



Exploring Intercultural Communication Barriers and Taboos and its Significance in the Learning of EFL by Chinese University Students

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Abstract

The research was carried out with the purpose of exploring intercultural communication barriers and taboos and its significance in the learning of EFL by Chinese University students. The survey was done at Hanjiang Normal University from second year students majoring in English language. The targeted students were comprised of three classes with an average of 36 students in each class. I have classified the three groups as Group A, B and C. Group A comprised of 31 girls and 5 boys while Group B was made up of 30 girls and 6 boys and finally Group C was comprised of 34 girls and 2 boys. The statistics shows that girls outnumbered boys in all the three classes. The survey was initiated through a debate organized for all the students to participate in their groups of 6 in each class attempting the debate topic on whether intercultural communication barriers and taboos had any effect on the students' learning of English as a Foreign Language. It has been noted that most of the students have been learning English for about ten years. Knowing what to say and what not to say when Chinese students of English language meet foreigners from different countries created many challenges in establishing proper way of relating daily issues. Some perceived taboos and certain vocabularies and phrases which are perceived to have negative communication results are just but a few leading examples.

Keywords: Intercultural communication; EFL significance; Hindrances; Chinese university students

Introduction

The learning of English language by Chinese students in Chinese Universities has increased in recent years. The major reason being the constant rising and opening up of Chinese market to the whole world which happens to speak English most. Most former British colonies and all Anglo-Saxon countries speak English. Many Chinese students wish to pursue further studies or open business in the world's major economies such as in the US, UK, Canada and Australia while some wish to work in Chinese multinational corporations where English gives them more advantages. During the survey I discovered that most of the students wish to work as primary school English teachers in China after their graduation. The trend in China after the COVID 19 era is that most primary and secondary school English teachers preferred qualified Chinese natives to teach while most foreign experts of English language are preserved places in Chinese Universities. There are many inter-

cultural communication barriers and taboos as far as Multi-Ethnic groups in China are concerned. The same is also not different from international communities where different cultures are made up of many communication barriers and taboos. The learning of English in Chinese Universities as a foreign language is conducted inclusively through in-class and off-campus as well as the use of digital technologies for learning languages such as some software and other artificial intelligence methodologies. The English books used in some Chinese universities are mostly locally designed and produced in line with local culture and local ideologies best for the promotion of a Chinese way of life and philosophy and do not have a lot of comparative study of local and international cross cultural experiences in intercultural communication barriers and taboos. The rate of limitation to vocabulary related to intercultural Communication barriers and taboos is very high to Chinese university students who end up fearing and hesitating the potential use of ambiguous words in their real application of communication. Since language is fundamentally influenced by a certain people's

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way of life, culture and moral values in a given society or community it is basically important to note that it's difficult to separate cultural values from basic semantics. Some basic examples are that it's very unlikely to hear a Chinese native or student to publicly use the (F) word the way it is used in the United States. Upon hearing such an utterance from any Chinese native or student one can quickly conclude or assume that such a person might have lived in the USA before or is just a novice person with no respect to Chinese communication moral values and taboos.

Research Background

Intercultural Communication barriers and taboos

The term "Intercultural Communication" has been purely defined relatively the same by many writers, researchers and authors from ancient to modern day due to human civilization that has found mass human movement in the world in search of a better life, new discoveries, exploration and world power dominance. The encountering of communication challenges due to lack of knowledge to the diverse cultural differences among world people has driven many scholars to participate in information gathering of the human cultures of the world, barriers and taboos so as to improve better communication among different people [1]. Views (ICC) as not new but traces many centuries back when nomads and religious missionaries wandered around the world where they met with different types of the human races with different way of life and different cultures. Knowing what other people of the world like or dislike, love or hate, accept or not taboo requires perpetual search of this deep knowledge to overcome the barriers in appropriate communication [2]. Describes intercultural communication as the capacity to understand how to relate with people of different beliefs, cultures, religion, values and languages [3]. Asserts that the opposite of (ICC) is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the belief in the centrality of one's own cultural standards. Before the opening up of China to the outside world many Chinese people were stereotyped in the centrality of the Chinese culture as the only culture until some few decades ago with the opening of the country to the world full of different cultures and different ways of communication now many Chinese people especially Chinese university students are very passionate to know more about how other races converse.

Definition of terms

Intercultural communication "Barrier"

China like any other country in the world has also various intercultural communication barriers [4,5]. Specifically defines intercultural communication barriers as the void of interaction of people due to their differences in ideology, culture, beliefs and values. The author further recommends that the sustainability and

development of any society is through the promotion of an effective mechanism that guarantees interaction of people of different ethnic groups, different ideological views and different beliefs by creating different communication platforms. In China 's recent years the rise of international exchange programs have appeared especially in universities to promote culture to culture knowledge through sports, art and second language proficiency. Modern Chinese and Ancient Chinese culture has not changed much regardless of it be it in urban or rural setups communication in China is also like anywhere else expressed in various forms such as verbal and nonverbal by differently people of different ethnic groups therefore creating and bringing many barriers to Chinese students when contacting English lessons. As [5] insist that failure to cope up with positive and negative aspects of intercultural exchange gives birth to barriers stated by [6], such as stereotypes, language, anxiety, religion, ethnocentrism, prejudice ,assumption of similarities instead of the differences and lastly but not least motivational barriers [5]. Insist again asserting that culture often times divides and separates people that bringing them together and the reason why many people usually prefers to go along with things that are only familiar to them.

Intercultural Communication "Taboos"

China is one country that has enormous amount of communication taboos in regards to intercultural interaction and communication [7,8]. In the author's quest to show intercultural communication between China and the West the author asserts that in the two blocks of the West and the East (Western society and Chinese society) two forms of communication; "Verbal and Non Verbal" communication carry various taboos as far as intercultural communication is concerned. The definition of the word "taboo" is taken differently by different world societies [8]. Asserts that in ancient China this word was a definition of the invisible laws of things that were not allowed to be said or done in a particular community or in an ethnic group in protection of humanity in certain perceived physical and non-physical dangers [9]. Defines "taboo" as to mean "to be forbidden" or not to be allowed either by action of speaking, touching or doing and usually followed by punishment in the form of physical or spiritual depending on a societal belief [10]. Describes taboo as a transfer of messages that are regarded as personal and private in a way that is not offensive in nature. In this case these two definitions shows that Ismail I.R's view of "taboo" as a very strict and no go area topic unlike Rogers' view which has room for communication of taboo things but with limitations to privacy and personal. In my view a "taboo" is the "don'ts practiced by other people in different communities and societies. They may either be things to do with spiritual beliefs or physical things which if done may have some very negative implications to the individual or the people of that society [11]. Describes "taboo" not only as "prohibited" but also as "sacred" that



was originally adopted from the Polynesian people and their language [12]. L describes “taboo” as to be not socially accepted but only related to religious belief norms.

Numbers taboo

There are more than six thousand languages in the world and Chinese is the most spoken language followed by English. Considering that in China alone there are 56 different ethnic groups comprised of different cultures and dialects it is very difficult then to assume how possible it should be for Chinese people to know more about the outside world cultures and languages [13]. Asserts that language is assumed and perceived as a barrier to the study abroad programs since it gives limitations to students’ interaction with foreign cultures [14]. Asserts that Chinese language specifically the Chinese words plays a very important role in shaping the Chinese culture. The author links some Chinese words such as number (four) 四 (sì) which is phonologically linked to the word (death) 死 (sǐ) because of the differences in the Chinese dialect some Chinese ethnic groups do not separate the pronunciation of these two words which ultimately results in the taboo usage of the number (four). Many if not all Chinese people do not buy phone numbers with a number (four) because they take it as associated with death. In Chinese language number (six) is a lucky number especially a triple six (666) is taken as a very lucky number to the contrary to Western Christian world who by biblical view triple six (666) is the sign of the biblical anti-Christ. The Chinese people according to their culture guiding to the knowledge of what to say or do and what not to say and do as far as intercultural communication is concerned is also found in Chinese numbers. Number “seven” 7 is regarded as representing bad lucky. So as many and most of Chinese people try by all means to avoid things with number “4” such as living in the 4th floor, phone numbers with “4” it is also the same with number “7”. It’s a bit funny to foreigners when they come to China when they may fail to find a 4th floor written as such because it is in some places written as 3A and 3B just as to avoid to write 4th floor. However some Chinese who now know some of the Western cultures have come to know that number “4” in some countries such as in the US it is actually not a taboo number as alluded by [15] that the common “Thanks Giving” festival in the US is actually on the 4th Thursday in November. The US Freedom or Independence Day is also on the 4th of July. Also in the Western countries such as in the UK number “13” thirteen is an unlucky number due to the belief by many Christians who assert that the biblical Judas Iscariot was the 13th person to sit with Jesus at the table during Jesus’ last supper. Judas who later sold Jesus to the Roman authorities who thereafter handed Jesus to the Jewish leaders who crucified him to death. It is perceived that this also happened on the 13th day. In this case number “13” is taken as a number symbolizing “betrayal” therefore

in many western countries who believe in Christianity avoid the use of number “13” in their gathering or eating at a table with 13 people. You can also fail to find a floor written “13th” floor. It may actually be written 12A and 12B just as to avoid writing number “13” [15]. Also reminds some foreigners in China who may not be aware of some of the Chinese taboos especially when dealing with the elderly people concerning their age. The belief that Chinese famous ancient scholars such as Confucius and Mencius who died at 73 and 84 years of age may depict the full length of earthly life so numbers 73 and 84 are a taboo in Chinese culture because of the fear of death. When a Chinese old person is 73 or 84 years old do not say on their birthday “wish you many more years” because they believe they are not different from the living dead. It is therefore critical for both foreigners and especially Chinese students to know these differences such as the ones shown above. If there are no such awareness to the Chinese students in their course of learning they may face great hindrances in the possible way to have smooth communication with the people in the western hemisphere.

Giving of gifts taboo

In Chinese culture a person should never give a gift in singular form but in pair form. When giving a gift never give a clock or a watch as a gift because by so doing you are only wishing “death” to that person Also the giving of a green hat as a gift to a girl friend is only but a sign of divorce. It is also in the same context described by [15,16] mentions the taboo use of an umbrella as a gift. In Chinese culture an umbrella word 伞 (sǎn) is taken similarly with the Chinese word 扇 (shàn) which is an English word for a “fan”. The Chinese sound of umbrella is said to sound the same with 散 (sàn) which means “separate”. In this case giving a girlfriend an umbrella is more of a wish of a separation.

Eating taboos

When eating with Chinese chopstick one must avoid sticking the chopsticks in rice or leaving the chopsticks vertically in the bowl. This act is a sign of remembering the dead. Even though most countries don’t use chopsticks when eating but because of the influx of many foreigners flooding into China in recent years the great need to give and show awareness when they start using chopsticks during the time they visit, study, stay or work in China. When eating a pear 梨 (lí) in China one must not cut it or use a knife to cut it because the Chinese word 梨 (lí) for pear sounds the same as 离 (lí) which means “leave” which when used in the sense such as “cut the pear” in Chinese it will mean (separate) 分梨 (fēn lí). The eventual implication will be wishing a separation of people such as in a relationship. Lastly but not least on some Chinese taboos is the issuance of a glass as a gift. In China one must never give a glass 杯 (bēi) because the same Chinese word



sounds the same with the word 悲 (bēi) which means (sadness). The collection of glasses in China is called 杯具 (bēi jù) which also sounds the same with 悲剧 (bēi jù) which means (tragedy). When Chinese students meet foreign students their first fear is about the differences they don't know about the foreigners' sense of belief, culture and values they uphold. The fear to offend and to be offended is the first hindrance to communication between Chinese students and foreigners. In countries where Islam is the majority religion eating taboos are a norm. Muslims do not eat pork nor do they eat in a restaurant where some meat has not been prepared the Islamic way of belief. Travelling to such countries needs more caution on issues dealing with eating beliefs. Inviting Muslims to a dinner or party one has to be very cautious on not to mess up the whole party due to some eating taboos. Never say "this is delicious" when referring to pork when you are eating at the same table with a Muslim. Most Westerners do not eat animal offal unlike in China where every meat is edible. It is very important to not offend someone who has different cultural beliefs and taboos when dealing with issues pertaining food either by religious basis or by ethnicity.

Death and diseases taboos

All humanity fear death and sicknesses. No one under normal situations prefers to die or to get sick unless one is under the influence of certain beliefs or other influences. In China because of the fear of this phenomena the term "death" 死亡 (sǐ wáng) is usually substituted by other euphemism in order to avoid the impact of the feelings it brings about. In many cases most Chinese people would prefer to avoid the term "death" by saying the following terms described by [8.2] such as;

"He is gone-他走了 (tā zǒu le)"

"He is asleep-他睡了 (tā shuì le)"

"He has rested-他休息了 (tā xiū xi le)" "He has passed on-他不在 (tā bù zài le)"

The death of the People's Republic of China's Prime Minister 李克强 (lǐ kè qiáng) in October of 2023 was marred with international condolences but most remarkable were condolences shared by the Chinese people. In order to avoid the use of the term "death" many condolences online were expressed as follows;

"He has gone, but he has not gone-他走了, 但他没走了 (tā zǒu le, dàn tā méi zǒu le)"

"He has gone, but he is forever living-他走了, 但他永远活着 (tā zǒu le, dàn tā yǒng yuǎn huó zhe)"

"He has gone, but history will forever remember him-他走了, 但历史将永远铭记他 (tā zǒu le, dàn lì shǐ jiāng yǒng yuǎn míng jì tā)"

All these are more acceptable ways to relate to issue dealing with death in China as a means of comforting the grieved ones. It's a taboo in China to openly say "death". Some funerals in some other places can be held quietly in order to avoid too much emotions caused by death. In China even if a person's illness is very serious no one speaks in a way of its seriousness in avoidance of thinking about death. Often time's people simply say in a positive way like;

"He is not serious-他的病不是严重 (tā de bing bù shì yán zhòng)" He is not serious-他没事儿 (tā méi shì er)". In so doing only serves to avoid the feeling brought about seriousness of illness that may cause death. A clear example has been illustrated by [17], assumes that even during the outbreak of COVID 19 many people avoided to be asked about if they had contracted the virus or not because of fear of being stigmatized by the society. In China it only became not too much of a taboo to ask about it during the end of the year 2022 because then there was a scientific belief that those who would have contracted the virus were now safer compared to those who had not. During that time I remember it well that even in the public transport you could hear people freely saying, 阳过了 (yán gòu le) which means that they already contracted the virus. Stigmatization due to the issues of health concerns has always been seen in the long past centuries in many parts of world societies. During the ravaging time of HIV, AIDS and Ebola etc has seen many people around the world being stigmatized due to the seriousness of such pandemics hence resulting in many cultures to take it as a taboo to be asked anything related to personal health issues.

Salary, marital status and age taboo

In China never ask one's age because it is deemed as one's privacy. Never ask one how much he/she earns in salaries and wages because it is also taken as one's privacy. The funny part of it is that many Chinese ask these questions to foreigners working or studying in China. Some westerners of course not all westerners also do not find it easy to be asked about their age and their salaries. Lastly but not least on this is that never ask a Chinese especially a lady if she is married or not. Many Chinese ladies in recent years prefer not to get married for various reasons so they choose not to be asked about their marital status. These three must never be asked in China otherwise one risks to be unfriended. During my random class survey I discovered that many university students be it boys or girls don't not feel comfortable to be asked if they have a boyfriend or a girlfriend even though the Chinese law says that girls can be married at 21 while boys can marry at 22. Most of the university's students in their second and third year who probably are over 20 years of age still do not take it likely to ask about their personal relationships even though they may have some relationship. I think from this observation from my class students



this is becoming a Chinese modern taboo. In most African countries it is a taboo to marry someone with similar surnames because it is assumed that you are related. In my lecture concerning the taboos that are known in China and what the students know of about some foreign countries I discovered that in China people with similar surnames can marry each other. African belief of same surname marriage is usually said to be followed by some mysterious misfortunes in such a marriage such as failure to have babies or having babies that dies soon after their birth. Without clear understanding of intercultural communication, beliefs, values, languages and taboos of other people of the world it is difficult to not offend each other in this world.

Love, marriage, and divorce taboo

China is a very complicated society in terms of issues dealing with Love, marriages and divorces. Ancient China and modern China seems to be varying in certain issues dealing with Chinese culture. As been alluded previously that one cannot easily separate ancient Chinese culture from modern Chinese cultures it is however not a comprehensive issue of choice of what to take and what not to take as far as Chinese culture is concerned particularly when taboos are the subject of the matter. Generally speaking the majority of ancient Chinese culture is considerably followed [18]. Reveals a number of issues that cannot publicly said in Chinese society because it's a taboo. When regarding to issues dealing with Love, marriage and divorce there are many things foreigners need to understand about them. China is a conservative society. In China it's a taboo to speak the following words in public; masturbation 手淫 (shǒu yín), oral sex 口交 (kǒu jiāo), orgasm 性高潮 (xìng gāo cháo), homosexuality 同性恋 (tóng xìng liàn), rape 强奸 (qiáng jiān), incest 乱伦 (luàn lún), menstruation 红潮 (hóng cháo), genital organs 外生殖器 (wài shēng zhí qì), prostitution 卖淫 (mài yín), copulation 交媾 (jiāo gòu). These words cannot be freely expressed in Chinese society because they are deemed to have negative incitement to people's feelings and may also not be suitable the demographics of the public who may hear them being spoken of. However all these words can be said openly in some Western countries such as the US, Australia, Canada and the UK and causes no damage to their society. In China such words can only be heard of mostly by doctors at the hospitals, courts of law and in institutions of higher learning classes. Some few funny words that I have heard publicly spoken in Chinese societies and have no negative impact to the Chinese culture and taboos are; fart/breaking the wind/talk nonsense 放屁 (fàng pì), rubbish/nonsense/crap 狗屁 (gǒu pì), ass/buttocks 屁股 (pì gǔ). When most Chinese get angry they usually say these words without remorse. Sometimes you will hear them; will kick your ass 打屁股

(dǎ pì gǔ). Unlike in some countries such as in India, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan where divorces are very low and rare due to their religion and culture in modern China cases divorces have skyrocketed. Many divorcees usually don't mention the word "divorced" rather they will choose to say they are "single". The term "divorced" has a very negative impact in Chinese society because they don't feel comfortable to be regarded as one. The reason for this is because they fear to be regarded otherwise as weak and lack of fidelity. Traditional Chinese culture regarding marriages mostly follows the habit of arranged marriages hence Chinese boys usually have loss of words to propose love to the girl. This in turn has seen most Chinese girls proposing love from the boys. It's hardly easy to hear a Chinese boy saying to a Chinese girl "I love you 我爱你 (wǒ ài nǐ)" instead the Chinese girls do that. It must be clearly understood by foreign boys in China to be very cautious in regards to proposing love to a Chinese girl. This may seem to be an inappropriate posture. The way how issues of love are perceived differ from one culture to another. In Africa most of the cultures and religious beliefs uphold to the law of "sex after marriage" while in some countries China included "sex before marriage" is not a punishable offence nor is it a taboo.

Gender (biological) sex Taboo

The traditional pronoun "he/she" are at risk in their use across the world and usually causes misunderstandings and conflicts among people of different cultures and ideologies rising up due to how other people wish to be identified as. This subject is no longer a big issue in most Western countries such as in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Italy. It is however the opposite in most of the developing countries where the biological sex has no ambiguity of identification. In the Western countries some individuals have even gone to an extend of preferring themselves to be gender neutral. It is now a become a confusing situation when one sees a biological born male or female opting to be identified as the opposite of their natural biological identity. China is a conservative country and such issues are very uncommon. It is a very confusing scenario for many Chinese University students who are yet to understand this development in most Western countries. Intercultural communication taboos knowledge is therefore a need in EFL studies in Chinese universities.

Hindrances in the Learning of EFL by Chinese Students

There are many hindrances faced by Chinese students of the English major in many Chinese universities when learning English as a foreign language. The English students at Hanjiang Normal University lacks exposure to international students therefore have not found adequate opportunity of putting into practice what they would have learned in their English classes. The very few



international students who have just enrolled in the university are enrolled in one year Chinese language studies and have separate classes from the rest of the students who are mainly Chinese students. If there is no interaction with other foreign nationals you may never know what is right or wrong to talk about when it comes to intercultural communication barriers and taboos.

Lack of Intercultural communication lessons and exposure

In [19] research observation on a quite similar topic they discovered that the methodologies used in the teaching of Intercultural Communication in their English majors were not satisfying to the level of understanding how best Chinese university students can understand how to communicate with the outside world in English due to the diverse cultural differences. Many students in Hanjiang Normal University after I asked them why after a long time of learning English their proficiency was not high, the students answered and said that because most of the previous English Foreign teachers could not speak a little Chinese to fully address students' questions and areas they could not understand hence the students could not understand anything. The other reason also was that most Chinese English teachers may not have travelled abroad to gain international experience in terms of intercultural communication so their lectures usually fail short to address the students' expectations as far as intercultural communication is concerned. In this modern world where English is mainly spoken everywhere China as the fastest growing economy has found many University students wanting to learn English as a major in order for them to explore many world opportunities but the many issues concerning intercultural barriers and taboos are a big hindrance to their success.

Studying to pass exams habit

Many Chinese students right from middle school up to university have a habit of learning or studying English just for the reason and aim to pass the exams and not to know how to listen or to speak it. Many Chinese students can read and write English very well but speaking basic conversation is a non-starter. Most of the University students passed their high school English exams very well but may not be in a position to say out a self-introduction clearly. Several times I usually greet students as follows; "How are you doing?" This greeting is usually mistaken for, (What are you doing?), hence their responds is usually responded in the way of what they may be doing at that particular moment such as, (I 'm reading) etc.

Strong Chinese cultural belief systems

Many Chinese people have an ethnocentric feeling as far as their belief in their culture, language and customs is concerned [20].

Asserts that Chinese education is believed to be a very conservative nature of education whereby from primary school to high school most of the curriculum are crafted in a way to over-promote local system of education against well-known international systems. One can actually get surprised when teaching some subjects with topics perceived to be sensitive such as China and the West or about China and Japan the two neighbours. A sentiment of refrain to discuss cultural, political and social issues on countries such as the US and Japan are a common example. Japan is considered as a bad neighbour even by Chinese Kindergarten kids while America is considered as a bully that should never be tolerated. This deep cultural belief in Chinese culture by most Chinese people drives most students away from the love of foreign culture [19-21]. Argues that ethnocentrism and ethnolinguistic is a huge hindrance to the acquisition of intercultural communication between people of different cultural backgrounds. Chinese students like many of the Chinese people intending to know about how to relate with foreigners find it difficult to easily accept foreign languages and cultures due to the belief in some of them that foreigners must not be trusted.

Lack of awareness of intercultural communication barriers and taboos in Chinese universities

As far as [22] is concerned, intercultural awareness can be considered as the basis of communication? The absence of awareness in intercultural communication therefore may result in conflict communication. Because of the fast development of a modern human stereotype different from traditional known stereotypes in the world many cultures have evolved deeply different from what has been known of other people half a century before. Many Western people who have heard of the horrors, sufferings and poverty that was experienced in China some 50 years ago may still think there has not been any remarkable development in China and hence may still embrace former Chinese stereotypes that no longer exist now. When some foreigners come to China some still think of the old China they read from the books and end up saying things that may be regarded as taboos in China resulting in misunderstandings and conflict. The critical need for awareness of intercultural communication barriers and taboos in Chinese universities is an urgent necessity so that it may increase confidence in Chinese students to freely communicate at all levels with the people of the world.

Research Methodologies

This survey was carried out using diverse kinds of methodologies in order to collect data from the Chinese students majoring in English from second year students in Hanjiang Normal University. The definition of Research Methodology has been fully described [23] as a system of techniques, models and procedures that are used



to establish the outcome of a research. Apparently this research involved three different types of methodologies as will be shown below to come up with the results of this survey.

In-class debate methodology

In-class debates on the topic on how Intercultural Communication barriers and taboos act as a hindrance to the learning of English as a foreign language in the university were carried out from three classes of second year students whose major is English. This methodology helped in a very crucial manner on seeing how each student contributed facts and views in line with intercultural communication barriers and taboos.

Students homework methodology

Students from each class were given set questions to attempt on. These questions were later used in this research as research questions. Three classes of year 2021 English major comprised of 6 groups per class with 6 students in a group made PPT for group presentation. Each student in each group found time to contribute their findings.

Literature review methodology

The other methodology used was in the form of a literature review. The research has involved abundant previous local papers, researches and books written or published by Chinese scholars and writers. The other part of literature came from broad international publishers and researchers in line with the topic's objectives.

Research questions

These are set questions crafted in a way meant to address the causes and proposed expected solutions to the topic's objectives. The following are the research questions that were attempted by the students in this research;

- What are the intercultural communication barriers and taboos in the learning of EFL in Chinese Universities?
- What are the hindrances in learning EFL by Chinese varsity students as far as Intercultural communication barriers and taboos are concerned?
- What is the significance that is brought about by intercultural communication barriers and taboos in the learning of EFL by Chinese university students?
- What solutions can be offered as recommendations so as to overcome the hindrances?

Data Presentation

The research was conducted at Hanjiang Normal University in Hubei province, in the PRC. The department of foreign languages also contact English lessons for the students whose major is English and English for Business studies. Every year the

department recruits an average of 3 classes composed of an average of 36 students in each class taking English lessons. As one of the department's Associate Professor in English Linguistics part of my duties is to carry out surveys on the students' performance and the challenges they face in their learning of EFL. The following table shows where data collection was carried out. The above groups (class of 2021A, B and C) were had altogether 108 students comprised of 95 girls and 13 boys. These students are in their university's second year. Most of these students are 20 years old. They also claim to have at least 10 years of learning English. All these students claim to have passed their high school English exam. The students' writing and reading skills are very encouraging but their listening and speaking of English leaves a lot to be desired. Many of them say that during their middle and high school time they only practiced English only for the sake of wanting to pass the exam. They learn a lot through reciting texts. If you ask them something outside the text they usually get confused and lost. In my lectures I would have to speak slowly and repeat many times certain words and phrases so that they may have a better understanding. All data used in this research was collected from these 3 classes during my lecture of the autumn semester the students' homework results and in-class debate results are the sources that serves as proof in this survey.

Data analysis

Data analysis is crucial in the establishment of research results. The following charts, tables, graphs and pictures will help prove how intercultural communication barriers and taboos have some significance in the learning of EFL by Chinese university students with special mention to the survey carried out at Hanjiang Normal University using the class of 2021 as a sample to this survey. The debates, homework and some activities used speaks volumes as to the results outcome of this survey. It is from these results that shows how crucial the subject and topic of Intercultural Communication it is to the Chinese students. The above chart shows one of the significance of intercultural communication which helps many Chinese students learning EFL. The destinations of many Chinese students going abroad for study purposes covers all regions of the world with the US, Australia, UK and Canada topping the list. When Chinese students learn intercultural communication barriers and taboos in Universities the main aim is to know how to interact with people of the world wherever and whenever they go abroad for different reasons. English speaking countries are the top destinations by Chinese students wishing to go abroad for further studies. The survey above shows that 90% of Chinese students who go abroad for further studies only go to the English speaking countries while 5% goes to some Asian countries and 3% goes to France. 2% goes to other parts of the world. [24]About 260 000 Chinese nationals worked in Angola counting to the one 4th of the population of Chinese nationals working in

Africa. Even though China is the world's second biggest economy with expectations of overtaking that of the US so many Chinese citizens feel that there are also many opportunities out of China to explore. It is in this regard that sees many Chinese University students wishing to broaden their horizons by seeking to study EFL where they can have access to the language of how to interact with the outside world.

The picture above shows how important intercultural communication is to the people of the world. The picture is a reflection of the 5th BRICS summit that was held in (2013) in South Africa during the time of former South African president Jacob Zuma. University students learning EFL takes this as a great positive significance in their learning of EFL. Because different languages ,different races, cultural barriers and taboos are not things to be ignored in this modern world therefore the interest of many Chinese students of English major has gone up to understand more about intercultural communication barriers and taboos. BRICS is an international organization founded by the five permanent members that includes; Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa with the aim to foster economic relations. Many more countries have since shown great interest to join the BRICS with the likes of Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Iran, Argentina, Ethiopia, Algeria, Zimbabwe, and Indonesia among the long list. The rising of BRICS is assumed by many scholars, analysts and politicians as a shift from too much dependence of the world on western dominance pertaining to issues dealing with political, financial, security, social and cultural affairs. The grouping of BRICS usually asserted as the global south is becoming a talk in many global capitals because of its vision and mission that is described as balancing the world power or changing the world powers towards the Global South. The Global South as it is defined holds more global population as compared to the Global North which is dominated by Western European countries that has less population but determines world affairs with the rest of the population they do not represent. BRICS is found to be bringing more poor nations together to find a common goal of achieving development. China which is the leading country in the group has been praised by most of the poor nations for initiating what is described by China as the "Belt and Road" which seeks to bring development to the world through revival and creation of infrastructure, roads, bridges, railways, airports, seaports ,hospitals and schools. The need for knowledge pertaining intercultural communication barriers and taboos of these nations which most of them speak English as an official language is a significance to the Chinese students learning EFL. The expectations of more cultural exchange programs in these countries is high.

Most of the developed countries each year host several intercultural exchange groups from different countries in their universities and schools so as to promote global interaction and increase global participation to common global problems the world is facing.

China has since joined these many nations in organizing students exchange programs so as to promote intercultural communication. Many Chinese universities including Hanjiang Normal University have since started this initiative though even if it is still on a low note but the future tells more. According to the Chinese Ambassador to the Republic of Zimbabwe [24-26] at the International Conference held on October 11-12 at the University of Zimbabwe, said that the people to people exchange programs had helped the two countries of China and Zimbabwe closer to each other than before through the issuance of scholarship opportunities to many Zimbabwean students, opened more business opportunities in the country and also improved the diplomatic relations of the two countries. Zimbabwe's official language is English therefore it has helped many Chinese nationals to find it easier to communicate with Zimbabwean nationals. The learning of Chinese language by many Zimbabwean students has also helped a lot in mutual understanding of the two countries' cultures which is a beneficiary to all as far as intercultural communication barriers and taboos are concerned. It is very amazing to see that the movement of Chinese people since 1949 to 1979 was relatively low as compared to the year 2005 and 2006 alone as shown in the above pictograph and more surprisingly in the most recent years (Figure 1-5).

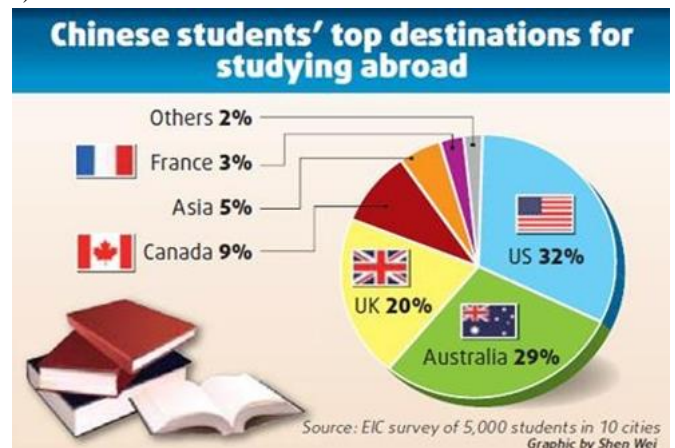


Figure 1: Creation of Study abroad opportunities.



Figure 2: Creation of working abroad opportunities.



Figure 3: Promotion of international affairs.



Figure 4: Intercultural Exchange groups.

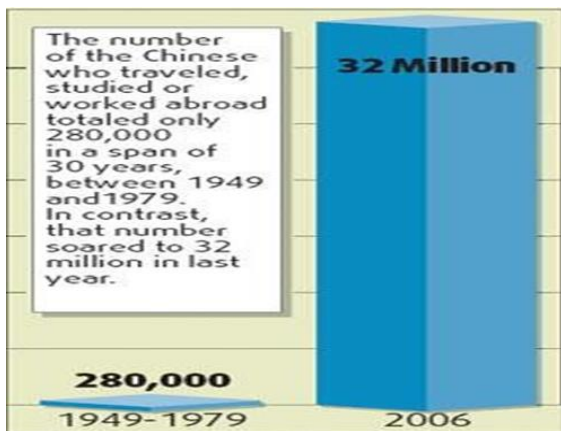


Figure 5: Chinese Touring and studying abroad historical.

Results

The following are the results following the costly work carried out at Hanjiang Normal University in Hubei, China during the course of my lectures. A total of 108 students took part in the survey. Of the 108 students, 95 were girls while the other 13 students were boys. These 108 students are from 3 classes of the year 2021 whose major is English. Most of these students have claimed that they have been learning English for the past 10 years. The results are

divided according to the research questions that were attempted through the students' debate facts and opinions and also from the students' findings during their homework. Each class comprised of 6 groups out of the 36 students in each class. Group 1 contested with group 2 while group 3 contested with group 4 and lastly group 5 contested with group 6. The homework was presented through PPT where an observation of the students' proficiency, gestures and facts were analyzed. The 3 classes brought out a total of 18 groups which ended up with 9 contestant groups. It is from these groups of Chinese students who brought up most of the problems that they say are faced by many of them when dealing with intercultural communication barriers and taboos and the ultimate suggestions on how to avoid the hindrances in their learning of EFL.

In-class debate results

During the in-class debate it has emerged that the 9 groups that contested together had different views as pertaining to the significance of intercultural communication barriers and taboos to the significance in the learning of EFL by Chinese University students. The views were divided as follows;

Group 2021A discussed the most common intercultural communication barriers and taboos that have some huge significance in the learning of EFL by Chinese University students. Most of them had very positive impact to their learning with the exception of only one that regards to gender (biological) sex taboo. Since China is a conservative society such subjects of talk do not hold any interest in open discussion therefore it was discussed with reservations. The table above was one of the research question discussed by group 2021 B during their debate session (Tables 1-3).

Table 1: English Class of 2021 A,B,C.

Class	Boys	Girls	Average Ages	Learned English period
2021 A	5	31	20	10 years
2021 B	6	30	20	10 years
2021 C	2	34	20	10 years
TOTAL	13	95		

Table 2: Intercultural communication barriers and taboos that have significance to the learning of EFL by Chinese university students.

Group 2021 A	Negative impact	Positive impact
Numbers taboo		✓
Giving of gifts taboos		✓
Eating taboos		✓
Death and Diseases taboo		✓



Salary,Marital status &Age taboo		✓
Love,Marriage ,Divorce taboo		✓
Gender(biological)sex taboo	✓	

Most of the hindrances had negative effects on the learning of EFL by Chinese university students. However the element of a strong Chinese cultural belief still stands in the middle of the significance of intercultural communication barriers and taboos in the learning of EFL has been greatly been expounded in previous sections of the research from the past and present situations in China. In this graph shown above represents the viewpoints discussed by Group 2021 C during the debate session whereby they shared some of the commonly topping significance in Chinese universities in regards to the learning of EFL. Topping the graph is the interests by Chinese university students to use their knowledge about intercultural communication barriers and taboos when travelling abroad. This class is followed by those who wish to work in international organization where this subject is very critically regarded. The third class is the being negatively and positively affecting the learning of EFL.

Table 3: The hindrances in the learning of intercultural communication barriers and taboos by Chinese university Students learning EFL.

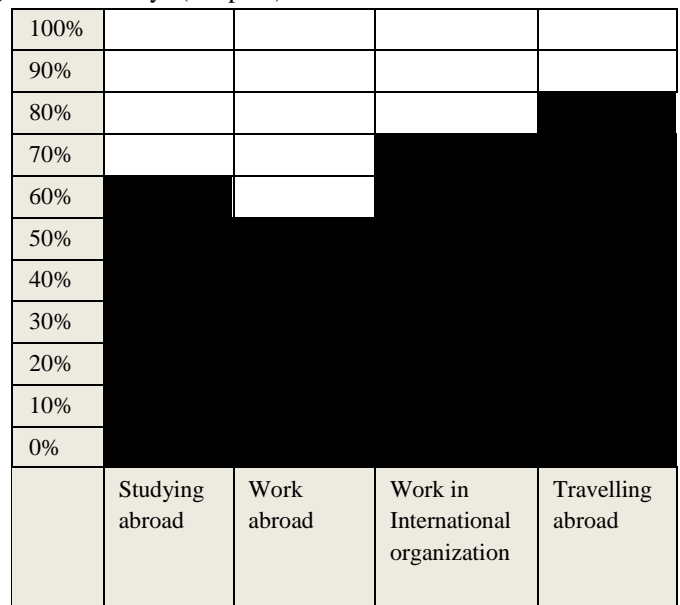
Group 2021 B	Negative Impact %	Positive Impact %
Lack of class lessons regarding Intercultural communication and exposure	90%	10%
Habit of studying to pass exams	70%	30%
Strong Chinese cultural belief systems	50%	50%
Lack of awareness as far as inter Cultural communication barriers and taboos are concerned	90%	10%

The main reason being that Chinese people are not easily taken away by foreign belief systems that comprises the barriers and taboos in intercultural communication. The habit of studying most of the school subjects in order to pass exams also shares a bit of stake as positively impacting the adaptation to intercultural communication barriers and taboo knowledge. Chinese culture and language has survived for the past 5000 years of traceable history and very intrinsic in the Chinese people’s hearts and soul. The acceptance of foreign culture and beliefs is not by the majority of the Chinese people. Chinese university students however have some open and liberal views towards the international community hence the growing of numbers of Chinese students going abroad

for study purposes. The significance of intercultural communication barriers and taboos in the learning of EFL has been greatly been expounded in previous sections of the research from the past and present situations in China. In this graph shown above represents the viewpoints discussed by Group 2021 C during the debate session whereby they shared some of the commonly topping significance in Chinese universities in regards to the learning of EFL. Topping the graph is the interests by Chinese university students to use their knowledge about intercultural communication barriers and taboos when travelling abroad. This class is followed by those who wish to work in international organization where this subject is very critically regarded. The third class is the being negatively and positively affecting the learning of EFL. The main reason being that Chinese people are not easily taken away by foreign belief systems that comprises the barriers and taboos in intercultural communication. The interests of Chinese university students’ wish to further their studies abroad. The last topping on the graph is the class that wish to work abroad in future. Very few Chinese university students wish to go abroad to work because the belief that China will one day in the near future become the leading country in the world in terms of economic is an inspiring element to many Chinese people to avoid leaving China to find work abroad.

Homework results

The students took a week to prepare their homework. The homework was prepared using PPT by individual students. The research questions showed in this research acted as the guide to their attempt of the homework task. A total of 108 students from 3 classes attempted the homework task. Of the 108 students 95 were girls and 13 boys (Graph 1).



Graph 1: The significance brought about by intercultural communication barriers and taboos in the learning of EFL by Chinese university students. (Group 2021 C).

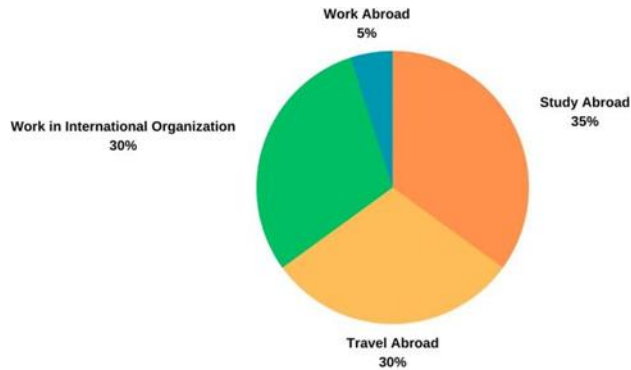


Chart 1: Overall homework result sentiments.

The following is the overall result from the students pertaining the questions given to them in regards to the topic on how intercultural communication barriers and taboos signifies to the learning of EFL by Chinese university students. The chart above gives an overall sentiment of the 108 students who took part in partaking the survey. The conclusive sentiment from the 108 students shows that 35% of them asserts that studying abroad is the top significance why they need to know more about intercultural barriers and taboos in their learning of EFL. The second on top significance carries 30% interest in travelling abroad while another 30% have interests in working for international organizations in China. The last percentage is of that one which only carries 5% whose interests are to work abroad. Most Chinese university students do not feel interested in working abroad because of various reasons among them is the fear of missing their small families alone at home. Chinese families are very small and are usually characterized by mother, father and one child. Most Chinese parents these days do not want to leave apart from their family members. This feeling was also influenced more by the situation which many Chinese families encountered during the COVID 19 outbreak where most families were kept apart from each other due to the closure of cities and residential areas in order to curb the spreading of the virus. The love of the country is in most of the Chinese people's hearts and has been rejuvenated more by the former and current Chinese leaders who have worked hard to bring Chinese economy to one of the top world flourishing economies with massive focus on becoming the world's leading economy in very few years to come (Chart 1).

Conclusion and Recommendations

As asserted [26] that China has come back again to assume it's previous place in the world as a global economic power house so is the demand by its people, students among them to understand more about the international community through wanting to know

more about intercultural communication barriers and taboos so as to increase more opportunities at home and abroad. The learning of EFL in Chinese universities has since increased. EFL is among the top Chinese university subject of study. The research as highlighted in the introduction and onset of this research shows that many Chinese university students believe that the study of intercultural communication barriers and taboos should be taken as seriously in universities studies. It has also emerged that many Chinese university students do not know much about many foreign countries' cultural barriers and taboos due to the selected views focused mainly on the most developed countries. It has also been made clear that most exchange programs are usually hosted outside China while Chinese universities have not done much on hosting foreign exchange programs locally. The top significance of learning intercultural communication barriers and taboos in the learning of EFL shows that studying abroad is the major interests by Chinese university students. After the interests of studying abroad the interest of wanting to travel abroad is the second top interest then followed by wanting to work in international organizations? The last interest is that of wanting to work abroad. The research shows that very few Chinese university students have the wish to work abroad. It is therefore from these sentiments that the following recommendations suits the readers to know how best one should overcome the hindrances encountered by Chinese university students learning EFL. The research took the brains and efforts of many participants in order to come up with the following recommendations suitable for policy makers to advance the idea of learning EFL by Chinese University students. In line with the research objectives, research questions and the hindrances discussed in this research some recommendation were shared to me from the students and professor Hebert Mushangwe an expert in applied linguistics at the University of Zimbabwe.

- To apply more emphasis on the teaching of the subject or topic of intercultural communication barriers and taboos in EFL classes.
- To put more countries' cultural communication barriers and taboos in EFL textbooks since English is spoken in many countries.
- To create more students and cultural exchange programs in universities.
- To become more familiar with the differences of English and Chinese barriers and taboos in EFL classes.

Abbreviations

- EFL English as Foreign Language
- ICC Intercultural Communication
- COVID 19 Corona Virus Infectious Disease 2019
- HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- AIDS Acquired immunodeficiency Syndrome



- PRC People's Republic of China

About the Author

Dr Itayi Artwell Mareya is currently an Associate Professor in the College of Foreign Languages at Hanjiang Normal University in Hubei, China. His research interests includes Applied Linguistics, Comparative studies, Second Language Acquisition and EFL analysis. He has written a number of yet to be published academic textbooks and dictionaries in Chinese and other foreign languages. He has also published a number of English papers in some international journals. E-mail address artwellmareya111@yahoo.com

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