

Global Competence: Development of Concepts and Overseas Practices

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Abstract: Cultivating international talents with global competence meets the need of time. Although domestic scholars have paid much attention to the study of global competence training for Chinese students, they lack a systematic understanding of its conceptual development and its training practices. Therefore, this paper systematically overviews the development of global competence and relative programs launched by foreign universities. At the same time, it provides practical insights into the introduction of training programs and assessment frameworks in China from multiple perspectives.

Keywords: global competence; higher education

1. Introduction

In recent years, global competence has become a hot topic at the forefront. Current research mainly focuses on the global competence elements, training programs, and evaluation systems. Most of the existing studies only cover one of these areas, which is not conducive for subsequent scholars to grasp the current status and development trend of research in this field.

Therefore, this study systematically overviews the development of the concept of global competence and gathers existing training programs held by foreign schools, to present a panoramic view of the status quo of research in this field and to inspire scholars to conduct further research in this area.

2. The concept of global competence

The concept of “global competence” originates from the concept of competence. “Competence” was first formally proposed by Harvard professor David McClelland in 1973 who argues that students’ performances in examinations won’t necessarily guarantee their future success in the workplace, and that “People could foresee student’s achievement on the job merely from IQ’s tests, so he advocated replacing IQ tests with competency tests”^[1].

The concept of “global competence” was proposed by Hayden, an American scholar, “to describe the competencies necessary for individuals living in an era of globalization”^{[2][3]}. In 1988, the American Association for International Educational Exchange (AIEE) systematically put forward “global competence” in its report “Teaching for Global Competence”, arguing that global competence means that learners can understand the interconnectedness between people and the world, grasp the general facts of historical processes and international events, accept and appreciate the existence of different cultures and values, and understand the diversity^[4].

Just as the German educator Humboldt and the father of modern American education, Dewey, represented different understandings of the purpose of education in their respective cultures, American education emphasizes more on the benefits of individual competence^[5], such as personal intercultural communication skills, while Germany focuses more on social effects, emphasizing that global competence education should cover global and sustainable development.^[2] Despite the difference in emphasis, there is a consensus on the main elements of global competence, namely knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It is worth noting that some scholars^{[5][6]} have pointed out that focusing too much on the individual can lead to further social and geopolitical inequalities.

In 2017, the OECD published Global Competence for an Inclusive World, which gives a more comprehensive definition of global competence. “Global competence is the capacity to analyze global and intercultural issues critically and from multiple perspectives, to understand how differences affect perceptions, judgments, and ideas of self and others, and engage in open, appropriate, and effective interactions with others from different backgrounds on the basis of a shared respect for human dignity. “. In the next year, global competencies were considered as one of the standards in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the first time.

3. Overseas Global Competency Development Programs

Major universities around the world have launched various global competency programs. Firstly, Harvard University^[9], in addition to the Zero Point Program, has reformed its general education curriculum to develop the four core qualities of global competence: “World Knowledge and Global Issues”, “Openness and Respect”, “Self-awareness and Confidence” and “Ethics and Responsibility” in general education courses. Secondly, Texas A&M [10] launches training practices with following features. Firstly, through partnerships with universities around the world (from Denmark to the United Kingdom), exchange students can complete a full semester at a variety of interconnected institutions. While taking the steps necessary to earn the degree they want, participants can delve into the culture and history of another country. Secondly, students travel to another country for several weeks to take a required course to earn a degree. The program includes technical tours related to the major, cultural tours, small class sizes, living-learning community environments, and free time for exploration. In addition, Aalto University Finland [11] establishes an interactive platform on the web for communication, by sending virtual expos or links to registered participants. They also encourage students to move from room to room by visiting the booths, playing games or meeting fellow students in the coffee room.

The University of Sydney [12] has also held a range of programs in the area of cultural competence, primarily undertaken by the National Centre for Cultural Competence. The following is a summary of the University of Sydney’s major efforts and programs in cultural competence:

3.1. Definition and Value of Cultural Competence

The University of Sydney emphasizes the importance of cultural competence and promotes understanding and respect for different cultures. The school encourages all Australians to behave respectfully, ethically, and effectively in cross-cultural interactions through spreading Aboriginal knowledge and approaches.

3.2. Education and Training

Aimed at enhancing students’ ability to communicate and interact across cultures, the University of Sydney offers various online and face-to-face education and training options to help individuals, groups, and organizations develop their cultural competence

3.3. Innovative Teaching, Research and Participation Programs

Through innovative teaching methods, research, and engagement programs, it is committed to advancing cultural competence to tackle problems and challenges arising from a lack of cultural competence.

3.4. Partnerships

The University of Sydney establishes partnerships with a diverse range of organizations to cultivate students’ cultural competence

4. Discussion

This paper systematically reviews the literature related to the concept of global competence and the practice programs conducted abroad, reflecting the existing achievements in the field. Based on the overview, several pieces of practical suggestions for the Chinese students’ cultivation of global competence are made as follows:

4.1. Since the concept of global competence is dynamic, it is feasible to establish a global competence framework theory and practice with Chinese characteristics. China’s understanding of globalization and global competence is featured with sociality and collectivism. Concepts such as a community with a shared future for mankind put the group and society on top of the individual. Therefore, global competence with Chinese characteristics can be drawn from traditional Chinese culture to establish its model and promote it to the world, which is also a way to tell Chinese story well.

4.2. The PISA assessment framework mainly focuses on juveniles around 15 years old. Therefore, when universities try to set up their own brand, they should not only pay attention to people of different age groups, but also attach importance to the fact that the culture and

discourse system of PISA is Western-led. Chinese organizations could value the need to establish various branding programs for global competence cultivation in consideration of different target customers at different ages. If our brand goes out, more cross-cultural factors should be considered. More cross-cultural factors are supposed to be taken into consideration when promoting Chinese brand.

4.3. Chinese universities should view foreign university programs in a dialectical way. In the lecture, Dr. Cha Qiang analyzed programs of many colleges and universities, including the University of Pittsburgh, the University of South Carolina, the Washington State University, the West Virginia University, etc. After comparing their curriculums and training plans, he pointed out the shortcomings. Firstly, most of the programs are designed to develop skills and experience for employment. Secondly, they are the continuation of the original cross-cultural courses. Thirdly, even if three modes of management are set, on the whole, these systems lack systematic epistemological development. Therefore, the curriculum in Chinese universities should be articulated echoing the goal of global competency development in all courses. In addition, we should carry out more second classes, social practice, internships and so on.

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Author Introduction:

Ling Shao (2003-), a female, undergraduate student majoring in English at the School of Foreign Languages, China University of Geosciences (Beijing), mainly engaged in research on foreign languages and literature