AN ASSESSMENT OF TEACHERS' INTERCULTURAL SKILLS COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

Today's diverse classrooms require teachers to have strong intercultural skills to meet students' varied needs. This study evaluates teachers' intercultural skills. A comprehensive survey was conducted with a diverse group of educators. The teachers' intercultural skills were assessed by examining their effectiveness in managing cultural interactions and integrating intercultural content into lessons. Practices were analyzed by the frequency and methods of incorporating intercultural activities and teaching strategies. The survey's quantitative analysis revealed teachers' strengths and areas needing support, emphasizing the importance of ongoing training to enhance intercultural competence for more inclusive and effective teaching practices.

Keywords; Intercultural Skills, Multicultural Education, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Cultural Bias in Assessment, Teacher Professional Development, Cultural Encapsulation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In an age of globalization and growing cultural interactions, the ability to successfully navigate and negotiate cultural differences is increasingly becoming a crucially valuable asset, especially in education. Teachers are important figures shaping the educational journeys and attainments of students from diverse backgrounds, acting as conduits for knowledge and cultural values. Their effectiveness in bridging cultural gaps extends an equitable, high-quality educational setting and prepares students for success in a diverse world.

According to Banks and Banks (2019), multicultural education intends to reshape educational institutions so that students from different racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality. This approach recognizes the importance of culturally responsive teaching and the need for teachers to develop cultural competence to effectively teach in diverse classrooms (Gay, 2018). By understanding and valuing students' cultural backgrounds, teachers can create more inclusive and supportive learning environments, which, in turn, enhance students' academic outcomes and social integration (Nieto & Bode, 2018).

There has been significant and in-depth research conducted around the distinctions of educator intercultural competency related to several key components, such as awareness, content knowledge, skills, and practices. Awareness is the foundational stage, the level at which an educator becomes aware and reflective of personal cultural biases and is more culturally sensitive to any cultural variances, a notion that Banks (2015) firmly insists on. Content knowledge is not merely factual; it encompasses deep understanding of different cultural theories and histories. Merryfield (2000) maintains that this is essential to the practice of compassionate teaching methods. Indeed, it is not only such knowledge and awareness but also the application into practice, both completed by the adaptability in communication and teaching, which form the core of intercultural skills and practices, as noted by Bennett (2004).

Despite recognizing the importance of these competencies, a systematic evaluation and development of intercultural competence are deficient in educational systems. Most institutions lack the structures to assess and develop these salient competencies among their teaching staff. This lapse has been identified by Ladson-Billings (2009) as one of the barriers to attaining fully inclusive, culturally responsive education.

Moving beyond awareness, content knowledge plays an important role in effective teaching practices. It surpasses information to develop a deep understanding of different topics and perspectives. Merryfield (2000) argues that such knowledge is essential for educators to adopt compassionate teaching methods that connect with students from various cultural backgrounds. By integrating diverse content into curriculum and instructional strategies, educators not only validate students' cultural identities but also enhance their engagement and learning outcomes.

Moreover, the application of cultural awareness and content knowledge into practice is essential for developing intercultural skills and practices. Bennett (2004) highlights the importance of adaptability in communication and teaching methods as core competencies for educators working in culturally diverse classrooms. This adaptability enables educators to adjust their approaches to meet the needs of diverse learners effectively, creating inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and respected.

Despite the recognition of these competencies' importance, there is still a significant gap in systematically evaluating and developing intercultural competence within educational systems. Many institutions still lack the ability to assess and nurture these critical skills among their teaching staff. This deficiency, as noted by Ladson-Billings (2009), represents a barrier to achieving fully inclusive and culturally responsive education systems. Addressing this gap requires collective efforts in curriculum development, professional development programs, and institutional policies that prioritize and support the cultivation of intercultural competence among educators.

This study addresses the gap in educational systems regarding the evaluation and development of teachers' intercultural competence by focusing on their skills. The guiding research question, 'How can the teachers intercultural skills competence be effectively assessed and enhanced to promote more inclusive educational environments? It highlights the need of a systematic approach in advocating for educational inclusivity. Through this framework, the study seeks to provide practical tools to promote intercultural competence among teachers particularly skills, thereby uplifting educational environments to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

For instance, Nieto and Bode (2018) stress the crucial role of multicultural education in teacher training programs, pointing out its potential to cultivate educators' cultural awareness and sensitivity. Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2009) argues for curriculum reforms that adopt diverse cultural perspectives, asserting that such reforms are essential for enhancing teachers' content knowledge and instructional strategies. Furthermore, Byram (2008) features the significance of intercultural communication competence among educators, stressing its role in creating meaningful interaction with diverse cultural backgrounds among students.

The implications of this research are significant. It offers educational leaders and policymakers practical tools and valuable insights to enhance teacher intercultural skills competencies, which will undoubtedly influence not only educational equity but also elevate student achievement significantly, better preparing them for the demands and opportunities in the 21st century. This research, therefore, addresses an academic gap and serves a critical societal function by enhancing intercultural proficiency among educators, enriching the educational landscape for all students.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Quantitative Descriptive Research Design to assess the intercultural competence of teachers at the University of the Cordilleras Senior High School, specifically focusing on the HUMSS and PE departments. A structured survey questionnaire was administered to gather data on four key dimensions of intercultural competence: awareness, content knowledge, skills, and practices. The questionnaire included items that explored teachers' consideration of cultural diversity in lesson planning, familiarity with intercultural communication theories, effectiveness in communicating with diverse students, and practices of including intercultural topics in the curriculum. The collected data were analyzed using the Weighted Mean method, allowing for the identification of average responses and providing insights into the current state of intercultural competence among the faculty members. This methodology ensures a comprehensive evaluation of the strengths and areas for improvement, contributing to the development of strategies for enhancing intercultural competence in the educational setting.

3.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research on assessing teachers' intercultural competence, particularly focusing on their skills reveals significant insights into educators' readiness to engage with culturally diverse classrooms. The findings indicate a generally high level of intercultural skills among teachers, as demonstrated by the high General Weighted Mean (GWA) scores across various dimensions. This suggests that educators are well-prepared to foster inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. However, the results also highlight areas where improvement is needed, particularly in addressing cultural biases in assessments and enhancing access to multicultural resources. Additionally, there is a moderate level of intercultural knowledge, with notable gaps in understanding complex concepts like cultural encapsulation and the Contact Hypothesis. The findings underscore the importance of ongoing professional development to deepen teachers' intercultural competence, ensuring they can effectively support the diverse needs of their students.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

INTERCULTURAL SKILLS	Mean
Teaching students from a cultural background significant to my own.	4.16
Discussing the role of "method" and "context" as they relate to teaching.	4.16
Identifying accurately culturally biased assumptions as they relate to my professional training.	4.16
Dealing effectively with biases, discrimination, and prejudices directed at me by students and/or families.	4.11
Articulating accurately the student's behavioral problem when the student is from a cultural group significantly different from my own.	4.05
Consulting effectively with another professional concerning the educational and behavioral needs of students who cultural background is significantly different from my own.	4.05
Assessing the behavior and educational needs of students from different genders.	4.05
Identifying properly the needs of students from a cultural background different from my own	4.00
Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of standardized tests in terms of their use with students from different cultural-racial-ethnic backgrounds.	4.00
Assessing the behavior and educational needs of students who come from very poor socioeconomic backgrounds.	3.95
General Weighted Mean	4.07

The findings of the study highlight educators' proficiency in certain aspects of intercultural competence while pointing to areas that need improvement. The overall General Weighted Mean (GWM) of 4.07 reflects a strong foundational skillset among educators to address the needs of diverse student populations. However, this also underscores the nuanced challenges in effectively engaging students from varying cultural and socioeconomic contexts. The results confirm that while educators are competent in adapting teaching strategies for culturally familiar contexts, there remains a need for targeted efforts in addressing the specific needs of marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

The highest mean scores emphasize educators' ability to teach students from a cultural background similar to their own (4.16) and their understanding of "method" and "context" in teaching (4.16). These competencies are well-supported in research by Sleeter (2012), which highlights the critical role of teachers' ability to contextualize lessons based on their own cultural experiences. This alignment with students' cultural norms fosters greater engagement and understanding. Furthermore, Gorski and Swalwell (2015) argue that culturally specific teaching methods can create a sense of inclusion and relevance, enhancing student outcomes. The ability to identify culturally biased assumptions (4.16) also reflects growing awareness among educators about implicit biases that may affect their teaching practices. Bishop (2011) highlights that such self-awareness is a cornerstone of inclusive education, enabling teachers to build equitable classroom environments.

Hammond (2015) further emphasizes that understanding and integrating cultural contexts into teaching methods are essential for effective instruction. Educators who recognize these contexts are better equipped to create meaningful and relevant learning experiences for their

students. Similarly, Howard (2019) asserts that developing self-awareness of one's cultural biases leads to equitable practices, fostering inclusivity and fairness in education. The educators' proficiency in these areas demonstrates their capacity to apply culturally responsive practices within familiar contexts, a crucial foundation for addressing broader challenges.

In contrast, the lowest scores in addressing the behavior and educational needs of students from very poor socioeconomic backgrounds (3.95) reveal a pressing issue. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face systemic barriers, and the inability to fully address these challenges suggests the need for further professional development. According to Carter and Welner (2013), understanding the socioeconomic context is as vital as cultural competence because it directly impacts students' learning experiences and outcomes. The slightly higher but still limited score in assessing students from a different cultural background (4.00) points to an additional gap in bridging cultural understanding. Research by Banks and Banks (2016) underscores the need for teachers to be trained in multicultural education, emphasizing strategies for inclusivity across diverse cultural settings.

The findings suggest a need to move beyond foundational intercultural skills toward more advanced applications, such as addressing the intersectionality of culture and socioeconomic status. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argue that equity-focused teacher training programs should emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing systemic inequities, including those tied to poverty. These programs should provide educators with the tools to critically examine and transform their instructional practices. Moreover, Yosso's (2005) framework of cultural wealth challenges educators to view students' diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds as assets rather than deficits, encouraging strength-based teaching approaches.

Professional development programs must address these gaps by incorporating training on implicit biases, understanding intersectionality, and strategies for supporting students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Lenski et al. (2013) point out that literature-based learning can be an effective tool in developing cultural competence, as it exposes educators and students to diverse narratives and fosters empathy. Gay (2018) similarly emphasizes the role of hands-on, culturally responsive training in improving educators' confidence and effectiveness in diverse classroom settings.

Curriculum reform also emerges as a critical recommendation. Teacher education programs should integrate intercultural competence as a core component, including courses on cultural anthropology, global citizenship, and equity in education. Paris and Alim (2017) advocate for culturally sustaining pedagogies, which actively preserve and celebrate students' cultural identities. Incorporating such approaches into teacher education curricula equips educators to create inclusive classrooms that empower students to thrive. Furthermore, embedding reflective practices into teacher training programs can help educators critically analyze how their biases and teaching methods impact student learning, as suggested by Hammond (2015). Powell and Rightmyer (2011) stress the importance of integrating intersectionality into teacher education, which includes exploring the overlapping effects of race, class, gender, and other identity markers.

Policy interventions play a crucial role in addressing the gaps identified in this study. Mandating intercultural competence workshops and offering incentives, such as advanced

certifications, can encourage educators to prioritize cultural inclusivity. Howard (2019) asserts that diversity in the teaching workforce positively influences student outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups. Additionally, policymakers should support resource allocation to enhance professional development initiatives, ensuring that educators have access to training and tools that promote equity. Local governments could collaborate with educational institutions to implement mentorship programs pairing experienced culturally competent educators with less experienced ones, fostering peer learning.

Technology also has a significant role to play in enhancing educators' intercultural skills. Digital platforms can facilitate cross-cultural dialogues by connecting classrooms globally, enabling both teachers and students to engage in meaningful cultural exchanges. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) tools can simulate diverse cultural scenarios, providing educators with opportunities to practice culturally responsive teaching strategies. Hammond (2015) points out that interactive tools like these can enhance educators' understanding and empathy, making them better prepared to support diverse learners. Ferdig et al. (2020) demonstrate that VR training tools improve teachers' empathy and preparedness for intercultural engagement.

The broader implications of these findings suggest that achieving true equity in education requires a systemic shift. Beyond teacher training and curriculum reform, institutions must create inclusive school climates that value diversity as a strength. For example, implementing restorative justice practices in schools, as supported by Gregory et al. (2016), can help address conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings, fostering a more inclusive environment. Furthermore, incorporating cultural representation into school decision-making processes ensures that policies and practices align with the needs of the student population.

Community partnerships also play a critical role in advancing intercultural competence. Schools must actively engage with local communities to understand their unique cultural and socioeconomic contexts. As highlighted by Epstein et al. (2018), collaborative programs that involve families, community leaders, and local organizations can strengthen the connection between schools and the communities they serve, resulting in more responsive and effective educational practices.

In conclusion, while the study's results reveal commendable strengths in educators' intercultural skills, the identified gaps highlight the need for targeted interventions. While the high GWM indicates a commendable level of competence, the lower scores in addressing the needs of students from socioeconomically and culturally diverse backgrounds point to significant gaps. Professional development, curriculum reform, and policy initiatives must work in concert to address these shortcomings. By adopting a holistic approach that incorporates research-backed strategies and community partnerships, educational institutions can create environments where all students, regardless of their cultural or socioeconomic background, can thrive.

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