

An Investigation of Learners' Perception of an Online Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Training Model

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Lemin Shen

Zhejiang Wanli University, Ningbo, China
slmyss@zwu.edu.cn

Abstract—Developing students' Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been viewed as the English as a foreign language teachers' responsibility in the globalized world, especially after the birth of COVID-19 pandemic. Amidst the flourishing development of ICC cultivation studies, a noted absence is on the study of how to actualize ICC in the online teaching based English language teaching. This study, by presenting a pedagogical case, explores the application of the online ICC training model, and focuses on how the online teaching can be established at the four teaching stages, namely, attitude development, knowledge construction, skills practice, and reflection. Attitude development is a pre-class activity to motivate students' learning curiosity. In the stage of knowledge construction, various kinds of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are selected as teaching resources for students to learn the key concepts and theories for the course. Skills practice requires students to make full use of WeChat or Bulletin Board System (BBS) to have online intercultural encounter, in this process students practice both their linguistic and intercultural communicative competence. The last stage provides chances for both students and teacher to rethink about their learning and teaching and move to the new circle of teaching stages. An eight-weeks' action research with a class of second-grade English Majors in a Chinese university has been conducted. Questionnaire and interview are the main methods for data collection, combined with teacher and students' reflective journals. The results of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation show that adopting online-teaching may serve as an effective way to develop students' ICC during epidemic and in the future.

Keywords—Intercultural communicative competence, online ICC training model

1 Introduction

Along with globalization, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been viewed as one of the most important abilities that "a global citizen" has to master [1]. ICC is especially crucial in higher education, as it bears the responsibility of

developing qualified talents for the future globalized world. In response to this trend, the Chinese College English Curriculum Requirements of 2020 predict that cultivating students to be the “global talents” is one of the purposes of English education [2]. In view of the development of ICC's official position in China, foreign language teaching has been urged to develop students' ICC. Numerous attempts have been made, but less focus has been given to online teaching.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced universities to implement online teaching fully [3]. This large-scale online education practice is likely to change our traditional education methods. From a research perspective, online teaching practice in this pandemic has given a rich sample that has never been seen in many years. This study is one of the cases under this background, as the author attempts to address the research gap by designing an online ICC training model to develop students' ICC. An eight-week online practice was carried out, and 39 English majors participated in this research.

The study began with a critical examination of the literature on ICC and its training. The research gap was identified, and the research questions were also raised. Next, the research design was presented, which illustrated the online ICC training model and the adopted research methods. The findings from this study showed the effectiveness of this online ICC training model and highlighted the importance of the knowledge construction stage and the skills practice stage for their contribution to students' ICC development. Moreover, this study confirmed the importance of students' self-motivation and self-discipline for online teaching. Suggestions for ICC educators were provided to prepare real intercultural speakers for the future.

2 State of Art

2.1 Intercultural communicative competence

The nature of ICC research is complex and contested despite the extensive research on the topic [4]. Scholars have difficulty in reaching an agreement on the definition of ICC, but most models include similar dimensions and vary in emphasis and detail of components. Among the numerous conceptualizations of ICC, Samovar and Porter (2004) summarized ICC into three elements, that is, motivation, knowledge and skills [5]. These three components of ICC are believed to be the premise for appropriate and effective communication [6]. For Fantini (2006), ICC is composed of awareness, attitude, skills, knowledge, and proficiency in the host tongue. In his view, awareness should be put at the center of his ICC model because it “leads to deeper cognition, skills and attitude just as it is also enhanced by their development” (p.29) [7]. Furthermore, according to the Delphi study conducted by Deardroff (2006), the theoretical model of ICC proposed by Byram is the most influential one, and it has been widely used in foreign language education [8]. Byram's (1997) model included five elements: knowledge of self and others; skills to interpret and relate; skills to

discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and critical cultural awareness [9].

Learning from Western theories, Chinese scholars have enriched and expanded the connotation of ICC theory. For example, Gao (2002) highlighted that ICC consists of two levels, namely, "going across" and "going beyond". The former focuses on the increase of the target cultural proficiency, whereas the latter focuses on the gain in cultural awareness and reflective tolerant attitudes. She suggested that these "going across" and "going beyond" abilities should be combined with "cognition, emotion, and behavior," which are the three key elements of ICC in the West [10]. Zhong and Fan (2013) believed that ICC covers communicative competence and intercultural competence and that these two abilities support each other in real communication [11]. Eastern and Western scholars evidently interpret ICC from different cultural perspectives, which leads to the distinction of theme and objectivity in ICC theory. However, scholars agree that ICC includes four dimensions, knowledge, attitude, skills and cultural awareness. As a whole, researchers at home and abroad believe that ICC should be analyzed from a scientific, neutral and objective perspective.

2.2 Intercultural communicative competence training

With the birth of education for intercultural citizenship and plurilingual education in the new era, teaching ICC has become increasingly important; moreover, foreign language education, which serves as a platform for students to increase cross-linguistic knowledge and intercultural communicative competence, has been placed at the center of teaching ICC for young generations, especially in China. Two distinguished features can be found from the major literature on ICC training in terms of research focus and research contents. First, the research on intercultural language teaching shows a growing trend on the whole, and the research focuses are closely related to foreign language teaching. Scholars, such as Ge and Wang (2016), have proposed four suggestions to develop students' ICC in foreign language teaching and provided some insights for the integration of intercultural teaching into language teaching [12]. The persisting problem is that most of the scholars have focused more on language ability development while few have paid on ICC development. Second, non-empirical studies outnumber empirical studies, and they have been increasing in recent years. By adopting the method of ethnography, Zhang and Zhao (2018) designed an intercultural teaching project of foreign language for college students and proved the effectiveness and applicability of ethnographic foreign language teaching [13]. Sun and Xu (2014) probed into the strategies for computer-autonomous ICC development in college English teaching [14]. However, these strategies lacked practical application. Especially in the digital era, role of the Internet in developing students' ICC remains uncertain. This study believes that the Internet has its function in education from the birth of MOOCs, which have swept the whole educational field in recent years [15]. However, how the Internet influences, constructs, and develops students' ICC remains largely unknown.

Given the research challenges identified above this study attempts to address the following questions:

RQ 1: Is an online ICC training model helpful in developing students' ICC?

RQ 2: How do students evaluate this online ICC training model?

RQ 3: What challenges are teachers faced with in carrying out online ICC training?

3 Methodology

This study is based on an online course which was offered during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author designed the "online ICC training model" into the teaching practice to develop students' ICC. In the following section, this training model and research methods are discussed.

3.1 Introduction to the online ICC training model

This online ICC training model consists of three parts that respectively represent teaching content, procedures and activities (see Figure 1). The teaching content, which lies in the center of this model and serves as the teaching objectives, includes critical cultural awareness, skills, knowledge and attitude, with critical cultural awareness being the most crucial aspect. The second level are assessment-based teaching activities that include attitude development, knowledge construction, skills practice and critical reflection. These activities construct the third level, the procedures for realizing the teaching objectives, ranging from pre-class and in class to post-class. A detailed explanation is as follows:

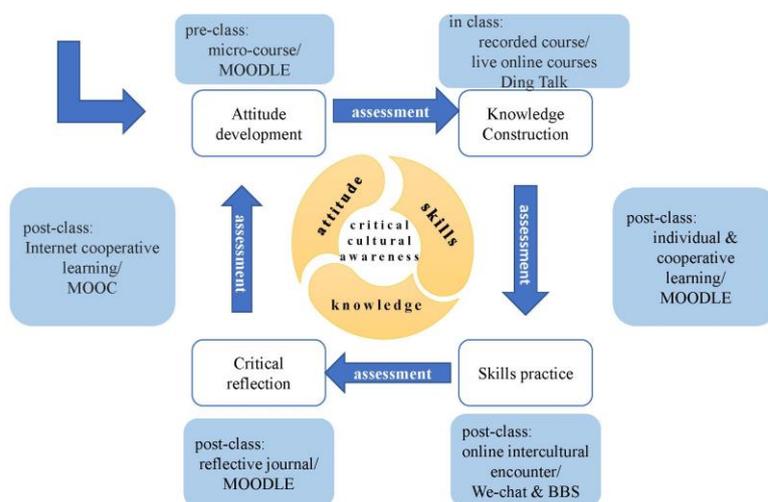


Fig. 1. Online ICC training model

The attitude development stage is a pre-class activity. It depends on the Moodle from which the teacher shares the prepared micro-course, clip, or reading materials related to the topics to motivate students' learning curiosity. It is problem-oriented; encouraging students to find the answers to the questions listed by the teacher. Through this process, the teacher would have a basic understanding about students' learning ability and how much they have gained about the new knowledge.

The knowledge construction stage is very important in the teaching process. It is combined with various teaching input to help students construct their own knowledge about self-culture, culture of others, and knowledge about intercultural communication. It is divided into two steps: in-class learning and post-class learning. In-class learning is led by the teacher through Ding Talk, which is a popular social software in China. In this process, the teacher uses recorded courses to introduce key theories of the course. Live online courses are also used to help students solve the problems they encounter in their self-learning process directly. Post-class learning has two parts to realize knowledge construction. First, the teacher gives students an assignment according to the teaching content. By searching for the related information individually or cooperatively from the Internet, students gain their own knowledge. Secondly, students are encouraged to participate in Internet cooperative learning, that is, the teacher delivered learning resources for students to learn the key concepts and theories further. Resources like Chinese University MOOC, For Ideal Future (FiF), and Future-learn are popular online teaching platforms that are carefully selected according to teaching content and learning ability.

The skills practice stage is the stage in which students realize "learning by doing" and check how much they have learned about the knowledge taught to them. In this stage, students are required to find someone from a different cultural background and carry out real communication via We-chat or BBS to practice their intercultural skills. Students can find their "cultural the other" with the help of the teacher or their classmates to ensure the sustainability and reliability of their partners. Their interaction does not involve free talking but is instead directed with the purpose of accomplishing the teachers' assignment. These assignments are delivered after each teaching session according to the teaching content with the aim for students to experience and discover cultural differences from the perspectives of customs, festivals, and behaviors.

The critical reflection stage provides opportunities for both students and the teacher to rethink of their learning and teaching process, respectively, and move to the new circle of the teaching stage. In this stage, students are asked to write their reflective journals with the guidance of the teacher and share their journals in the Moodle.

To ensure the students' attendance and to motivate their learning enthusiasm, an assessment is adopted across the whole process, which also enables the teacher to get a picture of the students' learning situation of students, thus allowing the researcher to adjust the teaching content and methods accordingly.

3.2 Research methods

This research conducted an action research to induce changes and improvements in education practices [16]. The primary focus of this study is to change and improve students' ICC in the time of COVID-19 when offline teaching is inaccessible. This research aim matches the targets of action research, that is, action taken and results changed. Moreover, self-reflection is the fundamental element of the action research cycle. Hopkins (1993) predicted that action research is a systematic self-conscious inquiry with the aim of understanding and improving their practice [17]. This doing-in-reflection cyclical process is helpful for the author, as a teacher and researcher, to improve the intervention scientifically. The author used the following methods to address the research aim, namely questionnaire, reflective journals from students and teacher, and interviews. For the questionnaire, this study adopted the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS), which was designed by Wu and his colleagues (2013). This questionnaire is mainly based on Byram's ICC model, which also fits the theoretical framework of the current research [18]. Moreover, the operability and effectiveness of the AIC-CCS has been proven by numerous Chinese scholars. A five-point Likert-type scale was sent to the students before and after the research. Interviews and reflective journals were also used, thus providing a holistic view of this research.

4 Result Analysis and Discussion

When students experienced online learning for eight weeks, two main themes were observed, namely, students' ICC development and student's feedback on the online teaching. The analysis of these themes suggested that the online ICC training model was effective in enhancing students' ICC and was popular among students.

4.1 ICC development

Quantitative data analysis: The results of the comparison of students' AIC-CCS scores before and after the research are demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of students ICC development before and after the learning

ICC Dimension	Before	After	Z	P
Knowledge	3.02±0.31	3.39±0.35	-7.249	<0.001
Attitude	4.13±0.50	4.33±0.39	-2.061	0.039
Skills	3.35±0.48	3.67±0.29	-3.543	<0.0001
Awareness	3.86±0.55	4.00±0.31	-1.538	0.132
Sum	3.41±0.29	3.71±0.24	-17.556	<0.001

The statistical analysis of Table 1 showed that the general ICC of the research participants were at an average level before the research. In contrast, they made great improvement after the online learning, especially in the dimensions of knowledge and skills. The knowledge dimension was enhanced the most, that is, from 3.02 to 3.39. This outcome showed the effectiveness of online teaching model in aiding students in acquiring new knowledge online. The dimension of skills followed the second, that is, from 3.35 to 3.67. This result testified that the effectiveness of communication simulation stage demonstrating that real interaction with foreigners from the Internet was helpful to develop students' intercultural skills. Among the four dimensions of ICC, attitude was the dimension with the highest score, which showed students' strong curiosity and openness to cultural diversity. Critical cultural awareness, had comparatively the least growth but the second highest score of the AIC-CCS. Table 1 showed a significant difference for the development of students' knowledge, attitude and skills. The statistical significance for the scale was $p \leq 0.05$, which was at the significant level. As a whole, the online teaching design is effective in enhancing students' ICC.

Qualitative data analysis: Findings from qualitative data echo the quantitative data, which revealed that students showed a strong agreement on the online teaching, as it helped them to broaden their knowledge and develop their intercultural skills. However, fewer instances were found for attitude and critical cultural awareness development. These findings are understandable because there were not many differences on teaching design for these two stages between online teaching and offline teaching. For offline teaching, the teacher used warm-up activities as a way to improve students' attitude and after-class writing to develop students' critical cultural awareness. These approaches are the same as those applied in online teaching. The only difference between these two teaching methods lies on in the teaching platforms. Hence, no distinguished differences were identified.

Gaining additional knowledge: Online teaching helped students to gain more knowledge, which was the most frequently addressed theme students mentioned in their reflective journals and interviews. For students, Internet cooperative learning meant that the ways to acquire knowledge were more diverse, that is, they learned new knowledge not simply through lectures but also through various methods, such as micro-courses provided by teachers, learning resources shared from Moodle, and searching on the Internet by themselves. Take student Y as an example,

“Traditionally, I gain the knowledge from my textbook which is limited. The Internet provides me more information that can help me learn better than before.”

The online teaching model is noticeably characterized by its rich learning resources. Under the guidance of teachers, students like Y could learn independently according to their actual needs, thus completing their knowledge construction. To students, the Internet was “a movable encyclopedia,” as student Z illustrated, which helped her to gain additional knowledge while studying.

Developing additional intercultural skills: According to Byram (1997), most ICC skills should be developed in “real-time communication and interaction.[7]” This online teaching design provided students with opportunities for real-time interaction and helped develop their intercultural skills. On the one hand, internet cooperative

learning improves the communication between teacher and students. Student H, for example, said:

“I do not have the chance to communicate directly with my teacher in class. But the online learning provided me that chance. Through Moodle, I could practice my intercultural skills, and the teacher gave me feedback directly! I like this way of communication, because I am in front of the computer but not my teacher, so I would not feel nervous.”

Evidently, student H preferred the online communication to traditional classes because she “would not feel nervous” to communicate with her teachers directly. Her journal also reflected the fact that the traditional classroom that usually had a large number of students and teachers had difficulty providing feedback to every student. As a result, skill practice was ineffective, whereas the online teaching made up for this deficiency.

On the other hand, the Internet makes intercultural encounter reliable by using different social applications, such as WeChat or BBS. The assignment in the skills practice stage in this study required students to carry out real interaction with their “cultural the other,” which provided a valuable chance for students to practice their intercultural skills. Through their interaction with foreigners in English, students were able to exercise their language skills and experience diverse cultures, which was a great opportunity for students to improve their ICC. Meanwhile, their direct interaction with foreigners led students to realize the cultural differences and allowed them to formulate their own intercultural communicative strategies to reach a successful interaction. For example, in H’s journal:

“Our campus does not have many foreigners. Hence, finding someone to talk with is difficult. With the help of the exchange student of our class, I found my ‘culture the other’ from the Czech Republic. We shared our WeChat contacts and discussed a lot about cultural differences. I think we have built up our friendship via the Internet.”

Having real intercultural communication is necessary for developing students’ ICC. However, given real-life constraints, Chinese students have difficulty engaging with individuals from other countries. The Internet helps to realize real intercultural communication.

4.2 Feedback on the ICC online teaching

Positive feedback: Most of the students’ feedback on the online teaching were positive, especially on their preference of the teaching design, which was found to be more popular among the after 90’s generation. The three most frequently addressed themes are discussed as follows.

“*I am the master of my study.*”: Online teaching is a type of “4A learning,” which means that anyone can study anytime, anywhere, and with any device as long as he has the access to the Internet [19]. This fact has been widely accepted by students. Take student S as an example:

“I am the master of my study now. I mean I can choose when and where to study as I like. I do not need to put on my jacket or fix my hair to attend the class, especially in

the cold winter. I can stay in my warm quilt and enjoy my learning. This experience is perfect. I seem to have more freedom than before.”

Student S's opinion was pervasive among students, for whom flexible online teaching provided opportunities to arrange their studies according to their own time table. Online classes usually lasted 20 minutes to ensure that learners could use their free time to acquire knowledge, which supported the concept of fragmented studying.

“I can be a student of SHFL University.”: Traditionally, students only can study in their own university. However, during the COVID-19 period, students could choose any course delivered by any university in China, which meant they had the chance to receive education from their dreamed institutions. Hence, online teaching was welcomed by students. According to different teaching topics, the teacher selected various kinds of teaching materials from the website, such as Chinese University MOOC, Future Learn, and FiF teaching platform. Some of the courses were delivered by the top universities in China, and some of the teaching materials were shared with world-class universities, which excited students about their learning experience. In the following story, student F illustrated how happy she was when she was given the chance to participate in other universities' online learning:

“I am a loser in the college entrance examinations. I sometimes wondered what the top universities taught. Thanks to online teaching, I was able to participate in the online ICC learning of Shanghai Foreign Language University. If I persevere in my studies and obtain all the credits for that course, then I can earn a certificate from that university. That means I can be a student of one of the best foreign language universities in China!”

“I have to be more self-disciplined.”: Online teaching is characterized by its convenience while also challenging students' self-discipline. Most of the students thought this method was a favorable opportunity for them to develop their personal abilities. Student W, for example, mentioned the following:

“Online teaching has forced me to be more self-disciplined. Studying only with recorded-course or participating in the MOOC that teacher shared requires more time and energy. Studying hard or simply searching for the answer from the Internet depends on myself. Moreover, staying at home allows me to get up late, which affects my study plan...I have to be stricter with myself, and I think this learning experience would benefit my future career.”

According to student W, online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to be a more disciplined person. She also believed that this experience would benefit her future career. Her opinion was echoed by many of her fellow classmates, that online teaching developed their sense of discipline more than offline teaching did. In the interviews, students also stated that this teaching model mobilized their learning enthusiasm and allowed them to become the master of their class. Meanwhile, teachers acted as “organizers” and “guiders” in the teaching process and instead of the “master” of the class anymore. These new roles allowed students to develop their sense of responsibility and spend more time and energy on preparing and studying.

Negative feedback: When students expressed their love and acceptance of the online ICC training, complaints also emerged. All this feedback was not related to the

teaching design for developing their ICC but to online teaching itself, such as having too many applications, being time-consuming, and worrying about their eyesight.

Complaints on numerous applications: The most frequently addressed theme on the negative feedback about online teaching was the numerous learning applications that confused students confused, thus causing them to misuse the applications. For example, student L said:

“The only weakness of online ICC training is the use of various kinds of software. Such as the Moodle, FiF and Future Learn. Therefore, I have to take notes on which application or website should be used for each teaching session. It, sometimes annoyed me.”

Student L's complaint was understandable. In the initial stage, the online teaching was not as mature as we had expected. Different teachers had different teaching designs even for the same topic. Hence, no one application was perfect in serving as a fit-for-all. The teacher had to draw upon all useful teaching materials and share these resources with the students, which led to the switching of different learning platforms or learning applications.

Complaints on time consumption: According to the students, the second problem with online teaching was that its learning process was time-consuming. Two main aspects caused for this issue. First, online teaching required students' autonomous learning ability. Different from traditional teaching methods in which the learning process was guided by the teacher, the online teaching process was led by the students themselves. If a student lacked autonomous learning ability, then the time spent on learning would double than before. For those who had relatively high autonomous learning ability, they would not want to miss any chance of learning. Hence, the time spent on online learning would also increase. Like student X said in the interview,

“So many materials are available for reading or watching. We can also participate in many teaching sources. Yes, indeed, the teacher said our pace depends on our learning energy. Some of the learning resources are not ‘have-to-learn.’ However, no one wants to miss any opportunity, right? Who knows whether it would or would not be part of the final exam? The fact is that I am busier than before. I have to spend a whole day on learning. I do not think I have enough time to finish all the task. This worried me a lot.”

Noticeably, students like student X, who were top students in class, always had high expectations on themselves. Hence, when presented with various kinds of online teaching resources, they were puzzled and also felt that they were unsuited for this new teaching style.

Second, in the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all the courses were carried out online. When asked to describe how long he spent on learning the course, student X explained as follows:

“30 minutes on watching the micro-class, 30 minutes on recorded-course or live online courses, one or two hours on after-class learning from the Moodle, two hours on doing homework (and it depends, sometimes even more, if you ask us to do an interview with foreigners, it will cost a whole day's work), and 40 minutes on writing reflective journals.”

According to student X, he spent almost six hours on learning one course. In fact, he had eight courses to study in that semester. If one online class took him six hours, then eight courses meant 48 hours a week. Hence, he did not have more free time for himself.

Worries about eyesight: Interestingly, a lot of students also complained about how overusing computers or mobile phones could affect their eyesight. As students complained about online teaching being time-consuming, one of its direct effects was on their eyesight. Almost all the interviewees mentioned that they experienced eyestrain. As a result, they preferred and missed the offline teaching. Online teaching led them to realize the advantages of books and offline teaching.

5 Discussion

This section returns to the three research questions and discusses the implications of these findings for them.

5.1 Is the online ICC training model helpful in developing students' ICC?

The purpose of this study was to identify whether the ICC of students developed after eight-weeks' online training. According to the collected data, the statistical results obtained from the AIC-CCS and the qualitative data from students' reflective journals and interviews confirmed that the online ICC training model was effectively helpful in improving students' ICC, especially in broadening students' intercultural knowledge and developing their intercultural skills. This study highlighted that the Internet played a crucial role in the knowledge construction that the abundant learning resources built up an encyclopedia for both teachers and students. With the guidance of the teacher, students could gain more relevant and more up-to-date knowledge. Moreover, online teaching was found to break the limits of time and space. With the help of WeChat and BBS, students were easily exposed to intercultural encounters, which provided them with more chances to practice their language skills and intercultural communicative skills. Hence, it helped to solve the problem that offline teaching faced on the lack of real-practice in developing students' ICC.

5.2 How do students evaluate this online ICC training model?

Students' feedback on the online ICC training model revealed at least three features. First, the effectiveness and appropriateness of this model was highly influenced by students' learning ability. As Ripley (2012) stated, "at this stage, most MOOCs work well for students who are self-motivated and already fairly well educated.[20]" This study echoed her finding by demonstrating that when the students were more self-motivated and self-disciplined, they performed in the learning process better, and received higher scores. In this study, the teacher used assessment as one

way to arouse the motivation of students who were not self-motivated and had poor self-discipline. Nevertheless, more attention and teaching methods should be fully considered to transform these “have-to-learn” students into “want-to-learn” students.

Second, the students showed their strong adaptability to online teaching. Most of the students experienced online learning for the first time. Despite complaints on participating in online learning, students still finished all their learning assignments successfully. Conversely, teachers accepted a series of online teaching training and still had difficulty carrying it out due to numerous barriers. From this perspective, online teaching among young students had unlimited possibilities.

Furthermore, students’ reflection proved that Chinese students were accustomed to relying on teachers but not on themselves. During the time of COVID-19 pandemic, they realized that the online teaching was the only choice to finish their studies. Thus, they had to rely on themselves wholeheartedly and work extremely hard to obtain their credits. Whereas when they back to school, both online and offline classes were available, they chose to neglect online teaching. As student Y said, “I know my teacher will explain this concept, so watching the micro-course before class seems not as important as before.” This attitude change illustrated that online teaching has yet to reach their prime.

5.3 What challenges are teachers faced with in carrying out online ICC training?

In this action research, the author was not only a teacher but also a researcher. The teaching reflection indicated the challenges the teacher was faced with in this process. Despite the insufficiency of online teaching skills and the heavy workload, the most challenging aspect for the teachers was that online teaching put forward new requirements for a qualified ICC teacher.

Earlier research has asserted that a qualified ICC teacher is the one who knows well about intercultural communication [21], who knows how to develop students’ ICC [22] [23], and who has high intercultural sensitivity and developed ICC [7]. In the digital era, these requirements for ICC teachers may not satisfy students’ needs nor fit their learning characteristics. Moreover, several existing models have described the components of ICC, while little attention has been paid to the ICC of educators. The teacher is evidently a vital link to the ICC development in young people [24]. Thus, this study suggests a new ICC theory for teachers (see Figure 2).

Table 2. Components in intercultural communicative competence of educators

	Skills Interpret and relate <i>IT teaching designing</i>	
Knowledge of self and other of interaction individually and socially <i>of IT skills</i>	Education political education critical cultural awareness <i>on selecting IT teaching resources</i>	Attitudes relativizing self valuing other <i>valuing IT teaching</i>
	Skills discover and/or interact <i>IT teaching</i>	

Table 2 relies heavily on Byram's definition for ICC which is specifically applicable for foreign language teaching-learning settings [25]. In accordance with Byram's five savors of ICC, this study would add IT contents into each savor. In this model, attitude is concerned as the precondition that an ICC educator should value online teaching in the digital era. Thus he/she would pay attention to integration of online teaching into his/her teaching design. Knowledge is the basis for the ICC educator; without knowledge on IT skills, he/she cannot execute online teaching efficiently. Skills contribute substantially to qualified ICC educator, that is, skills for online teaching design and online teaching ability play a vital role in realizing online ICC training. Finally, critical cultural awareness has a crucial role, not only because Byram emphasizes its importance in the ICC model but also because of the characteristics of the Internet. The Internet is complex and complicated. In carrying out online teaching, teachers must select appropriate content. Without critical cultural awareness, he/she will have difficulty distinguishing better from worse teaching resources.

6 Conclusion

This study designed an online ICC training model for Chinese students to determine its feasibility in developing students' ICC. The findings demonstrate that the online ICC training model is effective in developing students' ICC, especially for knowledge construction and skills practice. The study also highlights the positive and negative aspects of this model. Furthermore, this study illustrates a new theoretical model for ICC educators in the digital era. The modified ICC theory emphasizes the importance of information technology, thus demonstrating that simply knowing ICC academically is not enough for teachers today.

Indeed, this study has drawn a limited sample, which may not represent all Chinese universities. In addition, the selected university is not among the top universities in China. Hence, the self-motivation and self-discipline of these students may not be the same as that of students in other universities. Future studies may interview students on other campuses, thereby enabling the research findings to be considerably persuasive. A second concern is the limited time for this research which only lasted for eight weeks. With a longer practice, the effectiveness of this online training model would be demonstrated, and more observations could be identified.

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9 Author

Lemin Shen is an associate professor in the Foreign Languages College, Zhejiang Wanli University, China. Her research areas include EFL teaching and intercultural studies in education (slmyss@zwu.edu.cn).

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