

An Action Research Study of Developing Foreign Language Teachers' Intercultural Competence

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Abstract : In the past few decades, concerns and demands of promoting student intercultural communicative competence in foreign language education have been increasing along with the rapid growth of information technologies and globalization in the 21st century. In Sweden, related concepts such as internationalization, global citizenship, multiculturalism, and intercultural communication etc., are also keywords that would be found in the written learning objectives of the foreign language education in all levels. Being one of the leading higher institutes in distance education in Europe, Dalarna University clearly states that after completion of the teacher education program, students shall understand the needs for integrating internationalization, intercultural and global perspective in teaching and learning in Swedish schools and implement their own studies to promote education in an international and global context. Despite the fact that many teachers and educators agree with the institutes' mission and vision about the importance of internationalization and the need of increasing student understanding of intercultural and global perspective, they might find this objective unattainable and restricted due to the nature of the subject and their personal knowledge of intercultural competence. When conducting a comprehensive Chinese language course for the students who are going to become Chinese foreign language teachers, the researcher found that all the learning objectives are linguistic oriented while grammatical components dominate the entire course. Apparently, there is a gap between the learning objectives of the course and the DU's mission of fostering an international learner with intercultural and globalized perspectives. How to include this macro-learning objective in a foreign language course is a great challenge to the educator. Although scholars from different academic domains have provided different theoretical frameworks and approaches for developing student intercultural competence, research that focuses on the didactic perspectives of developing student intercultural competence in teaching Chinese as a foreign language education (CFL) is limited and practical examples are rare. This has motivated the researcher to conduct an action research study that aims at integrating DU's macro-learning objective in a current CFL course through different didactic practices with a purpose of developing the teacher student intercultural competence. This research study aims to, firstly, illustrate the cross-cultural knowledge integrated into the present Chinese language course for developing intercultural competence. Secondly, it investigates different didactic means that can be utilized to deliver cross-cultural knowledge to student teachers in the present course without generating dramatic disturbance of the syllabus. Thirdly, it examines the effectiveness of these didactic means in enhancing teacher student intercultural competence regarding the need for integrating and implementing internationalization, intercultural and global perspectives in teaching and learning in Swedish schools. Last but not least, it intends to serve as a practical example for developing the student teachers' intercultural competence in foreign language education in DU and fill in the research gap of this academic domain worldwide.

Keywords : intercultural competence, foreign language education, action research, teacher education

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