

AIGC-Empowered Teaching Practice: Cultivating Critical Thinking and Cultural Interpretation Competencies in Intercultural Communication Courses

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Abstract: Conventional Intercultural Communication classes are often constrained by insufficient training in intercultural critical thinking and students' weaknesses in interpreting Chinese culture to the outside world. Based on the current teaching situation of this course in Chinese universities, this paper leverages the strengths of AIGC and constructs an innovative teaching model featuring "intelligent critical-thinking guidance—cross-cultural comparative interpretation—personalized iterative output—multi-dimensional process-oriented assessment". The study reveals that the in-depth integration of AIGC into curriculum teaching can effectively foster learners' awareness of intercultural critical thinking and improve their ability to interpret both Chinese and foreign cultures. It offers practical references for the teaching innovation of the Intercultural Communication course and the cultivation of high-level foreign language talents.

Keywords: AIGC; Intercultural communication; Critical-thinking competence; Cultural interpretation; Teaching practice

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1. Introduction

Intercultural Communication serves as a core course for foreign-language majors and general education in higher education. It aims to guide learners to distinguish multicultural differences, break cultural stereotypes, and develop two-way intercultural communication competencies ^[1]. It also acts as a vital carrier for fostering moral values, strengthening cultural confidence and equipping students with capabilities to tell Chinese stories well ^[2].

At present, the course mostly adopts conventional paradigms such as situational simulation and case

discussion. Teaching tends to focus on superficial cultural phenomena like customs and etiquette, while insufficient exploration is conducted into underlying value logics and cultural paradoxes. Consequently, learners receive limited training in intercultural critical thinking and are prone to cultural-essentialist perceptions^[3]. Meanwhile, teaching prioritizes the input of foreign cultural knowledge yet lacks training in the external interpretation of local culture. Furthermore, in some classrooms, AIGC is merely treated as a utility tool for literature retrieval and courseware production. It fails to be deeply embedded in learners' cognitive construction and the generation of cultural texts, which creates a disconnect between technological application and curriculum educational objectives. Accordingly, taking the Intercultural Communication course as the research context, this paper explores practical pathways for AIGC-empowered development of intercultural critical-thinking and cultural-interpretation competences so as to provide references for improving intercultural education in universities.

2. Existing problems in university intercultural communication teaching

2.1. Superficial teaching modes and insufficient critical-thinking cultivation

The conventional instructional model combining theoretical lectures, case demonstrations and classroom discussions within Intercultural Communication courses enables students to gain foundational cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, in some classrooms, teaching focuses too much on knowledge such as customs, etiquette and linguistic disparities. Teaching activities mostly encourage students merely to “identify cultural differences”, lacking thorough analysis of social causes, value logics and thinking paradigms behind those differences^[3]. When faced with complex intercultural conflicts and contentious issues, some learners are inclined to form stereotyped or one-sided judgments shaped by preconceived notions. Accordingly, greater emphasis should be placed on training in rational analysis and dialectical reflection, and substantial scope remains for advancing the development of high-order intercultural critical-thinking competences.

2.2. Imbalanced teaching content and weak competence in interpreting local culture

Though many Intercultural Communication courses have incorporated elements of fine traditional Chinese culture, they still attach greater importance to cultural input than cultural output^[4]. Teaching activities focus more on understanding foreign cultures, with insufficient hands-on training on translating and interpreting Chinese culture to audiences from different cultural backgrounds^[5]. Students have limited opportunities to express local culture in alignment with international discourses. Some students experience “cultural aphasia”: they are capable of analyzing foreign cultural cases, yet unable to interpret Chinese cultural connotations appropriately for overseas audiences. Their output lacks appropriateness, falling short of the training objectives for international-communication-oriented talents.

2.3. Superficial technical empowerment: Insufficient integration into thinking development

Digital teaching reforms in some courses remain at the instrumental level, including courseware optimization, online resource distribution, and supplementary video materials^[6]. Technology functions mostly as an auxiliary tool and exerts limited influence on students' thinking training and competence development. Even with intelligent situational practices, it is difficult to offer targeted interventions for individual deficiencies such as logical loopholes in critical thinking, biased cultural interpretations, and expressive inadequacies.

Technical applications are poorly connected with core curriculum goals, so AIGC cannot fully boost students' critical-thinking and cultural-interpretation capabilities ^[7].

2.4. Imperfect assessment system with insufficient attention to higher-order competences

Many courses still adopt attendance, homework and final written examinations as major assessment instruments, which mainly examine students' memorization of cultural common sense and theoretical concepts. Process-oriented and diversified evaluations targeting critical-thinking logic, depth of cultural interpretation, accuracy of narration and appropriateness of intercultural expression are insufficient. Such assessment mechanisms can hardly reflect the real growth of students' higher-order competencies and partly hinder the transformation from knowledge transmission to competence-oriented education.

3. Advantages of AIGC in empowering intercultural communication courses

3.1. Generating progressive question chains to facilitate intercultural critical-thinking training

Focusing on core teaching topics including cultural conflicts and value tensions, AIGC is able to construct layered question sequences that probe cultural phenomena, root causes of conflicts, the rationality and constraints of phenomena from multiple cultural standpoints, as well as how communicative approaches evolve amid contextual shifts. Under the guidance of these structured questions, learners are encouraged to transcend superficial observations, examine cultural paradoxes and stereotyped mindsets, and move beyond oversimplified understandings. This process helps address the lack of sufficient critical-thinking practice within classroom sessions ^[8].

3.2. Realizing bidirectional cultural interpretation to support appropriate narration of local culture

AIGC enables two-way comparative interpretation of Chinese and foreign cultures. On the one hand, it decodes the deep-seated value logics embedded in foreign cultures and helps learners comprehend behavioral patterns of groups from other cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, concerning themes including traditional Chinese philosophies, folk customs and contemporary social practices, it offers multi-dimensional interpretive perspectives, provides narrative frameworks for overseas audiences, and assists learners in refining their narrative logic. By facilitating such two-sided analytical and interpretive work, AIGC connects native cultural meanings to international discursive frameworks and mitigates the long-observed issue of "cultural aphasia" among language learners ^[8,9].

3.3. Delivering personalized iterative feedback for differentiated teaching

Learners vary greatly in language proficiency levels, cultural cognition and critical-thinking foundations, which poses practical challenges for large-group classroom instruction ^[10]. Teachers can hardly provide adequate individualized guidance in large-size classes. AIGC, however, identifies logical flaws, cognitive biases and expressive errors in students' class speeches, case analyses and cultural-interpretation drafts, and puts forward revision suggestions and extended tasks. Learners iterate their outputs with AIGC support, while teachers conduct value checking and provide in-depth comments afterward. This mitigates teachers' workload and enables teaching tailored to individual needs.

4. Practical paths for AIGC-empowered intercultural communication teaching

Drawing on the principles of human-AI collaboration and scaffolded instruction, this study develops a closed-loop teaching model consisting of AIGC-supported critical-thinking activation, situational inquiry, bidirectional cultural interpretation, personalized iterative output, and multi-dimensional process-oriented assessment.

4.1. Restructuring curriculum objectives for high-order intercultural competences

Knowledge-oriented memorization objectives shall be replaced by four-dimensional educational goals: knowledge acquisition, critical-thinking inquiry, cultural interpretation, and comprehensive output, which echoes the multi-component intercultural competence framework for foreign language education^[11]. (1) Knowledge dimension: Mastery of core theories of intercultural communication and basic features of diverse cultures. (2) Critical-thinking dimension: Dialectical viewing of cultural differences, recognition of stereotypes, understanding of the situational nature and internal diversities of cultures, and formation of critical cultural awareness. (3) Interpretation dimension: Appropriate interpretation of Chinese culture for audiences with varied cultural backgrounds. (4) Output dimension: Flexible adjustment of communication strategies in simulated intercultural scenarios to achieve effective interaction.

4.2. Optimizing teaching content: Balancing foreign-culture understanding and local-culture output

AIGC is adopted to enrich curriculum resources and address the content imbalance. Real-world intercultural events with conflicts and complexities are selected as discussion materials instead of oversimplified hypothetical cases. Special modules for Chinese-culture interpretation are developed, providing reading resources and narrative samples concerning traditional thoughts, folk customs and contemporary Chinese society. Teachers must review and revise AIGC-generated materials to identify Western-centered biases and guarantee objectivity of teaching content.

4.3. Building closed-loop human-AI collaborative teaching procedures

Before class: AIGC-supported critical-thinking introduction. Teachers assign pre-exploration tasks with AIGC-generated reflective questions and comparative reading materials to activate learners' prior cultural cognition.

In class: Situational inquiry and bidirectional cultural interpretation. Authentic intercultural topics drive classroom discussion. Progressive question chains generated by AIGC guide students to analyze cultural conflicts and paradoxes. Two human-AI collaboration modes are designed: (1) Student-led mode: Students independently frame cultural narratives, and then use AIGC to polish language and narrative strategies. (2) AI-guided mode: AIGC proposes multiple interpretation schemes, and students evaluate, select and revise those outputs. Teachers and students jointly examine AIGC-produced content, identify stereotyped narratives and polish cultural-interpretation drafts.

After class: Personalized iterative outputs. Students finish case-study reports, cultural-interpretation drafts and simulated-communication scripts. They iterate their work with AIGC and keep original drafts as well as complete human-AI interaction records. Teachers deliver in-depth feedback, and at the same time, clear rules are emphasized to ensure AIGC serves merely as an auxiliary tool. Direct copying of AI-generated deliverables is prohibited, and reflections on human-AI collaboration are counted as part of assignments.

4.4. Establishing a multi-dimensional, process-oriented assessment system

The evaluation mechanism combines initial AI marking, final teacher judgment, student self-assessment and peer assessment. AIGC only marks preliminary problems while teachers have the final decisive evaluation power. Four assessment dimensions are included:

- (1) Learning process: Pre-class preparation, class participation and reflection records of human-AI interaction.
- (2) Intercultural critical thinking: Capability to analyze cultural phenomena dialectically and resist cultural essentialism.
- (3) Situational communication competence: Strategy selection and conflict resolution in simulation-based tasks.
- (4) Cultural-interpretation deliverables: Accuracy, audience-orientation and narrative logic of outputs interpreting Chinese culture. A virtuous cycle of “evaluation-feedback-revision” is therefore established.

5. Teaching reflections and risk countermeasures

AIGC brings new opportunities to Intercultural Communication teaching, yet potential risks cannot be ignored. Existing systematic reviews have pointed out multiple practical challenges of generative AI applied to foreign language classrooms, including algorithmic bias and learners’ over-reliance on intelligent tools ^[12]. First, limited by training datasets, large language models may adopt Western-centered perspectives and produce one-sided or stereotypical views on non-Western cultures. These outputs mislead learners without careful screening by teachers. Second, some students rely excessively on AIGC and directly copy AI-generated texts instead of independent thinking, which may weaken their critical-thinking abilities.

Three countermeasures are put forward. Firstly, teachers should take charge of content review and value guidance instead of fully delegating content production to AI. They should also design comparative tasks to encourage students to question AI outputs and develop critical cultural awareness. Secondly, norms for human-AI collaboration should be clarified. Students are required to preserve original drafts, distinguish self-created content from AI-modified sections and submit reflections on human-AI collaboration to strengthen their cultural subjectivity. Thirdly, real-world social events are supplemented as teaching resources to narrow gaps between AI-simulated cases and real-life contexts and improve the authenticity of teaching materials.

6. Conclusion

AIGC opens new possibilities for innovation in Intercultural Communication teaching. It helps mitigate long-standing drawbacks such as insufficient critical-thinking training, inadequate local-culture interpretation, rigid teaching modes, and one-dimensional assessment. The in-depth integration of AIGC and curriculum teaching promotes the transformation from knowledge-imparting to high-order-competence-oriented education, fostering learners with rational and inclusive intercultural perceptions and professional cultural-narration capabilities.

In teaching practice, the principle of “teacher-led, student-centered human-AI collaboration” should be followed. Risks, including the cultural bias embedded in AI and students’ over-reliance on technology, should be prevented by reconstructing high-order-oriented curriculum objectives, balancing dual-directional cultural content, optimizing human-AI collaborative workflows, and improving multi-dimensional process-oriented

assessment. Intercultural Communication courses can shift their focus from knowledge memorization to high-order competence cultivation, fostering culturally confident, rational, and globally oriented talents for the new era.

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