

Compulsory English Textbook Evaluation Based on Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (Icc) in Alignment with Chinese English Curriculum Standard (Cecs) Educational Policy

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the alignment of the intercultural component of Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Chinese English Curriculum Standards (CECS, 2022). ICC represents the international intercultural perspective, and CECS represents the Chinese intercultural perspective. This study answers 3 Objectives based on 3 research questions: 1. To conduct how compulsory English textbooks incorporate the intercultural dimensions of Byram's ICC framework. 2. To evaluate the alignment between compulsory English textbooks and the intercultural elements of the CECS educational policy. 3. To systematically examine the representation of knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural skills in textbooks and assess their alignment with CECS intercultural goals.

There are five dimensions of ICC: Knowledge, Intercultural Attitudes, Skills of interpreting and relating, Skills of discovery and interaction, and Critical Cultural Awareness. There are four dimensions of CECS: linguistic competence, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability.

Content analysis method of qualitative research is adopted, using ICC dimensions and CECS as the initial coding templates, 465 contents in 12 English textbooks were encoded and allocated separately, and frequency and percentage statistics were performed in all dimensions. The key finding of this article is: The data reveals that the two frameworks have a high overlap in the knowledge base (ICC-Knowledge/CECS-Cultural Awareness), while the critical dimension (ICC-Critical Cultural Awareness/CECS-Learning Ability) has a significant weakening.

The conclusion of this study is to obtain three results by 12 books on content analysis of the 5 dimensions of ICC and four dimensions of CECS: Height Alignment, Moderate alignment and Low alignment.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence (Icc), Chinese English Curriculum Standard (Cecs)

Introduction

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is a widely accepted framework in language education. It highlights the importance of not just learning to watch but also understanding and respecting different cultures. In today's globalized world, more communication across multicultural environments has become a very important thing for students (Byram, 1997). In the world today, ICC is widely accepted and applied in language teaching, making it a reliable and established framework for evaluating intercultural competence in education (Deardorff, 2006). Using ICC in the current study can help to make sure that the findings go along with global trends in English language education, contributing to a border conversation about how to prepare learners for a multicultural world.

The Chinese English Curriculum Standards (CECS) serve as a guideline for English language education in China, it outlines the goals and skills, and knowledge that students should achieve, including the ability to understand and respect cultural diversity (Wang & Liu, 2019). Since the current researcher is from China, the current study is aimed to contribute to improving English language education in the country. CECS is chosen because it reflects the specific educational context and the policy goal from China. Evaluating textbooks against CECS makes sure that the findings are relevant and practical for Chinese schools and students, helping the teachers and policymakers, and textbooks developers to address the gaps in intercultural communications education.

Combining ICC and CCS allows the current study to bring a bridge between the global theories, and local practices. ICC provides a well-accepted framework for understanding intercultural competence, while CECS reflects the specific requirements and goals of English language education in China. Measuring these two together can help to identify whether the global standard of intercultural communications education is being met with local content. This dual approach not only evaluates the effectiveness of the textbook but also highlights the opportunity to align Chinese educational practice with international trends. Such alignment is very important in preparing Chinese students to succeed in the globalized world (Chen, 2022).

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed for the current study.

1. How do compulsory English textbooks reflect the intercultural dimensions of Byram's ICC framework?
2. How do compulsory English textbooks align with the intercultural elements of the CECS educational policy?
3. How are knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural skills represented in the textbooks, and how do they align with CECS intercultural goals?

Objectives

The primary aim of the current study was to investigate the following objectives.

1. To conduct how compulsory English textbooks incorporate the intercultural dimensions of Byram's ICC framework.
2. To evaluate the alignment between compulsory English textbooks and the intercultural elements of the CECS educational policy.
3. To systematically examine the representation of knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural skills in textbooks and assess their alignment with CECS intercultural goals.

Literature Review

This chapter will elaborate on all the theoretical information used in this study and provide accurate theoretical support for this study.

Overview of the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Framework

Byram's (1997) ICC framework represents a comprehensive approach to developing intercultural competence in language education. The model comprises five key components: attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*).

According to Byram (1997), the attitudinal component emphasizes curiosity, openness, and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures. Deardorff (2006) highlights how these attitudes form the foundation for developing other ICC elements. Knowledge encompasses understandings of social groups, products, practices, and processes of interaction. According to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), this component requires both general and specific cultural knowledge.

The skills dimension involves two distinct abilities: interpreting/relating and discovery/interaction. Liu (2012) explains how these skills enable learners to mediate between cultures and engage in real-time intercultural communication. Critical cultural awareness, the framework's central element, develops learners' ability to evaluate cultural perspectives critically.

Recent developments have expanded the framework's application. Kramsch (2014) incorporates digital literacy and online interaction considerations, while Porto and Byram (2015) emphasize the framework's role in global citizenship education. Critical cultural awareness has also been considered the central element, which involves evaluating cultural perspectives, practices, and products critically using explicit criteria. Byram et al. (2002) emphasize its role in developing intercultural citizens who can engage critically with different cultural perspectives.

Chinese English Curriculum Standards (CeCS)

The Chinese English Curriculum Standards represent a significant educational framework that has evolved to meet the demands of globalization and intercultural communication needs in Chinese education. The latest version of CECS (2022 Edition) demonstrates China's commitment to developing students' comprehensive language abilities while emphasizing intercultural communicative competence as a core educational objective (MOE of China, 2022). This policy framework marks an important shift from traditional language-focused instruction to a more holistic approach that integrates cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills.

Recent reforms in CECS have specifically emphasized the integration of ICC into English language education at various educational levels in China. Wang and Chen (2021) note that the standards now explicitly incorporate intercultural elements as mandatory components of English language teaching. It also represents a significant departure from earlier versions primarily focused on linguistic competence (Wang & Chen, 2021). This policy evolution reflects China's recognition of the importance of preparing students for international engagement in an increasingly interconnected world (Li & Edwards, 2023).

The alignment between CECS and ICC principles is evident in several key policy areas. Zhang et al. (2022) identify three primary dimensions where the standards support ICC development: cultural awareness cultivation, practical communication skills, and cross-cultural understanding. Their analysis reveals that the curriculum standards now require

teachers to incorporate cultural knowledge and intercultural communication scenarios in to their daily teaching practices, marking a significant shift in pedagogical approach (Zhang et al., 2022).

Empirical studies have demonstrated both the implementation challenges and successes of these policy initiatives. Liu and Wang (2023) conducted a comprehensive study of 50 high schools across different provinces, finding that while the policy framework provides clear guidelines for ICC integration. Liu and Wang (2023) also practically implement varies significantly across regions and schools. Their research highlights the importance of teacher training and resource availability in successful policy implementation (Liu & Wang, 2023).

Furthermore, research by Chen and Liu (2022) indicates that schools successfully implementing the new standards have seen measurable improvements in students' intercultural awareness and communication abilities. Their longitudinal study of 1,200 students over three years showed that students exposed to ICC-integrated curriculum demonstrated superior cross-cultural communication skills compared to those following traditional English language instruction methods.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research design with a focus on content analysis will use to examine the integration of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) within English language teaching (ELT) in the Chinese educational context. The research investigates the extent to which compulsory English textbooks for senior high school students align with Byram's (1997) ICC framework and the Chinese English Curriculum Standards (CECS).

The population for this study includes all compulsory English textbooks used in senior high schools across China. From this population, a sample of 12 textbooks has been selected. These textbooks are part of the national curriculum and are widely used in classrooms, making them representative of the materials shaping students' linguistic and cultural competencies. The sample was chosen purposively to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the textbooks' content and their alignment with ICC and CECS frameworks.

The analysis focuses on the cultural and linguistic components embedded in the textbooks, including content, language activities, and pedagogical approaches. Byram's ICC framework is used as the primary analytical tool to assess how the textbooks address intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness. The CECS serves as a supplementary framework, ensuring that the analysis aligns with national educational policies and objectives.

Data analysis involves systematically coding and categorizing the content of the textbooks to identify explicit and implicit representations of ICC elements. The study examines the depth, breadth, and quality of cultural content, as well as the integration of intercultural communication skills in learning activities. The findings will highlight strengths and weaknesses in the textbooks' conformity to Byram's ICC framework and CECS guidelines, providing valuable insights for curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers.

Research Findings

The researchers presented the findings of the current study, which used 12 Chinese English textbooks to conduct content analysis for intercultural fields. After analysis, the results of ICC and CECS are obtained, and the research findings are introduced in detail in this chapter.

Findings from Research Objective 1

The first research objective was to conduct how compulsory English textbooks incorporate the intercultural dimensions of Byram's ICC framework.

Byram's ICC framework, which includes five main dimensions: Knowledge, Intercultural Attitudes, Skills of interpreting and relating, Skills of discovery and interaction, and Critical Cultural Awareness.

Table 1 ICC Dimensions Percentage

ICC Dimensions	Frequency	Percentage
Knowledge	181	38.92
Intercultural Attitudes	117	25.16
Skills of Interpreting and Relating	83	17.85
Skills of Discovery and Interaction	52	11.18
Critical Cultural Awareness	32	6.88
Total	465	100.00

Findings from Research Objective 2

The second research objective was to evaluate the alignment between compulsory English textbooks and the intercultural elements of the CECS educational policy.

Chinese English Curriculum Standards (CECS, 2022), include four main elements: linguistic competence, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability.

Table 2 CECS Elements Percentage

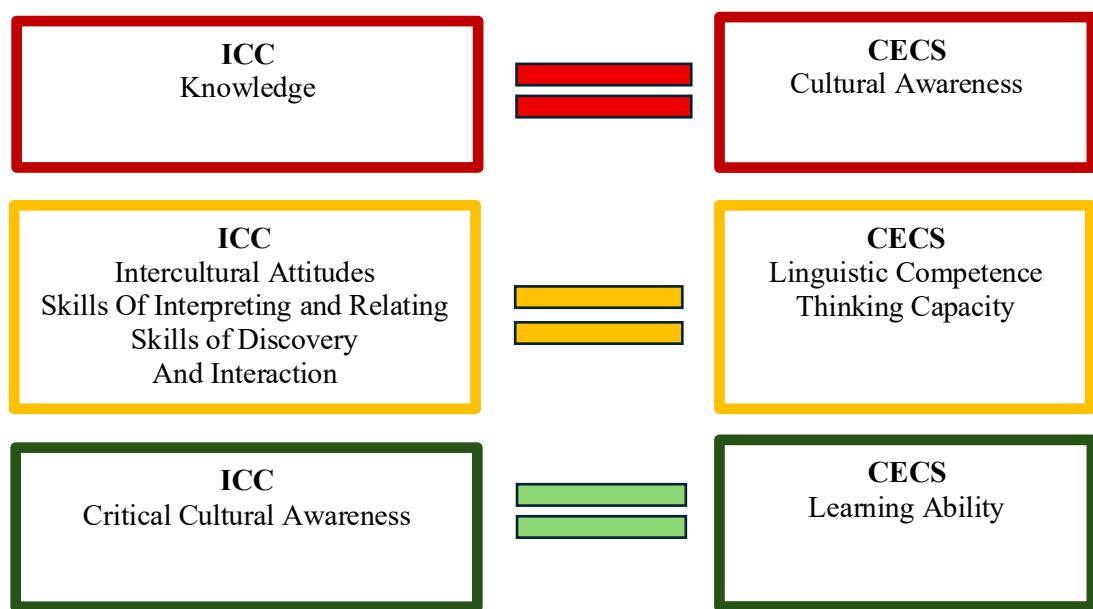
CECS Elements	Frequency	Percentage
Cultural Awareness	214	46.02
Thinking Capacity	140	30.11
Linguistic Competence	63	13.55
Learning Ability	48	10.32
Total	465	100.00

Findings from Research Objective 3

The third research objective was to systematically examine the representation of knowledge, attitudes, and intercultural skills in textbooks and assess their alignment with CECS intercultural goals.

Table 3 ICC And CECS Percentage Table

ICC And CECS	Frequency	Percentage
CECS\Cultural Awareness	214	23.01
ICC\Knowledge	181	19.46
CECS\Thinking Capacity	140	15.05
ICC\Intercultural Attitudes	117	12.58
ICC\Skills of Interpreting and Relating	83	8.92
CECS\Linguistic Competence	63	6.77
ICC\Skills of Discovery and Interaction	52	5.59
CECS\Learning Ability	48	5.16
ICC\Critical Cultural Awareness	32	3.44
TOTAL (valid)	930	100.00
Total	930	100.00

**Figure 1:** ICC and CECS Alignment Component

Conclusions

This study results were derived from content analysis between Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Chinese English Curriculum Standards (CECS, 2022).

Height Alignment: ICC's "Knowledge" and CECS's "Cultural Awareness" account for the highest proportion in texts (over 40% in total), confirming that both regard cultural factual knowledge (such as festivals, customs and cultural backgrounds) as the cornerstone of ability, reflecting cognitive consensus.

Moderate alignment: CECS\Thinking Capacity, ICC\Intercultural Attitudes, ICC\Skills of Interpreting and Relating, CECS\Linguistic Competence, ICC\Skills of Discovery and Interaction have a moderate proportion, indicating that although CECS does not directly name "skills", it implicitly intercultural behavior requirements through thinking and language application.

Low alignment: ICC's Critical Cultural Awareness accounted for the lowest proportion (<5%), and "CECS-Learning Ability" did not cover critical stances; this result may reflect that China's curriculum standards focus more on cultural understanding than critical thinking.

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