regulations. I

found this surprising." Whether it pertains to legal culture rooted in public legal consciousness and values or manifests in tangible forms such as legal norms and institutions, there exist substantial variations in legal systems across different countries. These disparities, often referred to as distinctions between Chinese and Western legal cultures, arise from differences in values.

Learning about the values. Many respondents emphasize the importance of gaining a profound comprehension of both their own and other countries' value norms. Participant 15 expressed, "I've worked in foreign affairs management for over a decade, and the most profound observation is the stark contrast in thinking between Chinese and Westerners. We Chinese tend to adopt a more indirect and nuanced approach, whereas Westerners are often forthright and direct. We Chinese hold a strong collective consciousness. During the pandemic, when the government instructed everyone to isolate or stay home, we complied without question. However, many of our international students couldn't grasp why they were subject to such restrictions."

Among the myriad components of culture, values wield the most significant influence on intercultural communication. Values serve as culture's nucleus, reflecting its fundamental attributes. They steer individuals' communicative conduct and shape how people interpret the communication behaviors of others. Acquiring an understanding of the values held by various cultures enhances one's capacity to fathom the cultural underpinnings behind the communication behaviors of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Learning about the geography. Most participants underscored the significance of acknowledging the importance of the geographical environment and actively seeking to comprehend the geographical context of diverse cultures. Participant 16 shared, "I've resided in Thailand for over a decade. I'm married to a Thai woman and have a child, yet I still struggle with Thailand's climate and suffer from recurring skin allergies. Despite my adaptation to Thai cuisine, I frequently long for my hometown... I believe I haven't delved deep enough into Thailand's geographical environment; otherwise, I could have taken preventative measures to avoid yearly allergies..."

Meanwhile, Participant 15 shared, "Malaysia's climate is extremely hot. I often wish to wear T-shirts for comfort during classes, but the school enforces strict attire guidelines. Malaysian social customs dictate dressing neatly, including wearing short sleeves. Collars are required, and skirts or shorts must extend below the knees. Adhering to this attire in hot weather makes me feel suffocated." Likewise, Participant 8 remarked, "It took me some time to adapt to the Korean practice of drinking ice water. It posed a bit of a challenge for me..."

Participants also underscored the significance of possessing knowledge about the basic information of other countries as a prerequisite for effective cross-cultural communication. Participant 9 noted, "... there was one thing that left a strong impression on me in France. I was having a conversation with some friends in society, and I asked them if they knew the capital of China. Surprisingly, many French individuals didn't know, and I found it quite astonishing. Ordinary Chinese citizens are aware that the capital of France is Paris, the capital of the United States is Washington, and the capital of the United Kingdom is London... This indicates that the French have a limited understanding of Chinese culture. If we hope to engage in future communication with foreigners, we should actively share some fundamental aspects of Chinese culture and knowledge with them."

Whether it pertains to dietary practices or dress codes, each country has its own established norms. Many individuals engaged in cross-cultural communication find themselves unaccustomed to the social customs of other nations, leading to uncomfortable situations. By proactively acquainting themselves with the social customs of other countries and mentally preparing for such differences, individuals can mitigate discomfort.

Learning about social customs. The majority of interviewees highlighted disparities between their own social customs and those of other countries, underscoring the impact of these social customs on cross-cultural communication.

Learning about the economy. Participants also raised the topic of other countries' economic development, highlighting the significance of national economic advancement in the context of cross-cultural communication. The researcher contends that comprehending diverse economic systems is a valuable asset for effective cross-cultural communication.

VI. DISCUSSION

The results of the study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing cross-cultural communication among Chinese university educators and shed light on the essential competencies and personality traits necessary for intercultural competence tailored to this specific group. This discussion will integrate the findings with the relevant literature, emphasizing key citations to contextualize and critically analyze the results.

The study's participants emphasized the fundamental role of intercultural knowledge as a cornerstone of intercultural competence. This finding aligns with existing literature on intercultural competence, which highlights the importance of cultural awareness and understanding (De Guzman, Durden, Taylor, Guzman, & Puthoff, 2016; Lumen Learning, n.d.). Byram's perspective on cross-cultural knowledge, encompassing an understanding of other cultures and recognizing personal biases (Byram, 2014), resonates with the participants' views.

The Chinese college educators interviewed in the study articulated that intercultural knowledge comprises two dimensions: understanding other cultures and comprehending one's own culture. This dual understanding of culture resonates with the concept of cultural awareness discussed in the literature (Lumen Learning, n.d.). The multifaceted nature of culture, which includes aspects such as history, religion, social organization, language, and communication (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2010), is acknowledged by the participants.

The participants' emphasis on learning about the history, religious beliefs, and political situations of other countries aligns with scholarly perspectives (Hegel, 1793; University of Kansas, 2023). Understanding these elements provides a deeper context for cross-cultural interactions and enables individuals to navigate potential cultural conflicts. Additionally, the study's participants highlighted the impact of political factors on cross-cultural communication, underlining the need to grasp diverse political systems (Participant 2). This view resonates with the literature on how politics can influence mutual recognition in intercultural exchanges (Williams, 1994).

The participants' recognition of the significant influence of values on intercultural communication is consistent with existing literature (University of Kansas, 2023). Values are considered the nucleus of culture, shaping individuals' communicative behaviors and interpretations of others' behaviors. Participant 15's observation of differences in thinking between Chinese and Westerners reflects the impact of values on communication (Participant 15). These insights align with the role of values in shaping communication styles and behaviors (De Guzman, Durden, Taylor, Guzman, & Puthoff, 2016).

The participants highlighted the significance of understanding the geographical environment and basic information about other countries. This aligns with the literature on cultural knowledge, emphasizing the importance of comprehending various aspects of cultures, including geography (University of Kansas, 2023). Participant 16's experience in Thailand underscores the relevance of geography to intercultural competence. Similarly, Participant 9's observation about the limited understanding of Chinese culture among some French individuals emphasizes the importance of sharing fundamental cultural knowledge in cross-cultural communication (Participant 9).

Participants emphasized the importance of being aware of and adapting to social customs in other countries. This aligns with the literature highlighting the role of cultural knowledge in navigating cultural differences (De Guzman, Durden, Taylor, Guzman, & Puthoff, 2016). By proactively acquainting themselves with social customs, individuals can mitigate discomfort in cross-cultural interactions, as suggested by the participants.

The participants also stressed the importance of understanding the economic development of other countries in the context of cross-cultural communication. This perspective aligns with the literature on cultural knowledge and its impact on international relations and business (University of Kansas, 2023). Comprehending diverse economic systems is considered a valuable asset for effective cross-cultural communication, as suggested by the participants.

VII. Conclusions

The study's results underscore the significance of intercultural knowledge, cultural awareness, and understanding the multifaceted nature of culture in achieving intercultural competence among Chinese university educators. These findings are consistent with established literature on intercultural competence and provide practical insights for educators and individuals engaging in cross-cultural communication. The findings revealed the determinants that impact cross-cultural communication, with a strong emphasis on the pivotal role played by intercultural knowledge. Within this realm, two essential dimensions of intercultural knowledge emerged: a grasp of foreign cultures and a profound understanding of one's own culture. This encompassed a diverse array of components, including historical context, religious beliefs, political dynamics, cultural values, geographical factors, and social customs. Furthermore, participants underscored the necessity of disseminating fundamental cultural insights to enhance the efficacy of cross-cultural interactions. Lastly, the participants acknowledged the significance of economic advancement in the context of cross-cultural engagements.

Recommendations

While the outcomes of this study align closely with the findings from prior research on intercultural competence, it is imperative to contextualize these themes in the contemporary landscape characterized by the widespread dissemination of culture through prevalent technologies, which concurrently fosters increased globalization and a resurgence of tribalism as a response to cultural dominance. Considering the prevalent research gaps identified, the following recommendations are proposed:

Standardized Measurement and Assessment Tools. While the study suggests that the perceptions of intercultural competence among university students in China exhibit consistency with knowledge beyond China, it is vital to recognize that the study participants represent a highly educated segment of the Chinese population who are more exposed to intercultural competence scholarship compared to the majority of Chinese citizens with varying levels of education. Consequently, the use of standardized questionnaires for evaluating intercultural competence should be approached with caution. The suitability, validity, and reliability of such instruments must be assessed in non-urban and less mainstream Chinese communities.

Examination of Long-term Effects of Training and Education. In light of the education and training imparted to educators focused on intercultural competence, it is essential to acknowledge the origins and limitations of their own intercultural education. Given that a substantial portion of educational resources in higher education derives from Western sources, educators must remain self-aware of the enduring impact of these resources on their training and subsequent education of others in intercultural competence. Achieving a more balanced and contextually informed understanding of intercultural competence necessitates the integration of non-Western intellectual resources alongside Western ones.

Assessment of the Influence of Online Technology and Interactions. Contemporary digital technologies, by virtue of their ubiquity, have the potential to homogenize cultures in multiple ways. Consequently, an awareness of this phenomenon should be counteracted by an equal awareness of the emergence of counter-cultures that actively resist standardization and mainstreaming. Intercultural competence fostered through online technology and interactions should be complemented by a sensitivity to countercultural perspectives.

Exploration of Identity Intersectionality. Recognizing that being Chinese constitutes just one facet of a person's identity, intercultural competence should extend to proficiency in navigating cultures that intersect with

various aspects of identity. This implies that intercultural competence should incorporate engagement in critical studies that elucidate the intersectionality of identities within Chinese individuals and beyond

Evaluation of training programs and interventions. While this study aligns with established literature on intercultural competence, it is essential to acknowledge the evolving discourse that challenges existing frameworks upon which training programs and interventions are constructed. Consequently, program evaluations should incorporate contemporary frameworks for intercultural competence to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

Incorporating developmental aspects. The study's findings indicate consistency in notions of intercultural competence among university teachers in China, but it is vital to recognize that this consistency applies primarily to young to middle-aged adults. Intercultural competence varies across the lifespan, and competence should be understood in the context of human development, which itself varies across cultures and age groups. Therefore, intercultural competence must be nuanced and adapted across various critical variables.

Balancing technology-mediated interactions. Given that current technologies can shape global mediated interactions by providing templates that may depersonalize and decontextualize online interactions, relying solely on technology as the primary determinant of intercultural competence may be counterproductive. Genuine cultural encounters necessitate a profound appreciation of cultural context, making it essential to exercise caution in overemphasizing technology as the sole facilitator of intercultural competence.

Addressing diversity and inclusivity. In an era where diversity and inclusivity hold increasing importance, especially in progressive and politically correct societies, the use of standardized instruments for assessing intercultural competence may face heightened scrutiny. The conventional benchmarks of intercultural competence are likely to be questioned when evaluated against standards that prioritize greater diversity and inclusion. Consequently, the criteria for assessing intercultural competence are expected to vary based on the level of intercultural maturity exhibited by scholars and their sources.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This is to certify that the authors complied with the need to acquire an informed consent for the participants as stipulated in the ethics review clearance granted to the researchers prior to data gathering. Participants were also informed that they have the withdraw from the study at any time (indicated in the informed consent form), and that identities will not be revealed at any point during the research and after it is completed (also indicated in the informed consent form). The respondents were not exposed to any form of harm. There was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study. All sources were properly acknowledged in the study. As this is a qualitative study, interpretation of the findings requires some degree of perspective-taking but not to the extent that the information given to the researchers were taken out of context. The results were used for research purposes only.

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