

The integration of inter-culture education into intensive reading teaching for English majors through Project-based Learning*

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Abstract: With the research of the relationship between inter-culture and language teaching development, people are well aware of the necessity of integrating inter-culture into language teaching. While providing the opportunity for the students to improve their intercultural communication competence, here, the research presented on the integration of inter-cultural teaching into intensive reading for English majors through Project-based Learning (PBL), which indicates that Project-based Learning is an effective way to integrate inter-culture teaching into intensive reading and it has a positive impact on students' inter-cultural communication competence and their language study and is really productive and rewarding to the English majors.

Key words: inter-culture; intensive reading; Project-based Learning

1. Introduction

With the development of society and economy, the relationship of the people from different countries and backgrounds is becoming closer and closer. Individuals with high inter-cultural competence in the 21st century are badly required than ever. Although teaching inter-culture has been considered important in foreign language instruction for almost one century, it is not until recent years that teaching inter-culture in language courses has been emphasized. Foreign culture learning and the contributions done by the foreign language educators have helped more and more foreign language teachers in China realize that inter-cultural competence is an integral part of communicative competence. Many courses on inter-culture have been introduced for language learners, which has brought striking improvement in their cultural awareness. As for the course of intensive reading for English majors, though the cultivation of students' inter-cultural competence is among the goals of the course of intensive reading for English majors, the course is not specially designed for such a goal and it is very difficult to arrange special instruction for such a purpose. It is also the case that almost all the progress is limited within the advanced language learners, and that the situation of college students in general is far from satisfactory (GAO, 2006). There is little evidence that teachers integrate inter-cultural instruction effectively into intensive reading through Project-based Learning (PBL). And this reveals the necessity and significance of the present research.

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2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of inter-culture education

The inter-culture education is to make the students explore and understand the culture of English-speaking countries, so that they have the sketchy understanding of the similarities or differences between Eastern culture and Western culture. It helps to improve students' sensitivity and resolution capability of the culture between East and West. It is useful to improve students' inter-cultural communicative competence. In this paper, inter-cultural communication competence is used to refer to the ability to communicate with people from diverse cultures in a mutually appropriate and effective manner. It needs motivation, knowledge, skill and strategy to demonstrate what behavior is appropriate and what is not.

As for the content of inter-culture education, WANG (2005) divided inter-cultural communication into 3 forms by means of different media: verbal interaction, non-verbal interaction and extra-verbal interaction.

2.2 Language and culture are inter-connected

The relevance of teaching culture with language is based on the belief that language and culture are inter-connected (Cruz, Bonissone & Baff, 1995; Heileman & Kaplan, 1985; Lessard-Clouston, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Peck, 1998; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Sellami, 2000; Singhal, 1997; Stern, 1983; Thanasoulas, 2001). The predominant view is that culture cannot be taught without language and similarly, that language cannot be taught without culture. In Peck's (1998, p. 1) words, "Without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete".

Canale and Swain (1980) also maintain that it is very necessary to teach about the target culture in social studies classes so that students are not only taught how to meet their communicative goals, but are also taught, "the socio-cultural knowledge of the second language group that is necessary in drawing inferences about the social meanings or values of utterances" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 28). A similar view is expressed by Stern (1983, p. 123) who suggests a multi-dimensional curriculum approach to teaching languages. In this approach, "Both a cultural and a communicative syllabus become essentials in language teaching as much as a more formal approach" (Stern, 1983, p. 123). Therefore, it is quite necessary to aim for the integration of language and culture learning in language education. The approaches to integration of language and inter-cultural learning are inspired by some experts, such as Damen (1987), Oxford (1994) and Moran (2001). They suggest a range of practical techniques and some tips that help to make the teaching of inter-culture and language a better experience for the teachers and students, such as contrast, cultural capsules and cultural clusters, culture quizzes, cultural problem solving, cognitive approach, and so on. While Project-based Learning can link all the above activities together, which is an experimental approach to teaching culture and language that can be applied to language learners in any context, studying language and culture (Moran, 2001).

2.3 Project-based Learning: Means of integrating inter-culture education into intensive reading teaching

Project-based instruction was introduced into English as a Second Language (ESL) education as one way to reflect the principles of student-centered teaching (Hedge, 1993). Organizing projects is seen as an effective way to teach language and content simultaneously (Stoller, 1997). The use of projects "establishes a direct link between language learning and its application" (Legutke & Thomas, 1991, p. 214), as well as to create opportunities which allow ESL learners to develop their abilities in the target language by interacting and communicating with each other and with native English speakers (e.g., Fried-Booth, 2002). Beckett (1999, as

cited in Beckett & Slater, 2005) found that teachers reported having various goals for implementing projects in their ESL classrooms, such as challenging students' creativity; fostering independence; enhancing cooperative learning skills; building decision-making, critical thinking and learning skills; and facilitating the language socialization of ESL students into local academic and social cultures.

Cullen and Sato (2000, p. 4) also advocated having teachers involve students in research, especially university students, as they feel this activity can lead to "long-term interest in the target-culture".

2.3.1 The basic mode of Project-based Learning

Project-based Learning is an instruction method which uses authentic, complex, real-life projects to motivate learning and provide learning experiences. It is a kind of activity in which students compose, test, improve and create something as a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks (William & Barbara, 1999).

The basic mode found in most projects includes selecting a topic, making plans, researching, developing products and sharing results with others (Wrigley, 1998). However, because Project-based Learning hinges on group effort, establishing a trusting, cooperative relationship before embarking on a full-fledged project is also necessary. Activities that engage learners in communication tasks and in peer- and self- evaluation help create the proper classroom environment. Information gap activities, learner-to-learner interviews, role-plays, simulations, field trips, contact assignments outside of class and process writing with peers prepare learners for project work.

2.3.1.1 Selecting topics

A project should reflect the interests and concerns of the learners. Teachers can begin determining project topics at the start of an instructional cycle by conducting a class needs assessment to identify topic areas and skills to be developed. As the teacher and learners talk about projects and get to know each other, new topics and issues may come to light that are appropriate for project learning. A project may focus on the objectives of one instructional unit, such as a unit on health, or it may span several units. It may take place during a unit or be a culminating final event. Whatever the project, learners need to be in on the decision making from the beginning (Moss, 1998).

2.3.1.2 Making plans and doing research

Once a topic is selected, learners work together to plan the project, conduct research and develop their products. Learners with low language proficiency or little experience working as part of a team may require structure and support throughout the project. Pre-project activities that introduce problem-solving strategies, language for negotiation and methods for developing plans are useful. Learners may also need practice in specific language skills to complete project tasks. For example, learners using interviews as an information gathering technique may need instruction and practice in constructing and asking questions as well as in taking notes.

2.3.1.3 Sharing results with others

Project results can be shared in a number of ways. Oral presentations can accompany written products within the classroom or in other classes within the program (Lawrence, 1997; Wrigley, 1998).

2.3.2 The teachers' roles in Project-based Learning

Project work can be more effective when teachers relax their control, when students regard the teacher as a guide and facilitator (Sheppard & Stoller, 1995). A teacher-facilitated project transforms from "teacher telling" to "student doing". It places the emphasis of the doing on the students. A teacher-guided project lets the teacher teach the curriculum and engage the students. Accountability is placed on the teacher. Thus, finding the proper balance

between teacher guidance and student autonomy enhances the advantages of project work in the language classroom.

2.4 Programs related to the present study

2.4.1 Programs related to the present study abroad

In the Eyring's (1989, as cited in Beckett & Slater, 2005) study, and Beckett's (1999, as cited in Beckett & Slater, 2005) study, the students from the project class appeared to be dissatisfied with the project approach to learning. In Moulton and Holmes' (2000, as cited in Beckett & Slater, 2005) study, it was observed that although the students who completed the course reported that they had benefited from project-based instruction, the completion rate for the course was low. In order to overcome these potential conflicts and differences, Beckett (1999, as cited in Beckett & Slater, 2005), William and Barbara (1999) advocated making explicit for students the goals and resources associated with project work in ESL classes.

In the study completed by Abrams (2002), 2 groups acted as the control group and 2 groups served as the treatment group. It was found that "learners developed more cross-cultural awareness through the experimental than the treatment portfolios" (Abrams, 2002, p. 150). Savignon and Sysoyev's (2002) study indicated that explicitly teaching socio-cultural strategies in a communicative foreign language classroom is successful. Bateman's (2002) study showed that not only were the students exposed to a native speaker of their target language, their attitudes towards the target culture, their peoples, their own culture and culture learning in general were all deemed to be positive. Beckett and Slater's (2005) study introduced a methodological tool called "the project framework", which allows ESL students to see the value of project-based instruction by making explicit the various components which work together to promote higher level academic literacy: language, thinking skills and content knowledge.

Based on the above programs, whereas ESL students' evaluations of projects in academic ESL classes have not been as consistent, opinions about project work in mainstream classes have generally been positive. According to ZHANG's (2010) research on 30 years' project-based second/foreign language learning and instruction, teaching practice research abroad has not yet gone through the preliminary stage of experimentation.

2.4.2 Programs related to the present study in China

In China, there are many theoretical explorations in integrating inter-culture into English language teaching (HU, 1999; HAN, 2002; LIU, 2003; CHEN, 2004; XU, 2004; WANG, 2005; ZHUANG, 2006; ZHANG, 2010), which can shed light on applying the theory into English teaching and empirical studies (ZHAO, 2006; OU, 2007; LI, Y. M., LI, Y. F. & DONG, 2007) with non-English students or high school students as the subjects indicate that Project-based Learning not only helps integrate inter-culture into English language teaching, but also contributes to the cultivation of students' overall communicative competence. However, most of the researchers in China focus on cultural introduction (CHEN, 1992; SHU, 1996; LIAO, 1999; CHEN, 2004; ZHAO, 2006) and students' motivation and autonomy need further exploring. What is more, very few empirical studies are conducted on Project-based Learning aiming at integrating inter-culture into extensive reading for English majors. Nevertheless, all the explorations provide insight for future experimental research on integration of inter-culture into intensive reading through Project-based Learning.

3. Research design

3.1 Research questions

The main purposes of the experiment are to cultivate the students' inter-cultural communication competence, improve their comprehensive ability, and therefore, form an effective way in the teaching and learning of intensive reading. Based on the theoretical framework proposed, the authors put forward the following research questions:

- (1) Does PBL help promote Chinese students' intercultural communication competence?
- (2) How much is PBL related to Chinese students' language proficiency?
- (3) What are Chinese students' attitudes towards the program?

3.2 Participants

The 2 classes are chosen by the way of stratified random sampling. Firstly, 80 students are selected from 117 juniors of English majors in the same university in Shandong province, with the sampling fraction 1:2:7:3 according to the students' scores in Test for English Majors, Band Four (TEM-4). And then, the selected students are distributed to 2 classes with simple random sampling according to the students' numbers given with one group consisting of 40 students as the Experimental Group (EG), and the rest as the Control Group (CG). They had similar experiences and English was learned as their second language. Both classes shared the same teacher, which was to prevent individual differences in teaching style affecting the results. The 2 groups worked from the same textbook which was *Advanced English (Book 1)* (ZHANG, 1995) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. They received 4 periods of English class each week. The textbook was progressed at the same rate in each class, and almost the same number of assignment was given after class. The amount of time that students spent studying outside class was a variable that could not be directly controlled during the investigational phase. At the end of the program, the teacher investigated the average time that the students spent in studying out of class so as to take this into consideration during the analysis of the results. The experimental group received the approach which was carefully designed by the researcher and teacher to integrate inter-culture and language instruction through Project-based Learning while the control group received the conventional teacher-centered approach. There are altogether 40 students in the experimental group, including 32 girls and 8 boys. There are 40 students in the control group, with 32 girls and 8 boys. The questionnaire on culture ($p=0.451$, 2-tailed) conducted before the program indicates there exists no significant difference in the 2 groups in terms of their initial levels of inter-culture before the experiment, which guarantees the results from the study are valid and reliable. The program extended from September 2007 to June 2008.

3.3 Instruments

In order to investigate the effects of the program, the researcher collected both quantitative data and qualitative data.

The final examination of the first term of 2007-2008 school year was taken as a posttest. The objective part of the exams was all marked with computer; the subjective part was marked by the other 3 teachers who did not carry out the program and the means of the marks given by the teachers were accepted to make sure the reliability of the study.

Questionnaires on culture adapted from the "A socio-cultural test" by WANG (1990) administrated to the subjects before and after the program consist of 4 parts, 2 of which are appropriate or inappropriate questions on non-verbal and verbal behavior in inter-cultural interaction. The third part is constituted by 20 incomplete sentences with 5 choices, which cover geographical, political, religious and literary knowledge about the USA and GB. The last part contains 3 Likert-scale items and 2 open-ended questions designed to measure the students' implementation of the reading materials concerning culture, their feelings and acknowledgement towards the inter-cultural knowledge.

Students' conferences and research logs were adopted to monitor the Project-based Learning and students' record was kept to investigate the value of project-based learning on students' inter-cultural communicative competence, included teacher-assessment, self-assessment and group-assessment.

3.4 Procedures of Project-based Learning

The main procedures of Project-based Learning can be divided into 6 steps which are choosing a project, making a plan for the project, implementing the plan, working on the product, presenting the product and assessing the project. To be specific, the students in the Experimental Group will be firstly placed into teams of 6. Teams collaboratively choose their topics by brainstorming to make sure the topics are worth studying and then the project is structured and students are asked to create a one-page project information sheet using Microsoft Word, checking that the students have attainable objectives and a practical plan. According to their plan for the project, the teams begin to gather, compile and analyze information, create a multimedia presentation describing their project, and then, the teams present their final products to an audience of their peers and teachers and after that the teams publish their work to the school website. Lastly, students are required to reflect on the processes used to complete their projects, the new skills they have learned, and the overall success of the product. Figure 1 presents the procedures of Project-based Learning.

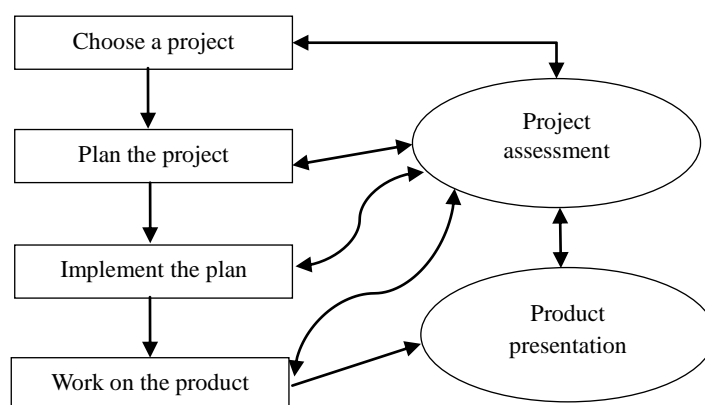


Figure 1 The procedures of Project-based Learning

Take the lesson from *Advanced English (Book 1)* (ZHANG, 1995) "Speech on Hitler's Invasion of the U.S.S.R" for example, before this lesson, the students are asked to learn about the background information of the text on the Internet.

At the first step of the lesson, the teacher asks the students the following questions in the form of brainstorming, such as (1) How much do you know about World War II? (2) How much do you know about Hitler? (3) How many great speakers can you think of? And then, the teacher requires the students to talk about something about the author of the text: his life, his works and evaluations on Hitler. This step offers cultural introduction to the text to arouse the students' previous schema, so that students can understand the text better. At the second step of the lesson, the students are required to read the text, trying to understand the text with the aid of the questions offered by the teacher or they are encouraged to raise their own questions based on the content of the text. If the students have understood the text and its structure well, the teacher can guide students to appreciate of the text, including the opening of the speech, rhetorical devices and ways of ending up the speech. And then, the students are asked to make a summary of the text. During this process, the teacher only acts as a facilitator, an organizer, and the students are encouraged to construct knowledge in their own way by reading, thinking, doubting,

analyzing and summarizing. At the third step of the lesson, the students are first required to listen to the speech, and then, to do the research work: "Comment on the Churchill's speech", which is a group work. Homepage of the Churchill center is offered by the teacher. The students can use the Internet to collect plenty of language knowledge and cultural materials concerning the target language and the speech. This activity helps students to plan, manage, make adjustments of the project, share and analyze the information they gathered for the final product, and work out the final product, which are mostly an oral presentation, a short-play, a report, a debate, a press conference, and so on. By critical reading and listening, comparing and contrasting, communicating and sharing with others, the students can construct their personal knowledge in different perspectives so as to enlarge their knowledge on inter-culture and language and cultivate their multi-angle view, which is beneficial to foster students' critical thinking and creative thinking. Next, it is time for students to assess their own work from the aspects of the attitudes towards the participation, personal responsibility, listening and respecting, and offering help. This kind of assessment can motivate students to reflect their learning product as well as the learning process, which is vital to maintain the students' interests and positive attitudes towards the target language learning, their awareness of responsibility being promoted.

More importantly, by doing the project, the students are well aware that Chinese discourse style is different from that of Westerners from 3 different aspects which are the nature of discourse, reasoning and organization, and models of expression. Knowledge of the differences between English and Chinese writing will help promote the students' intercultural awareness and help students to find an effective way of approaching the writing of speeches.

In this research, Project-based Learning is implemented in the form of classroom and out of class. During the whole process, students not only learn a particular culture and language, they also develop their overall abilities as learners of language and culture, a personal competence that they can apply to other culture learning situations. With practice and awareness, they learn to distinguish observation from interpretation, insider viewpoints from outsider viewpoints, their own culture from the new culture, and they are in a better position to accept, even empathize with people from other cultures and to get a sense of the humanity of other people.

3.5 Data analysis

Data from the 2 questionnaires and students' scores in the proficiency test were collected and analyzed by SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences) 15.0.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were performed in this study. The quantitative analysis involved several statistical procedures: descriptive statistics, Pearson analysis, regression analysis, independent-samples t-test and paired-samples t-test analysis. Qualitative data were mainly from the students' self-assessment sheet, and the students' evaluation of the model triggered by some open questions.

4. Results and discussion

According to the analysis of the teacher's investigation, there is no significant difference in the amount of time that students spent studying outside class between the 2 classes, so that it guarantees that the factor may not affect the reliability of results of the program.

4.1 Analysis of the students' inter-cultural communication competence

According to Table 1, it can be found that in the pre-survey there is no significant difference between the 2 groups. However, the result of the post-survey indicates that the mean of the experimental group is much higher than that of the control group and that significant difference between the 2 groups takes place, but the standard

The integration of inter-culture education into intensive reading teaching for English majors through Project-based Learning

deviation of the experimental group is a little larger than that of the control group. The reason for the higher mean and larger standard deviation may be that the majority of the students in the experimental group are willing to make greater effort and spend more time in inter-cultural learning. Therefore, they have made greater progress. However, some of the students might not be interested in the program and read little materials or pay little attention to that. Just as Beckett (1999, as cited in Beckett & Slater, 2005) pointed out that the reasons for the difference with project-based instruction in ESL classes reflect potentially different philosophical, cultural and linguistic beliefs held by students. There is a need to realize that ESL students may have different beliefs about the purpose of ESL classes, and have different goals for language learning in general. So it is very necessary for the teacher to give students psychological preparation before the program and give students patient guidance during the whole process of the program. The significant difference indicates that integration inter-cultural instruction into intensive reading is really rewarding on the whole.

Table 1 Comparison of the 2 groups in the questionnaires

Surveys	G	No.	Mean	Std. deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-survey	EG	40	30.375	2.669	0.798	0.451
	CG	40	29.875	2.356		
Post-survey	EG	40	31.500	2.746	-2.292	0.043*
	CG	40	30.166	1.992		

Note: *P<0.05.

4.2 Analysis of the students' language proficiency

There is no statistical difference between the 2 groups in the pre-test. From the results of the scores in the post-test (see Table 2), it can safely say that EG does better than CG, and there are significant differences between the scores of the Experimental Group and those of the Control Group.

But some may argue that how they could improve the scores in the examination, since there is no particularly added inter-cultural element in the final examination. The most possible reason, which will be mentioned in the following analysis, is that the experiment arouses the students' motivation in learning English, and therefore, they would like to spare no efforts to learn the target language. Another reason is that the Project-based Learning (putting forward questions, making suitable plans, reading intercultural materials in English, selecting information, making presentation and making assessment, etc.) can promote the students' cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies which will easily be transferred to lead to the students' high English proficiency. The result of the analysis of the students' language proficiency supports the view that teaching about the target culture when teaching the target language piques the interest of students and acts as a motivator (Hammerly, 1982; Hendon, 1980, as cited in Thanasoulas, 2001). The result echoes with Beckett and Slater's (2005) study and Savignon and Sysoyev's (2002) study that makes explicit that the various components of Project-based Learning and socio-cultural strategies helps promote students' high level academic literacy.

Table 2 A comparison of proficiency test results of the EG and CG

Proficiency test	G	No.	Mean	Std. deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post-test	EG	40	78.602	12.198	-8.192	0.000**
	CG	40	74.820	10.134		

Note: **P<0.01.

4.3 Analysis of the students' intercultural competence and language proficiency

Paired sample t-test is applied to find out whether the mean score of the questionnaire (post-survey) and that of the final examination (post-test) in the experimental group are significantly different. The result (see Table 3) shows that the significance of t-value is 0.000, which means the difference is significant at the level of 0.001. And according to the Pearson correlation analysis, the correlation coefficient between the scores of the post-survey and that of the post-test is 0.098, with its insignificance being 0.401. Therefore, this pair (Test & Culture) is positively correlated, the correlation, however, is insignificant, for the coefficient does not reach the significant level of 0.05. This result is also shared by WANG (1990) in his socio-cultural test.

Table 3 Comparison of the scores between the post-survey and the post-test of the EG

	No.	Correlation	Sig.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Test & Culture	40	0.098	0.401	-31.287	0.000**

Note: **P<0.01.

Table 4 Regression analysis of the post-survey and the post-test of the EG

Model	R	Adjust R	R ²	R ² △	F	F△
Culture	0.268	0.059	0.072	0.072	5.742	5.742
Predictors	B	t	Sig.			
Culture	2.352	15.935	0.000**			
Test	-0.112	-2.396	0.019*			

Note: **P<0.01; *P<0.05.

According to the regression model analysis (see Table 4), it can be seen that $t > 2$ and $t < -2$, with significance taking place, which shows that there is a linear relationship between inter-cultural communication competence and language proficiency of the students from the experimental group and their inter-cultural communication competence can predicate their language proficiency well. From the above analysis, the following conclusion can be drawn: Students with high inter-cultural communication competence almost lead to their high language proficiency, which means those whose score is high in the inter-cultural test may do high in the language test as well. Therefore, integration of inter-culture into intensive reading teaching through Project-based Learning is very necessary and important, and in fact, productive for English majors practically and theoretically. The result supports the point that if foreign language students are taught about the target culture while simultaneously acquiring the language, the potential exists to affect students' perceptions and attitudes toward the target language and culture in a positive way (Bateman, 2002; Kramsch, 1996; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Sellami, 2000, as cited in Thanasoulas, 2001). The result is also shared by ZHAO (2006) in her empirical study on cultural introduction to non-English majors.

4.4 Students' evaluation of the programme

At the end of the programme, students were given opportunities to comment on the programme in the form of e-mail. According to Table 5, 75% of the students agree that they can pay more attention to inter-culture in learning and 36.1% of the students show that they have more confidence in inter-cultural communication. 47.2% of the students admit that their inter-cultural communication competence has improved a lot. Most of the students (88.9%) like Project-based Learning, regarding it as a good way of linking English learning with inter-culture

The integration of inter-culture education into intensive reading teaching for English majors through Project-based Learning

communication and beneficial to improve their inter-cultural communication competence. Therefore, 80.6% of the students can take an active part in Project-based Learning.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics of the students' evaluation of the programme

Items	AG (%)	DI (%)	NU (%)
Can pay more attention to inter-culture in learning.	75.0	5.6	19.4
Have more confidence in inter-cultural communication.	36.1	36.1	27.8
Can foster the inter-cultural communication competence more autonomously.	58.3	33.3	8.3
My inter-cultural communication competence has improved a lot.	47.2	22.2	30.6
Project-based Learning is a good way of linking English learning with inter-cultural communication.	88.9	2.8	8.3
Project-based Learning is helpful to reflect my inter-cultural communication competence.	88.9	0.0	11.1
I am actively involved in the project-based learning.	80.6	5.6	13.9
Project-based Learning is beneficial for me to improve the inter-cultural communication competence.	88.9	0.0	11.1

To get more information about the Project-based Learning and the students' evaluation, the teacher interviewed 15 students from the experimental group. The students expressed that the program not only can help them grasp some inter-cultural knowledge to be more sensitive to the inter-culture, but also can broaden their horizon, arouse their language motivation and improve their language proficiency, especially in oral, reading, writing and translation. Some students mentioned the approach is more autonomous and is beneficial for them to improve their abilities to think and to cooperate. The students' evaluation of the program is in agreement with Beckett's (1999, as cited in Beckett & Slater, 2005) finding that teachers reported having achieved various goals for implementing projects in their ESL classrooms, such as challenging students' creativity; fostering independence; enhancing cooperative learning skills; building decision-making, critical thinking and learning skills; and facilitating the language socialization of ESL students into local academic and social cultures.

Interviews reveal that while most students recognize the value of Project-based Learning on the whole, it cannot satisfy the needs of students with different language proficiency; it calls for an overall innovation of curriculum standards, teaching, learning and assessment, also in course compilation.

4.5 Major findings

The major findings concluded from the present experiment can be summarized as follows:

(1) The students in the Experimental Group have evidently made much more progress in inter-cultural learning than those in the Control Group;

(2) The experiment on integration inter-cultural instruction into intensive reading is really rewarding and the students in the Experimental Group have made much more progress in their inter-cultural communication competence;

(3) Significant difference in their scores in the final examination of the 2 groups means the students in the Experimental Group have made much more progress in their language proficiency than those in the Control Group;

(4) Project-based Learning is an effective way to promote the students' inter-cultural communication competence in foreign language education. This also shows that Project-based Learning to the experimental class is appropriate and timely.

According to the students' responses from the Experimental Group, it can be seen that at the cognitive and meta-cognitive level, integrating inter-culture into intensive reading teaching through Project-based Learning is an effective approach to positively influence students' attitudes toward the target inter-cultural learning and the

language learning in general, and at the same time, their cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies are also promoted. This approach can not only enrich the students' intercultural communication competence, but also activate their motivation in language learning and hence improve their proficiency in language learning.

5. Pedagogical implications

In the light of major findings generated by the research, some useful implications of these findings for college English teaching can be found:

(1) The students' inter-cultural communication competence is not adequately developed before the experiment. Considering the students' inadequate development in their inter-cultural communication competence, teachers feel that there is a great need to strengthen the importance of inter-cultural elements in tests and integrate inter-cultural instruction with English teaching. The themes and topics must be based on the content learned in *Advanced English*, so that the students can understand the text better, while can improve their inter-cultural communication competence;

(2) Teachers should be trained to be familiar with knowledge in the field of inter-cultural communication. Without knowing the differences that interfere with smooth communication, teachers are not fully able to give information to their students. Teachers should provide students guidance during the whole process. Their attitudes, updated knowledge and skills will help them teach students more effectively;

(3) It is feasible to conduct Project-based Learning in *Advanced English*. Project-based Learning can be a better way to link inter-cultural communication with English language teaching and learning. Of course, structured and open projects should be combined;

(4) It is necessary to give proper instructions in Project-based Learning and check that each student plays an active part in the process of Project-based Learning. Students should be given opportunities to choose topics, make plans for their research, surf on the Internet to collect the resources, analyze and synthesize information, make performance, discuss and assess their learning process and their products.

6. Conclusion

To make a conclusion, the authors have presented a quasi-experiment on integration of inter-culture into intensive reading teaching for English majors through Project-based Learning, providing the opportunity for the students to get a general idea about inter-culture. The responses from the students show that the majority of the students from the experimental group hold a favorable attitude toward the program, and the results of the research analysis prove the effectiveness of the program: It not only helps improve students' intercultural awareness, but also contributes to the development of their motivation to learn English and the cultivation of their ability in using the language, thus, enhancing their overall communicative competence. It is hoped that the program helps develop the students' capacity of adapting to the changing world and broaden the horizon of the research world in the field of college English teaching in China. However, it must be pointed out that Project-based Learning is not the only way to integrate inter-culture into intensive reading teaching and that it should be combined with various ways to suit students with different learning styles. Furthermore, more authentic environments should be created to improve students' inter-cultural communication competence.

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**The integration of inter-culture education into intensive reading teaching for English majors
through Project-based Learning**

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