Study on the Cultural Self-efficacy of Chinese College Students in Intercultural Communication

Siyao Wu[1, a]

[1]Hangzhou Normal University, Hangzhou, 311100, China

[a]2827405070@qq.com

Abstract

Cultural self-efficacy refers to one's perception of his/her own capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity. Cultural self-efficacy is important in communication because it can promote the socio-cultural adaption. Thus, it is significant to study Chinese college students' cultural self-efficacy level and the influencing factors to improve cross-cultural communication. The present study uses quantitative method, with 64 students from Hangzhou Normal University as participants, and designs a questionnaire to study students' level of cultural self-efficacy as well as the influencing factors of it. The results of the study show that the mean score of CSE of Chinese college students is at limited level and more precisely, the dimension of learning and understanding a foreign language has the highest score. Meanwhile, within the five causing factors put forward by Bandura, intercultural experience, appraisal from other in the communication, and the observation of others' experiences all have possible influences on students' cultural self-efficacy. At last, the author provides some relevant practical suggestions to better improve students' cultural self-efficacy.

Keywords

Intercultural communication; Self-efficacy; Cultural self-efficacy.

1. Introduction

Self-efficacy, put forward by Bandura, was defined as one's belief of succeeding in learning a skill, performing a skill, and persisting at the skill against all the difficulties. Later on, Bermal and Froman put forward the cultural self-efficacy, which was defined as one's personal perception of ability in different cultural situations. With the development of globalization, it is getting more and more important to enhance people's cultural self-efficacy to promote intercultural communication because cultural self-efficacy can promote the socio-cultural adaption. But Chinese English learners have long been regared as having poor communicative ability. Thus, it is urgent to develop Chinese English learners' intercultural communication competence.

The present study investigates the cultural self-efficacy level of Chinese English learners and the causing facotrs, in order to give some implications for Chinese English teachers to develop students' ability to communicate more effectively, which can be applied in other domains and contexts to promote cultural adaption.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Self-efficacy

American psychologist Bandura (1997) put forward self-efficacy in his social learning theory and later on found that people's judgment of own ability is the most important factor in affecting motivation and behaviors. Self-efficacy refers to people's judgment of whether they

can succeed or not in one activity, which plays a crucial role in self-regulatory system and can play the decisive role in people's behaviors. Meanwhile, self-efficay has impact on thinking, self-esteem, goals how much efforts people extend and the situations they select in different areas of activities. There has been many researches show that people with lower level of self-efficacy often take it as a threat when facing difficulties and people with higher levels take more positive views on it.

According to Bandura, there are four factors having impact on self-efficacy: performance, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal, which will be further investigated in the present study.

Later on, Bermal and Froman put forward the concept of cultural self-efficacy, which refers to the perception of one's own capability in different cultural situations and it was first introduced in nursing literature. Bermal and Froman also designed the Cultural Self-Efficacy Scale to measure it and the scale items are as follows: knowledge of cultural concepts, cultural patterns, skills in performing transcultural nursing. In 2009, Carmen Tabemerod designed a cultural self-efficacy scale for adolescents (CSES-A) in order to guarantee multiple application with adolescents of diverse cuktural origins.

2.2. Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication is the communication which is about different cultures in different districts.

The intercultural communication competence has been widely studied by many scholars and they gruadually realized that the goal of L2 teaching is not just the mere acquisition of knowledge, but it also aims to help students develop intercultural communication competence. Gao Yihung(2002) proposed that intercultural communication competence refters to how to properly use the target language in the target cultural context so it can also be called as sociocultural competence.

Many Chinese scholars have studied the components of intercultural communication competence, for example, Huang Guosheng (1994) once pointed out that it consists of lexical competence and grammatical competence, discourse competence, strain competence and social linguitstic competence.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Instrument

The present study designs the questionnaire, whose first part aims to investigate students' overall cultural self-efficacy and second part aims to find out the causing factors.

Table 1. The first part's questions

Dimension	No.
Self-efficacy in possessing information about other cultures	1-5
Mixing satisfactorily with other cultures	6-11,16,17
Coping with homesickness and seperation	12-15
Understanding other ways of life	18-22
Learning and studying a foreign language	23-25

The standards of the five levels of students' cultural self-efficacy are listed as follows: scores between 0-59 can be seen as on the weak level; 60-69 as the limited level; 70-79 as the intermediate level; 80-89 as the good level; 90-100 as the excellent level.

The second part of the queationnaire is designed to find out the causing factors based on Bandura's theory: performance accomplishments, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences and emotional arousal, and the relevant questions are listed in the following table.

Table 2. The second part's questions

Factors	Questions
Performance accomplishments	Do you have intercultural experiences and are they successful or not?
Verbal persuasion	In the process, have you received some appraisals? Are they positive or negative?
Vicarious experiences	How about your classmates' intercultural experiences?
Emotional arousal	Do you have a positive attitude towards the intercultural communication?

3.2.   Participants and Data Collection

There are altogether 64 college students from Hangzhou Normal University participating in the present study.

For the data collection, the study uses Wenjuanxing to collect the data and counts students' scores of the overall cultural self-efficacy, the five dimensions of cultural self-efficcacy, as well as the four influencing factors, and then the author analyzes the distributions and the mean score to investigate the results.

4.   Results and Analysis

4.1.   The Overall Situation of CSE

Table 3. The Mean Scores of CSE

	Mean
Learning and understanding a foreign language	77.32
Mixing satisfactorily with other cultures	67.35
Coping with homesickness and seperation	51.23
Understanding other ways of life	71.26
Possessing information about other cultures	76.96
Cultural self-efficacy	68.82

The mean core can indicate students' overall CSE, the higher mean score, the better level of cultural self-efficacy. As the above outcome depicts, the overall cultural self-efficacy of all the participants is 68.82, and according to the standard in table 2, it is of the limited level. It can be concluded that participants don't have enough CSE in cross-cultural communication.Within the five dimensions of cultural self-efficacy, learning and understanding a foreign language got the highest score (M=77.32), while coping with homesickness and seperation got the lowest score (M=51.23). It can be predicted that students' ability of dealing with homesickness and seperation is very weak and they are relatively good at learning and understanding a foreign language. The reason behind might be that Chinese students have long been used to learning a language for examination, but they are not exposed to other cultures enough and they are not indipendent enough.

In order to study the overall situation of students' CSE, a more detailed figure is listed below.
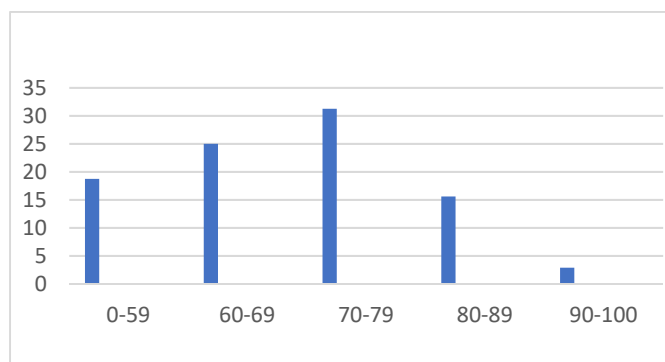
Figure 1. The percentage of the scores

The figure shows the distribution of the scores of CSE of participants. The percentage of students who socre between 0-59 is 18.75%; the percentage of 60-69 is 25%; the percentage of 70-79 is 31.25%; the percentage of 80-89 is 15.6%; the percentage of 90-100 is 9.4%.

It can be calculated that the main scores range from 60-79, accounting for 56.25%, which also indicates that the overall CSE of participants are limited and intermediate. And there are only 9.4% of participants score between 90 and 100, which is, about 6 students among the total 64 students. Thus, we can see that there are not many students with high cultural self-efficacy although they have a good command of English. The phenomenon that Chinese English learners lack of confidence in intercultural communication has been proved by other researchers, such as Gao Yongchen (2006), which states that most of college students showed negative assessment of the confidence and knowledge about culture in cross-cultural communications even if they can get high score in school examinations. The reason behind is obvious that, for so many years, school education in China have tended to emphasize on getting high scores, entering a good university etc., while paying little attention on students' overall language competence. Thus, many students found themselves helpless and unable to adapt to another culture when studying abroad.

To further investigate the situation of students' CSE, the five aspects of CSE have been investigated in details, listed as follows:

Table 5. The five aspects of CSE

	Learning and understanding a foreign language	Possessing information about other cultures	Understanding other ways of life	Mixing satisfactorily with other cultures	Coping with homesickness and seperation
Mean score	77.32	76.96	71.26	67.35	51.23
Scores	The percentage				
0-59	11.1	13.3	16.8	28.6	55.4
60-69	21.2	14.8	31.1	19.4	13.3
70-79	5.5	10.1	19.8	18.8	11.5
80-89	32.5	28.2	20.7	21.5	10.2
90-100	29.7	33.6	11.6	11.7	9.6

As the table shows, the dimension about learning and understanding gets the highest mean score which is 77.32, which suggests that participants have relatively high confidence in solving problems about learning and understanding a foreign language. And the dimension of coping with homesickness and separation gets the lowest score (M=51.32) which indicates that

Chinese language learners are not good at dealing with the homesickness and loneliness with confidence when they are abroad. Mixing satisfactorily with other cultures also gets relatively limited score (M=67.35), which indicates that participants are not good at mixing with other cultures, and there might some culture differences they cannot totally deal with. Understanding other ways of life and possessing information of other cultures have intermediate scores (M=71.26, 76.06 respectively), which indicates that participants have the ability to understand other people and life in other cultures.

For the dimensions of learning and information (M=77.32, 76.96 respectively), participants got higher level ranging from 80-100, which accounts for 62.2% and 61.8 respectively. As for the mixing dimension, the percentage of students range from 60-100 are only 53.4%, which indicates that participants have lower ability in this dimension compared to the other four dimensions. When in intercultural communication, some unexpected things and factors may occur, even if one is prepared, so it may cause the uncertainly of communication.

The score of coping with homesickness and seperation is the lowest, and there are only 44.6% of participants got the socre ranging from 60-100, which can be concluded that students are easy to feel homesick and lonely when the they are in the intercultural situations, which is cosistent with other research. According to the data from the education administrator, in 2016, about 80% of Chinese students who studied abroad choose to come back home when finishing their education abroad. Chinese parents tend to care too much about their kids and almost do everything for kids, so many Chinese kids are not independent enough. And it can also be noted that many Chinese students tend to have a nostalgic mood and this kind of emotion will increase their belief that they cannot deal with the homesickness in intercultural situations, which can account for the low score to some extent.

4.2. Influencing Factors of CSE

There are overall four factors investigated in the present study: performance accomplishments; verbal persuasion; vicarious experiences; emotional arousal. The answers of different questions can reveal the outcome of the influencing factors of CSE.

Table 6. The outcome of the influencing factors of CSE

Questions	Answer	Mean scorers
Do you have intercultural experiences?	YES: 48	YES: 90
	NO: 16	NO:69.2
Are they successful or not?	YES: 32	YES:92
	NO: 10	NO:72.14
In the process, have you received some positive or negative appraisals?	POSITIVE: 42	POSITIVE: 92.78
	NEGATIVE: 6	NEGATIVE: 78.32
How about your classmates' intercultural experiences?	SUCCESSFUL:54	SUCCESSFUL:90.12
	FAILED: 10	FAILED:67.52
Do you have a positive attitude towards the intercultural communication?	YES: 54	YES:90.32
	NO: 10	NO:89.52

There are altogether 48 students who have experiences to communicate interculturally, and 38 of them have succeeded, while 10 of them did not. And the participants who have successful experiences also have higher scores of cultural self-efficacy with 92.00 score than who failed (Mean=72.14). It is noteworthy that the failed experience score which is 72.14 is higher than the average score of all students. Thus, it can be concluded that despite the failed experiences may have negative impact on CSE, it can also promote cultural self-efficacy, compared with totally no intercultural communication experiences at all. Experience can help language

learners' buld up thwir confidence and is very important influencing factors of CSE, which can give language teachers insights that they should bring enough oppurtunities for students.

There are 42 students received positive appraisals while only 6 students received negative one. The mean scores of the two groups are 92.78 and 78.32 respectively, which are all higher than the average one. Thus, it can be stated that the appraisals whether they are positive or negative all have some good impacts on students cultural self-efficacy, and it is proved by Bandura that verbal persuasion is a good way to improve one's self-efficacy. Even if students receive negative comments, they can also know their drawbacks and find ways to improve them. It should also be paid attention to that language positive appraisals can largely improve language learners' confidence. Many teachers are used to criticizing students and finding the flaws of learners, because they hold the point of view that the critics can help students improve more, which can be proven wrong. It is suggested that language teachers should be used to praising students instead of critisizing them all the times.

According to the table, 27 students answered that their classmates' experiences are successful and 5 say those experiences are failed. The students who observe successful intercultural communication have higher mean score than who observed failed ones, (Mean=90.12, 67.52). Surrounding people's successful experience will have a big impact on participants' cultural self-efficacy, because while they are observing, they may tend to imitate the successful behaviors and try to avoid some mistakes so that they can be more prepared to conduct their own intercultural communications later on. Language learners', especially young learners, are quite good at observing and imitating, so the positive examples are so significant to improve their confidence and CSE.

There are 27 students have positive attitude towards intercultural communication while 5 students don't. However, their mean scores don't have big differences (Mean=90.32, 89.52 respectively), which indicates that the attitude may have little influence on cultural self-efficacy.

Based on all the above analysis, we can draw a conclusion that intercultural experience, appraisal from other in the communication, and the observation of others' experiences all have possible influence on students' cultural self-efficacy while the attitude has little.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Major Findings

The present study explores Chinese English learners' overall level of cultural self-efficacy and the causing factors of it. The major findings are listed as follows:

(1) The overall level of Chinese English learners are at the limited level. Most participants are in the range of 60-79, which are limited and intermediate levels and there are only small number of students have high score and excellent cultural self-efficacy. Within the five dimensions, Chinese English learners are best at learning and understanding a foreign language, and worst at dealing with homesickness and loneliness in other cultures.

(2) Among the five causing factors, intercultural experience, appraisal from other in the communication, and the observation of others' experiences all have possible influence on students' cultural self-efficacy, while the attitude towards intercultural communication has little.

5.2. Implications of the Present Study

The finding of the present study can give some implications that it is crucial and necessary to improve students overall cultural self-efficacy since at present, their overall cultural self-efficacy are at the limited or intermediate levels. As for the influencing factors of the cultural self-efficacy, here are some practical suggestions:

1) It is important for teachers to create the real-life situation to help students communicate more effectively and give every student enough oppurtunities to practice and experience.

2) It is not enough just to acquire knowledge and skills of the language, but it is also necessary to use language to communicate in real conversations to promote students' language competence.

3) Teachers should give students positive feedbacks to help them improve their self-efficacy and build up their confidence. When there are some mistakes in communication, teachers can choose to ignore some of the small mistakes, not to interrupt students, instead, to give them positive feedback and appraisals to let them continue speaking.

4) Teachers should build students' inclusiveness in multiculturalism and encourage them to communicate freely and confidently with foreigners. It is suggested to add more cultural knowledge in their daily teaching, which can help students know more about the diversity of cultures and better accept the difference and diversity.

5) It is also crucial to improve students' critical thinking and cultural identity. Presisely, the comparison games, debate, discussion can be added in class teaching to let students compare different cultures and finnaly to improve students' culture identity.

5.3. Limitations of the Present Study

Firstly, due to the limited time, there are only 64 students participated in the research, and they are all from Hangzhou Normal University, so the samples are not big enough and not exactly accurate.

Secondly, cultural self-efficacy is a quite complex and dynamic psychological formation, which may not only be influenced by only five dimensions studied in this paper. The possible factors can be further explored in the future.

Acknowledgments

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