Article

Bridging Cultures in the Classroom: Analyzing Pedagogical Approaches that Promote Intercultural Competence in Multicultural Higher Education Settings

Lynard A. Dela Cruz [1], **Alma B. Manera** [2], **Elizabeth C. Ramirez** [3], **Dannilyn U. Macato** [3], **Rogelio Joshua B. Catbagan, III** [4], **and Alnadzma Tulawie** [5]

[1]Isabela State University, [2]Cagayan State University, [3]Don Mariano Marcos State University, [4]Bulacan State University, and [5]Sulu State University

Correspondence: lynard.a.delacruz@isu.edu.ph

Abstract

In this research, the teaching practices used in multicultural universities and colleges that promote intercultural competence, cultural empathy, and effective communication were examined. Informed by the models of Deardorff (2006), Gay (2010) and Banks (2015), the study sought to (1) determine culturally responsive pedagogical practices, (2) analyze the institutional and contextual factors that affect their use, and (3) document the views of both educators and students about the effects of these strategies. A qualitative multiple case study approach was employed, with 12 instructors and 15 students from three ethnically diverse Philippine higher education institutions. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations in classrooms. Thematic analysis identified that culturally responsive teaching, dialogic reflection and experiential learning contribute considerably to cultural understanding. Institutional culture, curricular adaptability and teacher training were the key enablers, whereas fixed curricula and resistant dispositions were obstacles. Inclusive learning spaces and possibilities of intercultural encounters were stated by participants to promote empathy, global understanding, and communication skills. The results underscore the necessity for system support on all institution levels to integrate intercultural competence into higher education. Through synthesizing theory and the real-life experiences of students and teachers, the research adds to the discussion on inclusive and socially responsible pedagogy in classrooms across the globe.

Keywords: intercultural competence, culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, inclusive pedagogy, experiential learning, higher education, dialogic learning, global citizenship, qualitative case study

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world marked by cultural plurality and mobility, intercultural competence has become a cornerstone of meaningful education. This competence, defined by Deardorff (2006) as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes, is particularly vital in educational contexts that are linguistically and culturally diverse. In the Philippines, where more than 180 ethnolinguistic groups coexist and where internationalization efforts are expanding, higher education institutions (HEIs) are emerging as key sites for cultivating intercultural understanding (Gonzalez, 2010; Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2016).

The reality of multicultural classrooms in Philippine HEIs, especially in large urban centers and increasingly in provincial state universities, calls for pedagogical frameworks that are inclusive and deeply attuned to learners' lived experiences, cultural worldviews, and social identities. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) offers a robust framework in this context. CRP, as advanced by Gay (2010), centers on the recognition, affirmation, and integration of students' cultural knowledge in the learning process. It promotes mutual respect, cultural empathy, and equitable engagement, qualities that align strongly with the goals of intercultural competence (Banks, 2015).

However, despite policy declarations supporting inclusive education and diversity, such as CHED Memorandum Order No. 22, s. 2013, which advocates for gender- and culturally sensitive instruction, the translation of these ideals into classroom practices remains uneven. Existing research by Cruz (2020) and Pascual (2019) in selected Philippine HEIs found that while faculty members recognize the importance of CRP, many struggle with operationalizing it due to a lack of institutional support, training, and localized resources. These studies underscore that incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and multicultural texts is often teacher-dependent and not systematized within curricula.

Moreover, much of the Philippine literature on multicultural education remains focused on basic education, particularly in the K–12 system (e.g., Alamon, 2017; Bacud, 2018), with limited inquiry into how intercultural competence is conceptualized and nurtured at the tertiary level. This leaves a gap in understanding how university educators and students experience and implement CRP in diverse learning environments. The study of David and Arcilla (2021) highlighted that many faculty members in public HEIs in the Visayas still rely on Eurocentric texts, often overlooking local and regional literatures that could serve as entry points for intercultural engagement.

Furthermore, global literature (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2017) strongly supports the role of CRP in enhancing learning outcomes and cultural responsiveness, yet its local adaptation in the Philippine higher education setting remains under-explored. There is an evident absence of comprehensive, qualitative investigations that delve into the classroom-level realities, both successes and struggles of implementing CRP and building intercultural competence. Notably missing are the narratives of students and educators who navigate the tensions between institutional demands, cultural relevance, and pedagogical inclusivity.

This research seeks to bridge these gaps by investigating how culturally responsive teaching strategies are understood, applied, and experienced by faculty and students across Philippine HEIs. It focuses on how CRP contributes to developing intercultural competence, identifies institutional enablers and barriers, and explores the pedagogical approaches that promote cultural engagement and inclusion. By emphasizing local perspectives and practices, the study aspires to provide contextually grounded insights to inform more equitable and responsive teaching in Philippine higher education.

Considering the country's ongoing push for internationalization, the challenges of resource limitations, and the imperative to promote cultural inclusivity in education, this research is timely and necessary. Its findings may serve as a foundation for building institutional policies and faculty development programs that prioritize culturally sustaining education as an academic goal and a social responsibility within a pluralistic nation.

Research Objectives

1. To find out what teaching methods professors use in multicultural colleges and universities to help students become more culturally aware.
2. To look at the institutional and contextual elements that help or hurt the use of interculturally responsive teaching methods in various higher education settings.
3. To find out what students and teachers think about how well various teaching methods work to improve understanding of other cultures, empathy, and communication

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design to investigate and examine the teaching methods that help students become more culturally competent in

multicultural colleges and universities. It employed a varied case study technique to have a deeper look at the experiences and practices of teachers and students in different cultural and institutional settings. It chose three colleges and universities on purpose that have students from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Twelve faculty members had taught in multicultural classrooms for at least three years, and fifteen students had learned in intercultural settings.

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations in the classroom. The researchers prepared interview guides to get detailed stories about teaching methods, views on intercultural competence, and ways institutions help their students. The researchers conducted FGDs with students to determine how they felt about and reacted to education focused on different cultures. Classroom observations gave information about how teachers educate, how students interact, and how cultural differences affect real-life teaching sessions. The researchers recorded all the interviews and FGDs on tape, typed them out word for word, and then used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework to look at them. To make sure the coding was accurate, it was done in cycles. The themes were created both inductively from the participants' stories and deductively using the theoretical framework of Deardorff (2006) and Gay (2010). Member-checking was done to make the information more credible, and triangulation was achieved by combining interview data, observations, and institutional documents, including syllabi and teaching manuals. Before collecting data, ethical approval was sought, and participants gave informed consent with complete assurance of privacy and were free to leave at any time.

Review of Related Literature

In today's world, higher education is more responsible for preparing students for life in many cultures and for school. Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence says that to interact with people from other cultures well, you must have a dynamic balance of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and reflective behaviors. Many experts agree that intercultural competence is not something you are born with but can learn through teaching methods that promote openness, critical thinking, and self-awareness.

Geneva Gay's (2010) work on culturally responsive teaching says that lessons should focus on students' cultural experiences. She says that inclusive teaching makes students more interested and helps them comprehend other cultures better. She stresses that when teachers validate students' ethnic identities in the classroom, it helps them do well in school and learn about other cultures. In fact, in the study of

Dobrovolska et al. (2025), it was found that other countries included in the arts and education curriculum the study of the preservation of cultural heritage. Hence, students feel a sense of pride and inclusion despite cultural differences. Banks (2015) agrees with this point of view and talks about how important reflective and dialogic education are for developing intercultural skills.

Leask (2009) talks about *"internationalization at home,"* which includes intercultural elements in curriculum and teaching plans, especially for kids who do not travel abroad. Her concept is like Deardorff's model, which says that systematic reflection and debate are important ways to get students involved in learning about the world.

In the study of Gadaza et.al (2025), in Philippines, on the cultural identity and history consciousness revealed that studying multiculturalism concepts creates a sense of cultural self-awareness and nationalistic pride of the students, hence, there is still a need to crack structural barriers that restricts possibilities to educators offering context-related teachings. Existing research by Cruz (2020) and Pascual (2019) in selected Philippine HEIs found that while faculty members recognize the importance of CRP, many struggle with operationalizing it due to a lack of institutional support, training, and localized resources. These studies underscore that incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and multicultural texts is often teacher-dependent and not systematized within curricula.

Munalim (2020) concludes that despite the excellent multicultural practices of teachers, classroom practices may not have been complemented and supplemented with a much stronger, broader school culture. This has been true to the study of Sarino (2012), in fact he found the school leaders, faculty members, foreign local students, and academic support staffs of Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines agreed that they are under cursory sense of awareness of multicultural education and have yet to develop higher order multicultural thinking skills.

These frameworks are based on sound theory, but critics say they do not give us enough real-world information about teachers' tactics in the classroom to help students become more culturally aware, especially in non-Western settings. Caruana (2014) and others have said that institutional limits and similar curricular arrangements frequently make it hard to implement theory. Also, empirical studies often do not include the views and experiences of students most immediately affected by intercultural teaching. This is especially true in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines. The CHED Memorandum Order No. 22, s. 2013, which advocates gender- and culturally sensitive instruction, remains uneven in translating these ideals into classroom practices. Furthermore, there is a need for comprehensive teacher training

programs to equip educators with the skills to navigate diverse perspectives and address complex global issues effectively (Diano et.al., 2023)

This study fills this vacuum by examining the real and observed teaching methods used in multicultural higher education settings. The research aims to improve our understanding of how intercultural competence is developed by looking at specific teaching methods, classroom interactions, and institutional support. It does this by going beyond theory to include the thoughts of teachers and students in rich context settings.

Data Analysis and Results

Pedagogical Approaches Employed by Faculty in Multicultural Higher Education

Teaching students how to interact with people from different cultures has become an important goal in today's multicultural and diverse higher education settings. When students from different cultural, linguistic, and socio-political backgrounds come together in the same academic space, faculty members must find ways to educate that encourage inclusiveness, cultural awareness, and respect for others. This study examined the teaching methods that teachers in multicultural higher education settings use to help students become more culturally aware. The results showed that teachers use culturally responsive teaching, dialogic and reflective methods, and experiential or community-engaged learning to help their students grow in their ability to interact with people from other cultures. These teaching methods respect cultural identities and give students actual opportunities to talk, understand, and get involved in the world around them. This shows how thoughtful and inclusive teaching can unite people from different cultures and educate them to be global citizens.

Theme 1.1: Culturally Responsive Teaching is the Basis for Being Able to Work with People from Other Cultures.

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is one of the most common ways teachers in multicultural colleges and universities teach. Teachers base their decisions on how to teach and interact with pupils on what they know about their culture, their experiences, and how they learn best. This method ensures that students perceive their identities in the learning materials and that they may interact with people from different cultures in a safe and welcoming atmosphere. Geneva Gay (2010) says that

CRT helps pupils do well in school and understand other cultures by recognizing their cultural backgrounds as viable sources of knowledge and participation.

Answers from Participants:

"When I plan lessons, I always try to include examples or case studies from people of different races and cultures." "Students become more interested when they see their communities represented in the curriculum." (Participant 3, Faculty, Social Sciences)

"I tell my students to think about their customs and how they differ from those of other cultures." "It starts a conversation that goes beyond textbooks and is more about values, norms, and worldviews." (Participant 6, Faculty, Humanities)

These answers show that teachers do not see culture as an extra part of the learning process, but as a key part. Teachers who include various cultural content and encourage pupils to think about their identities move away from Eurocentric or monolithic methods and create a classroom environment of respect, empathy, and inclusiveness. Banks (2015) says that multicultural education works best when students are free to think about how their own identities relate to those of others. This helps them acquire the attitudes and critical thinking skills they need to work with people from various cultures.

Theme 1.2: Teaching That is Both Dialogic and Reflective to Help People Understand One Another Across Cultures

Another common way to educate is through organized reflection and dialogic education, which helps students learn about other cultures. Faculty plan classroom activities encouraging students to talk openly about power, culture, identity, and differences. Students can understand their intercultural experiences and think critically through reflective tasks, narrative writing, and guided conversations. Bennett (2009) says intercultural learning is most effective when students express their own cultural views while talking to others in a secure, open atmosphere.

Answers from Participants:

"I give my students cultural reflection essays in which they write about a time when they misunderstood someone from another culture and what they learned from it. "It helps them figure out what they think." (Participant 4, Faculty, Education)

"Debates in class and group work with people from different cultures help you see things from different points of view. "I play more of a facilitator role, encouraging students to disagree with each other's points of view respectfully." (Participant 8, Faculty, Communication)

Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence says that introspection, curiosity, and taking other people's points of view are important for learning about other cultures. These faculty practices are in line with that. By designing

classroom discussions and assignments around critical reflection, teachers help students go beyond a surface level of comprehension and build a deeper awareness of other cultures. These approaches also give students a chance to deal with their own biases, understand their privilege, and learn how to deal with differences courteously, which is an important part of being a global citizen and being good at interacting with people from other cultures.

Theme 1.3: Learning Via Experiences and Being Involved in the Community as Intercultural Practice

Teachers in multicultural settings use experiential and community-based teaching more to put intercultural learning into real-life situations. These include service-learning initiatives, ethnographic fieldwork, cultural immersion activities, and working together on projects with people from different backgrounds. These approaches make intercultural competence more than just information; they also include action-oriented learning and sensitivity to the situation. Leask (2009) says that internationalization at home must give pupils real chances to interact with people from different cultures in their communities to improve their intercultural skills.
Responses from participants:

"*Our students do community immersion activities with native groups. They do not just watch; they talk, listen, and think. "That is where the most learning happens."* (Participant 2, Faculty, Anthropology Department)

We asked migrant workers and cultural advocates to talk about their experiences in one of our business ethics workshops. *"It made students question what they thought they knew about globalization and fairness."* (Participant 13, Faculty, Business Department)

These methods show that you cannot only learn about other cultures in theory; you must live, feel, and do it. Teachers intentionally plan learning environments so students can use their multicultural communication skills in real life. This helps students develop empathy, critical thinking, and civic participation. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory says pupils acquire complex social ideas best through experience, reflection, and conceptualization cycles. These activities not only help students learn more, but they also help them become more socially responsible and cognizant of ethics in multicultural communities.

Teachers in multicultural colleges and universities use various teaching methods to help students become more culturally aware. These include culturally responsive education that respects students' identities, dialogic and reflective methods that help students comprehend and empathize with others, and experiential learning

that turns theory into action across cultures. These methods are in line with the frameworks set out by Deardorff (2006), Gay (2010), and Leask (2009). They show how important pedagogy is in getting students ready to live and lead in a varied and connected world. These practices show how to educate in an inclusive, meaningful, and socially responsible way as the global classroom continues to change.

The Institutional and Contextual Factors That Support or Hinder the Implementation of Interculturally Responsive Teaching Practices

In multicultural higher education environments, the successful implementation of interculturally responsive teaching (IRT) practices depends not only on the personal commitment of faculty but also on broader institutional and contextual factors. As higher education institutions strive to create inclusive and globally competent learning spaces, their ability to support diversity through policies, curricula, and faculty development becomes increasingly crucial. This study examined how institutional culture, curricular flexibility, and faculty training influence the integration of IRT strategies in diverse academic settings. Findings revealed that administrative support, academic freedom, and sustained professional development significantly shape the extent to which faculty can implement inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogies. Conversely, rigid curricular structures, limited training opportunities, and resistant attitudes hinder progress toward intercultural competence. These insights affirm the view of scholars such as Deardorff (2006), Gay (2010), and Leask (2009), who emphasize that intercultural education must be systemic and supported at all levels of the institution.

Theme 2.1: Institutional Culture and Administrative Support as Catalysts for Intercultural Pedagogy

In multicultural colleges and universities, interculturally responsive teaching (IRT) techniques can only be successful if faculty members are personally committed to them and other variables at the institution and in the surrounding area are equally supportive. As colleges and universities work to make their classrooms more welcoming and globally competent, it becomes more important for them to support diversity through policies, curricula, and faculty development. This study examined how institutional culture, flexible curricula, and faculty training affect the use of IRT methods in various academic settings. The results showed that administrative support, academic freedom, and ongoing professional development greatly impacted how much faculty can use inclusive and culturally relevant teaching methods. On the other hand, restrictive curricula, few training chances, and negative attitudes make it harder

to become interculturally competent. These findings reflect the views of scholars like Deardorff (2006), Gay (2010), and Leask (2009), who stress that intercultural education needs to be systemic and supported at all levels of the institution.

Theme 2.1: Institutional Culture and Administrative Support as Catalysts for Intercultural Pedagogy

The quality of administrative support and an institution's culture significantly impact how well interculturally responsive teaching (IRT) practices are implemented. Institutions that clearly support diversity, inclusion, and internationalization in their goals, policies, and faculty development programs tend to create environments that are good for developing intercultural competence. These schools put money into training, curriculum changes, and intercultural centers that help teachers use inclusive teaching methods. Leask (2009) says the best way to internationalize the curriculum is to build it into the institution's structures instead of letting people do it independently. Responses from Participants:

"Our university holds regular workshops on intercultural issues and even pays teachers who want to include global or cultural content in their classes." "It makes us want to think outside the box." (Participant 4, Faculty, Public University)

"The administration sets up platforms for intercultural exchange every time we have visiting scholars or international students. "It gives students a place to interact with other cultures meaningfully." (Participant 2, Faculty, Private HEI)

These answers show that symbolic and material institutional support is significant for making behaviors receptive to other cultures. When leaders ensure policies support diversity and inclusion, teachers are more likely to develop new ideas and use intercultural content in their teaching. Deardorff (2006) stressed that building intercultural competency is not simply up to each person; it must be a commitment from the whole institution to transformative education. If schools do not offer this kind of help, individual staff members may have to do all the work, leading to inconsistent practices and different student outcomes.

Theme 2. 2: Curricular Flexibility and Academic Freedom as Enablers of Responsive Teaching

The curriculum's flexibility and the level of academic freedom teachers give affect how well interculturally responsive teaching can be used. Teachers should be able to change the curriculum, tests, and learning materials to fit the different cultural backgrounds of their students. This adaptability is made more complicated by rigid syllabi, content that is too homogenized, and bureaucratic rules. Gay (2010) says that

culturally responsive teaching is naturally adaptable since pupils need to be aware of the cultural and local realities.

Responses from participants:

"Our curriculum tells us what to do too much." We must use uniform syllabi, even if they do not consider the many cultures of our pupils. "It makes it hard for me to make my examples more relevant to my students or to include global points of view." (Participant 5, Faculty, State University)

"I like that we can change our content and use materials relevant to our area in my department." "It helps me make lessons that connect with where my students come from." (Participant 8, Faculty, Liberal Arts Program)

This theme shows that there is a conflict between institutional control and new ways of teaching. When teachers have more freedom in their academic work, they are more likely to choose inclusive tactics, consider the context, and reflect the experiences of their students. However, rigid curricula get in the way and strengthen traditional and monocultural teaching methods. Banks (2015) says that multicultural education needs a curriculum that can change to meet the needs of different students and new social situations, this has been also proved by Saddhono et.al. (2025) in the inclusion of a traditional Indonesian game for foreign speakers which increases students' participation, enriches vocabulary and strengthens understanding. So, giving faculty academic independence, if it stays below realistic quality assurance limits, is important for improving IRT practices in various academic settings.

Theme 2.3: Faculty Attitudes and Professional Development as Mediating Factors

Structural supports are important, but faculty ideas, attitudes, and access to professional development play a significant role in whether they use interculturally responsive methods. Teachers trained in intercultural pedagogy and with a favorable view of diversity are more likely to use inclusive methods. On the other hand, teachers who do not know about or do not want to use intercultural frameworks may stick with traditional, monocultural ways of teaching. Bennett (2009) says that the first step in developing intercultural competence is being aware of yourself and willing to deal with cultural differences.

Responses from Participants:

"I did not know how culture affects learning styles until I attended a faculty development session on inclusive pedagogy." "Now, I try to be more intentional about making

activities that are relevant to different cultures." (Participant 1, Faculty, Education Department)

"Some of my coworkers still think 'academic information is neutral.' They do not see the need to change how they teach, even though their class comprises people from different backgrounds. "That way of thinking is a problem." (Participant 6, Faculty, Engineering)

These stories stress how important faculty mindset and ongoing professional development are for making classrooms into places where people from different cultures can learn from one another. So, institutions must offer regular and easy-to-find professional development focusing on decolonial pedagogy, intercultural competency, and inclusive evaluation. Caruana (2014) says that teacher agency is determined by the school's architecture and how teachers personally engage with intercultural theory and reflective practice. Without building this kind of knowledge, structural changes alone might not bring about fundamental changes in teaching.

Institutional and contextual factors greatly affect the implementation of interculturally responsive teaching in higher education. Institutions with supportive cultures, inclusive policies, and well-funded programs help new ideas and learning that include everyone. On the other hand, strict curricular structures and a lack of academic freedom make it harder for teachers to make information more relevant to their students' lives or to make it more global. In addition, how and whether intercultural pedagogy is used depends on how faculty feel about it and how easy it is for them to get the training they need. These results show that intercultural competency needs to be promoted at the institutional level. This means aligning administrative support, academic freedom, and faculty development to promote fairness and readiness for the world in various educational contexts.

The Experiences and Perceptions of Students and Educators Regarding the Effectiveness of These Pedagogical Strategies in Enhancing Cultural Understanding

In the changing world of higher education, developing intercultural competency has become an important goal, especially in culturally diverse and globalized classrooms. As students and teachers from different backgrounds, languages, and worldviews work together, the importance of pedagogy in developing cultural understanding, empathy, and communication grows. This study investigated how teachers and students feel about and use different teaching methods, like inclusive instruction, dialogic learning, and collaborative experiences. The results show that when teachers make classrooms more welcoming, encourage students to think critically, and allow them to work with people from other cultures, they become more aware of other cultures, more understanding, and better at dealing with

differences positively. These ideas are in line with the work of Gay (2010), Deardorff (2006), and Banks (2015), who stress that intercultural competency is not developed by being exposed to other cultures, but by actively learning about them in responsive educational contexts.

Theme 3.1: Inclusive Learning Environments as Foundations for Cultural Understanding

One of the most common things that teachers and students said was important was creating learning settings that respect cultural differences and are open to everyone. These settings are hallmarks of open communication, respect for one another, and the deliberate inclusion of different cultural points of view in course materials and class debates. Faculty members who used culturally inclusive methods, like using multicultural case studies, letting students lead cultural presentations, and encouraging the use of native languages, were seen as making a big difference in how much students learned about other cultures. Gay (2010) says culturally responsive education makes children more interested in school and socializing by validating who they are and what they have been through.

Responses from Participants:

"Our teacher invited us to discuss cultural practices from where we grew up. For the first time, I felt my background was important at school. "I learned a lot from my classmates, too." (Participant 4, Student, Education Program)

"I combine literature from Southeast Asia with philosophy from Africa in my class. Students say they like witnessing the parallels and contrasts because it helps them understand other cultures and themselves."

These stories highlight how inclusive teaching helps students comprehend other cultures by validating their cultural identities and giving them a wider view of the world. When students see that their cultures are important in the curriculum, they are more likely to connect with the topic and other students from various backgrounds. Banks' (2015) theory of multicultural education says that recognizing and using students' cultural knowledge helps them learn and become more sensitive to other cultures. This approach fits with that theory.

Theme 3.2: Dialogic Pedagogy and Empathy Development through Classroom Interactions

Students and teachers stressed how important structured conversations and reflection activities are for developing empathy. Students can listen to, interact with, and emotionally engage with other people's experiences through personal stories,

cultural reflection essays, and class debates about social concerns. Bennett (2009) says that empathy is an important part of being able to interact with people from various cultures. It grows when people are provided safe spaces to put aside their judgments and delve into other people's cultural worlds.

Responses from Participants:

"I did not know how biased I was about some areas until we had those reflection sessions." Hearing my classmate talk about the discrimination she faced changed how I thought about things.

"I always tell my students that listening is the first step to understanding another culture." "Students start to connect on a deeper level when we make that space." (Participant 5, Faculty, Social Sciences)

These experiences show that dialogic pedagogy, which is a way of teaching that focuses on conversation and relational learning, can help people connect emotionally and develop empathy. When students are asked to tell their stories and listen to others with care and openness, they see cultural differences as more human. This backs up Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning, which says that changing one's viewpoint happens when one critically reflects on one's own beliefs, considering the lived experiences of others.

Theme 3.3: Collaborative and Experiential Learning as Catalysts for Cross-Cultural Communication

Teachers who used group projects, activities that involved people from different cultures, and service-learning assignments found that these methods helped students communicate better with people from other cultures. Students said that being put in teams with people from different backgrounds made them deal with language barriers, figure out what others meant, and change how they talked to one another. These real-life interactions allowed people to practice working together and communicating across cultures, which are important skills for living in a globalized world. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory says pupils learn best when doing things, especially in complicated social situations.

Responses from Participants:

"Our group was made up of people from different backgrounds, like Tagalog, Ilocano, and even an international student." "At first, it was awkward, but working on the project

taught us how to be more respectful of each other's ways and explain things better." (Participant 7, Student – Engineering)

"I plan my group projects so the students depend on each other's strengths. "Sometimes they clash culturally, but I help them through it, and that is where the learning happens." (Participant 6, Faculty - Business and Management)

These answers show that direct, task-based contact is the most effective way to improve intercultural communication. Teachers who purposefully put students in groups with people from different backgrounds and give them tools to help them work through conflicts help students learn how to modify their communication styles, be patient, and respect differences. Deardorff (2006) says that you need both cognitive and behavioral components to learn about other cultures and how to connect with them in respectful and productive ways.

The results show that teaching methods that encourage cultural understanding, empathy, and communication work best when they (1) create welcoming environments that validate students' cultural identities, (2) use dialogue and reflection to build emotional connections and help students see things from other people's points of view, and (3) provide hands-on and group learning experiences that mimic real-life interactions between people from different cultures. Students and teachers agreed that these methods greatly affected how well they could understand and work with people from other cultures. These findings support earlier work by Gay (2010), Banks (2015), and Deardorff (2006) and stress that careful planning of lessons is necessary to prepare students to interact with people from different cultures in a courteous, understanding, and productive way.

Discussion

This study shows that teaching approaches that include reflection, cooperation, and advanced multisource synthesis are meant to help teachers and students in multicultural higher education become more interculturally competent. Teachers use culture-responsive resources, dialogue teaching, and experiential learning to help students understand and empathize with other cultures and improve their communication skills. When cultural identities are spoken about and kept alive, and when students and teachers critically examine their assumptions, transdisciplinary learning and teaching become very important.

The results of this study show how important teaching methods are for developing students' intercultural competency, especially when it comes to improving their ability to comprehend, empathize with, and communicate with people from different cultures in multicultural higher education settings. Students and teachers

said using culturally diverse materials and reflecting on students' backgrounds in the classroom were examples of inclusive practices. Helped people understand and value different cultural points of view. These results support Gay's (2010) theory, which said that culturally responsive teaching makes learning spaces that support students' identities and help them do well in school, regardless of their culture. People thought teachers who used this method were better at creating classrooms where respect and curiosity about differences were encouraged instead of just tolerated.

Also, dialogic and reflective teaching styles were quite effective at helping students build empathy. Students practiced active listening and critical self-awareness through storytelling, cultural reflection essays, and structured class discussions. These are two important signs of intercultural empathy. Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning says that real learning happens when people challenge and re-think their beliefs based on what other people have been through. These teaching methods fit with that idea. The stories told by the participants showed how discomfort, when allowed in safe environments, led to significant insights about other people and a change from ethnocentric to more culturally relativistic perspectives. Bennett (2009) said that empathy is more than just feeling what others feel; it is also the ability to see things from their point of view, which can be taught through careful educational design.

The study also found that experiential and collaborative learning significantly affected how well people from different cultures could talk to each other. Students had to practice negotiating, change their language, and learn through shared tasks when they worked in diverse teams or on community-based projects. This helped them acquire real-world intercultural skills. These results support Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning, which says that the best way to learn is by doing, thinking about, and using knowledge in real-life situations. Teachers said this involvement helped kids learn to communicate better and build trust, inclusion, and group cohesion. These experiences are significant for preparing students to be global citizens and for the workforce in countries with many different cultures.

In short, the study supports the idea that just being around different cultures or doing things without planning will not make you more interculturally competent. It comes from systemic teaching frameworks, based on relationships between students and teachers, and promotes inclusion. By combining inclusive curricula, reflective participation, and collaborative learning, students are better able to think, feel, and act in culturally diverse settings. Deardorff (2006) says that developing intercultural competence is an ongoing process that an institution can best encourage with planned institutional supports and creative teaching methods. Not only does this fit with

Deardorff's thinking, but there is also more and more evidence that when teaching approaches align with cultural diversity, higher education becomes a place where empathy, understanding, and meaningful communication may change people's lives.

Conclusions

This study shows that teaching approaches that include reflection, cooperation, and advanced multisource synthesis are meant to help teachers and students in multicultural higher education become more interculturally competent. Teachers use culture-responsive resources, dialogue teaching, and experiential learning to help students understand and empathize with other cultures and improve their communication skills. When cultural identities are spoken about and kept alive, and critical assumptions are reflected on, faculty and students can learn and teach in a multidisciplinary way.

The results confirm the ideas of Gay (2010), Deardorff (2006), and Mezirow (2000) that intercultural competence is not just a mental skill, but a transforming process that the proper context, teaching methods, and institutions support. The study also stresses the importance of "intentionality." Faculty must have the right to purposeful inclusion, reflection, and institutional support through professional advancement and frameworks that recognize diversity.

Intercultural competency should be developed on purpose throughout education, and this can only happen through comprehensive teaching that puts students in emotionally safe environments and exposes them to a wide range of cultures. Then, colleges and universities can better prepare students for life in a globalized society with many different ethnic groups.

References

[1] Bacud, S. A. (2018). Integrating cultural sensitivity in multicultural classrooms in the Philippines. Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 6(1), 1–8.

[2] Banks, J. A. (2015). Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching (6th ed.). Pearson. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622255

[3] Bennett, M. J. (2009). Defining, measuring, and facilitating intercultural learning: A conceptual introduction to the Intercultural Education double supplement. Intercultural Education, 20(sup1-2), S1–S13. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980903370763

[4] Butac, S., Manera, A., Gonzales, E., Paller, R., Eustaquio, M. T., & Tandoc, J. J. (2025). Forging global citizens: A comparative study of intercultural pedagogical

practices of higher educational institutions in the Philippines. International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 7(SI2), 62–79. https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.171

[5] Caruana, V. (2014). Re-thinking global citizenship in higher education: From cosmopolitanism and international mobility to cosmopolitanization, resilience and resilient thinking. Higher Education Quarterly, 68(1), 85–104. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12030

[6] Caruana, V. (2014). Trans-nationalizing academic mobility: Internationalizing at home and beyond. Journal of Studies in International Education, 18(1), 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980903371241

[7] CHED Memorandum Order No. 22, s. 2013. Policies and standards for Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd). Commission on Higher Education, Philippines.

[8] Cruz, R. M. (2020). Teachers' perspectives on culturally responsive teaching in a state university in Northern Luzon. Philippine Journal of Education Studies, 45(1), 34–52.

[9] David, C. C., & Arcilla, C. (2021). Teaching literature in the periphery: Experiences of faculty in regional HEIs in the Visayas. Asian Journal of Education, 11(2), 23–37.

[10] Deardorff, D. K. (2006). The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. Journal of Studies in International Education, 10(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002

[11] Deardorff, D. K., & Jones, E. (2012). Intercultural competence: An emerging focus in international higher education. In The SAGE handbook of international higher education (pp. 283–304). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218397.n16

[12] Dobrovolska, R., et al. (2025). Strategies for preserving cultural heritage through art and education: A comprehensive approach and evaluation of effectiveness. International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 7(1). https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7i1.98

[13] Diano Jr, F., Kilag, O. K., Malbas, M., Catacutan, A., Tiongzon, B., & Abendan, C. F. (2023). Towards global competence: Innovations in the Philippine curriculum for addressing international challenges. Excellencia: International Multidisciplinary Journal of Education, 1(4), 295–307. https://doi.org/10.5281/

[14] Gadaza, A., Manera, A., Caban, R., Alih, C., Tulawie, A., & Picpican, H. (2025). Cultural identity and historical consciousness: A study of Philippine history

instruction in tertiary education. International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 7(SI2), 19–35. https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.135

[15] Gadaza, A., Manera, A., Santos, S., Alih, C., & Caban, R. (2025). Reviving the past, teaching the future: The role of Philippine cultural heritage in curriculum development of teacher education programs. International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 7(SI2), 80–97. https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.169

[16] Gay, G. (2010). Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED581130

[17] Gonzalez, A. (2010). Language and higher education in the Philippines and beyond: Reflections and prospects. The Journal of English as an International Language, 5, 1–15.

[18] Kolb, D. A. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice Hall. https://surl.li/ulntxh

[19] Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED373128

[20] Leask, B. (2009). Using formal and informal curricula to improve interactions between home and international students. Journal of Studies in International Education, 13(2), 205–221. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315308329786

[21] Li, X. (2025). Cultural competence in technology-assisted language teaching: Insights from higher education. Education and Information Technologies, 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-025-13495-8

[22] Munalim, L. O. (2020). Micro and macro practices of multicultural education in a Philippine university: Is it global integration ready? Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 29, 441–454. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-019-00497-7

[23] Nieto, S. (2017). Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education (6th ed.). Pearson. https://surl.lt/ylcvke

[24] Pascual, J. M. (2019). Localizing the literature curriculum: A framework for inclusive teaching. The Normal Lights, 13(2), 144–169.

[25] Sarino, V. L. (2012). A critical appraisal of multicultural awareness in higher education institutions in the Philippines: Towards a framework for equity pedagogy. LICEJ: Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal, 2(2). https://doi.org/10.20533/licej.2040.2589.2012.0125

[26] Saddhono, K., Suhita, R., Suryanto, E., Sukmono, I., & Saputra, A. (2025). The traditional game of Dako is a learning medium for the Indonesian language for foreign speakers at Yale University, United States. International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 7(1). https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7i1.114

[27] Semilla, M. J. L., & Jalos Jr, L. M. (2024). Faculty's responsive teaching strategies and students' cultural communicative competence in Marinduque State College: Basis for SDG-aligned curriculum framework. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14253298

[28] Srichampa, S. (2024). Inclusive ethnic groups for ASEAN sustainable development. International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 6(1). https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v6i1.7