

An Action Research on Primary School Students' Ability to Narrate Chinese Stories in a Foreign Language with School-Based Micro-Course

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Abstract

To explore how to develop primary school students' ability to narrate Chinese stories in foreign language, in this study we employ two rounds of teaching action through school-based English micro-courses using a flipped classroom. Through a quantitative analysis of the grades of the 163 students in the pretest and post-test using SPSS 27.0 and a qualitative analysis of the interviews with the four teachers and 163 students using Nvivo12 after the action, we find that students' ability to narrate Chinese stories in foreign language improve significantly. Specifically, the grades of the students in the vocabulary test increase markedly, but the scores in the cross-cultural communication competence section improve, but not significantly. However, the reader can discern progress in the cognitive, affective, and operational aspect of cross-cultural communication competence through the student interviews.

Keywords: Chinese story, foreign language, school-based micro-courses

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become increasingly important. As the future pillars of society, primary school students should have the ability to spread local culture, which is of great significance to improving their ability of communicating with world and enhancing their cultural confidence and national identity. As an innovative educational method, school-based micro-courses in flipped classrooms provide primary school students with opportunities for personalized and independent learning, helping to develop their foreign language abilities and cultural literacy. In this study we intend to use action research to explore how to improve students' ability to narrate local culture in foreign language through school-based English micro-courses at a primary school based on the following questions:

- (1) To develop the students' ability to narrate the Chinese stories, what should be the teaching objectives, content, method, and assessment of the school-based English micro-course?
- (2) How is the students' ability to narrate Chinese stories in English developed after learning the school-based English micro-courses?
- (3) What is the impact of the micro-courses on the students in terms of their cross-cultural communication ability (cognitive, affective, operational)?

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Ability to Narrate the Chinese Stories*

2.1.1 Chinese Stories

The key to telling "Chinese stories" well lies in the choice of story content (Chu, 2015). Excellent traditional Chinese culture is an important part of telling the "Chinese story" well (Zhao, 2020). In addition, the story of modern China, especially the Chinese revolution and the story of contemporary China, is a key part of the wider story of China (Fan, 2021), and Yang Luna (2022) believed that high school English textbooks should contain stories of "Chinese road, Chinese dream, Chinese people, Chinese culture, and Chinese development" (p.126).

There are many studies about the content of Chinese culture. Wang Yongliang et al. (2022) studied the content of the stories of Henan province in China and believed that to tell the “Henan Story” well in English, it is necessary to include “traditional Henan story, modern Henan story and Henan story under the open-up policy of China” (p. 17). Along the same lines, Wang Yiwei (2015) posited that the “Chinese story” includes stories of the “traditional China, modern China and global China” (p. 53). Therefore, we believe that the ability to narrate the Chinese stories is the ability to tell the stories of “the traditional China, the modern China, and the globalized China.”

2.1.2 The Ability to Narrate the Chinese Stories

Chinese culture is the foundation and essence of Chinese stories. Only by using culture as a “network of meaning” can we connect the “Chinese stories” across the ages (Han, 2024). Many scholars have studied how to improve students’ ability to spread the local culture. On the one hand, multimedia video can effectively improve students’ ability to spread local culture (Cahyono, 2018; Elviana et al., 2020). On the other hand, Wanniarachchi (2021) and Ratri and Tyas (2022) proposed that developing culture-based teaching materials helps learners strengthen their identity and thus enhance their ability to transmit local culture. Estuarso (2017) also mentioned that English teachers can help learners understand and spread their local culture presented in English by designing extra reading materials based on the local culture content. Therefore, teacher-made micro-course videos based on local cultural content are an effective way to improve students’ ability to tell local stories well.

As a matter of fact, the ability to tell “Chinese stories” in foreign languages is a cross-cultural communication ability (Shi & Cheng, 2022). Cross-cultural communication abilities mainly include “cognition, affect and operation (behavior)” (Kim, 2001). Fantini (2020) believed that the ability to spread local culture in foreign languages can be cultivated around knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Cao Xiuping (2023) also proposed indicators for evaluating the ability to express Chinese culture in English based on “knowledge, skills, and attitudes”.

Sapir (1921) deemed that the connection between culture and language is mainly reflected in vocabulary, and Lin Danxia (2013) thought that the best way to test the ability to tell “Chinese stories” in a foreign language is to test the learners’ vocabulary.

Therefore, the ability to tell the Chinese stories well in foreign languages is composed of the cross-cultural communication ability, but also the ability to express the Chinese stories by a foreign language, particularly by using appropriate vocabulary at the preliminary level of learning the language.

2.2 School-Based Micro-Courses

The prototype of the micro-course originated from “the 60-second course” put forward by Professor McGrew at the University of Northern in 1993. In 2008, the instructional designer David Penrose formally proposed the concept of micro-courses, defining it as a 1-minute teaching that combines teaching resources with contents and objectives to provide independent learning tasks after class. The micro-course is a distance learning and teaching resource that uses a short video presentation on a single topic (Fang & Liu, 2017). Then, the school-based micro-courses in this study refer to those teaching videos through an e-learning platform developed by the school, produced for a certain knowledge point as the main carrier in the flipped classroom based on the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (Version, 2022).

The micro-courses are characterized by being short, concise, and interesting (Falkenstein-Smith et al., 2016; Ou, 2019; Xu, 2019; Zeng, 2020). They have a positive effect on students’ educational outcomes, engagement, and cross-cultural competence (Du, 2023; Han, 2019; Loong & Assier, 2016). Further, the micro-courses are suitable for children to carry out fragmented learning due to shorter duration, less pressure, and ease of repetition (Chen et al., 2018; Lv et al., 2020; Tian & Tsai, 2021). Students’ engagement can be increased with the help of local culture integration into English materials (Hu, 2020; Luo, 2017; Ratri & Tyas, 2022; Wang, 2019; Yektingtyas & Ginting, 2020). Therefore, school-based micro-courses have unique advantages in conveying the content of local culture to make up for the areas that are not covered by the National Curriculum and the textbooks (Yang et al., 2016). They are suitable for cultivating primary school students’ ability to narrate Chinese stories in foreign languages.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations

2.3.1 Interlanguage Theory

In 1969, Selinker proposed the concept of interlanguage. Later, Selinker (1972) coined the term in his paper of the same name. According to Selinker, learners will establish a language system that depends on their native language in the process of learning the target language. He described this phenomenon as interlanguage. In other words, interlanguage refers to a kind of language system set up by language learners, which is different from

both the mother tongue and the target language. As such, it is a kind of peculiar language. It also reflects learners' specific system in second language acquisition. With the efforts of learners and the need of communication, interlanguage is constantly changing, and it is the continuum that begins at the mother tongue and ends at the target language.

2.3.2 Internalization Theory

Internalization theory is one of the core concepts of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1920s). Social and cultural theory is about "how human cognition develops" emphasizing that such development is the result of the continuous interaction between the individual subject and the social, cultural, and historical environment (or object). Further, what connects and promotes the development is the intermediary tools. These tools can be divided into external material tools and internal psychological tools, which is the core of the development of individual advanced psychological functions. Internalization is the development mechanism of said functions. Social environment and social communication are the key to the development of individual higher psychological functions. Internalization is not mechanical imitation; its process is to gradually absorb new stimulus information actively and creatively into the existing cognitive system.

3. Research Method

3.1 Action Research

In this study we intended to use the action research method. Action research appeared in the 1940s and was first used by John Collier in his research. In the 1950s, Corey (1954) formally introduced it into educational research as a method for scientific researchers and practitioners to solve certain practical problems, which is problem-driven, situational, practical, collaborative, applied, and reflective. A common model of action research method is the spiral cycle model proposed by Lewin (1946), which mainly includes four steps: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

In this study we adopted two rounds of action research following Lewin's model. The first round is the development of school-based micro-courses; the second round is teaching practice, which lasted for 13 weeks.

3.2 Data Collection

We collected data in three ways. The first was via test papers. Before and after the 13-week micro-courses teaching, we tested 163 students using pretest and post-test papers respectively, and we analyzed the pretest and post-test scores to discover how the micro-courses improved students' ability to narrate Chinese stories in a foreign language.

The second method was interviews. We interviewed 20 students and four teachers after the micro-course teaching. The purpose of the student interviews was to understand the situation of primary school students' cross-cultural communication ability and to conduct interviews from the cognitive, operational, and affective level. The main purpose of the teacher interviews was to understand the teachers' ideas about the concept of course teaching, content themes, teaching methods, teaching evaluation, and so on.

The third method was classroom observation. We observed four teachers' teaching activities in eight classes for about 20 minutes each from three aspects: class lead-in, in-class activities, and homework assignment. Through classroom observation we aimed to have a more detailed grasp of the teachers' teaching implementation.

4. The First Round of Action Research

4.1 Description of the First Round of Action

In the first round of action, with the framework of curriculum development of Tyler (1949), we discussed and set the course objective, course content, teaching method, and evaluation of school-based micro-courses following the steps described in Table 1.

Table 1. Schedule of the first round of action research

Steps	Content of Action
Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read related literature to clarify ideas. 2. Plan the study and design the specific process of the two rounds of action research.
Action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talk with the coordinator to understand the current situation in developing the students' ability to narrate the Chinese stories in their teaching. 2. Discuss with the coordinator about the course objectives, teaching content, teaching method, and evaluation of the micro-course. 3. Discuss with the coordinator about the technical issues of micro-courses production, determine production template of the micro-course, and make a schedule for the teachers to complete the micro-course production. 4. Have a talk with all the teachers in the study about the teaching syllabus and the production of the micro-course so that they can understand the purpose of the study and complete the production of the micro-course videos.
Observation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organize teacher meeting to review the micro-courses video and check the teaching content. 2. Communicate with the teacher to revise the part that is not appropriate in the micro-courses.
Reflection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on the teaching objectives of the course. 2. Reflect on the teaching content of the course. 3. Reflect on the teaching method of the course. 4. Reflect on the assessment of the course.

4.2 Results of the First Round of Action

4.2.1 Course Objectives

After a comprehensive discussion with the coordinator and the English teachers in a primary school in Xi'an city in China, we formed the specific teaching objectives as follows:

First, help students master English vocabulary related to traditional, modern, global China and Xi'an. Second, help students learn to present the stories on traditional, modern, global China and Xi'an in English. Third, help students understand the similarities and differences in food, traditions, society, history, and values by way of comparison and contrast of the Chinese culture and the English culture so as to have a good understanding of the foreign culture as well as a deeper comprehension of the Chinese culture.

4.2.2 Teaching Content

Because the study was conducted in Xi'an city, the capital of 13 dynasties in China and the economic and political centre of the northwest of contemporary China. Based on Wang Yiwei (2015)'s idea of "three Chinas" and the local stories of Xi'an city, we selected 14 topics to be the content of the micro-course (see Table 2).

Table 2. Topics for the School-Based English Micro-Course

Categories	Topics
	Chinese New Year
	Chopsticks
Traditional Chinese and Xi'an Stories	The Past and Present of Xi'an City
	Stories of the Place Names in Xi'an
	Du Mu—A Famous Poet of the Tang Dynasty
	Panda as the Peace Ambassador
Modern Chinese and Xi'an Stories	Long March of the Red Army
	Eighth Route Army Office
	Story of Xi'an Aerospace Technology
	High-Speed Railway
	Youyou Tu as the Winner of a Nobel Prize
Global Chinese and Xi'an Stories	Traditional Chinese Medicine
	Delicious Food in Xi'an
	Terracotta Warriors

4.2.3 Teaching Methods

Based on the results of the first round of actions, we set the specific teaching method for the three stages of class: before class, during class, and after class.

Before class: We divided students into groups to watch the micro-courses videos and learn new words and sentences according to the task sheet given by the teacher. Then, we directed each group to submit a 1-minute English video with their oral presentation on what they learned from the video.

During class: The teacher gave comments on their videos, explained the difficult points if any, and presented the differences and similarities between the English culture and the Chinese culture based on the task sheet of the topic.

After class: We required students to conduct discovery learning based on the micro-courses content, find materials related to the courses content for extended reading, and share reading materials and reading experiences through WeChat (a kind of web-based communication software).

4.2.4 Assessment

We tested the students' ability to narrate the Chinese stories and their cross-cultural ability before and after-action using pretest and post-test papers (please see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Test Paper

The test paper had a total of 54 items, and the test lasted for 1 hour. The test paper consisted of two parts. The first part was a cultural and cross-cultural knowledge test (14 items), which covered three dimensions: cognition, affect, and operation (behaviour) with seven items on cognition, four items on affect, and three items on operation. We used multiple-choice questions, blank filling, and true-or-false questions in this part. The second part was a vocabulary test with 40 items, and we mainly selected the vocabulary from the Simplified Chinese English Dictionary, Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (Chinese Proficiency Test), and some bilingual reading materials, which included three dimensions: traditional Chinese and Xi'an stories, modern Chinese and Xi'an stories, and global Chinese and Xi'an stories. We used multiple-choice questions, blank filling, and matching in this part.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the test paper, we further verified the pre- and post-test papers using SPSS 27.0. We checked the reliability using the Cronbach's alpha, and the validity using KMO and Bartlett. The reliability of the test paper was 0.808, which is greater than 0.5, and the validity was 0.648, which is greater than 0.6. Therefore, it was suitable in this study to investigate students' cross-culture competence.

5. The Second Round of Action Research

5.1 Description of the Second Round of Action

In the second round of action, we implemented and recorded micro-courses teaching after adjusting the specific teaching time, teaching method, and evaluation method. We then set the following steps as described in Table 3.

Table 3. Schedule of the Second Round of Action Research

Steps	Content of Action
Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adjust the specific teaching time. 2. Adjust and set the specific teaching method. 3. Adjust the teaching evaluation method.
Action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify specific teaching objectives. 2. Implement micro-courses teaching and record the teaching process. 3. Test and interview students. 4. Conduct interviews with teachers.
Observation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observe and record the teaching process in class. 2. Observe students' performance in the class and their homework.
Reflection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on whether the setting of teaching objectives is appropriate. 2. Reflect on whether the teaching content has improved students' ability to narrate Chinese stories. 3. Reflect on whether the teaching method can arouse students' interest. 4. Reflect on whether the mode of assessment meets the purpose of promoting students' effective learning.

We recruited 163 students from four classes in a primary school in Xi'an for the research. We implemented the pretest and post-test in the first and ninth week, respectively, of the first semester of the 2023–2024 school year using the cross-cultural competency test paper. Using SPSS27.0, we analyzed the cross-cultural competence tests to examine whether micro-courses teaching could improve students' cross-cultural competence in cognition, affect, and operation, and gauge which aspects had significantly improved. Then we interviewed teachers and students after the test to understand the students' improvement in cross-cultural communication abilities and the teachers' ideas in designing the course.

5.2 The Development of the Ability to Tell Chinese Stories in English

5.2.1 Results and Discussions on Vocabulary Test

First, we analyzed the data on the vocabulary test before and after micro-courses teaching through SPSS 27.0.

Table 4. Paired Samples Statistics of Vocabulary Test

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest Results	29.15	163	5.609	.439
Post-test Results	30.21	163	5.546	.434

Table 5. Paired Samples T-Test of Vocabulary Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Post-test–pretest	1.061	5.170	.405	.262	1.861	2.621	162	.010

The results can be seen from Table 4. For “Pretest” results, the mean is 29.15 and the standard deviation is 5.609. For “post-test results” the mean is 30.21 and the standard deviation is 5.546. Compared to the pretest, the mean value had increased, and the standard deviation was smaller, indicating that the differences in the post-test results are relatively smaller.

Further, as demonstrated in Table 5, the data reflect that the value of Sig was 0.010, which are lower than 0.05, showing that students' test scores underwent a remarkable change after micro-course teaching. Therefore, micro-courses teaching had a positive impact on students' vocabulary learning, resulting in higher scores and smaller differences in the post-test results.

The students' improvement in vocabulary learning may be a reflection of the following aspects. First, micro-courses can help students better understand and master language knowledge. By watching and learning the content repeatedly, students' understanding of vocabulary deepens, thus showing more consistent results in the post-test. Second, micro-courses allow students to learn at their own pace and based on their own needs. For those students who may learn more slowly in traditional classrooms, micro-courses provide unlimited learning opportunities, helping them to understand and remember the specific words in the video. Third, the design and presentation of micro-courses can be appealing to students, thus increasing their interest and involvement in learning. Effective teaching methods can promote the learning effect of students, making the post-test results more consistent.

5.2.2 Results and Discussions on Cross-Cultural Competence Test

We conducted a further data analysis of the scores in the cross-cultural test via SPSS 27.0 (as shown in Table 6 and Table 7).

By analyzing Table 6 and Table 7, we see that the average cross-cultural scores before and after micro-course teaching were 11.20 and 11.06 respectively. The difference of means in the cross-cultural test before and after teaching is -0.147. Further, the value of Sig is 0.319, which is greater than 0.05, showing that there was no significant change in the cross-cultural test results after teaching.

Table 6. Paired Samples Statistics of Cross-Cultural Test

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cross-Cultural Test	Pretest	11.20	163	1.572	.123
	Post-test	11.06	163	1.537	.120

Table 7. Paired Samples T-Test of Cross-Cultural Test

Posttest-Pretest	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Cross - Cultural Test	-.147	1.880	.147	-.438	.144	-1.000	162	.319

This result is not surprising. First, Selinker (1972) believed that interlanguage is a language acquisition system constructed by learners. Learners will use the language rules of the native language and the target language accordingly, resulting in some "errors" in outputting the latter. Second, the interlanguage system of a foreign language learner can have different performances in phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, culture, and other aspects (Lv, 1993), which may extend the duration of the learning of both languages longer than for a monolingual learner. That might explain why the interlanguage system could have some positive influence on students' vocabulary learning, but a lesser and even negative impact on the acquisition of cross-cultural communicative competence. Vocabulary learning requires a comparatively shorter time, and the outcome can be observed easily in language output, whereas the progress of cross-cultural communicative competence requires the students to attain values, ideas, and some other implicit cultural factors, meaning it demands more time for observation. The time for this micro-course is relatively short, only 3 months. If learners approach other cultures with preconceived notions, interlanguage will form, which may hinder their true understanding of and adaptation to the cross-cultural environment for a period. Fortunately, the rule system of interlanguage is dynamic, and students are in the process of continuous correction and approximation to the standard target language. That is to say, although at the initial stage of learning, the influence of the learners' native language rules could be greater, the rules of the target language will gradually play a leading role in the learning progress (Selinker, 1972).

Therefore, compared with the development in vocabulary, the progress in cross-cultural competence requires a longer period to be observed.

Second, Vygotsky's (1920s) internalization theory emphasizes the influence of social and cultural environment on individual cognition and learning. He believed that the social and cultural environment provides the main conditions and supports for individual learning and development. Cross-cultural knowledge is relatively abstract and requires more practical cases and a cultural environment to help students understand, which makes it difficult to improve in the short term. Instead, the improvement of vocabulary scores is easier in the short term because the vocabulary itself is more concrete and can be mastered without the cultural environment.

Third, we can also use the duration of the intervention and the complexity of cross-cultural learning to explain the research results. The time for this micro-course is relatively short, only 3 months. However, cross-cultural learning involves the integration of two languages and two cultures. Language is an important part of culture, and different languages reflect different cultural characteristics and ways of thinking. Students need to master both languages at the same time and understand the cultural differences behind them, which is a highly complex task. In 13 weeks, students may have difficulty in fully understanding the deep connotations of the two languages and cultures, thus affecting the improvement of results in the cross-cultural test. Moreover, time limitation has a negative impact on the teaching effect, which can also be verified through the interview.

T1: Because of less time and high academic pressure, many of the field activities that students want to do have not been realized, and there is not much time to prepare beautiful mind maps for them.

T2: Some students feel that the time left for them is very short and there are few opportunities.

T4: The time schedule is a bit tight. If the class time is more sufficient, the teaching effect may be better, and it will also give the children more opportunities to share their outcomes.

Last, but not least, teachers' teaching concepts, teaching methods, and ways of evaluating students' learning will all have an impact on test results. The results of interviews and the test also indicate that the classes could achieve a more significant score improvement if their teachers had a correct understanding of teaching goals and teaching methods and employed multiple teaching approaches and assessment methods. We show the specific results in Table 8.

Table 8. Overall Results of Classes Taught by Different Teachers

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Post-test–Pretest
T1	Pretest	43.36	44	4.001	0.05
	Post-test	43.41	44	3.896	
T2	Pretest	42.21	42	5.668	-1.66
	Post-test	40.55	42	5.709	
T3	Pretest	40.65	40	5.563	2.4
	Post-test	43.05	40	5.439	
T4	Pretest	34.32	37	5.940	3.27
	Post-test	37.59	37	7.354	

It can be seen from Table 8 that the overall results of classes taught by T2 decreased, but the overall results of classes taught by T1, T3, and T4 all increased.

The following is an analysis of teachers' teaching concept, teaching methods, and teaching effects based on interviews.

Q1: How do you implement the teaching goal in this micro-course teaching? Can you give an example to illustrate?

T1: I think we must first clarify our teaching goals, whether it is knowledge transfer or skill development, or some promotion of traditional culture.

T2: In class, I mainly implement the purpose of this micro-course teaching through three periods, namely before class, during class, and after class.

T3: We should have a deeper understanding of traditional and modern culture about Xi'an and can spread them in English.

T4: We need students have an understanding of Chinese traditional culture and have the ability to tell Chinese stories in English.

In terms of the goals of micro-courses, T1 considered them to be knowledge transfer and skill development, as well as the promotion of Chinese culture. T2 did not mention what the teaching objectives were, but believed that implementing the teaching objectives is to do the tasks before, during, and after class. T3 and T4 described the teaching objectives in detail, and it is the real goal of micro-course teaching. The results showed that the grades of classes taught by T1, T3, and T4 had improved, whereas the performance of the class taught by T2 had not, and there was even a downward trend. Therefore, whether teachers can accurately understand the teaching objectives will affect their teaching methods and students' performance.

To further verify that teachers' teaching concepts have an impact on students' performance, we further observed and analyzed teachers' actual teaching classes. The results show that the teachers' understanding of the teaching concept described in the interview is consistent with the actual teaching behaviour in the teaching process. Although T1 only mentioned knowledge transfer and skill cultivation in the teaching objectives in the interview, the cultivation of students' cultural awareness and thinking quality was involved in the activities during the actual teaching process, such as organizing a group discussion on how to better introduce Chinese chopsticks in English (the use, etiquette and influence of chopsticks) and letting students express their feelings in English after watching the development of China's high-speed train. T3 and T4 described in detail and accurately that the teaching goal of this micro-course is to improve students' cross-cultural communication ability and narrate Chinese stories well. In the course of their actual teaching, they were not limited to the relevant vocabulary in the micro-courses' content, but expanded the content. For example, T3 guided students to talk about their favorite scientists in the micro-course about You Tu. In the micro-course on Stories of the Place Names in Xi'an City, T4 asked students to introduce the places of interest in said city. T1 equated the teaching goal with the teaching behaviour before, during, and after class. Therefore, the observation of this teacher's classroom shows that most of the teaching activities were focused on the micro-course itself, the teaching format was mostly question-and-answer, and group discussion was rarely involved.

Q2: Can you describe the method and process of micro-course teaching? What are you most concerned about during this process?

T1: First of all, I will inform students of the topic. ... Afterwards, I will distribute learning tasks and micro-course videos. ... After class, I will explain the teaching content in depth and ask students some questions and assign tasks to students: draw mind maps or record videos.

T2: This is basically the same as the first question I just answered. How to implement [the] objective is before class, during class, and after class.

T3: During class, students will work in groups to discuss relevant issues under the guidance of teachers and understand the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures.

T4: When we conduct micro-course teaching, we mainly use videos and pictures to present the content. Through vivid visuals, this teaching method not only ensures the efficiency of micro-courses, but also improves the teaching effect.

From the preceding interviews, it can be seen that the teaching methods used by teachers in the teaching process are also different. T1 used mind maps in the preview to activate students' existing experience as well as in the teaching process. T3 used classroom discussions, and T4 mentioned that videos and pictures can make the teaching process more interesting. However, T2 confused teaching methods with teaching implementation processes. The results also showed that the performance of the class taught by teacher T2 had not improved, and there was even a downward trend. Therefore, it can be seen that teachers' accurate understanding and application of teaching methods will have a positive impact on student performance and vice versa.

To further verify the influence of teachers' teaching methods on students' performance, we further observed and analyzed the actual teaching class of teachers. The results show that the teachers' understanding and use of the teaching methods described in the interview are basically consistent with the actual teaching behaviour in the teaching process. There was no significant difference among the four teachers' lead-in, either by playing micro-course videos or presenting reports by students, but there were differences in the organization of class

activities. T1 mentioned in the interview that she would play videos to link the old knowledge and the new version, but we observed other teaching methods as well. For example, T1 used a situational method in vocabulary teaching by asking students to make up sentences based on their weekend activities when taking the high-speed train to different places. Further, T1 also used various forms of group activities, such as group work, pair work, and individual work, to stimulate students' interest in learning and strengthen the learning effect. T3 and T4 often used group discussion in the teaching process. According to the observation, T4 focused on guiding students to compare the differences between Chinese and Western cultures by comparing traditional festival and delicious food. However, T2 rarely used group discussion in the teaching process, and mostly used the question-and-answer format to teach the content of micro-courses. We also found that the homework assigned by T3 was to expand the knowledge in micro-courses rather than the production of videos or tabloids as other teachers did. In conclusion, the organization of class activities of T2 was monotonous compared with other teachers. The observation further proves that teachers' accurate understanding and wide application of teaching methods will have a positive impact on student performance and vice versa.

Q3: In this process, how do you evaluate children's learning outcomes?

T1: The evaluation methods include Q&A in class, observing students' performance in class, feedback from parents, learning task list, and the video and PPT they made.

T2: [The] first important thing is our task list. The second is the report written by the child in the next class. Third, by talking about some of his gains in the on-site class. Fourth, when the content related to micro-lessons is involved in daily teaching, the mastery of the students is tested through language output.

T3: I first let them work in groups to learn from them what kind of content they want to learn, and then I will make adjustments based on students' feedback. There may be some children who are very capable, and I will let them try to introduce the food of their hometown in English. If a child even has trouble in reading, I will give them some tasks to upload, ask them to follow some important content in the micro-lesson, and then make this kind of mind map or note after class.

T4: We use questions in class to test whether we have completed the task list carefully.

From the preceding interviews, it can be seen that the methods to evaluate student achievements are the implementation of the assignment sheets, Q&A, classroom performance, and videos. However, teacher T3 made two points that were different from other teachers. First, before evaluating students' learning outcomes, she would first understand what everyone expected to learn through group discussions, and then make adjustments to the teaching content before forming an evaluation. Allowing students to learn what interests them, rather than imposing tasks on students, will inevitably improve the effectiveness of learning. In addition, she also conducted stratified assessments for students at different levels.

To further verify the influence of teachers' teaching methods on students' performance, we further observed and analyzed the actual teaching class of teachers. There was no significant difference among the four teachers' assessments in the lead-in. However, T2's act of providing a pointer and personally recording the video would be encouraging. In the class, T2 used a sticker of a red flower as a reward to evaluate students' performance. Some of the students in her class were only motivated by the reward, so they raised their hands to answer the question without carefully thinking about the question, whereas others who were not enticed by the little red flower were not motivated at all in the class. Furthermore, after finishing a question and rewarding the students, the teacher would quickly move on to the next question without paying attention to the feedback of most students, so it seemed that the class was highly motivated, but the true learning process had not been facilitated. We also found that the homework assigned by T3 was to expand the knowledge via micro-courses rather than the production of videos or tabloids as other teachers did. This may also explain why the test results of the class taught by T3 had a significant increase, but those of the class by T2 decreased.

5.3 The Development of Cross-Cultural Communicative Ability (Cognition, Affect, Operation)

5.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

To study the impact of micro-course teaching on students' cross-cultural communicative ability, we analyzed three subcategories of cultural and cross-cultural knowledge (cognitive, affective, and operational abilities) (see Table 9 and Table 10).

Table 9. Paired Samples Statistics of Cross-Cultural Test in Three Dimensions

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cognitive	Pretest	5.12	163	1.130	.088
	Post-test	4.65	163	1.269	.099
Operational	Pretest	2.454	163	.6402	.0501
	Post-test	2.82	163	.399	.031
Affective	Pretest	3.63	163	.587	.046
	Post-test	3.58	163	.617	.048

Table 10. Paired Samples T-Test of Cross-Cultural Test in Three Dimensions

post-test–Pretest	Paired Differences					t	df	sig. (two-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Cognitive	-.466	1.437	.113	-.689	-.244	-4.142	162	.000
Operational	.3681	.7532	.0590	.2516	.4846	6.239	162	.000
Affective	-.049	.830	.065	-.177	.079	-.755	162	.451

It can be seen from Table 9 that the mean of operational competence in the post-test score is greater than the pretest score, that is, $2.454 > 2.82$. It shows that the post-test score has a slight increase compared with the pretest score. Further, as demonstrated in Table 10, the data reflect that the value of Sig is 0.000, which is lower than 0.05, illustrating that students' test scores have an unremarkable change after micro-course teaching. However, the results of cognitive competence and affective competence have decreased, among which the decrease of affective ability is not remarkable.

The results show that micro-course teaching has a certain impact on students' operational ability, but the impact on cognitive and emotional ability is not significant or decreased. This may reflect the complexity of the learning effect, and the improvement of different aspects of ability is not necessarily synchronized. To further explore whether teachers' teaching behaviors have an impact on students' cognition, emotion and operation, we made a comparative analysis of the pre- and post-test scores of students in different grades taught by teachers in cognition, emotion, and operation. The specific results are shown in Table 11.

The results show that T2 class performed better in the cross-cultural competence test on cognitive, affective, and operational dimensions, although the overall score declined, as shown in Table 8 in 5.2.2. We examined the teaching videos of four teachers to find the reasons for it. The results show that T2 mainly explained local culture in classroom teaching almost without comparing Chinese and Western culture. Other teachers, especially T3, have infused the contrast into the classroom. This only confirms the interlanguage theory we mentioned earlier. When teachers add the content of comparison between Chinese and foreign language in the classroom, as a result, students will use the language rules of the native language and the target language irregularly, resulting in some "errors," which may explain their students' grades in cross-cultural decreases instead.

Table 11. Cross-Cultural Results of Classes Taught by Different Teachers

		Cognitive	Operational	Affective
T1	Post-test–Pretest	-0.74	0.70	0.05
T2	Post-test–Pretest	0.02	0.23	0.02
T3	Post-test–Pretest	-0.86	0.14	-0.19
T4	Post-test–Pretest	-0.47	0.36	-0.08

Additionally, “peace” and “different” in the third level and “communication,” “friendly,” and “coexistence” in the fourth level demonstrate students’ global awareness. They believe that China and the world are an interconnected and interdependent community. In the face of differences among countries, all nations of the world should communicate with each other in a friendly manner to seek peaceful development.

Therefore, it can be concluded that students’ cross-cultural communicative ability in the affective dimension has been improved. They not only have the self-confidence for the local culture but also the global consciousness.



Figure 4. Word Cloud Map on Operational Dimension

Table 14. Five Levels of Major Vocabulary on Operational Dimension

Level	Vocabulary
1	knowledge, Chinese, history, story
2	improve, vocabulary, culture, confidence
3	progress, English, expression, words
4	equality, objective, tolerance, respect, different, mutual, learning
5	better, promoted, ability, smooth, fluency, material, compare

Figure 4 is a word cloud map generated by extracting keywords from students’ answers on the operational dimension. As shown in Table 14, these words can be generally divided into five levels according to the frequency of the words occurring in the interview.

The students’ cross-cultural communicative ability on operational dimension has also been improved, which can be seen from the following three aspects.

First, many students believe that their ability to narrate Chinese stories and Xi’an stories has improved, which can be evidenced by the following high-frequency words: “improve” in the second level, “progress” in the third level, and “better” and “promoted” in the fifth level (see student 6’s words),

Student 6: I think my ability to tell the story of Xi’an has been improved, because the micro class contains a lot of Chinese stories, which I did not know before. I could tell Chinese stories in English more fluently and confidently because they learned a lot of relevant vocabulary.

Second, in terms of specific improvement, students’ English language application ability has been improved. They not only accumulated relevant knowledge materials and English vocabulary about Chinese stories, but also can speak English more fluently, smoothly, and confidently.

Third, the students also showed their critical thinking ability according to the words in the fourth level. They believe that Chinese and foreign cultures are equal and should be viewed objectively (see student 1’s words). We should show respect and tolerance for the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures. China and the rest of the world should learn from each other and seek common ground while setting aside differences (see student 3’s words).

Student 1: Different countries have different cultures; we should respect each other.

Student 3: I don't think there is any better or worse culture from different countries. The world is wonderful because of differences, and we should learn from each other and make progress together.

In summary, although scores of the cross-cultural competency test have not been improved significantly, progress in the cognitive, affective, and operational aspects can be witnessed. Therefore, school-based micro-courses can improve students' cross-cultural communication skills and better spread local culture.

6. Conclusions

To sum up, we have achieved all the objectives of the research. First, we confirmed the teaching objectives, content, method, and assessment of the school-based English micro-course during the first-round action. Second, after adopting English school-based micro-courses, the students' ability to narrate Chinese stories in foreign language improved significantly, which can be witnessed through the improvement of vocabulary scores and cross-cultural communication ability. Third, as for the specific impact of micro-courses on students' cross-cultural communicative ability, the students know more about both Chinese and Western culture and their difference on cognition. Further, they have built cultural self-confidence and global consciousness on the affect. For the operation, their English language application ability and critical thinking ability are improved.

Therefore, school-based micro-courses can improve students' cross-cultural communication skills and ability to better narrate Chinese stories.

7. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the complexity of cross-cultural communication competence, it takes a long time to improve. However, due to objective reasons, the second round of action research teaching practice lasted only 13 weeks. This is also one of the reasons why the test results of students' cross-cultural communication ability have not improved significantly. To compensate for this limitation, future researchers may opt for diachronic studies, extending the duration of teaching practice to 1–2 years or even longer. Over a longer period, researchers should concentrate more on detailed research on the factors that affect the improvement of students' intercultural communication ability during the implementation of school-based micro-lessons.

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