

# Chapter 3

## Improving Intercultural Communication: Navigating the Complexities of Cultural Interactions

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Intercultural communication includes the ability of individuals to act purposefully, efficiently, and reflectively in a culturally diverse environment. This is commonly a component of university educational goals and an objective of many intercultural management training programs. The study describes a training program for intercultural communication between Germany and China, including the training design, methods, and content. The participants were students from a Chinese and a German university. The results indicate that students found the training program very effective and positive and that the combination of self-reflection and cooperative teaching methods can increase motivation and interest, leading to a rethinking of stereotypes. The results also indicate that the training program increased and improved mutual understanding, knowledge, and intercultural communication regarding their respective cultures.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In a complex and globalized world, intercultural communication contributes significantly to economic development, initiates cooperation, and helps to reduce conflict between states or interest groups. The promotion of intercultural competence (Maele & Jin, 2022) has become an increasingly prominent feature of training programs for foreign language teachers and interpreters in China. However, within university-level programs for learning German as a foreign language—particularly for those training to become teachers, interpreters, or translators—most teaching hours are still dedicated to linguistic proficiency. Although acquiring a foreign language remains a key component of intercultural competence, curricula are gradually evolving to include and/or offer elective units that introduce learners to the target country's culture, history, and values.

Furthermore, international task managers increasingly receive training and education in intercultural communication, highlighting the growing relevance of cultural competence in professional contexts. For individuals working in interaction-intensive professions, one important goal of education and training is to ensure that their actions are reflective, effective, and appropriate (Dewey, 1904). Despite growing recognition of the importance of intercultural competence, systematic and properly evaluated training units remain rare. This is true both in China and in many Western countries, where evidence-based training programs that effectively integrate theoretical frameworks with practical methods, content, and instructional design are still lacking (Kulich et al., 2020). The gap between theoretical understanding and applied skills presents a challenge for both educators and learners.

This article presents a training program entitled *Navigating the Complexities of Cultural Interactions*, which builds on a series of studies addressing intercultural communication between Germany and China. Initially launched in 2019 as a two-day, face-to-face seminar in China, the program was adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic into a series of three one-day online seminars offered annually between 2020 and 2022. The programs were developed by one of the authors and subsequently delivered collaboratively by both authors. The initial explorative studies conducted by Huang and Rupp (2023) confirmed that a systematically developed training program using the microteaching method contributed positively to learning outcomes and improved students' intercultural communicative behavior. These programs, when viewed through the lens of Gudykunst and Hammer's (1983) typology, can be categorized as didactic culture-general training. By contrast, the present program fits within the category of experiential culture-specific training. In this regard, the four analytical dimensions of culture, context, communication, and acculturation serve as a guiding framework for the design and evaluation of the training model.

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