

An Investigation into Chinese Novice and Expert Teachers' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

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Abstract: Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is an essential ability for language learners, which has raised lots of research. However, while comparing with the studies on the learners' ICC, we can find few empirical studies on the ICC of the language teachers, especially those teachers of Chinese as a foreign language. This study attempts to explore the difference of the ICC between the novice teachers of Chinese as a foreign language and expert ones, the reasons and possible influences of such difference, as well as some implications from it. 20 teachers of Chinese as a foreign language (10 expert teachers and 10 novice teachers) from different universities in Beijing participated in the interview designed by this study. The analysis shows that expert teachers have a keen awareness of the culture teaching and have the confidence to teach culture in the class, while the novice teachers tend to avoid the culture teaching and pay more attention to the language teaching. Therefore, the novice teachers need intercultural training so that the students can enhance their ICC.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), novice teachers, expert teachers, Chinese as a Foreign Language

1. Introduction

The rapid development of China has given the Chinese language wider popularity across the globe. Meanwhile, with the help of Chinese government and social communities, more and more international students come to China and learn Chinese as their second language. In a sense, the Chinese language has transcended its original function of communication, and it has become a means for those international students to learn about China and for Chinese language and Chinese image to go global. Therefore, against this backdrop, the effective Chinese teaching is crucial, and a Chinese teachers' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is required. However, ICC is the result of teachers' cultural awareness and years of teaching experience, so it is not easy for every teacher of Chinese as a foreign language to grasp this ability. In fact, those teachers with higher ICC can improve their students' ICC, and this is what we pursue while teaching Chinese as a second language. Hence, an investigation into the ICC of teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, including novice teachers and expert teachers is necessary to draw some lessons to enhance Chinese teachers' ICC generally, thus helping international students immerse in this fascinating country as quickly as possible and reinforce China's cultural influence in the world.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Awareness vs. Cultural Awareness

Language awareness and cultural awareness are two essential components of foreign language education, and they have different functions. Kennedy and Trofimovich (2010) examined the second language (L2) learners' pronunciation and their language awareness. The result showed that those learners with higher language awareness often have more accurate L2 pronunciation, which demonstrates that language awareness is important for learners at the beginning, for it determines the appropriateness of language learning. Kiely (2009) also mentioned that language awareness contributed to learners' academic literacy skills. Therefore, language awareness plays a fundamental role in language education. However, the problem is that many teachers pay too much attention to language awareness, especially the novice teachers, and this cannot generate effective communication and exchanges in the context of globalization. Therefore, language awareness alone is not enough for successful foreign language education, and cultural awareness is gaining more and more popularity. Although cultural awareness is difficult to obtain, pre-service teachers' family stories can be gathered and cultural identity can be enhanced to train such awareness (Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2004).

According to He (2013), teachers' cultural awareness helps teachers to better interact with learners because cultural competence is an effective way to get to know each other. He thought that teachers with higher cultural competence could discover students' potential and strengths, thus improving their teaching performances. Such viewpoint shows that cultural awareness, with its unique function in a globalized era, is what the successful language education requires. Meanwhile, Turner (2007) thought that we should have a vision beyond cultural awareness, and we should envision a culturally responsive literacy teaching. In Turner's opinion, cultural awareness should not stop at the current point; instead, it needs to cast more light into foreign language education.

Byram (2012) discussed the relationship between language awareness and cultural awareness in language education, and he concluded that both language awareness and cultural awareness played significant roles in individuals' education in the society. Byram also believed that effective intercultural communication requires language and cultural awareness as well. It is true that the language awareness cannot solve many problems involved in intercultural communication, and adequate cultural awareness can help the people from different cultural backgrounds to better understand each other.

2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

International communication is a kind of communication practice taking place among different cultures. It is now ubiquitous around the world, and it is gradually changing people's traditional mindset of communication between different countries. At present, intercultural understanding is more emphasized than the simple economic ties among nations (Chen, 2017). Also, this pushes the research of intercultural communication to a new level.

With the advancement of people's cultural awareness and the general cultural atmosphere

globally, culture is becoming an indispensable part of teaching, which is different from the traditional model. In the meanwhile, people begin to assess a person's language skill not by merely referring to his language competence, but the cultural competence as well. According to Byram, Holmes and Savvides (2013), Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) indicates that teachers and learners now need to be aware of other people's cultures and their own at the same time in an era dominated by globalization. They pointed out that traditional focus on socio-linguistic appropriateness and politeness in foreign language teaching cannot meet the requirement of transnational communication and exchanges. Under this circumstance, ICC becomes an absolute standard of language teaching and learning. A great many researchers have discussed the importance of ICC. According to Piatkowska (2015), ICC is an effective way to teach cultural competence in foreign language education. This means that teachers having high ICC can effectively improve their students' cultural competence, and those not having a thorough understanding of ICC cannot train students' cultural competence. Piatkowska's viewpoint demonstrates that ICC is a vital capability teachers are expected to have. Houghton (2013) mentioned that ICC could nurture the identity-development of language learners. Through analyzing a research case study made in a university in Japan, Houghton found that students' ICC and identity-development can be assessed by different kinds of students' behaviors related to intercultural communication. Therefore, in foreign language education, ICC can not only help to develop students' identity, but it also helps to assess students' learning outcomes. This is the reason why Houghton thinks that ICC should be combined with students' identity-development to evaluate their performances in foreign language learning. Tarozzi (2014) also emphasized the key role of ICC through advocating teachers to build an "intercultural ethos". After reporting the results of a study that focuses on the pre-service training programs for teachers, Tarozzi concluded that only when knowledge and competence acquisition are combined could the teacher education be effective. ICC is also a crucial and beneficial skill for language learners. For example, ICC is positively related to foreign language learners' learning motivation (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). They designed a questionnaire for 180 students who learn English as a second language (L2) from several Iranian universities, and the result showed that the L2 learners with higher levels of ICC had stronger learning motivation, and this further requires ICC development to be included in L2 teachers' teaching plans at different educational levels.

As a skill featured by intercultural communication, ICC is particularly crucial for those students who plan to study abroad. Almarza, Martinez and Llavador (2015) conducted a questionnaire with two groups of students, among whom, one group is in an exchange programme, while the other is already studying abroad. Through analyzing their answers to the questionnaire, Almarza, Martinez, and Llavador (2015) found that both groups had high levels of ICC and they considered themselves ready to adapt to new cultural environments. This demonstrates that ICC can help students better understand the host country and have more self-confidence about their adaptability, which are vital elements for a student planning to study and stay abroad.

2.3. Factors Restraining ICC's Application

Despite its importance, ICC is not an ability possessed by all language teachers due to various

limitations. Research conducted by Alaei and Nosrati (2018) showed that Iranian EFL teachers had high levels of ICC and intercultural sensitivity (IS). Through conducting a questionnaire with 167 Iranian EFL teachers, Alaei and Nosrati found that there was a significant relationship between ICC and IS of EFL teachers. Iranian EFL teachers often respect other cultures and enjoy interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds, so they played a key role in improving their ICC and developing their students' ICC and IS as well. The good news is that those Iranian EFL teachers can do so and their learners have better access to acquire high levels of ICC. Maybe, other countries and educational institutions should draw lessons from this research.

However, Gu (2016) conducted a questionnaire aiming at 1170 Chinese university EFL teachers and the data showed that those teachers failed to clearly and precisely understand ICC, let alone assessing students' ICC in the classroom. The current situation is that teachers teaching English as a foreign language still give high priority to language teaching in the class. Sometimes, even if they have realized the necessity of ICC while teaching, they don't know how to apply it, thus leaving the English teaching at a language level. In addition, Strugielska and Piatkowska (2016) reported on an international project (a two-week summer school) conducted at a university, in which teachers and students from four European universities participated. The analysis found that teachers of English as a Foreign Language could not demonstrate the intercultural competence in an English class. Then, through demonstrating both students' and teachers' perspectives, Strugielska and Piatkowska (2016) told the readers that the intercultural competence contributes to more satisfying learning outcomes, and the urgent thing now is to develop teachers' ICC. Apart from the language teachers' lack of cultural awareness, some other elements are also hindering the application of ICC in the classroom. Young and Sachdev (2011) analyzed an investigation into some experienced teachers in the USA, UK and France to study their beliefs and practices of applying ICC to English teaching. Young and Sachdev found that most experienced teachers could realize the importance of ICC in the class and those supporting the combination of interculturality and their work had high intercultural competence. This, to some extent, indicates that experienced teachers have an advantage in developing and applying ICC. However, the participating teachers thought that the broad application of ICC faced a lack of support, including textbooks, tests, and institutional syllabi.

3. Methodology

To investigate the ICC of Chinese novice teachers and expert teachers, I conducted interviews with 20 teachers of Chinese as a foreign language (10 novice teachers and 10 expert teachers) from several universities in Beijing. 20 teachers would be an appropriate choice because this number of interviewees is able to generate expected answers for this research, and the research time is limited. Generally, those novice teachers are 20-30 years old and have less than 2 years of teaching experience, while the expert teachers are 35-45 years old and have more than 10 years of teaching experience. Among the 20 participants in the interview, 10 novice teachers consisted of 6 female and 4 male, while the other 10 expert teachers consisted of 5 female and 5 male. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

The participants were recruited through a popular language website, and all selected

interviewees were Chinese teachers from different universities in Beijing. In this way, the interview can be easier to carry out, for it was a face-to-face interview. The interview lasted for a day – 4 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the afternoon. All the interviewees were Chinese, and they majored in English language in normal universities. The interview was designed to investigate both novice teachers' and expert teachers' ICC to raise proper recommendations. Considering the importance of ICC mentioned by the studies above, I asked the questions involving Chinese novice and expert teachers' conception of ICC, their employment of ICC in the classroom, and the role of ICC from their perspectives.

Table 1. Participants' Gender, Age and Teaching Experience

	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience (in years)
Novice Teachers	Male: 4	20-23: 0	<1: 2
	Female: 6	24-27: 8	1-2: 8
		28-30: 2	
Expert Teachers	Male: 5	35-38: 3	10-13: 6
	Female: 5	39-42: 5	14-17: 3
		43-45: 2	17-20: 1

3.1. Data Analysis

Data analysis includes studying the general mode of the participants' answers to the interview questions. The following 10 questions were asked and the conclusion was drawn from them.

1. Are you familiar with ICC? When did you know it?
2. How do you understand ICC? Do you think it just as a communication skill or a powerful means to spread culture?
3. Have you ever applied ICC in your teaching agenda? If so, how and how often?
4. Have you noticed your students' interest in ICC in the classroom?
5. Have you assessed your students' ICC in the classroom?
6. Do you think the richer teaching experience means more confidence in teaching culture in the language class?
7. Do you think your teaching experience influences your awareness and application of ICC in the class?
8. Do you think there is a positive link between ICC and your successful language teaching?
9. Do you think there is a strong relationship between ICC and students' learning outcomes?
10. What challenges are you facing in terms of applying ICC in the class?

4. Results

After collecting the interviewees' responses to the interview questions, I organized their answers to draw a conclusion to this research. In this part, some direct quotations from the participants' answers are used to support the results.

Q1: Are you familiar with ICC? When did you know it?

The vast majority of teachers, including novice and expert teachers, are not familiar with ICC. Out of 10 novice teachers, 8 are not familiar with ICC, while the number among expert teachers is 0. We can see an obvious contrast between these two groups – expert teachers are much more familiar with ICC than novice teachers. According to novice teachers, many of them know ICC in the university or college classrooms. With the enhancement of people's cultural awareness, many normal schools have included the ICC-relevant curriculum in their educational agenda, so the students have the access to those courses. Nevertheless, ICC-relevant courses are optional in many normal schools, and students show different levels of interest in it. Some students spare the time to learn ICC, while some regard it as a personal preference. Expert teachers know ICC mainly from other experienced teachers or through their own experience. After all, in expert teachers' university days, ICC was not a popular topic. Nevertheless, expert teachers generally know more about ICC, while the novice teachers cannot comprehend ICC profoundly.

"I've heard about ICC when I was in the normal school. However, I am not familiar with it, because in my university years, ICC was an optional course, and I had too many other classes and didn't have the time to take ICC courses" (Interviewee A from novice teachers group).

"I'm familiar with ICC even though I don't have enough teaching experience. I know a lot about ICC because I was very interested in it when I was in the university. I used to go to the library to borrow some books about ICC, and I have spent lots of time in studying it. For example, I used to spare an hour a day to learn how to employ ICC in my future teaching. Frankly speaking, I think my interest in ICC mainly comes from my enthusiasm towards teaching" (Interviewee H from novice teachers group).

"Although I have not learned ICC systematically in my university years, I have learned a lot in my work as a teacher. After observing some excellent teachers' classes, I found that they had a common point: the skillful application of ICC. Hence, I exchanged my ideas with them frequently, and after years of teaching, I have formed a unique way to employ ICC in the classroom and train students' ICC" (Interview C from expert teacher group).

Q2: How do you understand ICC? Do you think it just as a communication skill or a powerful means to spread culture?

Different teachers have the different understanding of ICC, but there is still a pattern. Novice teachers tend to take ICC as a practical tool to communicate and teach language more efficiently; however, expert teachers have a more profound understanding. They think that

apart from the language-teaching function, ICC can be a useful means to teach and disseminate Chinese culture to international students, which should be an essential part of language education at present and in the future. The good thing is that some teachers are quite rational on this issue. They recognize the importance of ICC, but they also say that language teachers should not exaggerate the function of ICC in the class. After all, language skills should be the first step of language education.

“In my opinion, ICC can help me to give the lessons more smoothly and effectively. If I knew how to employ ICC skillfully, I could make my classes more dynamic and interesting. After all, language classes are always boring, both for students and teachers” (Interviewee F from novice teachers group).

“I believe that ICC’s function is more than just teaching language; rather, the efficient use of it can help the foreign students learn Chinese more quickly from a cultural perspective, which further enhances the importance of Chinese culture in foreigners’ eyes. However, the challenge now for me is that I cannot find a natural and interesting way to combine ICC with my current teaching content” (Interviewee J from novice group).

“Now that I have known the significance of ICC, I, to some extent, regard it as an approach to spread Chinese culture and enhance Chinese culture’s influence all over the world. In the classroom, I have found that students taught with ICC can have more interest in Chinese culture while grasping the Chinese language as well” (Interviewee A from expert teachers group).

“I think ICC facilitates the language teaching, and no one can deny it. However, in my opinion, we should not exaggerate the role of ICC in foreign language education. The foundation of language education should always be the language itself. Just imagine, how can a student become a qualified communicator in the international community without necessary knowledge of language? My experience tells me that only the perfect combination of language teaching and ICC can make your language class a successful one” (Interviewee B from expert teachers group).

Q3: Have you ever applied ICC in your teaching agenda? If so, how and how often?

Almost all expert teachers have applied ICC in the class, while only 2 novice teachers have tried to do so. This is a sharp contrast. According to the expert teachers, they apply ICC in 40%-50% of their classes. They often encourage students to make presentations through teamwork and demonstrate them in the class. Normally, the presentation should contain the cultural background of a particular lesson. Meanwhile, those expert teachers also try their best to find videos or other artworks related to a lesson, and they are always fully prepared to tell students something about Chinese culture. On the contrary, only 2 novice teachers have tried to apply ICC in the class, but not in a consistent way. These two novice teachers had the awareness of applying ICC in the class, but they could not integrate it with the teaching contents, and the occasional application of ICC was not smooth enough.

“I have tried to teach language lessons under the aid of ICC, but it didn’t work

well. First, I think I was not fully prepared to teach culture in the class. Second, I could not find supporting textbooks or guidelines. Third, I was not confident while teaching culture, and this influenced students' feelings" (Interviewee H from novice teachers group).

"I have used ICC in the language classes. After years of teaching, I try to guarantee that nearly half of my classes are combined with ICC. Then, unconsciously, students will be influenced positively by it. As for the specific application methods, I think both teachers and students are subjects. I find relevant videos or other materials and students are required to make presentations or discussions in teams" (Interviewee F from expert teachers group).

Q4: Have you noticed your students' interest in ICC in the classroom?

Due to the lack of teaching experience, novice teachers often cannot notice whether students are interested in ICC or not. They always strictly adhere to their language teaching plan, and they are not sensitive to students' reaction. For novice teachers, students' language skills represent their teaching excellence, and students' interest in ICC should be personal hobbies. However, expert teachers value students' feedback while using ICC in the class. To decide whether to adjust the teaching agenda, expert teachers will observe students' participation in and acceptance degree of ICC-related activities, thus perfecting their teaching.

"Frankly speaking, I have not noticed my students' interest in ICC in the classroom because I am too concentrated in completing my teaching plan on the class, and I cannot notice students' reaction towards my teaching. I always pay too much attention to students' language skills and my teaching schedule; hence, it doesn't come to me that I should give more space to my students" (Interviewee D from novice teachers group).

"I have more than ten years of teaching experience, and I know how to adjust my teaching content or methods according to students' feedback, even within a certain class. Through observing students' participation degree, I can estimate their interest in the ICC I introduce in the class, and the application of ICC helps me improve the quality of my lessons" (Interviewee H from expert teachers group).

Q5: Have you assessed your students' ICC in the classroom?

Novice teachers themselves don't know how to use ICC in the class effectively, let alone assessing students' ICC. As for the expert teachers, 5 of them have assessed students' ICC. For example, in the class, the expert teachers always design some situations entailing cultural gaps and communication barriers between Chinese culture and other cultures to examine students' ICC levels. Sometimes, the expert teachers encourage the role play in the class to assess students' ICC. These 5 teachers think that an understanding of students' ICC enables them to cooperate better with students in the class. In terms of the other 5 expert teachers, although they can notice students' interest in ICC, they don't know how to assess it.

"To be honest, I don't know how to assess students' ICC in the class, so I have

never done this. For me, ICC is a communication method requiring much skill and experience, and I personally think that it is hard for students to grasp this ability” (Interviewee E from novice teachers group).

“I think students can possess ICC as long as they are exposed in an environment encouraging ICC. Therefore, in the class, I always consciously design some activities to assess students’ ICC, so that I can tailor my follow-up teaching. For example, I sometimes design the scenarios about cultural differences and examine students’ reaction, so that I can know their ICC level and give them appropriate advice. I think this is quite beneficial for students at every educational level” (Interviewee D from expert teachers group).

Q6: Do you think the richer teaching experience means more confidence in teaching culture in the language class?

Novice teachers think that teaching culture is the most challenging part of the class, and they are always not very confident to do so. On the one hand, they are afraid that they may make mistakes; on the other hand, they think they don’t have enough experience enabling them to combine the language teaching and culture teaching. In a word, they don’t have the self-confidence to teach culture due to the lack of experience. On the contrary, expert teachers know how to add culture to their teaching convincingly and interestingly. Almost all expert teachers are confident in applying ICC in their classes, for they are good at interacting with students and they know what students want to learn in the class. For example, expert teachers are sensitive to any points that can be combined with culture, and they always try their best to teach culture to their students.

“I think that teaching culture needs enthusiasm and confidence. First of all, the teacher should always be aware of the importance of culture teaching. Second, they should know that they have the responsibility to add culture to the teaching contents. Novice teachers may make culture teaching boring and even awkward, mainly because they don’t have mature and effective methods to teach culture. I always feel that I am not experienced enough to teach culture, and this largely lowers my confidence” (Interviewee F from novice teachers group).

“In my opinion, teaching experience determines the degree and frequency of culture teaching in the class. I have more than ten years of teaching experience, and I am confident in the class while teaching culture because I am sure that I can teach in a desirable way” (Interviewee G from expert teachers group).

Q7: Do you think your teaching experience influences your awareness and application of ICC in the class?

For novice teachers, language teaching takes up too much energy, and they are likely to neglect ICC in the class. Besides, the lack of teaching experience hinders the novice teachers from applying ICC effectively. On the contrary, expert teachers know when and how to use ICC in the class because they are very familiar with the students’ responses. They ask a question related to the culture at the beginning of the class to raise students’ curiosity and

encourage them to find the answer during the class; meanwhile, they always show the students that language itself is not the end of language learning, and the ability to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds matters. Besides, while teaching, they always keep ICC in mind and are ready to use it anytime possible. For them, teaching language is to make students qualified communicators in the international arena, and language teachers have the responsibility to enhance students' ICC.

"I admit that I emphasize language teaching too much. Sometimes, I realized that I had not employed ICC in the classroom after class. The problem is that I am not skillful enough to apply ICC" (Interviewee I from novice teachers group).

"After years of teaching, I always have ICC in mind in the class because I know that students can benefit from it. In addition, I am sensitive enough to know the appropriate time and method to add ICC while teaching. I have not learned ICC before, but I can employ it skillfully now. For me, experience is more practical, and I often learn good methods from other teachers and communicate with them frequently" (Interviewee B from expert teachers group).

Q8: Do you think there is a positive link between ICC and your successful language teaching?

Since novice teachers don't use ICC very frequently and skillfully, they don't figure out the positive relationship between the employment of ICC and their performances. However, they recognize the significance of ICC and believe in its positive influence in language teaching. Expert teachers benefit a lot from ICC. First, ICC helps them improve the quality of their classes. Second, through employing ICC, those teachers' ICC level is also improved, and their teaching experience also gradually accumulates. Third, ICC enables them to equip students with the ability to recognize cultural differences and deal with them effectively. Expert teachers think that ICC not only makes language teaching more efficient and internationalized, but it also spreads Chinese culture.

"I have not demonstrated ICC successfully in the class, but I can imagine its positive effect on my teaching. I have learned from other experienced teachers' classes that the appropriate use of ICC helps the teacher a lot. In this respect, teachers play a crucial role in intercultural communication" (Interviewee A from novice teachers group).

"ICC helps me to convey some culture-related ideas in the class better. It enables me to relate a certain language aspect with a cultural implication naturally. In this way, I can reach the set teaching goals more efficiently" (Interviewee C from expert teachers group).

Q9: Do you think there is a strong relationship between ICC and students' learning outcomes?

Novice teachers don't have high ICC, and they cannot precisely measure the relation between ICC and students' learning outcomes. What they find is that students who know more

of the cultural background of the Chinese language always perform better in the class and exams. Expert teachers observe that those students exposed to an ICC-oriented environment have better learning outcomes. Students who receive intercultural communicative education tend to have more motivation in learning the Chinese language, thus wanting to learn more autonomously (Ruan, Duan & Du, 2015).

“I don’t know how to determine the relationship between ICC and students’ learning outcomes because I always pay too much attention to teaching language in the class. However, I find that some students often perform better in the class and exams because they know more relevant cultural knowledge” (Interviewee B from novice teachers group).

“I can feel that most students perform better in the class in which I taught ICC. When I use ICC, students’ interest increases and they can understand a language phenomenon more profoundly, which, in turn, gives them more confidence to do so. Generally, ICC helps a language class shake off boredom, and this is what students want” (Interviewee E from expert teachers group).

Q10: What challenges are you facing in terms of applying ICC in the class?

Although many teachers and students gradually recognize ICC as beneficial, there are still some obstacles in the course of ICC’s development. Novice teachers think that the biggest challenge is the lack of support from textbooks and school administration. Novice teachers don’t have enough teaching experience to combine the language teaching with ICC freely without the assistance of textbooks. Meanwhile, it seems that many universities hold a neutral viewpoint in terms of adopting ICC in the class, and novice teachers often don’t have enough motivation. Besides, expert teachers also face difficulties. They find that different teachers have different methods of applying ICC in the class, which is understandable. However, once there is a personnel adjustment, students will suffer because they have to accept a new set of intercultural communicative methods.

“I often feel discouraged when I recognize that there isn’t much support for the application of ICC. I hope that textbooks can give me some inspiration” (Interviewee H from novice teachers group).

“I think that there lacks an effective system encouraging ICC’s development in many universities. Under such circumstances, I cannot feel a strong motivation to apply ICC in the class; after all, it is difficult for me at present” (Interviewee C from novice teachers group).

“I think the current problem is that every teacher’s method of employing ICC is isolated, and this cannot generate fruitful results in the long run. We need to find an appropriate and practical solution” (Interviewee G from expert teachers group).

From the analysis above, we can observe the following results. First, novice teachers and expert teachers have different levels of ICC due to the difference in their teaching experience. Novice teachers pay more attention to language in the class. For example, while teaching a

particular Chinese character, they only tell students how to write it correctly and memorize it. However, in the same case, expert teachers will use more time to explain the origin and cultural background of that character (Lwin & Marlina, 2018). This is the most significant difference between novice teachers and expert teachers.

Second, the reason why novice teachers and expert teachers do differently in this respect is that ICC has not won the broad recognition of the whole society. It should be the normal schools' responsibility to teach students the importance and application of ICC so that the latter can perform better in the class after graduation. However, the current situation is that many normal schools in China don't pay much attention to train students' cultural awareness while teaching the language. This is a great pity. On the one hand, the Chinese language is closely connected with its splendid culture, and language learning should be combined with culture and customs learning to enhance students' comprehensive ability. On the other hand, the language education failing to train students' cultural awareness doesn't always recognize the significance of ICC, which is also about comparing Chinese culture with other cultures in the world.

Third, the inadequacy of pre-service training makes novice teachers lack self-confidence in class while teaching culture and this is a reason for the difference between novice teachers and expert teachers. Normally, the pre-service training for teachers trains their language competence as well as cultural awareness, and those teachers who don't receive adequate pre-service training don't know how to teach culture appropriately. In such cases, they will not be confident to employ ICC in the class. Another reason for such difference is that there is a wide gap between their teaching experience. To some extent, these two reasons also influence each other. For example, some novice teachers claim that they have no confidence in teaching culture because they don't have adequate experience, either to use the appropriate method or to observe students' reaction. Fourth, although novice teachers and expert teachers have different performance in ICC, they both recognize the significance of it regardless of their gender. On the one hand, they think that ICC facilitates their teaching. They can enable students to understand the language in a shorter period through using intercultural communicative methods, thus improving the efficiency of their teaching. On the other hand, they can improve students' learning outcomes through equipping the latter with some intercultural communicative means. Hence, ICC is vital in foreign language education. Fifth, the difference between novice teachers' and expert teachers' ICC is an urgent problem to solve for it will exert lasting influence on students. The interview above shows that novice teachers don't demonstrate ICC frequently in the class, and they don't know how to assess students' ICC, let alone training it. Therefore, students also don't have the cultural awareness while learning the Chinese language, indicating that their learning is very superficial. In the long run, foreign students won't have enough enthusiasm for Chinese culture and the higher goal of foreign language education won't be achieved. Sixth, ICC's development faces some challenges at present, and those challenges can also provide some implications. First, the normal schools should perfect their curriculum design. For example, they can increase the ICC courses and require students to choose those courses to get full credits. Second, the pre-service training should be reinforced, and the host universities of the novice teachers should undertake this responsibility. There should be an atmosphere in the university that ICC is encouraged and pursued. The university can also organize some activities to improve novice teachers' cultural awareness and strengthen their

ICC. Third, novice teachers should try their best to improve their ICC and train students' ICC. They should shift the pure emphasis on language to the combination of language and culture. They can also utilize some tools, such as movies and television series, to assist them in the class. Fourth, expert teachers should exchange ideas frequently with other colleagues so that their demonstration of ICC in the class can be integrated gradually. Of course, if affordable, studying or training abroad is an advised way to improve language teachers' ICC (Saricoban & Oz, 2014). Generally, studying abroad helps language teachers immerse in an environment full of different cultures and customs. Such an environment enables language teachers to realize the importance of ICC and trains their ICC at the same time.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

5.1. Conclusion

To sum up, the results above demonstrate that ICC is a crucial ability for both novice teachers and expert teachers, especially in a globalization-dominated era. Although there is a considerable difference between novice teachers and expert teachers as well as other obstacles, some implications have been drawn. In the long run, as long as novice teachers can gain adequate training about cultural awareness both in university years and pre-service phase, they can have more confidence in teaching culture in language classes. Then, with their experience accumulating, they will have higher levels of ICC, thus influencing learners positively.

In modern society, the exchanges among different cultures become increasingly frequent, and people are often curious about different cultures. Hence, while learning the language, people always pay much attention to the culture behind it. In such cases, the significance of intercultural communicative competence stands out, and anyone grasping this ability will benefit a lot from it. For teachers of Chinese as a Foreign Language, a high level of ICC can not only improve their teaching effects and students' learning outcomes, but it will also help to spread Chinese culture and enhance China's soft power around the world. Therefore, ICC is particularly crucial in the current days.

5.2. Limitations of This Study and Directions for Future Research

There are some limitations of this study, but fortunately, they can offer directions for future research. First, the research time is limited, and I have only interviewed 20 teachers in several universities in Beijing. A larger number of interviewees may generate a more instructive result. Second, due to various restraints, I only interviewed teachers in Beijing, and I think it would be better if I covered more cities in my research. Third, there is not a very clear definition of novice teachers and expert teachers, and I roughly use "less than 2 years" and "more than 10 years" to classify their working experience. Meanwhile, the age of the interviewees is also not well designed, and to some extent, novice teachers represent "young" (aged 24-30) and expert teachers represent "old" (aged 35-45) in the sample. Actually, with people aging, they will have a different understanding of ICC despite their teaching experience. Therefore, a more sophisticated design of age and teaching experience may enable this research to be more

objective and convincing. The good thing is that these limitations can provide some inspiration and references for future research.

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