



# Chinese as a second language teachers' cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence

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## ABSTRACT

The development of intercultural communicative competence has recently emerged as one of the major foci in language education. The rise of Chinese as an international language has increased demand for studies exploring how Chinese language teachers teach intercultural communicative competence. This study investigated: (1) Chinese language teachers' pedagogical cultural knowledge and objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence; and (2) the contextual factors (i.e., overall university surroundings, computer accessibility, academic atmosphere, and colleagues and superiors) influencing their pedagogical cultural knowledge and objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence. Based on a survey of 43 university teachers from China, it shows that the participants had different degrees of familiarity with pedagogical cultural knowledge and that contextual factors affected their pedagogical cultural knowledge development. Moreover, the participants' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence were more skill-than knowledge- and attitude-oriented, and had different relationships with different contextual factors. The findings inform the development of in-service and pre-service teacher education programmes to help Chinese language teachers become effective intercultural language teachers.

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher cognition refers to 'what teachers think, know, and believe' (Borg, 2003, p. 81), and significantly influences teacher instructional practices (Feryok, 2010; Zhu & Shu, 2017). In turn, the instructional practices of teachers influence the learning experiences they plan for students and hence student learning outcomes. In the field of language education since the 1970s, a considerable body of literature has examined a wide range of issues relating to language teacher cognition, such as teacher cognition in grammar teaching, teacher cognition in literacy instruction and factors influencing teacher cognition. In the past 20 years, the pedagogy of language teachers across the world, especially in Europe, North America, and Australia, has been greatly affected by 'the principles of a sociocultural understanding of language and culture' (Moloney, 2013, p. 213). Language teachers are required to set intercultural communicative competence as a key goal in their teaching since enabling language learners to be 'intercultural speakers' (Byram, 1997, p. 3) has been widely recognized as one essential aim of language

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education (Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). However, insufficient attention has been paid to teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence, even though intercultural communicative competence has become the overall orientation of language education in the context of globalization (Gu, 2016; Young, Sachdev, & Seedhouse, 2009).

Previous research has revealed that teacher cognition may change depending on a variety of factors, including teachers' personal factors and contextual factors (Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2012). Prior studies, such as Larzén-Östermark (2008), Serçu (2006), and Young and Sachdev (2011), have also generated important findings on English teachers' cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence and its potential influential factors. Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between teacher cognition and its influencing factors, because this relationship could affect student learning processes and achievement. Yet, limited studies have focused on teachers who teach Chinese as a second language (CSL) in the process of teaching intercultural communicative competence.

In the last 15 years, the significance of teaching CSL has been increasingly recognized and is still gaining momentum, attracting increasing attention within and outside China (Moloney & Xu, 2015; Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Zheng & Gao, 2016). According to Hanban (also referred to as the Chinese Language Council International), by the end of 2016, over 1500 Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms had been established in a total of 140 countries, and six million foreign learners are now taking various Chinese tests around the world (Hanban, 2017, p. 2016). Also, according to China's Ministry of Education, 442,773 international students were studying in China in 2016, among whom 38.2% were learning Chinese as a second language in higher educational institutions (Ministry of education of the People's Republic of China, 2016). In contrast to the rapid increase of Chinese language education within and outside China, there is a relatively inadequate understanding of how CSL teachers perceive teaching intercultural communicative competence. To address this issue, the present research aimed to examine how CSL teachers viewed teaching intercultural communicative competence and how contextual factors influenced these teachers' cognition.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence

Being an important goal of language education, intercultural communicative competence has become a critical concept for language teachers. The notion of intercultural communicative competence has been generally used by researchers to refer to the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with people from different countries or with various cultural backgrounds (e.g. Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Deardorff, 2006). In his well-cited model of foreign language education, Byram (1997) argued that intercultural communicative competence comprises linguistics, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural competences. The notion has five *savoirs* under its umbrella: *savoir être* (attitudes of curiosity and openness), *savoirs* (knowledge), *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre/faire* (skills of discovery and interaction), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness) (p. 73). In other words, a good language learner is expected to become an intercultural communicator with five *savoirs*.

Language teachers play a central part in cultivating the five *savoirs* that constitute students' intercultural communicative competence. For this reason, language teachers should equip themselves with relevant knowledge and competence before helping students to develop their intercultural communicative competence (Bok, 2006). It is also noted that teacher cognition with regard to teaching intercultural communicative competence to a large extent determines the success of their instructional practices, since language teacher cognition refers to 'the complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs that language teachers draw on in their work' (Borg, 1999, p. 272). Therefore, it is important to examine language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence.

While research on language teacher cognition can be traced back to the 1970s, studies on language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence emerged at the beginning of the 21st century. Existing research on language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence mainly concerns language teachers' perceptions, knowledge, objectives or attitudes relevant to teaching intercultural communicative competence. **It is worth noting that the majority of the current studies were conducted in the context of English teaching.** For instance, surveying seventy-eight Flemish secondary English teachers, Serçu (2002) investigated language teachers' knowledge of and purposes in teaching intercultural communicative competence. It was found that the teachers were most familiar with aspects related to 'daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink' (p. 155) of the people in the target-language cultures, and they mostly prioritized the teaching of linguistic content rather than intercultural content in lessons. More specifically, they defined intercultural teaching primarily in terms of providing cultural knowledge and facts, not in terms of improving students' intercultural attitudes and skills. In interviewing 13 Finland-Swedish teachers of English, Larzén-Östermark (2008) found that most of the teachers viewed culture as factual knowledge of English-speaking countries and believed that intercultural teaching was mainly limited to the transmission of cultural facts or knowledge. Also, few teachers in the study expressed their willingness to improve students' intercultural attitudes, such as multicultural understanding or openness and tolerance towards other cultures. In a study examining language teacher perceptions in teaching intercultural communicative competence within the context of Chinese English teaching, Han and Song (2011) found that the Chinese university English language teachers in their study lacked a clear understanding of intercultural communicative competence and mostly focused on providing cultural facts or information about English-speaking countries.

In general, many researchers perceive teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence as a pivotal factor influencing language teachers' intercultural instructional practices (Castro, Sercu, & Garcia, 2004; Young & Sachdev, 2011). Although there is no commonly-accepted definition of language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence, studies on this issue mainly shed light on second or foreign language (SL/FL) teachers' pedagogical knowledge about and objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence. Specifically, SL/FL teachers should be sufficiently familiar with the pedagogical cultural knowledge related to the target language(s) they teach, which can help them display, relate, and explain the similarities and differences between cultures to learners. With respect to the objectives of teaching intercultural communicative competence, SL/FL teachers are required to not only enhance learners' intercultural knowledge, but also improve their intercultural attitudes and skills. These studies have indicated that most SL/FL teachers have only a vague understanding of intercultural communicative competence theoretically and take little account of students' intercultural competence acquisition pedagogically.

In SL/FL teaching, insufficient pedagogical knowledge about intercultural communicative competence and failure to define aims of teaching intercultural communicative competence can be attributed to a variety of factors, including personal factors and contextual factors in general. Despite prior studies claiming to identify some factors influencing teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence, little research has empirically addressed the relationship between internal or external factors and SL/FL teachers' knowledge of intercultural communicative competence and their objectives of teaching intercultural communicative competence.

## 2.2. Factors that may affect language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence

A number of studies have documented that teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence is subject to a spectrum of personal, sociocultural and institutional factors, which comprise individual's cultural background, professional and life experiences and school community (Czura, 2016; Gong, 2016; Gu, 2016; Wu, Palmer, & Field, 2011). First of all, teacher individual factors may facilitate or constrain teacher perspectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence. For instance, Garrido and Álvarez (2006) argued that the lack of a consistent methodology for teaching intercultural content, the fluid and problematic understanding of the concept of culture, and the limited insights into students' needs in the multicultural world had made it hard for teachers to identify intercultural objectives in language education. Castro, Sercu and Garcia (2004) asserted that teachers' prior language learning experience might have an impact on their objectives in integrating intercultural dimensions into language teaching since the way in which teachers were taught as students could continue to be influential throughout their professional lives. In one of the few empirical studies, Peiser and Jones (2014) explored teachers' conceptions of the importance of intercultural understanding in the modern foreign languages curriculum in England. They identified that the teachers' individual interests, personalities and intercultural experiences in English-speaking countries profoundly influenced their intercultural teaching beliefs. Furthermore, they argued that teacher personal factors seemed much more influential than contextual factors, although there has been no empirical evidence yet.

Compared to the individual factors mentioned above, contextual factors were also found to have significantly influenced language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence. As described by Sercu (2002), practical educational circumstances, teaching materials or teacher training had a significant impact on foreign language teachers' decisions in teaching intercultural communicative competence. Larzén-Östermark (2008) argued that the lack of time available to teach intercultural content, the lack of appropriate teaching materials, the pressure to conform to traditional teaching approaches, the lack of student interest in intercultural learning, and heterogeneous student groups were all obstacles constraining non-native English teachers' views on teaching intercultural communicative competence. Young and Sachdev (2011) maintained that lack of learner interest, lack of curricular support, lack of suitable teaching textbooks, lack of intercultural communicative competence assessment, and lack of teacher training in teaching intercultural communicative competence could impair EFL teachers' willingness to integrate intercultural content into their classroom practices. In addition, it is widely acknowledged that integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into education generates high-quality teaching and learning (Cox et al., 2003). In this increasingly complex landscape, where technology facilities are used to foster communication across cultures, ICT access can be considered as a challenge to language teachers in intercultural teaching (Resta & Laferrière, 2015). In other words, computer accessibility can also be a key factor influencing teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence. Hence, according to the existing literature exploring language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence, work environment, academic atmosphere, the support from colleagues, and computer accessibility could be influential factors on language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence.

## 2.3. Chinese language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence

The teaching of intercultural communicative competence has been an important goal in teaching Chinese as a second/foreign language (CSL/CFL) for a long time. The 'Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages', Hanban's (2007) official guidebook for CSL/CFL teachers, lists knowing 'culture and communication' as one of the five essential modules of Chinese education. Despite the much emphasis on intercultural communicative competence in CSL/SFL education, there had been little research exploring teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence, in the

context of CSL/CFL teaching. Moreover, hardly any of these few studies have specifically examined teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence (Gong, Lyu, & Gao, 2018; Jin & Dervin, 2017; Ma, Gong, Gao, & Xiang, 2017). Previous studies primarily covered CSL/CFL teachers' understanding of their roles in teaching Chinese, and, according to Richards and Rodgers (2014), teachers' roles generally refer to the following issues: the functions teachers are expected to fulfill, the relationship between teachers and students, the degree of control the teacher has over organizing teaching activities as well as the degree to which the teacher is responsible for determining lesson content (cited in Wang & Du, 2016, p. 3). For instance, Wang and Du (2014) examined the transformation of immigrant Chinese teachers' professional roles and their perceptions about the teacher-student relationship in a Danish context. Their findings suggested that teachers' roles shifted in a new environment and could be influenced by personal and contextual factors. These factors included the teachers' prior experiences and backgrounds as well as their intercultural experiences in Denmark. Similarly, Moloney and Xu (2015) found that CFL teachers in Australia underwent a transformation in their pedagogical beliefs, from a traditional Chinese education schema to a constructivist education pattern. The study found that teacher age, teacher status or positioning in the professional teaching community as well as the type and amount of professional development contributed to the transformation of CFL teacher beliefs. In a recent study, Ma and Gao (2017) examined the roles that pre-service teachers of Chinese as an international language expected to play in student learning by analyzing the metaphors they utilized to describe themselves as teachers. The metaphors indicated that the pre-service teachers' insights related not only to the 'roles one fulfills or activities one engages in' (p. 10) but also to the professional competencies; moreover, their perceptions of teacher roles reflected Chinese cultural traditions and socio-political conditions.

Overall, insufficient studies have addressed teachers' cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence in languages other than English. Researchers have mainly investigated language teachers' cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence in the context of teaching English as a second/foreign language, which may limit the applicability of the results to teachers of other languages. In addition, it is claimed by researchers that teachers' personal factors and contextual factors may affect teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence, although little prior research has empirically examined the relationship between these factors. More specifically, apart from a few studies revealing the association between teachers' personal factors and the intercultural teaching beliefs of SL/FL teachers, little research has been conducted to explore how contextual factors might influence SL/FL teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence. However, in language education, contextual factors have played an important role in modifying teacher cognition (Borg, 2012). Hence, the present study aimed to investigate CSL teachers from universities in China in terms of their teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence and its influencing factors. Specifically, two research questions would be addressed in this study:

RQ1: What is the nature of the Chinese language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence (i.e., teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence and objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence)? And

RQ2: What is the relationship between contextual factors (i.e., overall university surroundings, computer accessibility, academic atmosphere, and colleagues and superiors) and the Chinese language teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence?

### 3. Research method

#### 3.1. Participants

In this study, the target participants were CSL teachers from universities in China (ranking the top 100 among around 2500 Chinese universities) who taught overseas students Chinese. In China, educational resources of CSL (e.g., government financial support) and qualified CSL teachers are mainly distributed in these top universities, and the universities have attracted a great many international students from different countries. To ensure their representativeness, the universities were selected from the seven geographical regions across China (Northeast China, Northwest China, North China, South China, Central China, Southeast China, and Southwest China), also covering comprehensive universities and universities of different specialties (e.g. business, education, foreign language, engineering, agriculture and medicine). As a result, 43 participants from 12 universities voluntarily participated in this study in response to a mass email request. The participants included 38 female and 5 male teachers, which could have reflected the predominance of female teachers in teaching CSL/CFL-related curriculums (Ma & Gao, 2017). Table 1 summarizes the profiles of the 43 participants.

#### 3.2. Measures

The dependent variables in the present study were CSL teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence, which consisted of two constructs: *teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence* and *teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence*. On the basis of Borg (2012), the questionnaire is one of the most commonly used approaches to examine teacher cognition. Hence, Sercu et al.'s (2005) questionnaire was used to measure these two constructs as it has been widely adopted in this field (e.g., Gu, 2016; Han & Song, 2011). This survey

**Table 1**  
Sample characteristics.

Variables		Count	Proportion
Gender	Male	5	11.6%
	Female	38	88.4%
Educational level	Bachelor	12	27.9%
	Master	26	60.5%
	Ph.D.	5	11.6%
Professional title	Lecturer	12	27.9%
	Associate professor	3	7.0%
	Others	28	65.1%
Teaching experience	Within 5 years	22	51.2%
	5–10 years	8	18.6%
	11–15 years	8	18.6%
	More than 15 years	5	11.6%

included 10 items that measured *teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence*, and these items assessed the CSL teachers' familiarities with 10 aspects of Chinese culture (e.g., 'traditions, folklore and tourist attractions'; see Table 2). This survey also included 9 items that measured *teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence* using three constructs: intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, and intercultural skills. 4 items measured intercultural knowledge, which referred to 'knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one's own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor's country on the one hand; knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels, on the other hand' (Byram, 1997, p. 35); 3 items measured intercultural attitudes, which referred to the general disposition towards self-relativizing and respecting others; and 2 items measured intercultural skills, which were the capacity to interpret and relate cultures, 'to learn cultures and assign meaning to cultural phenomena in an independent way' and to interact in intercultural contact situations (Byram & Zarate, 1997, p. 241) (see Table 2 for example items). These 33 items were Likert-scale questions on a range from 1 to 5 (1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree), and were constructed in light of the dimensions highlighted in most of the literature on teaching intercultural communicative competence in language education.

Based on the existing literature, four contextual predictors were considered as independent factors in the present study: overall university surroundings (OUS), computer accessibility (CA), academic atmosphere (AA), and colleagues and superiors (C&S). Survey items that measured the first two factors (e.g. overall university surroundings and computer accessibility) were adapted from the TIMSS contextual questionnaire (Martin & Mullis, 2012), while those that measured the last two were adapted from Yang, Li and Zhang (2005). The instrument was in simplified Chinese, the participants' native language. The back translation method was implemented by two bilingual translators to produce the Chinese version questionnaire. After this, a pilot test on three CSL teachers was conducted to ensure their understanding of each item in the survey (Creswell, 2005). Rephrasing of survey items and reformatting of the survey were done based on the pilot test. Since all the predictors of the study were adapted from widely used instruments with satisfactory reliability and validity, there was no need to examine the reliability and validity in this study. A brief introduction of variables and example items were listed in Table 2.

### 3.3. Data collection procedure and analysis

The study was based on an email survey because 'Email questionnaires are cost-effective and allow respondents to answer questions at their own convenience' (Ghorbani & Alavi, 2014, p. 5). The survey was administered in March 2016. The study was announced through a few project coordinators of the 12 universities, and teachers who expressed interest in participating in this research were contacted directly. The email survey was delivered to the 43 participant teachers who volunteered participation via mass emails. All of them completed the email survey. Then, the raw scores taken from the 43 survey questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive analysis and Pearson Correlation analysis in Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0).

## 4. Results

This section first reports on CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence and objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence in order to answer the first research question. It then discusses the relationship between the contextual factors and CSL teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence in order to answer the second research question.

**Table 2**  
Brief description of variables.

Variables	Description
CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence	Ten items (e.g. 'History, geography, and political system'; 'Different ethnic and social groups')
CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence	Three categories: (1) Four items on teaching intercultural knowledge (e.g. Helping students acquire knowledge and information about China, like Chinese history, geography, political condition, etc.) (2) Three items on teaching intercultural attitudes (e.g. Facilitating students to reflect cultural differences) (3) Two items on teaching intercultural skills (e.g. Improving students' ability to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds)
Overall university surroundings (OUS)	Five items on teachers' general attitudes about the overall surroundings of the university (e.g. 'The school is located in a safe neighbourhood')
Computer accessibility (CA)	Three items on teachers' perceived computer use in teaching intercultural communicative competence (e.g. 'I feel comfortable using computers in my teaching')
Academic atmosphere (AA)	Three items on university academic atmosphere (e.g. 'The university has excellent academic resources, like books and digital resources')
Colleagues and superiors (C&S)	Three items on teachers' perceived interpersonal relationship with their superiors and colleagues (e.g. 'I feel comfortable communicating and collaborating with my colleagues')

#### 4.1. CSL teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence

##### 4.1.1. CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence

The descriptive statistics in Table 3 suggest that the CSL teachers were sufficiently knowledgeable about 'Chinese daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink etc.' (Mean = 4.37, SD = 0.655), 'youth culture' (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.731) and 'traditions, folklore and tourist attractions' (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.688). On the other hand, they were less familiar with, for example, Chinese 'literature' (Mean = 3.53, SD = 1.032), 'different ethnic and social groups' (Mean = 3.51, SD = 0.798), 'international relations (political, economic and cultural)' (Mean = 3.42, SD = 0.879) and 'other cultural expressions (music, drama or art)' (Mean = 3.37, SD = 0.926). Also, the Standard Deviation (SD) values indicated that the participating CSL teachers demonstrated much more congruence in the Chinese culture content they were familiar with. That is, they expressed consistency in terms of Chinese cultural knowledge.

##### 4.1.2. CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence

Regarding CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence, Table 4 shows CSL teachers put similar emphasis on teaching intercultural knowledge (Mean = 3.90, SD = 0.646) and intercultural attitudes (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.822), and they highlighted the improvement of learners' intercultural skills (Mean = 4.49, SD = 0.467) more than that of learners' intercultural knowledge and attitudes.

#### 4.2. The relationship between contextual factors and CSL teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence

As mentioned above, the CSL teachers demonstrated different degrees of familiarity with Chinese cultural content, and they focused more on promoting students' intercultural skills and knowledge than on enhancing their intercultural attitudes in teaching. According to Table 5, there was no statistically significant correlation between CA and CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence. In contrast, OUS ( $r = 0.322$ ,  $p < .05$ ), AA ( $r = 0.353$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and C&S ( $r = 0.317$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were positively associated with CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence.

Regarding CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence, it was found that OUS ( $r = 0.334$ ,  $p < .05$ ), CA ( $r = 0.374$ ,  $p < .05$ ), AA ( $r = 0.429$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and C&S ( $r = 0.327$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were positively associated with the

**Table 3**  
CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence.

CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence	Mean	SD
Daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink etc.	4.37	.655
Youth culture	4.12	.731
Traditions, folklore and tourist attractions	4.05	.688
Value and beliefs	3.95	.754
History, geography and political system	3.67	.808
Education and professional life	3.65	.842
Literature	3.53	1.032
Different ethnic and social groups	3.51	.798
International relations (political, economic and cultural)	3.42	.879
Other cultural expressions (music, drama or art)	3.37	.926

Note: N = 43.

**Table 4**  
 CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence.

CSL teachers' objectives of teaching intercultural communicative competence	Mean	SD
Intercultural knowledge	3.90	.646
Intercultural attitudes	3.86	.822
Intercultural skills	4.49	.467

Note: N = 43.

intercultural knowledge dimension. However, no statistically significant relationships were identified between all included contextual factors and CSL teachers' aim of improving intercultural attitudes or skills (see Table 6). This means that OUS, CA, AA, and C&S were positively associated with CSL teachers' objective of teaching intercultural knowledge rather than their objective of teaching intercultural attitudes and skills.

## 5. Discussion

There is a paucity of research examining CSL/CFL teacher cognition or the interrelatedness between elements of university environments and SL/FL teachers' teaching intercultural communicative competence. The present study examined 43 CSL teachers' cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence in Chinese universities, and its contextual determinants. The results indicated that the CSL teachers had different levels of familiarity with different Chinese cultural topics. Overall, they knew more about Chinese people's daily life, pop culture, folklore and traditions than about Chinese literature, ethnic and social groups, international relations and art. Moreover, three contextual factors – OUS, AA, and C&S – positively correlated with CSL teachers' familiarity with Chinese culture. Thirdly, the findings suggested that all the four contextual factors were positively associated with CSL teachers' aim in teaching intercultural knowledge, but had no correlation with that in teaching intercultural attitudes or skills.

### 5.1. CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence and influential factors

In congruence with previous literature (Han & Song, 2011; Sercu, 2002, Sercu et al., 2005), the present study found that the CSL teachers were less confident about their cultural knowledge in many aspects, such as traditional art forms, ethnic groups and international relations, compared to their familiarity with knowledge about daily life and youth culture. Although the 'Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages' emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural knowledge and intercultural communication, it describes them in very general, high-end ways. It mentions little about the unique features of CSL teachers or the specific dimensions of intercultural knowledge in the CSL classroom. In addition, CSL teacher education programs in China are 'heavily theory-based, focusing closely on general linguistics, Chinese linguistics and second language acquisition theory' (Wang, Moloney, & Li, 2013, p. 124), and thus native Chinese language teachers educated in China can be ill-prepared for intercultural teaching and the development of learners' intercultural competence. Similar to Jin and Dervin (2017), Lai, Gu and Hu (2015), Moloney (2013), and Moloney and Xu (2015), we call for the integration of intercultural elements and cross-cultural awareness into CSL teacher education programs and teacher training courses to fulfill CSL teachers' professional roles.

Three contextual factors (i.e., OUS, AA, and C&S) were positively correlated with the CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence. This aligns with Brownell et al.'s (2014) findings, which suggested that teaching time allocation, service delivery systems and curricula influenced the degree of learning of integrated knowledge and practice demonstrated by special education teachers. One possible explanation for the result is that the CSL teachers' perceptions of these contextual factors affected how they utilized intercultural-knowledge-learning strategies and also the opportunities they had to construct more content knowledge for intercultural teaching. In other words, a positive work environment can play a positive role in teacher learning and knowledge development, and vice versa. Hence, administrators in higher educational institutions need to make continuous efforts to improve hardware facilities and to create a good academic atmosphere, which serves as a powerful vehicle to construct a supportive professional community. At the same time, discussing with and collaborations among peers should be encouraged. According to Sachs (2005), teacher professional development is generally connected with the teaching community which they are situated in, and thus the culture of collaboration is extremely crucial to building on teachers' expertise. In contrast, computer access in the university was not associated with CSL teachers' content knowledge in teaching intercultural communicative competence. This finding was surprising as accessing online materials could potentially influence teachers' intercultural knowledge and awareness. It can be possible that CSL teachers may mostly use technologies in the working context for class preparation and enhancing instructional outcomes instead of building their own knowledge in teaching intercultural competence (Baran, 2014; Kessler & Hubbard, 2017). Hence, CA did not show up to be strongly associated with CSL teachers' intercultural knowledge development.

**Table 5**

The relationship between contextual factors and CSL teachers' knowledge about intercultural communicative competence.

Pearson Correlation	OUS	CA	AA	C&S
Teacher knowledge about intercultural communicative competence	.322*	.235	.353*	.317*

Note: N = 43. \*p &lt; .05; \*\*p &lt; .01.

### 5.2. CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence and influential factors

The present research found that the CSL teachers were more likely to relate the aim of intercultural teaching to skills than knowledge and attitudinal dimensions. The findings differed from the results reported in [Sercu \(2002\)](#) and [Sercu et al. \(2005\)](#), which demonstrated that teachers of English, French and German defined intercultural teaching primarily in terms of providing knowledge and did not think their teaching practice was mainly aimed at promoting students' acquisition of intercultural attitudes or skills. The findings were also different from [Han and Song's \(2011\)](#) investigation on English language teachers in Chinese universities – they found that the teachers rated enhancing cultural knowledge to be the most important objective in intercultural teaching, which was followed by the improvement of learners' ability to handle intercultural communications (the skill dimensions) and to improve intercultural attitudes. The inconsistent results indicated that regional differences (e.g., between the Eastern and Western countries) and (or) language differences (e.g., Chinese versus English) might exist in language teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence, because every country in general has a different language policy highlighting communication abilities. While most of the existing literature paid attention to English teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence in the Western context, we call for more research from non-Western contexts focusing on other languages (e.g., Chinese, French, and Japanese) to investigate whether teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence varies by regions or languages. Another possible reason for the emphasis on improving intercultural skills of CSL teachers might be related to Chinese traditional view on the role of teachers. In the Chinese education schema, teachers' responsibility is 'Jiao Shu Yu Ren' (教书育人), which literally means 'teach books and cultivate persons' ([Hui, 2005](#)); and thus 'teachers are expected to do their best to serve students in the learning process by providing the required knowledge and skills' ([Ma & Gao, 2017](#), p. 10). At the same time, even though [Hanban \(2007\)](#) emphasized raising CSL teachers' cross-cultural awareness, the significance of the attitude dimension in intercultural communication is still little understood. Hence, it is imperative that further professional development in teaching intercultural communicative competence should be provided for Chinese language teachers to achieve more effective student learning in CSL classrooms. This is a major step to achieve a win-win situation for both teachers and learners in SL/FL language education.

In terms of the relationship between contextual factors and the CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence, this study found that OUS, CA, AA, and C&S all had positive associations with the CSL teachers' aim of teaching intercultural knowledge but had no significant effect on that of teaching intercultural attitudes or skills. This means that the impact of work environment elements on the CSL teachers' objectives in intercultural teaching was non-homogeneous. According to [Wu et al. \(2011\)](#), although beliefs may change over time and be modified by new experiences in altered contexts, some fundamental beliefs formed by profound and 'culturally shared experiences' may be resistant to change (p. 48). At the same time, the researchers concluded that Confucian educational culture profoundly influenced Chinese teachers' intercultural professional positioning. Moreover, in light of the opinion of [Ma and Gao \(2017\)](#), the role of the Chinese language teachers in promoting and disseminating Chinese culture was also shaped by the Chinese government's expectations. Many researchers have stated that identity represents a core component of teacher instructional practices and professional development ([Gee, 2001](#); [Pennington & Richards, 2016](#); [Singh & Richards, 2006](#)). Since little research has been conducted on the interaction between teacher identity and SL/FL teachers' cognition or practices in teaching intercultural communicative competence, especially in the case of CSL teachers, further studies are needed to explore the impact of teacher identity on teaching intercultural communicative competence, and how this influence may differ across teaching objectives.

## 6. Conclusion

This exploratory quantitative study investigated teacher cognition in teaching intercultural communicative competence and its relationship to various contextual factors, in the context of university CSL teaching. It provides new perspectives on teaching intercultural communicative competence in language education. Taken as a whole, the findings of this study suggest that the CSL teachers had different degrees of familiarity with cultural knowledge, and that contextual factors had an impact on CSL teacher cultural knowledge development. In the present study, the CSL teachers' intercultural pedagogical objectives were more skill-oriented and knowledge-oriented than attitude-oriented, and different contextual factors had different influences on the teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of teaching intercultural communicative competence.

The present study was subject to several limitations. Firstly, the survey questions concerning contextual factors may need to be improved, as the 14 questions in the instrument covered a limited set of features related to the university work environment. Measuring a broader set of work setting elements would undoubtedly sharpen the results. At the same time, since teacher cognition is influenced by a wide range of personal, sociocultural and institutional factors, further research is



**Table 6**

The relationship between contextual factors and CSL teachers' objectives in teaching intercultural communicative competence.

Pearson Correlation	OUS	CA	AA	C&S
Objective: intercultural knowledge	.334*	.374*	.429**	.327*
Objective: intercultural attitudes	.024	.056	.118	.047
Objective: intercultural skills	.107	.015	.012	.062

Note: N = 43. \*p &lt; .05; \*\*p &lt; .01.

needed to examine the effect of teacher intercultural training, teaching experience, intercultural exposure experiences and official policies. Secondly, as just over 40 CSL teachers from Chinese universities were involved, the sample size was relatively small and may not have adequately reflected the large disparity in socioeconomic and cultural status from region to region in the Chinese context. Although respondents were from universities in various geographical regions across China and in different educational categories, only sampling from elite universities might restrict the external validity of the result even in the Chinese settings. A larger sample size from diverse Chinese universities is in need to improve the generalizability of the results. Thirdly, since the participants in this survey were all Chinese teachers working in mainland China, it is necessary to investigate the intercultural teaching of CFL teachers who are working overseas, which may present a different landscape in intercultural teaching. Furthermore, comparative studies of CSL and CFL teachers' intercultural teaching of Chinese may better inform different teacher professional development trajectories and make a significant contribution to CSL/CFL teacher education.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.09.009>.

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