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Belonging in Culturally  
Diverse Societies  
Official Structures and Personal Customs

*Edited by Ingrid Muenstermann*





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Belonging in Culturally Diverse Societies – Official Structures and Personal Customs

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Edited by Ingrid Muenstermann

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# Meet the editor



Ingrid Muenstermann was born in Hamburg, Germany, and made her home in Australia in 1973. She worked as a secretary in different medical fields in Germany and Australia for many years. Still, she discovered the rewards of becoming an academic after achieving a Ph.D. in Social Sciences. She is a sociologist at heart and is casually employed at Flinders University in South Australia, where she teaches health sociology, and at the School for the German Language in Adelaide, where she teaches German. Ingrid Muenstermann has a special interest in equity. People's movements worldwide and their settlement processes, social responsibility, ageing, health and health care, and the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth have particularly interested her.



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# Preface

The chapters in this book address a fast-changing world. People move fast, technology develops fast, and attitudes change fast. How can the sense of belonging be established? How important is the sense of belonging in a highly automated, motorized and technically advanced society anyway? We seem to become increasingly ‘robotized’; however, reading through the chapters, it became clear that social cohesion and a sense of belonging are important for all societies because people need to feel safe, and societies have to provide security. So, how can a sense of belonging be established when one leaves all things important behind and moves to a culturally different and diverse country? To me, as a migrant from Germany having made Australia home, security was important, security to find a job, to live in a safe area and place, to raise children without experiencing hostilities and prejudices. What a dream it was... and, needless to say, not all expectations were fulfilled. But looking back now and being rational, many opportunities were provided and taken up.

Here is a very brief overview of Australia’s journey to a multicultural society; it may be helpful to societies that are contemplating changing their system. In 1901, the Australian Immigration Restriction Act was passed. It had been among the first pieces of legislation introduced to the newly formed federal parliament [1]. The legislation was specifically designed to limit non-British migration to Australia. It represented the formal establishment of the ‘White Australia Policy’ and caused great suffering, especially amongst Chinese immigrants, who had to leave the country. In 1972/73, Australia declared itself a multicultural society, and the ‘White Australia Policy’ was abolished, meaning that ‘coloured people’ and people from Mediterranean countries could migrate to Australia. In 1975, the Australian Government legislated for the first time to establish the Racial Discrimination Act: migrants and minorities were protected from discrimination [2], suggesting that migrants could assert some rights but also had some responsibilities, i.e. learning the language, accepting the law, and learning the history since 1788, as taught in schools. Australian multiculturalism is based on four principles: responsibilities for all, respect for each person, fairness for each person, and benefits for all. In 2023, Australia’s population was 26.6 million and 8.2 million people (30%) were born overseas. Overall, Australian multicultural principles and laws/rules have provided a sound base for society to function harmoniously. However, no federal legislation is specifically directed toward promoting and protecting multiculturalism. According to the Final Report of the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism [3], the Australian Multicultural Council noted that “all Australian states have legislation or other instruments that assert the values of multiculturalism and mandate their systematic application in public services... [but] it would be timely to enact equivalent federal legislation, as an important plank of a reinvigorated public commitment to multiculturalism”.

This is a very important point when considering that today's society has changed and that interculturalism also plays an important part. At the 2017 meeting, a 'National Centre for Intercultural Diversity' was suggested, but in 2024, no evidence could be found that this has occurred. On the other hand, it is noted that students' reports of the South Australian Certificate of Education mention 'intercultural knowledge and understanding [4]. So, Australia, a country of many migrants, is moving in the right direction. However, even here, important issues still need to be addressed to provide a secure future in and for a multicultural and intercultural society.

Before commenting on the content of this book, it is important to define what multiculturalism and interculturalism mean in relation to social cohesion and the sense of belonging, two very important matters. The concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism are different, not only in practice and methodological research but also in their approach to cultural diversity. The two concepts are complementary and (unfortunately) often confused or blurred:

- Multiculturalism focuses on diverse cultural groups existing independently of each other; rights and responsibilities of members of society are officially determined, rules and regulations are legislated, promoting unity and criticizing narrow-minded cultural practices.
- Interculturalism focuses on interaction and participation between groups and diverse cultures; it concentrates on understanding and accepting differences in shared experiences and on mutual respect [5, 6], encouraging communication and recognizing different identities.

The book has been divided into four sections and education and public policy are embedded in all of them:

1. Multiculturalism and Interculturalism within the Digital Space
2. Multiculturalism and Interculturalism and the Creation of Global Citizens
3. Multiculturalism and Interculturalism and Social Cohesion
4. Maintaining Old Values and Customs in Modern Diverse Societies

To adhere to the publisher's request and divide the chapters into sections was not easy: multiculturalism and interculturalism are complementary and are the main focus of the sections, indicating their importance, but there are many overlapping principles which made the division difficult.

The chapters have been written by experts in different fields and different countries; all demonstrate societal changes; some changes are welcome, and others are rejected

or met with caution. I want to thank all authors for their efforts to provide their knowledge and discuss their challenges - it was very rewarding to work with you!

The underlying message of this book: A changing world welcomes you, capturing your sense of belonging - especially in the digital sphere!

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Section 1

Multiculturalism and  
Interculturalism within  
the Digital Space

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## Chapter 1

# Assessing the Impact of Intercultural Virtual Collaboration on Global Citizenship Education

*Ingrid Van Rompay-Bartels, Clinton Watkins, Laurens Zijlstra and Jannemieke Geessink*

### Abstract

The development of the capabilities necessary to foster global citizenship in undergraduate university students is an important goal of many higher education institutions. We assess the impact of intercultural virtual collaboration (IVC) courses on the three key competencies of students—collaborative skills, ethical and social responsibility, and intercultural proficiency—that underpin global citizenship (GC). We analyse pre- and post-course test data related to the learning goals of three IVCs between the universities in the Netherlands and Japan, Spain, and the USA, respectively. Using one-tailed paired sample t-tests, we find statistically significant improvements in each of these competencies and conclude that IVC supports the development of GC in university students, even if they have prior international experience.

**Keywords:** empirical assessment, global citizenship, higher education, intercultural competence, internationalisation at home, sustainable development goals, virtual collaboration

### 1. Introduction

Intercultural Virtual Collaboration (IVC) provides students from diverse backgrounds and locations with the opportunity to engage in collaborative learning activities, including joint research projects, cultural exchanges, and problem-solving tasks, without the need for physical travel [1]. This approach allows students to gain intercultural and international experience at their home institution, which will benefit their future professional workplaces. In the context of academic literature, the term ‘intercultural virtual collaboration’ is used in conjunction with the term ‘virtual exchange’ (VE), which is a more encompassing concept that includes various forms of online intercultural exchanges in education, for example ‘telecollaboration’, ‘online intercultural exchange’, and ‘global virtual teams’ [2].

In business education, the term IVC is also referred to as ‘global virtual teams’ or GVTs [3], which employs an experiential approach in which students work together

on business cases and collaborative projects to develop, among other things, their intercultural and digital communication skills. As with the other approaches in virtual exchanges, IVC is gaining traction due to its potential to be more inclusive and less impactful on the environment. It is, therefore, vital to assess the most recent advancements in IVC and its efficacy, as this approach has the potential to facilitate a more comprehensive and inclusive framework for developing students' intercultural competence, which aligns with global citizenship education. The current state of empirical research on the VE approach is limited [4]. The available research is predominantly exploratory in nature, qualitative in focus, or conducted on a limited scale. The purpose of this study is to make a contribution to empirical research through the application of quantitative methodology, specifically by assessing the effectiveness of three IVCs in their particular contexts.

### **1.1 Internationalisation and global citizenship education**

For those seeking to thrive in multicultural environments, educate and engage with diverse audiences, and lead successfully in diverse institutions, organisations, and communities, developing intercultural competence is essential [5, 6]. Intercultural competence is a crucial factor in fostering the successful integration of individuals and groups into a given environment [7], whether that be domestically or internationally. As such, academic experts have emphasised the importance of incorporating international and intercultural competence as an essential component of the knowledge and abilities that all graduates should possess, regardless of their academic field of study [6, 8–10]. The initiative is aligned with one of the primary objectives of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda [11], which is expressed in SDG 4.7, also known as global citizenship [12].

Digital technologies have the potential to play an essential role in achieving this goal [13, 14]. The recent challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have served to highlight the critical role that technologies play in achieving the desired outcomes in education [13, 15], while also illustrating the interconnectedness and fragility of the global community. In response to those pressing challenges of globalisation and sustainability [6, 16], there is a notable trend of universities and national higher education policies embracing global citizenship education [14, 16–20]. As defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), “global citizenship education (GCED) aims to empower learners of all ages to play an active role, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure societies [21]”. In this context, global citizenship goes beyond a legal status [22]. As noted by Rhoads and Szelenyi: “global citizenship is not so much a static identity, as it is an ability, disposition or commitment” ([22], p. 267). For Van Rompay-Bartels and Tuninga [20], it starts with “an awareness that we are interconnected and that in our choices, we have responsibilities for the quality of life of current and future generations and for protecting and preserving our environment”. The implementation of GCED, however, varies in form and extent across institutions and countries [16–18, 23]. Internationalisation plays a critical role inside this context in higher education [24, 25].

Based on the work of Knight [26], De Wit et al. ([27], p. 29, authors' emphasis in italics) refined the definition of internationalisation of higher education as: “The *intentional* process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education,

in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, *and to make a meaningful contribution to society*". The authors emphasise that internationalisation is intended to be a purposeful and meaningful contribution to society [28]. One key role of internationalisation is to foster the development of students' intercultural competence, a crucial skill that enables effective communication and collaboration across national boundaries [9], which can be achieved through international (student mobility) or domestic internationalisation. Given the limited number of students who are able to undertake studies abroad and the environmental impacts of student mobility [29], it would be advantageous for higher education institutions to provide students with the opportunity to develop global citizenship skills in their local contexts, thereby fostering internationalisation and mitigating their environmental footprint.

## **1.2 A call for internationalisation at home**

Recently, there has been a critical call for internationalisation of higher education for a more inclusive and sustainable approach [24, 25, 30]. The domestic internationalisation strategy or internationalisation at home (IaH) offers a solution that is both practical and beneficial, allowing more students to access international experiences and acquire the knowledge required to foster global citizenship [29]. Particularly in the current changing landscape of global higher education, it is crucial to facilitate students to learn to effectively collaborate to address global challenges at both the local and international levels.

In this study, internationalisation at home (IaH) is defined as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" ([31], p. 69). The proposed definition of Beelen [31] emphasises intentionally including international and intercultural aspects into curricula in a purposeful manner. This means that simply adding random international elements or electives would not be enough to internationalise a programme. Additionally, the definition highlights the importance of internationalisation for all students in all programmes.

The acceleration of cross-cultural interaction on a global scale is the result of a number of factors. These include international trade and long value chains, globalisation of the media, innovation in communication tools, international travel, increased migration, and internationalisation in education. Globalisation, specifically greater interconnectedness between nations, presents higher education institutions with the imperative to adapt by offering international education to all students. This form of education encourages an open approach to intercultural dialogue and collaboration in order to meet the challenges we face globally [30]. Curiosity, flexibility, respect, and empathy are human traits fostered in the intercultural learning process [32], which are essential for the development of global citizenship. These traits enable individuals to demonstrate commitment to international solidarity and responsibility in an increasingly interconnected global environment [33]. As DeWit et al. [27] assert, there is a pressing need to comprehend that internationalisation is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

As online and virtual modalities for international education have become prominent in university curricula, the question arises as to whether these methods are effective in developing students' intercultural competence, understanding of ethics and social responsibility, and ability to collaborate with diverse partners on challenging

projects. A systematic literature review [34] has identified a gap in the development of methodologies for teaching and evaluating international online collaboration competencies (IOOCs), which are essential for global virtual teamwork. The present study aims to contribute to this academic debate by providing evidence of evaluations based on the assessment of the 122 student learners involved in business intercultural virtual collaborations with a focus on the global citizenship mindset and competence.

### **1.3 The aims of intercultural virtual collaboration**

This study assesses the impact of three IVCs. IVC “connects students from different locations through technology, allowing them to collaborate in tasks or projects without the need to move physically” ([1], p. 1).

The IVC aims to enhance students’ comprehension of the course material while simultaneously developing their abilities to interact with individuals from diverse cultures, collaborate with others, and engage in critical analysis. Consequently, the IVC allows students to obtain international and intercultural exposure and experience within their institution as a form of internationalisation at home.

Bennett [35] claims that intercultural competence is most often understood “as an asset of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts”. Similarly, intercultural competence is “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” [36].

This study assesses the extent to which the IVC approach—as a form of VE—contributes to the development of the aforementioned competencies among the students involved in it. Furthermore, it allows for an evaluation of the role of IVCs in the internationalisation process and GCED within the domestic context.

### **1.4 Empirical assessment of intercultural learning**

Several studies from a variety of disciplines, including second language acquisition [14, 37], intercultural competence development [4], cross-cultural management [38], and civic competence [39], have investigated the use of virtual collaboration to identify effective virtual practices. Some of these studies concentrate on effective virtual practices that facilitate the developmental aspects of global citizenship [14, 40, 41].

Bartel-Radic et al. [38] conducted an investigation to evaluate the relationship between student acquisition of intercultural competence and their experience of participating in global teams. The researchers gathered data from 115 students who took part in one of the 22 virtual intercultural teams. Pre- and post-tests were developed by the authors using the scale of Bennett’s six DMIS stages from 1993, which were divided into two groups: ethnocentric stages (absence of intercultural competence) and ethnorelative stages (signifying intercultural competence). Although the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was low, the researchers were able to derive some insights from the sample data. The changes in intercultural competence (as measured by the six values on the DMIS scale) before and after the teamwork period were in the predicted direction (i.e., a decrease in ethnocentric stages and an increase in ethnorelative stages), but the differences were not statistically significant. The mean differences between the groups were also not significant. According to the results, which did not show a significant correlation but an improvement in the students’ learning, it

can be seen that students learned from the teaming experience, especially those with more prior international experience. Furthermore, it can be seen that learning was greater when teams were in contact more frequently. The researchers recommended that faculty members provide greater assistance to students in managing conflict within teams, which is a crucial aspect of the students' learning process when dealing with other cultures. O'Dowd [14] puts forth the proposition that engaging students in virtual intercultural collaboration with their peers from other cultural backgrounds can facilitate the acquisition of a second language, enhance intercultural competence, and foster global citizenship. The study was based on a qualitative content analysis of the reported learning outcomes of 345 students' portfolios of Spanish students learning English (L2) at B2-C1 level, in one of the 13 virtual exchanges. The results of the study indicated that while there was no evidence that learners developed empathy, their confidence in communicating in a second language increased, and they gained insights into the cultures of their partners. This facilitated the development of curiosity and the overcoming of stereotypes. Furthermore, the author asserts that the crucial role of the teacher in guiding students through this process should not be underestimated.

In a recent study, Hackett et al. [4] employed a mixed methods approach in order to examine the impact of COIL on the relationship between collaborative learning and intercultural competence development. In doing so, the researchers made use of two cultural models, specifically the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) model developed by Earley et al. [42] and the Multicultural Personality model introduced by van der Zee et al. [43]. The COIL findings revealed a significant improvement in intercultural competence among the experimental group from the US in comparison with the US control group, which consisted solely of US nationals. However, no such distinction was observed among the students from the Netherlands (NL). This discrepancy may be attributed to the NL control group's exposure to international students during the course, which resulted in no significant differences on intercultural competence development between the experimental and control groups.

There is disagreement in the nascent literature empirically investigating the impact of virtual collaborative and intercultural education on students with previous international experience. A few recent studies demonstrate the benefits of virtual learning for students with previous international experiences, such as Bartel-Radic et al. [38]. In contrast, some of those studies do not show significant results for students that were already exposed to international experiences, for example, Hackett et al. [4].

## **2. Aims of the study**

The objective of this study is to evaluate empirical evidence on whether IVC is associated with the development of intercultural competence, collaborative skills, and ethics and social responsibility, as elements of global citizenship education. We draw on data from student pre- and post-tests conducted as part of three IVCs between the Netherlands and Japan, Spain, and the USA. We contribute to the literature on the empirical assessment of virtual learning with regard to intercultural competence, collaborative skills, and ethics and social responsibility. As our study involves students with pre-existing international experience, the results also have implications as to whether virtual methods support learning for those students.

### **3. Materials and methods**

#### **3.1 Design and sample**

We evaluate the intercultural, collaborative, ethical, and social responsibility learning outcomes of the students who participated in three IVC projects during 2023. The IVC projects were implemented as an undergraduate course entitled “Crossing Borders Without Crossing Borders” (CBWCB). Each IVC project was conducted between an international business school at a university in the Netherlands and one of its partner institutions. The partners for the IVCs are located in Japan, the USA, and Spain. The first project took place from January to March 2023 between the institutions in the USA and the Netherlands. The second project ran from September to October 2023 between the universities in Japan and the Netherlands. The third project proceeded from November to December 2023 between the institutions in Spain and the Netherlands.

The CBWCB course was offered as an elective in the regular business curriculum at the Netherlands, Japan, and Spain institutions, while it was a special sessional elective at the USA university. The course was scheduled to fit the academic calendars and requirements of the institutions involved in each project. The IVC was delivered over 7 weeks for the projects involving the Japan and the USA institutions, and over 5 weeks for the collaboration with Spain. All three IVC projects were delivered in English.

The course consists of mixed sessions of instruction and teamwork. Students work virtually in diverse and cross-institutional teams of around five or six to develop a business case study related to SDGs, communication, culture, and marketing. Instructors allocate students to teams, formulating each team to include students representing both institutions and diversity of background and gender as far as possible. The size of each team and the number of students participating in the IVC depends on the number of students who have registered for the course at each institution. The business case study is the primary evaluation item contributing to students’ final grades and serves as a common goal to motivate intercultural teamwork and communication.

In each IVC, the students complete pre- and post-course questionnaires on intended and accomplished learning outcomes. We analyse the questionnaire data using paired sample t-tests to assess the effectiveness of the IVC through testing hypotheses related to the intended learning outcomes. Students also complete reflection exercises as part of the course, which have been analysed in Ref. [41]. For background on the methodology behind CBWCB and the business case study, please see Ref. [29].

#### **3.2 Participants**

Our study examines data from the 122 undergraduate students who participated in the three IVCs. All participants were enrolled in business higher education programmes at their respective institutions or international exchange students. The CBWCB course participants at the Japan and USA universities included only domestic students. In contrast, both domestic and international exchange students were enrolled in the course at the Netherlands and Spain institutions. Each student participated in only one IVC project. In the first session of each course, the instructors provided students with the informed opportunity to consent to participate in

the study, as required by each institution’s research protocols. We analyse the data for the students who consented to participate, adhering to ethical guidelines to ensure the safety and data privacy of all involved. **Table 1** shows the number of students from each institution participating in each of the three IVCs, as well as totals by project and for all three projects.

### 3.3 Learning outcomes

Key ingredients for a successful IVC include close partnership at the institutional, instructor, and student levels [29]. An important aspect of the institutional and instructor partnership is ensuring that the learning outcomes of the CBWCB are consistent with those required by each institution’s curriculum. An identical and consistent set of learning objectives were used in the three IVC projects that we analyse. These reflect fundamental learning objectives for GCED.

We frame the learning objectives in the context of the Netherlands business school’s study programme (IB), which is aligned with the 2017 National Framework for International Business (NFIB), as established by the National Platform for International Business [44]. This framework was developed in close collaboration between educational experts, international businesses, and the international business school’s alumni. The framework is constructed according to the KSAVE model—Knowledge, Skills, Attitude, Values, and Ethics. It emphasises a well-rounded approach to education, including academic knowledge, practical skills, positive attitudes, and ethical values. The IB programme’s alignment with the KSAVE model ensures compliance with recognised standards and confirms its status as an internationally recognised professional bachelor qualification.

The NFIB consists of four themes: 1. Ways of thinking (WT), 2. Ways of working (WW), 3. Living in the world (LW), and 4. Tools for Working and Management (TWM). Each theme comprises several programme learning outcomes (PLOs). The framework consists of 24 PLOs in total. Each IB programme can decide how to achieve the PLOs. The Dutch programme has operationalised the PLOs into more specific Module Learning Outcomes (MLOs), also well known as intended learning outcomes (ILOs) at the course level.

The CBWCB course is related to theme 2 (WW) in that it emphasises the development of collaborative skills, and to theme 3 (LW) in that it focuses on competences such as ethical and social responsibility and intercultural proficiency. **Table 2**

Project	Partner University	Number of participants		
		Netherlands	Partner	Total
1	Japan	23	13	36
2	USA	24	7	31
3	Spain	26	29	55
Total	All	73	49	122

*Note: The table provides the number of students participating in each of the three IVCs that agreed that their data may be used for research purposes. The data is presented for each of the three IVC projects, as the number of students at the Netherlands university and the international partner, the total for each project in the last column, and the totals for all three projects in the last row.*

**Table 1.**  
*Participants in the three IVC projects.*

Capability ( <i>Theme</i> )	Intended learning outcome (ILO)	Behaviour The student:
Ethical and social responsibility <i>LW10 (Living in the World)</i>	1. Formulate one's position concerning ethical and social responsibility in a professional environment.	a. demonstrates insight into ethical and global issues (based on a business case).
Intercultural context <i>LW11 (Living in the world)</i>	2. Mitigate the pitfalls of cultural differences in business and social contexts.	a. identifies cultural differences and similarities. b. shows openness (curiosity) and sensitivity/appreciation towards cultural diversity; feels inspired to explore cultures other than theirs.
Intercultural communication <i>LW13 (Living in the World)</i>	3. Appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication in an intercultural setting.	a. demonstrates effective verbal communication styles, including listening in a virtual setting. b. demonstrates effective non-verbal communication styles in a virtual setting.
Collaboration <i>WW6 (Ways of Working)</i>	4. Collaborate effectively (virtual) with different kinds of stakeholders in different cultural organisations and political landscapes to contribute to achieving agreed goals.	a. establishes a virtual professional and social relationship with students from the home and the partner institution on agreed shared goals. b. applies the specific requirements for virtual collaboration.

*Note: The table shows the type of competence, intended learning outcomes, and the corresponding student behaviour. The learning outcomes are based on the Netherlands international business school's study programme which is aligned with the 2017 National Framework for International Business (IB), as established by the National Platform for International Business [44]. The relevant IB themes that correspond to the capabilities shown in the table are provided in italics as theme code: theme name. Ethical and social responsibility is also assessed in the course individual reflection task and the team business case report. A fifth theme—LW14 (Living in the World) focused on cultural differences and behaviour—is assessed based on only the team business case.*

**Table 2.**  
*The intended learning outcomes assessed in the pre- and post-tests.*

provides the ILOs specified for LW10 (ethical and social responsibility), LW11 (intercultural context), LW13 (intercultural communication), and WW6 (collaborative skills). The associated student behaviours are also provided. These are the capabilities, learning outcomes, and student behaviours used in the CBWCB course.

### 3.4 The pre- and post-test questionnaire

All students were required to complete identical pre- and post-course questionnaires developed to evaluate students' progress towards the learning outcomes of CBWCB. The questions and associated capabilities are provided in **Table 3**. The questions are constructed specifically to measure one or more of the four capabilities introduced in sub-Section 3.3. For brevity, we refer to the four capabilities from this point onward as follows. 'Responsibility' represents ethical and social responsibility, LW10 (Living in the World). 'Context' represents intercultural context, LW11 (Living in the World). 'Communication' represents intercultural communication, LW13 (Living in the World). 'Collaboration' represents WW6 (Ways of Working).

Students answered the questionnaire according to a five-point Likert scale with the following options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly

Question	Capability
1. What is your name?	—
2. I consider different perspectives before making conclusions about other cultures.	Context
3. I appreciate differences between cultures.	Context
4. I am able to cope when faced with multiple cultural perspectives.	Context
5. I can make effective decisions when placed in different cultural situations.	Context
6. I can recognise how different cultures solve problems.	Context
7. I am able to recognise how members of other cultures make decisions.	Context
8. I can contrast important aspects of different cultures with my own.	Context
9. I am able to think critically to interpret global and intercultural issues.	Responsibility
10. I feel comfortable discussing international issues.	Responsibility
11. I am open to different cultural ways of thinking in any international context.	Collaboration
12. Understanding different points of view is a priority for me.	Context
13. Knowing about other cultural norms and beliefs is important to me.	Context
14. I enjoy learning about other cultures.	Collaboration
15. I actively learn about different cultural values and norms.	Responsibility
16. Knowing about other cultural beliefs is important.	Responsibility
17. I often ask questions about culture to members of other cultures.	Context
18. I appreciate members of other cultures teaching me about their culture.	Context
19. I feel comfortable in conversations that may involve cultural differences.	Communication
20. I am able to communicate effectively with members of other cultures.	Communication
21. I understand how non-verbal communication plays a role in intercultural interactions.	Communication
22. I can clearly articulate my point of view to members of other cultures.	Communication
23. I am able to interact effectively with members of other cultures.	Collaboration
24. I am confident that I can adapt to different cultural environments.	Collaboration
25. I demonstrate flexibility when interacting with members of another culture.	Communication, Collaboration
26. I prefer to socialise with people of my own culture.	Collaboration
27. I like working in groups with students from other countries.	Responsibility

*Note: The table provides the questionnaire used for the pre- and post-tests and the capability measured by each question. The capabilities are shown as follows. 'Collaboration' represents WW6 (Ways of Working). 'Responsibility' represents ethical and social responsibility, LW10 (Living in the World). 'Context' represents intercultural context, LW11 (Living in the World). 'Communication' represents intercultural communication, LW13 (Living in the World).*

**Table 3.**  
*The pre- and post-test questionnaire.*

agree. The pre-test was administered online during the first class for each of the three projects. The pre-test score establishes a baseline against which each student's progress towards the ILOs can be measured and allows the identification of any differences between the student cohorts of each institution at the beginning of the course. The post-test was administered in the last class of the course and used to evaluate students' progress towards the ILOs relative to the baseline established via the pre-test.

After each CBWCB course concluded, students’ test data was anonymised and stored consistent with the relevant universities’ research ethics and data privacy regulations. Students’ Likert scale answers were scored as follows: Strongly disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; and Strongly agree = 5. Question 26 was reverse-coded for consistency in the direction of its scale with the scales of the other questions. Application of the questionnaire at the beginning and end of CBWCB provides a paired samples dataset where we have pre- and post-course observations on each of the questions for each student involved in one of the three projects.

### 3.5 Hypotheses

In the analysis that follows, we examine the following four hypotheses.

- Hypothesis 1: Virtual collaboration between students from different universities and cultural backgrounds has a positive effect on students’ attitudes towards ethical and social responsibility (LW10, responsibility).
- Hypothesis 2: Virtual collaboration between students from different universities and cultural backgrounds has a positive effect on students’ skills in mitigating the pitfalls of cultural differences in business and social contexts (LW11, context).
- Hypothesis 3: Virtual collaboration between students from different universities and cultural backgrounds has a positive effect on appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication in an intercultural setting (LW13, communication).
- Hypothesis 4: Virtual collaboration between students from different universities and cultural backgrounds has a positive effect on students’ collaborative skills (WW6, collaboration).

### 3.6 Analysis

We analyse the questionnaire data by grouping student responses in four ways. We examine all students for all projects together, all students grouped by project, students grouped by institution for all projects, and students grouped by institution for each project. For the latter two aggregations, we delineate the institutions as Netherlands versus partner (Japan or USA or Spain).

Capability	Question number	Number of questions
Responsibility	9, 10, 11, 16, 27	5
Context	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 17, 18	11
Communication	19, 20, 21, 22, 25	5
Collaboration	12, 15, 23, 25, 26	5

*Note: The capabilities are shown as follows. ‘Responsibility’ represents ethical and social responsibility, LW10 (Living in the World). ‘Context’ represents intercultural context, LW11 (Living in the World). ‘Communication’ represents intercultural communication, LW13 (Living in the World). ‘Collaboration’ represents WW6 (Ways of Working).*

**Table 4.** Summary of capabilities and corresponding pre- and post-test question numbers.

To assess the appropriateness of our pooling of the questions according to their relevant capability, we use Cronbach's alpha, bearing in mind the guidance of [45, 46]. **Table 4** summarises the proposed pooling. Cronbach's alpha is provided with the results in the next section.

We employ one-tailed paired samples t-tests to compare the mean pre- and post-test scores to evaluate hypotheses one to four on the effectiveness of IVC in developing the capabilities of responsibility, context, communication, and collaboration, respectively. We also provide means and standard deviations for the pooled pre- and post-test responses by capability.

## 4. Results

Cronbach's alpha is provided in **Table 5** for all three projects together in Panel (a) and for each project separately in Panels (b), (c), and (d). All of the alpha statistics are above or close to 0.7, the commonly considered level for satisfactory item inter-relatedness. Given the distinction between items is not particularly fine, around 0.7 would appear reasonable [45]. None of the alphas appear excessively high [47]. Note that the number of items (or questions) is five for responsibility, communication, and collaboration, and 11 for context. Accordingly, our allocation of questions to the four capabilities is supported by the data.

**Table 5** provides the results for all students for all projects together in Panel (a) and all students grouped by project in Panels (b), (c), and (d). Tests of hypotheses 1 to 4 are provided in the lines for responsibility, context, communication, and collaboration, respectively. All capabilities show statistically significant improvements under the paired sample t-tests for all respondents together, with the complete sample of 122 students. The test statistic for collaboration is significant at the 1% level, the context and communication test statistics are significant at 5% and responsibility is significant at 10%. By project, the paired sample t-tests show a statistically significant improvement in collaboration for all three projects at the 5% level. Students' communication improves for the courses involving the Netherlands and Japan (at the 5% level of significance) and the Netherlands and the USA (at the 1% level). Responsibility shows an improvement for the Netherlands and Spain project only, at the 10% level. The samples are relatively small for the t-tests conducted on each project separately.

The means of the question scores for each capability generally increase between the pre- and post-tests for all four capabilities. The standard deviations of the question scores decrease noticeably for the Netherlands-Japan CBWCB course, but less so or not at all, for the other projects.

**Table 6** shows the results for the paired sample t-tests separately for each partner involved in the virtual collaboration. This allows us to tease out whether there are differences in learning outcome improvements between institutions, both from the perspective of the Netherlands university versus all partners and in each collaboration between the Netherlands and the respective partner university separately.

Panel (a) gives the results for students grouped by institution for all projects, delineated between those enrolled in the Netherlands and those at the Japan, USA, and Spain institutions combined. The test statistics show a significant improvement in collaboration for both the students of the Netherlands business school and those of the partner institutions, at the 1 and 5% levels of significance, respectively. Similarly, the evidence suggests an improvement in communication for both sides of the projects at the 10% level. Responsibility and context improve for the partner

	Mean		St. Dev.		$\alpha$	Paired t-test		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post		t	df	p
<b>Panel (a)</b>	<b>All respondents</b>							
Responsibility	4.17	4.21	0.46	0.47	0.70	1.294	121	0.099
Context	4.18	4.23	0.45	0.37	0.82	1.775	121	<b>0.039</b>
Communication	4.10	4.18	0.48	0.45	0.76	2.130	121	<b>0.017</b>
Collaboration	3.89	4.00	0.48	0.44	0.75	3.329	121	<b>0.001</b>
<b>Panel (b)</b>	<b>Netherlands and Japan</b>							
Responsibility	4.22	4.23	0.50	0.43	0.71	0.125	35	0.451
Context	4.22	4.27	0.45	0.28	0.80	0.728	35	0.236
Communication	4.13	4.27	0.55	0.40	0.80	1.871	35	<b>0.035</b>
Collaboration	3.92	4.08	0.52	0.36	0.69	2.116	35	<b>0.021</b>
<b>Panel (c)</b>	<b>Netherlands and USA</b>							
Responsibility	4.30	4.34	0.42	0.51	0.75	0.549	30	0.294
Context	4.26	4.33	0.32	0.43	0.82	1.256	30	0.110
Communication	4.15	4.30	0.39	0.51	0.75	2.832	30	<b>0.004</b>
Collaboration	3.95	4.07	0.53	0.52	0.81	1.836	30	<b>0.038</b>
<b>Panel (d)</b>	<b>Netherlands and Spain</b>							
Responsibility	4.05	4.13	0.44	0.46	0.65	1.434	54	0.079
Context	4.10	4.16	0.40	0.38	0.83	1.182	54	0.121
Communication	4.05	4.05	0.48	0.41	0.71	0.000	54	0.500
Collaboration	3.83	3.90	0.41	0.41	0.71	1.788	54	<b>0.040</b>

*Note: The table provides the means and standard deviations of the pre- and post-test responses and paired sample t-tests for the four capabilities for the IVC courses between The Netherlands and Japan, the USA and Spain, respectively, and for all respondents.  $\alpha$  represents Cronbach's alpha, t is the one-sided paired t-test statistic, df shows the degrees of freedom of the t-test, and p provides the prob. value. Prob. values for test statistics significant at the 5% level are shown in bold. Panel (a) provides the results for all participants in projects 1, 2, and 3 and all institutions pooled. Panels (b), (c), and (d), labelled Netherlands and Japan, Netherlands and USA, and Netherlands and Spain, show the results for the participants of each of projects 1, 2, and 3 pooled, respectively. The capabilities are shown as follows. 'Responsibility' represents ethical and social responsibility, LW10 (Living in the World). 'Context' represents intercultural context, LW11 (Living in the World). 'Communication' represents intercultural communication, LW13 (Living in the World). 'Collaboration' represents WW6 (Ways of Working).*

**Table 5.**  
*Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , and paired sample t-tests for participants grouped by project.*

institution students, at the 10 and 1% levels, respectively, but not for the students in the Netherlands.

**Table 6** panels (b), (c), and (d) group students by their institution for each of the three projects separately. In Panel (b), communication and collaboration show an improvement at the 5% level, but there is no statistically significant improvement for students on the Japan side of the course. For the Netherlands and USA project in Panel (c), collaboration and communication demonstrate an improvement again for the Netherlands students, while the USA students improve in terms of responsibility, context, and communication. In Panel (d), the t-tests suggest that Netherlands students' communication capability improves while the Spain students' responsibility and context capabilities improve.

	Mean		St. Dev.		Paired t-test		Mean		St. Dev.		Paired t-test			
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	t	df	p	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	t	df	p
<b>Panel (a)</b>	<b>All partner students</b>													
	<b>All Netherlands students</b>													
Responsibility	4.18	4.20	0.42	0.44	0.36	72	0.36	4.14	4.24	0.52	0.50	1.57	48	0.06
Context	4.21	4.20	0.34	0.35	-0.25	72	0.40	4.14	4.28	0.48	0.40	2.74	48	<b>0.01</b>
Communication	4.12	4.19	0.43	0.43	1.60	72	0.06	4.08	4.16	0.55	0.47	1.42	48	0.08
Collaboration	3.89	4.02	0.48	0.42	2.84	72	<b>0.00</b>	3.88	3.97	0.47	0.46	1.74	48	<b>0.04</b>
<b>Panel (b)</b>	<b>Japan</b>													
	<b>Netherlands</b>													
Responsibility	4.22	4.22	0.42	0.41	0.00	22	0.50	4.22	4.24	0.64	0.48	0.19	12	0.42
Context	4.22	4.22	0.31	0.27	0.00	22	0.50	4.22	4.35	0.64	0.27	0.98	12	0.17
Communication	4.09	4.28	0.45	0.37	1.96	22	<b>0.03</b>	4.20	4.25	0.71	0.46	0.42	12	0.34
Collaboration	3.90	4.09	0.50	0.36	1.73	22	<b>0.05</b>	3.96	4.07	0.57	0.39	1.28	12	0.11
<b>Panel (c)</b>	<b>USA</b>													
	<b>Netherlands</b>													
Responsibility	4.23	4.23	0.44	0.50	-0.13	23	0.45	4.54	4.71	0.22	0.34	1.44	6	0.10
Context	4.19	4.20	0.31	0.39	0.31	23	0.38	4.25	4.74	0.20	0.22	2.12	6	<b>0.04</b>
Communication	4.12	4.22	0.38	0.51	1.63	23	<b>0.05</b>	4.29	4.53	0.41	0.45	7.07	6	<b>0.00</b>
Collaboration	3.85	3.97	0.55	0.53	1.40	23	0.09	4.26	4.43	0.36	0.30	1.27	6	0.13

Panel (d)	Mean		St. Dev.		Paired t-test		Mean		St. Dev.		Paired t-test			
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	t	df	p	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	t	df	p
	<b>Netherlands</b>													
Responsibility	4.10	4.15	0.42	0.43	0.65	25	0.26	4.01	4.12	0.46	0.49	1.35	28	0.09
Context	4.21	4.17	0.39	0.37	-0.71	25	0.24	4.01	4.14	0.39	0.40	2.08	28	<b>0.02</b>
Communication	4.14	4.10	0.46	0.39	-0.42	25	0.34	3.98	4.01	0.49	0.43	0.50	28	0.31
Collaboration	3.91	4.00	0.42	0.36	2.31	25	<b>0.01</b>	0.76	3.81	0.40	0.45	0.78	28	0.22

Note: The table provides the means and standard deviations of the pre- and post-test responses and paired sample t-tests for the four capabilities for the IVC courses between The Netherlands and Japan, the USA and Spain, respectively, and for all respondents. *t* is the one-sided paired sample t-test statistic, *df* shows the degrees of freedom of the t-test, and *p* provides the prob. value. Prob. values for test statistics significant at the 5% level are shown in bold. Panel (a) provides the results for all participants in projects 1, 2, and 3 pooled by enrolment at the Netherlands university or one of the three partner universities in Japan, the USA, and Spain combined. Panels (b), (c), and (d) show the results for the participants of each of projects 1, 2, and 3 by enrolment at the Netherlands university or each partner institution in Japan, the USA, or Spain, respectively. The capabilities are shown as follows. 'Responsibility' represents ethical and social responsibility, LW10 (Living in the World). 'Context' represents intercultural context, LW11 (Living in the World). 'Communication' represents intercultural communication, LW13 (Living in the World). 'Collaboration' represents WW6 (Ways of Working).

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests for participants by institution and project.

Interestingly, the means of the question scores increased for all capabilities for all partner universities, while only some of the means increased for the Netherlands university. The samples for the individual project paired sample t-tests are relatively small, especially for Japan (13 students) and the USA (7 students).

## 5. Discussion

Our analysis of the pre- and post-course questionnaire data on the learning objectives of three IVCs conducted between an international business school in the Netherlands and partner universities in the Japan, the USA, and Spain, yields valuable insights. **Table 7** summarises our key results. The t-tests including all participants in all three projects, and with a sample of 122 students, provided support for hypotheses 1 to 4. That is, students made progress towards the learning objectives for (i) ethical and social responsibility, (ii) intercultural context, (iii) intercultural communication, and (iv) collaboration.

The tests for all students split by institution between the Netherlands and partners provided support for hypotheses 3 and 4 for the Netherlands students, and hypotheses 1 to 4 for the partner institution students. Looking at the results by capability, collaboration (hypothesis 4) received the most support across almost all tests, followed by communication (hypothesis 3) with most tests providing support. However, responsibility (hypothesis 1) and context (hypothesis 2) did not have broad-based support over the tests of different respondent groupings. This suggests that while collaboration and, to some extent communication, capabilities appear to improve through IVC, there is more work to do on developing the effectiveness of virtual collaboration in developing students' responsibility and context capabilities.

Although the mean scores for responsibility are higher following virtual collaboration, only five paired t-tests of 12 are significant, and then only at the 10% level. There is substantial scope for improvement to gain a deeper understanding of IVC's potential and effectiveness in the development of ethical and social responsibility.

Despite the improvement of the students in both campuses, the mean scores presented in **Table 6** show that the differences between the pre- and post-test scores are more pronounced in the partner institutions where the students had a more homogeneous socio-cultural environment, with less experience of working with international students.

There are some limitations to our study. The sample size is small, particularly for statistical tests on the data from each individual CBWCB project separately. Typically, IVC courses are conducted with a small class so that instructors can provide intensive guidance to students as they complete their team project. However, over time, we hope to accumulate data from further IVC projects for analysis. As we do not have individual data on international experience, we are unable to make a more definitive interpretation on the benefit of IVC for students who have international experience through IaH, student mobility, an international education environment, or other means. Collecting this data would provide for a deeper analysis.

The presented outcomes contribute to the ongoing academic discourse and empirical research on the impact of virtual collaboration as a form of internationalisation at home [14, 41] which can be conceptualised as an inclusive opportunity for all undergraduate students to acquire the requisite skills to operate effectively in our globalised economy [6, 9, 29, 30].

Respondents by:	Project		Institution and project									
	ALL	NJ	NU	NS	ALLN	ALLP	N1	J1	N2	U2	N3	S3
df	121	35	30	54	72	48	22	12	23	6	25	28
Responsibility	Y*			Y*		Y*				Y*		Y*
Context	Y				Y					Y		Y
Communication	Y	Y	Y		Y*	Y*	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Collaboration	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*		Y	

Note: The table summarises the inference drawn from one-tailed paired sample t-tests. Hypotheses 1 to 4 are listed in the first column as responsibility, context, communication, and collaboration, respectively. The row labelled df represents the degrees of freedom of the t-tests. ALL represents all respondents for all projects, NJ represents all respondents for project 1 between the Netherlands and Japan, NU represents all respondents for project 2 between the Netherlands and the USA, and NS represents all respondents in project 3 between the Netherlands and Spain. ALLN represents all Netherlands respondents for projects 1 to 3, and ALL represents all partner (Japan, USA, and Spain) respondents for projects 1 to 3. N1 and J1 represent all Netherlands and Japan respondents in project 1, respectively. N2 and U2 represent all Netherlands and USA respondents in project 2, respectively. N3 and S3 represent all Netherlands and Spain respondents in project 3, respectively. Y indicates that the paired sample t-test statistic is significant at the 5% level or lower. Y\* indicates that the test statistic is significant at 10%. The capabilities are shown as follows. 'Responsibility' represents ethical and social responsibility, LW10 (Living in the World). 'Context' represents intercultural context, LW11 (Living in the World). 'Communication' represents intercultural communication, LW13 (Living in the World). 'Collaboration' represents WW6 (Ways of Working).

**Table 7.**  
Summary of paired sample t-test inference for hypotheses 1 to 4.

It is imperative to expand our understanding of the long-term and contextual effects of IVC on students, including those belonging to language homogeneous groups with little or no experience of studying internationally. Future studies can use this preliminary research as a basis for understanding how IVC is established as a form of internationalisation within universities and its impact on the development of global citizenship. Subsequent studies can build on this initial research to gain insight into how IVC becomes institutionalised as a form of internationalisation within universities and its impact on the development of global citizenship. Furthermore, these studies should investigate the qualities of these programmes in achieving the development of intercultural competence, collaboration skills, and other qualities that emphasise the necessity of collective efforts to promote global competence. The results of this study provide educators and professionals with practical insights that facilitate the promotion of intercultural cooperation and global citizenship through internationalisation at home. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the broader literature on evidence-based research, which has previously demonstrated the value of developing intercultural competence and other elements of global citizenship in higher education through virtual collaboration as a form of curriculum internationalisation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Our research has examined the practical implications of group interactions in three IVCs. We focus on how these interactions influence students' development of intercultural competence, ethical and social responsibility, and the capacity for collaboration as important capability development in GCED. We contribute empirical evidence to assess the effectiveness of the CBWCB IVC course in fostering GC. Our evidence suggests that IVC can play a valuable role in IaH in higher education through virtual collaboration as a form of curriculum internationalisation.

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## Chapter 2

# *Homo Transmutans*: Challenges of Educational Discourse in a Digital Multicultural Class

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### Abstract

The focus of the study is on the transformation of individuals as communicators in a digital multicultural educational environment, a large-scale worldwide transition that was caused by pandemic (COVID-19) restrictions and the consequences of which have dramatically changed the formats and forms of communication in educational settings. Adapting to the virtual space of intercultural communication and the new, electronic, continuum of educational discourse, students, transforming themselves, transform the communicative community and their learning environment. The purpose of the study is to identify and conceptualize the signs of transformation of the multicultural class participants' identities when studying under international programs in the virtual space of communication. The research methods involved participant longitudinal observation (during the period of 2020–2024: the pandemic and the immediate post-pandemic years), survey, discourse analysis, and conceptual and axiological analyses. Among the results reflecting the dynamics of communication transformation processes in digital intercultural education are the encapsulation of communication, transcultural communication, and the development of multimodal competency, to name but a few.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication, educational discourse, multicultural class, capsule communication, multimodal competency, transcultural communication, transmodern situation

### 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic factor has unprecedentedly accelerated the processes of identity transformation of a human as a linguistic and communicative personality and as an intercultural personality when acting in a multicultural setting. The pandemic situation proved to become a catalyst and trigger for changes in the educational sector. Education systems in all countries quickly responded to the “COVID-19 force majeure” by creative improvising and innovative digitalizing of their educational processes and operations. Scientific and academic communities, scholars, teachers, and educators at all levels in different countries of the world have launched a

discourse on pandemic and post-pandemic pedagogy, placing its issues in the focus of their research. The topical themes covered providing for students' and educators' healthcare, ensuring safety, developing an academic anti-crisis policy, choosing strategies, tactics, techniques and technologies of education and training, forms and types of communication, continuity of educational cycles when moving to online platforms, efficiency and quality, pedagogical mediation and facilitation in organizing the educational process in a digital environment, establishing communication between the academic (or school) community, students and their families, pandemic crisis consulting, privacy concern and many more [1–8].

Among the research methods that led us to a number of inferences and conclusions are *participant longitudinal observation*, which made it possible to observe and record transformations in the communicative behavior of students from different countries in international online education programs over several academic semesters (during the period of 2020–2024: the pandemic and the immediate post-pandemic years), *survey* (questionnaires and interviews with open-ended and closed questions aimed at self-reflection and autoethnography of students and identifying signs of transformation of their relationships, values, and orientations in the new conditions of communication), *discourse analysis* (sentences as units of analysis of written speech (texts of emails, chat-box posts, and research papers), statements as units of analysis of oral speech, as well as interactive blocks as minimal units of communicative interaction); and *conceptual analysis*, including *axiological analysis*, of the verbal concepts the students used. These methods made it possible to identify new meanings that emerged in the natural and free (not staged) communication of students from different cultures and register changes in their value orientations and attitudes in the conditions of the virtualized training.

## **2. Transmodern situation**

The digitalization of educational discourse, which has been transforming communication processes, has made it possible to take a closer look at the values and anti-values of transmodernism with all its inherent phenomena having the “trans” prefix. According to the type of mentality, *Homo Transmutans* (or a person undergoing transformation) is a phenomenological product of the transmodern situation. Transmodernism, as R.M. Rodriguez Magda, the conceptologist of this phenomenon, discusses in her article “Crossroads of Transmodernity,” is a period of transformation, transience, and acceleration of time [9]. The transmodern situation is conceptually (philosophically, semiotically, semantically, and structurally) connected with globalization and informatization of society. “It is not the power of theory that offers us today a new Grand Narrative, but the Great Fact of globalization” [9].

Everything in today's world is rapidly transforming. The “trans” prefix means transition, turn, and movement “across,” “through,” “beyond,” and “above”. Self-awareness and self-concept cease to be part of a person's inner world, but go outside, exposed for self-realization. Transparency is the new objectivity. To be is to be seen. This does not mean literal visibility, that is, creating a visual image of oneself for another interactant or a wider audience. To be visible equals to being notable, noticeable, observable, marked, registered, and discernible in any conspicuous way, through any sign systems, symbols, codes, and communication channels. Language as a verbal means of communication is transformed into a nonverbal mode, into some quasi-gesture, into an instrument of phatic communication, to establish a closer contact and a communication channel, but not to transmit meaningful information only.

This transmodernist concept of the existence of the subject of communication echoes the famous aphorism from the Antiquity “Speak, that I may see thee,” which Marshall McLuhan recalled in his work “Culture is Our Business” [10].

The primacy of the virtual confronts us with the challenges of the digital mind hegemony. Material reality is enhanced and modified by virtual reality. Globalization creates the effect of simultaneity, while territoriality is replaced by cyberspace, where the global and the local coexist in a hybrid form of “glocality,” unfolding the panorama of transculture. Regarding communication in the digital space, R.M. Rodríguez Magda points out that virtual reality does not materially exist, but it is not reduced to a mere fiction either; it becomes a true reality. The subject is no longer physically represented but is not lost in the vast flow of digital data; it is telepresent, and therefore, it is interactive [11].

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for further development of globalization and informatization of societies, economies, and cultures, (re)turning us to the limitless possibilities of digitalization of communication practices, intercultural interaction, forcing us to get transformed, developing competencies to exist in the “New Normal”. The concept of the “New Normal” suggests that those facts and circumstances of human existence that were previously perceived as exceptional have now become or are becoming everyday reality or the norm.

Despite the contradictory nature of the processes of globalization and informatization of communication spaces, one of the pandemic-generated effects has become the phenomenon of transgression, that is, the possibility of crossing an impassable border, overcoming the insurmountable, the inaccessible, and the impossible. Discriminatory barriers are eliminated; restrictions are transformed into rights, and intentions into opportunities, involving any interactant in the communicative process, making activity (and interactivity) of any type, form, and quality available to everyone. This transformation of consciousness has led to the understanding of inclusiveness as a reality of life “for everyone”: such concepts as “inclusive environment,” “inclusive education,” “inclusive tourism,” “inclusive theater,” “inclusive museum,” and “inclusive language” have entered the domains of social, cultural, and communicative practice. Inclusivity of education under pandemic restrictions took on new meanings. This means the accessibility of any educational resources, synchronous and asynchronous communication with teachers, participation in all remotely organized educational, scientific, cultural, and social events, in pedagogical discourse of any nature on different digital platforms, while away from the venue, for example, at home. Stationary mobility became possible. Moving around the world, country, city, and university campus got transformed into web navigation.

### **3. A new configuration of a multicultural class**

The educational environment has changed, including contexts, contacts, channels, and the communicators themselves. In digital spaces, the spatiotemporal compression of communicative contexts has become visualized and objectified. The reality of Marshall McLuhan’s “Global Village” appeared in the new version 4.0 and acquired a comprehensive virtual visualization. Contacting cultures, distanced in real physical space, turned out to be localized in spaces of virtual communication. During the COVID-19 pandemic in my digital multicultural class students from China, Turkey, Indonesia, Nigeria, Japan, France, Spain, Italy, Serbia, Croatia, Colombia, Cuba, and different cities of Russia communicated synchronously in time and space on a regular

daily basis, geographically being at home, in their cities and countries, or somewhere on the way, in transit.

Now, in the post-pandemic period, participants of a multicultural digital class come from different continents, cultures, traditions, languages, beliefs, and value systems (**Table 1**). This reality has ceased to be seen as extraordinary and special or intriguing and exciting any more. It is perceived as a rank-and-file type by all those involved in teaching and learning. For the intercultural competency building and for cross-cultural research, it proves to be extremely useful, contributing, and broadening. It provides real-life cases of cross-cultural educational interaction. After the pandemic, the online format has become part of daily routine. It is seen as a resource for intercampus training courses with the participants residing and located in campuses geographically distant from each other.

Academic year	Number of course participants*	Countries/Cultures of participants' origin	Gender of course participants	Age of course participants
2020/2021	27	14 countries: Armenia, China, Colombia, Cuba, Georgia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan	Male students—6 Female students—21	21–26
2021/2022	43	21 country: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, China, France, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, Russia, Spain, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, the USA, Uzbekistan, Vietnam	Male students—9 Female students—34	22–27
2022/2023	33	17 countries: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cameroon, China, Indonesia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Russia, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Vietnam	Male students—7 Female students—26	22–28
2023/2024	38	26 countries**: Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brazil, China, Congo, Ecuador, Falkland Islands, Gambia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Syria, Taiwan, Togo, Turkey, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, Vietnam	Male students—16 Female students—22	22–41

\*The courses are *Introduction to Intercultural Communication; Pragmatics of Intercultural and Cross-Cultural Communication; Modeling of Intercultural Dialog; Ethnosociolinguistics; Translinguistics and Transcultural Communication; Axiological Linguistics; Linguistic Personology.*

\*\*In the 2023/2024 academic year, the HSE University (like many universities of Russia) had an increased influx of students from Middle East, Asia, and Africa with a decrease from European countries.

**Table 1.** Multicultural class demographics (higher school of economics master's program "foreign languages and intercultural communication": 2020–2024 academic years).

An educational event (a lecture, seminar, workshop, and tutorial) in an electronic environment for a multicultural class has become a virtual miniature picture of the world that comes to life during a communication session. It consists of a mosaic of national images brought about by the communication event participants. Their social and communicative space is compressed to the size of a computer (laptop or smartphone) screen with frames as micro-representations of their Home. Screen communication is based on interaction with digital images of participants. In this context, the linguacognitive concept of “frame” (with the literal picture in a frame) receives a visual embodiment—it gets objectified. The opportunities to cognitively expand the boundaries create the conditions for inter – and cross-cultural learning and understanding. The picture of the world unfolds for students in a multicultural class from a mosaic of frames of their classmates.

The “frame” metaphor is conceptualized as a semantic frame and cognitive structure that organizes and systematizes knowledge in the human mental world. Leontovich argues that human mentality automatically completes those objects that are only partially presented in the frame or just roughly outlined [12]. In a multicultural class involving students from different national cultures, it is possible for those involved to complete their sociocultural environment and communicative contexts by expanding their “window” frames. The degree of adequacy of such completion will depend on the cultural competence of each of the interactants, with due consideration of their ability to apply a “thick description” (according to K. Geertz) in order to interpret fragments of cultures on the screen [13]. The completion of the cultural space from frames is based on visible cultural artifacts in the external image of the communicators, on the background with objects and subjects (including family members and pets) falling into the “frame,” as well as on the communicative behavior itself: verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal [In the COVID-19 period, the online format of classes seemed novel, romantic, exciting, entertaining, and provoking interest on the part of family members and pets, so their fleeting presence in the frame during classes never seemed to be out of place]. Students’ communicative personalities are revealed as cultural identities when the frames of their images on the screen are expanded into a broader context: for instance, a smiling Chinese grandmother emerging behind a student, sounds of a holiday coming from the streets in a Turkish city, and authentic household utensils placed in the background of an Indonesian house. All fall into the communicative context of educational discourse and are perceptually and cognitively integrated into more complex and voluminous images of communicating cultures.

Avatar photographs, which may hide intercultural communicators in the virtual classroom, but which the participants choose for self-presentation, also appear as “frames.” They schematize the cultural experience of the participants and activate the processes of deciphering and completing the images in the photographs (of the participants themselves, as well as of a certain place, event, or situation).

Our survey and observation leave no doubt that in a multicultural class, when participants join a new training course, they start by stereotyping each other because stereotyping is a universal natural cognitive method of becoming familiar with the unfamiliar. Following Walter Lippmann’s interpretation of stereotyping in relation to human communication, there is no doubt that people are psychologically inclined to stereotype, that is, to make judgments about others on the basis of their ethnic or national group membership [14]. Stereotypes are “rigid, inaccurate popular concepts applied indiscriminately to individuals without due regard for their actual characteristics” [15]; therefore, after a while, having gotten to know each other better, students stop generalizing. However, as our participant observation shows, multicultural class

students frequently perceive their classmates from other cultures as model personalities, linguacultural types [16], or social types [15], evoking images and associations that correspond to their practical sociocultural experience. For example, Chinese students are seen by their Russian classmates as typical representatives of the Chinese culture, while Russian students are by default perceived by other international students as “typical Russians” and so on. Concurrently, all international students with their linguistic and cultural identities and experience have become a “firsthand” source of cultural knowledge, resource, capital, “added value”, and “asset” for the entire group of students professionally studying intercultural and cross-cultural communication. Consequently, the phenomenon of a digital multicultural class produces a multiplier effect for quality learning.

The concept of “script” as a cognitive structure can also be applied to conceptualize communication in a virtual classroom. The “script” unfolds according to certain canons and rules, based on the context of interaction, the communicative situation, and the type of discourse. In the educational context and pedagogical discourse, the class (lecture or seminar) develops in the genre of a scenario with a plot and distributed roles, part of which is implemented according to the teacher’s plan, and part depends on the conditions of the digital environment and the specific circumstances of electronic communication. Participants in the discourse have now got used to and feel prepared for unexpected turns in the scenario (due to possible technical failures on the part of any of them). Internal readiness for unintentional interruption of contact (break of digital connection) is a new construct of communicative competency. A technological failure, digital distortion of sound or video can and does lead to stressful situations of awkwardness, loss of “face,” attribution errors, irretrievably missed information, and so forth. Meanwhile, the emerging digital communication competency allows the participants in a communicative event to confidently cope with the bifurcations of unstable virtual connection, get reconfigured, go back, speed up or slow down the pace, identify and revise key components of the message, be prepared for different “turns of the plot” in the event scenario, and so on.

“Scripts” dictate the behavior of people, as well as their interpretation of the behavior of other people in a certain communicative situation. In the digital space, the rules are unified and become common to everyone, eliminating the boundaries between in-group and out-group members. Everyone learns to think, speak, and act as a bearer of a new (“digital”) culture.

#### **4. The “new normal”**

A well-known argument that the study of a foreign culture reveals the depths and subtleties of one’s own cultural tradition has also got visualized in virtual conditions. Analyzing identities and mentalities, values and beliefs, symbols and signs, stereotypes, and biases, students display and observe revelations, surprises, doubts, bewilderments, grief, or joy of each other when cognitive-communicative processes appear in a close focus of attention, concentrating in time and space.

Literally before our eyes, with a convincing evidence, their recognition and re-recognition occurs based on the “reformatting” of their previous cultural experience. On the one hand, students rediscover their own linguistic culture, evaluating it from the perspective of other cultures, through the eyes of their “another culture” classmates, their values and behavior patterns in the form of orientations, standards, norms, and customs. On the other hand, they are rethinking (reevaluating) their

values, beliefs, and customs in the context of a new reality, that is, the emerging “new normal”, enhanced and strengthened by the effect of virtual proximity (“We are so far, but at the same time we are so close”). Meanwhile, they realize that going back to the pre-pandemic world with its “old school” attitudes, rules, and customs will be hardly possible. The concept of “new normal” (now in relation to the sphere of education) means that the previous situation, which was conceptualized as a stable and sustainable norm, is a thing of the past, and there is no return to the pre-pandemic order of things.

As Karasik points out, “each person belongs to different communities and thereby adheres to different cultural prescriptions, and these prescriptions are subject to change” [17]. In the virtual educational process, long-term, with uncertain prospects, with incompletely explored effects, with ambiguously conceptualized gains and losses, the educational communicative environment with its inherent communicative culture seemed to be a certain *terra incognita* for the vast majority of participants, that is, some *terra incognita* with prescriptions and regulations not yet established, but with changes already taking place.

In the depths of the “new normal,” new rules and patterns of behavior are emerging and getting fixed. The transformational restructuring of collective mentality consists, in particular, in the mutual adjustment of participants of a communicative event, which is fixed as a socially significant skill. The display of appropriate and socially approved behavior by one of the communicators in the group and the positive evaluative reaction of others sets a certain reference communicative pattern for all. This, according to Karasik, is “orientation on a meaningful model” [17]. For instance, in my multicultural virtual class, Chinese master’s degree students start (though with obvious signs of overcoming internal boundaries) to engage in discussions and debates, in the same way as students from other cultures do. During the survey, they admitted that such communicative activity in class is “not normal” for them. Only after joining the international program, they slowly developed the pattern of speaking up openly and individually in class, discussing the topical issues, arguing and disagreeing, “even with teachers”. This is a new experience for them, because such active student behavior is not practiced (and thus not accepted) at Chinese universities (Entering a debate with a teacher by expressing individual point of view is an inappropriate behavior, it is not only unwise, but also unethical). The Chinese students also noted that it was easier for them to transform their previous attitudes and practices in a virtual environment than in physical reality (in a public discussion in a large classroom offline).

From the perspective of identity changes recorded in the communicative behavior of students, identity is truly context-dependent. Digital multicultural class participants provide numerous narratives of how they have to “switch on” or “switch off” some of their internal impulses to adapt to the New Normal. Identity is “highly context sensitive and any attempt to define it must be situated within a specific frame of reference” [18]. Since in the digital educational space, students share value orientations and behavioral standards of the New Normal, they feel encouraged to adapt or adjust their identities. It is a sort of digital acculturation that interactants go through while restructuring their online Self.

One of our surveys showed that students from different cultures comprehended the teacher’s remark “Any questions?” on the issue or topic under discussion differently. Some took it as a signal for mandatory inclusion in communication, indicating their activity, that is, they MUST ask questions as these are conventions of educational discourse. Students from some other cultures, on the contrary, responded by silence,

even if they had some questions because they believed that any question they would ask could be assessed as evidence of their intellectual weakness. Still some others interpreted the teacher's "Any questions?" as only one of the ritualistic conventions of educational discourse, a formula of politeness, the ethics of interaction, or just a way of filling in a pause before the start of the next segment of the lecture or seminar. The emerging conventions of the digital educational environment reduce such intercultural doubts to uniform rules that regulate and streamline the activities of students.

The existing digital educational platforms have a function of fixing the order of speaking for the participants online. It is based on virtually raised hands in the list of participants, which the system builds itself. So, the teacher online is freed from the need to decide who raised their hand first; that might mean that those students are faster learners and thus won the priority to answer the question first. The rising digital hands are visible to everyone in class, giving confidence to those who are not hesitant to raise their hands, or vice versa, encouraging those who are hesitating.

The focus on "activity in class" (at the National Research University "Higher School of Economics," this is one of the elements of ongoing monitoring and evaluation criteria for their individual progress assessment and final score for the course) has transformed the communicative behavior of Chinese students in the digital learning environment. Our discourse analysis of interactive blocks showed that for some students, this is expressed in their desire to seize the initiative and hold it for as long as possible, in competition for the teacher's attention, in noncompliance with the rules of speech and the communicative balance between the nature of the question and the volume of the answer, and in reflexive concern about the control of their participation from the part of the teacher. Initially restrained and silent due to national cultural norms, now they ask, "Did you register my activity in class?" which, from our perspective, indicates some transformation of their value system in educational discourse and some "reformatting" of their personality in intercultural digital communication. Our observations indicate that in the electronic environment, the activity of students, as well as their concern about recording their involvement in the educational process, has increased, since they know that the digital educational platform itself registers their presence in class and participation in the discourse. In our assessment, these are some signs of adaptation of participants to new conditions of interaction through the transformation of mental maps and cognitive base: from entropy with movement "by touch," through embedding oneself into a system with constantly updated and completed structural elements (with the development of new behavioral conventions and habits), to the "new normal" situation.

## **5. Encapsulation of communication**

Getting transformed and adapting to the electronic environment, communicators find themselves in the conditions of capsule communication (in an ontologically conceptualized closed capsule or, if we extrapolate the metaphorical projection by Lakoff and Johnson to a digital communication platform, in a container, or receptacle) [19]. Firstly, communicators have a quick access to an unlimited number of a wide variety of Internet resources. Secondly, the collective mind, the center of thematic discourse, the focus of control and evaluation, and their formal educational community are all concentrated on one site, closed from the rest of the university community, in a digital capsule of their virtual stay. A learning capsule continuum emerges. During the COVID-19 period, it was as such on a daily basis with no alternatives. In the

post-pandemic period, it is applied on some regular basis, for instance, in Higher School of Economics the virtual mode of classes is used for Master's degree students on Saturdays. During the day, students and teachers enter and reenter after breaks to their capsule classrooms, then move on to other educational capsules, get together for tutorials, consultations, meetings, workshops, or conferences. At the end of the day, participants exit the multi-capsule digital university moving to their real Home. The capsule becomes a unit of educational space, part of the environment, and the encapsulation of communication becomes a new dimension of the culture of being. Modeling of communication in the conditions of a training capsule with new rules and conventions takes place.

Modeling of cultural concepts with a value component in educational communication in the capsule conditions reflects the axiological picture of the world in relation to the virtual community. For instance, the axiological concept of "sharing" (displaying one's ideas, solutions, or arguments and making them common) has been transferred from computer discourse to educational discourse and entered the usual lexicon of everyday communication. In educational settings, "sharing" has ceased to be a typically technical term but has gained a "human touch" construct equal to "sharing is caring." Often an interlocutor's intention to "share the screen" reflects a desire to provide assistance, render support, explain visually, demonstrate a sequence of actions, show the location of an object, and so forth.

The expansion (and "sharing") of new knowledge, new meanings and concepts, new experiences, new communication contexts, and new channels and tools of interaction is the expected pattern of communicative behavior of participants of educational discourse in the digital environment. Important in comprehending of such expectations is the understanding of knowledge as a three-component formation consisting of "sensory experience, common sense and a rational system of deducing new knowledge from previously acquired knowledge" [17].

Capsule communication contributes to cultural awareness and sensitivity. With its frontal type of interaction (in front of each other, face to face, or eye to eye), it exacerbates the need to develop the skills of sensing a communication partner in unconventional virtual settings.

Phatic communication acquires new semantic accents and value constructs. Without physical presence of other interlocutors, but communicating with them frontally, it is important to receive signals of human essence, communicative commonality, emotional involvement, support, solidarity, and empathy. The conditions for phatic communication, setting up channels for establishing contact, and transmitting relations and attitudes of participants to each other in a virtual environment have changed. In some ways, it has become simpler, because chronotopically, all the participants are concentrated nearby, beyond their personal "window frames," in a very close digital proximity. However, the difficulty is that digital phatics has not yet developed according to uniform canons, causing uncertainty about the appropriateness and effectiveness of communication practices for the purpose of establishing contact, taken so far from real reality.

In the capsule class, there is greater democracy in communication. The transformation of the learning space has led to the democratization of communicative behavior with a social distance being greatly reduced. As a result of developing and consolidating such a democratic style in the virtual classroom, it is transferred to the real physical classroom, as our practice shows.

In the context of the encapsulation of communication, it seems that the competencies in demand are those that are studied by scientists within the framework

of theories of intelligence, understood not from the perspective of cognition and cognitive abilities, but as a conscious sensitivity, developed adaptability, and well-developed communication skills. Among the types of intelligence, the following are distinguished [20–22]: (1) *cultural intelligence* (understanding of cultural values that influence the communicative behavior of interacting partners); (2) *emotional intelligence* (sensitivity to the emotional state of partners and emotional atmosphere in the setting as the context of communication); (3) *social intelligence* (the ability to adapt to the social environment); (4) *collective intelligence* (the ability for collective activity); (5) *leadership intelligence* (developed leadership qualities); and (6) *practical* or *applied intelligence* (developed practical communication skills for creative or analytical activities). In many aspects and constructs, these types of intelligence intersect with the concepts of competencies and “soft” skills.

The response to the challenges of the encapsulation of communication is also found in the modeling of “*positive communication*” as a universal behavioral strategy. It proves to be transformative, value-based, supportive, and life-affirming, bringing “*human touch*” into the virtual capsule of communication.

## **6. Positive communication**

Positive communication, which implies interdependent positive intentionality and positive expectations of interactants, feels extremely important in multicultural groups, particularly, online, because participants are isolated (encapsulated) from the real physical classroom, may have no proper understanding of the cultural identities of other students, and lack familiar communication methods and rules. In such conditions, positivity as a strategy of communication can be a solution.

Mirivel in his groundbreaking work “The Art of Positive Communication: Theory and Practice” defines positive communication as “any verbal or non-verbal behaviors that function positively in the course of human interaction.” “It includes all of the behaviors that reflect our best, that produce personal and relational happiness and satisfaction, as well as those that challenge our self to move in the direction of others and to act ethically” [23]. Mirivel developed a model of positive communication based on six behavioral patterns aimed to inspire and influence interactants: greeting, asking, complimenting, disclosing, encouraging, and listening. They are all designed as cause and effect (or signal and response) (**Figure 1**).

Leontovich argues that positive communication is an interaction based on positive emotions, aimed at achieving mutual understanding and bringing satisfaction to all participants [24]. Positive communication as an imperative for interactional development of society involves a strategy of supportive communication, that is, some strategy chosen to help communicative partners in a difficult situation. In the conditions of virtual multicultural interaction, positive communication aims to become the basis of communicative ethics. Participants are supposed to develop needs to be capable of mutual understanding, demonstrating positive intentions, and transmitting readiness to help or support each other in any situations of unforeseen collapse, loss of contact or poor connection, or any errors caused by uncertainty. Leontovich points out that positive communication embraces communicative initiative, involvement in interaction, adaptation to the interlocutor, and social support and congruence as its intrinsic constitutive features. Communicative initiative is based on positive intentions on the part of communicators. Involvement in interaction presupposes empathy. Adaptation to the interlocutor means adjusting to the partner, because this helps optimize



**Figure 1.**  
*Mirivel's model of positive communication.*

communication. Social support is seen as any help, including emotional, informational, or instrumental. Congruence is understood as the correspondence of internal self-concept to its external manifestations: sincerity, honesty, and openness [24].

Emphasizing the benefits and gains of positive communication, it feels impossible to ignore a controversial phenomenon of positive discrimination, which in the context of digital educational discourse turns out to be a value construct of communication. The policy of positive discrimination, if shared by all members of the group, may serve to support those participants who, for reasons beyond their control, find themselves in an unfavorable or unequal position with the others. In one of the pandemic years, a Cuban student of mine, when defending her project online, encountered problems with Internet access in her country and poor connection quality. However, she received a positive discriminatory support from all participants in her virtual multicultural class. They all agreed that she did not have to stick to the rules of online classes. They were ready to wait for her to get reconnected to the network again and again because of loss of connection, to tolerate poor sound quality, to have audio only without the video mode, to agree to some context-based interpretation of the talk because of the unstable signal, and so on. Solidarity, patience, and support displayed by the students can be conceptualized as a human construct of the “New Normal” situation. Positive communication (positive discrimination) was perceived as much more significant for all and everyone than strict compliance with formal conventions and rules.

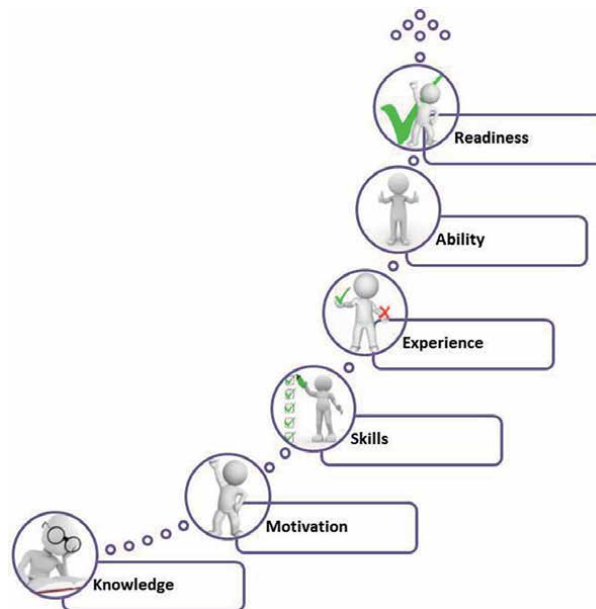
## 7. Multimodality as a competency

Digital educational space is social, communicative, and semiotic. With this in mind, we have to agree that a virtual classroom is a functional space for constructing and developing new competencies.

Within international programs worldwide, communication in a multicultural classroom is carried out in global English as a lingua franca of the participants [25–27]. The level of *language competence* of students can vary significantly in terms of both speech production and its interpretation and understanding. Their levels of *communicative competence* also differ. This has the effect of increasing or decreasing communicative effectiveness. The *cultural competence* of multicultural class participants is not similar either, and in the conditions of intercultural contacts, it is always subject to correction and renewal. The formation of *intercultural competence* in e-learning conditions is an even more complex process than in physical reality.

Digital educational platforms create equal communication conditions for everyone, offering many ways for effective discourse. The resources and instruments of digital mediation and the multimodality of the environment make it possible for students to generate ideas, systematize and structure them, transform them into creative products, share them, and analyze and evaluate the products of their fellow-students using a wide range of various tools. Multimodality is understood as a variety of modes and methods used comprehensively to convey meanings. They include printed texts, maps, diagrams, graphs, photographs, screenshots, other images and illustrations, animation, music, sound and color effects, video clips, hyperlinks, QR codes, and other semiotic resources. Students can work in groups or teams in different digital “rooms,” then get together in some common space to discuss the results. It is also possible to conduct an educational discussion using the World Café technology, but in a virtual format, and many more techniques.

By acquiring technological *knowledge*, forming *motivation* to communicate effectively, mastering digital communication *skills*, and gaining *experience* in educational, scientific, and practical activities on various educational platforms, students develop the *ability* and *readiness* to communicate effectively in professional domains (Figure 2). This is a *multimodal competency*, the formation of which is directly



**Figure 2.**  
*Trajectory of competency formation.*

encouraged and facilitated by the digital environment. The multimodality of the digital platform in the semiotic space of communication creates a synergy effect in which the multimodal competency of students is not the sum of individual competences, but the result of their multiplication and integration. The synergistic effect of multimodality adds multidimensionality and volume to the created cultural meanings.

Digital communication creates new conditions and opportunities for an individual as a linguistic and communicative personality in the development of intellectual flexibility, adaptability to a new environment, effective use of time and space compression for the capitalization of knowledge, and synergy of information sources, turning them into competencies of a different order with the increment of new constructs that are significant for the individual.

## 8. Transculture and transcultural communication

Transculture can be generally understood as some “imaginary artificial culture”—some common space, contact zone, or text—where an intersection and fusion of ideas, beliefs, values, and practices specific for different cultures take place.

Krasnykh reflects on the multidimensionality and “multi-worldliness” of the existence of an individual as a speaking person (*homo loquens*), representing their language and culture (linguaculture) in communication and at the same time realizing themselves as a personality [28]. Individuals involved in a continuous process of communication, “weaving” language and culture within themselves as well as “weaving” themselves into language and culture, turn out to be not only objects but also subjects (creators) of “language, culture, and communication” [28]. In the space of transculture of the digital communication environment, which interweaves and intertwines elements of different languages, cultures, societies, communities, education systems, and communication systems, an individual becomes both an object and a subject of change. Online communicators prove to start acting as agents of change themselves.

The transformation of the cultural identity and communicative personality of students in a multicultural class is an obvious but at the same time not absolutely obvious process. This is due to the fact that students in the conditions of capsule communication mentally and communicatively become closer to each other, while adapting to a new but common transculture. There they create new ways of self-presentation, accept new “rules of the game,” and share new communicative behavior patterns. At the same time, they strive to correspond to a certain transcultural model of a student, an equal participant in educational discourse. The idea is to be like everyone else (not Other, or Stranger, or Alien from the position of a new culture) so that the criteria for learning progress and success are uniformly applicable to everyone.

As for some obvious signs of transcultural communication, as well as the formation of transcultural identity, there are real cases with students, especially from more traditional cultures, who modify their behavior in order to get adjusted to the transculture of digital education.

A Japanese student wrote a detailed letter to me as her teacher, giving her reasons why she did not show up for classes. She explained that she had not prepared her homework and missed the essay deadline, and her feelings of shame did not allow her to join the online classes with me. The discourse analysis of the email showed that the Japanese student used forms of respect and worship towards her teacher and forms of self-reproach and humiliation towards herself. She built her text on the

lexical structures that carried meanings of shameful weaknesses of her personality, inappropriate behavior, and unacceptable actions. She stressed that her laziness, selfishness, and arrogance prevented her from putting in extra effort and spending more time to complete the assignment and meet the professor's requirements. The discourse analysis of her text showed that she actually transferred the Japanese style of interaction to communicate with her Russian teacher, but in the English language. This case of the transition to transcultural communication with the English-language replacement of the Japanese forms of honorifics when addressing a Russian teacher (combined with the depreciative forms towards herself) in the context of an international virtual education indicates the multifaceted transformation of cultural identity in a multicultural class.

Another case of transcultural communication involves one of my Chinese students who started her research paper, she submitted online, by expressing esteem and respect for me as her lecturing professor in a separate paragraph. Honorifics as part of the Chinese culture value system was applied by the student in a separate paragraph of her study, as in the conditions of virtual communication she did not find other ways to demonstrate her respect. Apart from honorifics, she used metaphors characteristic of the Chinese language and culture, but in English. Signing her paper, she even explained that her name means "flower" in Chinese. For her, this means that she is supposed to exude beauty and harmony. Therefore, she makes every effort to live up to her name.

Identity transformations are not the same, uniform or homogeneous, even for students from culturally close countries and regions. In an interview with a Taiwanese student of mine about the learning barriers and failures she encountered in her virtual multicultural class, she talked about her uncertainty and anxiety because she could not understand whether she was losing face or not when she had to debate in class and when it clearly was not a win-win outcome for her. There were no familiar signs from her classmates that she could decipher, and no familiar physical context that she could rely on. The Taiwanese student negotiated some problems beyond her control with me (as her teacher). One of them was about maintaining face in digital public; another one was about the "class activity" requirement. She asked for my permission to (1) write emails with her questions about her face and get my feedback and (2) stay after class and provide for her "class activity" when other students are gone. She was trying hard to adapt to the new conditions and conventions of learning but still could not (or did not want to?) give up her cultural Self. She did it her way.

For students from traditional, collectivistic, and shame cultures, the issues of positive face and politeness are obviously among the priority ones. The metaphoric concept of "face" stands for the public self-image composed of self-worth and esteem of the others. As the "face" conceptologist Ting-Toomey argues, face refers to "an individual's claimed sense of positive image in a relational and network context" [29]. Moreover, on the surface level, face can be about give-and-take respect and disrespect attitudes, while on the deeper level, it is about honor and shame belief and value systems [30].

## **9. Conclusion**

Transformation to adapt to a new space of interaction involves restructuring of self-concept, reformatting of the mental map, reprogramming of value systems, beliefs, norms, rules, ethics, and other identity "programs." Transformation is the

result of communication as a process of joint creation of meanings, as shared knowledge in society and culture (including virtual society and global culture). *Homo communicativus* (a human who communicates) has transformed the environment and got transformed him/herself/themselves. This process is going on, and internal readiness for change has been formed. Can this ability, willingness, and readiness to transform (and get transformed) and to adapt (get adapted) be conceptualized, accepted and expected as a new universal human competency? Time will show.


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## Chapter 3

# Digital Dialog: A/r/tographic Insights into Greek Migrant Youth Identities and Intercultural Dynamics

*Melina Mallos*

### Abstract

This chapter investigates the intercultural and cross-cultural dynamics present in the digital interactions of Greek migrant youths. By employing a/r/tography—a methodology that blends artmaking, research, and teaching—the chapter emphasizes how these youths express their identities through social media. The research highlights the role of digital technologies in allowing Greek migrant youths to reflect on their migration experiences and cultural heritage during the global COVID-19 lockdown of 2020. Visual artifacts, including storyboards, are incorporated to illustrate the insights gained through a/r/tographical renderings, which reveal how new media use supports intercultural interaction and translanguaging, thereby enhancing identity construction and a sense of belonging within contemporary migration experiences.

**Keywords:** digital media, Greek migrant youth, intercultural identity, social media, transnationalism, migration studies, a/r/tography, cultural heritage, translanguaging, identity construction

### 1. Introduction

This chapter delves into the ways in which my a/r/tographic research with eight Greek migrant youth aged 18–24, who migrated to Melbourne, Australia between 2010 and 2017, reveals the dynamics of interculturalism and cross-culturalism within digital spaces. By employing a/r/tography—enacting the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher to create art and theorize new knowledge—I provide examples of how Greek migrant youths integrate cross-cultural elements, such as languages, customs, and personal interests, through their social media interactions. This research also examines how these youths communicate their hybrid Australian and Greek identities in the digital space. I argue that digital platforms serve as vital sites for Greek migrant youth in Melbourne’s Greek diaspora to communicate, maintain, and reimagine their cultural heritage. Building on this, six storyboards were created, each corresponding to distinct renderings within a/r/tography (see Section 5).

This research was conducted in the multicultural city of Melbourne, Victoria, during the global COVID-19 lockdown of 2020. According to Ito et al. [1], new media can be defined as a “constellation of media changes, in a move toward more digital, networked, and interactive forms, which together define the horizon of the new.” The use of new media facilitates intercultural interactions in daily life, particularly evident in the translanguaging practices within the Greek migrant youths’ social media interactions. I will discuss how transnational migrants access new media and how these tools allow identity construction and a sense of belonging, helped by Bakhtin’s concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. Additionally, I will provide evidence of the interplay between the Greek and English languages in the digital space, viewed through the lens of translanguaging as an indicator of cross-cultural competence.

## **2. Greek migration to Melbourne: 2010–2020**

Between 2009–2010 and 2012–2013, an estimated 6315 people from Greece migrated to Victoria [2]. My research focuses on Greek migrant youth who relocated to Australia between 2010 and 2017. Melbourne was an attractive destination for Greek migrants due to its status as the largest Greek diaspora outside of Greece [3]. Melbourne’s cultural diversity is reflected in its various diasporic communities, with the Greek diaspora being particularly prominent in areas such as Oakleigh and the Lonsdale Street precinct. Diaspora communities often recreate activities, cultural traditions, and engage in language or educational pursuits that echo those of their homeland, requiring adult members to navigate their childhood memories in conjunction with their current realities [2]. Modern diasporas may include both physical and virtual components [3–5]. For new members, diaspora culture necessitates a negotiation among worlds, cultures, and locations [6]. Greek migrant youths in Melbourne blend their Australian and Greek cultures, revealing through their social media interactions a unique expression of Greek identity in Australia, marked by specific indicators of “Greekness” in their use of new media.

## **3. Greek migrant youth’s new media use**

This recent wave of Greek migration to Melbourne coincided with the widespread adoption of new media, which transcends physical borders and enables transnational interactions [7]. Participants in my study offered various definitions of new media. For instance, Smaragda described new media as a “*connection bridge that brings online communities together based on a user’s preference, purpose, and mood (διάθεση) to interact with a targeted group of people.*” Other participants highlighted themes such as interaction (Nikki), fixation/dependence (Antonis), social media (Anastasia), and identity switching (Sophia). From participant insights, we developed a collaborative definition of new media for migrant youths in diasporic communities: “New media relies on an internet connection and digital devices to bring people together based on preference, purpose, and mood. It is an interactive form of multimodal communication, such as social networking, and is used for enjoyment, education, and work.”

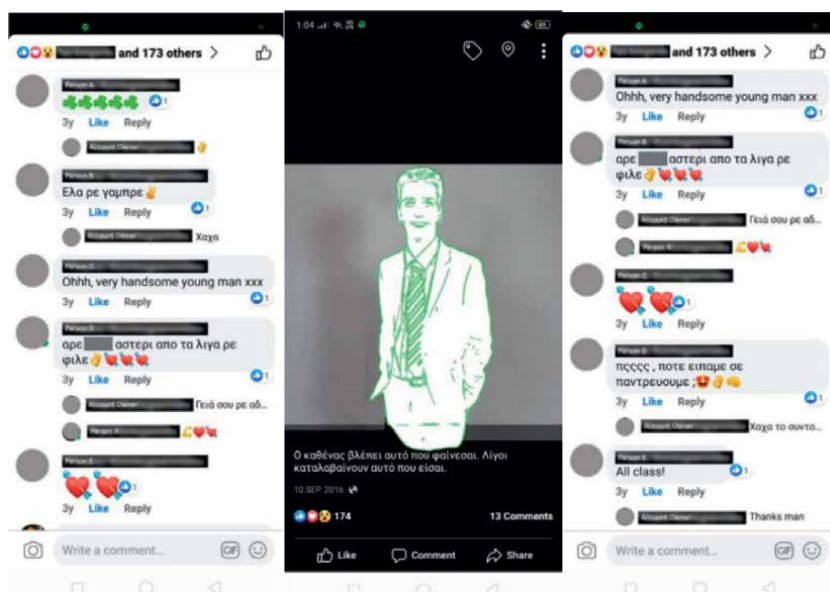
In cross-cultural communication, differences are recognized and acknowledged, potentially leading to individual change but not necessarily collective transformation. In cross-cultural societies, one culture is often considered “the norm,” with other cultures compared or contrasted against it [8]. Anastasia expressed this sentiment:

*“I think it depends on the content that you see every day on your social media, whether it be Greek or Australian. If you see more content from Greece, and you communicate with friends who have migrated to Australia from Greece, then you are going to feel some sense of belonging because you can relate to one another.”*

This daily comparison between Australia and Greece was a common experience among my research participants. Gupta and Ferguson’s concept of in-betweenness is particularly relevant for new migrants, who must reconcile their past selves with their evolving identities in a new country [9]. These mental negotiations, although varied, are often shared among migrants from the same homeland [5], and digital spaces, such as videoconferencing, can facilitate these connections.

The youths described in this chapter utilized social media as a tool to maintain their Greek heritage while exercising personal agency in expressing their hybrid identities in digital spaces. According to Kamyli [10], one way for teenage migrants to feel part of a group is by communicating in a common language. Alexandros noted: *“We all use new media every day of our lives, and the way we use them can really affect how we use it, what we think while using it, what the consequences are, and even how we use language differently in new media.”* This is evident in Alexandros’ social media screenshot of his formal photo (see **Figure 1**), shared as his first Facebook profile picture after arriving in Australia in 2016.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, dialog is essential to forming a sense of self. Human identity is constructed through language, as people assert and reflect upon who they are and their place in the world through words. For Bakhtin [11], language varies as we adjust our speech according to social circumstances, influenced by contextual, social, educational, and historical factors [11]. The participants’ language choices and the text they used reveal the translanguaging practices they naturally engaged in both their physical and digital lives. The same utterance can be interpreted differently, depending on the speaker or context [12]. This is evident in Alexandros’



**Figure 1.** Alexandros’ first photograph taken in Australia, used as his Facebook profile picture in 2016.

social media screenshot (**Figure 1**), where code-switching—a common behavior among bilingual speakers [13]—is used. Engaging in translanguaging in the digital space is a marker of cross-cultural competence, expression, communication, and representation, enabling migrants to adapt to different cultures. Additionally, some participants wrote collectively: “*We all lead two different lives with different communities, one being in Greece and one in Australia, but when it comes to new media, it reflects our personality as a whole, and the two communities unite (in terms of comments, likes, etc.)*.” This statement exemplifies interculturalism in action within the digital space.

When communicating in digital spaces, individuals’ activities are influenced by the anticipated reactions of an audience, whether real or imagined, shaping their sense of self through the perspectives and feedback of others. The participants’ daily new media practices are therefore communicated through a complex interplay of words and images [14]. These social media screenshots illustrate the interaction between Greek and English cultures in the digital space, serving as examples of translanguaging and hybrid identities that are always “in a process of becoming” [15].

#### **4. Greek migrant youth representing their identities in digital spaces**

Greek migrant youth in this study engaged in artmaking using new media as a means of exploring and representing their identities. Kim [2] describes identity work as “an active process of constructing, altering, performing, or sustaining the self in a range of social spheres.” This is evident in the participants’ choice of roles, languages, and symbols—such as flags and warding off the evil eye—which are characteristically Greek. Other emoticons used relate to pastimes, hobbies, and interests like playing music, photography, and tennis.

Other identity markers included dress or appearance (Alexandros), likes, loves, and hobbies (Nikki, Anastasia, Sophia, and Smaragda), values and beliefs (Antonis), behavior on social media (Melina, Alexandros, and Anastasia), and personality traits (Costas, Smaragda, Sophia, and Nikki). Regarding how each participant presented themselves through images in their Instagram portraits, the participants carefully considered the words they used to describe who they were, focusing on what was meaningful to them on a personal level (Alexandros). Three participants included the word “creative” (Nikki, Sophia, and Melina) in their descriptions. Hard work and dedication (Nikki and Costas) were also highlighted as key traits.

Antonis remarked that “*the climate change rally [in his Instagram portrait] represents the unity that diversity has created in my heart,*” referring to himself as “*a person who has migrated from one country to another.*” For Alexandros, creating the Instagram portrait allowed him to “*see more clearly what I consider the most important in my life and what I’ve allowed to influence me.*” Nikki noted that it “*allowed me to highlight certain parts of my identity, possibly the ones I usually like showing online anyway, or the parts I like more about myself.*” For Smaragda, new media “*simply reinforces who I am and emphasizes the ‘essence’ of me,*” while for Costas, “*it’s a new way for me to realize more about who I am as a person.*” Antonis reflected that the portrait helped him “*clarify my core values, the way I perceive the world, and in turn how it perceives me.*” He noted that “*it made me really think about how I characterize myself—what are the key words I would use to describe my identity to others?*” In contrast, Sophia found the process confronting, stating that “*seeing so many descriptive words about myself in one document sure is confronting in a way.*”

The statements and reflections of the Greek migrant youths in this section underscore the significance of digital spaces as arenas for identity exploration and representation. Through their engagement with new media, these youths navigate and negotiate their hybrid identities, blending elements of their Greek heritage with their Australian experiences. The process of creating digital artifacts, such as Instagram portraits, not only allows them to express who they are but also provides a means of understanding and affirming their identities in a multicultural context.

## 5. Applying a/r/tography

A/r/tographers utilize renderings, or conceptual organizers, that encourage engagement and provide avenues for understanding research through an artistic lens. These renderings guide, but do not confine, the methods by which research is conducted, presented, and interpreted. The six renderings of a/r/tography are outlined as follows:

**Contiguity:** Concepts exist alongside each other, depending on or intertwining with one another.

**Living Inquiry:** Reflects the a/r/tographer's identities as an artist, researcher, and teacher across both personal and professional realms, documented through narratives, reflections, note-taking, and artmaking.

**Metaphor and Metonymy:** These create connotations and symbols that simultaneously unravel and discover meaning [16].

**Openings:** Create opportunities for contemplation or confusion.

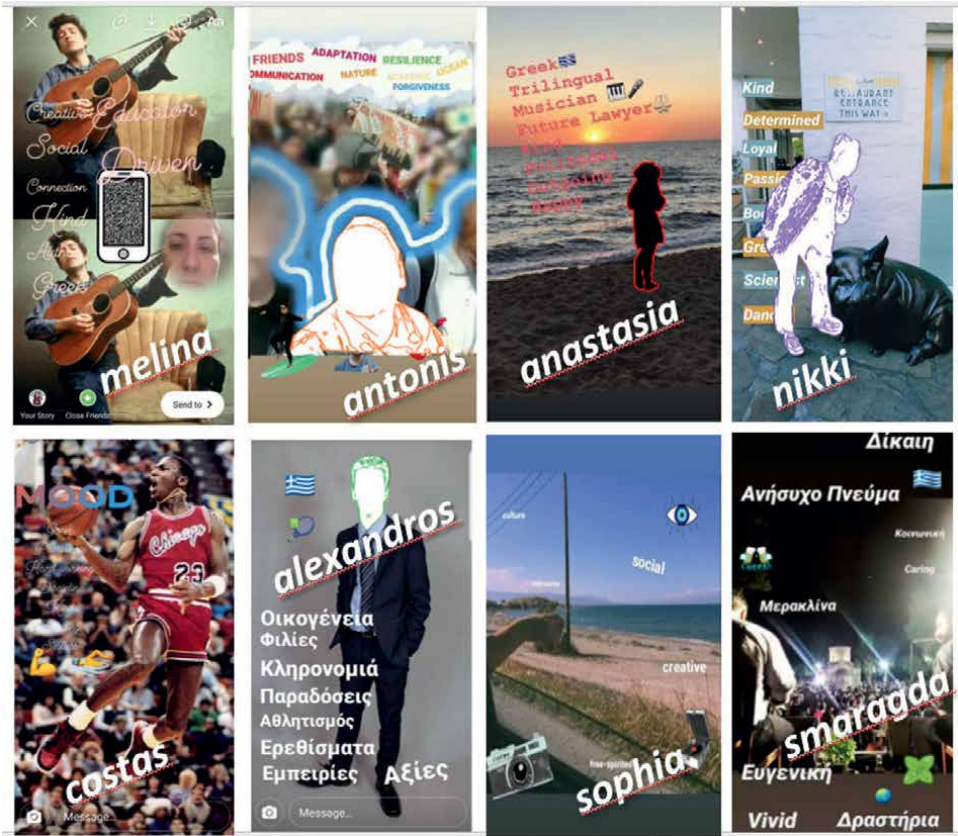
**Reverberations:** Trigger the emergence of new understandings and meanings.

**Excess:** Becoming is achieved through complex pathways and deeper comprehension [17].

In this research, I drew upon Bakhtin's [18, 19] concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, wherein individuals' identities merge with others through dialog and sharing in digital spaces. To capture these heteroglossic entanglements, I created storyboards that are directly related to digital content from the participants' social media screenshots (e.g., **Figure 1**), their Instagram portraits (**Figure 2**), and visually combining the words and images of the participants, derived from dialog and group discussions about their experiences of using new media as migrants to Melbourne (see Section 6). The storyboards are not entirely subjective; rather, they respond to the data, providing a visual narrative of the participants' experiences, and display synergies and commonalities that evidenced their cultural heritage.

## 6. Reverberations: Storyboards as a/r/tographical responses

As the a/r/tographer, for each rendering I created a storyboard to visually represent the relational inquiry that the participants and I engaged in (see Section 5). Through this process, I discovered not only commonalities but also new creative possibilities for exploring identity work in digital spaces. The act of creating these storyboards brought to light new entry points and knowledge, highlighting the potential of digital spaces for examining the living inquiries of migrants.



**Figure 2.**  
*Participant created Instagram portraits, 2020.*

The storyboards incorporate fragments of the participants’ voices, images, and metaphors, allowing these elements to resonate within the context of their cultural experiences. This process aligns with the rendering of reverberations, which emphasizes the emergence of new meanings through the interaction of these elements [20]. In each storyboard, text and imagery are fitted together to communicate meaning, using visual prominence to highlight key moments extracted from conversations and other data. The storyboards, therefore, embody artistic and textual experiences, leveraging symbols, metaphors, patterns, and concepts that repeat and generate new understandings.

Each storyboard can be analyzed according to the three key elements of reverberations: (1) echoes, (2) tension, and (3) movement. Echoes are indicated via yellow highlights and include faces and bodies, transport, sport, maps, and the Greek language. Tension is shown through blue highlights and includes contrasts such as English versus Greek and traditional versus contemporary. Movement, indicated by pink highlights, includes dynamic elements like traveling across international borders, engaging in sports, dancing, and swimming. This approach underscores the interconnectedness of artistic understanding and lived experiences, revealing the participants’ new media practices in evocative ways [16].

### 6.1 Living inquiry storyboard

In the Living Inquiry storyboard, we see echoes of the Greek language, tension between contemporary living (modern attire) and traditions (Greek dancing costumes), and movement symbolized by the geographical divide between Canada and Australia, reflecting Yiorgos's parents' migration decision (**Figure 3**).

### 6.2 Metaphor and metonymy storyboard

In the Metaphor and Metonymy storyboard, the participants conceptualized new media as a bridge connecting their past in Greece to their present in Australia. This storyboard integrates elements such as Alexandros's tennis hobby from his youth in Kavala and Costas's competitiveness in swimming, symbolizing the tension between Greece and Australia—a game of tennis metaphorically representing the struggle for cultural loyalty. The inclusion of social media icons and devices like mobile phones and tablets echoes the participants' engagement with new media as a means of connecting across borders (**Figure 4**).

### 6.3 Openings storyboard

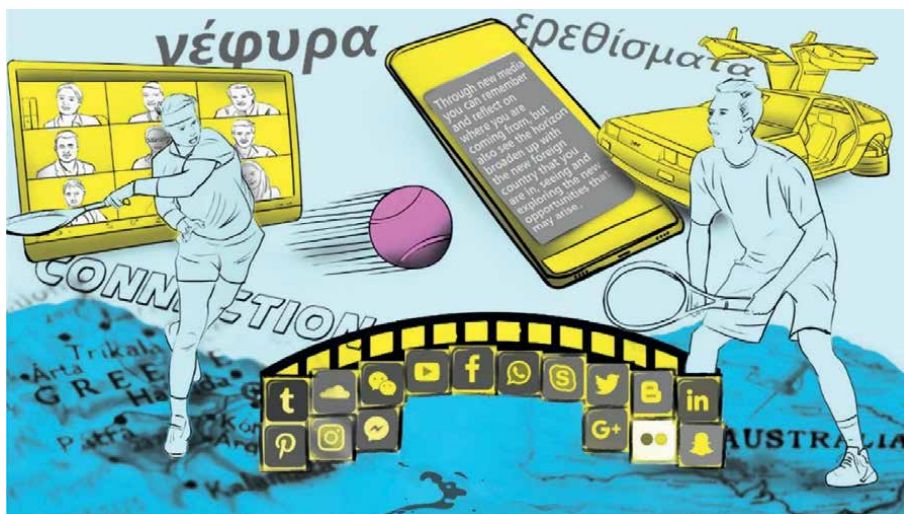
The Openings storyboard features figures with outstretched arms, a butterfly stroke, and the phrase “How does a butterfly transform?”, symbolizing the participants' ongoing process of becoming. This storyboard juxtaposes the freedom of dance and movement against the dark history of the Pontian genocide, illustrating the tension between the participants' Greek heritage and their current life in Melbourne (**Figure 5**).

### 6.4 Contiguity storyboard

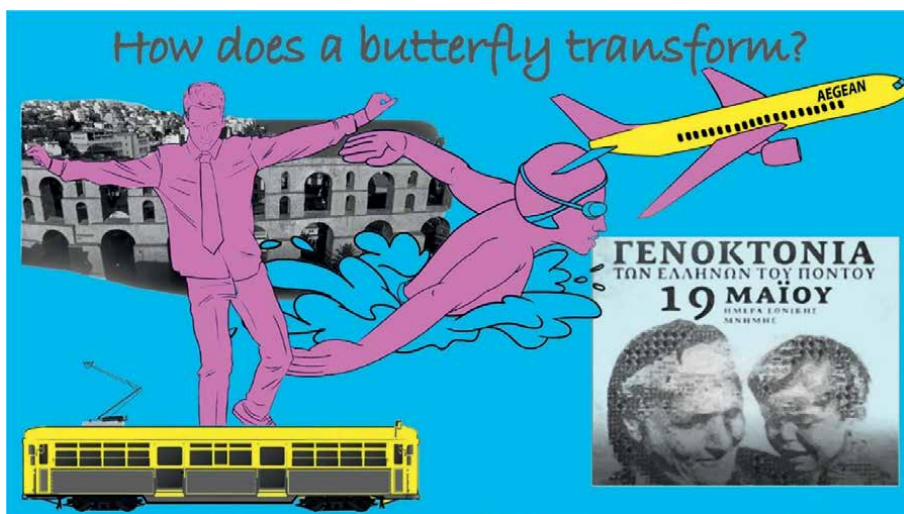
The Contiguity storyboard is a collage of Greek locations, socializing moments, and cultural symbols, reflecting the participants' lived experiences. It highlights



**Figure 3.**  
*Storyboard: Living inquiry through the lens of reverberations, computer-generated image: Melina Mallos, 2020.*



**Figure 4.**  
*Storyboard: Metaphor and metonymy through the lens of reverberations, computer-generated image: Melina Mallos, 2020.*



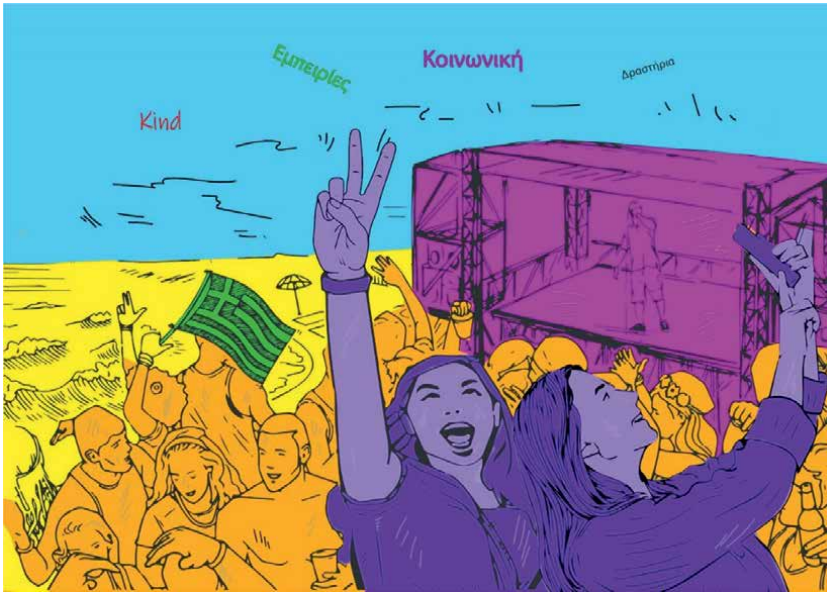
**Figure 5.**  
*Storyboard: Openings through the lens of reverberations, computer-generated image: Melina Mallos, 2020.*

echoes of social interactions, enjoyment, and musical experiences, with tension arising between the physical and virtual realms of sharing these moments. Movement is represented by the participants' engagement in activities like attending music festivals and capturing these moments through photography, which are then shared on social media (Figure 6).

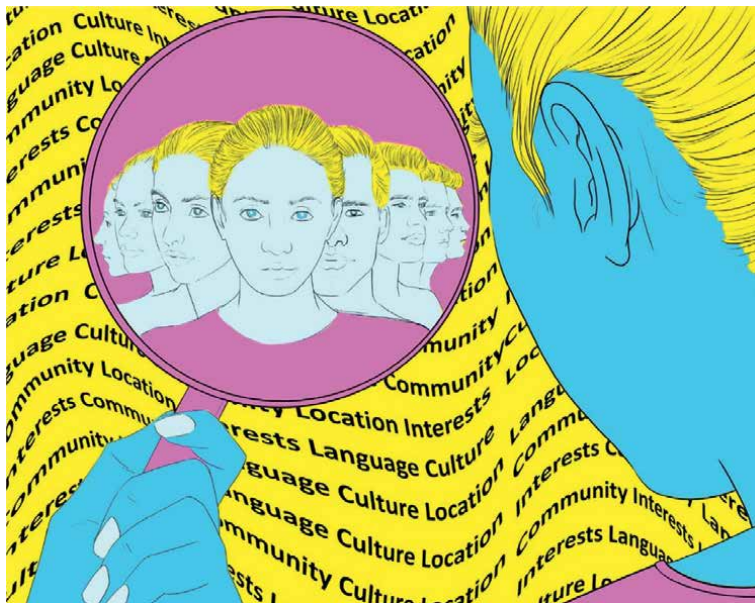
### 6.5 Excess storyboard

In the Excess storyboard, I placed myself centrally, reflecting the participants' identities in the mirror. This composition explores the tension between the

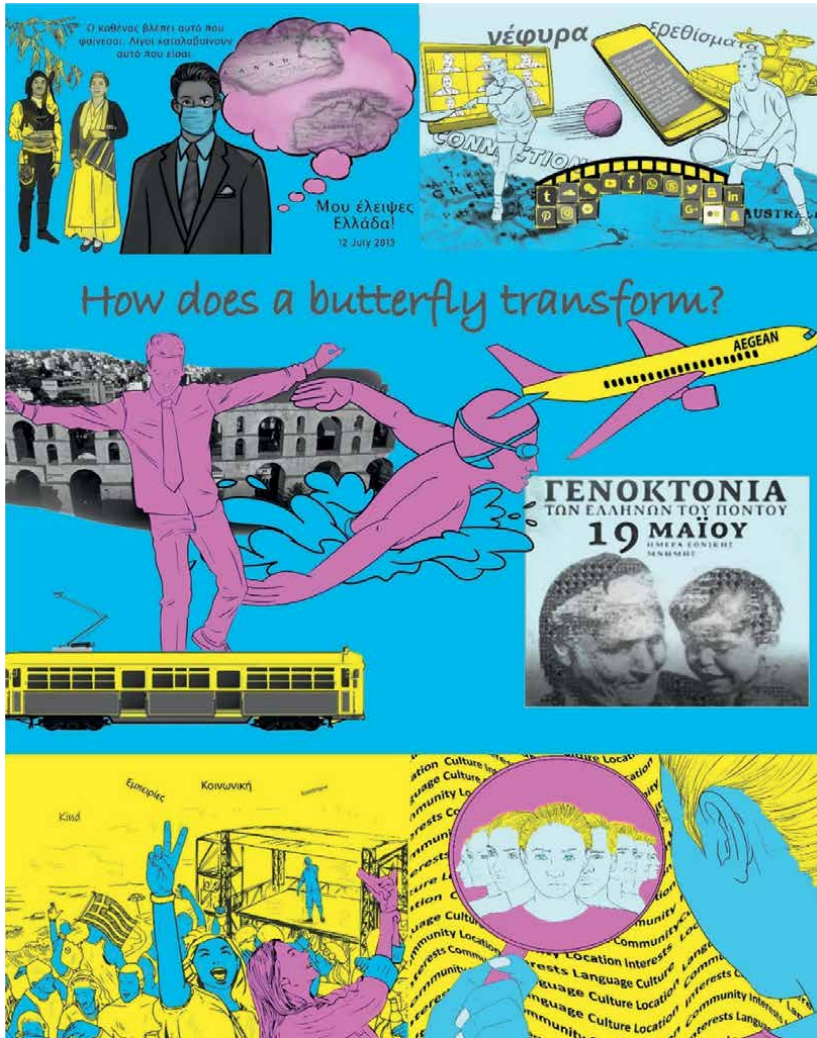
researcher's perspective and the participants' reflections, with movement represented by the waves of emotion, engagement, and energy evoked by the repeated words in the background: "community," "location," "language," and "culture." The mirrored image invites the viewer to reflect on the relational aspects of identity formation (Figure 7).



**Figure 6.**  
Storyboard: Contiguity through the lens of reverberations, computer-generated image: Melina Mallos, 2020.



**Figure 7.**  
Storyboard: Excess through the lens of reverberations, computer-generated image: Melina Mallos, 2020.



**Figure 8.** *Collective storyboards through the lens of reverberations, computer-generated image: Melina Mallos, 2020.*

## 6.6 Viewing the storyboards together

Collectively, the storyboards offer a visual representation of the participants’ complex identities, encompassing elements of Greek culture and traditions, friendships, family history, and the impact of migration on their sense of self. The imagery captures a multitude of meanings, allowing the participants to express their experiences, vulnerabilities, and cultural heritage, as well as the tensions and challenges they face in navigating their identities in a new country (**Figure 8**).

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter explored the application of a/r/tography to uncover the ways in which Greek migrant youths in Melbourne use digital platforms to navigate and represent

their hybrid identities. New media plays a crucial role in providing these youths with the agency to explore and express their identities in digital spaces. Key findings presented through reverberations in the storyboards highlight the dynamic interplay of language, culture, and personal history in shaping these identities. The research demonstrated the significance of digital spaces in facilitating intercultural interactions and the potential of artistic methods to put on display the lived experiences of migrant youth.

The value of a/r/tography lies in its ability to capture the fluidity and complexity of identity formation, particularly within the context of cultural heritage, living experience, and creativity. The storyboards demonstrate how artistic methods can reveal the nuances of cultural heritage and lived experiences, offering new insights into the creative possibilities of digital spaces. The creative process of making the storyboards in response to participants' use of new media highlighted the ways the a/r/tographic renderings, specifically reverberations, uncover new meanings and understandings.


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## Chapter 4

# The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Intercultural Communication

*Shuang Yang, Huiwen Zhao and Wen Luo*

### Abstract

The arrival of the artificial intelligence era has changed the style of unimodal cultural communication and integrated multimodal communication technology, which helps understand social development and people's lives from a new, all-round perspective. Cross-cultural communication can make full use of artificial intelligence and digital virtual simulation technology to achieve in-depth experience and in-depth perception of culture, and ultimately realize people's in-depth recognition of each other's national culture. The multimodal way of transforming language into a way of expression that the other party can understand and accept, thus generating identity, can greatly enhance the power of cross-cultural communication so that the content of the communication will first act on the emotional field of each other, and then transition from emotional identity to rational identity.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural communication, artificial intelligence, cultural exchanges, generative artificial intelligence, multimodal communication

### 1. Introduction

Cross-cultural communication refers to all kinds of cultural information in the scope of time and space flow, sharing, and interactive process, its research content not only includes different cultural backgrounds of individuals, and groups, the characteristics and rules of the communication between organizations and countries, also involves cultural conflict and solve the way, technology development influence on culture, and many other aspects [1]. As a unique phenomenon, cross-cultural communication transmits and spreads information between various cultures, with most of it being attached to language [2]. If there is no communication, culture will lose its vitality. In the context of international exchanges, cross-cultural exchanges play an increasingly important role, reflecting the recognition of international audiences of the country's culture [3]. The main purpose of cross-cultural communication is to obtain enough information to reduce uncertainty, reduce cultural conflict, and improve mutual adaptation as well as identity [4]. Cross-cultural exchange situates cultural phenomena within an international context, bridging cultural differences and fostering cultural and value identity [5]. Cultural exchanges are an important driving force for social development and civilization progress and a basic way for

mankind to understand and communicate with each other, while cross-cultural exchanges are one of the main ways of international exchanges.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the result of continuous development in high-tech technology. In 1956, John McCarthy and other disciplines proposed it at the Dartmouth Conference in the United States, which is known as the strategic technology leading the future [6]. Laswell proposed the 5 W linear communication mode: namely the communication subject, communication content, communication channel, communication audience, and communication effect [7]. According to this communication mode, artificial intelligence technology is applied in various scenarios, which greatly improves the efficiency and accuracy of communication. With the development of ChatGPT and other cutting-edge science and technologies, AI is becoming more and more widely used in cultural exchanges, especially in cross-cultural exchanges.

Artificial intelligence is a subdiscipline of computer science involving the research, design, and application of intelligent machines [8]. The main research goal of artificial intelligence is to explore how machines can imitate and perform intellectual functions of the human brain, such as judgment, reasoning, proof, recognition, perception, understanding, design, thinking, etc [9]. Developing related theories and technology of AI, the field of study includes robots, speech recognition, image recognition, natural language processing, and expert systems etc [10]. “Artificial intelligence is exploring how to make computers capable a work that only humans could ever do.” The development of artificial intelligence after the “Expert Systems”, “Deep Blue” and other different stages, as the computer on the information processing and hardware function and the Internet data environment, artificial intelligence technology into the multilayer neural network (MNN) based on the era of “deep learning” [11].

The “deep learning” algorithm is based on building a multilevel recognition mode system, explores the high-level attributes and categories through the underlying analysis of characteristics, and excavates the distribution characteristics of massive data. Due to the emergence of deep learning algorithms, artificial intelligence has achieved a qualitative leap in algorithms [12]. It is different from the mode of simulating brain thinking by computer, and for the first time, the artificial intelligence system can quickly establish the best way to solve problems in the complex operations and laws of massive data [13]. With the development of deep learning intelligent neural networks, artificial intelligence can be quickly promoted in our social life. At present, AI has achieved great results in speech recognition, autonomous driving, biomedical, education and training, financial markets, and other application scenarios. In 2016, Google’s artificial intelligence program AlphaGo defeated Lee Sedol in Go, capturing the last highland in the field of human intelligence and directly having a significant impact on human production and quality of life [14]. The application of artificial intelligence in information processing systems, natural language understanding, machine learning, intelligent medical care, intelligent robots, and other fields enables artificial intelligence to have an all-round impact on the international community, and gradually become the core topic in cross-cultural exchange activities.

## **2. Application scenarios of artificial intelligence in cross-cultural communication**

The application scenarios of artificial intelligence in cross-cultural communication mainly include four fields, namely, intelligent collection, intelligent production,

intelligent delivery, and intelligent management. Intelligent collection and intelligent production can effectively solve the representative problems in the communication subject and the authenticity of the communication content [15]. Intelligent delivery can ensure the accuracy of the communication channel and communication audience. Intelligent management can further improve and optimize the communication content, communication channel, and communication audience according to the feedback of the receptor [16].

In the era of intelligent communication, information collection in cross-cultural exchange bid farewell to the traditional artificial statistics method and moved to the automatic method with the help of artificial intelligence and big data. The traditional way of intelligent collection mainly relies on manual browsing, searching, searching, and screening of information sources, which affects the timeliness of communication and communication. Take BBC, for example, which is one of the largest news media companies in the world, BBC uses artificial intelligence to build an intelligent information collection robot that can be used for news aggregation and content extraction, to monitor 850 news sources of international, domestic, and local news media [17]. After the information collection robot captures the original text and metadata of the information, BBC Juicer applies named entity recognition technology to identify and mark the concepts mentioned in the text, so as to provide intelligent retrieval of information sources, places, people, and events, as well as trend analysis in international communication for media communication. AP has also configured the corresponding information monitoring tool SAM [18]. AP staff can use SAM to search for and track information clues on the original Twitter and other social platforms in real-time. Compared with manual monitoring and collection of social media information, SAM effectively improves the accuracy and efficiency of information collection. Reuters in the UK uses a dedicated tracker (Reuters Tracer) to retrieve and browse data information on Twitter and other communication media, through data mining technology to determine themes and priorities to accurately obtain useful information [19].

Currently, with the advancement of cutting-edge technology, various AI-driven cultural exchange mediums have emerged, including machine writing, visual news, and virtual anchors [20]. Among them, machine writing uses artificial intelligence algorithms to process the data information collected in the intelligent collection stage and automatically generate effective communication text. For example, the AP auto-generated tool Wibbitz, a communication platform with automated video creation as its main function, works to convert text into video, without any manual operation [21]. Wibbitz can automatically convert pure text into a video clip, the content of the short including pictures, narration, charts, and other multimedia elements, transformation steps are as follows: the first system analysis object uploads text data, then generates a short video script, according to the script content automatically generate information complete and rich short video.

The information communication and recommendation system based on an artificial intelligence algorithm can realize personalized content recommendations and improve the efficiency of human-computer interaction by analyzing the status of the user login browser, project attributes of browsing information, browsing behavior data, and user's social network information. Taking the chat tool Facebook as an example, it distributes social media with the help of a machine learning algorithm, optimizes user communication experience, and realizes accurate recommendations according to user's preferences [22]. In the YouTube deep learning recommendation model, candidate video sets are generated for users based on the usage behavior and

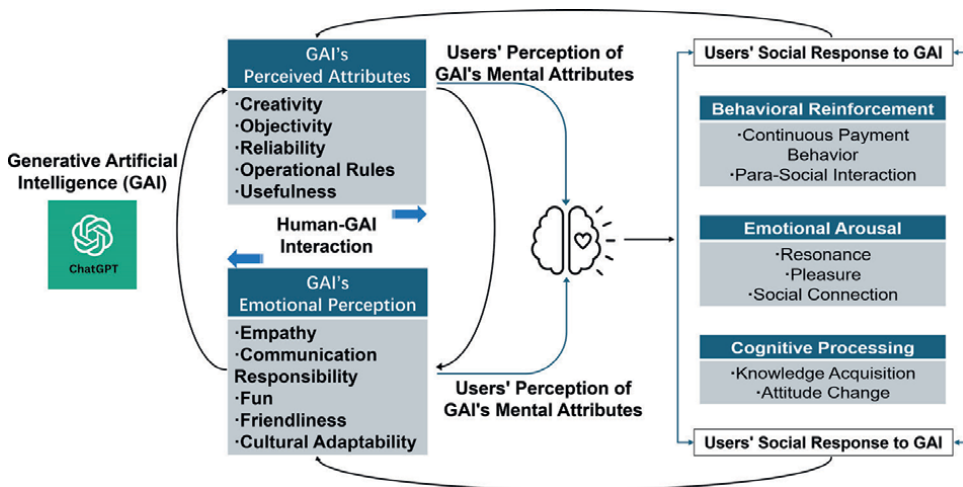
interests of YouTube users. Based on the OCEAN model, Cambridge Analytica has designed a quantitative deduction evaluation tool using the five-personality classification method to explore the potential psychological characteristics and personalities of users, quantitatively analyze the personalities of users, and use big data analysis technology to achieve precise positioning of target users [23].

Intelligent communication management improves the communication efficiency between users and the system by conducting deep mining of users' comments and feedback. The New York Times has worked with Jigsaw to create the Coral Project, which relies on artificial intelligence algorithms to grade and portrait users and facilitate information exchange between users. The New York Times used the Moderator model-building algorithm to conduct deep learning of user discussions in the comments section for 10 years, accurately identify user discussions, and screen out malicious and aggressive comments [24].

### **3. Impact of generative AI on cross-cultural communication**

Different from the emotional interaction of traditional artificial intelligence, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) refers to the computer's ability not only to recognize human emotions but also to input corresponding emotional feedback when humans use the computer [25]. The foundation of emotional interaction is "emotional computing" technology, which aims to establish a harmonious human-computer interaction environment by giving computers the ability to recognize, understand, express, and adapt to human emotions, and to make the computer have a higher and more comprehensive level of intelligence. At present, in international network of cultural exchanges, billions of users around the world have billions of times of interactive information every day, including human interaction and human-computer interaction. There is also ubiquitous intelligent interaction in this communication information. With the popularization of the Internet and communication technology in the world, users' demand and dependence on the network are increasing, and different types of emotional feedback mechanisms are presented in the network information exchange, which greatly improves the possibility of artificial intelligence training a deep intelligent interaction model beyond the semantic space.

In recent years, text-based ChatBot has been capable of human-computer interaction through natural language, and the technology has been widely deployed across applications. In 2022, OpenAI released the chat generation pretraining Converter (ChatGPT), which completely changed the mode of artificial intelligence and human interaction, caused a sensation on a global scale, and became a phenomenal generative AI product [14]. ChatGPT is a GAI developed based on a large language model, which can complete communication tasks between different users, such as language translation, induction of language texts in different cultures, answering knowledge questions in different fields, etc. The free-text interaction characteristics of GAI are more flexible and adaptable in the process of dialog and communication with human users. The development design of GAI combines both ability and emotion, enabling users to produce a complex perception of GAI like human communication. Research has proved that human users can generate different social responses after communicating with GAI: in behavior, human users and GAI can interact more continuously and closely; in emotion, human users can communicate with GAI, effectively relieve negative emotions, generate positive emotional gain and arouse the psychological



**Figure 1.**  
 The GAI acts as the theoretical framework of social actors.

resonance of users; in cognition, GAI can learn new knowledge after communicating with human users, enrich the knowledge reserve of the internal expert system of the model, and improve the working state of the model in the future [26].

In the context of human social interactions, GAI is gradually taking the role of a social actor, prompting users to generate social responses based on their perceptions of AI [27]. The process framework is shown in **Figure 1**. In the process of interaction between human users and GAI, the mental perception of GAI is formed according to whether GAI has the ability to think and feel emotions [28]. In this state, communication between human users and GAI has two-way interaction and influence on each other. Based on the mental perception of GAI, human-computer interaction can generate the social response of internal communication, and this reaction is reflected in three aspects: behavior, cognition and emotion.

#### 4. Expanding the connotation of cross-cultural exchanges

In the field of historical heritage protection, the use of artificial intelligence technology to protect the material and intangible historical and cultural heritage of various countries in the world will become a hot topic in international cultural exchanges. The combination of science technology and history can not only enable the traditional culture and art of various countries to grow anew after thousands of years of changes but also let people from different backgrounds experience the charm of different cultures and arts, and feel the diversity and richness of human civilization. Microsoft Research Asia and Dunhuang Research Institute have added the online chat robot “Dunhuang Little Ice” to the WeChat official account of Dunhuang Academy [29]. At present, this ChatBot has grown into an expert in Dunhuang cultural knowledge and has become a typical case of using the intelligent Internet platform to publicize and exchange historical heritage. Recently, Japanese government departments have begun to study the use of artificial intelligence technology to analyze the production procedures of various ancient handicrafts and to digitize the production process intelligently to facilitate communication and promotion [30].

In the field of intelligent education, “artificial intelligence + education” has gradually developed into a global trend, education change is imperative; the development of science and technology has become the endogenous variable of education innovation and the focus of global common concern. The international community in the frontier science and technology with the international quality education resources integration cooperation and communication more and more frequent. With the technological progress of artificial intelligence in natural language understanding, the problem of language communication barriers can be solved quickly and efficiently. Since 2016, the Ministry of Education of China has implemented the “Sino-US industry-education Integration + High-level Application-oriented University Construction Project”. This project, through the deep cooperation between 100 applied universities, 100 schools, and enterprises establishment an “intelligent education platform” and “school + enterprise” cooperation mode to establish a new international application technology education system [29]. Through the introduction of American educational resources, build a curriculum and teaching system with international standards and establish an intelligent education evaluation system.

## 5. Epilogue

With the global popularity and adoption of cutting-edge science and technologies such as machine learning and 6G communication technology around the world, the influence of artificial intelligence on human cross-cultural exchanges will become more and more obvious in the future, and human exchanges will be more intelligent.

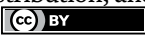
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## Chapter 5

# Understanding Culture, Cultural Identity, and Cultural Heritage in the Post-Digital Age

*Luisa Conti*

### Abstract

This article examines the critical importance of developing a reflective understanding of culture, cultural identity, and cultural heritage in our increasingly interconnected, post-digital world. It begins by defining these key concepts and exploring their evolution in the contemporary context. The study then investigates how cultural representations are shaped and disseminated in the post-digital age, with a particular focus on the “Talahon” phenomenon as a case study. This example illustrates the power of digital media in amplifying and perpetuating cultural stereotypes, while also demonstrating the complex interplay between self-representation and external perception. The article argues that essentialist views of culture can lead to harmful “othering” practices, reinforcing societal divisions and inequalities. To counter these effects, it advocates for a constructivist approach to understanding cultural identity, emphasizing the fluid and multifaceted nature of cultural belonging. The conclusion underscores the need for critical media literacy, inclusive policies, and the promotion of reciprocity and trust in building cohesive societies. By fostering a more nuanced comprehension of culture, this work aims to contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable social dynamics in diverse communities.

**Keywords:** social media, cultural identity, cultural heritage, post-digital, multiculturalism

### 1. Introduction

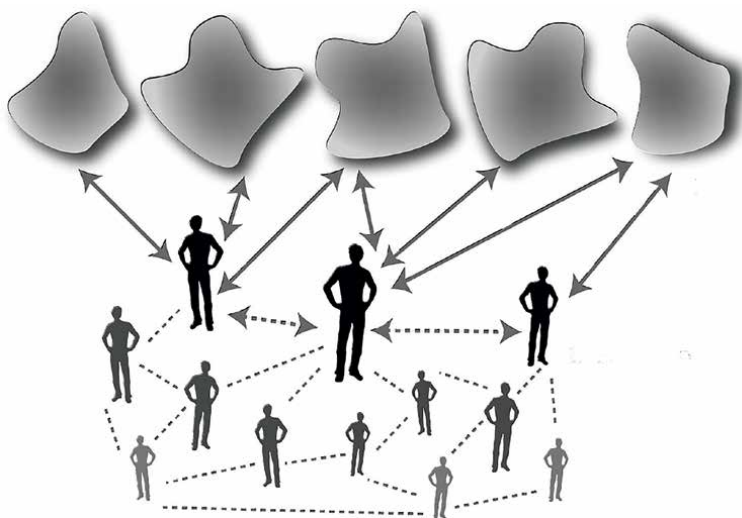
The concept of culture is often perceived as straightforward, with many believing they have a clear understanding of what it entails. However, the discourses surrounding culture, cultural identity, and cultural heritage often remain obscured and unexamined, leading to oversimplified and potentially harmful interpretations. This article seeks to illuminate the critical importance of developing a reflective understanding of these concepts, particularly in the context of our increasingly interconnected and digital world. To achieve this, the article will first provide comprehensive definitions of culture and cultural identity (Section 2) as well as cultural heritage (Section 3), establishing a foundation for understanding their complexities and interrelationships. These definitions will draw on contemporary scholarship that

recognizes the fluid and contested nature of these concepts, moving beyond essentialist views that treat culture as a fixed or homogeneous entity.

The article will then explore how these concepts are evolving in the post-digital age (Section 4), where the boundaries between online and offline experiences are increasingly blurred. This section will examine how digital platforms and social media are reshaping the ways in which cultural identities are formed, expressed, and negotiated. It will consider both the opportunities for increased cultural exchange and representation, as well as the challenges posed by echo chambers, algorithmic biases, and the spread of stereotypes. Finally, the article will delve into the potential impact of the construction and biased representation of “the others,” using the example of the “Talahon” phenomenon to illustrate how stereotypes can shape perceptions and influence societal dynamics (Section 5). This case study will demonstrate the complex interplay between self-representation, media amplification, and societal reception of cultural narratives. By examining this phenomenon, the article aims to make tangible the real-world consequences of how culture is understood and represented today. Through this comprehensive exploration, the article aims to underscore the relevance of a nuanced approach to culture in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

## 2. Cultural identity

Cultural identity has often been framed within an “essentialist” perspective, where identity is viewed as something fixed and inherently tied to membership in specific cultural groups [1–3]. In this view, culture is treated as a “closed” concept [4], leading to the notion that individual behavior is “defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are” [5]. This perspective implies that places (usually framed in geo-political entities) are cultures. This understanding of cultures as closed, and therefore static “containers” [4] is incompatible with more contemporary views of identity as plural, dynamic, and constructed through communication and as a hybrid (Figure 1) [4–11].



**Figure 1.**  
*Identities, communication, and cultures [6].*

In recent decades, the understanding of cultural identity has evolved beyond these monolithic interpretations to embrace a more dynamic and pluralistic perspective. This shift requires a deeper exploration of how cultural identity is constructed and reconstructed through communicative actions within various social contexts. Central to this understanding is the concept of the intersubjective lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), as described by Schütz and Luckmann [12]. The lifeworld is a shared social reality that provides meaning and structure to everyday actions and is both a product of and a contributor to communicative processes. Individuals continuously shape their identities through a complex interplay of intentional and unintentional communicative behaviors in their heterogeneous, we could say multicultural lifeworld. As Bolten [4] highlights, the more individuals engage in the process of communal creation, the more familiar and navigable their shared lifeworld becomes.

This familiarity is essential for the semiotic interpretation of communication, as Abel [13] notes. Individuals draw from their fields of experience to interpret and understand their interactions, creating a dynamic feedback loop between their lifeworld and their communicative actions. This process is not merely a passive absorption of cultural norms but an active engagement in shaping and reshaping the cultural landscape.

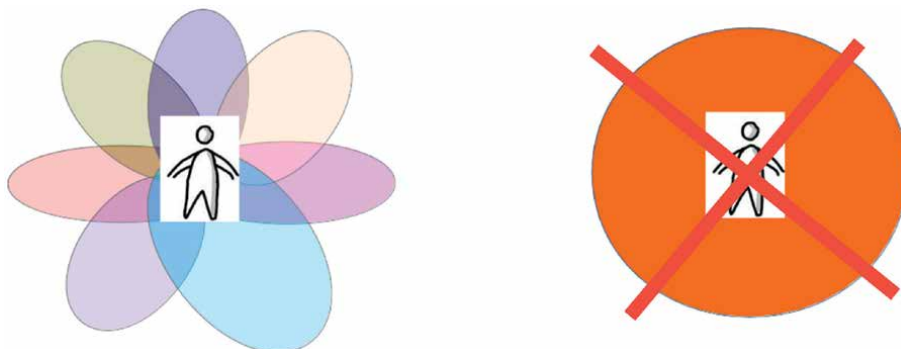
The dialogic nature of identity formation is particularly evident in this context. Lührmann [14] describes identity as a “creative self-performance,” where past and present identities are linked through a selective process of reinterpretation. This ongoing dialog enables individuals to construct a coherent and authentic sense of self, integrating various identity components into a “meta-identity” [15]. This dialogic process underscores the plural nature of cultural identity, as individuals belong to multiple cultural contexts simultaneously, each contributing to their identity. Layes [15] frames this as “intercultural identity management,” where individuals navigate and reconcile potentially conflicting aspects of their identity. The overlapping of cultural collectives creates a complex network of cultural influences, where individuals activate different cultural practices depending on the context.

Hermans and Kempen’s [16] theory of the plural, dialogic self-offers a compelling framework for understanding this complexity. They propose that identity consists of multiple ‘voices’ or components, each representing different cultural affiliations. These voices engage in intrapersonal dialog, continuously shaping the individual’s identity. Ziebertz [17] concludes that identity has a structurally plural nature, characterized by ongoing dialog with both real and imagined others.

This understanding of identity as a dialogic process has significant implications for how culture and cultural change are conceptualized. As individuals engage with cultural elements of a variety of cultural contexts or “collectives” [18], they reinterpret and transform these elements, contributing to cultural change. Bolten [4] describes culture as a “historically mediated dynamic of reciprocity,” emphasizing the role of communication as a driving force for cultural exchange and adaptation.

The interconnectedness of cultural collectives creates a macro-level network of cultures, where individual actors use elements from the macro-level to communicate and create new cultural elements. This process is marked by both synchronic coordination and diachronic continuity, where cultural elements are reproduced, spread, and potentially transformed over time [4]. In this context, the individual can be understood as a node in a network of collectives, simultaneously influenced by and influencing the cultural elements of each collective they belong to (**Figure 2**).

This dynamic view of cultural identity challenges the notion of culture as a static, homogeneous entity. Instead, culture is seen as a product of interculturality, with communication as the driving force. The continuous interplay between individual



**Figure 2.**  
*Constructivist versus essentialist perspective on identity.*

creativity and collective cultural norms results in an ever-evolving cultural landscape. Hansen [18] argues that culture and collective represent two sides of the same coin, with culture focusing on content (standardizations) and collective encompassing the formal and structural aspects (the people nurturing a certain culture).

Thus, cultural identity is characterized by its dialogic, plural, and dynamic nature. Individuals navigate their identities within a complex web of cultural influences, engaging in continuous dialogs that shape both their personal identities and the broader cultural environment. This understanding not only challenges traditional notions of cultural identity but also highlights the importance of recognizing and accepting cultural diversity as a vital component of any society.

### **3. Cultural heritage**

The intersubjective lifeworld shapes individuals' perceptions of normality and meaning. The continuous negotiation of meanings within a given community leads to the creation of a collective knowledge base, which informs the boundaries of what is considered plausible or meaningful. This collective knowledge is closely intertwined with the development of collective memory, which is constantly being redefined through the interactions and exchanges that occur within a community.

It is common for knowledge bases to overlap among individuals who share similar experiences or who engage with the same elements of collective memory. However, this knowledge base is not homogeneous; it is composed of heterogeneous, sometimes contradictory elements that reflect the diversity of experiences and interpretations within a community. The coexistence of diversity and relative homogeneity in a community highlights the complex interplay between these forces in shaping cultural heritage.

Understanding cultural heritage requires acknowledging the dynamic and historical nature of culture, shaped by the dynamic interplay of communication, media, and memory [3]. This definition broadens the focus from micro-level individual interactions to macro-level patterns that constitute cultural networks, where heritage is continuously produced, reproduced, and transformed.

Through ongoing communication, individuals integrate elements from various experiences into a complex, evolving cultural tapestry. These elements, when stored, contribute to a collective memory that serves as a reservoir of shared knowledge and experiences. Over time, this reservoir forms a three-dimensional structure, encompassing layers of historical and contemporary experiences. Some elements, such as

bodily practices, are directly expressed in daily life, while others are embedded in the system's structures. The structures of institutionalized collectives such as the nation state are particularly powerful.

According to Assmann [19], everything experienced, whether lived or imagined, has the potential to become part of collective memory. When these memories are shared within a community, they form what is known as communicative memory, actively transmitted through social interactions. However, "communicative memory" is typically short-lived, often extending only over a few generations [20]. In contrast, memories preserved in media contribute to the more enduring cultural memory of a collective. Media thus play a crucial role in sustaining "cultural memory" by making these memories accessible over time and space [20].

Cultural heritage is preserved and transmitted not only through human memory but also through various media, which extend the capacities of human cognition and communication. Marshall McLuhan's [21] broad definition of media includes traditional forms such as books and electronic media, as well as tools and everyday objects that carry cultural significance. These objects act as carriers of meaning and memory, materializing collective memories and cultural narratives [22].

This understanding of memory underlines the importance of place in the formation and transmission of culture. Culture is not tied to a specific territory in a rigid sense, but rather exists wherever its carriers—individuals and communities—engage in communication and interaction. The places where people live and interact provide the primary contexts for these cultural exchanges, serving as the backdrop against which cultural norms, values, and meanings are negotiated and solidified [23].

Cultural memory, while composed of individual memories, functions as more than just their aggregate; it operates as an institution deeply intertwined with human action. It is produced, activated, and interpreted by individuals who simultaneously draw from it to orient and justify their actions. This memory fulfills multiple functions, providing a foundation for understanding the past, guiding present behavior and envisioning the future [23]. The processes of selecting, interpreting, and negotiating cultural memory occur at the micro-level, where individuals engage with and choose from competing memories based on their affiliations and contexts [24]. This selection can be influenced by media, which have the power to shape and prioritize certain elements of collective memory [25].

The development of mass media has profoundly impacted the way cultural heritage is transmitted and preserved. Mass media allow cultural elements to be disseminated over vast distances, even simultaneously. This means that cultural elements can now reach far beyond their original contexts and be absorbed by individuals and communities who may never have had direct contact with the culture from which these elements originated.

Mass media also play a crucial role in the preservation of cultural heritage by storing and transmitting cultural elements that would otherwise be lost to time.

Aleida and Jan Assmann's [26] definition of culture as a "historically variable interplay of communication, media, and collective memory" emphasizes the role of media in extending the reach of cultural heritage. The distribution of culture through media is amplified by the actions of its cultural carriers, engaging—usually unconsciously—in the transmission and reinterpretation of cultural elements [23].

Institutionalized collectives, particularly nation-states, wield significant power in shaping cultural heritage through their control of media and other distribution channels. Nation-states, as highly institutionalized collectives, exercise institutionalized homogenization, creating a shared field of action for their citizens.

The nation-state's capacity to create a unified cultural experience is further bolstered by a shared legal framework, nationwide businesses and organizations, and a standardized education system. These institutions collectively contribute to a consistent lifeworld across the national territory, facilitating coordinated action and reinforcing the development of common cultural norms and practices. While this explains how cultural heritage is produced, it is now important to reflect on how it is narrated, as its narration itself influences its production. Central to this process is the concept of the "imaginary," [27] which shapes the collective representations and shared understandings that underpin the nation-state's cultural dominance.

The "imaginary" refers to the symbolic realm encompassing the beliefs, values, and aspirations of a society. It is within this realm that the nation-state's cultural narratives are constructed, disseminated, and internalized by its citizens. Through the creation of a shared imaginary, the nation-state fosters a sense of belonging and loyalty among its members, cultivating a collective identity that transcends individual differences. This process gives rise to what Benedict Anderson [28] calls the "imagined community," often rooted in historical-political myths of shared identity. While the imaginary can operate at various levels of social organization—ranging from local communities to the global community—the nation-state plays a particularly powerful role in shaping it, thanks to its resources and institutional mechanisms that enable the widespread dissemination of cultural narratives.

This process of shaping the imaginary involves the selective activation and deactivation of elements that transition between "storage memory" and "functional memory" [20]. Storage memory refers to the long-term preservation of cultural knowledge, practices, and symbols that are not actively employed in everyday life but can be recalled and reactivated when needed. Functional memory, on the other hand, comprises those elements actively engaged in the present, shaping identity and social practices. While the movement of elements from storage memory to functional memory can be influenced by various actors and may occur in a decentralized manner, institutionalized authorities exert significant power in determining which aspects of memory are emphasized and brought to the forefront, as seen in the battles over street names and public holidays.

The negotiation of what enters functional memory is often driven by motives of legitimization, delegitimization, and differentiation [5]. The nation-state, with its considerable institutional power, remains a dominant force in shaping the imaginary, strategically mobilizing cultural narratives to maintain or gain cultural hegemony and reinforce its authority. In this process, political forces within the state compete with one another, each seeking to influence which cultural elements are highlighted to solidify their own power and control over the collective identity.

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [29] defines cultural heritage broadly, encompassing practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as part of their heritage. This inclusive definition emphasizes the crucial role of communities in identifying and safeguarding their heritage, highlighting the importance of local participation and self-determination in heritage processes to accurately reflect the inherent heterogeneity and fluidity of cultural expressions. While the nation-state often exerts significant influence over the shaping of the collective imaginary, this definition underscores the potential for decentralized, community-driven approaches to cultural heritage that respect and preserve the local identities and traditions.

However, the scientific discussion reveals tensions between top-down and bottom-up approaches to defining cultural heritage. Scholars like Smith [30] argue

that heritage is often controlled by “authorized heritage discourse” (AHD), which is dominated by experts, institutions, and governments who impose their definitions and values on what is considered worthy of preservation. This discourse often prioritizes tangible heritage, such as monuments and sites, over intangible cultural practices and knowledge, potentially marginalizing the voices of local communities and indigenous groups.

This top-down approach contrasts with more participatory models that emphasize the role of communities in defining and managing their heritage [31]. These models recognize that cultural heritage is not static but is continually negotiated and redefined through social interactions and collective memory. The shift toward recognizing intangible cultural heritage as equally important reflects a growing acknowledgment of the need for more inclusive and democratic heritage practices.

Connecting this discussion to the earlier points, it becomes clear that cultural heritage is a product of both individual and collective efforts, shaped by the interactions between people, places, and media. While institutional power plays a significant role in defining and preserving heritage, as seen in the nation-state’s role in shaping national narratives, there is also a growing recognition of the importance of local voices and grassroots initiatives in safeguarding cultural heritage. This dynamic interplay between top-down and bottom-up forces reflects the complex and contested nature of cultural heritage, where definitions and practices are continuously negotiated and reinterpreted. Understanding these processes is crucial for appreciating the depth and complexity of cultural heritage, as well as for recognizing the ways in which it is both preserved and transformed over time.

#### **4. Culture, cultural identity, and cultural heritage in the post-digital era**

The post-digital era is marked by the seamless integration of digital technologies into everyday life, where the boundaries between digital and physical realities are increasingly blurred. Cramer [32] describes the term “post-digital” as a condition where digital technologies have become so ubiquitous that they are no longer perceived as distinct or novel but are fully integrated into our lived experiences.

In this context, identities have become more fluid and hybrid than ever before. The digital extension of the physical context allows individuals to construct and express their identities across multiple, overlapping environments, often transcending geographical boundaries. Turkle [33] highlights how digital platforms provide spaces for experimenting with different facets of identity, enabling individuals to engage with diverse cultural content and connect with others globally. This capability enriches personal identities, making them increasingly multicultural, as individuals navigate and incorporate elements from a myriad of cultural contexts [6].

Individuals nurture their dynamic and plural identity over the course of their “onlife” [34] in an increasingly translocal space, where even languages are no longer barriers due to the advent of automatic translation tools. This fluid movement of cultural elements across virtual and physical spaces not only alters existing local cultures but also fosters the emergence of entirely new cultural forms within the digital realm, spreading virally across the web. In light of this, understanding culture in an essentialistic way becomes increasingly disconnected from reality, as individuals today are even more free than ever before to access and engage with a variety of local and translocal cultures, internalizing their elements and performing them in unique and personal ways.

The pervasive nature of digital media in the post-digital era also profoundly influences cultural heritage. Digital technologies facilitate the preservation, sharing, and reinterpretation of cultural heritage on an unprecedented scale. Giaccardi [35] emphasizes that the digitization of cultural artifacts, texts, and practices allows heritage to be accessed and engaged with by a global audience, effectively transcending the traditional limitations of time and space.

In relation to the cultural heritage of highly institutionalized collectives such as the Nation-States, this has led to new opportunities for cultural engagement and the democratization of heritage preservation. Digital media have transformed heritage preservation from a process traditionally controlled by institutions and experts to one that is increasingly participatory. Smith [30] argues that while heritage has traditionally been controlled by institutions and experts, digital platforms now empower individuals and communities to shape the narrative of what constitutes cultural heritage. User-generated content, social media, and collaborative platforms create new avenues for documenting, sharing, and interpreting cultural experiences in ways that are more inclusive and reflective of diverse voices, making heritage more inclusive and participatory [36].

The digital divide [37] and the platformization of the Internet [38, 39] are phenomena that significantly limit and shape the potential democratization process of cultural narratives. The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not, encompassing not only physical access but also skills and usage patterns [37]. This divide exists along various socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic lines, potentially excluding certain groups from participating in digital cultural production and consumption [40]. Platformization, the growing dominance of digital platforms as intermediaries in online interactions, further complicates this landscape. These platforms, while providing opportunities for user-generated content, also exert significant control over the visibility and distribution of cultural expressions [40].

The role of algorithms on digital platforms poses significant limitations to users' creative agency and profoundly influences the impact of their contributions [41]. As Pariser [42] argues with his concept of the "filter bubble," algorithms often prioritize popular content and personalized recommendations, potentially marginalizing less mainstream cultural expressions and leading to a narrower representation of cultural diversity. This algorithmic curation can create echo chambers, reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. Despite these challenges, digital platforms do facilitate the creation, challenging, reinterpretation, and remixing of cultural narratives by a diverse array of participants, reflecting the multiplicity of identities and experiences in the post-digital age.

Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become spaces for cultural expression, allowing marginalized voices to reach wider audiences and challenge dominant narratives. However, this process of negotiation is influenced by various factors that tend to reflect and sometimes amplify societal imbalances. Disparities in digital literacy and access can lead to underrepresentation of certain communities in online cultural discourse.

Moreover, the increased probability of being targeted by hate speech and online harassment disproportionately affects marginalized groups, potentially silencing their voices in digital spaces. Studies have shown that women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience online abuse [43], which can lead to self-censorship or withdrawal from online platforms [44]. This creates a hostile environment that further exacerbates the underrepresentation of these communities

in digital cultural production and discourse [45]. Additionally, content moderation policies on these platforms, while necessary to combat harmful content, can sometimes inadvertently suppress legitimate cultural expressions, particularly those from marginalized communities whose contexts may be misunderstood or misinterpreted by content moderators [41]. Furthermore, the contributions made through these platforms are often filtered and shaped by the platforms' own economic interests and content moderation policies [39, 41].

These factors collectively contribute to a complex digital landscape where the democratization of cultural narratives is simultaneously enabled and constrained, reflecting broader societal power dynamics and inequalities which indeed end up being reinforced, potentially limiting the truly transformative potential of digital cultural participation.

This dynamic creates a paradoxical situation where digital platforms ostensibly offer unprecedented opportunities for diverse cultural expression, yet often reproduce and amplify existing social hierarchies and power imbalances. The promise of digital democratization is thus tempered by the reality of digital stratification.

For instance, while social media platforms have given voice to previously marginalized groups, the amplification of these voices is often subject to the same biases and prejudices that exist in offline spaces. Algorithmic bias can lead to the under-promotion of content from certain communities while over-promoting content that aligns with dominant cultural narratives. This algorithmic curation, driven by engagement metrics and advertising imperatives, can create a self-reinforcing cycle that further entrenches existing inequalities [46].

Moreover, the commodification of cultural expression on these platforms often favors those with pre-existing cultural, social, or economic capital. Influencer culture, for example, while seemingly meritocratic, often reproduces traditional beauty standards and consumer-driven values, potentially drowning out more diverse or challenging cultural narratives.

The global reach of these platforms raises questions about cultural imperialism and the homogenization of cultural expression, above all considering the dominance of certain cultural forms over others, particularly those originating from the Global North or from areas with greater economic and technological resources. However, it must be highlighted that cultural elements tend to acquire new meanings and frequently transform when adapted to different local contexts. Indeed, culture is a product of inter-culture.

In this context, however, the transformative potential of digital cultural participation is not negated, but it is significantly constrained. While digital platforms have undoubtedly expanded the range of voices contributing to cultural narratives, the structures and mechanisms through which these contributions are made, disseminated, and consumed often serve to reinforce rather than challenge existing power dynamics. This underscores the need for critical engagement with digital platforms, not just as neutral tools for cultural expression, but as complex socio-technical systems that are deeply embedded in, and reflective of, broader societal structures and inequalities.

## **5. The fundamental error and its impact on communities**

In an increasingly interconnected world, the essentialist understanding of culture poses significant risks to social justice and cohesion. This perspective, which treats culture as a fixed, homogeneous entity intrinsically tied to specific groups, often serves

as a proxy for race and can lead to the stigmatization of individuals and communities [47]. Such essentialist views reproduce racist power relations and endanger the fabric of diverse societies. The tendency to view reality in simplistic terms of “us” versus “them” leads to the “Fundamental Error” [48]; that is an extension of the Fundamental Attribution Error—a cognitive bias where individuals overemphasize personal characteristics and undervalue situational factors when explaining others’ behaviors [49]. The “Fundamental Error” refers to the propensity to attribute complex phenomena to certain groups, frequently identified through an essentialist notion of culture, ignoring the multifaceted nature of identity and the complexity of the whole context.

The Fundamental Error shakes the very foundations of society by dividing people and justifying oppression under the guise of cultural preservation or self-defense. The digital landscape, with its echo chambers and algorithmic rabbit holes, often reinforces essentialist beliefs. Social media platforms can create powerful collective experiences that lead to self-enhancement through othering practices. Users find themselves in digital environments that confirm and amplify their pre-existing biases while strengthening positive relations with the other users which seem to be a materialization of the “imagined community”, making it increasingly difficult to challenge essentialist perspectives.

The recent “Talahon” trend in Germany provides a compelling illustration of how cultural essentialism manifests and evolves in the digital age. Initially emerging as a TikTok trend (#talahon) among young people, particularly those from Arabic migrant backgrounds, the term “Talahon” was first used in the song *Ta3al Lahon* released by Hassan in August 2022 to describe a stereotypical image of young men associated with certain behaviors and fashion choices. This trend began as a form of self-stereotyping, where individuals playfully embraced and exaggerated certain stereotypes that mainstream society tends to project onto them. It could be seen as a way of reclaiming and reappropriating negative stereotypes, a common strategy among marginalized groups to assert agency over their representation [50]. However, the phenomenon took a controversial turn with the release of an AI-generated song created by the Austrian music producer living in Germany Butterbro titled “*Verknallt in einen Talahon*” (“In Love with a Talahon”). This song, which gained extreme popularity in German charts, mixed prejudices about the Arabic migrant community, particularly males, with elements of the TikTok trend, packaging it within the traditional German “Schlager” music genre. The AI generated cover and lyrics depict a blonde German woman renouncing her emancipation to serve a “Talahon,” portrayed as a criminal and a macho figure.

This portrayal is problematic as it normalizes harmful stereotypes, which many do not even question, as evidenced by the almost entirely positive comments on the unofficial music video created by user *ariellebilo* on YouTube<sup>1</sup>. The “Talahon” phenomenon illustrates a complex dynamic. On one hand, we see individuals from marginalized communities accepting and playfully exaggerating roles assigned to them by society—a strategy that can be seen as a form of resistance through appropriation. This is particularly understandable when discrimination makes other social roles hard to achieve. On the other hand, the mainstream adoption and commercialization of

<sup>1</sup> User: *ariellebilo*; Titel: *Verknallt in einen Talahon – Unofficial Music Video* 🎵🎶 Music: Butterbro – *Verknallt in einen Talahon*; link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EbSpT5weWE>; 520.998 views; 7716 thumbs up; 0 thumbs down; 469 comments. User: “Butterbro – Thema”; title: “*Verknallt in einen Talahon*” (Originalvideo mit statischem Coverbild); link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0aG3SiD6Y>; 144.603 users; 3451 thumbs up; 0 thumbs down; comments have been disabled (as at 20th of August 2024).

these stereotypes, as seen in the AI-generated song, risk confirming and amplifying existing fears and prejudices. It reinforces the essentialist notion of unbridgeable cultural differences between “us” and “them,” potentially justifying discriminatory attitudes and policies.

In light of these challenges, it is vital to deconstruct essentialist perspectives on culture and promote a constructivist understanding of individual identity as multicultural and fluid. We must recognize that cultures are not monolithic national entities but diverse, evolving, and interconnected systems of meaning. Critical Intercultural Education and media literacy play crucial roles in this process. By fostering critical thinking skills and promoting exposure to diverse perspectives, we can help individuals recognize and challenge essentialist narratives. Additionally, platforms and content creators have a responsibility to consider the broader implications of trends and content that play with cultural stereotypes. In particular, AI—which is rooted in existing content and is therefore likely to reproduce such stereotypes—needs reliable mechanisms to make it *diversity competent*, overcoming the Fundamental Error requires a collective effort to embrace the complexity of reality. By rejecting simplistic, essentialist understandings of human identity and culture, we can build more inclusive societies that celebrate diversity while addressing the real structural sources of societal problems. This approach not only combats discrimination but also enriches our collective cultural experience, fostering genuine intercultural dialog and understanding across all contexts.

## 6. Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that understanding culture, cultural identity, and cultural heritage through a critical lens is not only essential for academic discourse but crucial for navigating the complexities of contemporary society. The exploration of these concepts reveals that culture is not a static or monolithic entity but a dynamic interplay of identities and narratives that are continuously shaped by social, economic, political, environmental and technological forces. The examination of how cultural concepts evolve in the post-digital age has highlighted both the opportunities and challenges presented by our increasingly interconnected world. Digital platforms have provided unprecedented opportunities for cultural expression and exchange, allowing marginalized voices to reach wider audiences. However, they have also facilitated the spread of stereotypes and the creation of echo chambers that can reinforce divisive narratives.

The example of the “Talahon” phenomenon vividly demonstrates the profound impact that cultural representations can have, both in reinforcing stereotypes and in shaping societal perceptions. It illustrates how digital trends can quickly amplify and normalize problematic narratives, underscoring the need for critical engagement with media content. To counteract the Fundamental Error taking form through collective othering practices and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, it is crucial to challenge the narratives that sustain division and promote a more inclusive understanding of identity and belonging. This requires a shift in both discourse and practice, recognizing diversity as a strength rather than a threat.

Education and media play pivotal roles in this transformation, providing platforms for marginalized voices and equipping individuals with the skills to critically engage with cultural content. Moreover, policy interventions that address social inequalities are vital for creating a more inclusive society. By fostering reciprocity and trust, and recognizing the contributions of all community members, society can become

more cohesive and resilient. This approach not only benefits those who have been marginalized but also contributes to the overall health and stability of society. Finally, embracing a constructivist perspective on culture and identity opens up new possibilities for intercultural dialog and understanding. It allows us to move beyond simplistic categorizations and appreciate the rich tapestry of human experience. By developing a more nuanced and reflective understanding of culture, we can work toward building societies that are not only more equitable and harmonious but also better equipped to harness the creative potential that diversity brings. As we continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities of our globalized, digital world, the ability to critically engage with cultural narratives and representations will become increasingly important. Indeed, the polycrisis we (will) face requires citizens who are interculturally competent. They should be able to make sustainable decisions without falling into the traps of conspiracy theories or hateful narratives against scapegoats. It is through this engagement that we can hope to foster a more inclusive, empathetic, and just society for all.

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## **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

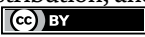
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Section 2

Multiculturalism and  
Interculturalism and the  
Creation of Global Citizens

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## Chapter 6

# Contextualizing Diversity in a Study of Educational Psychology Course Syllabi for Preservice Teachers

*Adam I. Attwood*

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to conduct a content analysis of educational psychology course syllabi for courses taken by preservice teachers to determine how the course descriptions and objectives compare for diversity. A content analysis of educational psychology syllabi ( $N = 25$ ) from colleges and universities mostly (96% or 24 of the 25 syllabi) in the United States was conducted for this study. While there was generally consensus among this sample of syllabi of what topics were covered as part of content knowledge course objectives, there was a divergence in emphasis on diversity as well as only one syllabus that directly addressed controversies in educational psychology. The word *diversity* appeared in 28% of the course overviews/descriptions in this sample. This study highlights the importance of autoethnographic practices for diversity in educational psychology. Examples of historically underrepresented scholars in psychology are summarized for inclusion in educational psychology courses for preservice teachers as a way to address representation.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive pedagogy, content analysis, curriculum, diversity, educational psychology, multicultural, preservice teachers, syllabus

### 1. Introduction

This study adds to the research literature on the role of the syllabus in survey courses on educational psychology for undergraduate and graduate students in initial teacher licensure programs in the United States. This study highlights the need for autoethnographic studies to address change and continuity in the representation of educational psychology theories and practices. A sample ( $N = 25$ ) of educational psychology course syllabi from colleges and universities are analyzed for implications in how these courses are structured, what is emphasized, and what is communicated to preservice teachers via the syllabus as itself being a pedagogical tool. Themes were derived from word frequencies of the syllabi in the aggregate. Discussion of implications is contextualized based on the syllabi overviews, learning objectives, and related information as derived from word frequencies, term-to-term correlations, and a

qualitative comparison across the sample. This study provides an additional foundation for the importance of autoethnographic practice in educational psychology.

## **2. Background and rationale**

Some of the literature has identified challenges in the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in terms of some teachers focusing too much on deficit models [1]. Culturally relevant pedagogy is the adaptation of curriculum and the teaching of that curriculum to diverse learners [2]. Course syllabi can be a way to gauge trends in how concepts and skills are presented to preservice teachers. As such, the syllabus can be a way to guide students away from deficit model perception. The syllabus is an important document for all courses in higher education institutions [3]. It is the primary, central document that communicates requirements, expectations, and policies for the course [4]. Some students rely on the course syllabus to determine whether they will enroll in the course, especially if it is an elective [5]. For courses in educational psychology, the syllabus may serve a role beyond its essential function in other disciplines because of the main audience of educational psychology courses are preservice teachers—in initial licensure programs—who are learning pedagogical strategies. As such, the syllabus in educational psychology courses is itself a teaching tool for fostering inclusive practices in teaching and learning [6, 7]. Considering the essential role of educational psychology in teacher education and the necessity to effectively communicate the principles and strategies of teaching and learning that training in educational psychology provides, researchers have suggested the importance of documenting the role of educational psychology from multiple perspectives [8–10]. One of the ways to do this is to analyze educational psychology courses via the course syllabus. This is important for identifying a baseline of what preservice teachers are expected to know and what skills they should have by the end of a course in educational psychology, and this study will provide a basis for program conceptualization, topic standardization and differentiation, as well as potential for program improvement.

There is a paucity of research on educational psychology course syllabi in the United States. There has been a study of preservice teacher perceptions of educational psychology syllabi in Spain [11]. That research study found that preservice teachers who participated in their study “attributed greater importance to syllabus topics related to socio-emotional development and teaching roles in the classroom. Theoretical topics, such as conceptual frameworks for development and learning, were less rated” ([11], p. 81). This suggests that there is a need for examining syllabi, among other components of educational psychology curricula, for how the practitioner experience is represented since this seems to be of substantial importance to preservice teachers. Alvarez and colleagues [11] also found that the components on theory which tended to form a large part of educational psychology curriculum in their sample of participants who seemed to perceive the theories in their course as needing updated. Another study on educational psychology syllabi was conducted in Malta with in-service teachers [12]. The earlier study conducted by Borg and Falzon [12] had similar results though more focused on assessment process rather than content and focused only on an honors section of educational psychology.

There are related studies in the United States, but not specifically on syllabi of survey courses in educational psychology for preservice teachers. For example, there was

a study that approaches the topic of psychology course syllabi analysis in the United States, but it was for a multicultural course in a counseling psychology program [13], not a course in educational psychology. Another study analyzed doctoral level syllabi of courses on the history of educational psychology [14]. The study conducted by Merced and colleagues [14] found that the syllabi in their sample had on average five course objectives that could be improved through rephrasing for measurability. They also found that the syllabi were vague with a focus on “foundational competencies” rather than on outcomes that promoted measurable advanced skills.

There have been studies that analyzed course syllabi from courses on general psychology [15, 16]. There have also been studies that analyze course syllabi in related disciplines but, again, not specifically on courses in educational psychology for preservice teachers (e.g., [17–20]). Most found that there was less of an emphasis on dynamic critical thinking skills assessed through measurable outcomes at the higher level of Bloom’s taxonomy and instead focused on what Merced and colleagues [14] called “foundational competencies.” In an analysis of general psychology syllabi, a research team suggested that their sample of syllabi were “disproportionately learner-centered on almost all of the factors assessed. In addition, there were moderate to strong associations among learner-centered factors, syllabus length, and use of images in syllabi” ([16], p. 6). They noted that there has been a trend in the past 20 years that general psychology syllabi have included more “learner-centered” or constructivist pedagogy. This factor can be important for culturally responsive pedagogy. Some studies also reference the importance of a course syllabus as a factor in the study of K-12 and college courses (e.g., [5, 21, 22]) which support the findings of Alvarez and colleagues [11] in their case study in that students placed substantial importance on the syllabus for how they approach a course.

Other than the study by Alvarez and colleagues [11] on preservice teacher perceptions of educational psychology syllabi in Spain, the research study that is closest to the present topic on educational psychology courses in the United States was a study by Miller and colleagues [23] that analyzed the syllabi of school psychology courses from across the United States. While their research is certainly relevant to the present study, it is not focused on educational psychology courses for preservice teachers. Their study focused on school psychology syllabi in courses taken by preservice school psychologists, finding that the assessment methods used in those courses were largely unchanged over the previous two decades which suggested the potential need for reviewing assessment strategies. The findings that there has perhaps been very little change in school psychology courses [23] and the findings that suggested a trend toward learner-centered approaches in general psychology courses [16], indicate a growing interest in the course syllabus as an essential component of pedagogy to study. Given the gap in the literature on analyzing educational psychology syllabi of courses for preservice teachers and the related findings of Miller and colleagues [23] and Richmond and colleagues [16], there is a need to study educational psychology courses for diversity and inclusion practices in the course content as well as assessment strategies used. This highlights that there is a gap in the research literature on educational psychology course syllabi in the United States. This present study addresses this gap and calls for additional research on this topic by providing a qualitative study of a sample of educational psychology course syllabi from public and private colleges and universities from across the United States. Through a content analysis of the syllabi, implications are identified and discussed for how educational psychology courses are presented to students through the syllabus.

### **3. Study design**

#### **3.1 Materials and method**

A content analysis of educational psychology syllabi ( $N = 25$ ) from colleges and universities was conducted for this study. The content analysis strategy used is based on comparing documents for themes [24, 25]. The theoretical framework that informs this content analysis is based on culturally responsive pedagogy with emphasis in humanizing pedagogy [2, 26] to “connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” ([27], p. 254). In this study, humanizing pedagogy is used as a framework for analyzing the course syllabi for how students might potentially interface with the curriculum through the assessment methods listed or “see” themselves or groups with whom students might historically associate for representation in the curriculum.

Voyant was the software package used for supporting analysis of the course overviews, descriptions, and course objectives listed on each syllabus (see Welsh’s [28] review of Voyant software in its application for conducting content analysis). The software-aided portion of the analysis combined all the course overviews/descriptions from each syllabus into one document for determining vocabulary density, readability index, word frequencies, and term correlations. Documents were selected using modified thematic keyword online search for qualitative analysis [24]. The readability index is a measure of how difficult a text is to read. The methodology used to select the samples was online search using thematic keywords, screening documents for thematic relevance, and including those that were representative of the theme both geographically and by content area. This study compared a selection of publicly available syllabi from accredited public and private non-profit colleges and universities.

#### **3.2 Research questions**

The research questions guiding this study are: What are the common themes across the syllabi for educational psychology courses in colleges and universities in the United States? What themes and topics are featured in the syllabi? Are there apparent similarities and differences in the course overviews/descriptions and what are the implications?

### **4. Findings and discussion**

#### **4.1 Descriptive details summary of syllabi**

The syllabi ( $N = 25$ ) analyzed in this study are from private colleges/universities ( $n = 9$ ) and public colleges/universities ( $n = 16$ ). Of the 16 public institutions in this sample, 11 are 4-year universities, 4 are 2-year community colleges and one is a public four-year institution in Canada. For comparison between undergraduate initial teacher licensure programs and graduate initial teacher licensure programs, five of the 25 are graduate level programs for students with a baccalaureate degree seeking initial licensure plus a master’s degree. Of these five, three are public institutions and two are private institutions. Syllabi included in this study are addressed pseudonymously for reasons of privacy. See **Table 1** for descriptive details.

Syllabus	Institution type (all are accredited, non-profit)	Program type (all are for initial licensure programs)	State/location	Syllabus length (page-count)	Learning objectives (number listed)	Topics of study (number listed)	Exams or quizzes required
1	Public university	Graduate	WA	10	6	9	No
2	Public university	Graduate	NM	6	15	12	No
3	Public university	Graduate	CO	13	9	8	Yes
4	Private university	Graduate	TN	19	6	7	No
5	Private university	Graduate	IN	5	10	10	No
6	Public university	Undergraduate	KY	9	11	No course calendar with topics listed	Yes
7	Public university	Undergraduate	WI	3	5	No course calendar with topics listed	Yes
8	Public university	Undergraduate	TX	9	4	13	Yes
9	Public university	Undergraduate	TX	7	10	15	Yes
10	Public university	Undergraduate	TX	7	9	10	Yes
11	Public university	Undergraduate	MI	7	4	No course calendar with topics listed	Yes
12	Public university	Undergraduate	VA	3	None specifically listed	16	Yes
13	Public university	Undergraduate	CO	18	3	No course calendar with topics listed	Yes ("take-home essay exams")
14	Private university	Undergraduate	WI	12	10	No course calendar with topics listed	Yes
15	Private university	Undergraduate	MN	8	6	11	Yes
16	Private university	Undergraduate	LA	9	9	9	Yes
17	Private university	Undergraduate	NY	20	6	14	No
18	Private university	Undergraduate	RI	9	4	13	Yes ("take-home exams")

Syllabus	Institution type (all are accredited, non-profit)	Program type (all are for initial licensure programs)	State/location	Syllabus length (page-count)	Learning objectives (number listed)	Topics of study (number listed)	Exams or quizzes required
19	Private university	Undergraduate	DC	5	17	No course calendar with topics listed	Yes
20	Private university	Undergraduate	TX	5	8	No course calendar with topics listed	No
21	Public community college (2-year)	Undergraduate	MO	8	13	16	Yes
22	Public community college (2-year)	Undergraduate	IA	3	16	No course calendar with topics listed	No
23	Public Community College (2-Year)	Undergraduate	NJ	8	5	15	Yes
24	Public community college (2-year)	Undergraduate	CT	3	7	5	Yes
25	Public university in Canada	Undergraduate	ON	8	6	17	No

Note: Syllabi are referenced pseudonymously.

**Table 1.**  
Descriptive details of educational psychology course syllabi.

Frequencies of items such as syllabus length, number of topics of study, and whether exams and quizzes are used and form the basis for determinations about assessment as an essential theme in educational psychology. Of the five graduate initial licensure programs in this sample, only one (2%) had required exams and/or quizzes. This descriptive statistic is inverted when looking at the undergraduate initial licensure programs in which 16 (80%) of the syllabi require tests and/or quizzes. All the course syllabi listed a required combination of papers, projects, and discussion assignments. The average syllabus length was just under 9 pages (median = 8, mode = 9). The average number of learning objectives was 8 (median = 7, mode = 6, highest number = 17, lowest number = 3). The average number of topics of study was 12 (median = 12, mode = 9, highest number = 17, lowest number = 5) of the 17 syllabi that included a detailed course schedule with topics and assignments listed. Topics of study were generally consistent across syllabi and the learning objectives were generally consistent as well with action verbs such as “discuss,” “apply,” “analyze,” “evaluate,” “explore,” and “understand,” among similar other action verbs starting each learning objective aligned with course content and skills. Those syllabi that listed a required field experience as part of the course were more practitioner oriented in that the assignments focused on applying theory to practice whereas the courses without a field experience component focused more on the theories of teaching and learning and going in depth learning about educational psychological theories through discussion, papers, and related projects.

#### **4.2 Analysis of syllabi course overviews**

After reading each syllabus, this researcher initially used manual process to determine themes and coded the course overview/description from each syllabus, and then used an automated process for determining word-count frequencies. Themes were determined based on keyword frequency in the course overview/description. These keywords ( $n = 14$ ) include by order of frequency from most frequent to least frequent: learning, development, educational, psychology, theories, teaching, students, motivation, research, understanding, process, knowledge, assessment, and classroom. The top three keywords most seen in the course overviews/descriptions from the syllabi were learning, development, and educational. The word course was technically second in frequency but that is removed from this analysis as it was a standardized heading in course syllabi and not a content word.

There are about 2430 words (within which there were 677 unique word forms) total when combining the course overviews from all 25 syllabi in this sample. The top fifteen word-frequencies in the course overviews of the syllabi combined were: learning ( $n = 71$ ); course ( $n = 52$ ); development ( $n = 31$ ); educational ( $n = 29$ ); psychology ( $n = 27$ ); teaching ( $n = 24$ ); theories ( $n = 24$ ); students ( $n = 16$ ); motivation ( $n = 14$ ); social ( $n = 12$ ); research ( $n = 11$ ); education ( $n = 10$ ); process ( $n = 10$ ); understanding ( $n = 10$ ); assessment ( $n = 9$ ). The vocabulary density was .279 and the readability index was 17.154, which indicates the text is at the level of a college graduate.

When comparing terms in course objectives for correlations. Results most notable for this study include strongly positive correlation coefficients ( $r = 1$ ) between terms such as “application” with “pupil,” “democracy” with “justice,” “agency” with “language,” “developing” with “understandings,” “developing” with “vocabulary,” “develops” with “supports,” “diverse” with “interests,” and “strategies” with “understanding.” These strong correlations suggest the course overviews are emphasizing

that preservice teachers in these courses will be able to develop and apply theories to practice so that they and their future students have agency to achieve the learning targets.

The main theme that emerged was assessment. Since a survey course on educational psychology is focused on preparing teachers, the keyword of assessment—although relatively low in frequency in the course descriptions—was frequently listed as one of the topics in the syllabi that included a course schedule with topics list which was 68% of this sample. When considering the top three keywords by frequency, they each are reinforced through assessment. This finding is consistent with another study's finding that formative assessment, specifically, is an essential tool in educational psychology [29]. Therefore, assessment was determined to be a theme in this study and measured by recording whether the syllabus listed required exams and/or quizzes. The number of objectives the syllabi listed was recorded in **Table 1** as also reinforcing the theme of assessment.

Another theme that emerged was diversity and inclusion. The word diversity appeared seven times (28%) in the course overviews/descriptions. The word inclusion did not appear in any of the course overviews/descriptions, but it was in most of the topic lists of the syllabi either directly stated as inclusion or inclusive practice or included as part of a topic on diversity or listed as a topic on individual and group differences. It may be inferred that diversity and inclusion are synonymous for the purposes of this specific analysis. Also of note, the word controversial was in one of the syllabi's course descriptions—Syllabus 16—suggesting that the course at that institution would directly address debates in the field of educational psychology instead of problematically presenting material as static. Part of the course description read: "This course also emphasizes several contemporary educational psychology issues of a controversial/debatable nature that lend themselves to examination via a point-counterpoint or pro-con dialectical process" (Syllabus 16). This was the only syllabus in this sample to address controversy in the field of educational psychology. It was also one of the few syllabi to not require tests or quizzes as part of the assessment structure of the course. This would support the constructivist method with which Syllabus 16 seems to be predicated. Constructivism tends to not require tests and quizzes and instead relies largely on discussion-based and project-based learning strategies [30].

All the syllabi in this sample that included a course schedule with list of topics of study were generally consistent in including theories and frameworks of Vygotsky [31, 32], Piaget [33], Bandura [34], and included topics of lifespan development, cognitive processes, behavioral processes, intelligence constructs, and individual and group differences, among other topics in parallel across these syllabi. The framing or emphasis of these topics varied as did the amount of time for each of the topics, but the list of topics themselves were consistent among the 17 (68% of the) syllabi that included a detailed course calendar that listed topics and assignments. When considering the theme of diversity and inclusion, 28% addressed this topic directly within the course overview/description. Most included this in a cultural process topic or across multiple topics in the course schedule section. Although the course overview/description suggests what will be most emphasized in the course, survey courses such as educational psychology for preservice teachers include many topics, and it is in the list of topics and readings that matters more than the overview/description. As such, diversity and inclusion or cultural perspectives in educational psychology were featured in at least one topic in more than 90% of the syllabi in this sample.

It is interesting that one of the syllabi directly addressed the concept of controversy and debate in the course overview/description. Emphasizing discussion of controversy in the field of educational psychology was highly unusual in this sample of syllabi. Possible reasons for the topic of controversy being an outlier may be because of this course being a survey course and likely the only educational psychology course that preservice teachers will take so there is little time to address controversies in psychology. This consideration of time as a factor may result in the course presenting what has become a standard list of topics on educational psychology that are deemed most influential by the instructor and leave out discussion of controversy as this could take a substantial amount of time. Teaching about general psychology via case studies on controversial topics has been shown to be effective in generating and maintaining student engagement in learning [35]. However, the subfield of educational psychology is usually focused on teaching practical pedagogical strategies—that are informed by the research literature—to teachers for their K-12 classrooms. Therefore, direct instruction is more efficient, and controversial topics or the teaching of controversies within the field may be viewed as a distraction or as potentially counterproductive. This is especially the case in a survey course which is likely the only course in educational psychology that preservice teachers take in their teacher education program.

A related issue to partially explain a reluctance to directly address controversy is also in what Kaplan [36] and others have discussed as a focus on quantitative methodology and the positivist paradigm that have historically reformed the entire field of psychology: “the perception that the epistemological assumptions guiding their research are incompatible with the assumptions and corresponding standards that serve to screen out [methodologically divergent studies]” ([36], p. 2). While this has been changing across multiple subfields of psychology, and the field of psychology has a robust qualitative research tradition, there has also been critique of narrow cultural influence on the field of psychology that has historically tended to emphasize the positivist paradigm, though this itself is also debated and without consensus [37–39]. Also, Hwang and colleagues [40] specifically critiqued what they call Kantian Eurocentrism—and its historical emphasis on quantitative primacy—that has dominated the development of psychology as a field. Nevertheless, research teams have affirmed the importance of the quantitative paradigm in educational psychology for its usefulness as a tool to assist in challenging process of dispelling “neuromyths” [41].

Diversifying psychology methodologically and in multicultural viewpoints can be important for preservice teachers so they may have a better understanding of multiple vantage points and be better prepared for teaching in a pluralistic society [42, 43]. That conceptual goal starts with the syllabus [6]. This study’s sample of course syllabi suggests that syllabi in survey courses on educational psychology nearly all address individual and group differences as a topic of study and most address diversity within that topic and some of these syllabi address diversity and multicultural perspectives as additional topics of study and linked to the course objectives. The course learning objectives were also largely in parallel with each other, though there were some notable outliers in how qualitative or quantitative research was emphasized and if the course objectives emphasized outcomes in psychological science literacy or social-emotional interaction skills (e.g., Syllabus 11 in comparison to Syllabus 13). Some syllabi emphasized psychological science throughout the course objectives and that the course readings would mostly be research studies (e.g., Syllabus 11) while a couple other syllabi (e.g., Syllabus 13) emphasized social-emotional skills such as empathy and application of these skills to field placements. Most syllabi demonstrated

a balanced approach to course objectives between developing psychological scientific understanding and social-emotional professionalism and between theory and practice across several major educational psychological theories and either their historical implications for classroom practice and/or their contemporary applications and what historical and recent research suggests for practice.

Students can benefit from faculty regularly reviewing their syllabi and updating the syllabus to include multiple perspectives in both psychological research methodology and in multicultural conceptualizations of psychology that include recent research. In the related field of school psychology, a research team found in a survey of members of the National Association of School Psychologists that “Overall, only about 11% of school psychologists reported that they were knowledgeable or very knowledgeable of social justice as part of school psychology practice” ([44], p. 13). While their study was about school psychologists and not preservice teachers or instructors of educational psychology, the field of school psychology is related. This further highlights the importance for instructors of survey courses on educational psychology to address the field from multiple methodological perspectives and foster discussion of psychological constructs across time and place. Preservice teachers should have knowledge and skills by the end of their educational psychology course in how to identify and summarize theories of teaching and learning, articulate the purposes of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in addition to understanding how to apply a theory with its research foundations both historically and contemporaneously in classroom practice [10].

When considering the theme of assessment, the keywords of learning, development, and educational were most frequently seen in the course overviews/ descriptions. This makes sense when considering studies such as one conducted by Leenknecht and colleagues [29] that have suggested that learning and development in schools is predicated on assessment—specifically formative assessment. Other studies have also suggested the essential importance of assessment in K-12 teaching and learning (e.g., [45–47]). Therefore, this finding is congruent with the assumption of the foundational role of assessment in educational psychology.

Only four of the 16 (25%) syllabi for the undergraduate courses did not have exams and quizzes as part of the assessment method. This prompts the theme of psychological paradigms—namely positivism and constructivism, as the syllabi seemed to bifurcate along these two paradigms in terms of assessment structure. Although this statistic inverts for the graduate course syllabi sample—four of the five (80%) do not require tests or quizzes—it is notable that the requirement of tests and quizzes suggests a positivist paradigm in assessment is the majority in this sample for the undergraduate courses. The use of exams and quizzes has substantial support in the research literature as formative and summative assessment tools that effectively promote and support student learning (e.g., [48–50]), so the observation from this study of syllabi that include exams and quizzes as part of the assessment is consistent with much of the research. Constructivist approaches that are project-based and discussion-based are also popular and have support in research literature [51–53]. Therefore, the combination of constructivism and direct instruction with objective exams and quizzes make sense for a survey course [54], which is consistent with what is observed in the syllabi in this study’s sample.

While all the syllabi in this sample have a combination of these approaches to assessment—quantitative and qualitative assessment modalities—most syllabi in this sample have listed required exams and quizzes as summative assessment tools that are substantial percentages of the course grade. Of the four syllabi that suggest a

mostly constructivist approach to assessment—relying on discussions, projects, and essays/papers without any tests or quizzes—one was especially constructivist because of its unique highlighting of the topic of controversies in the field of psychology. This set Syllabus 16 apart from all the other syllabi. It emphasized discussion-based approaches to controversies in educational psychology. As a pedagogical approach, discussion (and inferring potential debates) of controversies in the field was in only one of the syllabi in this sample. When considering a previous study [7], the use of that language in the syllabus was itself indirectly teaching students that educational psychology is not a static field but one of iterative evolution. In either case, whether the course requires tests and quizzes or not, educational psychology courses are important components of teacher education that improve preservice teachers' knowledge and skills in pedagogy and in neuroscience literacy, but course curriculum should be regularly reviewed by their faculty to ensure a mix of historical and recent research studies are included in the readings as part of the curriculum [41, 55].

### **4.3 Analysis of the syllabi course objectives**

There were 3034 words (within which there were 690 unique word forms) total when combining the course objectives from all 25 syllabi in this sample. The top fifteen word-frequencies in the course objectives from the syllabi combined were: learning (n = 89); theories (n = 37); student (n = 32); development (n = 31); educational (n = 29); students (n = 28); teaching (n = 26); classroom (n = 23); course (n = 23); identify (n = 22); describe (n = 17); motivation (n = 17); assessment (n = 16); instruction (n = 16); cognitive (n = 15). The vocabulary density was .227 and the readability index was 17.329, which indicates the text is at the level of a college graduate. The terms student and students were not combined because their use as singular and plural seemed intentional in the syllabi. The context in each case seemed indicative of emphasis on differentiation where use of singular student suggested specific differentiation (e.g., learning styles theory) while use of plural students suggested whole group instructional context.

While the syllabi in this sample are mostly consistent in the topics of study covered, their different approaches in assessment of student learning are notable in relation to the differences in what was emphasized within the course learning objectives. Assessment methods matter to students, especially those who use the syllabus to choose which section to enroll in and navigate the course throughout the term. The method of assessment can affect students' initial interest in the course and their situational interest in course material during the semester [56]. In a study of what influences undergraduate students' elective course selections, Chaturapruek et al. [5] found that the syllabus can influence students' enrollment decisions. One of the first-year undergraduate students in their study stated: "I'll start off on [the university's central course catalog], look at the description of it, and then go back to previous years because you can usually see the syllabus so I feel like that's helpful in seeing like, what sorts of assignments are and stuff" (as cited in [5], p. 9). The implication is that the syllabus is perhaps the single most important document for a course in that it serves a purpose before, during, and after students are enrolled in the course. Some students use the publicly posted syllabus to determine classes to take, consult the syllabus throughout the term for the assignments and class meetings schedule, course policies, grading scale and procedures, et cetera. If a student transfers universities, the syllabus can often be part of the course transfer evaluation process.

As seen in **Table 2**, the top fifteen words by frequency were largely shared across the course overviews and course objectives though their relative order differed in many cases suggesting different emphasis. Learning was notable the first most frequent word across both the aggregate course overviews and aggregate course objectives. After that the order of emphasis diverged, but the words themselves were shared in both areas. For example, development was the third most frequent word in the course overviews while it was fourth in frequency in course objectives. Notably, the word assessment is fifteenth in frequency in the course overviews while it is thirteenth in frequency in course objectives. The word diversity is not in the top fifteen words by frequency in either category.

When comparing terms in course objectives for correlations. Results most notable for this study include strongly positive correlation coefficients ( $r = 1$ ) between terms such as “assumptions” with “contexts,” “planning” with “professional,” “academic” with “methodology,” “active” with “solving,” “age” with “inclusive,” “analysis” with “relationship,” “approach” with “exceptionality,” “approach” with “inclusive,” “background” with “psychological,” “characterize” with “empirical,” “communicate” with “diverse,” “influences” with “mastery,” “theorists” with “varying,” “assessing” with “cognition,” and “processing” with “psychological.” These strong correlations suggest the course objectives that emphasize differentiation through problem-solving terminology and related phrases. It is also notable that these term-to-term correlations tend to more likely include the words diversity and inclusion in action verb statements and more frequently than what was seen in the course overviews. Assessment also features notably in the action verb form assessing with its strong correlation ( $r = 1$ ) with the word cognition in the aggregate course objectives.

These results suggest the importance of inclusive pedagogy as being a process of curriculum planning. The syllabus is a central document that conveys the messages

Course overview/description word (frequency)	Course objectives word (frequency)
Learning (71)	Learning (89)
Course (52)	Theories (37)
Development (31)	Student (32)
Educational (29)	Development (31)
Psychology (27)	Educational (29)
Teaching (24)	Students (28)
Theories (24)	Teaching (26)
Students (16)	Classroom (23)
Motivation (14)	Course (23)
Social (12)	Identify (22)
Research (11)	Describe (17)
Education (10)	Motivation (17)
Process (10)	Assessment (16)
Understanding (10)	Instruction (16)
Assessment (9)	Cognitive (15)

**Table 2.**  
*Top fifteen words by frequency in course overview/description compared to course objectives.*

of the course. Diversity, then, is reflected in the course syllabus. As such, teacher educators in an educational psychology course are in an important role to convey why diversity matters in schools through the lenses of educational psychology. Local culture should be reflected in some way in course curriculum while designing curriculum that avoids the trap of the deficit model [1]. In designing educational psychology curricula for preservice teachers that addresses diversity as a generative model—part of which has been described as a humanizing pedagogy [2, 26]—this can help teacher educators in providing representative educational psychology that avoids “hierarchy of oppression” traps that Gorski and Goodman [57] observed of the deficit model seen in a sample of multicultural courses they examined. By examining course syllabi, gaps might be identified so that deficit models may be proactively removed so that the curriculum in educational psychology is representative. Vygotsky, Piaget, and other major figures in educational psychology should be included in course curriculum, too. It is important to consider representation in educational psychology, especially as preservice teachers may only take one course in educational psychology in their entire degree program.

#### **4.4 Limitations and future research directions**

This content analysis of educational psychology course syllabi from across the United States—and one syllabus from Canada for the purpose of comparison for a potential future study—presents qualitatively substantial observations, but this is not generalizable. This study focuses on what is listed in the syllabi. This current study includes syllabi from 18 states and the District of Columbia, as well as one syllabus from Ontario, Canada. Some syllabi in this sample are from different institutions within the same state. This was a convenience sample of publicly available syllabi on college and university websites. While these syllabi are from after 2010, they do not include syllabi from after 2019. As such, findings from this study are not generalizable. A future study could include only syllabi from after 2020 to emphasize the most recent syllabi. Nevertheless, this study provides insights into what some educational psychology syllabi for preservice teachers emphasized between 2010 and 2019 to establish a baseline for a potential future study to compare syllabi after 2020.

The syllabi that were included for this study prompts discussion of how educational psychology was presented to preservice teachers in the syllabus during the 2010s. Even though these are not generalizable, this study offers a conversation prompt to highlight a research methodology in “personal experience as an important source of knowledge in and of itself, as well as a source of insight into cultural experience” ([27], p. 254). In doing so, this study contextualizes the importance of anecdotal insights in educational psychology that can foster conversations in pedagogical practice. This provides an additional foundation for future autoethnographic research into educational psychology for preservice teachers.

The use of Voyant software for computer-assisted content analysis to estimate vocabulary density, readability index, word frequencies, and term frequency correlations is limited in that for this study the course overviews and objectives were each analyzed in a combined corpus. The overview from each syllabus was placed in a single document and analyzed as a whole. This was done to give an overall perspective of what was emphasized in the sample. Likewise, the list of course objectives from each syllabus was placed in a single document and analyzed as a whole. This was done for the purpose of determining overall descriptive numbers and term frequency correlations.

Furthermore, these were combined in an intentional order for both the combined document of course overviews and combined document of course objectives: the first five are from graduate courses which were listed further in order by public and private institutional status; and the next 20 are from undergraduate courses which were listed further in order by public 4-year universities, private 4-year universities, and then public 2-year community colleges. Therefore, even though each of the course overviews and course objectives were placed in one document for analysis, they were analyzed in order of course level (graduate or undergraduate) and by institutional type (public or private 4-year and 2-year community college) so that relative frequencies in document segments could be interpreted.

For term frequency correlations, Voyant was used. The correlation coefficient is calculated by comparing the relative frequencies of terms. A coefficient that approaches 1 indicates that values correlate positively, they rise and fall together. A coefficient that approaches  $-1$  indicates that values correlate negatively, frequencies rise for one term as it drops for the other. Coefficients that approach 0 indicate little correlation, positive or negative. Vocabulary density means the ratio of the number of words to the number of unique words in the text.

This study complements the research literature on the role of the course syllabus in student perception and efficacy, provides another example of how an exploratory comparative content analysis can be conducted on this topic, and addresses a gap in the literature on analysis of educational psychology course syllabi in the United States. Future research could include a quantitatively systematic approach, or a larger qualitative or mixed methods study modeled on this qualitative approach. Future research could also include a systematic sample of syllabi from undergraduate and graduate initial teacher licensure programs from every state in the United States.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

This study of educational psychology course syllabi highlights the importance of self-assessment as a foundational concept in teacher education. It also highlights the importance of diversity and inclusion for multicultural points of view on educational psychology. The work of Vygotsky and Piaget are featured in each of the syllabi evaluated in this study but considering that the word diversity appeared in 28% of the course overviews/descriptions it makes sense to highlight the importance of these concepts when revising course syllabi for surveys of educational psychology for pre-service teachers. As such, autoethnographic practices could be applied to educational psychology survey courses to foster diverse representation of scholarly voices in the curriculum. One of the ways to do this in the United States, for example, in a survey course on educational psychology is to include culturally responsive pedagogy.

Recommendations for implementing diverse perspectives in educational psychology survey courses for preservice teachers through a culturally responsive lens include teaching about the twentieth century history of psychologists such as Mamie Phipps Clark (see [58]), Ruth Winifred Howard (see [59]), and Albert Sidney Beckham (see [60]) on the leadership of African American psychologists, Carolyn Lewis Attneave (see [61]) on American Indigenous psychology, Evelyn Hooker (see [62, 63]) on LGBTQ+ psychology, and Reiko Homma-True (see [64, 65]) on feminist psychology and the psychology of minority groups in pluralistic societies. With inclusive autoethnographic practice in the educational psychology curriculum, culturally relevant pedagogy can achieve its goal. This should avoid the deficit model problem [1].

It is important that preservice teachers take a course in educational psychology to learn pedagogical strategies and the historical and contemporary contexts of K-12 teaching and learning that will inform their practice as teachers. Course syllabi should be regularly updated for a combination of historical and contemporary readings that present students with multiple points of view both methodologically and culturally so that they may have an informed understanding of educational psychology as a field and its implications for K-12 teaching practice.

### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.


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# Cultural Differences in Human Reasoning: Some Philosophical Reflections on Theories and Implications

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## Abstract

The target of this chapter is cultural differences in thinking. Westerners think in a linear way whereas Easterners think dialectically. Three explanations have been proposed for the cultural differences in thinking. The first is based on the framework of between individualist (in the West) and collectivist (in the East) cultures. The second is based on Chinese philosophy (Taoism, Buddhism, etc.), which is contrasted with ancient Greek philosophy. The third is based on the distinction between Westerners' low-context culture and Easterners' high-context culture. The third explanation can be developed to a socio-ecological theory in the sense that a low-context culture is likely to be nourished by multicultural environments. The socio-ecological explanation can be in the frame of 'big history' approach which describes how contemporary cultural diversity has been achieved, although it is criticized by some institutionalists.

**Keywords:** cultural difference, linear thinking, dialectical thinking, low-context culture and high-context culture, socio-ecological approach, multicultural communication

## 1. Introduction

Is human nature culturally universal? This question has been posed to the followers of Social Darwinism, which posits Westerners as the fittest in the world. The assumption of human universality has criticized this false theory, which was once used to explain the hegemony of Westerners and to justify colonialism by Western countries. This assumption has been carried forward by the philosophical stance that the human mind is inherently rational and consistent across cultures. In addition, the concept of universality was taken up by twentieth-century psychology [1]. However, it does not always support Social Darwinism when it comes to cultural differences. Rather, some proponents of the universality assumption may have been misled by the idea that all peoples are like Westerners. Criticisms of the universality assumption are

summarized by Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan [2]. They claim that the majority of psychological data comes from WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) populations. Consequently, it is invalid to make general statements about the human mind based solely on this data, given the evidence for cultural variations in cognition, fairness judgments, cooperation, and other aspects.

Recent cross-cultural research is beginning to move away from the idea of universality and toward a perspective that sees the human mind as shaped by the interaction of culture and individual experience. Cultural differences in human behavior and thinking have been recognized, and it has been suggested that many psychological tasks can be interpreted differently depending on the culture in which an individual is born and raised. Underlying cultural psychology are the ideas of Vygotskians, who emphasized the non-evolutionary nature and mechanism of the development of higher mental functioning. This framework emphasizes the transmission of cultural elements like values, beliefs, customs, and skills from one generation to the next. Every culture has a structure of shared views and values in terms of customs, pragmatics, morals, educational systems and so on. In this sense, culture and the human mind are inseparable. Shweder [3] claimed that no individual mind can be isolated from its culture. He argued that the concept of independence stemmed from the European view of humanity during the enlightenment: The belief was that because humans possess intelligence and rationality, their minds are considered separate from cultural influences.

Evolutionary psychology is occasionally viewed as conflicting with cultural psychology because it tends to focus on human universals and innate traits. Nevertheless, some psychologists who study culture have incorporated evolutionary psychology perspectives [4]. Evolutionary psychology offers a framework for examining how humans adapt within a cultural context and how they develop cultures to address adaptive challenges. The process of adaptation might be consistent across different cultures. As a result, the issue of which aspects of human nature are universal and how universally they apply becomes significant for cultural psychologists as well [5].

According to the interactive view, cultural systems, each of which has a structure of shared views and values regarding customs, pragmatics, morals, educational system, and so on, are created and invented so that people can solve adaptive problems, but once they are established, people have to be adaptive to the given systems. Their minds must be shaped for such adaptation. For example, a moral system may be designed so that people can cooperate well; therefore, this system requires them to obey the moral rules. Furthermore, some argue that a new cultural system may have triggered human genetic evolution [6]. A cultural system may thus be able to shape human biology.

A socio-ecological approach to cultural differences has made it possible to explain the uneven development of the world, including the hegemony of Westerners, without assuming that some people (mostly Westerners) are genetically more intelligent than others. This approach examines how minds and behavior are shaped by their natural and social environments, and how natural and social environments are in turn partly shaped by minds and behavior [7]. For example, Diamond [8] identified specific geographical and ecological factors to account for current cultural differences and aimed to explain why Eurasian civilizations have endured and dominated others without attributing this to any supposed intellectual, moral, or genetic superiority of Eurasian peoples. In short, explanations of cultural differences need not involve ideas associated with Social Darwinism and do not require us to abandon the assumption of universality.

This chapter addresses the issue of cultural differences in thinking and reasoning between Westerners and Easterners. First, we present some pioneering studies on cultural differences in thinking [9] and discuss what kinds of cultural differences can really be confirmed. Next, we examine two types of explanations for cultural differences: one based on different social patterns and self-concepts across cultures, and the other based on different cultural and philosophical traditions. Third, I present an explanation of cultural differences in thinking in the light of the socio-ecological approach [10]. Finally, we show how the explanation can be developed into a socio-ecological theory in line with the adaptation approach.

## **2. Cultural differences in human thinking**

It has been suggested that those who do not receive a Western-style education are less likely to engage in logical reasoning [11]. Although the observed fact that tribal people in Africa are less likely to use deductive rules has not been attributed to a disability in logical ability, some people have accepted this fact as reflecting the glory of Western-style education. However, Medin and Atran [12] compared the performance of ornithologists, American university students and Maya people in reasoning about bird categories and found that the Maya data showed a similar pattern to that of the ornithologists. This does not mean that the differences between ornithologists and American university students are due to professional training in biology, but rather to how people conceptualize living species. Their findings, gathered from standard populations in industrialized societies, are often not generalizable to humanity as a whole.

Similarly, the style of reasoning in which people do not favor logical rules cannot be attributed to deficiencies in Western-style education. Norenzayan, Smith, Kim, and Nisbett [13] found that when choosing which of two groups a target object resembled, Americans typically concentrated on one specific property for categorization, whereas Koreans did not. Americans favored linear reasoning (referred to as “formal” and/or “rule-based” in the original paper), which involved focusing on a single characteristic. In contrast, Koreans preferred similarity-based, nonlinear reasoning (described as “intuitive” in the paper), where they viewed items within a group as sharing a family resemblance.

Instead of the term “Easterners’ intuitive thinking,” many researchers accept the term “Easterners’ dialectical thinking,” which means that people consider several characteristics or rules based on family resemblance as a key for categorization. In other words, they look at rules dialectically. Similarly, instead of the term Westerners’ rule-based thinking, many researchers accept the term Westerners’ linear thinking. The term “rule” can be understood as a conditional statement like if  $p$  then  $q$ , so “rule-based” suggests that people use this formal logic for reasoning. However, since Westerners’ thinking patterns do not always align with strict logical reasoning, we use the term “linear thinking” in this chapter instead.

Peng and Nisbett [9] claimed that the thinking of Easterners is dialectical. They found that the thinking style of Chinese people was more dialectical than that of Americans. Compared with Americans, Chinese were less bothered by and more accepting of contradictory proverbs such as “Too modest is half proud,” suggesting a higher tolerance for contradiction and a preference for dialectical thinking. In addition, Peng and Nisbett found that Chinese participants expressed more moderate agreement with two contradictory statements when presented together than when

each statement was presented separately. This pattern was not found in the American data. These findings suggest that the Chinese are more likely to take the middle ground when faced with conflicting opinions.

The contrast between Westerners' linear thinking and Easterners' dialectical thinking may be related to differences in the tendency to consider more or fewer rules, factors, and properties in thinking and reasoning [14]. It is proposed that Easterners make more situational attributions, whereas Westerners make more dispositional attributions [15, 16]. In Easterners' dialectical reasoning, the tendency to consider two contradictory possibilities was observed in a cross-cultural study of hindsight bias. Hindsight bias is the tendency, after an event has occurred, to see it as predictable. Yama, Manktelow, Mercier, Van der Henst, Do, Kawasaki, and Adachi [17] confirmed in a study with Japanese, Korean, British, and French participants that hindsight bias was stronger in Easterners than in Westerners [18]. Easterners were more inclined to engage in dialectical thinking when faced with both a plausible and an unexpected outcome in a vignette, while Westerners' judgments were less affected by the unexpected outcome.

The distinction between the linear thinking of Westerners and the dialectical thinking of Easterners has been interpreted in different ways. Some who still believe in the superiority of Westerners see it as evidence that Easterners are irrational and illogical thinkers. Others believe that dialectical thinking reflects the wisdom of Easterners, which can serve as a way to break through the impasses of contemporary civilization. In general, dialectical thinking focuses on how an individual perceives conflicting concepts to develop a comprehensive point of view. Hegelian dialecticism is the best-known of these forms of thought. Hegel proposed that dialecticism involves deriving a synthesis from a thesis and its antithesis. Consequently, dialecticism aims to achieve a higher-level resolution of conflicting viewpoints. While dialectical thinking embraces contradiction and may appear illogical, it is also viewed as a more advanced form of reasoning that transcends the binary nature of propositional logic.

Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, and Peng [19] suggested that Easterners' dialectical thinking is neither merely flawed nor illogical nor a form of advanced reasoning, but what they refer to as "naïve dialecticism." The naïve dialecticism of Easterners consists of folk beliefs and is a lay theory that people have acquired through their rich cultural practices. Peng and Nisbett [9] had proposed three principles of naïve dialecticism:

1. The principle of contradiction

Due to the interrelated nature of things and the constantly changing world, paradoxes and contradictions frequently emerge. It is possible for two opposing statements to both be true and apparent opposites may merely be illusions.

2. The principle of change

The universe is continuously in motion and evolving, so concepts that represent it must also be adaptable. What seems stable is often an indication that change is imminent.

3. The principle of holism

Nothing exists independently; everything is interconnected.

Paletz, Bogue, Miron-Spektor, and Spencer-Rodgers [20] identified two key differences between Hegelian dialecticism and the naive dialecticism found in Eastern cultures. The first difference concerns the nature of cognitive styles: naive dialecticism is a practical, culturally shaped set of beliefs, whereas Hegelian dialecticism is a philosophical theory with various forms used for different purposes. The second difference pertains to how contradiction is handled. Hegelian dialecticism focuses on creating a synthesized solution to contradictions, while naive dialecticism emphasizes the acceptance and tolerance of contradictions without necessarily seeking to resolve them. In this regard, East Asian philosophy does not aim to resolve contradictions.

The naive dialecticism of Easterners is reflected in their self-concept. Spencer-Rodgers, Boucher, Mori, Wang, and Peng [21] developed a questionnaire, the Dialectical Self Scale (DSS), consisting of 32 items. Their participants were asked if they often agreed with both, when they heard two sides of an argument, for instance. It was designed to measure the individual's level of naive dialecticism and thus the individual's ontological worldview, which is either contradictory or consistent. Their finding that DSS scores were higher among Easterners than Westerners supports the claim that Easterners tend to have a more dialectical self-concept compared to Westerners and perceive the world as inherently full of contradictions. This claim is consistent with the finding that Chinese gave more contradictory responses in their self-evaluations than Americans [22]. Chinese respondents' self-evaluations were both positive and negative, whereas American respondents' self-evaluations were not.

### **3. Do Easterners really think dialectically?**

Do the cultural differences reported in scientific journals describe what they really are? This doubt arises because psychological differences are sometimes overestimated due to publication bias. Cross-cultural studies that find cultural differences are more likely to be published in scientific journals, while those that do not find cultural differences are less likely to be accepted for publication. As a result, the cultural differences reported by scientific journals are overestimated.

While Peng and Nisbett [9] demonstrated that Easterners are more inclined to adopt a middle way, their finding about Chinese dialectical judgment was only observed when contradictory statements were presented simultaneously. Some studies report that Easterners do not take the middle way when faced with contradictory statements. Mercier, Zhang, Qu, Lu, and Van der Henst [23] replicated Peng and Nisbett's study with French and Chinese participants but found that neither group adopted a middle way when presented with contradictory statements. Additionally, Mercier, Yama, Kawasaki, Adachi, and Van der Henst [24] discovered that neither French nor Japanese participants chose a middle way when given advice that conflicted with their own views. In other words, both French and Japanese participants maintained their original opinions. Is this because the cognitive style of the French is different from that of other Westerners? We can conclude that this cultural difference is not robust [25].

Furthermore, Friedman, Chen, and Vaid [26] did not replicate Peng and Nisbett's [9] findings using contradictory proverbs. Their study was designed to confirm Peng and Nisbett's claim, but both Chinese and Americans preferred dialectical proverbs better to non-dialectical ones and decided dialectical proverbs to be wiser. Their study was designed to control for the effect of poeticism, which possibly covaried with preference judgments. They concluded that the cultural differences identified by Peng

and Nisbett were influenced by the poetic quality of the proverbs. Specifically, the Chinese perceived dialectical proverbs as more poetic than non-dialectical ones and thus preferred them. This means that the results found by Peng and Nisbett do not support the idea that Easterners think more dialectically than Westerners.

The cross-cultural study by Zhang, Galbraith, Yama, Wang, and Manktelow [27] was designed to investigate whether cultural differences in cognitive style could be found. They used the DSS questionnaire and counter-attitudinal pairs. They reported that the mean DSS scores for Japanese and Chinese participants were higher compared to those of British participants. This result mirrored the findings of Spencer-Rodgers et al. [21, 22], which indicated that Easterners generally had higher mean scores than Westerners. However, when participants were presented with pairs of opposing opinions and asked to rate their agreement with each opinion, the Japanese and Chinese did not exhibit a greater tendency toward dialectical responses compared to the British. In other words, Easterners were no more likely than Westerners to agree or disagree with both sides of an argument. In summary, while Easterners often believe they agree with both sides when presented with opposing views, this does not necessarily translate into making dialectical choices. On the other hand, our recent cross-cultural study [28] found that Japanese were more dialectical thinkers than the British and French when confronted with opposing religious beliefs such as “Hell and paradise are real” and “Hell and paradise are superstitions.” The result is inconsistent with Zhang et al. [27], but suggests that Eastern religious traditions may influence Japanese religious dialectical thinking. We will discuss this further in the next section.

In summary, my tentative conclusions are as follows. First, it is very doubtful that Easterners are more likely than Westerners to take the middle way when confronted with opposing opinions. Rather, Easterners’ dialectical thinking is naive, and thus different from Hegelian dialecticism, and may not include taking the middle way to infer a higher-level resolution. Therefore, the data of Mercier et al. [23, 24] do not provide a counter-example to the naive dialectic of Easterners. Second, it is doubtful that Easterners are more likely than Westerners to agree with contradictory statements, but for religious contradictions, and that Easterners are more likely than Westerners to prefer proverbs with contradictions. Third, however, the results on the DSS consistently support Easterners’ naive dialecticism, so there are certainly cultural differences in individual ontological worldviews. In contrast to Westerners, Easterners are more likely to perceive the world as inherently contradictory and, as a result, often view their thoughts as encompassing both positive and negative elements within their cultural practices.

#### **4. How shall we explain cultural differences in thinking?**

Three types of explanations have been proposed for cultural differences in thinking styles, as shown in **Table 1**. The first is based on the distinction between the individualist culture of Westerners and the collectivist culture of Easterners. It has been argued that Westerners have developed a more individualist culture, while Easterners have developed a more collectivist culture. According to Triandis [29], individualism is characterized by a social pattern where individuals are loosely connected and view themselves as independent from groups such as family, colleagues, tribes, or nations. They are driven mainly by their preferences, needs, and rights, and by the agreements they form with others. They prioritize their personal goals over those of others and focus on rational evaluations of the benefits and drawbacks of interactions

Explanations	Target	Socio-ecological explanation
Individualist/collectivist	Analytic/holistic	Livelihood (rice-growing, herding, etc.)
Philosophical traditions	Linear/dialectical	Not mentioned
Low/high-context	Linear/dialectical	Multicultural interaction

**Table 1.**  
*Three kinds of explanations for cultural differences in thinking.*

with others. In contrast, collectivism is described as a social pattern where individuals are closely connected and see themselves as part of one or more groups. They are primarily motivated by the norms and responsibilities of these groups, are willing to place the goals of the groups above their own personal objectives, and emphasize their connection to other members of these groups.

There are two ways of explaining the link between cultural patterns and thinking styles. The first emphasizes the direct influence of culture on thinking style. Focusing on contradiction, Peng and Nisbett [9] propose that resolving contradictions by finding a middle way is adaptive within a collectivist cultural tradition and has influenced the implicit ontology and epistemology of Easterners. They argue that dialectical thinking serves as a cognitive tool for managing social conflict, which is beneficial in collectivist cultures that value group harmony. In contrast, dichotomous judgments, which aim to avoid contradictions, are less adaptive in such cultures. However, as mentioned earlier, it remains uncertain whether Easterners are indeed more inclined to adopt a middle way compared to Westerners. Therefore, this route of explanation may not be necessary.

The second route is to see thinking styles as an aspect of the distinction between analytic and holistic cognition. The goal of this approach is not specifically to account for the cultural differences between linear thinking by Westerners and dialectical thinking by Easterners, but to propose an account for the distinction between analytic cognition by Westerners and holistic cognition by Easterners. This distinction has been discussed in terms of the contrast between Westerners' analytic cognition and Easterners' holistic cognition [30]. Linear thinking is a form of analytic cognition, whereas dialectical thinking is a form of holistic cognition. Analytic cognition involves separating an object from its context, concentrating on the object's attributes to categorize it, and using category-based rules to explain and predict its behavior. On the other hand, holistic cognition focuses on the overall context or field, considers the relationships between the focal object and its surroundings, and prefers to explain and predict events based on these relationships. In cultures where individuals are required to prioritize group goals, such as maintaining group harmony, people must consider not only the object itself but also its contextual information to uphold harmony within their groups. Dialectical thinking is a form of holistic cognition because people have to consider many situational elements and factors to make a dialectical decision.

Both routes are from a group level (individualism/collectivism) to an individual-level cognitive style. However, as with the second route, Varnum, Grossman, Kitayama, and Nisbett [31] suggested an individual-level explanation linking Westerners' independent self-concept to analytical cognition, and Easterners' interdependent self-concept to holistic cognition. According to this perspective, the self-acts as a bridge between culture and cognitive style. In collectivist cultures, Easterners exhibit a greater inclination toward sociability and interdependence compared to Westerners.

The second explanation is based on philosophical traditions. Spencer-Rodgers and colleagues [19, 21, 22] emphasize the influence of philosophical traditions on ways of thinking and ontology: Western (ancient Greek) philosophy and Eastern (ancient Chinese) philosophy. This explanation may coincide with that based on the individualist culture of Westerners and the collectivist culture of Easterners [30], in the sense that Western philosophical traditions have nurtured an individualist culture, while Eastern philosophical traditions have developed a collectivist culture. However, this perspective differs from the individualism/collectivism explanation for two reasons. First, Spencer-Rodgers contends that the difference between linear and dialectical thinking is not the same as the difference in attention between analytical and holistic. Instead, she recognizes that this distinction is related to those manifested in causal inference [16] and the perception of change [32]. In short, the style of thinking that Spencer-Rodgers was concerned with is different from the style of attention. Second, Spencer-Rodgers proposes that this distinction is not closely linked to the individualism/collectivism distinction. This is supported by findings from Spencer-Rodgers et al. [22], which showed that Latinos in the United States, who come from collectivist cultures, did not exhibit contradictory self-views [33]. Therefore, the individualism/collectivism framework does not adequately explain the cultural difference between Western linear thinking and Eastern dialectical thinking.

Spencer-Rodgers et al. [19] assert that linear thinking originated from ancient Greek philosophy, such as Aristotle's logic, while dialectical thinking emerged from ancient Chinese philosophical traditions, including Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. This dialectical approach is closely linked to the Eastern perspective of a mutable world, influenced by broader beliefs about contradiction and change. Easterners' naive dialectic and folk beliefs are rooted in the Taoist concept of yin (negative aspects) and yang (positive aspects), which illustrates how opposing forces are interconnected and interdependent in reality. This concept reflects the Chinese ontology that the world is in a constant state of change, oscillating between yin and yang, and is inherently full of contradictions.

This tradition is evident in their reluctance to make hasty final judgments. For example, the well-known story of *Sāi Weng's lost horse*, featured in the *Huáinánzǐ*—a classic Chinese text that integrates Taoism and Confucianism—illustrates this. The story tells of an old man named Sāi who raised horses and faced fluctuating fortunes without making definitive judgments about whether each event was good or bad. This narrative gave rise to a proverb about the reversal of fortune, where bad luck can turn into good and vice versa. Similarly, many classic Japanese tales and essays reflect the folk belief in constant change, emphasizing the absence of permanence and the concept of impermanence. The term 'impermanence' embodies the Buddhist idea that all conditioned existence is transient and perpetually in flux, often interpreted as a reminder of the mutable nature of individual life. For instance, Japanese classical literature, *the Tale of the Heike*, provides examples of this concept. The story tells of the impermanence of prosperity. *The Tale of the Heike* depicts the story of the Heike clan which rose to the top of power in the twelfth century but fell within a short time.

Furthermore, this explanation is strongly supported by our findings that the Japanese were more dialectical thinkers than the British and French when confronted with opposing religious beliefs [28]. It is plausible that the dialectical religious beliefs of Easterners have been influenced by the tradition of Taoism and Buddhism, and thus the world view of naive dialecticism has been formed among Easterners.

The third explanation is based on context and communication [10]. Hall [34] proposed the distinction between the high-context culture of Westerners and the

low-context culture of Easterners. Context consists of implicit beliefs, such as common sense, that are shared by people and can be used for communication. In high-context cultures, people can understand messages from others without needing detailed descriptions because they share implicit information that aids interpretation. These shared understandings are further supported by established relationships within the group. In contrast, individuals in low-context cultures require explicit verbal communication since they do not rely as heavily on shared implicit knowledge. Consequently, they depend on communication that is direct and explicit. According to Hall, Western cultures are generally low-context, while Eastern cultures are high-context. Thus, the distinction between high-context and low-context cultures can be viewed as a facet of the broader individualism/collectivism distinction [29]. However, this contextual distinction is based on differences in communication practices and language use rather than on data about human relationships. Additionally, the low-/high-context dimension does not always align perfectly with the individualism/collectivism distinction.

Hall [34] did not provide an explanation for the cultural differences between Westerners' linear thinking and Easterners' dialectical thinking, but his idea has been extended by Yama and Zakaria [10] to explain the differences in thinking. It is uncertain whether Easterners are actually more likely than Westerners to draw a middle conclusion regarding contradictory opinions, but they may have a stronger tendency than Westerners to hold a view that the world is contradictory. According to their explanation, the norm that contradictions can be resolved through context is likely to be formed in a high-context culture, from which people do not hesitate to see the world as full of contradictions.

The key point is that a low-context situation typically arises when people engage in intercultural communication and interaction [35, 36]. In this regard, Gudykunst [37] suggested that implicit common sense (context) cannot be relied upon in intercultural communication. Individuals are uncertain about how much shared knowledge exists between them and their interlocutors from different communities. Consequently, explicit, intentional, and careful communication is necessary to achieve mutual understanding in the absence of shared context. Building on the differences in communication between humans and other primates, Tomasello [38] proposed that the evolutionary roots of human communication lie in gestures rather than vocalizations. Early humans relied more on nonverbal communication tools, such as gestures, and could not effectively interpret others' messages without contextual cues. When common contexts are absent, this form of communication becomes ineffective. The very early human communication is thought to have been in a high-context culture. Thus, with the evolution of language, humans were able to create a low-context culture in which they could engage in explicit communication. Humans have sought clearer and more general rules that can be applied in situations where there is no shared context. General rules are especially necessary when interacting with different cultural groups. Therefore, the tendency to focus on a single property [13] is an adaptive strategy in this situation. This tendency helps people address inconsistencies resulting from changes, which can become more frequent in cross-cultural interactions. Consequently, individuals adapt their ontological views to align with naive dialecticism. This adjustment likely causes Westerners to perceive the world as less fluid compared to Easterners, since viewing the world as changeable complicates the development of a few general rules or principles. Conversely, those in high-context cultures, who share implicit beliefs, can communicate effectively without explicit expressions. Because they have fewer interactions with other cultural

groups, they do not require explicit rules or a universal rule for cross-cultural communication. They are more attuned to the inconsistencies arising from various factors and more accepting of these inconsistencies due to their cultural practices, unlike those in low-context cultures. This sensitivity to change and acceptance of contradictions may explain Easterners' perception of the world as full of contradictions and their preference for dialectical thinking. Additionally, when faced with apparent contradictions, Easterners tend to resolve them more easily using implicit contextual beliefs within their high-context culture.

## **5. Socio-ecological explanations for cultural diversity**

Although we do not reject the explanation based on philosophical traditions [19, 21, 22], what is lacking is an explanation of how these traditions were formed in history. That is, we should know how such philosophical traditions have been formed, accepted, and transmitted by socio-ecological and geographical factors. However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully discuss socio-ecological explanations for each of these traditions, Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and ancient Greek philosophy.

Some socio-ecological explanations have been proposed for the difference between individualist and collectivist cultures, as shown in **Table 1**. Note that the distinction between individualist and collectivist culture can be linked to a social-ecological approach. For example, Talhelm, Zhang, Oishi, Shimin, Duan, Lan, and Kitayama [39] found that individuals from the southern rice-growing regions of China are more holistic in their thinking and interdependent compared to those from the northern wheat-growing areas, who exhibit less holistic cognition and interdependence. They suggest that the history of rice cultivation fosters greater interdependence in cultures than wheat farming does and that these agricultural traditions continue to influence people in contemporary society. In short, their explanation is based on livelihoods constrained by socio-ecological factors.

We will show that the explanation based on the high/low-context contrast is promising as a socio-ecological theory. As noted above, the basic idea is that a low-context culture typically emerges when people engage in multicultural communication. Context shapes the type of information needed to produce an accurate interpretation of meaning. The absence of any of these three elements - context, information, and meaning - makes it difficult for a high-context culture to work with a low-context culture, and vice versa. It is advantageous for people to develop a low-context culture where relying on context-dependent styles not shared by strangers is minimized, especially when they frequently engage in intercultural communication and interactions [35, 36]. Therefore, a multicultural environment is crucial for fostering a low-context culture, where clear and unambiguous expressions are preferred over those that require extensive contextual information. Further support for this was provided by Rychlowska, Miyamoto, Matsumoto, Hess, Gilboa-Schechtman, Kamble, et al. [40], who found that individuals in countries with high historical (cultural) diversity need to use more explicit facial expressions. Historical heterogeneity refers to how a country's current population descends from a large number of source countries, which is typically greater in Western nations. They analyzed data from 32 countries, representing both Western and Eastern regions, to examine the explicitness of facial expressions. They reported that explicitness is determined by historical heterogeneity, which is associated with the norm favoring explicit facial expressions.

In a historically heterogeneous society, people have less context to interpret others' facial expressions. Therefore, they need to make explicit facial expressions. Although Rychlowska et al.'s study does not address the distinction between dialectical and linear thinking, the principle that ambiguous expressions are avoided in multicultural settings can be applied to distinctions in thinking styles. Although Rychlowska et al. did not extensively address the low-/high-context distinction, it is evident that shared beliefs (context) are less accessible to individuals in historically heterogeneous—essentially, low-context—cultures. Generally, people in low-context cultures should avoid using ambiguous language and must ensure that their communication is consistent and clear.

So the next step is to identify the factors of multicultural communication. Our ancestors lived in tribal or clan societies where they predominantly used nonverbal communication and developed a high-context culture. However, upon encountering and interacting with different cultural groups, they likely developed a low-context culture. Originally, human culture was highly contextual in a self-sufficient society where there was much less need to interact with other cultural members. We point out two necessary conditions for a low-context culture. The first condition is a multicultural environment, as has been mentioned repeatedly. This notion is possibly consistent with the socio-ecological approach, since many socio-ecological factors form the multicultural environment. For instance, if there is an unbalanced distribution of resources (e.g., edible livestock, natural resources, etc.) among different social groups, if they can move to obtain distant resources (by foot, horseback, boat, etc.), and if different groups are not hostile to each other, then multicultural interactions involving cross-cultural communication will be widespread and likely to form a multicultural environment. It is then adaptive for people to create a low-context culture because they do not share much context. Intercultural interaction also occurs in times of human migration, as most human migration is caused by socio-ecological factors such as climate change, which may cause famine. However, if the groups are hostile to each other, it is unlikely that a low-context culture will develop even in this multicultural environment, and the interaction will result in war. Interaction is likely to be hostile when trade is a zero-sum game rather than a win-win game.

Even when people form a low-context culture, some negative factors prevent such a development and restore a high-context culture. The key factor is that if various cultural groups come together and form a unified monocultural group through interaction, it is highly probable that they will revert to a high-context culture. Thus, a second requirement for maintaining a low-context culture is that people do not merge into a single monoculture. This unification is more likely to occur when one cultural group holds more power and exerts influence over the others. Geographic and ecological factors can also play a role in this process. For instance, if cultural interactions occur in expansive plains with large rivers, it is likely that distinct cultural groups will blend into larger, more homogeneous cultural groups. This explains how the philosophical traditions that have been used to explain cultural differences between the linear thinking of Westerners and the dialectical thinking of Easterners were formed in history. Ancient Greece is a typical place that fulfills both conditions. It consisted of small, loosely connected, not unified city-states among which there was extensive trade and interaction. Although there were some conflicts between the cities, they needed to trade with each other because none of the cities formed a self-sufficient society. For example, the level of food self-sufficiency in Ancient Athens was low; Ancient Athens could not produce enough food for its people. It is not certain whether Ancient Greece had a low-context culture, but we do know that the Greeks created logic, which is a set of rules for resolving

contradictions. This is in stark contrast to the case of ancient China, which developed on a vast plain with large rivers that nourished the philosophical tradition of dialectic. Although there were several countries on the North China Plain before the third century B.C., these countries were united into one under these ecological conditions. The Han Chinese, who resided in the plains, emerged as the dominant cultural group in China. Consequently, despite interacting with surrounding ethnic groups, most of these groups were assimilated into Han Chinese culture. In this way, in spite that the Chinese had the opportunity to develop a low-context culture, they maintained a high-context culture. This may explain how the tradition of logic was developed in Ancient Greece and the tradition of Taoism and Buddhism was nurtured in ancient China.

As mentioned above, a socio-ecological approach to cultural differences is expected to provide explanations for this uneven development around the world without introducing the idea that some people are genetically more intelligent than others. This means that this approach is one of the recipes for reducing peoples prejudices against those who live in undeveloped areas [41]. In fact, there is little difference in IQ between people [42]. Therefore, the explanations for the uneven development of civilization worldwide, without recourse to the concept of intellectual ability, are consistent with the empirical evidence. Initially, the term “big history” described an academic field that examines history from the universe’s “big bang” to the present day. However, the term is in use in the fields of psychology and anthropology to focus on human evolution and cultural development from the time of the earliest humans to the contemporary world. The migration of *Homo sapiens* out of Africa some 60,000 years ago begins the great story of how modern cultural diversity developed. This approach has brought outstanding works on explaining cultural diversity and how contemporary civilizations developed [43].

There are still more facts that we do not know than those that we do know about how each culture has been shaped and how cultural diversity has emerged in human history. Psychologists should join research teams of historians, archaeologists, sociologists, and economists to describe the exact process in the grand scheme of history. Cultural diversity is a consequence of the human struggle for survival and prosperity. Diamond [8] sought to account for cultural diversity through ecological and geographic factors, specifically addressing why Eurasian civilizations have endured and expanded while challenging the notion that Eurasian dominance stems from intellectual, moral, or genetic superiority.

However, this approach has been criticized by those who focus on institutions or cultural products [44]. For example, Acemoglu and Robinson [45] argue that political institutions are the strongest factor responsible for the political and economic success or failure of states. Political institutions can be seen as one of the products of culture invented to solve an adaptive problem (adaptation to the ecological environment) in the interactive view of the adaptation approach. However, once an institution is established, it constrains how people think and behave. Thus, it becomes more important for people to adapt to the institution than to the original ecological environment. Similarly, Henrich [46] emphasizes the importance of Western Christianity, which has led to the decline of close kinship, making Westerners more individualistic than other peoples. Western Christianity may be a consequence of peoples adaptation to the ecological environment, but it has become more influential on human thinking and behavior than ecological factors. The acceptance of Buddhism and Taoism by the Japanese may be a result of adaptation. However, the results of our study [28] suggest that Japanese dialectical thinking has been strengthened by Buddhism and Taoism, which have inherent dialectic, in addition to their adaptive purpose.

## 6. Conclusion

After introducing the distinction between Westerners' linear thinking and Easterners' dialectical thinking, we present three explanations for cultural differences: the distinction between Westerners' individualistic culture and Easterners' collectivist culture, philosophical tradition (ancient Greek philosophy and ancient Chinese philosophy), and the distinction between Westerners' low-context culture and Easterners' high-context culture. The third explanation is promising to be developed into an interactive view of the adaptation approach, which holds great promise for providing socio-ecological explanations for cultural differences and for contributing to the development of the big history approach. The explanation of cultural differences in thinking discussed in this chapter may be one such socio-ecological explanation, and thus one of the big pieces of big history. We should recognize, however, that there are some critics of the socio-ecological approach, which places too much emphasis on ecological and geographical factors in explaining cultural diversity.

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The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.


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## Chapter 8

# Between Ethnic Nationalism and Multiculturalism: South Korean Teachers' Perspectives in the Emerging Multicultural Society

*EunJung Kim*

### Abstract

In the cross-cultural era, examining deep-seated ethnic nationalism is critical to advancing multiculturalism in the interest of creating an equitable society. Teachers' roles are vital as gatekeepers to shape young minds in terms of dealing with dominant and new cultural values and beliefs. This study discusses South Korean teachers' perspectives on ethnic nationalism and how to define Koreanness in a society that used to be ethnically, racially and linguistically homogenous but recently has become more diverse. Teachers face challenges when questioning the long-rooted concept of ethnic nationalism, which has been the basis of Korean identity and exploring new definitions of what it means to be Korean. Capturing teachers' perspectives will inform approaches to teacher education and professional development that address emerging multiculturalism and shed light on how teachers deal with issues and the possibility of more diverse societies.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, South Korea, ethnic nationalism, teacher education, social studies teachers

### 1. Introduction

South Korea (hereafter, Korea) has been changing from a homogenous to a multicultural society over the last 20 years due to an influx of foreign workers and an increase in international marriages. While the number of foreigners and naturalized Koreans who were originally born in other countries is still low among the whole population, their rate of representation has been increasing rapidly. The Korean government responded to this change by employing multicultural policies and school curriculum changes. In schools, teachers and administrators have employed multicultural education policies, including those in the curriculum. Financial support and extracurricular activities related to Korean culture and history have been provided to students from racially, ethnically, or linguistically diverse backgrounds. Curricula are adjusted by including social change, the introduction of diverse cultures, global citizenship education, human rights and the reduction of bias and prejudice toward

people from diverse backgrounds. While the changes in society and schools are mostly welcomed and accepted by mainstream Koreans, explicit and implicit ethnic nationalism, as well as misunderstandings and animosity, can also be found inside and outside schools. Scholars [1–3] have pointed out that Koreans are experiencing challenges to the deeply rooted concept of ethnic nationalism due to the emerging multicultural society. However, little research—except a few survey-based studies [3]—has examined detailed teachers’ perspectives on ethnic nationalism. As a former social studies teacher and current teacher educator in social studies education, I specifically focus on social studies teachers whose content most directly addresses nationalism in Korean and world history, multiculturalism in social studies and diverse cultures in geography and other subject areas. Examining their views on ethnic nationalism amid rising multiculturalism in Korean society will reveal possibilities, dilemmas and teaching constraints regarding the topic. Through this examination, the study seeks to contribute to more equitable practice in schools for all students.

## **2. Social and educational context**

### **2.1 Korea’s emerging multiculturalism and long-standing ethnic nationalism**

#### *2.1.1 From homogenous to multicultural society*

Due to an increase in foreign workers and international marriage since the late 1990s, Koreans have been experiencing the emergence of a multicultural society for about two decades. This unprecedented change in demographics has had a big impact on the historically homogenous Korean society. Koreans have started to use new terms such as *Damunhwa* (multi-culture) and diversity at unparalleled rates, which is a new social phenomenon. At the same time, Koreans have complex feelings toward the emerging multicultural society because the meaning of multiculturalism challenges the long-held value of Korean identity and their ethnic nationalism, which is rooted in the concept of a pure bloodline [1–4].

#### *2.1.2 Korea’s ethnic nationalism*

Koreans have a deep-rooted concept of a pure-blooded nation due to a long history of linguistic and cultural homogeneity. Specifically, the notion of pure-blooded nationalism was solidified during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945) and the long period of dictatorship (1960–1987) after Korean independence (1945) and the Korean War [3, 5–8]. During Japanese colonization, the notion of ethnic nationalism based on a pure bloodline functioned to unify Koreans as they endured the hardship of losing Korean sovereignty and language, and it provided a sense of pride in spite of Koreans being stigmatized as second-class citizens.

After the Korean War (1950–1953), dictators used the concept of the pure bloodline as a political ideology “to justify various types of sacrifices for the sake of modern nation building” [7]. This strong ideology of ethnic nationalism led to an exclusive mindset toward foreigners and justified discrimination against biracial people among Koreans and in the government policies during the dictatorship [3].

However, unprecedented demographic changes have occurred since the late 1990s. People from diverse backgrounds have increased, including children from multicultural families who are not of a single ethnicity and immigrants from foreign countries,

and are becoming new Koreans [6, 9–12]. The explicit makeup of these new Koreans casts a critical question about Korean identity determined by the ideology of a pure bloodline. It is also noteworthy that there have been social conflicts in the workplace where foreigners and immigrants work, as well as conflicts within multicultural families [12–14]. These conflicts are derived from misunderstandings of cultural differences and discrimination against people who are from different ethnicities or races, as well as those from a low economic status. In spite of the complex reasons for the conflicts, there is no doubt that one of the foundational bases for the social issues lies in the notion of separation between us and them [15], which grows out of the long-held ideology of a single ethnicity [4].

## **2.2 Teachers' experiences and perspectives**

Changing Korean demographics and rising conflicts made the government engage in educational curriculum reform to change the deep-rooted notion of a single ethnicity, which the K-12 curriculum had been explicitly fostering. The 2007 Curriculum Reform officially removed the term “pure bloodline Koreans” when describing the current makeup Korean society, a change that resulted from pressure from social activists and scholars who had criticized the wide use of the term pure-blooded Koreans in textbooks and formal documents [2]. Thus, government-led multicultural education through curriculum reform and other educational programs has promoted cultural pluralism rather than ethnic nationalism as an official policy in Korean society. Throughout several revisions of the national standards curriculum responding to the changing society, multiculturalism has become a dominant discourse in education and has influenced the social studies curriculum for more than a decade. Even though the government eliminated the expression of pure-blooded Koreans in the national standards curriculum and formal documents, it is not difficult to find public discourse, such as in the media or local institutions and local governments, as well as individuals' daily lives, reflecting a wide range of understandings of ethnic nationalism—from explicit opposition to vague understandings to strong advocates—given the long history of maintaining the concept in the society. Likewise, studies show that teachers demonstrate ambiguous understandings of the relationship among the concepts of ethnic nationalism, Korean identity and emerging multiculturalism, such as ambivalence or a hybrid identity [3, 16]. Because most previous studies focused mainly on elementary school teachers through survey data, scholars in Refs [3, 17]. have urged further investigations of the teacher perspective on ethnic nationalism and Korean identity and how the perspective eventually affects their teaching [18]. In this regard, this study examines middle and high school social studies teachers' perspectives by asking a research question: “How do teachers understand the deep-rooted ideology of pure-blooded nationalism and define Korean identity in the changing society?”

## **3. Research methods**

### **3.1 Critical discourse analysis**

This study utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a primary method. CDA is a qualitative method with a strong focus on the nuances of discourse. Discourse refers to “language in use” or “language above the sentence or above the clause” [19]. CDA

considers that discourse is governed by and produces broader systems of meaning-making and is shaped by power such as government policies, ideologies, national curriculum and media.

Teachers' discourses are both shaped by and shape ongoing meaning-making and are varied in their contexts (personal experiences, schools, the school district and Korean society). Hence, analyzing teachers' discourse in interviews is one way to understand how they understand ethnic nationalism and Korean identity in the changing Korean society.

While various CDA tools are available, two of the most common methods used by educational researchers are drawn from Gee's and Fairclough's approaches in [19]. Gee's main method is to connect language bits to cultural models, situated identities and situated meanings [20]. For instance, when analyzing text (speech, written words, etc.), Gee encourage analysts to pose questions of their data that include, "What sort of grammatical patterns indicated this?", "What socially situated identities and activities do these social languages enact?" (pp. 77–78) [20]. Gee also encourages analysts to focus on an analysis of *what is said and what is not said*, which will be one of analysis method tools in this study [20].

Fairclough provides a wide range of tools that analysts may use to analyze discourse [21]; my study makes use of some of those tools that are most useful to examine teachers' interviews. One is relational modality in grammar, which asks analysts to consider the speaker's authority in relation to others. Relational modality is expressed by modal auxiliary verbs like *must*, *should*, *might have*, or *can*, and also by adverbs and verb tense [21]. For instance, teacher statements during interviews such as "I would tell students" signal less assertion and more caution than saying "I should." Teachers also stated "It might have some risks" to demonstrate uncertainty and hesitation. Other tools such as tone of voice and repetitive words are also utilized when analyzing teachers' responses to interview questions (facial expressions and/or pauses).

### 3.2 Settings and participants

The study is a subset of a larger research project<sup>1</sup>, which was conducted in one of Korea's metropolitan areas. The metropolitan city<sup>2</sup> with 3 million has 3.9% foreign residents and 2.2% Damunhwa (다문화, multi-culture) students, which means they are racially/ethnically diverse compared to mainstream Koreans. Twenty social studies teachers (9 in middle and 11 in high schools) participated in the study.

### 3.3 Data collection

Twenty participants were selected as convenient and purposeful samples using the researcher's professional network<sup>3</sup> first and participants' nominations for others [22]. The three questions below were asked:

(a) What did you learn about Korean identity from schools or your family? (b) How would you teach or address the concept of ethnic nationalism or single ethnicity

<sup>1</sup> The data was drawn from a part of the researcher's doctoral dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> The Metropolitan city where the research worked is presented anonymously to protect teachers' identities.

<sup>3</sup> I worked as a social studies teacher in the Metropolitan city, Korea before becoming a teacher educator in the US. I started interviews with my coworkers in social studies group.

in class, if you have any thoughts? (c) How would you guide students or approach Korean identity in class in a multicultural society? Subsequent questions were added during interviews as needed.

### 3.4 Data analysis

Reiterative reading and comparison of interview data across participants were employed during the analysis [22]. Based on CDA, I analyzed patterns and themes of interview content in simultaneity with noted tones of each response, choice of words, repetition of words and participants' facial expressions. After analyzing the interview data, three main themes were categorized as (a) opposition to single ethnicity and ethnic nationalism, (b) approach to ethnic nationalism as a current issue and (c) (dis) connecting to Korean identity.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Opposition to single ethnicity and ethnic nationalism

When social studies teachers were asked about the long-held ideology of ethnic nationalism based on a pure bloodline, they strongly rejected the concept. Their oppositions stemmed from two different perceptions. One is teachers' knowledge about historical facts related to the concept, which makes them regard it as a fallacy or illusion. The other is teachers' views on the irrelevancy of the concept in a multicultural society.

#### 4.1.1 Fallacy of ethnic nationalism based on pure bloodline

Teachers strongly opposed the concept of ethnic nationalism based on the concept of a pure bloodline because they knew it was not based on historical facts. Most teachers said that they learned the concept of a single ethnicity as a basis of Korean identity and carried the belief until they learned different aspects of Korean history. Soojee Lim's perspective demonstrates a concise summary of most teachers' interviews. She shared what she learned and how she perceived her education on this matter:

*We've learned that we are a single ethnicity since we were kids, but if you learn more after entering high school, you know we are not homogeneous people. And there were so many wars. As I wondered if we were a single ethnicity, I thought that I had been forced to think that I am a Korean based on a single ethnicity.*

Another middle school history teacher Kahee Ju, asserted that "I think it's a *very dangerous* [emphasis added] idea" based on her teaching in class about extreme nationalism that arose during World War II. Noticeably, her tone and perspective on the concept of ethnic nationalism based on a pure bloodline demonstrated her confidence. Her confident attitude in opposing the concept of ethnic nationalism is based on her knowledge as a history teacher. She said "after I learned, I realized that we are not a single ethnicity at all. We were influenced by the Mongolians and others."

A novice history teacher Kyoungjin Hong even questioned the concept of race/ethnicity as the reason for opposition:

*I think we need to emphasize that it's an illusion. In fact, the race/ethnicity is also a myth. Is pure blood really pure blood, and has it historically been that we could be pure blooded? I think the first thing to do is to break the illusion.*

His facial expression was firm, and his voice tone was strong during the interview. These can be interpreted as the teacher taking the concept seriously and signifying what he may work on in his class. Younghee Na, as a history teacher, also firmly expressed her perspective by pointing out the historical fact that foreign workers had been doing the work that Koreans disliked over our long history.

As such, these teachers had a strong tone when discussing the deep-rooted concept of ethnic nationalism based on their subject knowledge and personal experiences of schooling. These social studies teachers are well aware of how the concept was created and contributed to historic events in Korean history and have insights into the negative impacts on Koreans' mindsets and actions. Knowing not only how social studies teachers perceive the concept but also why they express strong opposition through the interviews with these teachers elaborates and expands on previous studies on this matter such as Chang's study, which only showed survey results [3].

#### *4.1.2 Irrelevancy in multicultural society*

A group of teachers expressed their opposition to the way their views have been influenced by the current societal change. The view of change set a different tone from the strong opposition of the concept itself. They said that the idea is not just suitable for a multicultural and global society due to the risk of the notion of exclusivity. Inyoung Hong's case is one of many responses among the interviewees. She said:

*I heard about my identity as a single ethnicity, and I was very proud of it when I was young, but now I'm concerned about it. Now I think that meaning sounds like a bad word. When we say we are a single ethnicity people, it sounds exclusive.*

Many teachers like Eunsoon Lim resonated Inyoung Hong's view saying, "I would tell my students that the days of talking only about blood or a single ethnicity are gone, and we should move on for the changing time."

In this case, the concept of a single ethnicity for Korean identity or ethnic nationalism is not viewed as fallacy or illusion, rather it is not suitable for the changing society. Sunhwa Yoon understood why people advocate single nationalism saying "they might want to have a sense of belonging, a sense of community and superiority. But I think that their thought might have some risks."

Sunhee Oh articulated her view on the concept, stressing the necessary discussion of its origin and its significant roles in the past as well as its outdated meaning in the current time:

*It is up to you how you evaluate the concept of a single ethnicity. I do not want to deny it [emphasis added]. We need to talk about geographical features and characteristics compared to other countries, but it's not desirable to emphasize excessively and inculcate the idea into one direction. In fact, we cannot just say that it's bad to value kinship based on blood, but we have to think again because it has side effects.*

Unlike strong oppositions to nationalism based on a single ethnicity, these three teachers acknowledged the importance of the concept of ethnic nationalism, which

originated from the unique Korean history, but pointed out the current negative impacts on the emerging multicultural society due to its exclusivity. To express this, they used quite cautious voices, and the words: “it sounds exclusive...now I’m concerned about it,” “might have some risks,” “it’s not desirable to emphasize excessively” and “we have to think again because it has side effects.”

In the same vein, the history teacher Hoonjun Na frequently used “now” that clearly demonstrated the urgency of not using the concept of the single ethnicity in the multicultural society whether he personally acknowledged the fallacy of the concept or not:

*From a young age, we learned about pride, the uniqueness of the Korean people... and superiority as a single nation. But now [emphasis added] I know it's not, and now I cannot use that we are a single ethnicity. Now, I do not use the expression, and I do not think other teachers teach like that.*

The repeated use of “now” is an indicator that the teacher sees an imminent necessity of changing views along with societal change.

As a whole, social studies teachers strongly demonstrate their objections to ethnic nationalism based on a pure bloodline due to their knowledge of Korean history or the notion’s unsuitability in a multicultural society. These social studies teachers show no confusion or ambiguity on this matter.

#### **4.2 Approach to ethnic nationalism as current issue: minor to dangerous**

While teachers’ opposition to the concept of ethnic nationalism based on a pure bloodline is assertive regardless of different reasons, attitudes toward the concept as a social issue are diversified. In other words, there are different levels of teachers’ perceptions about the seriousness of the concept related current issues, which could have implications for their teaching. When I asked what teachers thought about controversial issues and protests in the news related to the concept of a pure bloodline or ethnic nationalism<sup>4</sup>, teachers’ views varied. The history teacher Hoonjun Na saw the issue as a natural phenomenon in a transitional era and showed little concern:

*I think it's natural. Maybe it's populism, maybe it's purposeful to make it...[old] ideas are still existing, and they are maintained. You can spread it out to get what you want. I think it needs time. By the time ten- or twenty-years pass, more children would talk more [about multiculturalism]. I think for now it is a transitional situation.*

Then, he showed his caution in expressing a certain opinion on the issue in the school environment stating, “the difficulty is that there’s a variety of people who have different ideas, and each teacher has different ideas, so you do not know what you are going to get because you are talking about your own opinions.” He said that issues such as the news need to be avoided due to their controversial nature. When

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<sup>4</sup> Coincidentally, *Damunhwa* families protested against one city mayor who used a derogatory word *Japjong* meaning “mixed blood of species” which is a worse connotation than *Honhyeol* (*mixed blood*) to indicate *Damunhwa* children when I was interviewing teachers in June 2019. His words were derived from the concept of a single ethnicity. <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/area/honam/899207.html> [23]

he demonstrated his opinion, his facial expression was confident, and his voice was assertive. It is noteworthy that his view is quite different from reasons normally cited for avoiding controversial issues due to lack of confidence in teaching methods, time constraints from workloads and heavy pressure of high-stake test preparations [7, 24]. His perspective highlights the importance of differentiating teachers' awareness between exclusion and neutrality in regard to sensitive and controversial issues. Some teachers in the interview believe that neutrality can be exercised by having students discuss controversial issues in social studies classrooms without showing a teacher's opinions, which is different from excluding issues that temporarily arise.

Another teacher, Hyeonsoo Kim, who has a deeper understanding of multiculturalism in theory and active roles in applying global education to his extracurricular activities such as leading the UNESCO Club, questioned the seriousness of the concept saying "are there many people in our country who hold the view of single, pure-blood nationalism? I do not think that's a lot... I do not think that's going to be a problem because that's a very small number." He regarded the concept of ethnic nationalism as a minor issue in Korea.

Thus, these teachers see no need for discussions on the currently emerging issue because they think the existence of ethnic nationalism in the changing society is natural or is a minor issue. Two things are implied from these perspectives: (1) The "minor" event caused by the concept of pure-blooded Koreanness may make *Damunhwa* students confused about their identities because they are unable to know how to identify their place in Korean society. (2) As a whole, both majority and minority students who are exposed to the news about the concept of a pure bloodline might be left alone to shape their own thoughts on the issue without opportunities for sharing and developing critical thinking in class.

In contrast, a group of teachers demonstrated the importance of engaging in issues related to ethnic nationalism/single ethnicity and brought up ideas of retraining teachers and having conversations in class with students. The high school geography teacher Soojee Lim pointed out ethnic nationalism could be considered a hidden curriculum. She said "I think a hidden curriculum is very scary. If you feel a problem with such nationalism in society, I think teachers should be retrained as soon as possible so that students will get educated." The words she used such as "as soon as possible," and "very scary" are in contrast with the previous perspectives of Hyeonsoo Kim and Hoonjun Na using "natural" or "not... a problem." Soojee Lim sees the issue as urgent and points out the importance of teachers being retrained because teachers' views eventually affect students' learning.

In a similar tone, Yoora Hyeon immediately responded in a strong voice when I asked about the ethnic nationalism in the news of what the mayor said about *Damunhwa* children such as "I totally disagree. I do not teach nor mention the concept of a single ethnicity in class."

Further, a few teachers who regarded the issue of the ethnic nationalism as serious, gave me specific examples of what they did in class. For instance, Kahee Ju talked about the connection of ethnic nationalism to historical facts in her world history class such as "since the subject I'm teaching these days is nationalism in world history, there's a lot of talk about ethnic conflict, holocaust, ethnic cleansing and so on." Another teacher Suhee Kim, elaborately explained what she did in relation to conservative nationalism:

*In fact, right-wing forces are strengthening around the world...In Korean history class, [we talked about] the Japanese prime minister who distorted our country's history. I*

*compared this with our situation. I told students that the same goes for our country [like what Japanese prime minister did]. People do not want to reveal their shameful side and point out the weak and the wrongs of other countries but, it's actually what we see in ourselves. I told my students about the extreme conservative nationalism who criticize people of and from other countries.*

She tried to address unsaid and shameful facts that are mostly missing in Korean history textbooks and classroom discussions in regard to the issues of Korean ethnic nationalism.

A middle school teacher, Sunhwa Yoon, told me she approached the issue using a question “I asked them what the benefit of it would be.” I would argue that this type of inquiry sounds basic but is an important first step to fostering students’ critical thinking in social studies classrooms according to guidelines of College, Career and Civic Life (C3) framework for social studies state standards in the National Council for Social Studies [25].

Seojee Kim shared the way she intervened in her class when her students used derogatory terms toward an opponent country in an international soccer game. She said:

*I usually make a point that it [the derogatory remark] is wrong. I say “You should not think like that, there are things that we are good at, some things they are good at. Since we are in a multicultural society such an idea is not good.*

The discourses of three teachers (Kahee Ju, Suhee Kim and Sunhwa Yoon) used here “I am teaching...a lot of talk,” “I asked them,” “I told them” and “I usually make a point” represent strong oppositions with visible actions about the concept of ethnic nationalism and its influence on the society. The teachers demonstrate exemplary methods of social studies education such as connecting historical facts with current issues, utilizing an inquiry method and seeing students’ negative attitudes as a teaching moment. These teachers’ intervention is an indicator of exercising their agency to disturb socially dominant discourse such as a single ethnicity and ethnic nationalism.

Now, this study took the next inquiry based on an understanding of teachers’ perspectives on ethnic nationalism. The subsequent step is to investigate how social studies teachers define Korean identity in the time of acknowledging the multicultural society and denying the single ethnicity that has historically been used to define Korean identity. An examination of teachers’ perspectives on Korean identity follows.

### **4.3 (dis)connecting to Korean identity**

Studies show that teachers hold ambiguous and confusing views on the relationship among ethnic nationalism, Korean identity and multiculturalism [3, 17]. Further, defining Korean identity based on the concept of a pure bloodline has been challenged more than ever and needs to be examined beyond that definition [1, 3]. As teachers in this study showed their strong opposition to ethnic nationalism derived from the notion of a single ethnicity, questions emerged such as “how do teachers define Korean identity, how do they approach their new Korean students based on their understandings of Korean identity?”

First of all, not many answers to the questions were obtained during the interviews. Most teachers said that they never thought about how to define Korean identity in the emerging multicultural society. For example, high school ethics teacher

Hyeonsoo Kim said “I’ve never thought deeply about how Koreans are defined.” Teachers have not thought about how Koreans would be defined in the changing society, even though they are against the concept of ethnic nationalism based on one single ethnicity. A few teachers shared their thoughts on this inquiry. Eunsoon Lim, a middle school social studies teacher, said that “I thought about Korean identity, but I cannot find the answer to that. My thoughts are not organized yet. In fact, I need to find it, but I’m *still confused* [emphasis added].”

The rare answers of how to define Korean identity in a multicultural society imply that teachers are standing in ambiguous and confusing positions in search of a new Korean identity beyond what they were given in the past. Given the transitional time that Koreans are facing, the unanswered or vaguely answered questions need to be navigated because “what is not said” is as significant as “what is said [20]” to identify configurations of Korean multiculturalism that teachers are constructing.

In many cases, the emerging multicultural realities in teachers’ daily lives have not reached the need for critically examining their Korean identity. The disconnection means that teachers’ need to explore new directions in how to conceptualize multiculturalism and define what it means to be Korean in a multicultural society. These social studies teachers are in the beginning stage of the critical moment of searching for meaning. Critically investigating Korean identity has not been a topic in social studies, but it is imperative to attend to the topic in class to foster students’ understanding of inclusivity and a just multicultural society. This investigation should start with the teachers themselves. In fact, I met a few teachers who had a critical question about the necessity of defining Korean identity. When the private high school geography teacher Minyoung Lee said “I’ve never thought about it [on purpose]” she meant that defining the strict scope of Koreanness was not the direction she wanted to see. She explained “I do not want to emphasize to my current students what Koreans are like or about Koreans. These days, I live without thinking what it means to be Korean.” She went on why she did not emphasize the concept of Korean identity:

*I told my son that we are all living on earth together in order to teach a notion of global citizen because the word ‘global citizen’ is hard for him to understand. I’ve never thought about redefining Koreans because I think we all people living on the same earth.*

She sees a new Korean identity as an expansion to the concept of global citizenship, which suggests that defining what it means to be Korean should be approached from a different angle. Specifically, the new definition of Korean identity is not an alternative choice of A or B to overcome the old definition, but it should be a flexible and even different frame for defining who we are. It means that defining Korean identity does not depend on a strict adoption from our single nationality. Soojee Lim’s perspective is an example of a different frame of approaching Korean identity:

*Foreigners have different identities depending on their region. So, I think creating one identity is a very dangerous idea. No matter where you are, if you live in the same country, you will have a Korean identity with the background of your country of origin.*

*If you were born in China but live here, China is your home country and also have a Korean identity. If you were born in Turkey, you’d have Turkish and Korean identity. Identities have very multiple meanings. So, I think it’s very dangerous to try to bind your identity with one broad concept.*

What Soojee Lim sees as “who I am” is an identity not based on one nationality but on how we think about ourselves in this multicultural and globalized time. Her view for a different frame to define Korean identity can be interpreted as multiple “identities” [26] or “transnational identities” [27]. Hall [26] argued that cultural identities have multiple components in the era of globalization, and Abu El Haj [27] found that Muslim youth in the United States have flexible belongings across the globe between US citizens and Muslim countries where their cultures originated. As people move around within and beyond the boundaries of a country more than ever, people form a sense of multiple belongings beyond their formal nationality and multiple cultural identities [26–29].

Likewise, Korean identity based on one single ethnicity needs to be rethought in the emerging multicultural time. Switching a frame from a single ethnicity to multiple ethnicities for defining identities may be revolutionary to most Koreans, but it might be happening, which is evident in what the teacher Soojee Lim said.

Having a sense of a “community” is another idea of being Korean for the majority and new Koreans. Some teachers provided this idea in the interview. Inyoung Hong, said “I think... birthright citizenship<sup>5</sup> is going to be the right direction... and I think we should lead our Korean identity toward the community we live together.” While she displayed an unclear and hesitant attitude by using “I think” repeatedly with frequent pauses, she brought up the idea of “community” living in the same area to define who is considered Korean. Her idea of being in the same community may have been drawn from her teaching geography such as cultural landscape of place and/or personal experiences of having a Muslim friend and traveling overseas. Even though she said that she never thought about it before the interview, Inyoung Hong did not seem to have difficulties bringing up the idea. She just needed to have time and opportunities to articulate and develop her thoughts. I also observed similar moments from other teachers I interviewed. Soojee Lim and Heesu Lim were among these teachers:

*Soojee Lim: I think living in the same place would be a commonality.*

*Heesu Lim: Wouldn't it be to live in the same space enjoying the same culture?*

The culture is not necessarily a traditional classical culture but a culture that can be shared as it is today. These teachers developed their thoughts on what might be possible for Koreans in the emerging multicultural society in order to build a new sense of Koreanness through the medium of the interview. These three teachers' cases serve as an example of the importance of having a space for teachers to share concerns and develop ideas about how to better prepare in a multicultural society.

It is imperative that teachers in Korea in this changing time have opportunities to critically examine what they had thought about Korean identity and articulate what it means to be Korean beyond the concept of a single ethnicity or any type of the previous perspectives. In that way, teachers will have a positive impact on students' learning in class rather than avoid discussions of Korean identity and ethnic nationalism.

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<sup>5</sup> Korea basically follows Jus Sanguinis, which means people obtain their citizenship based on nationality. The opposite is Jus Soli, territory principle. Inyoung Hong's remark meant the territory principle for people's citizenship.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Previous studies have showed that ethnic nationalism based on a single ethnicity has permeated Korean society, and that this have been used as a main criterion for Korean identity [2, 3, 5, 7, 8]; it has also challenged and shaped the meaning of multiculturalism in the Korean context [30, 31]. However, few studies have examined teachers' perspectives on this ideology and its implications for Korean multicultural education. This study responded to the need to understand teachers' detailed experiences and perspectives regarding the topics.

In the findings, most teachers clearly demonstrate their strong opposition to the concept of ethnic nationalism based on a pure bloodline. This is in accordance with their understandings of the nature of multiculturalism and its emergence in Korea based on their knowledge gained through teaching social studies. In the meantime, teachers' responses varied about how serious ethnic nationalism is as a current social issue and whether they engage with it in their teaching. There are largely two types of responses: A few teachers promptly explain what they said in class or how they would approach the concept of ethnic nationalism, which signals their readiness to address such a topic. However, some teachers evaluate the concept as minor or natural as society becomes more multicultural and see no urgent need to address it in class.

The differentiated responses imply that teacher education and professional development for in-service teachers in social studies education need to delve into the relationship between ethnic nationalism and multiculturalism and its implications for classroom teaching. And in-service teachers and pre-service teachers need to reflect on their own perspectives on the topic, and need to listen to students from diverse backgrounds in terms of how they feel when ethnic nationalism is addressed in the media and/or in their daily lives. Along with the reflection and discussion, teachers need to understand how their roles as gatekeepers influence students' learning and perspectives toward the topics [32]. Regardless of teachers' personal evaluation of its urgency, the connection between the history of ethnic nationalism and emerging multiculturalism to current issues needs to be addressed as a teachable moment so that *all* Korean students have a space where they can reflect on the changes emerging in Korean society [30]. A critical understanding of teacher roles in education and cultivating teacher agency in the classroom should be constantly encouraged in teacher education and professional development so that teachers can be equipped with competence to facilitate students' inquiry-based learning regarding sensitive topics and foster an equity-based learning environment for students from diverse backgrounds [25, 31, 33].

Another main component of this study is parsing out teachers' perspectives on how Koreanness is defined in the emerging multiculturalism. Since the deep-rooted concept of ethnic nationalism has been a major component for many decades, it is necessary to investigate teachers' understanding of Korean identity. In the findings, few teachers define the new Korean identity in an emerging multicultural society where a single ethnicity is no longer valid; this is in contrast to most teachers' strong opposition to ethnic nationalism. The *what is unsaid* [20]—little or vague responses—suggest that teachers have yet to think about a new direction for defining Korean identity. As a few teachers in the interview mentioned, there are possible concepts that could be explored. First, building a sense of community could be encouraged more through educational and societal discourse in the time of a more diverse and globalized world where cross cultures and multiple identities arise rapidly. Another exploration will be a flexible concept of citizenships such as multiple and transnational

citizenships that are not strictly bound to a legal status [27, 29]. Having teachers (and students ultimately) explore a new idea of who can be Koreans will open a concrete step for a transformative future that overcomes ethnic nationalism where all students with diverse backgrounds will receive more equitable and just education.

The findings will be informative to scholarship and educators in Asian countries where similar competing concepts of ethnic nationalism and multiculturalism have been developing. For instance, Japan has undergone similar experiences of emerging multiculturalism with its prevalent discourse of Japanese ethnic nationalism [34]. Many countries in Asia still have mostly ethnically homogenous demographics and strong government roles in education, and they need to organically adopt policies along with programs of teacher education and professional development where pre-service and in-service teachers constantly reflect how rapid changes affect their practices. In this sense, the study has implications for contextualized ethnic nationalism and multicultural education in Asian countries.

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# The Impact of Short Stories in EFL Classrooms: Enhancing Language Skills, Attitudes, and Perceptions in Two Iranian Schools

*Zahra Heidarian and Rachel Heydon*

## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of incorporating short stories into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms on students' language skills, attitudes, and perceptions in two Iranian schools. The research demonstrates a significant influence and high level of agreement among the students, indicating that short stories substantially enhance language skills, critical thinking, creativity, and cultural understanding for both male and female students. The findings suggest that the integration of short stories can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in EFL education, contributing to improved language acquisition and fostering a more engaging and culturally enriching learning environment. This study underscores the importance of literary texts in language education, advocating for the inclusion of diverse literary genres to promote comprehensive language development and intercultural competence. Further research is recommended to investigate the efficacy of short stories in varied educational settings, thereby validating these findings and extending their applicability across different contexts in EFL instruction.

**Keywords:** short story, language skills, attitudes, culture, EFL context

## 1. Introduction

The educational value of literature has been regarded as substantial for a long time [1]. The benefits of using short stories in ESL/EFL lessons are well documented, including increasing students' skills, motivation, interest in writing, access to culture, and desire for critical thinking [2–5].

Using short stories, the students create a link between the classroom and their real-life experiences, encouraging conversation between teachers and students. The variety of materials provides a wealth of information to support classroom discussions and provide language learners with the skills to overcome real-world challenges.

The current teaching of reading strategies in Iranian schools presents several issues that must be addressed. Firstly, there needs to be more effective teaching strategies that assist students in constructing meaning from texts. Students may need help to extract the intended meaning and engage critically with the material they read [6].

Secondly, more emphasis should be placed on facilitating transactions between readers and texts to make personal connections, ask questions, and apply critical thinking skills [7].

Furthermore, teaching reading strategies in Iranian schools often needs to pay more attention to the importance of students' background knowledge and cultural understanding [8–10]. This oversight undermines the students' ability to relate to the texts personally and inhibits their appreciation of different perspectives and cultural contexts in the readings.

Lastly, more attention must be paid to the authenticity of reading materials used in Iranian schools. Many reading materials lack real-world language use and cultural contexts, which can limit students' exposure to authentic language and impede their ability to navigate real-world situations effectively [11, 12].

Considering these issues, it is crucial to address the need to develop and implement more effective reading strategies in Iranian schools. The objective of the present study is to investigate the influence of short stories on students' language skills and attitudes toward language learning. A quantitative and qualitative research design is employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding.

## **2. The power of storytelling in language learning and development**

Fluency in reading and positive attitudes toward reading are related, and storytelling plays an important role in developing these aspects [13]. Storytelling is an ancient artistic practice that conserves human heritage, inspires imagination, and promotes children's academic achievement [14, 15]. In English language acquisition, stories are an appropriate tool for developing positive attitudes, motivation, and reading skills [16–18].

Using stories in a language class can teach various topics while facilitating content discussion. As a result, stories have great potential for language learning and development. They improve positive attitudes, motivation, and reading skills. It also supports language development by providing expressive language and reflection opportunities. Through storytelling, students can relate to language meaningfully and improve their overall language skills.

## **3. Theoretical framework**

This section explores three theoretical perspectives to inform the proposed framework for teaching language skills in EFL classrooms. Theories discussed include social constructivism, multimodal multiliteracy, and acculturation.

### **3.1 Social constructivism**

According to Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, learning is a social process influenced by language and culture, shaping individuals' understanding of the world. In this approach, knowledge is constructed through interactions and

within cultural contexts. Teachers have a vital role in creating a social constructivist classroom by facilitating group interactions, encouraging collaboration, and valuing students' ideas and contributions. This approach promotes active engagement, collaborative learning, and the construction of knowledge through social interactions, preparing students for real-life situations [19].

### **3.2 Multimodal multiliteracy**

The concept of multiliteracies acknowledges the diverse ways in which meaning is constructed in different cultural, social, and domain-specific settings [20]. It highlights the significance of comprehending and navigating varied patterns of meaning within different contexts. Furthermore, the evolution of information and communication technologies has expanded the definition of literacy to encompass multimodal forms of representation. Integrating multimodal representations into literacy pedagogy enhances engagement and aligns with the modes of communication prevalent in modern education.

### **3.3 Acculturation**

Schumann [21] proposed the concept of acculturation, which emphasizes the gradual adaptation to the target language's culture while maintaining one's native culture and identity. The acculturation process progresses through various stages, from initial unfamiliarity to near-native proficiency in the target culture. Social interaction is crucial in facilitating learners' transition between these stages.

Drawing on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learners undergo social and cultural development with the guidance of more knowledgeable individuals. Learners' native culture can challenge language acquisition and serve as a valuable resource in teaching culture [22].

By incorporating the Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the "third space" between native and target language cultures, the proposed framework seeks to establish an inclusive learning environment that embraces the similarities and differences between cultures. This integration of social constructivism, multimodal multiliteracy, and acculturation theories forms a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the framework, enabling a holistic approach to teaching language skills in classrooms. Moreover, this approach can positively impact students' attitudes toward language learning and foster critical thinking and motivation in their education [21].

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 The educational landscape in Iran**

Iran's education system includes public and private schools at all levels and is divided by gender. Boys and girls attend separate schools, and the Ministry of Education monitors and controls the learning environment. Activities such as planning, funding, management, and curriculum development ensure compliance with core education standards. The study concentrates on two private elementary schools in Iran, specifically in grades 4–6, focusing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Through research and observation, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of teaching English in these schools [23].

## 4.2 Data collection and analysis

The participants in this study consist of 140 students, comprising 64 boys and 76 girls, who were enrolled in the 4, 5, and 6th grades in two branches of Best (Iranian schools). The distribution of participants across grades is as follows: 49 students (35%) in the 4th grade, 40 students (28.6%) in the 5th grade, and 51 students (36.4%) in the 6th grade.

These participants were from my EFL classrooms at two private Iranian schools (boys and girls) where I taught as an EFL teacher. They shared a similar socio-economic background and had been learning English since their pre-elementary school years, ensuring a consistent context for the investigation. The frequency and number of the participants are shown in **Table 1**.

I adopted an inclusive approach by integrating the theoretical frameworks of social constructivism, multimodal multiliteracy, and acculturation into the reading process. By doing so, I sought to develop a comprehensive methodology that acknowledges the active role of learners in constructing meaning, engages them with various modes of communication, and facilitates their cultural and personal growth. Throughout the study, data will be collected from three distinct phases: pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading. This data analysis would provide valuable insights into the impact of short stories on students' attitudes toward reading and their reading comprehension skills, aligning with the theoretical frameworks that guide this study.

Data collection for this study includes two phases: administering pre and post-tests and distributing the questionnaires.

Tests were used to evaluate students' language skills and determine the significance of using short stories as a teaching strategy. The tests were administered for approximately (15–20) minutes for each student. The pre-test is conducted before the implementation of the short story intervention, while the post-test is administered after a one-month intervention period. Students were given in-class and out-of-class assignments to work on over 4 weeks. Gender is considered the independent variable, with post-test results as the dependent variable and pre-test results as a covariate in this study.

The collected data will be analyzed using statistical methods, such as one-way ANOVA, means, and standard deviations as well as Person Correlation Coefficient to examine the quantitative results obtained from the pre and post-tests. The aim is to determine the significance of any observed differences.

Grade	Girls		Boys		Frequency	Total	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)		Valid percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
4th	22	15.7	27	19.3	49	35.0	35.0
5th	19	13.6	21	15.0	40	28.6	63.6
6th	23	16.4	28	20.0	51	36.4	100.0
	64	45.7	76	54.3	140	100.0	

**Table 1.**  
*Students' distribution is based on grades and gender.*

After the post-test, the students were given three questionnaires to express their opinions about the effect of short stories on improving their language skills, developing their reflection, and their cultural understanding or tolerance.

The collected data will be analyzed using graphs and statistical software packages “SPSS” program, to examine the quantitative and qualitative results obtained from the questionnaires. The aim is to determine any kind of attitude toward using short stories in EFL classes.

It should be noted that the study was conducted during the first semester of the 2019–2020 academic year. This specific timeframe provides a contextual framework for the investigation, allowing for the consideration of potential external factors that may have influenced the results. By conducting the study within this defined time frame, the researchers aim to control potential confounding variables and ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

### 4.3 Reliability and validity

To ensure the reliability of the tests and questionnaires used in this study, several measures were implemented. The test re-test approach was employed, with participants taking the same tests twice under identical conditions. Pearson’s correlation analysis revealed a strong correlation coefficient of 0.8, indicating consistent and reliable results over time.

To establish the validity of the tests and questionnaires, a multistep process was followed. Initially, reputable tests were obtained from a reliable source and revised to align with the study’s objectives. The content of the tests and questions underwent expert evaluation by my thesis supervisor and colleagues, ensuring content validity. By employing these rigorous measures, including test re-test analysis, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, and expert evaluation, the study ensures the consistency, accuracy, and overall quality of the collected data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the research findings (Table 2).

### 4.4 Reading approach

The story used in the study is made from simple materials (suitable to the student’s level and according to the study’s purpose) for teachers to apply and for students to read.

The theoretical frameworks of social constructivism, multimodal multiliteracy, and acculturation guided the reading approach utilized in this study. These frameworks provided a foundation for designing and implementing pre-reading while reading, and post-reading activities, offering a comprehensive approach to improving students’ attitudes toward language learning and improving their attitudes toward learning English.

Questionnaire reliability		Test reliability	
Cronbach’s alpha	N of items	Pearson’s correlation	N of items
0.762	18	0.8	50

**Table 2.**  
*Reliability of the tests and questionnaires.*

#### 4.4.1 Pre-reading phase

During the pre-reading phase of the study, the focus was on engaging students’ prior knowledge and facilitating the construction of meaning based on their personal experiences. *Warm-up techniques* were utilized to achieve this purpose, and the teacher-initiated discussions with students about the author, title, and cultural aspects related to the story of Rostam and Sohrab. These activities aimed to foster social interactions and develop a shared understanding among the learners by encouraging students to share their existing knowledge and perspectives. This approach aligns with the principles of social constructivism, which emphasize that learning is a subjective process in which individuals actively shape their understanding through interactions with others [19].

- Activity: Some warm-up questions were as follows.
  - What do you know about the story of Rostam and Sohrab?
  - What do you think about the relationship between the father and the son?
  - What are the reasons that can ruin the relationship between the father and the son?

#### 4.4.2 Reading phase

The teaching method incorporates the principles of multimodal multiliteracy by incorporating a variety of teaching resources and real-life materials. These resources include audio and visual recordings of the story of “Rostam and Sohrab,” individual English pamphlets, posters, word cards, flashcards, pictures, and lesson plans. Two primary types of activities were utilized to improve vocabulary acquisition and grammar development.

##### 4.4.2.1 Vocabulary acquisition

To enhance vocabulary learning, group work activities were conducted where students, in groups of 5–6, participated in tasks to infer the meanings of keywords presented on flashcards or on board in multiple-choice and matching questions derived from dictionaries. This collaborative approach allowed students to engage with multiple modes of meaning, including written-linguistic and visual cues, facilitating a deeper understanding of vocabulary (**Table 3**) [20].

Column A	Column B
Challenger	Quality of courage and vigor
Arts of war	Extremely surprised.
Spirit	Skill in the use of weapons and infighting.
Amazed	One who calls someone for a fight.

**Table 3.**

*Activity: Match the words in Column A with the explanations given in Column B.*

#### 4.4.2.2 Grammar development

Grammar instruction during the reading phase focused on language functions such as tenses, punctuation marks, negative forms, and adjectives. The teacher presented these grammar concepts on the board and utilized sticky notes to support comprehension. By recognizing the multimodal nature of language, students develop a more comprehensive grasp of how language operates, enhancing their overall language proficiency [20]. Throughout the while reading stage, students were encouraged to read the text aloud in collaboration with the teacher. Additionally, they engaged in question-and-answer activities to discuss different aspects of the story as needed (**Table 4**).

- Activity: Correct the mistakes (underlined verbs).

“They fighting in single combat and Rostam wrestled Sohrab to the ground, stab him fatally. As he lay dying, Sohrab recalled how his love for his father – the mighty Rostam - brought him there in the first place. Rostam, to his horror, realized the truth. He saw his own arm bracelet on Sohrab, which he had given to Tahmina many years before and which Tahmina given to Sohrab before the battle, in the hope that it might protect him.”

- Activity: Complete this paragraph by replacing the appropriate punctuation mark: ““?!. ();

“Rostam was unaware that he had a son ( ) Sohrab ( ) by Princess Tahmina ( ) He had not seen the Princess for many years ( ) After years without any real knowledge of one another ( ) Rostam and Sohrab faced each other in battle(f)ighting on opposing sides ( ) Rostam did not recognize his own son( ) although Sohrab had suspicions that Rostam may be his father( )”.

#### 4.4.3 Post-reading phase

During this phase, the acculturation framework, which emphasizes the development of learners’ identity through interactions with more proficient individuals, was incorporated [24]. Both controlled and uncontrolled questioning techniques were employed to assess comprehension and encourage students to express their thoughts and interpretations. Controlled questions focused on specific details to ensure understanding of the story’s content. Conversely, uncontrolled questions allowed students

Verb	Adjective	Noun
Wrestle	.....	Wrestle
.....	Suspicious	.....
Recognize	.....	.....
Die	.....	.....

*Note: Some words do not have all forms.*

**Table 4.**  
 Activity: Complete the parts of speech in the table below.

to reflect on their cultural and personal experiences, enabling them to construct meanings. After reading the story, the teacher asked students to read and act out the story in front of other students.

In this phase, the teacher-initiated discussions with the students, prompting them to identify and discuss the differences or similarities they noticed between Iranian and English cultures. The aim was to encourage the students to express their understanding and opinions. Additionally, students were encouraged to conduct further research and explore the internet for more information. By navigating between their first language (L1) culture and the target language (L2) culture, students were allowed to develop a distinct persona and identity. This process fostered the creation of a “third space” where students could negotiate and construct their cultural understanding [21]. This stage is divided into two types of questions:

#### *4.4.3.1 Controlled types of questions*

Controlled types of questions with an emphasis on comprehension. The focus is on comprehension of the main ideas in the text and helping the students make connections among the characters and their roles (**Table 5**).

- Activity: Match the traits with the suitable character:  
(1). *Ashamed* (2). *Strong* (3). *Suspicious*.....*Rostam/Sohrab*
- Activity: Order the events according to the time sequence of the story.
  - His horse, Raksh, wanders away while he takes a rest and falls asleep in the woods.
  - He woke up searching for his horse.
  - Asked the King of Samangan to help him find Raksh
  - The king invited him to a feast that night.
  - He met Tahmineh, the king’s daughter, and they fell in love with each other.
- Activity: Listen and fill in the blanks by listening to the recorder.
  - Sohrab has inherited his father’s unbelievable... (skill)
  - ...has told him to hide his father’s real name from others. (Tahmineh)
  - The King returns...to Rostam. (Rakhsh)

1. “Persia is safe as long as Rostam leads our soldiers,”	The King of Persia
2. “I do not fight in single combat with anyone who is of low birth”	The Challenger
3. “If you must go, I want to tell you something.”	Tahmineh
4. “Carry me to your home and bury me there.”	Sohrab

**Table 5.**

*Activity: Match the characters with the related quotations.*

- Activity: Answer each sentence with True (T) or False (F):
  - Rostam went on a hunting trip near the city of Samangan (T).
  - He meets Tahmineh and they fall in love with each other (T).
  - Tahmineh gives birth to a daughter (F).
- Activity: Answer the following comprehension questions:
  - Why did not Rostam live with his wife? The king of Persia wanted to see him.
  - Why did Tanimah lie in the letter to Rostam about their child? She did not want Rostam to take his son.
  - What was the secret that Tahmineh told Sohrab? The secret was that he was the son of Rostam.
  - Why did Rostam not tell Sohrab who he was? He did not tell Sohrab who he was because he thought maybe Sohrab gave up fighting with him.
  - How was Sohrab wounded? Rostam hit him with his sword.

#### *4.4.3.2 Uncontrolled types of questions*

Uncontrolled type of questions with an emphasis on production. In this stage, students were offered some effective tasks to develop their critical thinking skills. Students were told to study secondary sources, literature collections, or internet sites and learn more about the author and the historical conditions during the time of writing the story. The aim was to encourage students about the action, characters, and theme of the story. This phase is divided into listening and watching, speaking, and writing activities.

#### *4.4.3.3 Listening and watching*

- Activity: Listen to the audio and write five sentences you heard.

The students should do the activity in their groups. The teacher played the audio of the story and asked the students to write five sentences they heard. The students should exchange their ideas and discuss the sentences in their groups. This activity increases listening skills and encourages the students to think and speak.

- Activity: Watch the video and guess the dialogs.

The teacher shows a short video of the story on IWB to the students twice and mutes some parts the second time. The students should guess what the characters were saying or what was happening. This activity increases comprehension and elevates speaking and listening skills.

#### *4.4.3.4 Speaking*

- Activity: Students should have a group discussion about the story by responding to the following questions. This exercise fosters a dynamic and interactive dialog among the students, like real-world conversations.
  - What would you do if you were Sohrab?
  - What would you do if you were Rostam?
  - Which character do you admire most? Why?
  - Does people's behavior influence or reflect people's decisions?
- Activity: Play the story.

In this activity, students will perform the story in front of the class, using gestures and voices that match the characters (an enjoyable and amusing task). This engaging activity establishes an authentic environment for the students and enhances their speaking skills by providing increased opportunities for oral expression.

- Activity: Recite and feedback.

Students should recite the story they had written in the writing section in front of the class and their classmates should vote on the best rewriting of the story. This activity focused on both writing and speaking skills.

- Activity: Morals.

The teacher writes some extracted ideas such as forgiveness on the board and asks students to share their comments. This activity promotes critical thinking about the underlying messages in the story and offers an ideal stage for students to express their ideas and engage in meaningful discussion.

- Activity: Cultural comparisons.

Students are required to explore and analyze the similarities and differences between Iranian culture and European or American culture. They should conduct thorough research and research deeper into these similarities or differences. Afterward, they will present their findings to the class. As Ref. [21] mentioned comparing two cultures can increase the understanding of the students about the cultures being compared.

#### *4.4.3.5 Writing*

Students were encouraged to write about forgiveness, kindness, empathy, love, and loyalty and how these characteristics have an influence on people's lives. Also, they should write about a variety of cultures. These suggested activities revealed that the students developed their critical thinking skills, imagination, and creativity. They gained the ability to be creative and imaginative and were able to produce different versions of the story by different ends and letters through the following activities:

- Activity: Choose two topics and write about them in 150 words.
  - Describe the main characters in a different way by their imagination.
  - Write a different end for the story.
  - Write a letter from Sohrab to Rostam.
  - Write a different version for the story.
  - Write about the similarities and differences among our culture and European or American cultures.

#### 4.5 Pre-test and post-test analysis (Total)

The results of tests for each language skill separately are shown below (**Table 6**).

The table presents the results of tests conducted to assess language skills separately, specifically focusing on the average scores of the pre-test and post-test for reading ability. The analysis reveals the following statistical measures:

1. The average pre-test score was 78.44, based on a sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation of the scores was 9.895, indicating the spread of the data points around the mean. The standard error mean, which estimates the sampling error, was calculated as 0.836.
2. In comparison, the post-test yielded a higher average score of 85.62, with the same sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation for the post-test scores was 10.734, suggesting a slightly larger dispersion of scores compared to the pre-test. The standard error means for the post-test was calculated as 0.907.
3. The analysis demonstrates that the average score for reading ability in the post-test was higher than in the pre-test. This indicates an improvement in participants' reading skills between the two assessments.

The table displays the results of tests focusing on the average scores of the pre-test and post-test for writing ability (**Table 7**). The analysis reveals the following statistical measures:

1. For the pre-test, the average writing score was 60.26, based on a sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation of the scores was 15.023, indicating a relatively wide spread of the data points around the mean. The standard error mean, which estimates the sampling error, was calculated as 1.270.

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pre-test	78.44	140	9.895	0.836
post-test	85.62	140	10.734	0.907

**Table 6.**  
*Average score of Reading pre-test and post-test.*

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pre-test	60.26	140	15.023	1.270
post-test	77.63	140	10.273	0.868

**Table 7.**  
*Average score of writing pre-test and post-test.*

2. On the other hand, the post-test yielded a higher average writing score of 77.63, with the same sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation for the post-test scores was 10.273, suggesting a smaller dispersion of scores compared to the pre-test. The standard error means for the post-test was calculated as 0.868.
3. In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that the average writing score in the post-test was higher than in the pre-test. This indicates a notable improvement in participants’ writing skills between the two assessments (**Table 8**).

The provided table presents the results of tests conducted to assess listening ability. The analysis of the table reveals the following statistical measures:

1. The average listening score for the pre-test was 81.76, based on a sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation of the scores was 9.967, indicating the spread of the data points around the mean. The standard error mean, which estimates the sampling error, was calculated as 0.842.
2. The post-test yielded a higher average listening score of 87.01, with the same sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation for the post-test scores was 10.348, suggesting a slightly larger dispersion of scores compared to the pre-test. The standard error means for the post-test was calculated as 0.875.
3. Based on the analysis, it is evident that the average listening score in the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test. This finding suggests an improvement in participants’ listening skills between the two assessments.

The table provides information on the average scores of the pre-test and post-test for speaking ability and additional statistical measures (**Table 9**). The analysis of the table is as follows:

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pre-test	81.76	140	9.967	0.842
post-test	87.01	140	10.348	0.875

**Table 8.**  
*Average score of listening pre-test and post-test.*

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pre-test	76.51	140	10.069	0.851
post-test	81.39	140	9.993	0.845

**Table 9.**  
*Average score of Speaking pre-test and post-test.*

1. The average speaking score for the pre-test was 76.51, based on a sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation of the scores was 10.069, indicating the spread of the data points around the mean. The standard error mean, which estimates the sampling error, was calculated as 0.851.
2. In comparison, the post-test yielded a higher average speaking score of 81.39, with the same sample size of 140 participants. The standard deviation for the post-test scores was 9.993, suggesting a relatively smaller dispersion of scores compared to the pre-test. The standard error means for the post-test was calculated as 0.845.
3. From the analysis, it can be observed that the average speaking score in the post-test was higher than that of the pre-test. This implies an improvement in participants' speaking skills between the two assessments.

## 5. Questionnaire analysis

Based on Abu Zahra and Farrah [25], the researcher utilized a questionnaire to examine the learners' attitudes toward using short stories in the EFL classroom. The questionnaire has two parts: Part one covers demographic information: gender, seniority, and mark average (GPA), while the second part of the questionnaire includes 18 statements using Likert's 5-point scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree). Students were advised to place a tick within the appropriate box representing their attitudes toward using short stories within the EFL class.

The data collected from the questionnaires will be analyzed in two sections: Figurative analysis and statistical analysis.

- *Figurative analysis*: The researcher uses bar graphs to depict the distribution of each scale in the questionnaires.
- *Statistical analysis*: Using the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Chi-Square, Mann–Whitney U, and Kruskal–Wallis H will provide insights into the qualitative analysis of learners' attitudes toward using short stories in the EFL classroom.

In this study, three questionnaires were used. The first questionnaire discusses improving language skills, The second questionnaire asks about learners' reflection, and the last questionnaire asks about developing learners' cultural understanding/tolerance.

- Questionnaire one: Can short stories improve learners' language skills?
  - Short stories improve reading skills.
  - Short stories enhance vocabulary acquisition.
  - Short stories develop critical thinking.
  - Short stories improve writing skills.
  - Short stories enrich speaking skills.

- Short stories strengthen social/communication skills.
- Short stories enhance listening skills.
- Questionnaire two: Can short stories develop learners' personal reflections?
  - Short stories increase imagination.
  - Short stories make the learning and teaching process fascinating.
  - Short stories develop creativity.
  - Short stories make learners think critically.
  - Short stories create an authentic learning and teaching process.
  - Short stories enhance empathy.
  - Short stories develop self-esteem.
- Question three: Can short stories develop learners' cultural understanding/tolerance?
  - Short stories enhance students' general knowledge about various cultures.
  - Short stories help students to adjust to different backgrounds and cultures.
  - Short stories encourage students to put up with cultural differences.
  - Short stories assist the development of intercultural communication.

## **6. Figurative analysis**

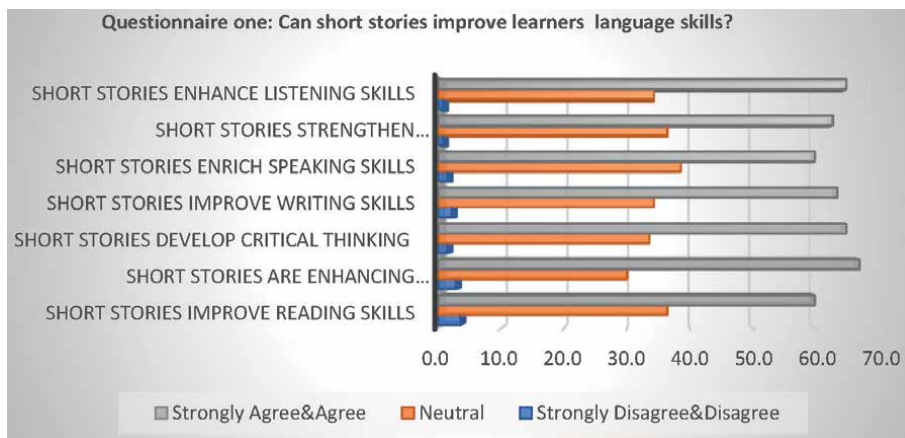
### **6.1 Questionnaire 1**

The bar graph analysis reveals that students believed that short stories have the strongest impact on speaking skills, followed by reading and writing skills. Vocabulary acquisition and listening skills also benefit from short stories, although slightly less. Critical thinking and social/communication skills show a moderate impact from engaging with short stories.

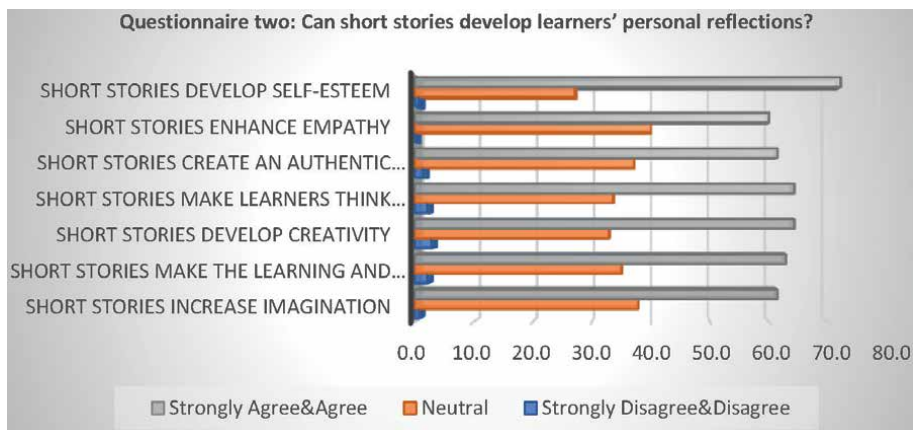
This analysis helps to visually represent the strengths of short stories in different language skills, providing a clear understanding of their effects as indicated by the ratings on the Likert scale (**Figure 1**).

### **6.2 Questionnaire 2**

Based on the bar graph analysis, short stories have a relatively high impact on developing self-esteem, increasing imagination, and enhancing empathy. Short stories also positively affect creating an authentic learning and teaching process. However, they have a lower impact on making learners think critically and developing creativity. The statement regarding making the learning and teaching process fascinating falls somewhere in between (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 1.**  
 Questionnaire one bar graph.



**Figure 2.**  
 Questionnaire two bar graph.

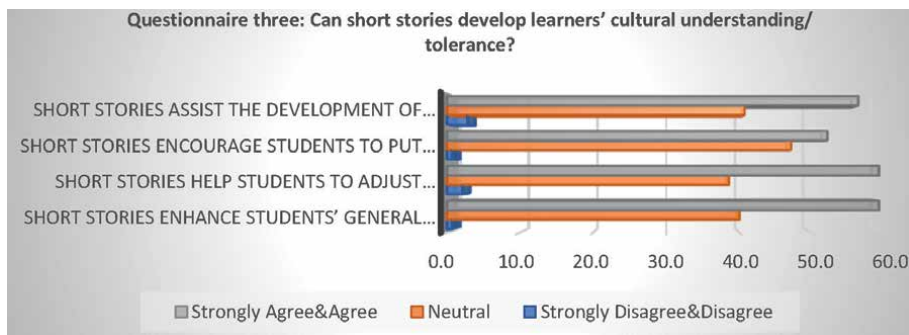
### 6.3 Questionnaire 3

The ratings demonstrate that students recognize the educational value of short stories in broadening their cultural knowledge, facilitating cultural adjustment, promoting tolerance, and fostering intercultural communication skills. Short stories can be an effective tool for educators to create an inclusive and multicultural learning environment (Figure 3).

## 7. Statistical analysis

### 7.1 One-sample Kolmogorov: Smirnov test

To check the test related to the interview questions, we first check the normality. For this purpose, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used. According to the results



**Figure 3.**  
*Questionnaire three bar graph.*

of **Table 10**, the significance of the questions is less than 0.05, so the assumption of normality needs to be established. Therefore, nonparametric methods are used.

The table provides the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test statistics (values) for each question, which measure the maximum discrepancy between the observed data and

Questions	One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test	Asymp. Sig
Short stories improve reading skills	0.239	0.000
Short stories enhance vocabulary acquisition	0.242	0.000
Short stories develop critical thinking	0.248	0.000
Short stories improve writing skills	0.222	0.000
Short stories enrich speaking skills	0.245	0.000
Short stories strengthen social/communication skills	0.240	0.000
Short stories enhance listening skills	0.224	0.000
Short stories increase imagination	0.224	0.000
Short stories make the learning and teaching process fascinating	0.244	0.000
Short stories develop creativity	0.239	0.000
Short stories make learners think critically	0.206	0.000
Short stories create an authentic learning and teaching process	0.239	0.000
Short stories enhance empathy	0.255	0.000
Short stories develop self-esteem	0.207	0.000
Short stories enhance students' general knowledge about various cultures	0.260	0.000
Short stories help students to adjust different backgrounds and cultures	0.230	0.000
Short stories encourage students to put up with cultural differences	0.293	0.000
Short stories assist in the development of intercultural communication	0.264	0.000

**Table 10.**  
*One-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.*

the expected distribution. The smaller the statistic value, the closer the data is to a normal distribution. In this case, all the statistics are relatively small, indicating that the observed data deviates from the normal distribution.

In summary, the analysis suggests that the assumption of normality is not met, and therefore, nonparametric methods should be used for further data analysis.

## 7.2 Nonparametric chi-square test

The nonparametric chi-square test has been used to check the compatibility of students' opinions with teaching methods for listening, reading, reading comprehension, and conversation skills. The results are shown in **Table 11**.

The results of **Table 11** show that most students favored using the short story method in conversation, reading, listening, and understanding skills because the significant results in all questions were less than 0.05.

Questions	Mean	Std. deviation	Chi-square test	Asymp. Sig.
Short stories improve reading skills	3.92	0.930	39.468	0.000
Short stories enhance vocabulary acquisition	4.02	0.893	39.143	0.000
Short stories develop critical thinking	4.01	0.906	92	0.000
Short stories improve writing skills	3.95	0.924	85.357	0.000
Short stories enrich speaking skills	3.79	0.775	55.429	0.000
Short stories strengthen social/communication skills	3.96	0.856	45.486	0.000
Short stories enhance listening skills	3.94	0.815	45.314	0.000
Short stories increase imagination	3.88	0.818	47.371	0.000
Short stories make the learning and teaching process fascinating	3.97	0.921	88.786	0.000
Short stories develop creativity	3.91	0.881	81.214	0.000
Short stories make learners think critically	3.99	0.937	88.286	0.000
Short stories create an authentic learning and teaching process	3.92	0.890	89.357	0.000
Short stories enhance empathy	3.89	0.823	2.971	0.000
Short stories develop self-esteem	4.03	0.786	49.429	0.000
Short stories enhance students' general knowledge about various cultures	3.90	0.859	48.4	0.000
Short stories help students to adjust different backgrounds and cultures	3.81	0.878	89.5	0.000
Short stories encourage students to put up with cultural differences	3.79	0.886	61.314	0.000
Short stories assist in the development of intercultural communication	3.87	0.920	45.657	0.000

**Table 11.**  
*Chi-square test.*

### 7.3 Mann–Whitney U test

**Table 12** shows the agreement between girls and boys using short stories in language skills with the Mann–Whitney test. The results of **Table 11** show no difference between girls and boys.

Based on **Table 12**, which presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U test comparing the agreement between girls and boys on the use of short stories in language skills, it can be observed that there is no significant difference between girls and boys in their perceptions. The p-values for all the questions in the table are greater than 0.05, indicating no statistically significant distinction between the responses of girls and boys regarding the impact of short stories on various language skills, critical thinking, creativity, cultural understanding, and communication.

The mean scores for each question range from 3.79 to 4.03, indicating that both girls and boys generally agree that short stories positively affect the mentioned language skills and other aspects. The standard deviations (Std. Deviation) for each question reflect the degree of variability in responses, with lower values indicating less variability among participants.

Questions	Mean	Std. deviation	Mann–Whitney U	Asymp. Sig.
Short stories improve reading skills	3.92	0.930	2041	0.083
Short stories enhance vocabulary acquisition	4.02	0.893	2354	0.73
Short stories develop critical thinking	4.01	0.906	2252.5	0.425
Short stories improve writing skills	3.95	0.924	2324	0.633
Short stories enrich speaking skills	3.79	0.775	2359	0.743
Short stories strengthen social/communication skills	3.96	0.856	2378	0.811
Short stories enhance listening skills	3.94	0.815	2228.5	0.367
Short stories increase imagination	3.88	0.818	2220.5	0.347
Short stories make the learning and teaching process fascinating	3.97	0.921	2352	0.723
Short stories develop creativity	3.91	0.881	2345.5	0.702
Short stories make learners think critically	3.99	0.937	2315	0.604
Short stories create an authentic learning and teaching process	3.92	0.890	2073	0.111
Short stories enhance empathy	3.89	0.823	2174	0.25
Short stories develop self-esteem	4.03	0.786	2205.5	0.313
Short stories enhance students' general knowledge about various cultures	3.90	0.859	2326	0.637
Short stories help students to adjust different backgrounds and cultures	3.81	0.878	2417	0.947
Short stories encourage students to put up with cultural differences	3.79	0.886	2369	0.776
Short stories assist in the development of intercultural communication	3.87	0.920	2045	0.085

**Table 12.**  
*Mann–Whitney U test.*

However, it is important to note that for the question “Short stories create an authentic learning and teaching process,” the p-value (Asymp. Sig.) is 0.111, slightly below the typical threshold of 0.05 for statistical significance. This suggests a trend toward a difference in perceptions between girls and boys regarding the authenticity of the learning and teaching process facilitated by short stories, but it does not reach statistical significance.

Generally, the results indicate a high level of agreement between girls and boys regarding the positive impact of short stories on various language skills and other aspects such as critical thinking, creativity, and cultural understanding. These findings support the effectiveness and benefits of incorporating short stories in both genders’ language learning and teaching contexts.

To compare the level of students’ agreement in language skills using short stories among the educational levels, there was only one case that showed differences between different levels, and that was that short stories develop self-esteem. The results are shown in **Table 13**.

Questions	Mean	Std. deviation	Kruskal-Wallis H	Asymp. Sig.
Short stories improve reading skills	3.92	0.930	0.171	0.918
Short stories enhance vocabulary acquisition	4.02	0.893	1.591	0.451
Short stories develop critical thinking	4.01	0.906	1.219	0.544
Short stories improve writing skills	3.95	0.924	4.093	0.129
Short stories enrich speaking skills	3.79	0.775	1.414	0.493
Short stories strengthen social/communication skills	3.96	0.856	2.261	0.323
Short stories enhance listening skills	3.94	0.815	.741	0.691
Short stories increase imagination	3.88	0.818	1.174	0.556
Short stories make the learning and teaching process fascinating	3.97	0.921	0.665	0.717
Short stories develop creativity	3.91	0.881	1.296	0.523
Short stories make learners think critically	3.99	0.937	1.848	0.397
Short stories create an authentic learning and teaching process	3.92	0.890	1.81	0.404
Short stories enhance empathy	3.89	.823	0.18	0.914
Short stories develop self-esteem	4.03	.786	10.517	0.005
Short stories enhance students’ general knowledge about various cultures	3.90	.859	0.735	0.693
Short stories help students to adjust different backgrounds and cultures	3.81	0.878	1.940	0.379
Short stories encourage students to put up with cultural differences	3.79	0.886	0.004	0.998
Short stories assist in the development of intercultural communication	3.87	0.920	0.035	0.983

**Table 13.**  
*Kruskal-Wallis H test.*

#### **7.4 Kruskal-Wallis H test**

Based on the provided table and the texts above, the data shows the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test, which was conducted to compare students' agreement in various language skills using short stories at different educational levels. The table displays the mean, standard deviation, Kruskal-Wallis H statistic, and asymptotic significance values for each question related to language skills and the impact of short stories.

In terms of the differences between educational levels, the only case that showed significant variation was the question, "Short stories develop self-esteem." The mean score for this question was 4.03, with a standard deviation of 0.786. The Kruskal-Wallis H statistic for this question was 10.517, indicating a significant difference between the educational levels. The corresponding asymptotic significance value was 0.005, which is below the conventional threshold of 0.05, suggesting that there are significant differences in students' agreement regarding the impact of short stories on self-esteem across different educational levels.

For the remaining questions related to different language skills and the impact of short stories, the Kruskal-Wallis H statistics and asymptotic significance values indicate no significant differences between the educational levels. This suggests that students' agreement in these areas is consistent across different educational levels.

As a result, the data analysis reveals that while there is a significant difference in students' agreement regarding the development of self-esteem through short stories, there are no significant variations in their agreement on other language skills when using short stories among the different educational levels.

### **8. Result and discussion**

The study explores the impact of integrating short stories into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms on students' reading comprehension, language learning attitudes, personal reflection, and cultural understanding. It also investigates how gender and educational level influence students' perceptions of short stories.

From a socio-constructivist perspective, the study emphasizes the importance of creating a positive and immersive learning environment that allows students to enjoy reading short stories while actively constructing meaning through interaction and drawing on their existing knowledge. The adoption of a multiliteracy multimodal approach, integrating short stories as a distinct form of literacy, is recommended to enhance students' educational experiences by leveraging various modes of communication and representation.

Statistical analyses, including the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests, were employed to examine differences in perceptions between genders and across educational levels. The results indicate no significant gender-based differences in perceptions regarding the impact of short stories on language skills, critical thinking, creativity, cultural understanding, and communication, suggesting that both male and female students benefit equally from using short stories in language learning.

However, significant differences were observed in students' perceptions of the impact of short stories on self-esteem across educational levels. Further investigation is needed to understand the underlying factors contributing to this variation and its implications for pedagogical practices.

Overall, the study highlights the potential of short stories as a valuable tool for enhancing language learning and teaching processes and promoting inclusive educational practices for students of different genders and educational backgrounds. The findings regarding self-esteem development underscore the need for targeted interventions and further research in this area to inform effective teaching strategies.

## **9. Conclusion**

The present study contributes to the existing literature by examining students' agreement on the impact of short stories on language skills. The results indicate a high level of consensus between boys and girls, suggesting that short stories positively affect various language skills, critical thinking, creativity, and cultural understanding for both genders. However, differences in agreement were observed regarding the influence of short stories on self-esteem across different educational levels.

These findings provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers, highlighting the potential of short stories as an effective pedagogical tool to enhance language learning experiences. Educators can foster students' language skills, critical thinking abilities, and cultural understanding by incorporating short stories into language teaching practices, promoting a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Further research is needed to delve deeper into the factors contributing to the differences in students' perceptions of the impact of short stories on self-esteem across educational levels. Such investigations will enable educators to tailor their teaching approaches and create targeted interventions to address students' specific needs, ultimately maximizing the benefits of incorporating short stories in language education.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of using short stories as a valuable resource in language learning and teaching, potentially enhancing students' language skills and fostering a positive learning environment.

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# Navigating Identity and Belonging: The Role of Intercultural Education in Shaping Global Citizens

*Ali Hashemi*

## Abstract

This paper discusses the importance of intercultural education in the formation of global citizens in an increasingly integrated world. It explains how intercultural education fosters self-awareness, empathy, and multicultural identity in students. Additionally, it examines the historical perspective of intercultural education, its basic assumptions, and the significant breakthroughs that have shaped its development. Intercultural education, by creating inclusive environments and enhancing social cohesion for marginalized students, can prepare all learners to contribute effectively and positively to a diverse and integrated world. The discussion addresses the definition of global citizenship and outlines important skills and competencies needed through case examples that demonstrate the impact of intercultural education on student development. The challenges related to implementing an intercultural education approach will also be discussed, including resistance to change, resource constraints, and the lack of proper teacher training. The paper will explore opportunities for improvement, such as supporting professional development, integrating intercultural content across the curriculum, utilizing technology, and fostering community and international collaboration.

**Keywords:** intercultural education, global citizenship, sense of belonging, cultural awareness, multicultural identity, empathy, inclusive environments, teacher training, diversity and inclusion, cultural competence

## 1. Introduction

In an era where globalization connects the world, the concepts of identity and belonging are crucial to understanding human experiences. As people move through different cultural landscapes, education's role in shaping one's identity and sense of community has never been more significant. Intercultural education plays a vital role in understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. It fosters deeper self-awareness and empathy among students, preparing them to be responsible global citizens capable of contributing in a multicultural world. This paper examines the profound influence of intercultural education on identity and belonging among students. Through various educational strategies and real-life examples, it illustrates how

intercultural education nurtures multicultural identity and enhances social cohesion, preparing global citizens for the complexities of a globalized world.

## **1.1 Background and context**

Identity and belonging are central to social behavior in an increasingly globalized world. Identity, traditionally rooted in local and cultural contexts, is now often shaped by global dynamics [1]. A sense of self, or identity, refers to personal beliefs, values, and roles derived from culture, ethnicity, nationality, and personal experience. As people cross boundaries in search of opportunities in education, work, and other fields, they carry their unique cultural backgrounds, which interact and blend with new cultures, forming hybrid identities.

Belonging, on the other hand, is a fundamental human need that influences psychological well-being and social cohesion. It refers to feeling accepted and recognized within a community or society. It involves emotional bonding and the comfort of being part of a group. In a globalized world, exposure to different cultures can either enhance understanding and acceptance, leading to a more inclusive community, or result in potential cultural clashes that can cause feelings of alienation and exclusion [2].

The increasing interaction between diverse cultures has led to more complex and fluid identities. This situation calls for a sophisticated process where individuals continuously negotiate and redefine their sense of self in relation to different cultural norms and values. Intercultural education offers a means to navigate this complexity by promoting understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, preparing learners to develop flexible and inclusive identities. It creates educational settings where diversity is valued and celebrated, helping students succeed in a globalized world where understanding and relating to people from diverse backgrounds is essential.

## **1.2 Purpose of the paper**

The aim of this paper is to investigate and describe the key role that intercultural education can play in regard to the development of identity and the feeling of belonging through all levels and ages in a globalized world. As the world is now growing towards being one large global village, it becomes quite important to know the ways in which educational practices help in forming personal and social identities. It aims to:

- Study the Impact of Intercultural Education on Identity Formation by outlining how intercultural education fosters self-awareness and empathy, making many multiply-exposed cultures take on multi-dimensional and flexible identities.
- Measure the effects of intercultural education on the sense of belonging: We will give some important examples and share some cases, showing in turn how these inclusive educational atmospheres, achieved with intercultural education, lead to increasing levels of belonging and social cohesion among the students.
- Highlight of the role of intercultural education in developing global citizens: The paper will discuss how intercultural education has enabled students to acquire appropriate skills and competencies that would enable them to live effectively in a multi-cultural environment, transforming them into responsible and active global citizens.

It is with this view that this paper provides a detailed description of these aspects in order to underline the importance of integrating intercultural education into the curricula for better preparation of students for the complexities and opportunities of a globalized society.

## **2. Understanding identity and belonging**

### **2.1 Defining identity**

Identity is a complex concept that can be either personal or social. Personal identity refers to an individual's self-concept, including their values, qualities, and sense of uniqueness. It evolves from personal reflection and decisions and can change over time as new experiences and insights arise. Social identity, on the other hand, refers to how an individual's self-concept is influenced by their membership in social groups, such as family, cultural communities, and professional associations. Social identity is shaped by roles, norms, and expectations within groups, and is crucial in determining how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others [3].

The following are many factors that help shape and develop identity: culture, family, education, and social interactions. These factors need to be understood for the way they interact with each other in explaining how a person develops a coherent and dynamic sense of identity.

*Culture:* It is always the dimension of culture that establishes the range of norms, values, and practice frames within which one lives. It shapes identity because it gives people a belonging and identity that offers continuity in traditions, language, and behavior, among other things. Cultural identity is very powerful in diverse societies where people are often exposed to different forms of cultures.

*Family:* Family is the most powerful agent of socialization and a determinant of identity. Family members pass on to children certain values, beliefs, and behaviors that help mold a child's emerging sense of self and knowledge of what is expected in their interactions with others [4]. Family interaction and approaches to parenting can have a big impact on personal and social identity development.

*Education:* Learning institutions play an important role in identity development through the structured environment provided for learning and interaction with others. Schools introduce people to different views and knowledge that encourage critical thinking and self-discovery [5]. Social identity is also developed through peer interaction and extracurricular activities within education.

*Social interactions:* Peer teachers and community interactions mold one's identity through information exchange, feedback, and social reinforcement. In these, people are able to develop their self-concept and cope with social demands [6]. Social networks and communities affirm, support, and validate further shaping one's identity.

### **2.2 Concept of belonging**

Belonging is a fundamental human need that denotes a sense of being accepted, valued, and integral to a community or society. It involves the feeling of being connected to others, sharing common goals, values, and traditions, and experiencing mutual respect and support [7]. Belonging goes beyond the status of being a member of a certain group; it consists of meaningful involvement and emotional attachment that ensures an individual derives an identity and purpose.

Belonging can be seen in a community when one is involved in social activities, cultural practices, and collective efforts that amplify mutual identity and bonds among community members. In wider social contexts, belonging refers to an inclusive social fabric in which diverse individuals feel recognized and are free to contribute towards the common good. It is having a place or position within a certain social setup whereby one's personality is embraced yet life within the group is harmoniously led. The sense of belonging yields numerous psychological and social benefits that contribute to overall well-being and social cohesion. Psychological and social benefits of belonging underline its importance in both individual and collective life.

### *2.2.1 Psychological benefits*

**Improved self-esteem and self-worth:** Belonging fosters positive self-regard and confidence. When individuals feel accepted and valued by their communities, they are likely to demonstrate improved self-esteem and self-worth [7].

**Mental health and emotional well-being:** Individuals who are strongly connected to the sense of belonging are associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. It provides emotional support and a buffer against stress which promotes mental health [8].

**Motivation and personal growth:** Belonging motivates and encourages the drive to achieve goals and do self-improvement. The support and validation of a community may contribute to the motivation for personal and mutual achievements [9].

### *2.2.2 Social benefits*

**Social cohesion and harmony:** Communities with high belongingness demonstrate a high level of social cohesion and trust. People are more likely to cooperate, extend mutual help, and resolve conflicts in an amicable manner [10].

**Civic engagement and participation:** Belonging enhances civic engagement and active participation in community activities. People who are more connected to their communities tend to contribute towards social causes and volunteer for community service.

**Cultural preservation and innovation:** Feeling part of a cultural community helps in retaining traditions and values; at the same time, innovation can occur as a result of exchange of ideas and practices from diverse sources [11].

## **2.3 Identity and belonging interconnected**

An individual's identity and sense of belonging are deeply interconnected. The development of a coherent sense of self (identity) is linked to feelings of acceptance and inclusion (belonging) in various social contexts. This dynamic relationship shapes how individuals negotiate their social surroundings and form personal and social identities.

### *2.3.1 Identity shaping belonging*

**Self-perception and group membership:** An individual's identity influences their choice of social groups and communities. People often seek out groups that align with their self-concept and values enhancing their sense of belonging. For instance,

someone who identifies strongly with environmentalism may feel a stronger sense of belonging in a community of environmental activists [3].

*Importance of social identity:* Social identity acquired from membership within various groups gives a person a structure for belonging. The feeling that an individual belongs to a group provides continuity and connection that accentuates the feeling and recognition of 'being' something more than oneself.

### 2.3.2 *Belonging shaping identity*

*Validation and reinforcement:* Such is the way in which the entitlement to membership of a particular community or social group brings endorsement and verification upon the identity of a person. Acceptance and recognition by others solidify one's self-concept and social identity adding to a stable and positive sense of self [7].

*Role models and socialization:* Within communities, individuals are exposed to role models and norms that influence identity formation. Social interactions within a group provide opportunities for learning and adopting behaviors, values, and beliefs that shape one's identity [4].

### 2.3.3 *Mutual influence*

*Dynamic feedback loop:* The relationship between identity and belonging is dynamic with each continually influencing and being influenced by the other. Positive experiences of belonging can enhance self-esteem and confidence reinforcing a positive identity. Conversely, a strong coherent identity can facilitate deeper and more meaningful connections within a community enhancing the sense of belonging [8].

*Cultural and social adaptation:* A dynamic interplay between identity and belonging is considered as the most fundamental process through which people learn how to belong and adapt in contexts where multiple cultures come into play. This continuous adaptation process ultimately leads people who belong to more than one culture into multi-cultural communities, in such a way that treats diversity with due respect and celebration. This kind of intercultural belonging enriches their identity and makes it all the more inclusive and flexible.

## 3. Intercultural education

Education that fosters respect and appreciation for cultural diversity involves a teaching and learning process aimed at equipping students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to navigate and thrive in a multicultural world [11]. Intercultural education goes beyond studying different cultures—it is a pedagogical framework that ensures cultural diversity permeates all aspects of education, creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment [12].

The basic idea of intercultural education is to counter debunked stereotypes and prejudices. It underscores the need for cultural competence in an individual, developing the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. This is essential in preparing students to be global citizens who can contribute positively to an interconnected world.

### **3.1 Objectives of intercultural education**

Intercultural education is a thorough educational strategy that aims to foster cultural awareness, competence, and inclusivity. By doing so, it ensures that students interact in ways that enable them to live positively with others in a diverse and interdependent world.

#### *3.1.1 Promoting cultural awareness and understanding*

One of the major aims of intercultural education is to raise the level of awareness and understanding of other people's cultures among students. This includes exposing students to different cultural perspectives, histories, and practices, broadening their horizons and fostering a deep appreciation for cultural diversity [11].

#### *3.1.2 Developing intercultural competence*

One of the key objectives of intercultural education is raising students' awareness and understanding of different cultures. This includes exposing students to various cultural perspectives, histories, and practices, broadening their horizons and fostering a deep appreciation for cultural diversity [11].

#### *3.1.3 Encouraging critical thinking and reflexivity*

Another goal is to encourage students to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and biases, as well as those of others. This process fosters a nuanced understanding of cultural issues.

#### *3.1.4 Fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments*

Intercultural education promotes inclusive and equitable educational practices that ensure all students feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural backgrounds [13].

#### *3.1.5 Promoting social cohesion and mutual respect*

Intercultural education fosters mutual understanding and respect, promoting social cohesion by encouraging students to build bridges across cultural differences [12].

#### *3.1.6 Preparing students for global citizenship*

Ultimately, intercultural education equips students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for global citizenship, including a commitment to social justice, human rights, and sustainable development [14].

### **3.2 Historical context**

Intercultural education has evolved significantly over the past century in response to social, political, and educational changes. Initially, education systems were largely monocultural, focusing on the dominant culture while sidelining minority groups. Key historical milestones have shaped the development of intercultural education:

### *3.2.1 Early twentieth century*

Multicultural education emerged in response to rising immigration in countries like the United States. Educators began recognizing the importance of addressing students' cultural diversity and integrating their cultural backgrounds into the educational process [15].

### *3.2.2 Civil rights movements (1960s–1970s)*

The Civil Rights Movement and similar movements around the world highlighted racial and ethnic inequalities. This led to educational reforms that aimed to promote social justice, equity, and inclusion in schools [16].

### *3.2.3 1980s–1990s*

Globalization brought increased cultural interactions and interdependence, emphasizing the need for intercultural competence. During this time, intercultural education expanded to include global awareness and cross-cultural skills [17].

### *3.2.4 Twenty-first century*

Modern intercultural education adopts a more integrated and holistic approach, addressing identity, belonging, and global citizenship. It now includes critical pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and transformative practices to foster cultural competence and promote social justice.

### *3.2.5 Key milestones and significant developments*

#### *3.2.5.1 1948: Universal declaration of human rights*

The United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights highlighted the importance of education in fostering understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and cultural groups [18].

#### *3.2.5.2 1968: Establishment of ethnic studies programs*

The late 1960s saw the creation of ethnic studies programs at various universities, particularly in the United States. These programs aimed to address the histories, experiences, and contributions of marginalized groups, challenging dominant narratives in education [15].

#### *3.2.5.3 2001: UNESCO's declaration on cultural diversity*

UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity emphasized the importance of cultural diversity for the enrichment of humanity and called for the promotion of intercultural dialog and education [19].

#### *3.2.5.4 2006: Guidelines on intercultural education*

UNESCO published guidelines on intercultural education, providing a framework for integrating intercultural principles into educational policies and practices. These

guidelines stressed the need for education systems to respect cultural diversity and prepare students for active participation in a multicultural world [12].

### **3.3 Core components**

#### *3.3.1 Curriculum design and content*

Intercultural education contains a curriculum that is representative of different cultures' perspectives and histories. Some important components include:

*Inclusive curriculum content:* Incorporating the histories, contributions, and experiences of various cultural groups across subjects, such as literature, history, art, and social studies [13].

*Critical pedagogy:* Encouraging students to critically analyze social structures, power dynamics, and stereotypes [20].

*Language and communication:* Promoting multilingualism and language acquisition to facilitate cross-cultural communication [11].

#### *3.3.2 Pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies*

Successful intercultural education is supported by the use of these methods:

*Culturally responsive teaching:* Tailoring teaching methods to reflect students' cultural backgrounds, using relevant examples and materials.

*Collaborative learning:* Promoting interaction among students from diverse backgrounds through group work, discussions, and peer teaching [21].

*Experiential learning:* Providing cultural immersion experiences, such as field trips and community service, to foster empathy and cultural competence.

*Social-emotional learning (SEL):* Integrating SEL to help students develop empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills.

## **4. The role of intercultural education in shaping identity**

Intercultural education plays a significant role in shaping students' identities by enhancing self-awareness, promoting multicultural identity, and fostering empathy and understanding.

### **4.1 Enhancing self-awareness**

Through reflective exercises, cultural autobiographies, and role-playing, intercultural education encourages students to reflect on their cultural identities and how these identities shape their perceptions of the world. Key strategies in intercultural education that enhance self-awareness include:

*Reflective exercises:* Assignments such as personal essays, journals, and reflective discussions encourage students to think critically about their cultural heritage and experiences.

*Cultural autobiographies:* Students write about their cultural backgrounds, traditions, and values, fostering a deeper understanding of their identities.

*Role-playing and simulations:* Activities that place students in scenarios where they must navigate cultural differences, helping them understand their cultural assumptions and reactions.

#### 4.1.1 Case examples illustrating this impact

- *Case example 1:* In a multicultural classroom, a teacher assigns a project where students interview family members about their cultural traditions and present their findings to the class. One student, initially unaware of the significance of their cultural heritage, discovers the rich history of their immigrant grandparents. This process not only enhances the student's self-awareness but also instills pride in their cultural background [11].
- *Case example 2:* A high school implements a reflective journaling exercise where students write about instances of cultural misunderstanding they have experienced or witnessed. Through this exercise, a student realizes the implicit biases they hold and how these biases have affected their interactions with peers from different cultural backgrounds. This realization leads to more mindful and inclusive behavior.

### 4.2 Promoting multicultural identity

By exposing students to diverse cultural experiences and perspectives, intercultural education helps students appreciate the value of multiple cultural influences and integrate them into their own identities [17]. A multicultural identity is characterized by the ability to navigate and feel comfortable in various cultural settings, an openness to learning from different cultural traditions, and a commitment to inclusivity and respect for diversity.

*Example 1:* A student participates in an international exchange program where they live with a host family in a different country. Through daily interactions and cultural immersion, the student learns to appreciate the host culture's customs and values. Upon returning home, the student becomes an advocate for cultural exchange and incorporates elements of the host culture into their daily life, reflecting a newly formed multicultural identity.

*Example 2:* A university offers a course on global perspectives that includes readings, discussions, and projects on various cultural practices and worldviews. A student in the course, initially identifying solely with their own national culture, starts to see themselves as part of a larger global community. They begin to celebrate multiple cultural festivals and seek friendships with international students, embodying a multicultural identity [14].

### 4.3 Building empathy and understanding

Intercultural education cultivates empathy by encouraging students to step into others' shoes and understand different cultural experiences. Methods such as cultural immersion and storytelling help students develop compassion and a commitment to social justice [11]. Key methods include:

*Cultural immersion:* Activities that immerse students in different cultural environments, such as exchange programs or community service in multicultural settings.

*Storytelling and narrative:* Using stories and narratives from diverse cultures to help students connect emotionally with the experiences of others.

*Collaborative projects:* Group work that brings together students from different cultural backgrounds to achieve common goals, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation.

*Instance 1:* In a middle school, students participate in a pen-pal program with peers from another country. Through regular correspondence, they learn about each other's daily lives, cultural practices, and personal challenges. This interaction helps the students develop empathy for their peers' experiences and fosters a deeper understanding of global issues [17].

*Instance 2:* A college course on human rights includes guest speakers who are refugees sharing their personal stories. Students are profoundly moved by these firsthand accounts and become involved in advocacy and support initiatives for refugees in their community, demonstrating enhanced empathy and understanding.

## **5. Intercultural education and sense of belonging**

Intercultural education fosters a sense of belonging by promoting inclusivity and social cohesion. By creating inclusive environments, intercultural education ensures that students from diverse backgrounds feel valued and connected.

### **5.1 Creating inclusive environments**

Schools that integrate cultural diversity into their curricula and practices create a welcoming atmosphere for all students, fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing academic and personal growth [13]. Case examples include:

*Inclusive curriculum:* Schools that incorporate literature, history, and perspectives from various cultures help students see their own experiences reflected in the curriculum. For instance, a history class might include units on non-Western civilizations and significant contributions from diverse cultural groups, fostering an inclusive learning environment [11].

*Cultural celebrations:* Schools that celebrate cultural events create a welcoming atmosphere for students from those cultural backgrounds. These celebrations allow all students to learn about and appreciate different cultures, enhancing the overall inclusivity of the school.

### **5.2 Enhancing social cohesion**

Intercultural education promotes mutual understanding and respect among students from diverse backgrounds, reducing social tensions and strengthening community ties [17]. Case examples include:

*Collaborative projects:* Group projects that bring together students from diverse backgrounds encourage collaboration and mutual respect. For example, a science class might involve a group project where students must work together to solve a problem, learning to appreciate each other's perspectives and contributions [21].

*Conflict resolution programs:* Schools that implement conflict resolution and peer mediation programs help students learn to resolve disagreements respectfully and constructively. These programs teach important social skills and contribute to a more harmonious school environment.

### **5.3 Supporting marginalized students**

Intercultural education is vital for supporting marginalized students by addressing their unique challenges and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities [13]. Case examples include:

*Mentorship programs:* Schools that establish mentorship programs pairing marginalized students with mentors from similar cultural backgrounds provide valuable support and guidance. These programs help students navigate academic and social challenges, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.

*Resource centers:* Creating resource centers that offer academic support, counseling, and cultural enrichment activities can significantly benefit marginalized students. These centers provide a safe space where students can access the resources they need to thrive [11].

## 6. Preparing global citizens

### 6.1 Defining global citizenship

Global citizenship involves understanding and committing to being a responsible and active participant in the global community. It requires recognizing the interconnectedness of the world and understanding how individual actions impact global issues. Global citizens are aware of challenges like inequality, climate change, and human rights violations, and are motivated to contribute to solutions [14]. Key characteristics of global citizenship include:

- *Awareness of global issues:* Understanding global interdependencies and the complexities of worldwide problems.
- *Respect for diversity:* Valuing and respecting cultural diversity and promoting inclusive practices.
- *Sense of responsibility:* Feeling accountable for contributing to a just and sustainable world.

### 6.2 Skills and competencies

To prepare students as global citizens, intercultural education focuses on developing essential skills and competencies:

- *Critical thinking and problem solving:* The ability to analyze complex issues, think critically, and propose viable solutions, including understanding different perspectives and evaluating the impact of decisions on a global scale.
- *Communication and collaboration:* Effective communication skills across cultures and the ability to work collaboratively with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This involves active listening, empathy, and adaptability [11].
- *Cultural awareness and sensitivity:* Recognizing and appreciating cultural differences and being sensitive to the customs and values of others. This includes the ability to interact respectfully and effectively in multicultural settings.
- *Ethical and responsible behavior:* Making ethical decisions and acting responsibly with a sense of accountability to the global community, including practicing sustainability and advocating for social justice [14].

## **7. Challenges and opportunities**

Intercultural education, despite its importance, faces several challenges that hinder its full implementation. However, these challenges also present opportunities for improvement.

### **7.1 Challenges in implementing intercultural education**

*Resistance to change:* One of the main challenges is the resistance from various stakeholders, including educators, parents, and policymakers, who are accustomed to traditional educational methods and curricula. Resistance often arises from a lack of understanding of the benefits of intercultural education or a fear of disrupting established systems [11].

*Limited resources:* Educational institutions often face constraints such as insufficient funding, limited access to training, and inadequate materials to support intercultural education programs. Without adequate resources, it becomes difficult to provide the necessary support for teachers and students.

*Inadequate teacher training:* Effective intercultural education requires teachers to be well-trained in culturally responsive pedagogy and to be aware of their own biases. Unfortunately, many teacher training programs do not sufficiently address these areas, leaving educators unprepared to manage diverse classrooms.

*Curriculum constraints:* Standardized curricula often leave little room for integrating intercultural education. This rigidity can prevent the inclusion of diverse perspectives and the development of critical intercultural competencies among students [13].

### **7.2 Opportunities for improvement**

*Professional development for educators:* Investing in professional development can significantly enhance the implementation of intercultural education. Workshops, courses, and ongoing training in culturally responsive teaching practices empower teachers to create more inclusive and effective learning environments.

*Integrating intercultural content across the curriculum:* Rather than confining intercultural education to specific courses, integrating it across all subjects can provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of global issues and cultural diversity. This approach normalizes intercultural learning as a fundamental part of the educational experience [11].

*Leveraging technology:* Technology offers numerous opportunities to enhance intercultural education. Online platforms and digital resources provide access to diverse cultural content, virtual exchange programs, and global collaboration projects. These tools help overcome geographical and resource limitations, making intercultural education more accessible [14].

*Community and international partnerships:* Building partnerships with local communities and international organizations enriches intercultural education programs. Community involvement brings real-world perspectives and experiences into the classroom, while international collaborations offer students opportunities to engage with peers from different cultural backgrounds.

### **7.3 Future directions**

To ensure the continued growth and effectiveness of intercultural education, several future directions should be considered:

*Expanding research and best practices:* Future efforts should focus on expanding research into effective intercultural education practices and disseminating these findings to educators and policymakers. Identifying successful models will help schools adopt strategies that have proven effective in diverse settings [11].

*Policy advocacy:* Advocating for policies that support intercultural education at local, national, and international levels is crucial for its long-term success. Policies that promote funding, resource allocation, and curricular flexibility create environments where intercultural education can thrive [13].

*Emphasizing global competence:* As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, global competence should be emphasized as a core educational goal. Preparing students to be global citizens ensures that they have the skills and mindset to navigate and contribute positively to a diverse world [14].

*Inclusive assessment practices:* Developing assessment practices that recognize and value diverse cultural perspectives and ways of knowing is essential. Inclusive assessment ensures that all students' learning and achievements are acknowledged and appreciated, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement.

By addressing these challenges and seizing opportunities, the future of intercultural education can be one of growth and increased effectiveness, preparing students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world.

## 8. Conclusion

Intercultural education plays an essential role in shaping global citizens equipped to navigate the complexities of an interconnected world. By fostering a deep understanding of identity and belonging, promoting self-awareness, and developing empathy and multicultural competencies, intercultural education prepares students to engage meaningfully and respectfully with diverse cultures.

Integrating intercultural education into the curriculum creates inclusive environments where all students feel valued and connected. This inclusivity not only enhances individual well-being but also strengthens social cohesion by promoting mutual respect and understanding. Moreover, supporting marginalized students through targeted initiatives ensures that educational equity is upheld, providing all learners with the opportunities they need to succeed.

Preparing students for global citizenship involves instilling critical skills and competencies such as critical thinking, effective communication, cultural awareness, and ethical responsibility. These attributes are essential for addressing global challenges and contributing to a more just and sustainable world. Case examples throughout the paper illustrate the profound impact intercultural education can have on students, fostering a commitment to global citizenship.

However, the implementation of intercultural education faces challenges, including resistance to change, limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and curriculum constraints. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to provide professional development for educators, integrate intercultural content across the curriculum, leverage technology, and build community and international partnerships.

Looking ahead, expanding research, advocating for supportive policies, emphasizing global competence, and developing inclusive assessment practices are critical for the continued advancement of intercultural education. These future directions will help ensure that intercultural education remains a dynamic and effective force in preparing students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world.

In conclusion, the role of intercultural education in shaping global citizens cannot be overstated. Through understanding, respect, and collaboration, students can become empowered global citizens capable of making positive contributions to their communities and the world at large. By embracing and enhancing intercultural education, we pave the way for a more inclusive, empathetic, and globally connected society.

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# Cross-Cultural Differences: A Review of a Random Sample of Cross-Cultural Studies on Speech Acts

*Hala Rashed Hosni*

## Abstract

The rapidly increasing movement of people across borders brings more and more cultures into contact and increases the need for cross-cultural communication as well as the potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding. Thus, raising cultural awareness and learning the different cultural practices have become highly important in the increasingly growing and culturally diverse world. For this reason, this study provides a review of some cross-cultural studies on speech acts with the aim of highlighting the effect of culture on the perception/performance of these speech acts and giving some insights into how to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings. This review highlights the importance of having deep respect for cultural differences and developing a sense of acceptance toward the fact that there are many ways to view the world and many ways to perform different speech acts.

**Keywords:** culture, individualist-collectivist dimension, high/low context cultures, cross-cultural differences, intracultural differences, speech acts

## 1. Introduction

Bodley ([1], p. 22) defined culture as “what people think, make, and do.” This definition has been developed to what is called the 3P model of culture by Frank [2]. The 3P’s refer to *perspectives*, *practices*, and *products*. Perspectives describe “what members of a culture think, feel, and value” ([2], p. 3). It also includes ideas about what is important in life and convictions and beliefs about how younger people should deal with older members of society. In brief, perspectives refer to what members of a particular culture consider appropriate or inappropriate behavior. For example, while the act of complimenting a man on the beauty of his wife might be considered a nice compliment in some western cultures, it is considered a totally inappropriate act in almost all Arabic-speaking countries. The second P, which refers to ‘Practices,’ includes the traditions and typical behaviors in a culture. The way people

communicate, the gestures they use, their use of eye contact, and body language. Practices include other behaviors as well, such as how people dress, behave, and eat on a day-to-day basis. As for the third P, it refers to ‘Products’ such as food, clothing, music, and literature. Though the 3 P model has shown that there are many fundamental patterns of cultural differences, this research will focus basically on cultural differences in “communication styles.” Such differences in communication styles could be considered as part of both ‘perspectives’ and ‘practices’ at the same time. This is simply because these differences entail how people perceive these acts on the one hand and how people perform them on the other hand.

Of the many dimensions in which cultural groups differ, two dimensions have received the greatest attention. The first of these is the well-researched individualist-collectivist dimension (e.g., Triandis, [3]; and Ting-Toomey, [4]), according to which individualists focus on individual goals, needs, and rights more than community concerns. On the other hand, collectivists value in-group goals and concerns, with priority given to obligations and responsibilities to the group. Hofstede [5] explains that individualism pertains to “societies in which ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family” (p. 51). Collectivism, by contrast, refers to “societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” ([5], p. 51). Hofstede [5] further indicates that individualism is a cultural pattern that is found in most northern and western regions of Europe and in North America. Collectivism, on the other hand, refers to a cultural pattern common in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America, and the Pacific Islands. Thus, it could be claimed that whereas Arab cultures seem to be closer to the eastern philosophies that promote collectivism, social relationships, and concern for others, the Americans and Europeans seem to be closer to the western philosophies that promote individualism, freedom of speech, freedom of action, logical thinking, and independence. The second dimension mentioned in the literature is the concept of high- and low-context cultures, which refers directly to communication style types. Low-context cultures that value individualist goals, such as Australia, are known for being confrontational and using explicit codes of speech. High-context cultures that value collectivist goals, such as those in East Asia, are known for being indirect and relying on implicit references and indirect speech acts [3].

Ting-Toomey [4] argues that these two cultural dimensions are the keys to differing preferences between Easterners and Westerners when communicating with each other. She further proposes that individualist cultures, such as those of the US and Australia, are more likely to use dominant and assertive speech styles involving direct speech codes, whereas collectivist cultures, such as those found in the East Asian nations, are more likely to favor using indirect speech codes.

Unfortunately, though language and culture seem to be two sides of one coin, most studies on speech acts have concentrated on the linguistic aspect of language use. However, in an increasingly interconnected world in which people from different cultural backgrounds are interacting, the need to investigate such cultural differences becomes extremely important in understanding how people behave. Lack of research on cultural traits and cultural identities of different societies is a major gap. For this reason, the current research paper intends to shed light on some of the cultural differences between some eastern and western countries when performing different speech acts.

## 2. Cross-cultural studies on speech acts

There has been a vast literature of cross-linguistic, cross-cultural studies on different speech acts. These studies have investigated the social/linguistic norms associated with the performance of different speech acts in different languages/cultures with the aim of testing NNSs' mastery of the rules of language use as well as developing a deeper understanding of other languages and cultures. Following is a review of some of those studies, with special emphasis on cross-linguistic cross-cultural studies contrasting Arabic and English.

Eisenstein and Bodman [6], for example, studied how non-native speakers from different linguistic backgrounds express gratitude in English. The subjects participating in the study were fifty-six Americans and sixty-seven advanced EFL learners representing various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Eisenstein and Bodman expected that advanced non-native speakers who lived in the United States for one or more years would approximate native speakers' communicative competence. The results of the study, however, indicated that advanced non-native speakers failed to approximate native speakers' communicative competence; they committed pragma-linguistic as well as socio-pragmatic errors. Eisenstein and Bodman concluded that failure to express gratitude adequately stresses the need to include the rules of use of different speech acts as a basic part of the language learning curricula. However, using subjects from different linguistic backgrounds is an element of strength and weakness at the same time. It is an element of strength because it helps to discover the universal as well as the specific aspects of language use. Meanwhile, it is an element of weakness because it would be difficult to generalize results coming from students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Closely related to expressions of gratitude is the speech act of thanking that was studied by Gabr [7]. The study examined thanking as expressed by native speakers of Egyptian Arabic performing in Arabic as L1, Egyptian EFL learners performing in English as L2, and native speakers of American English performing in English as L1. The study aimed at familiarizing Egyptians and Americans with each other's pragmatic strategies of thanking as well as investigating the impact of cross-cultural differences on EFL learners' ability to perform thanking in English according to native speaker norms. The total number of subjects participating in the study was ninety, divided equally into three groups. The data of the study were collected using two instruments: a questionnaire to collect elicited thanking responses and worksheets to collect spontaneous data. The findings of the study confirmed Gabr's expectations that similarities and differences exist in the performance of the three groups. For example, Egyptians were found to employ a slightly wider variety of acts to express gratitude than Americans. Gabr also stated that while some thanking strategies were found to be peculiar to Egyptians, such as using religious expressions and showing the desire to continue relationships, others were found to be peculiar to Americans, such as mentioning the action or the object that deserves thanking and taking leave. The study also revealed that Egyptian EFL learners committed socio-pragmatic as well as pragma-linguistic errors, especially in situations when the two cultures' strategies were different. Gabr concluded that it is important for English teachers to acknowledge cross-cultural differences and to "sensitize their students to those differences" (p. 153). The variability in using instruments as well as the use of native speakers of English to judge the appropriateness of EFLs' responses allow for the generalizability of results.

From a different angle, Andrawis [8] studied the speech act of apology in Egyptian Arabic and American English. The instruments used for data collection include an open-ended questionnaire, a multiple-choice task, and spontaneous or near-spontaneous speech. Social distance, dominance, and severity of offense were the variables of the study. Findings of the study revealed that while the Egyptian subjects were affected by the role of the participants and severity of offense when choosing their apology strategies, the Americans' performance remained constant throughout. The study also proved that cross-cultural differences existed in the performance of the two groups. For example, Americans were found to apologize more frequently and to use different forms of apology than Egyptians did. Another difference is that Americans tended to acknowledge responsibility for offense and offer repair regardless of the context of the situation or the role of the participants. Egyptians' use of these two strategies, on the other hand, seemed to be affected by the situation as well as the role of the participants. The study also revealed that Americans tended to give great importance to their negative face and, accordingly, they were formal with their interlocutors. Egyptians, on the other hand, tended to be less formal than Americans, which shows the great importance they assign to their positive face. In other words, the two subject groups were highly influenced by their socio-cultural conventions. Finally, the fact that Andrawis employed three instruments to collect the data helped to generalize the results. However, the relatively small sample of Egyptian and American subjects as well as the lack of an adequate amount of spontaneous and near-spontaneous data may have led to unrealistic findings.

The speech act of apology was also studied by Osman [9]. This study examined the relation between the level of proficiency in English, on the one hand, and both the degree of politeness as well as the degree of directness in the production of the speech act of apology by native Americans and Egyptian speakers of English, on the other hand. The study revealed that the level of proficiency positively affected the degree of politeness but did not affect the degree of directness. Unlike previous research, the study indicated that no miscommunication happened between L1 and L2 English speakers when performing the speech act of apology. The study also revealed that while Americans perceived themselves to be less polite than Egyptians, Egyptians perceived Americans to be equally polite. Unfortunately, the fact that Osman did not collect any spontaneous data for her study and that she had Egyptian raters rate the responses produced in English on a directness scale affected the reliability of results.

Apologizing was once more studied by Suszczynska [10], who analyzed and contrasted apologizing in English, Hungarian, and Polish. A questionnaire consisting of eight situations was used to collect data from 14 Americans, 20 Hungarians, and seventy-six Polish students. The study aimed at highlighting cross-cultural differences and similarities in the realization of apology across the three cultures involved. The study revealed that the responses of the three groups were similar in the strategy choice. For example, strategies like expressing regret, offering help, expressing concern, and taking on responsibility were used by the three groups. However, a more detailed analysis of the data indicated that the performance of the three groups differed not only in the arrangement of these strategies but also in their content and form. The study also supported Wierzbicka's [11] view that while direct confrontation is usually avoided in Anglo-American culture, it is not avoided in Poland or Hungary, where opinions and feelings—even negative ones—are directly expressed. Suszczynska concluded that conducting cross-cultural studies is important in order to find out the cultural differences in communicative styles and to understand the values and attitudes of different societies.

Another type of speech act, complimenting, was studied by Morsy [12], who examined complimenting behavior in Egyptian Arabic as L1 and American English as L1 and L2 on the basis of sex. He used spontaneous data as well as a questionnaire task. Findings of the study revealed that some EFL learners failed to perform the act of complimenting appropriately in American English and that females tended to show more pragmatic competence than males. Moreover, religious expressions were frequent in Egyptian Arabic compliments. As for compliment topic, the findings of the study agree with previous research that most compliments centered around appearance, ability, or performance. As far as sex is concerned, females were found to receive more compliments than males in the two languages investigated. Morsy did not mention any restrictions on male–female compliments. A plausible explanation could be the fact that almost all his subjects were living in Cairo. He concluded that further investigation of the role of sex differences in complimenting behavior in both American English and Egyptian Arabic is needed. However, the fact that Morsy did not differentiate between complimenting and praising is a major flaw in his study. The second major, and probably more important, flaw in this study is that the results are not representative of the whole Egyptian society, especially when it comes to exchanging compliments between males and females. There is a lot of intracultural variation in the perception as well as the production of the speech act of compliments between males and females in Egypt. Many variables are involved when giving or receiving compliments between males and females. Examples of these variables include, though not limited to, the level of education, how conservative the participants are, whether they live in an urban or a rural area, and many other variables. Some of the effects of these variables have appeared in the results of another study conducted on complimenting behavior by Mazid [13].

In examining complimenting behavior from an entirely different perspective, Mazid [13] compared the way Upper Egyptians compliment each other in English and Arabic. A total of eighty Upper Egyptian university students participated in the study. Data for the study were collected using three instruments: a questionnaire of two versions (English and Arabic), a role-play task, and observation of natural speech. The findings of the study highlighted the need for a more communicative approach to EFL teaching in Upper Egypt. Mazid attributes the relatively low pragmatic competence of the subjects to rote learning, the absence of the teacher-student interaction, and the absence of authentic learning material. He also points out that the effect of pragmatic and pragma-linguistic transfer is significant, so we need to reconsider the role of these two types of transfer in foreign language learning. Although Morsy [12] did not mention any restrictions on cross-sex interaction in Cairene Egyptian Arabic, Mazid stresses that the restrictions on male–female compliments on appearance as well as the general inhibition of cross-sex interaction are among the most unique features of the Upper Egyptian society. This, in turn, reflects the fact that the Upper Egyptian community is linguistically and culturally different from Cairo.

Requests as a speech act were also investigated cross-culturally. El-Shazly [14] examined the requesting behavior of Americans performing in L1 and Egyptians performing in L1 and L2. The instruments used for data collection included: a questionnaire to collect elicited responses and an observation sheet to collect naturally occurring data. Two bilingual speakers were used to rate the requests according to the level of directness on an 11-point scale. The study revealed that while American NSs tended to use conventionalized indirect strategies such as interrogatives, Egyptian NSs and EFL learners, on the other hand, tended to use a higher level of directness in most situations. El-Shazly further states that EFL learners were found to approximate

NS communicative competence where the rules of the two languages are similar, but they deviated where the rules are culture/language specific. The study has also dealt with the relationship between politeness and indirectness, indicating that politeness is manifested differently in the two languages and that indirectness does not necessarily imply politeness. She also stated that the subjects tended to transfer the rules of their native language to the target language. However, the most striking feature of native Egyptians' performance is the use of religious expressions such as/winnabi/and/wallahi/to solicit the hearer to do the request. This lends emphasis to the assertion that there is a widespread usage of religious expressions in Arabic [15–18]. Finally, although El-Shazly used two instruments for data collection, which made the results more conclusive, the use of an eleven-point rating scale is a major flaw in the study because it made the rating a difficult and confusing task.

Another study, Rinnert and Kobayashi [19], investigated requesting behavior in Japanese and English. Spontaneous as well as elicited data were used in the study. The study revealed that although decontextualized hints were perceived as relatively impolite because they lacked clarity (except for the very formal level in Japanese), they were frequently used, especially in a university office setting. Further investigation revealed that the Japanese speakers tended to use more implicit hints than the English speakers. Consequently, Rinnert and Kobayashi stated that Blum-Kulka's [20] notion of politeness as "a balance between pragmatic clarity and avoiding coerciveness" (p. 1173) is affected by situational and cultural variables and that the amount of information necessary for pragmatic clarity varies cross-culturally. The study also revealed that requestive hints, following Brown and Levinson's [21], can be divided into "off-record" hints, which refer to indirect requestive statements and are considered to be the most indirect strategy used to minimize the face threat implied in the act of requesting, and "on-record" hints, which refer to hint-like statements that occur when the speaker's intent can be easily understood by the hearer because of shared knowledge. Rinnert and Kobayashi concluded that further research is needed to find out how "off-record" requestive hints differ from "on-record" hints.

Another relevant study is that of Mostafa [22], who compared complaining strategies in American English and Egyptian Arabic as L1. A questionnaire with two versions (English and Arabic) was used to collect the data for the study. Mostafa found that both Egyptians and Americans often employed the following six strategies when complaining: tolerating the offender, protesting and accusation, requesting for repair, threatening the offender, deciding to penalize the offender, and insulting the offender. He further stated that although some of those strategies seem to be universal as they were frequent in the data gathered from the two groups, other strategies seem to be culture-specific. For example, while Americans tended to threaten the offender in certain situations, Egyptians tended to insult him/her. Mostafa also found that sarcastic expressions were often used by both groups in several situations. He further stated that politeness markers such as "please" were more frequent in the English data than in the Arabic corpus. Mostafa, however, indicated that there was a positive correlation between the use of politeness markers and the educational level of the subjects. However, the fact that Mostafa did not specify independent variables for the study and that he used only one instrument for data collection makes it risky to generalize his results.

Complaining as a speech act was once more examined by Salah- El-Din [23], who investigated the levels of directness in the expression of oral complaints and responses by Egyptians performing in Arabic as L1 and English as L2 and Americans performing in English as L1 and Arabic as L2. The study aimed at achieving a deeper

understanding of how people communicate within the same culture and cross-culturally. Three instruments were used for data collection: an open-ended questionnaire, a role-play task, and observation of naturally occurring data. A total of 256 subjects participated in the study. Findings of the study indicate that the subjects' responses in all three instruments were generally rated as either direct or less direct. Indirect responses were the least employed in all three instruments. The study also revealed that although Egyptians and Americans, on the whole, used similar components when performing the speech act of complaining in both languages as L1 and L2, differences existed in the frequency and order of each component. For example, while subjects from both cultures employed informatives, requests, and justifications in the questionnaire task in L1 with almost the same order of occurrence, other components, such as expressives, were more frequently employed by Americans when performing in English as L1 than by Egyptians when performing in Arabic as L1. As for the speech act type, the study indicated that complaints are usually more direct than responses and that the issue of gender proved to have a nonsignificant effect on the way subjects performed the speech act both in L1 and L2. The fact that Salah-El-Din used three different instruments as well as having native speakers rate the degree of directness of complaints and responses allows for the generalizability of results.

Following the same lines, Nelson et al. [24] compared refusals in Egyptian Arabic and American English. A Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used for data collection. A total of fifty-five subjects participated in the study. The results of the study indicated that Americans used indirect strategies more often than Egyptians. However, this greater preference for indirect strategies on the part of the American group was not large in comparison with the Egyptian group. Moreover, it was revealed that the indirect strategies used by Americans differed from those used by Egyptians. For example, while Egyptians tended to give reasons and show regret for their refusal, Americans, on the other hand, tended to show consideration of the interlocutors' feelings. The study also stressed the importance of politeness, face, and complexities of social interaction when performing different FTAs. For example, it was found that Egyptians were reluctant to refuse a friend or boss, which, in turn, reflects the importance that Egyptians assign to friendship and also reflects deference to a person of higher status or more power. On the whole, the study indicated that Egyptians and Americans were quite similar in their choice of refusal strategies. However, the fact that only one instrument is used for data collection as well as the relatively small number of subjects risks the generalizability of results. Moreover, it should be noted that in order to achieve a full understanding of refusals in the two languages examined, natural data need to be collected, as DCTs lack the spontaneity and complexities of actual face-threatening acts encountered in real life.

Hosni conducted three separate but interrelated studies [17, 18, 25] on the speech act of advice giving in Egyptian Arabic and American English as L1. The main aims of these studies are to find out the effect of the variables of power, distance, and imposition on the level of directness when forming oral advice. Two data collection instruments were employed: a role-play task and a multiple-choice questionnaire. The results of the study showed the influence of culture on the perception and, consequently, on the production of the speech act of advice given by both Egyptians and Americans. More specifically, while Americans were found to perceive advice-giving as an intrusive and overbearing act, Egyptians considered it an expression of friendliness and a means of providing assistance. Although the studies showed that caution is devised when giving advice to Americans, it also revealed that giving advice is relatively common among Americans, and it can be a way to establish good

relationships and maintain social harmony as in any other cultural context if properly phrased. These findings, on the one hand, support the stereotypical description of Americans as being more individualistic and independent [4, 26–28] than Egyptians. On the other hand, it also supports the stereotypical description of Arabs in general and Egyptians in particular as being collectivist and group-oriented [3–5]. On the whole, the performance of the two groups shows that language is closely related to culture and thought and that the difference in the performance of the two groups was a reflection of the two different cultures they represent. To be more specific, the findings of these studies show that while emphasis in Egyptian society is placed on cooperation and solidarity, emphasis in American society is placed on freedom of action and the ability to make one's own decisions. Interestingly enough, the author states that these cultural traits are manifest in some of the proverbs of every society. An example of these proverbs in Egyptian society can be: "Older than you by a day, wiser than you by a year" (i.e., respect older people and their advice). As for Americans, on the other hand, they also have proverbs that show how they abhor interference and intrusion. For example, "Give neither advice nor salt until you are asked for it." Thus, according to Hosni [17, 18, 25] cross-cultural misunderstandings are highly probable when Egyptians and Americans communicate with each other because each group adheres to its cultural norms. Consequently, understanding the social and cultural patterns of every society will certainly help reduce such misunderstandings.

### **3. Conclusion**

From the above discussion, one can easily detect some differences or probably contradictions in these studies. First, while Gabr [7] and El-Shazly [14] stated that NNs approximate NS communicative competence, especially when the rules of the two languages are similar, Mazid [13] stated that they tended to transfer the rules of their native language to the target language. Second, Salah-El-Din [23] and Nelson et al. [24] stated that Egyptians and Americans, on the whole, were relatively similar in their choice of complaining as well as refusal strategies. Gabr [7], El-Shazly [14], and Hosni [17, 18, 25], on the other hand, stated that Egyptians tended to use strategies that were peculiar to them, such as religious expressions. Thus, one can safely reach the conclusion that although speech acts and politeness formulas exist in all languages and cultures, their structures and norms of use are culture-specific [8, 14, 25, 29]. For this reason, several studies [7, 13, 25] indicate that NNSs lack NSs sensitivity in performing different speech acts. Therefore, the need for conducting more research on speech acts becomes highly apparent to sensitize students to cross-cultural differences and ruin the blocks to cultural communication such as ethnocentrism, discrimination, or stereotyping. This does not mean that one should become an authority in the values and traditions of every culture, but rather that one should develop some degree of tolerance toward cultural differences and should be willing to accept, respect, and learn them.


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Section 3

Multiculturalism and  
Interculturalism and Social  
Cohesion

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# Organized to Integrate? On NGOs Bridging and Trust-Building in Local Communities

*Bodil Elise Ravneberg*

## Abstract

Immigration after the millennium challenged Norwegian NGOs to change their organizations to include refugees and immigrants. This chapter discusses challenges and solutions for the majority represented by the NGOs and minorities when trying to adopt each other's cultural practices, and the decision-making steps NGOs took to change their organizational culture and structure to build social capital for newcomers. Challenges were to communicate to newcomers what Norwegian voluntary culture was about, to meet newcomers on an equal footing, and to gain trustworthiness. Going out of the comfort zone and co-creating and co-producing activities together with immigrant families was successful. Many NGOs offered activities aiming at reducing loneliness, learning the language, and facilitating network building across cultures. Although organizations to some degree managed to change their traditional structures and ways of communication, bridging people was demanding due to lack of time and resources.

**Keywords:** NGOs, integration, community, social capital, co-creation, co-production, minority population, majority population

## 1. Introduction

A common view on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is that they constitute scopes of opportunities for participation in local communities and for the development of the local community itself. It is not novel that organizations ranging from sports clubs and religious communities to humanitarian organizations work to strengthen the quality of life for individuals. However, integration efforts to include and integrate refugees and immigrants have long been a challenge to Norwegian communities since before the millennium and still are, due to many refugees coming from Syria from 2015 on, and then Ukrainian refugees since 2022.

This chapter is about how NGOs in Norway after the millennium managed to change their organizations to include refugees and immigrants and manage the barriers they met. The main challenge was to change the organizational culture and structure to attract and involve refugees and immigrants to reach an overall goal;

of integrating them into the NGO and Norwegian society. Participation in NGOs has long shown positive effects on well-being, feeling of belonging, and health for citizens [1–3]. A raised awareness of health-related gains when public schools are partners with local voluntary actors in the planning and implementing of activities has also come to the fore regarding pupils' motivation for learning [4]. However, the landscape of organizations in the non-governmental sector in Norway, as in many countries, is large with many demarcation lines between them. They offer different activities, cover unique needs, and have different goals.

Participation in humanitarian aid organizations represents one way of taking part, sports clubs and associations for youth, children, or grownups another way, and organizations for immigrants or religious communities represent a third way. Another difference is that humanitarian organizations work *for* vulnerable people. Vulnerable people seldom establish humanitarian organizations themselves, as compared to sports clubs or immigrant organizations that are organized by sports people or immigrants.

Thus, among NGOs, there are many different forms of affiliations and roles. Immigrant organizations appear primarily as cultural mediators of their own country's culture. Through organizational activities, volunteer members shape and maintain social ties and common values and communicate this toward the majority. Affiliation with humanitarian organizations is different; here, vulnerable people are merely recipients of charity or philanthropic aid. They are not in the role of being volunteers, at least not in the beginning. The organizational system is based on asymmetrical relations between givers and receivers. In contrast to this, paying members partaking in competitive sports activities with the help of volunteers produces value and benefits for sports clubs.

Contributions from local humanitarian organizations (such as the Red Cross or Save the Children) have nevertheless proven to be important for refugees and newly arrived immigrants in the short run in Norway. Their input might give people with weak social networks valuable connections to other people in society [5, 6]. By establishing various activities, humanitarian organizations recruit participants with distinct roles, mostly as receivers but also as volunteers.

After the millennium, it was clear that many organizations groped in the dark when it came to helping refugees and immigrants find their way into Norwegian society. The aim of people in leading positions became to make refugees and immigrants get to know Norwegian society better, help them increase their network and manage their own lives [6].

In this chapter, concepts such as the “non-governmental sector” or “the third sector” are used as synonyms. Many of these concepts are contested, such as “the third sector,” which is characterized by “numerous competing terms and definitions” in Europe ([7], p. 2). Other similar concepts used here (as synonyms) are “NGOs,” “voluntary organizations,” or “voluntary sector.” However, to be clear of what phenomenon (type of organizations or networks) we are speaking of, is that they are characterized by “unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own family” ([8], pp. 17–18).

In Norway, before the 1980s, there were political disagreements about the role NGOs had in relation to the welfare state and welfare state services [9]. The relationship was described by contrasting concepts, such as proximity/distance or dependency/independency [10]. Two approaches dominated the debate. One approach, called “the disintegrating thesis,” argued that the state threatened the distinctive

character of the voluntary sector. The approach implied a concern for NGOs, that their distinctive character would disappear if the state integrated the voluntary sector's work. Another approach, called "the strangling thesis," signaled a worry that voluntary measures would become too similar to public measures, making people not notice the difference between the voluntary and public sectors [11–13].

Researchers emphasized cleavages and imbalances of power when describing the relationship between the state and NGOs. Some stated that voluntary work was efficient because it contributed to societal change and development without taking a detour to the bureaucratic apparatus of the welfare state. Others argued that a big civil sector did not recognize the responsibility of public welfare institutions, which was unfortunate. They were afraid that the voluntary sector would become an excuse for the state to do nothing [11–13]. Social democrats were skeptical regarding volunteering, as they did not want vulnerable people to get too dependent upon charity from rich people [14]. On the other side, it was argued, that state or municipal features might trigger new interpretations of needs and positively propose innovative solutions voluntarily [9, 11–13].

As we shall see, different approaches to the relationship between the state and NGOs became visible when the NGOs tried to attract refugees and newly arrived immigrants, something that challenged the NGO's self-image. Voluntary organizations "internal life," which we are concerned with in this chapter, is operating differently than the public sector and can be associated with the German concept "Gemeinschaft," introduced by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies in 1887. Gemeinschaft depicts organizations or associations characterized by a wish for values such as closeness, fellowship, and empathy, which is different from the public sector but also the private sector that he described as organizations consisting of "Gesellschaft," characterized with more regulatory management seeking to maximize profits.

On this background, an analysis of a sample of Norwegian NGOs (four sports clubs, four major humanitarian organizations, three religious societies, and two immigrant organizations) and their organizational challenges and solutions regarding integration is presented in this chapter, seen from the position of refugees and immigrants (minority) and Norwegian-born citizens (majority).

After the millennium, many NGOs in Norway realized that they did not work well enough regarding integration and decided to do something about it. Immigration became a societal challenge for NGOs, forcing them to make internal organizational changes regarding their structure, culture, tasks, people, problem-solving approaches, and programs [15]. The chapter focuses on changes at the organizational level but also on the individual level. How did NGOs manage to make structural and cultural changes within their organizations? What were their main challenges, and how did they try to solve them?

## **2. Research background**

The chapter builds on some of my own and my colleague's research in the years after 2008 [5, 6, 16, 17]. The research between 2008 and 2014 was important as it contributed to breaking the first ground in developing knowledge of the role of NGOs in building social capital for immigrants in Norwegian communities. The research was financed by the Ministry of Culture. Their aim was for the researchers to develop knowledge about the significance of the voluntary sector, to contribute to the further

development of the government's voluntary sector policies, and to strengthen the voluntary sector itself through more research-based knowledge [5].

We knew that participation in civil sector activities or NGOs was not equally distributed among the population in socioeconomic terms. Participation was uneven regarding income, education, and work and has continued to be so [18]. We also knew that children of immigrant backgrounds were underrepresented in traditional Norwegian NGO activities such as sports clubs, especially girls [16]. In fact, we had extraordinarily little knowledge about the barriers to immigrant boys' and girls' participation. We knew that their absenteeism in traditional Norwegian NGOs did not mean they were living a passive life in their leisure time, but we lacked knowledge about their whereabouts [5, 16].

We started to examine our research on how different local social actors worked to recruit children and youth of minority backgrounds. Robert Putnam's concept of social capital inspired our research [19]. We wanted to find out whether and how local public community institutions and NGOs in Norway functioned as "bridge builders" between the majority and minority and what obstacles or barriers existed on various levels. Part of the question was how NGOs and local public institutions (i.e., municipalities and public schools) cooperated with each other to recruit children and youth of immigrant backgrounds. We also collected data on how refugees and migrants themselves experienced their contact with humanitarian organizations [5, 6]. We analyzed a sample of Norwegian NGOs and their work in four different communities across the country, consisting of four sports clubs and their public collaborators. In one city, we studied four major humanitarian organizations, three religious societies, and two immigration organizations. We saw religious communities not only as a place for religious activities but also as a social arena where newcomers could get information about how to proceed in the new society [5].

### **3. Methodology**

Qualitative data-collecting techniques were used in all projects because of little knowledge about the topic. We used in-depth analyses based on fieldwork, individual and group interviews, observations, and document analyses as sources of data. The biggest research project (2008–2014) took place in four large Norwegian communities, each with large populations of refugees and immigrants [5]. Here four researchers used the same interview guide in the four communities and interviewed about forty-seven people in total: eight representatives from four local governments, six representatives from six schools (teachers), eight representatives from sports clubs and sports associations, and twenty-five representatives from various local actors/NGOs ([5, 16], p. 55–56).

A smaller project [6] took place in one of the cities. Here, we interviewed 25 people with dissimilar roles, 15 of whom were immigrants (being both leaders and participants). We interviewed leaders in two immigrant organizations, participants, and leaders in four humanitarian organizations and leaders in three religious communities. The researchers observed activities as well as analyzed reports, action plans and other relevant documents from the four local communities situated in various parts of Norway. The Notification Form for Personal Data was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) (now SIKT, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research).

#### 4. The process of acculturation

As a starting point, the analysis draws on the acculturation model of the Canadian social psychologist Berry [20], a model that seeks to explain the process individuals and groups go through when adjusting to a new society in a meaningful way, explaining different adopting strategies. The research team also used this model as a theoretical approach in the abovementioned research (5–6, 17). However, Berry's acculturation model has been developed further by Tharmalingam [21] in 2013. The difference is that Tharmalingam considered "both majority and the minority perceptions in adopting each other's cultural practices" ([21], p. 14).

This chapter draws upon both these two models in combination with Robert Putnam's [19] theory on bridging and bonding strategies to build social capital for participants. Added to the analysis is also another pair of lenses, that of management theories on co-creation and co-production, to highlight in more detail important internal NGOs decision-making steps in the process of integrating minorities and building social capital.

According to Berry ([20], p. 8), the process of acculturation, or "the general processes and outcomes (both cultural and psychological) of intercultural contact," consists of two different independent and cultural dimensions. The first dimension is *cultural maintenance*, which is to what extent immigrants choose to keep and maintain their own culture. The second dimension is *contact and participation*, which is to what extent they wish to participate in the prevailing culture in the new country. Accordingly, all immigrants in a plural society must ask themselves the same question: how to become part of the new society? Here adjustment strategies on the micro level vary between the two abovementioned dimensions.

Holding on to one's original culture and avoiding contact with others defines a *separation* strategy. This strategy might as well lead to *segregation*, voluntarily or involuntarily. A total adjustment to the majority culture for varied reasons defines *assimilation*, while neither cultural maintenance nor little interest in having relations with others defines marginalization. *Integration* (that is of most interest in this chapter) occurs when individuals or groups balance the relation between maintaining their own cultural identity on the one side and, at the same time, participating in networks within the majority society on the other side [20, 21]. This means that integration first happens when diverse cultures influence each other mutually.

Tharmalingam has developed a model (heavily inspired by Berry's) called "The Cultural Incorporation model." The difference between the two models is that his model considers "both the majority and the minority perceptions in adopting each other's cultural practices," not only the minority perceptions as Berry's model ([21], p. 14). He explains that *cultural segregations* are areas where values or practices are open for the majority to practice but closed for the minority [21]. An example is alcoholic beverages during parties. Minorities might choose not to take part in such parties or avoid taking alcohol if they choose to go. Values and practices such as forced/arranged marriages or female circumcision are examples of *cultural domination*, as these are practices not only closed for the majority but also prohibited by law, thus making minority communities to give it up ([21], p. 15).

#### 5. Social capital-resources gained through networks

Social capital as an analytical concept has been widely popular but also debated for at least two decades now. Authors have criticized the concept for not reducing social

and economic inequalities [22], for being vaguely defined, and for being too untheoretical [23–26]. Furthermore, it has been criticized for oversimplifying complex processes [27]. In sum, the value of the concept of social capital has been contested by researchers.

Nevertheless, the concept is useful as part of this theoretical toolbox in understanding what happens in acculturation processes. According to Putnam and Goss [28], citizens in general benefit from network building with neighbors, contact with representatives for municipal institutions, or participation in NGOs activities. The concept depicts acquisitions of valuable knowledge, insights, learnings, and experiences about new and other values through social gatherings, relations, norms, and cultural elements in the new country [28]. This also accounts for refugees and migrants. According to Putnam and Goss, the acquisition takes place during participation in different networks through which participants might gain social capital, such as a feeling of belonging, security, trust, well-being, interdependence, solidarity, and sympathy ([28], pp. 4–7). Thus, a network is a resource that might add to a citizen's social capital and ease integration into local communities by reducing loneliness and mistrust and developing a feeling of belonging and well-being.

Context matters, and social as well as organizational structures made to *bridge, bond, or link* people and/or organizations make participants act in certain ways. Participants might develop networks of mutual trust and common norms, something that might lead to integration in the long term, primarily through bridging activities [28]. Bridging capital, according to Putnam [19], strengthens networks across individuals with *heterogenous* characteristics, while bonding capital might strengthen networks between individuals with *homogenous* characteristics, an example being local immigrant organizations in a community or a city. Many immigrant organizations work with cultural activities. They collect members from the same country, enabling them to stay connected all over the country and promote their culture [6]. This motto is an example that emphasizes the bonding character of one of the immigrant organizations: “Together we stand, divided we fall.”

Linking capital is a third type of network building (originally mentioned by Woolcock [29]), across institutions at macro- or meso-level such as state institutions or public municipal institutions, establishing contact that secures a connection between them. Many NGOs have contact with and collaborate with municipal local institutions in their work to assist newcomers, that is, municipal offices, introduction centers, education centers, public libraries, and schools.

This chapter takes as a starting point that the subject is complex and that the processes of network building among people who are quite different from each other in many aspects, is challenging. Adding management theories about co-creation and co-production might be relevant and fruitful analytical keys to understand in more detail how social capital is produced in practice, and what can be gained from participating in NGOs bridging activities for refugees and immigrants.

To get a closer grasp on these complex processes behind social capital, the chapter therefore focuses on small internal steps taken in the organizations decision-making processes and distinguishes between co-creation and co-producing steps. Together, these two concepts are in this chapter seen as important organizational prerequisites, not only within public organizations, but also in NGOs decision-making processes when it comes to build social capital and reach the aim of integrating refugees and immigrants.

## 6. Co-creation and co-producing activities

Part of the research question after the millennium was how NGOs and local public institutions such as schools cooperated to recruit children and youth of immigrant background to NGOs. As outlined in the introduction, NGOs have for decades provided services and activities as a supplement or substitute to the public sector's provision and the question, therefore also was how the NGOs that we studied cooperated with the public sector on these issues.

This chapter has added a management perspective on social capital building. This means that theories on co-creation and co-producing are used as analytical tools and response to the abovementioned critique of the concept of social capital, that it is too vague and oversimplifies complex processes. Management theories ask for a more detailed analysis of organizations and are therefore drawn upon to understand these NGO's decision-making processes (organizational steps) in their efforts to integrate refugees and immigrants and build social capital.

Originally, the theory on co-production stems from studies on the public sector that challenged the conventional separation between civil society and the public sector, seeing co-producing as breaking the great divide between the two sectors [30–33]. Co-creation, on the other hand, stems from the private sector but was later seen as relevant also for the public sector [33]. In the first place, the two concepts co-creation and co-producing were seen by researchers as interchangeable concepts or synonyms, something that was confusing. Researchers defined the concepts as “joint efforts of citizens and public sector professionals in initiating, planning, designing, and implementing public services” ([33], p. 3). However, the unclear relation between the two concepts confused the matter, and clarifications were asked for [33].

Thus, the two concepts have lately been more separated. According to Brandsen et al. [33], this is because they point at distinct phases in the decision-making process. These authors see co-creation as joint efforts in the *beginning* of an organizational process, that is, in the *planning* and *preparation* phase, while co-production is joint efforts in the *design* and *implementation* phase, which comes later in the same organizational process [33]. In this chapter, the concepts relate to collaborations between institutions within the public or non-governmental sectors to improve services for the increasing number of people facing social and structural barriers to full participation [34–36]. Co-creation and co-producing are seen as participatory processes, seen from the position of NGOs trying to be a solid and sustainable supplement, innovation, or substitute to the public sector by improving their activities and services to integrate refugees and immigrants in local communities.

Related to this is the ability of leaders or managers to exercise *discretion* to co-produce services [30, 31, 35]. Lipsky [37] found that discretion was an important feature in how public employees spent their working time. Here it is equally interesting to find out how leaders or managers of NGOs use their discretion in decision-making processes regarding integration. The anticipation is that successful co-creation and co-production needs discretion to develop innovative bridging activities, services, or programs to encourage participants to develop social capital.

My research on how a World Café at a public Adult Education Centre (AEC) was arranged by the AEC to improve the learning environments for newly arrived refugees can serve as an example [35]. The teachers at the AEC tried to prevent negative social control among their learners and saw that microaggressive behavior hindered learning. The outcome of the World Cafés was that bridges were built, not only

between learners coming from (among others) the Middle East and Africa but also between staff, bilingual immigrant assistants, and learners [35].

Use of professional discretion by the head and leaders of the AEC leads to a positive result. The leaders managed to get funding to employ bilingual immigrants as assistants to help with the organization of the World Café. The leaders and the Norwegian-born teachers invited the bilingual assistants to take an active part in the decision-making process of the World Café. The bilingual immigrants became co-creators and co-producers together with the teachers and leaders. The result was improved learning environments. Employing representatives from the target group's social context was a successful administrative strategy that bridged cultural gaps by co-creating and co-producing the World Café [35].

## **7. Organizational challenges and solutions in NGOs integration work**

As already stated, NGOs play distinct roles for migrants' acculturation process based on what activities they offer. *Bonding* activities are the easiest, as they are targeted for people who have something in common, like a common identity or having the same land background. *Bridging* activities that are of concern in this chapter are demanding to develop because they seek to connect people having little in common in the first place [19].

Building bridges across social, religious, economic, and cultural cleavages does not happen by itself. It is important to state that *linking* social capital is necessary to succeed with this, something that is dependent upon local authorities to take an active part too, to tie different networks together [5]. However, as a delimitation, in this chapter we are primarily concerned with organizational barriers and solutions from the perspectives of the NGOs, such as their structure, resources, cooperation, competency, culture, and legitimacy, and not so much systemic barriers regarding the responsibility of the public sector. The focus is to a certain extent also on individual barriers, such as economical or human resources, language, and knowledge of Norwegian culture.

### **7.1 Communication of tacit knowledge**

Our research showed that bridging activities are challenging and time-consuming for NGOs. To produce social capital, bridging activities require the participation and engagement of many actors: devoted voluntary workers, the organization's management, and eager participants or members [5, 6, 16, 17]. For NGOs, it also requires financial support from the state or from the municipality [5, 16].

Sports clubs (in our sample) found it hard to reach parents of children of immigrant backgrounds, partly due to what they experienced as "misunderstandings and confused ideas" about the *raison d'être* of voluntary work [17]. Voluntary work is, as mentioned in the introduction, not paid work and not led by the state nor the municipality. They do not even finance activities, although there are public support schemes to apply for, and for some activities, such as NGO administration, coaches, or trainers might get financial support from authorities to give them as salary. This ambiguity between the role of NGOs and the state created dilemmas that gave rise to misunderstandings [17]. Immigrants, according to leaders in the voluntary sector, did not participate much in NGOs because they did not want to work for free for Norwegian authorities. They wanted instead to spend their spare time with their family. When

they participated, according to Norwegian-born leaders, it was mostly when food was for free being served by voluntary organizations. One misunderstanding was that immigrants thought the food was for free because the state had paid for it [17]. Norwegian-born participants and leaders learned from immigrants themselves that immigrants reluctance to participate happened for another reason, because minorities to some extents, were treated by the majority as passive and needy individuals, or as receivers of a humanitarian project. Minorities and majority volunteers raised many questions and challenged NGOs leaders accordingly. Minorities said that immigrants should be invited by the majority to voluntary work out of their own interest and be met as a resource, not only for the “good cause” [17]. Volunteers on their side wanted to make clear to immigrants that they did not work for the welfare state and that they did not get paid. The conclusion in this case was that minorities felt like receivers and not as resources, and that voluntary work did not integrate them.

Club leaders in one of the football clubs in our sample that had been established in 1913 stated that they found it quite impossible to pass on information about Norwegian voluntary culture. There were a lot of misunderstandings, which was frustrating. They said in interviews that they “got into a mess because of this, with silly situations, misunderstandings, and irritations” ([17], p. 83).

As a start, to improve information, club leaders cooperated with public schools nearby, asking the teachers if they could put information folders in the children’s rucksacks, hoping to reach their parents. This failed. The leaders resonated later in interviews that this had to do with the information not given by leaders or volunteers orally in person [5, 17].

The situation forced club leaders to change their mindset and strategy of communication. In 2008, they decided to make an informative DVD in five languages about Norwegian voluntary culture, the part of the city in which the club was situated, and the activities they offered [17]. The club started targeting parents more directly. Their aim was to recruit children to the club by informing parents [5, 17]. They wanted to recruit players to their football teams, and when the inexperienced players were good enough to play matches, the club would invite them to football cups and series at weekends.

They succeeded partly in their effort to reach out to minority families in the neighborhood with the information on the DVD. Also, other local initiatives in the neighborhood such as Christmas markets and Park Days, were helpful regarding reaching out to immigrant families [17], however, it was just a first small step.

## **7.2 Accessibility**

The change of communication channel led the club leaders to do more outreaching activities, and they found low-threshold activities to be more accessible and outreaching. They started to follow-up children physically in diverse ways. The strategy was to get to know the children’s family relations. The football club even hired a part-time employee to go and knock on people’s doors, talk to the kids’ mothers and fathers, build mutual trust, and offer parents to come along to football matches and cups. The club got some financial support from the municipality to do this but needed much more financial aid, for instance, to be able to buy a bus when traveling to matches with players and their families instead of using the parents’ cars [5, 16, 17].

Club leaders realized that their traditional culture and operational forms developed since 1913 were difficult to understand for newcomers. Many of the clubs were old, being established more than a 100 years ago. They were “infused

with values,” according to Selznick [38]. The organizational culture was based on “good old” traditional Norwegian norms, values, and hierarchical structures. This was the reason behind establishing new low-threshold activities that were more accessible. They organized several new football activities to make the club’s activities more accessible and affordable for groups of children and their parents, and to build relations and trust between representants of the organizations and possible new members [5].

However, the leaders of the club found this type of work very resource-demanding due to the time it took to talk to people and to win respect [5, 16, 17]. Nevertheless, low threshold accessible activities contributed over time to ease the work and to transfer knowledge about Norwegian voluntary culture. Public schools also arranged similar activities free of charge. In some local communities, volunteers offered childminding at the same time as the activities, something that was successful in getting mothers to participate. Sports clubs also invited parents directly and asked them if they wanted to establish football teams and to become leaders.

### **7.3 Out of comfort zone**

Leaders and volunteers made several efforts to bridge immigrant parents and their children with Norwegian-born citizens and their children, all participating in the club’s football teams. However, an important prerequisite for bridging social capital is, as mentioned, good leadership, like the use of professional discretion [30, 35–37]. According to Loga [17], the leaders of one of the clubs said that it was “not language nor economy on an individual level that was the main barrier for the parents to join the club, but cultural issues.”

One important challenge they learned, was the need for participants to buy hot dogs made of halal meat during football cups (hot dogs are immensely popular among kids in Norway). The club leaders respected this need from the parents and managed to import their own halal sausages (imported from Sweden) to cups. The parents on their side came along as cheerers [5]. This is an example of efforts toward cultural integration as described by Tharmalingam [21], something that might happen when majority and minority people adjust and incorporate elements from each other’s culture.

Club leaders, when visiting parents, would ask them about the reason for not participating in the club activities when their children were so good at playing football. They decided to privately import halal meat from Sweden and serve halal sausages to their own team at cup activities. The immigrant parents became a valuable resource, by serving halal sausages and by coming along to cheerlead the cups. The adjustment took time, and everyone did the “little extra,” and got out of their comfort zones to obtain this mutual achievement.

Theoretically, the process can also be analyzed in terms of co-creation and co-producing [34, 35], here between the leaders of a voluntary organization (the football club) and immigrant families. It can be argued that co-creation and co-producing are important organizational prerequisites for bridging social capital toward cultural integration. As mentioned, the club leaders talked with immigrant parents, took their time to gain trust, and experienced that this led to mutual respect being developed. Both the club and immigrant parents did something new. Their first step was to co-create the arrangement and import halal meat. Their second step was to co-produce the match and invite parents to come along as cheerleaders.

## 7.4 Equal footing?

“Open kindergartens,” “refugee guides,” and “settlement help” are examples of other bridging activities organized by Norwegian humanitarian organizations (Red Cross, The Church City Mission, or Save the Children). For decades, humanitarian organizations have organized activities for immigrants, but with many pitfalls. In this work, organizations cooperate with municipal introduction centers to contact newcomers. Save the Children decided to target children in families, which was something the municipality did not do, volunteers said in an interview [6]. The municipality targeted their public services primarily to grownups, helping adults to get a house and a job, and paid less attention to the children. Volunteers said in interviews that public services lost focus on the children; they were not concerned with how they were doing or how children came to participate in local activities. This was something volunteers working locally for Save the Children wanted to change [6]. This is an example where an NGO is innovative and takes up activities not covered by the state or the municipality, as discussed in the introduction. They planned and implemented a project on how to introduce newly arrived children to activities in their respective neighborhood, wanting to help small children of immigrant families to make new friends [6].

As with the sports clubs, they experienced the work as time-consuming, thinking in the first place it would take half a year, but realized that it took double as long. Volunteers in Save the Children learned many lessons about bridging activities. They learned that it was important that the first meeting between volunteers and parents take place *with* an interpreter and on *neutral* grounds to avoid misunderstandings. It became important to make parents understand that they were volunteers, coming from an NGO, and not from any public service. Volunteers also learned that their second meeting with the family and their children should happen on the family’s own territory, in their homes [6].

Time was needed for the volunteers to get acquainted with the family and build trust before they could co-create ideas about participating in activities in the neighborhood. Making and maintaining good relationships on equal footing was important for the volunteers, but it was a challenge. They were aware of the power relations that some immigrants might find their way of saying things offensive, as Loga also described regarding the football club [6, 17]. It was a challenge because Norwegian-born volunteers did try to “push” immigrant families into something for which the newcomers were not ready. Obviously, they were not equals. Nevertheless, volunteers said during interviews that they experienced many families appreciated the “push.” This contact contributed to reducing loneliness. In the process of sharing values, traditions, and norms, as well as co-creating ideas about what activities the children should join, they experienced that some families felt that their feeling of loneliness was reduced [6].

## 7.5 Trustworthy?

At the turn of the century, very few immigrants were volunteers in Norwegian NGO’s. A challenge was therefore that most volunteers were Norwegian-born, making refugees or immigrant families hesitate to participate actively in NGOs as volunteers. They participated primarily as learners or receivers of help or aid, in counseling groups, discussion groups, reading groups, homework groups, sports clubs, hiking tours, self-defense courses, handiwork, and food courses [6]. Many NGOs started, as sports clubs, to change this by developing more symmetrical relations between

majority and minority participants. Their aim was to make the organization worthy of trust. Engaging new participants, that is, immigrants as volunteers, and to become role models was one crucial step toward change, however also a difficult one [6].

NGOs started to recruit bilingual immigrants to become volunteers as well as employees in the NGOs administration, also giving them opportunities to make a career in the NGO. The recruitment is another example of co-creation and co-production activities between minority and majority populations in NGOs. It was particularly hard to recruit women of immigrant background to NGOs. The obstacle was that most of the volunteers and their leader(s) were Norwegian-born. Slowly, they managed to recruit women with minority backgrounds. Eventually this made it easier to recruit new minority women, primarily as participants. The reason was that female bilingual immigrants could be key role models, as they had thorough experiences of being a female refugee and/or immigrant in Norway and could develop trust in other newcomers. Bilingual immigrants shared experiences and became attractive as discussion partners, not only for Norwegian-born participants, but also for minority women and men. They could, for instance, suggest new activities, such as guidance to parents that were empathetic to newcomers [6].

As already pointed out, loneliness and lack of language skills were major challenges for newcomers, but minority bilingual volunteers or employees knew this and could draw on their own experiences on how to become integrated. Where Norwegian volunteers would hesitate, minority volunteers could also tell newly arrived immigrants that they should ring the bell on their neighbor's door, introduce themselves, and say that they wanted to get to know/each other [6].

## **7.6 Learning the language**

Many refugees or newly arrived immigrants stated during the interviews that they were overly concerned with learning the new language as quickly as possible [6]. They were eager to talk to Norwegians from day 1. This is not easy, as Norwegians are not as talkative as people of other nationalities. Refugees might find it hard to get into Norwegian society without any specific reason. One refugee put it like this: "Even if you have a reason, it is difficult. Norwegians are polite but keep a distance, not only to immigrants but also to each other" [6]. It might also be hard to obtain information about activities in which to partake and to find information about when, which, and how to enter a club or an NGO. This is tacit knowledge in Norwegian society [5].

Some immigrants want a "push" as mentioned, and search for bridging activities where they can meet different people, also from the majority population. Others are not ready for such meetings before they can speak the new language properly. A young refugee from Eritrea told his story in an interview. He was eager to start already when he stayed at the reception center for asylum seekers. He started quickly to learn Norwegian and to study. He also got himself a part-time job at a hospital. He was eager to get help from NGOs to learn the language and the culture. He had learned about the Red Cross and their refugee guide service, a service that connects Norwegian volunteers with refugees. Having a guide like that, he resonated, would make it easier for him to practice the language and build himself a network ([6], pp. 117–118).

He did not have time to wait for assistance from the contact person at the municipality's introduction center. When he learned that his contact person was on vacation, he contacted the Red Cross and studied Norwegian assiduously at the same time. He was very satisfied with the refugee guide service and emphasized the importance of having such an opportunity to speak Norwegian. He spoke with his guide in cafes and

played bowling and billiards with him. Laughing, when he had learned how to ski for the first time in his life, he said: “I never expected it to be so difficult, that the shoes were so heavy. I felt like a ten-month-old child learning to walk... but it went well after a while” ([6], p. 118).

## **7.7 Mutual orientation of values and norms**

A meeting between a refugee and a guide is a mutual orientation of values and norms. Refugees learn about Norwegian norms and codes and vice versa. Learning to crack Norwegian codes in different areas is part of the Red Cross service. Refugee guides have a double role, partly being bridge builders in interpersonal relations and networks and partly as door openers to different societal arenas [6].

The role of door opener to the new society is equally important for NGOs to take up, and this role was also found in religious communities. The role is to inform migrants about how to contact public welfare and health institutions and to build solidarity among people. The biggest challenge was, however, to become bridge builders, which is more than being a mere door opener, but being co-creators and co-producers—providing newly arrived immigrants with the possibility to build networks and to have dialogs with representatives of the majority.

The lesson learned by an Ethiopian immigrant was that getting a guide from the Red Cross might make people better off in daily life as compared to those not having a guide. The guide, according to the immigrant leader of this service at the Red Cross, helped immigrants to formulate themselves in writing as well as orally, for instance, helping them write job applications. As a result, immigrants having a guide might get better job opportunities, have greater social and family status, and have improved living conditions and self-confidence, he said [6].

## **7.8 Building networks**

Immigrants tell in interviews that when they learned the language and felt safer, they became more active and participated more in Norwegian society. Mothers using the Open Kindergarten service, arranged by the Church City Mission, said that they visited this service together with their children several times a week. This service was particularly important, not only for their children to participate in activities together with other children but was important for themselves, as immigrant mothers [6].

A mother from India who had used the kindergarten for all her children needed time before she had the courage and time to participate. She said during an interview that she did not feel ready to socially participate for many years in Norway, not until she mastered the language and when her oldest children were becoming adults. She had gained many benefits by using the kindergarten. She got to know other mothers, both Norwegian and mothers of a minority background, which was useful to her. A mother from Kenya said that she had felt bored being at home with her child. She also felt lonely, searched the internet, found information about the kindergarten, and started to use it twice a week [6].

Other mothers mentioned during interviews that the Open Kindergarten gave them opportunities to develop and build networks. A Chinese mother who had lived in Norway for 11 months was without a network when she arrived. She asked her neighbors (in English) if there was an open kindergarten service in the neighborhood. She made the point that it was hard to find information on her own about these kinds of services. However, she did make friends with other mothers at the kindergarten, and met them also outside the kindergarten, going for walks [6].

Two mothers, from Kenya and Kongo, described the kindergarten as a nice social opportunity to be together with each other as well as with others. One of the mothers described it like this: “Cozy. Here we hit the right tone, it is a good atmosphere. You feel welcome. It is genuinely nice. I have learned to know many people, both Norwegian and foreigners.” She had been very conscious when choosing this kindergarten service, deliberately searching for a place with a mixture of many different people with diverse backgrounds and from different countries [6].

## **8. Concluding remarks**

This chapter has discussed what happened when immigration became a societal challenge for Norwegian NGOs after the millennium, forcing them to make internal organizational changes regarding their traditional way of communicating, recruiting people, managing tasks, and organizing activities. The chapter presents small decision-making steps NGOs took to solve challenges. The main argument is that the most successful organizing steps toward integration were those that were co-created and co-produced by minority and majority people.

The acculturation process, as described by Berry and Tharmalingam [20, 21], is a process of bridging people and building networks, producing social capital for the individual. This has shown to be a time-consuming and resourceful process with many challenges due to cultural misunderstandings about what Norwegian voluntary work is questions about which institutions the majority of volunteers represent, the state or otherwise (private), and what their mission is and why refugees and immigrants do not get paid if they participate.

Immigrants lacked information about Norwegian culture in general and voluntary culture in special, as this is tacit knowledge not communicated well enough to newcomers. This caused a lot of misunderstandings and frustration. Immigrants felt themselves being treated as receivers of a humanitarian project and not as a resource. Norwegian volunteers did not feel they were trustworthy enough and had to work hard, trying to be on equal footing with immigrant families while at the same time trying to “push” them into something. It was an asymmetrical relationship, a relation volunteers in NGOs strived to change. Some immigrant families welcomed the “push,” others did not.

Co-creating and co-producing activities in the football club together with minority families proved to be an important and helpful step toward change, however, a demanding one, making people go out of their comfort zone. An example presented in this chapter was the club’s decision to import halal meat and serve hot dogs made of halal meat to their own players at cups, something they never had done before. On the other side, immigrant mothers and fathers, because of this decision became cheerleaders and traveled together with the team to cups, something they never had done before.

Hiring bilingual immigrants as role models was another example of co-creation and co-producing between the majority and minority. It was also a helpful and crucial step toward trustworthiness and contributed to internal cultural changes in many organizations. Bilingual immigrants suggested for instance that NGOs should establish new activities as well as new arenas enabling people to do networking, for instance, parental guidance. The bilingual immigrants understood complex issues and misunderstandings coming from both the minority and majority, as they had made their own way into the community and had experienced being in the role as

newcomers. They had learned about what was tacit knowledge in the Norwegian culture, something that gave them competency to give useful advice and information to newcomers.

The chapter has shown that both majority (NGOs) and minorities (refugees, immigrants) benefited from immigrants contact with and participation in different activities of NGOs. For refugees and immigrants, the contact led to increased knowledge of Norwegian culture and its special voluntary culture; it reduced loneliness and helped them to build networks, learning the language, norms, and values, as well as knowledge about how to “crack” Norwegian codes in different arenas such as education and paid work. For the majority, football clubs, for instance, got successful football players and their families as supporters, who contributed to developing clubs to be more out-reaching, accessible, informative, and communicative and able to change their traditional way of structuring and operating the organization.

In sum, there are many challenges for organizations when confronted with immigration. This chapter has shown some barriers to and solutions for NGOs after the millennium. It has shown that reducing organizational barriers on a meso- and systemic level takes time. It is hard to change an organizational culture that is “infused” with values. Bridging activities is demanding because of the resources and time needed. Often, activities are being closed because NGOs need financial aid from the state or municipalities to keep going. A condition for success regarding integration is thus long-term input and commitment. Linking NGOs with municipal institutions is important for social capital building by NGOs, but at the same time it is important to keep their distinctiveness as a *Gemeinschaft* compared to *Gesellschaft*, comparable to the private and the public sector.

Knowledge on what types of activities have the potential to improve integration efforts for majority and minority populations is a key for developing sustainable local communities. Raised awareness on the role of NGOs, together with knowledge on best practices and relevant macro politics, when it comes to acculturation processes in local communities, is important. Integration in communities through bridging by co-creating and co-producing activities will always be a challenge but, when successful, contribute to strengthen integration and prevent segregation tendencies.

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# Australia's Journey to Super-Diverse Ethnoburbs

*Shilpi Tewari*

## Abstract

After the demise of the White Australia Policy in the 1960s, the focus of the migration program has shifted. The government's skilled migration scheme brought a new category of migrants into Australia who possess relatively higher educational qualifications and economic capabilities compared to previous migrants. A new level of residential differentiation patterns has thus emerged out of this mass immigration of professionals and entrepreneurs, which is more complex and fine-grained. More class-based residential differentiation is evident, which can be explained through a new phenomenon using the new phrase "super-diverse ethnoburbs." These super-diverse ethnoburbs are suburbs encompassing migrants from a great variety of origin and ethnicity who have settled in new suburbs in Australian cities. This chapter explains this phenomenon with examples from Australian cities and describes the transformation in physical, social, and cultural environments in these highly multicultural suburbs. It talks about the Australian government's social policy on multiculturalism and ways in which it supports cross-cultural interactions in these suburbs.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, super-diversity, ethnoburbs, residential differentiation, migration

## 1. Introduction

Following the dismantling of the Immigration Restriction Act [1] in the 1960s and 1970s, the Australian government initiated a series of measures designed to prohibit racial discrimination and adopt multiculturalism as a key policy framework. These efforts were intended to promote social cohesion, foster understanding, and encourage tolerance within communities. As a result, Australia's immigration policies underwent significant transformation [2]. Prior to the 1970s, the country's migrant intake was heavily restricted and controlled under the White Australia Policy, which limited immigration primarily to individuals from European nations. Post-1970s, however, Australia broadened its immigration intake to encompass individuals from a wider range of ethnic and national backgrounds under various categories, including skilled migration, business migration, family migration, asylum seekers, and international students. These revised immigration criteria facilitated a substantial increase in migrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East [3].

Since the early 1990s, Australia's migration program has integrated social, humanitarian, and economic objectives. Social objectives have centered on family

reunification, while humanitarian objectives have focused on the intake of refugees and other humanitarian migrants. Economic objectives have been achieved through a focus on skilled migration, introducing a new category of migrants to Australia. These migrants, originating from both affluent and economically disadvantaged countries, generally possess higher levels of educational qualifications and economic capabilities compared to earlier cohorts. As a result, a new pattern of residential differentiation has emerged, characterized by greater complexity and fine granularity [4].

The arrival of middle- and upper-class professionals as part of Australia's migration program has led to increasingly pronounced class-based residential differentiation. These migrants, motivated by both economic and social aspirations, have shown a growing preference for settling in the outer suburban areas of Australia's major capital cities. This trend is driven by two key factors: first, the relative affordability of housing in the outer suburbs compared to inner-city areas, where property prices have risen considerably; and second, the desire of economically advantaged migrants to purchase large family homes within secure, master-planned estates (MPEs) located on the suburban fringe. Many new migrants express greater satisfaction residing in these privatized and physically separated environments, where they are surrounded by individuals of similar socio-economic status. These areas offer enhanced security and a high-quality living environment for their families. Consequently, this settlement pattern has led to the development of suburbs predominantly inhabited by professional middle-class families residing within MPEs, effectively insulating them from the perceived insecurities of the broader urban environment. This clustering of high-income, professional migrants with elevated socio-economic statuses in particular suburbs is an increasingly evident trend in Australia's urban landscape [5].

These highly multicultural suburbs can be characterized by a novel theory of migrant settlement patterns in the host society emergent in most capital cities in Australia. This new phenomenon, when examined through the lens of two well-established theories—ethnoburbs and super-diversity—provides a comprehensive explanation for the observed patterns in migrant settlement. The integration of these theories offers a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of recent migrant settlement in Australia.

The theory of ethnoburb was first theorized by Chinese geographer Wei Li in her book "Ethnoburbs." [6] Ethnoburbs are suburban ethnic clusters characterized by residential areas and business districts within large metropolitan regions of major cities in the USA. These multi-ethnic communities feature a significant concentration of one ethnic minority group, though this group does not necessarily constitute a majority. At the turn of the century, due to economic restructuring and changes in national trade and immigration policies, there was an influx of new migrants with higher educational qualifications and greater economic capabilities who opted to settle in suburbs, thus forming new suburban ethnic enclaves markedly different from their inner-city predecessors. Using the example of San Gabriel Valley in California, Li has demonstrated how strong ethnic clusters of Chinese populations have successfully transformed the architectural styles, street signs, commercial streets, and businesses of a suburb [7]. She argues that the interdependence of ethnic populations and ethnic economies is a key factor in the establishment of these ethnoburbs. According to Li, these self-sufficient economies contribute significantly to the overall economic progress of the nation [8].

Although the process of migrant influx is very similar in both the USA and Australia, there are notable differences between these models of suburbanization.

The concept of American ethnoburbs cannot be directly applied to Australian cities. Li's ethnoburbs are characterized by suburbs where one ethnic group dominates and concentrates in a single area, eventually transforming the physical and social environment to reflect the dominant ethnic culture. In contrast, the suburbs of Australian cities are cultural mosaics, where numerous ethnic groups coexist simultaneously, albeit with some cultural groups being significantly larger than others. The demographic composition of these Australian suburbs reveals that more than half of their populations were born overseas, with new migrants originating from a diverse range of destinations. For instance, Point Cook, a suburb in Melbourne, has a diverse population with residents hailing from countries such as India, China, England, and the Philippines. This diversity contrasts sharply with the more homogeneous ethnic clusters observed in American ethnoburbs, highlighting the unique multicultural fabric of Australian suburban communities.

Another interesting concept in migrant settlement known as "super-diversity" was introduced by Steven Vertovec to explain the complexity of contemporary immigration patterns in the UK, which have evolved significantly since the early 1990s. Vertovec's concept of super-diversity refers to the complex interplay of multiple factors that shape the experiences of immigrants in contemporary Britain [9]. "Super-diversity" describes the proliferation and mutual conditioning of various variables beyond ethnicity that affect immigrants' lives, such as immigration statuses, labor market experiences, gender and age profiles, spatial distribution, and local area responses. Vertovec argues that conventional focus on ethnicity alone is inadequate to understand the diversity of immigrant experiences and interactions. Instead, a multi-dimensional perspective is necessary to capture the full range of influences on immigrants' social and economic lives. This perspective considers the intersection of ethnicity with other factors like country of origin, legal status, human capital, access to employment, locality, transnational practices, and the responses of local authorities and service providers [9].

Just like Australian suburbs do not completely follow the ethnoburb model, the concept of "super-diversity" as articulated by Vertovec cannot be applied to the Australian context. In Australia, the focus is primarily on a specific category of migrants who enter under the skilled migration stream and settle in outer suburbs for reasons such as housing affordability, ownership of large family homes, and proximity to individuals of similar economic status. These skilled migrants, while coming from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, share similar economic status and educational qualifications. In the Australian context, the term "super-diversity" can be adapted to describe the extensive range of ethnicities within the skilled migrant category. A notable example is Point Cook in Melbourne, where residents originate from diverse countries but predominantly comprise professionals and managers with high educational qualifications and economic status. Consequently, while Point Cook exhibits significant ethnic and cultural diversity, it lacks diversity in economic and class dimensions, being largely populated by high-income earners.

By integrating selected characteristics from both the theories of ethnoburbs and super-diversity, a new phenomenon is observable in the outer suburbs of Australian capital cities, which can be aptly termed as "super-diverse ethnoburbs." These super-diverse ethnoburbs are characterized by the absence of a dominant Anglo-Celtic population and the presence of numerous ethnic minority groups coexisting without any single group predominating. Point Cook serves as a quintessential example of this emerging phenomenon, where a substantial percentage of the population consists of diverse ethnic groups originating from a wide variety of locations.

In this chapter, the following themes will be examined within the Australian context:

- **Multiculturalism in Australia:** An analysis of the historical evolution of multicultural policies, the current policy framework, and the processes of integration and inclusion of diverse cultural groups.
- **Migration patterns and policies:** An exploration of immigration policies, patterns of migration, the skilled migration program, and the economic and social aspirations of new migrants.
- **Settlement patterns and residential differentiation:** A study of settlement trends, the development of super-diverse ethnoburbs, and the economic and class-based segregation within residential areas.
- **Social environment and community dynamics:** An investigation into community satisfaction, issues of social isolation and alienation, and the dynamics of cross-cultural interactions.
- **Hidden multiculturalism:** An examination of cultural expression in the built environment and the tension between conformity and cultural identity.

## **2. Australia's journey toward ethnic diversity**

Australia exemplifies a colonial-settler nation that has progressively extended residency and citizenship to migrants. Although migration to Australia had occurred in various forms since the late nineteenth century, it increased substantially following World War II. The factors driving immigration to Australia can be categorized into “push” factors, such as international conflicts and discrimination, and “pull” factors, including economic growth, population expansion, and the attraction of individuals with specialized skills. Over the course of the twentieth century, significant waves of immigration and settlement occurred, initially from Britain, followed by Western Europe, then Central and Southern Europe, and finally from the Middle East and Asia. The immigration rate peaked at 40% in 1969–1970 [10, 11].

Following Federation in 1901, the Australian government encouraged controlled migration while maintaining social homogeneity. Through the Immigration Restriction Act, commonly known as the White Australia Policy, the government severely restricted the entry of non-white, non-Anglo-Saxon migrants [12]. This policy sought to exclude Southern and Eastern Europeans and prevent low-wage immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands, effectively giving preference to British migrants through the first four decades of the twentieth century [12].

After World War II, the White Australia Policy was gradually dismantled by successive governments, culminating in its official abolition in 1973 under the Whitlam government. Laws were passed to ensure that race was no longer a criterion for immigration to Australia. The introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act [1] in 1975 made racially based selection criteria unlawful, thereby enabling large-scale, multi-ethnic immigration. Australia's contemporary migration program now allows individuals from any nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, or language to migrate, provided they meet the legal requirements [13].

Like other migrant countries, Australia has faced challenges in integrating ethnic minority groups into its society. Until the 1970s, the federal government's official policy toward migrants was one of integration, which expected migrants to abandon their own cultures and adopt the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. The White Australia Policy underpinned this assimilationist approach, promoting Anglo-conformism [14] by encouraging migrants, particularly those from cultures considered close to Anglo-Australian, to embrace the majority culture. However, this policy failed, as many members of minority groups resisted surrendering their languages and cultural identities, even while accepting some aspects of Australian life. Demographic pressures, particularly the need for population growth following World War II, also necessitated a broadening of acceptable migrant backgrounds [14].

The failure of assimilationist policies set the stage for a major shift in the 1960s and 1970s. The concept of "new nationalism" emerged as the federal government's response to migration, though it lacked the clarity of the previous long-standing British-centric identity. In 1973, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam delivered a speech in Ballarat outlining the need for a new sense of national community, emphasizing Australian control over industries, resources, and an independent foreign policy [15, 16]. Al Grassby, then Minister for Immigration, referred to this emerging concept as the "Family of the Nation," advocating for an integrative approach where different ethnic groups could preserve their languages and customs while contributing to a united Australian national identity. However, this policy of integration, despite its rebranding, was still rooted in the principles of assimilation [17].

The policy framework of multiculturalism replaced integration as Australia's official approach to managing cultural diversity in the mid-1970s. The shift toward multiculturalism was driven by the failure of previous attempts at assimilation and the lack of clear definition in the "new nationalism" as a basis for national identity. Multiculturalism was initially adopted as a defensive rather than proactive response by the government to Australia's increasing cultural diversity [18]. Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki, a migration specialist at the Australian National University, introduced the concept of multiculturalism to the Australian government during a national citizenship convention in 1968. He proposed a model of cultural pluralism, arguing that immigrants could retain their cultural traditions while contributing productively to their new country [19].

The Whitlam government was the first to formally discuss multiculturalism as a concept aimed at replacing assimilation and validating cultural diversity. Al Grassby first used the term "multicultural" in a government speech, though the "Family of the Nation" concept he advocated was seen by many as merely a rebranded form of integration. It was not until the Fraser government came into power in late 1975 that multiculturalism was fully institutionalized in government policy, underpinned by the recommendations of the Galbally Report [20]. The report, commissioned to review post-arrival programs and services for migrants, acknowledged the growing settlement needs of migrants and recognized the importance of fostering multiculturalism at all levels of government. It emphasized the recognition of cultural diversity, equal opportunities, and adequate services for migrants, including interpreter services, ethnic media, and the establishment of Migrant Resource Centers. The report's focus on cultural pluralism allowed migrants to maintain their cultural identities while contributing to a cohesive Australian society [21].

Multicultural policies reached their peak in the early 1990s but began to lose political support by the mid-1990s and early 2000s. The Howard government, which was critical of multiculturalism, replaced it with a policy emphasizing social cohesion and cultural "sameness" through his "One Australia" policy, which called for a

reduction in Asian immigration. During Howard's tenure, the rise of the One Nation Party, led by Pauline Hanson, reflected concerns that multiculturalism, migration, and economic globalization were undermining national unity [22].

In the 2007 federal election, multiculturalism was replaced by the concept of "social inclusion," which focused on addressing the needs of jobless families, long-term disadvantaged children, the homeless, people with disabilities and mental illness, and Indigenous Australians [23]. Critics argued that the social inclusion agenda lacked specificity and provided little benefit to migrant populations. In 2011, however, multiculturalism was reaffirmed by both the Minister for Immigration, Chris Bowen, and opposition leader Tony Abbott in parliamentary speeches, signaling bipartisan support for the policy.

The subsequent leadership of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull highlighted Australia's diverse population as one of its greatest assets. Turnbull's approach to multiculturalism balanced economic pragmatism with social cohesion, marking a nuanced evolution in Australia's response to cultural diversity. Post-Turnbull, multiculturalism has continued to adapt, reflecting global trends and domestic imperatives, with the Australian government committed to maintaining social harmony amidst an increasingly diverse population [24].

In the past few years, immigration policies have been characterized by a dual focus on attracting skilled migrants and managing the social impacts of migration. The government has implemented measures to streamline the immigration process and ensure that migrants can contribute effectively to the economy. Skilled migration remains a cornerstone of Australia's immigration policy. Subsequent governments have introduced programs to align migrants' skills with national economic needs while also addressing the social aspirations of new migrants through community support and integration programs.

### **3. How is Australian multiculturalism defined?**

Australia imported the concept of multiculturalism from Canada; however, a primary distinction exists between the two versions. Canadian multiculturalism arose from the nation's bicultural and bilingual nature, with British and French cultures forming significant portions of the population. In contrast, Australia had no historical experience with biculturalism or bilingualism, as it was primarily dominated by a single Anglo-British culture. Consequently, Australia's acceptance of multiculturalism was more remarkable, as policymakers emphasized unity as a fundamental value, contrasting with Canada's focus on accommodating two dominant cultural groups [25].

Australian multiculturalism encompasses four distinct phenomena [26]. First, it reflects a demographic reality, with Australia being home to an ethnically diverse population. Hence multiculturalism is a demographic reality in Australia. Second, it represents an ideological framework that acknowledges and adapts to ethnic diversity. Third, multiculturalism has evolved as a policy response to managing cultural diversity, shaped by government actions. Finally, multiculturalism encapsulates the lived experiences of diverse cultural groups interacting within common urban spaces [26].

Australian multicultural policy has exhibited both inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies [27]. A significant step toward inclusion was the government's public acknowledgment of ethnic and cultural diversity, along with the recognition of the

rights of individuals to express and maintain their cultural identities. Government programs aimed at providing support and equity to overcome barriers of culture, language, and prejudice have been central to achieving multicultural objectives [27]. However, critics of these policies argue that multiculturalism is inherently divisive, privileging ethnic minorities over the majority Anglo-Australian culture, thereby promoting “reverse racism.” [28–31]

From its inception, the Australian model of multiculturalism has faced political and ideological challenges, attracting criticism from both academics and policy-makers. Scholars argue that multiculturalism contributes to social fragmentation and threatens national unity, with some calling for a return to assimilation policies [32, 33]. Critics contend that multiculturalism undermines shared national identity and should be replaced by policies that emphasize common citizenship. Scholars such as Modood have argued that multiculturalism hinders the integration of migrants into the social, economic, and political fabric of the nation, particularly by prioritizing individual over communal identity [29].

One of the primary critiques of Australian multiculturalism is its focus on superficial aspects of ethnic minority lifestyles, diverting attention from more substantive issues such as labor market segmentation, educational inequality, and limited access to public services. Critics argue that multicultural policies, while celebrating diversity, fail to address deeper structural inequalities and racism. As a result, many scholars advocate for a more radical form of multiculturalism—often termed “deeper multiculturalism”—which seeks to combat racism and address systemic inequities faced by ethnic minority groups [30].

Jerzy Smolicz has questioned the extent of diversity sanctioned by Australian multiculturalism, advocating for a model of “cultural democracy.” In this framework, the cultural rights of migrants are balanced with the broader societal need for peace and unity. Cultural democracy emphasizes equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their cultural, religious, or racial backgrounds. This approach seeks a dynamic equilibrium between national values and the core ethnic values of migrants, such as language, family traditions, and religion [31].

Ghassan Hage’s work, *White Nation* [34], offers a critical perspective on Australian multiculturalism, which he terms “White Multiculturalism.” Hage argues that Australian multiculturalism is underpinned by a white, Anglo-centric core, which remains the dominant cultural force, shaping the nation’s identity. In his view, multiculturalism in Australia is a “white nation fantasy” that promotes ethnic culture while maintaining the supremacy of Anglo culture. He contends that the process of assimilation in Australia involves migrants acquiring “whiteness” through citizenship and other forms of national capital, such as adopting white cultural preferences and behaviors [34].

Over time, Australian multiculturalism has become a dynamic and integral part of the nation’s identity, contributing to its global reputation as a diverse and inclusive society. The celebration of Harmony Day on March 21 exemplifies Australia’s commitment to promoting cultural respect and diversity, reinforcing multiculturalism as a defining element of the country’s social fabric.

#### **4. Ethnic segregation and suburban living**

The opening of new migration channels and the adoption of multiculturalism in Australia led to substantial waves of migration, producing distinctive settlement

patterns and a polarization of ethnic groups linked to socio-economic advancements. In the early twentieth century, under the White Australia Policy, a noticeable trend emerged in major Australian cities where the affluent Anglo-Celtic population vacated the increasingly crowded inner-city areas, moving to the outer suburbs. Australia, as a predominantly urbanized society, has historically supported suburban settlement patterns, with suburbanization occurring as early as the mid-nineteenth century. During the land and building boom of the 1880s, 70% of the population expansion in cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane took place in the suburbs [35].

This early suburban growth, although somewhat disorganized, largely followed existing transport networks and was characterized by broader roads and small houses with gardens, reflecting a more prosperous and progressive way of living. These early suburban settlements were marked by social homogeneity and esthetic uniformity and were predominantly occupied by the Anglo-British population, who often restricted the settlement of other racial groups in these areas [36].

Following World War II, Australia shifted its migration policies, welcoming an influx of migrants from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, which, combined with the embrace of multiculturalism, introduced a new trend in settlement patterns [36]. New migrant communities, arriving in increasing numbers, often settled in more affordable inner-city areas, contributing to a distinct pattern of ethnic segregation. While native-born Australians and migrants from Northern and Eastern Europe typically established themselves in the expanding outer suburbs, communities of Greeks, Italians, Yugoslavs, and Maltese formed enclaves within the inner city. Over time, these ethnically concentrated communities gradually dispersed, with many of their members relocating to suburban areas as they experienced socio-economic mobility [36].

This evolving settlement pattern highlights the dynamic nature of migration and urbanization in Australia, where suburbanization and multiculturalism have shaped the country's demographic and spatial landscape.

This pattern of ethnic segregation and movement of migrants was explained by a popular model in the twentieth century, known as the Chicago Model [37]. According to this model, in the early years of migration, the ethnic minority groups faced forced segregation as a result of discrimination based on race and color. These original migrants and those who joined them initially clustered in poor quality, high-density, inner-city housing known as enclaves. Nevertheless, eventually these migrants from inner-city enclaves tend to assimilate with the social norms of the host society and disperse through the residential fabric as they become more economically stable and acquire better skills. They move out of their inner-city enclaves into more expensive and low-density outer suburbs [38].

The post-war European migrants, especially Greeks and Italians, brought a new culture of "Cosmopolitanism" with them to most large cities of Australia like Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. Cosmopolitanism was significantly defined by diverse cultural practices, particularly in food and drink [39]. Sydney and Melbourne's inner suburbs became known for their cosmopolitan atmosphere, characterized by restaurants, cafes, and pubs. The new culture popularly known as "Cosmopolitan leisure" was embodied in the everyday practices of dining out, drinking, and socializing in urban settings. This leisure culture was both a result of and a catalyst for the gentrification process. The inner-city pubs adapted to changing tastes, offering more sophisticated dining options and a variety of wines, reflecting the preferences of the new cosmopolitan residents [39].

This new culture was the key driver for gentrification of inner-city areas during the 1960 and 1970s. The shifting preferences and identities within the middle class caused them to reject traditional suburban middle-class identity in order to embrace a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Many middle-income professionals moved into renovated Victorian-era houses in inner Sydney and Melbourne to compete for social status through displays of “good taste.” University students too contributed to the gentrification and cosmopolitan culture of these cities. The post-war expansion of the universities significantly increased the student population, leading many to seek accommodation in inner-city locations. The intellectual and cultural contributions of academics were instrumental in the gentrification process. They promoted an appreciation for the terrace houses and urban living, which contrasted with the suburban lifestyle prevalent in Australia at the time [40].

The trend of inner-city gentrification received a great impetus after the 1986 economic reforms under the Australian Federal Labor government, which marked a transition toward neoliberal policies, including market liberalization and financial deregulation [41]. The economic restructuring associated with economic globalization served as a significant catalyst for gentrification. The transition toward central business district (CBD)-centric, service sector employment elevated the demand for housing in inner-city areas. As inner-city living became increasingly desirable, housing prices escalated dramatically. This transformation of urban space to cater to progressively more affluent inhabitants in city centers led to the involuntary displacement of low-income residents to suburban areas [41].

The economic reforms significantly altered the socio-economic landscape of all major cities in Australia. These policies, though initially paired with welfare support, eventually led to greater income inequality and spatial polarization. The period saw a substantial widening of the income gap, with a marked increase in both high-income and low-income households and a decline in middle-income groups. This income polarization was reflected spatially, with affluent areas becoming more concentrated in certain parts of the city, while disadvantaged areas spread outward. There was a significant shift in the geographic concentration of disadvantage from inner-city areas to middle and outer suburbs [42]. In 1986, disadvantaged populations were more concentrated in the inner city, but by 2006, these populations were largely displaced to the suburbs. The number of suburbs with high concentrations of disadvantaged populations increased, indicating a deeper entrenchment of disadvantage in suburban areas. Suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne exhibit varied levels of disadvantage, with some experiencing significant socio-economic decline while others remain relatively affluent [42].

Since the turn of the century, due to international geopolitical, global economic restructuring, and evolving national immigration and trade policies, Australia has increasingly focused on attracting skilled migrants to meet labor market demands. The skilled migration program has been designed to fill skill shortages and stimulate economic growth. Between 1996 and 2014, there was a significant rise in skilled visa intakes, with skilled permanent visas growing from 19,697 to 127,774 and temporary skilled visas (457 visas) increasing from 25,368 to 96,080 [43]. Additionally, a two-step migration process has become more prevalent. This pathway allows migrants to initially enter Australia on temporary visas, such as student or working holiday visas, and later transition to permanent residency. This approach has been beneficial in integrating migrants into the labor market and addressing short-term skill shortages [43].

The new category of skilled migrants who come with high educational qualifications and economic capabilities often settle in areas with strong job markets and

industries that require specific skills. For example, the technology and healthcare sectors in Sydney and Melbourne attract skilled migrants. They also look for established ethnic communities, which can provide social support, cultural familiarity, and assistance in navigating the settlement process, making areas with existing migrant populations particularly attractive. Furthermore, cost of living, especially housing affordability, plays a significant role in where migrants choose to settle. Suburbs and regional areas offering lower housing costs compared to inner-city locations have become popular choices. The influx of migrants into suburban areas has led to the emergence of highly multi-ethnic suburban neighborhoods, for which we have introduced the term “super-diverse ethnoburb” [44].

There is an increasing residential segregation by education and occupation across Australia’s main capital cities—Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth. This trend mirrors broader social and economic transformations seen in other industrialized countries, driven by factors such as skilled-biased technical change, labor market polarization, and declining labor market institutions [45]. High-skilled groups have become more concentrated in the inner parts of cities, whereas low-educated individuals and those in low-status occupations are increasingly overrepresented in outer suburban areas. The degree of segregation for highly educated groups diminished slightly but remained high overall. While residential segregation has increased for low-status occupations over the years, it decreased for high-status occupations. The middle occupation group saw the highest increase in segregation among all groups [46].

The history of ethnic segregation clearly demonstrates that ethnic group segregation in Australia is mainly driven by economic factors, not so much social discrimination. It has been observed that ethnic enclaves in inner-city locations in Australia were transitory, with significant intergenerational movement out of these areas into suburbs. However, both ethnicity and class significantly influence residential segregation patterns, although their impact varies across different groups and scales. For most long-established ancestry groups (e.g., British, Irish, German), residential segregation is predominantly driven by occupational class rather than ethnicity [47]. However, for more recent immigrant groups (e.g., Chinese, Indian, Lebanese), segregation is influenced by both ethnicity and class. These groups tend to be more concentrated in specific areas based on their ethnic background and socio-economic status. Additionally, the intensity of segregation varies significantly across different occupational classes within each ancestry group. Generally, lower-status occupational groups experience higher levels of segregation due to limited housing choices [47].

## **5. Super-diverse ethnoburbs: Point Cook is a typical example**

In recent decades, international geopolitical shifts, global economic restructuring, and evolving national immigration and trade policies have prompted Australia to increasingly target skilled migrants to satisfy labor market needs. The emergence of super-diverse ethnoburbs is a direct result of these evolving migration policies. Consequently, ethnic diversity has become a prominent feature of outer suburbs in Australia, particularly in capital cities. These suburbs can be categorized into various types based on their socio-economic characteristics; however, the majority exhibit significant ethnic diversity. There is a physical character that is typical of these super-diverse ethnoburbs, which has evolved as a response of the state and local governments to the fast population expansion and the associated need for housing. It represents a

qualitative urban phenomenon that has emerged as a new paradigm shift in the area of integrated and comprehensive planning and urban design in Australia [47].

Using Point Cook as a representative example of a “super-diverse ethnoburb,” this section will explore the physical environment, social environment, and community dynamics within these suburbs. It will investigate community satisfaction, issues of social isolation and alienation, and the dynamics of cross-cultural interactions. Additionally, the section will examine hidden multiculturalism by analyzing cultural expression in the built environment and the tension between conformity and cultural identity [2].

Point Cook, which is situated in the southwest of Melbourne within the City of Wyndham, exemplifies a diverse and relatively affluent community according to data from the 2021 census. The census reveals that the suburb is home to residents from over 40 different countries, with more than 51% of the population being born overseas. An analysis of the ancestry data indicates that the top five ancestries reported are Indian (17.4%), English (16.1%), Chinese (14.3%), Australian (13.8%), and Irish (4.1%). Furthermore, 59.4% of Point Cook residents speak a language other than English at home [48].

The median weekly household income in Point Cook exceeds the averages for both Victoria and Australia. This higher income level suggests a relatively affluent community with greater disposable income and financial stability. The higher income is likely a result of the prevalent employment in well-paying occupations, such as professional, managerial, administrative, and technical roles [48].

Employment in Point Cook is predominantly in professional, administrative, managerial, and technical jobs. These occupations typically require higher educational qualifications and offer better remuneration compared to tradespersons and laborers. The smaller proportion of residents employed in trades and labor-intensive jobs further highlights the suburb's professional and educated workforce. While the specific educational attainment levels are not provided, the prevalence of professional and managerial jobs implies a highly educated population. Such roles often require tertiary education or advanced qualifications, indicating that the residents of Point Cook likely have access to higher education and skill development opportunities [48].

Despite the high income and professional employment, Point Cook's SEIFA score of 1056 classifies it as average in terms of social disadvantage. This score reflects a balanced socio-economic status, taking into account factors like income, education, employment, and housing conditions. However, the high income levels, educational qualifications, and professional employment patterns suggest a community with greater economic resources and opportunities compared to the broader averages [49].

Strategic planning and development in Point Cook has unfolded in stages and has been controlled by a group of individual private developers acting within the policy framework of Wyndham City Council's Point Cook Concept Plan. The resultant development in Point Cook occurred in phases in the form of residential estates. These residential estates, also known as master-planned estates (MPEs), are an outcome of a market-led planning process that has its roots in neo-liberalism, where private land developers acquire land from landowners for development and then prepare master plans prior to seeking approval from the local government authorities (**Figure 1**) [50].

The neighborhood character of Point Cook is a typical urban character that has evolved as a result of pre-defined and controlled processes in the planning, design, and implementation of housing developments. This neighborhood character features contemporary housing styles and traditional techniques of neighborhood design derived from late nineteenth century British/North American planning models such as Garden City. These developments contain uniform streetscapes, streets lined with



Alamanda

Featherbrook

Innisfail

**Figure 1.** Master plans of housing estates of Point Cook. Source: Villawood Property Developers, Central Equity Land Developers, PEET Pvt. Ltd.



**Figure 2.** Aerial views of neighborhood parks in Point Cook. Source: Nearmap Australia Pvt. Ltd. ([www.nearmap.com.au](http://www.nearmap.com.au)).

trees, ornamental neighborhood parks equipped with playgrounds, BBQ areas, and large water bodies such as lakes and wetlands. Esthetic uniformity in streetscapes and patterns in neighborhood design layouts are important features of this new character. The physical appearance of streetscapes, community facilities, open spaces, and parks in fringe suburbs do not differ tremendously and seem to originate from similar templates or models (Figure 2) [5].

The character of these residential developments that have unfolded under private developers lacks variety and uniqueness because there is usually a single private development company that designs the entire estate, or sometimes the entire suburb. Additionally, through urban design regulations issued as government directives, the private developers exercise regulatory control over the residential built environment [44]. There are covenants and other building regulations that regulate the type of building materials, roof style, fencing, setbacks, garages, and crossovers and impose a strict restraint over the esthetic outcome of the streetscapes. The primary motive of the developers in regulating uniformity is to raise the status of these developments and thus boost the real estate values. It is also a lot cheaper to design buildings that follow standard sizes rather than experimenting with a variety of designs. The



**Figure 3.**  
*Streetscapes in Point Cook. Source: Pictures by Shilpi Tewari.*

overregulated uniformity in the design and streetscapes results in a character that is indistinguishable from one suburb to the other [44].

In addition, the role of volume builders is a significant factor in shaping the residential landscape of Point Cook. These volume builders, distinct from the developers, are primarily responsible for the construction of individual dwellings within these developments. They exert considerable influence over the esthetics of these residential areas by offering a limited selection of styles, colors, and features for the front facades of the homes. This practice is primarily driven by cost control measures, as uniformity in design proves to be more economically efficient than differentiation. The prevalence of homogeneous physical environments in Point Cook's residential developments can be attributed to this cost-effective approach to construction. These volume builders offer attractive low-cost construction options, which appeal to buyers seeking affordability. Consequently, the physical environment of these residential developments is characterized by a high degree of uniformity, driven by the economic efficiencies of cost-effective construction rather than diverse architectural innovation (**Figure 3**).

The homogeneity of the physical environment has been perceived by new migrant residents as esthetically pleasing, well-planned, modern, and contemporary. This perception suggests that professional migrants in the twenty-first century may prioritize such qualities over those related to cultural expression [2]. However, this architectural uniformity conceals the diverse cultures existing behind the front facades of these multicultural suburbs. As previously noted, residents from over 40 different countries coexist in large numbers within these externally undifferentiated dwellings. Despite the homogenous appearance of the streetscapes, a rich mix of cultures persists within the private spaces of these homes [2].

In a multicultural social environment that promotes cultural pluralism, migrants from various cultural backgrounds often retain their cultural traditions and preferences, including food, music, television, customs, and beliefs. However, in Point Cook, this vibrant cultural diversity is subtly concealed behind the uniform facades of a

tightly controlled housing market. Examining Point Cook and other super-diverse ethnoburbs through the lens of Australia's political ideology on multiculturalism, which advocates for cultural pluralism, raises several pertinent questions: Is there a need for these diverse cultures to be expressed openly rather than being hidden behind homogeneous facades? Should this hidden multiculturalism assert itself more prominently in both the physical and communal environments of these suburbs? Is it necessary for this cultural diversity to emerge and interact more visibly in the public realm?

As a part of a PhD project, a survey was conducted to explore the lived experiences of residents in Point Cook. The survey included questions about the physical and social environment of their suburb to gauge the level of satisfaction among the new migrant population residing in this suburb [2]. According to the survey responses, residents described Point Cook as a well-planned, attractive, and modern suburb equipped with various amenities and facilities. The residents valued their community, neighbors, and the social environment over the physical attributes of the area [2].

The residents of Point Cook valued the “quiet and peaceful” environment, which was a primary attribute influencing their residential preferences. According to the 2021 Census data, approximately 51% of Point Cook's residents are recent migrants from various countries, seeking improved employment opportunities and living conditions compared to their countries of origin. These migrants hail from densely populated nations such as India and China, where they cannot afford large living spaces and are eager to invest in property. Additionally, migrants from countries experiencing internal unrest, such as Iraq and Libya, are attracted to Australia in search of a stable and tranquil environment for their families. Consequently, the serene and peaceful nature of these new suburbs is particularly appealing to both groups of migrants [44].

The residents also described their suburb as “friendly and family-oriented,” largely because a significant percentage of the population in Point Cook consists of new migrants who seem to value and identify with the concept of “friendliness” in their neighborhood. Their responses reflect a longing for a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in their new host society, especially as they navigate the challenges of establishing new connections [44].

The tranquil and serene atmosphere of Point Cook has led to feelings of loneliness and alienation among its residents. Residents noted that despite their geographic proximity, people often live in isolation. They attributed this to the busy schedules typical of middle-class living in these suburbs, which leave little time for social activities [44]. This lack of social involvement among neighbors due to work commitments contributed to the alienation experienced by residents. Additionally, the ethnic diversity within the community, particularly among smaller ethnic groups, may exacerbate feelings of alienation and fragmentation. Residents from different cultural backgrounds often socialize primarily within their own cultural groups, demonstrating reluctance to form lasting connections with individuals from other ethnicities [5, 51].

The local council organizes many festivals and cross-cultural events in Point Cook to promote multicultural engagement, connectivity, and unity within the community. Despite efforts by local councils, the connections made at these events often do not endure beyond the event itself. As people become busy with their daily lives, they struggle to maintain these connections over time. Although there is some community cohesion evident among certain ethnic groups, such as Indians and Chinese [52]. The Indian community in Point Cook displays a higher level of connection and interaction. This helps to counteract feelings of loneliness more effectively than in the predominantly Anglo community. An analysis of community events programs in Point Cook reveals that the Indian community engages with one another through

various events organized at community centers in the suburb. In contrast, there are very few events organized by the Anglo population, apart from those initiated by the council for the broader community [53, 54].

The PhD study revealed that irrespective of some of the challenges that residents face in Point Cook, such as traffic congestion, slow internet connection, crime, and lack of security, the residents seemed to be generally happy and satisfied with their choice to live in Point Cook. It could be inferred that irrespective of some issues, their status aspirations are satisfied by living in what they perceive as contemporary, lavishly designed, and well-equipped neighborhoods, and that they are buying into the broader “Australian dream” of home ownership [2].

Point Cook residents identify with a globalized, professional middle-class community, characterized by a specific economic status and age group that aligns with the targets of urban planners. This indicates that new migrants arrive in Australia with certain expectations and that these expectations can be met when they belong to a particular professional and economic bracket. Furthermore, it suggests that their cultural backgrounds do not impede their aspirations. While it is important for these residents to retain certain aspects of their culture, such as food, television, language, festivals, and religious practices, they do not demand the open expression of their cultural priorities in the public realm. This highlights their ability to integrate and find satisfaction within the broader community framework without necessitating extensive public acknowledgment of their individual cultural practices.

The residents’ lack of interest in showcasing their cultural backgrounds within the built environment calls into question the concept of hidden multiculturalism. What could be the reasons for the lack of interest among migrants to openly express cultural preferences? Either it could be that the residents genuinely believe that the environments provided by councils and developers meet their needs perfectly, or perhaps they have never been offered alternatives. Another possibility is that most migrants prefer to conform rather than to express themselves and stand out. It may also be that they are more inclined to publicly identify with their social and economic class rather than their cultural background, or that they aspire to “become” Australian and view their house and neighborhood as intrinsic parts of Australian residential streetscapes.

Whatever the reason, it suggests that hidden multiculturalism might not be a significant issue after all. If the residents of Point Cook show no desire to express their culture in the built environment, it may be more appropriate for this multiculturalism to remain subtly integrated within the homogenous facades of the streetscapes rather than making overt displays.

## **6. Conclusion**

The dismantling of the White Australia Policy and the subsequent adoption of multiculturalism have significantly influenced Australia’s immigration policies, fostering a diverse and inclusive society. The influx of skilled migrants, driven by economic and social aspirations, has contributed to the emergence of super-diverse ethnoburbs like Point Cook. These suburbs are characterized by high levels of ethnic diversity and a professional, middle-class population. Despite the cultural heterogeneity, residents prioritize the quiet, peaceful, and family-oriented nature of their neighborhoods, which aligns with their expectations and aspirations.

This chapter has examined the nuanced dynamics of multiculturalism and migrant settlement patterns in the outer suburbs of Australian cities, giving rise

to ethnoburbs. Using Point Cook as an example of a super-diverse ethnoburb, the chapter reveals a complex interplay of factors shaping the lived experiences of new migrants, including the socio-economic attributes, urban planning strategies, and cultural integration mechanisms. It highlights the challenges of social isolation and alienation that some residents face due to their busy lifestyles and the tendency to socialize within their ethnic groups. While local councils have made efforts to promote cross-cultural interactions through events and festivals, these connections often do not persist beyond the events themselves. The lack of a cohesive, long-term social integration strategy remains a concern.

The concept of hidden multiculturalism emerges as a critical theme in understanding the settlement patterns in these super-diverse ethnoburbs. Despite the rich cultural diversity, there is a noticeable lack of interest among residents in expressing their cultural identities in the built environment. This suggests that hidden multiculturalism might not be problematic, as residents appear to be satisfied with their living conditions and do not demand public displays of their cultural preferences.

There is a current lack of cultural expression of migrant cultural beliefs and preferences in the physical environment; however, there is scope to develop strategies that could foster more inclusive and cohesive communities. Understanding the motivations and aspirations of new migrants can inform urban planning and policymaking, ensuring that the diverse needs of these communities are met while promoting social cohesion and integration. The journey toward a multicultural society in Australia has been marked by significant progress and challenges. The case of Point Cook exemplifies the complex reality of modern suburban life for new migrants, reflecting both the successes and the areas needing attention in the broader narrative of Australian multiculturalism.

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## Chapter 14

# Multiculturalism and Cultural Tolerance

*Ntshengedzeni Evans Netshivhambe*

### Abstract

In an interconnected world shaped by globalisation, and multiculturalism, global migration reshapes social landscapes. South Africa, within the African continent, faces a daily influx of individuals seeking refuge or opportunity. Since the advent of democracy, illegal immigration has become contentious, with increased corruption at entry points. Xenophobic violence often scapegoats foreign nationals for economic struggles, including human trafficking, crime and the sale of expired goods. These tensions manifest as cultural clashes and are worsened by crimes like robbery and kidnapping, often linked to foreign-owned businesses. This challenges the fundamental right to safety and security, raising questions about the coexistence of life security and multiculturalism. This chapter explores the interplay between life security and cultural diversity in South Africa, examining literature, socio-political dynamics and cultural tensions. It aims to foster inclusive communities where everyone, regardless of origin, can live without fear and discrimination, advocating for a future where diversity is celebrated.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, conflict and tolerance, cultural clashes and tensions, inclusive communities, societal attitudes

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### 1. Introduction

South Africa relies heavily on its Constitution as an instrumental framework for informing its foreign policy position regarding the protection of its citizens within the ambit of democracy and human rights. Chapter 2 of the Constitution underpins the Bill of Rights, serving as the essential foundation and guiding framework for human rights. Additionally, the Freedom Charter is an important document that laid the groundwork for rebuilding and reshaping South Africa after 1994 [1]. However, while these documents are instruments that are designed to protect both the citizens and the foreign nationals living among them, they remain documents that inform policy. Documents alone cannot bring change; it is up to individuals to use these cornerstone documents to effect change in society. Understanding foreign policy is crucial to comprehending how South Africa interacts with its foreign state partners on matters related to treaties, agreements and issues arising from their citizens living

among South Africans. Klaaren and Halim [2] postulate that South Africa's foreign policy serves as the instrument to maintain smooth dialogue with other foreign state organs. It addresses issues and concerns in the field of international relations and ensures that decisions made by the executive and other public officials align with the country's Constitution. It is important to note that some civil society organisations, such as the Helen Suzman Foundation, which are dedicated to protecting and promoting human rights do so by ensuring that the government and its various bodies responsible for administering human rights are held accountable. These organisations have voiced their frustration regarding South Africa's foreign policy position, which seems to deviate from the constitutional framework when handling the Bill of Rights for its citizens [3]. Multiculturalism and harmonious coexistence between nationals and foreign nationals must be guided by the country's human rights laws to prevent friction, disputes and hatred among people. The foreign policy framework should protect both nationals and foreign nationals, ensuring accountability for wrongdoing. Additionally, the framework should leverage its authority to encourage cooperation from the governments of foreign nationals in addressing problems, particularly those involving undocumented individuals.

## **2. Effects and challenges of managing immigration policies**

In African culture, when a visitor arrives in a community, there is a customary practice of properly introducing the visitor to the community. This introduction informs the villagers and the local chief about the visitor's presence, ensuring that the community takes responsibility if anything happens to them. This practice is particularly important if the visitor commits a crime or passes away, as community authorities are then accountable for meting out justice or burying them. The South African government, however, is failing to properly record people when they enter the country. As a result, many individuals become undocumented foreign nationals, taking advantage of their status to commit crimes without being traced back to their countries of origin. This situation creates tension and friction between undocumented foreign nationals and local citizens. It also creates tension with documented foreign nationals, because they are here legitimately, trying to make a living, because crime ultimately affects both groups. When undocumented foreign nationals commit crimes, local citizens often retaliate with violence, burning properties owned by foreign nationals and sometimes killing them. The locals feel unsafe in their own country and believe the government is not taking adequate action regarding undocumented foreign nationals. Gordon ([4], p. 2) postulates that South African history has been one that relies on protests and violent retaliation due to the military policing used by the apartheid government and such continues to be how the majority of South Africans resort to quick solutions to their social problems.

The police force should be responsible for protecting people from illegal activities committed by individuals who are in the country illegally. However, due to high crime rates and widespread poverty, some members of the police force accept bribes from foreign nationals to allow them to remain in the country illegally. This corruption undermines trust between the police and national citizens, as bribery and the protection of criminals erode confidence in law enforcement. The situation also exacerbates tensions between national citizens and those who are legally in the country, as all foreign nationals are often unfairly grouped together, regardless of their legal status. Border gates have become a point of easy access for many foreign nationals who enter

the country illegally by bribing their way through. Gordon ([4], p. 3) postulates that 'while crime rates have decreased globally, South Africa's crime rate continues to show a consistent incline' and heinous crimes such as murder, hijacking, kidnapping, human trafficking and drug smuggling are often committed by undocumented foreign nationals, who frequently evade capture due to their inability to be traced after the crimes. Many of these individuals are even hired as hitmen to target people within the country. A particularly disturbing case involved the rapper Kiernan 'AKA' Forbes, who was gunned down in Cape Town with his friend Tebello 'Tibz' Motshoane. This case, which garnered significant media attention due to the victim's celebrity status, involved two foreign nationals from Eswatini and is just one of many similar incidents.

In a study conducted by Zitha and van Rensburg [5], interviews were held with 40 foreign nationals incarcerated in South African correctional centres for criminal offences. The researchers aimed to understand the motivations behind the crimes for which these individuals were charged. Of the 40 prisoners, 20 were arrested for murder, representing 50% of the study's participants. The remaining individuals were arrested for other crimes, including rape, attempted murder and robbery. Zitha and van Rensburg ([5], p. 12) further stipulate that 'the most significant and practical way to measure crime is through murder. It is the most serious and final crime.'

According to the *White Paper on International Migration* [6], the risk associated to the increased number of undocumented foreign nationals poses a wider social threat.

*National security and public safety depend on knowing the identity and civil status of every person within a country. In addition, the presence of communities and individuals who are not known to the state but for whom the state has to provide, puts pressure on resources and increases the risk of social conflicts. ([6], p. 56)*

Every country should prioritise the security of its citizens, which includes consistently monitoring individuals who pose a social threat to the government. If there are any lapses in this monitoring, the government will need to allocate resources to evaluate and manage the potential threat to the nation. Cultural intolerance is often exacerbated by the lack of effective international relations laws designed to prioritise the protection of a country's citizens. In South Africa, changing government policies have contributed to this issue, with shifts from the first democratic administration to the current one. When Nelson Mandela, the first democratic president of South Africa, assumed office, his primary task was a multilateral foreign policy, which focused on uniting the broken nation of black and white South Africans, who were at a boiling point in terms of tolerance. This responsibility was addressed through initiatives like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which aimed to reconcile and reunite black and white communities living in persistently strained conditions and to make reparations for crimes committed during apartheid. The transition from the newly elected first democratic government to subsequent ANC administrations was a critical period for South African democracy, particularly in terms of handling cultural tolerance.

Although the shift from white to black leadership was initially applauded as seamless, South Africa soon became a destination attracting many people seeking economic and democratic opportunities [7, 8]. The newly democratic government's commitment to peaceful negotiations and the principles enshrined in the Constitution, particularly the statement 'South Africa belongs to everyone who lives in it', encouraged many to come in large numbers to explore what the country had to

offer. Meanwhile, the living conditions and tolerance levels between black and white people in South Africa still resemble the segregation policies of apartheid, albeit in a modern, democratic context. People appear to tolerate each other for the sake of democracy, but this tolerance often lacks genuine warmth and understanding. Unfortunately, despite bold statements aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination and addressing South Africa's past of strong segregation policies under apartheid, the country began to attract many foreign nationals seeking business opportunities and better prospects. Not all these individuals came with good intentions or followed legal routes to enter the country. Entering South Africa illegally often provides a free pass to criminal activities, as such individuals are not documented in any South African government system, making it difficult to trace the perpetrators [4].

### **3. Change of government administrations and their impact on immigration policy**

After the first democratic government established peace and reconciliation commissions, the second administration, led by Thabo Mbeki, introduced new policies aimed at strengthening economic development and enhancing South Africa's position in international law. Mbeki's policies were centred on the concept of African Renaissance, which focused on promoting African unity and welcoming neighbouring countries. This approach was intended to express gratitude to these neighbouring nations for their support during South Africa's struggle against apartheid and to foster a sense of solidarity and cooperation across the continent. Mbeki's policies were aimed at reunification of all Africans through the acknowledgement that we are all Africans, he championed the values of '*Ubuntu*', which encouraged unity, tolerance and acceptance of one another ([9], p. 106).

Many African countries showed solidarity with South Africa by accepting exiled South Africans during the apartheid era, demonstrating sympathy and support for the oppressed black community [10]. The second ANC-led administration under Thabo Mbeki embraced this spirit of African unity and extended a welcoming hand to those who had supported South Africa in its time of need. However, this noble gesture inadvertently opened the door to opportunists, including individuals from countries that had not provided refuge during the apartheid period. As a result, South Africa began to be perceived as a country that welcomed anyone seeking refuge and the opportunity to live within its borders. South Africa began to experience an influx of foreign nationals coming both legally and illegally for various reasons. Unfortunately, illegal immigrants soon outnumbered those entering the country through legal channels, partly due to relaxed regulations at South Africa's borders, seaports and airports [10, 11]. This situation led to problems that subsequent administrations found increasingly difficult to manage.

The influx of foreign nationals, especially those entering the country illegally, exacerbates job competition and survival struggles. Kanayo et al. ([12], p. 68) argue that the discovery of mines in South Africa by Europeans created a demand for labour, leading to the recruitment of workers from neighbouring countries for cheap labour. However, as more people migrate to South Africa seeking better opportunities, it becomes increasingly challenging for the government to meet the growing demands for social services [13]. For example, government hospitals are often overwhelmed by foreign nationals, sparking heated debates about the insufficiency of beds and medication [4, 5]. These resources are allocated based on the number of South African

citizens expected to use these services, leading to shortages ([12], p. 69). Kihato ([14], p. 263) asserts that government budget allocations to various ministries responsible for service delivery often fail to reflect the actual population needing these services. This discrepancy arises because immigrant communities, who frequently access these services, are typically excluded from local service delivery projections. Consequently, it is akin to planning for an invisible population.

Crush and Williams ([15], p. 3) further explain that the apartheid government in South Africa permitted undocumented foreign nationals from neighbouring countries to enter and stay in the country due to the availability of cheap labour. These individuals were allowed to remain in South Africa and even start families, forming a crucial part of the labour force. In townships, the prevalence of tuckshops operated by foreign nationals has compounded this problem [16]. Local youth, unable to compete with these foreign-run businesses, find themselves at a disadvantage in the trading and wholesale sectors. Foreign nationals often collaborate to secure stock at lower prices and distribute it within their networks. They may also use undercover manufacturing and distribution channels exclusive to their communities, further undercutting local competitors. This unequal competition not only affects economic opportunities for young South Africans but also fuels resentment and tension between different cultural groups. Without effective intervention to address unemployment and create fair trading environments, these issues will persist, deepening divisions and undermining efforts towards social cohesion.

The two administrations following Thabo Mbeki's inherited immigration policies that had already begun to open the doors widely to foreign nationals and which were becoming increasingly unmanageable. The situation worsened under the third administration led by President Jacob Zuma. During Zuma's tenure, South Africa began to experience significant foreign influence, the most notorious being that of the Gupta family, from India, who gained control over many government structures. This period saw top government officials and opportunists exploiting these structures to loot government resources, exacerbating the problems related to immigration and governance. Senior government officials granted citizenship to powerful foreign nationals in exchange for ministerial positions or other favours. This practice was particularly evident with the Gupta family, who were very close to then-President Jacob Zuma. Zuma frequently changed his cabinet to facilitate certain deals within ministries, allowing the Gupta family to operate without any disruption in their business activities. This was the highest form of corruption, which Olivier de Sardan [17] deems a 'corruption complex', to describe the extensive nature of this type of corruption, which goes beyond the simple acts of bribery for specific services to more formalised practices carried out by senior officials. These officials professionally orchestrate corruption to benefit themselves and their families, making it appear as a legitimate business practice between government and non-governmental entities. They enable this process in such a way that they are not directly involved in the operational aspects of granting business contracts. Instead, they operate at an enabling level, receiving kickbacks or other rewards once the business is secured.

De Sardan ([17], p. 30) describes complex corruption, which operates on multiple levels, as a routine part of business. This can be categorised into what I term 'clean corruption' and 'dirty corruption'. Clean corruption meticulously removes evidence and follows due diligence to hide any wrongdoing. It operates under the guise of normal business practices while secretly engaging in corrupt activities. On the other hand, dirty corruption does not bother with concealing its tracks. It is not institutionalised but occurs as quick and sometimes one-off transactions that can also involve

killing. Clean corruption is embedded within institutions, forming a difficult-to-sever chain of operations involving many individuals. Even when exposed, eradicating it is challenging due to its widespread and deeply ingrained nature. Much like gang members who adhere to a code of silence to protect each other and their families, those involved in clean corruption deny their participation, even under threat of severe consequences.

When the Gupta matter surfaced in South Africa, media reports and parliamentary discussions revealed that the Gupta family was granted South African citizenship by then-Minister Malusi Gigaba before their naturalisation process was officially completed ([18], p. 13) [19]. Such cases highlight the pervasive nature of corruption within government structures. If senior officials are involved in such corruption, it raises concerns about the extent of bribery within departments responsible for handling sensitive documentation. These departments may be accepting bribes daily to grant official citizenship to individuals who do not meet the necessary criteria.

The entire situation was investigated by Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, who uncovered that foreign nationals were effectively running the country, making decisions about who was fired or hired within senior government ministries. Madonsela declared that South Africa was under state capture [20], with the state being controlled by wealthy families and influential individuals who prioritised their personal interests over those of the South African people. While many foreign nationals arrived as legitimate businesspeople and investors, others came as pastors who used their influence to exploit South Africans financially through religious means. These various government administrations illustrate how South Africa's international relations laws deteriorated, leading to a significant number of people entering the country illegally. Many of these individuals began to recognise the corruption within the Ministry of Home Affairs and border control departments. They started bribing officials responsible for naturalisation to obtain citizenship status. This allowed them to operate as national citizens, enabling them to open bank accounts and secure loans to start businesses. As a result, many foreign nationals used these strategies to gain control of their affairs in South Africa. Additionally, they would call their friends and families to join them, helping them obtain citizenship through the same corrupt means.

#### **4. Corrupt strategies for obtaining citizenship**

Naturalisation through marital status has significantly increased corruption in South Africa. Many women find themselves unwittingly married to foreign nationals, while numerous foreign men enter into marital agreements with South African women. In these transactions, the women are paid to help the foreign nationals obtain citizenship. According to the White Paper on Marriages in South Africa [21], the following findings were discovered regarding civil unions in the period from 2015 to 2019 in relation to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).

*The DHA receives at least 2 000 queries about illegal marriages a year. In the period between 1 April 2018 and 31 May 2019, the DHA discovered 2 132 cases of fraudulent marriages. Of these 1 160 were found to be fraudulent and were annulled by the department. Some of these happen because of fraud syndicates consisting of DHA officials and some marriage officers outside the department. Such marriage officers knowingly submit fictitious marriages for registration and, working with Home Affairs officials, such marriages get registered on the NPR. ([21], p. 19)*

The statistics on fraudulent marriages highlight the severe issue of corruption among Home Affairs officials in South Africa, particularly in facilitating the illegal naturalisation of foreign nationals. Despite the marriages being fake, officials within the Ministry of Home Affairs enable these unlawful practices. According to Callixte ([22], p. 525), foreign nationals submit fake documents to the Department of Home Affairs, often in collusion with DHA officials, allowing these fraudulent marriages to be registered. Due to poverty and unemployment, many women agree to these arrangements, registering marriages at the Ministry of Home Affairs even though the marriages are not genuine. This kind of arrangement, which Tati [23] refers to as 'bogus marriages' are used as part of economic hardships exploitation and contributes to the corruption within the system. In these arrangements, women are typically paid either a lump sum or a monthly amount to enter into sham marriages with foreign nationals. The foreign nationals, in turn, obtain citizenship status within a specific period after marrying a South African woman. The marriage is merely a business transaction, with the individuals involved continuing to live with their actual spouses and fulfilling only the obligations outlined in their agreement. This exploitative practice is often driven by the women's need to alleviate their economic hardships, taking advantage of the corruptible systems within the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Television series and investigative reports have exposed many of these tactics, highlighting the reality and prevalence of such schemes. These exposés reveal that the agreements are often not honoured, with foreign nationals ceasing payments once they secure their citizenship. Consequently, the women involved find themselves without the promised financial support and entangled in legal complications. Such practices not only exploit vulnerable women but also undermine the integrity of South Africa's immigration system. The corruption and deceit involved in these transactions contribute to broader societal issues, including the perpetuation of poverty and the erosion of trust in governmental institutions. Addressing this problem requires a multifaceted approach, including stricter enforcement of immigration laws, increased transparency within the Ministry of Home Affairs and support for those economically vulnerable to such exploitation. These kinds of corruptions further increase tensions between nationals and foreign nationals within the country. The sight of South African nationals being exploited due to poverty and vulnerability by foreign nationals exacerbates these tensions, leading to resentment and distrust. The study conducted by the Democracy and Governance Research Programme of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2008 after the eruption of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa reveals that among other things corruption was one of the leading causes of the ensuing violence ([24], p. 4).

These frequent instances of corruption involving foreign nationals suggest the complicity of South African officials in fostering such activities [22]. This, in turn, exacerbates tensions between foreign nationals and local citizens, leading to a heightened sense of insecurity among South Africans. Many locals feel that foreign nationals cannot be trusted and do not coexist with them in good faith. This distrust stems from numerous incidents observed in public spaces and on television, where it appears that some foreign nationals have come to South Africa not to build their professions respectfully, but to exploit the country. A significant concern is within the retail sector, where some foreign nationals sell expired food merchandise and fail to comply with health regulations. This disregard for proper standards not only endangers the health of South Africans but also reinforces negative perceptions and fuels further distrust and resentment. In crowded urban areas where people are often crammed into flats and squatter camps, some foreign nationals turn to human

trafficking and drug dealing as a means of survival [23]. Disturbingly, these individuals frequently sell drugs to minors, who, while under the influence, are at high risk of being trafficked to other countries as cheap labour or sex workers. Incidents of child kidnapping and street snatching are frequent, and in many cases, the perpetrators are undocumented foreign nationals. It is important to understand that while not all South Africans are xenophobic towards foreigners, similarly, not all foreign nationals engage in dubious activities. There are many law-abiding foreign nationals with good intentions who are unfairly tarnished by the actions of a few, and their reputations should not be unjustly maligned.

Matters of criminal activities fuel tensions between South Africans and foreign nationals, making multiculturalism and cultural tolerance significant challenges. The rise in crime has become one of the most pressing concerns for local citizens, who no longer feel safe in their own country. Incidents of robbery and violence not only heighten this sense of insecurity but also deter potential investors and individuals considering living in South Africa. As a result, South Africans have grown increasingly resentful of foreign nationals, whether they are in the country legally or illegally, due to the association of many criminal activities with foreign nationals. As Mlambo et al. ([10], p. 113) clearly state, 'With South Africa gradually re-integrating into continental and international politics, Pretoria witnessed an influx of foreign nationals to its shores, creating a hostile relationship between locals and foreign nationals'. Crush and Williams ([15], p. 3) assert that since 1990, immigration from other African countries to South Africa has significantly increased, as South Africa is viewed as the preferred destination in Africa.

The government needs to implement robust foreign policies that effectively manage both illegal and legal migrants. Such policies should promote multiculturalism and cultural tolerance while also benefitting the economy. Often, tensions between national citizens arise from government policies that fail to adequately protect the local population. According to Kanayo et al. [12], most South Africans generally feel that immigrants do not make a significant contribution to the economy, while on a global scale, research indicates that the economies of developed countries have been significantly built by immigrants ([12], p. 68). Some of the concerns by South Africans relate to informal business trading, such as in townships and semi-urban areas, where many foreign nationals operate unregistered tuckshops [8]. These businesses evade tax regulations and do not comply with health and safety standards for the food they sell. When incidents occur, such as children falling ill or even dying from consuming unsafe food from these unregulated shops, local citizens react with anger and frustration. This resentment sometimes leads to violence, including the destruction of foreign-owned shops and theft of stock. Effective foreign policies and regulatory enforcement are essential to prevent such conflicts, ensure public safety and foster a more harmonious coexistence between local and foreign nationals, because most foreign nationals left their countries due to conflicts, wars, hunger and violence as asylum seekers [3].

There have been numerous incidents where local citizens resort to violence in response to cases of poisoning or the sale of unhealthy food, particularly when these issues involve foreign-owned, unregulated tuckshops. Despite the government's awareness of these activities, little is done to address the problems, primarily because foreign nationals often use bribery to influence police and other officials, effectively suppressing action on these issues. When local citizens perceive that the government and law enforcement are not taking effective measures and are instead protecting foreign nationals due to bribery, they may resort to taking the law into their own

hands. The HSRC report of 2008 highlights several concerns, particularly noting that the low wages of police officials create a vulnerability where foreign nationals can use bribery to evade legal consequences for their criminal activities, taking advantage of the underpaid police force ([24], p. 7). This often results in the destruction of foreign-owned property and violent confrontations. Such reactions reflect the frustration and helplessness felt by residents who are left vulnerable in their communities. As these conflicts escalate, they further erode trust in both government institutions and foreign nationals, exacerbating tensions and creating unsafe conditions for everyone involved. Addressing these issues requires robust enforcement of regulations, transparency in governance and effective measures to ensure that all businesses comply with health and safety standards.

South Africa has faced numerous incidents of xenophobic attacks, largely fuelled by concerns over the government's management of foreign nationals and the promotion of social cohesion and multicultural harmony [12]. These attacks are detrimental not only to the country's international image but also to the well-being of its citizens, regardless of any justifications provided for such violence. The government's response has been inadequate, failing to implement strong measures to address the issue effectively. There is a lack of decisive action to deport illegal immigrants and enforce strict regulations for those residing legally in the country. This inaction exacerbates tensions between foreign nationals and local citizens. Additionally, the perception that foreign nationals receive job preferences over South Africans further heightens these tensions. To mitigate these problems, the government needs to take a more proactive approach, particularly with employers who are breaking the law by employing foreign nationals for cheap labour, which is historically a system that has been largely used to exploit black people [3]. This includes enforcing immigration laws rigorously, ensuring fair employment practices and promoting initiatives that foster integration and mutual respect among different communities. Addressing these issues comprehensively will help to reduce xenophobic sentiments and contribute to a more harmonious society.

## **5. Exploitation of foreign workers for cost savings**

South Africa has a long history of exploiting workers for cheap labour, dating back to the discovery of minerals [4, 12, 25–27]. While this exploitation has not entirely ceased, it has evolved in democratic South Africa, often involving foreign nationals to bypass statutory compliance. The government has introduced measures, such as implementing a minimum wage, to address ongoing exploitation, particularly in the farming and mining sectors. However, tensions arise within multicultural communities due to these labour disputes. Foreign nationals, willing to accept lower wages, are perceived by some South Africans as taking their jobs, leading to conflicts and blame between the two groups [8].

Often, companies that seek to evade compliance with national labour regulations encourage the employment of foreign workers. These businesses prefer to save costs by hiring foreign nationals who are willing to work for lower wages. Rugunanan ([8], p. 30) avers that 'migrant workers enter into a range of low-level service occupations such as cleaning, caring, tending, selling and fixing for the wealthier sections of society'. Because many of these foreign workers are not properly registered in the government system, they are less likely to raise complaints about their lower pay. By employing foreign workers under these conditions, companies avoid the expenses

associated with complying with statutory regulations, such as paying for employee benefits, taxes and other mandatory deductions like Pay as You Earn (PAYE) and medical aid contributions. This practice allows companies to significantly cut costs, as they do not have to provide the same level of compensation or benefits that are required for South African employees. Consequently, this preference for cheaper labour exacerbates tensions between foreign nationals and local citizens, as it not only undermines fair wage practices but also contributes to the perception of unfair job competition.

In the trucking industry, many companies in South Africa have employed foreign nationals to cut operational costs by paying lower wages. This practice is part of a broader trend where businesses prefer hiring foreign workers who are often willing to work for less, allowing companies to save on labour expenses and avoid complying with local statutory regulations. Rugunanan ([8], p. 34) argues that 'working in ethnic enclaves opens up the migrants to exploitative labour practices of low wages and long working hours. While the migrants appear to tolerate these exploitative conditions, their overriding concerns are to remit money as a form of necessity and to remain in employment'. Recently, this preference has led to significant tensions between foreign nationals and South African truck drivers. Kanayo et al. ([12], p. 67) suggest that research indicates tensions between multicultural communities are often exacerbated by rising crime rates. This increase in crime is driven by competition for jobs, access to limited resources and high levels of unemployment. The exploitation of foreign workers and the perceived favouritism towards them have heightened these conflicts, contributing to a sense of injustice among local drivers. The situation has escalated to the point where protests have resulted in the torching of trucks, with vehicles being burned beyond recognition as a form of demonstration against the discriminatory practices of employers. These incidents reflect deep-seated frustrations and highlight the need for more equitable employment practices and regulatory oversight. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that ensures fair wages and benefits for all workers while also fostering a more inclusive and harmonious working environment.

Labour unions have been actively advocating against unfair employment practices that contribute to tensions between foreign nationals and local workers. These unions argue that such practices create inequities and exacerbate conflicts in the workforce. Unfortunately, when national citizens protest against these practices, the media often portrays them as xenophobic or opposed to multiculturalism. This portrayal oversimplifies the issue and misrepresents the underlying cause of their frustration. Rugunanan ([8], p. 35) postulates that 'from various media accounts, migrants from Africa are here to take jobs, and contribute to the increase in crime'. The reality is that local workers are targeting foreign nationals as a visible representation of the broader problem, even though the actual source of the issue lies with the employers who enforce discriminatory hiring practices. Many of these workers lack the means to confront employers directly, as they are not employed by the companies making these decisions [25]. Consequently, their protests often manifest in conflicts with their foreign peers, further fuelling tensions and perpetuating negative stereotypes. Addressing these issues effectively requires a nuanced understanding of the underlying causes of discontent. It is essential to focus on reforming employment practices and ensuring fair treatment for all workers, rather than attributing the problem solely to interactions between foreign nationals and local citizens.

The mining sector in South Africa has faced significant challenges due to illegal mining activities, with a large portion of these operations being conducted by

undocumented foreign nationals. This issue has escalated to the point where both the police and the National Defence Force in some cases have had to intervene to address the situation. One notable example involves illegal mining operations at closed mines, where unauthorised miners gained access to extract minerals. These activities have been particularly associated with a group known as the Zama Zama miners, who are part of the Basotho gang. The Zama Zama miners are known for their violent methods, and they operate outside the South African mining laws in which they often carry firearms to protect their operations and assert control over the illegal mining sites ([28], p. 53). The involvement of law enforcement and military forces underscores the severity of the problem and the complexities involved in managing illegal mining. The presence of heavily armed groups further complicates efforts to curb these activities and maintain safety in the affected areas. Addressing the issue requires a comprehensive approach that includes stringent law enforcement measures, improved monitoring of mining activities and strategies to address the root causes driving individuals to engage in illegal mining. Illegal mining activities are driven by various reasons such as poverty, hunger, unclosed shafts and greed including unlicensed operations [29], which have increasingly created heated tensions between foreign nationals and local illegal miners.

The South African government needs to develop and implement policies that ensure both the protection of its citizens and the fair treatment of foreign nationals while promoting multiculturalism and social cohesion. Effective policies should address the needs of all residents and foster an environment where diverse cultures can coexist harmoniously. When the legal framework fails to safeguard the rights and well-being of its citizens, it can lead to increased lawlessness and erode trust in government institutions. This breakdown in legal protection often results in heightened tensions between different cultural groups and undermines efforts to build a cohesive and inclusive society. To prevent such outcomes, it is essential for the government to create and enforce regulations that protect both national and foreign individuals, support equitable opportunities and uphold human rights. By establishing a robust and fair legal system, the government can help mitigate conflicts, enhance cultural tolerance and build a more unified and resilient society. Different cultural groups should be encouraged to share space and live together which will enhance level of tolerance instead of living in isolation [8].

Companies and individuals who exploit the system for personal gain must be held accountable and serve as examples of the government's commitment to fostering a genuinely harmonious multicultural society. South Africa, often hailed as the 'rainbow nation', promotes unity and peaceful coexistence among its diverse population. However, realising this vision requires more than just rhetoric; it demands tangible efforts to ensure safety and security for all citizens. Effective enforcement of laws against exploitation and corruption is essential. The government must prioritise creating a secure environment where every individual, regardless of background, feels protected and valued. People are more likely to embrace multiculturalism and live together harmoniously when they are assured that their safety is not compromised by the actions of others. For South Africa to truly embody its slogan, 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it', it must translate this promise into a secure and supportive reality for every resident, within its Bill of Rights foundation for respect of all human rights; ([3], p. 225) [30].

In a society like South Africa, plagued by deep-seated issues such as inequality, poverty and racial discrimination, the divide between the rich and the poor significantly impacts social harmony. The disparity between these groups is stark: the wealthy often exploit the poor as cheap labour, while the impoverished may resort to

theft and other illicit means to survive [3]. This economic divide not only exacerbates tensions between different racial and social groups but also fuels a cycle of resentment and conflict. The poor, feeling marginalised and disenfranchised, might view stealing from the rich as their only viable means of improving their circumstances, further increasing the strain on multicultural coexistence. As the rich continue to accumulate wealth and the poor remain trapped in a cycle of poverty, the social fabric of the nation is frayed, making it difficult for individuals to coexist peacefully. The stark inequality drives a wedge between communities, undermining efforts towards cultural tolerance and mutual respect.

When national citizens observe that many foreign nationals seem to be benefitting from the exploitation of an inadequate and unregulated system, their trust in the government begins to erode. This disillusionment drives them to seek alternative means of survival. Foreign nationals, in turn, criticise the government's failure to protect them from crime and theft. Inequality exacerbates this situation, leading to a scenario where a few individuals accumulate wealth while others resort to robbery and house-breaking as a means of subsistence. The South African government has attempted to address this disparity by implementing policies aimed at empowering black citizens, such as prioritising government positions and procurement opportunities for them. However, these efforts have not fully resolved the underlying issues of inequality and exploitation, leaving many still struggling for a better life.

## **6. Impact of inequality on a multicultural coexistence**

Inequality and poverty disrupt multicultural harmony with the poor not enjoying the benefits of the fruits of the new democratic government. As Desai ([9], p. 102) stipulates, 'the transition to democracy and the economic programmes that unfolded failed to make an impact on levels of poverty and inequality'. These opportunities frequently favour the elite, those well-connected within government structures or members of specific ethnic groups while disadvantaging others. Opposition political parties, such as the Democratic Alliance (DA), have strongly criticised these empowerment policies, alleging that they have become mechanisms for looting government resources and favouring the friends and allies of the political elite. Additionally, job placements in government positions are sometimes based on family ties and connections, further entrenching inequality among different cultural groups within South Africa.

People should be encouraged to pursue social coherence and live in harmony with one another. Social cohesion became a buzzing word as a tool to reunite people and finding better ways to tolerate each other in the fragmented society ([9], p. 105). The term 'social cohesion', frequently emphasised by all government departments, became an envisioned goal aimed at uniting South Africans and non-South Africans under the concept of social unity. According to Mlambo et al. [10], the coining of the term social cohesion was to build an inclusive nation that is different from the apartheid regime that promoted intolerance through its separate development policies [31]. They argue this because 'one of the unintended consequences of the initiative is intolerance toward foreigners since the end of apartheid' ([10], p. 120). The South African government has championed principles of social unity, cohesion and justice, emphasising slogans like 'a united nation', 'social justice' and 'rainbow nation' to promote multiculturalism and harmony. These slogans play a significant role in fostering peace and cultural tolerance. Many of these ideals are enshrined in the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and they are echoed in the national anthem.

By frequently discussing and singing these values, they become more than just words—they evolve into a way of life that encourages national multicultural harmony. Promoting such principles helps to build a society where diverse cultures can coexist peacefully and respectfully.

South Africa needs to take more proactive steps to encourage multiculturalism and cultural tolerance by actively utilising the Constitution to embrace its diverse population. While promoting the values enshrined in the Constitution is essential, it is not sufficient if these principles are not implemented effectively in practice. The preamble of the Constitution emphasises that every citizen should be equally protected by law. Realising this principle is crucial for achieving the ambitious goals articulated in the Constitution. Promoting social cohesion goes beyond merely balancing racial equality between white and black citizens; it also involves safeguarding the vulnerable members of society. Ensuring that these protections are genuinely enacted and experienced by all citizens is key to fostering a truly inclusive and harmonious society.

An additional concern in South Africa is the disparity between educational opportunities and employment outcomes. The government has made significant efforts to empower previously disadvantaged individuals, primarily black South Africans, by providing access to education. Basic education and even higher education are now available for free to students from families who cannot afford tuition. Despite these advancements, the government has struggled to create enough job opportunities for graduates. This mismatch between educational attainment and job availability leads to instability and dissatisfaction among educated young South Africans who are left unemployed, holding qualifications that do not translate into career opportunities [32]. According to Cloete, 'Youth unemployment has a negative effect on the individual and the family, but also on the broader community in the form of serious economic and social consequences' ([33], p. 520). In contrast, children of foreign nationals who have acquired South African citizenship often find employment more readily. This discrepancy exacerbates feelings of injustice among local youths, who see foreign nationals benefitting from job opportunities while they remain unemployed despite their education. The situation highlights an imbalance in the system, where local graduates are unable to secure jobs, creating a sense of unfairness and increasing frustration within the community. This imbalance underscores the need for the government to address both educational access and employment creation to ensure that all citizens, regardless of background, have equitable opportunities for meaningful employment.

Inequality contributes significantly to instability and social discomfort, undermining the cohesion and harmony that are crucial for a thriving society. In South Africa, many young people who have completed their education and hold qualifications find themselves unemployed, leading to growing frustration and disillusionment. These individuals question the value of their education and the efficacy of a system that seems to neglect their right to meaningful employment and the opportunity to start families, much like their peers in other nations. The government has attempted to address some of these issues by introducing grants for children and young people who are unemployed, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic [34–37]. However, this measure falls short of providing a sustainable solution. The grants, which amount to R350 (approximately \$20) per month, are insufficient for a graduate trying to support themselves. This minimal financial support not only fails to meet the basic needs of young individuals but also exacerbates their sense of marginalisation. The situation highlights a deeper problem: while education is promoted as a pathway to opportunity, the lack of job creation and adequate support

for graduates undermines its perceived value. It also fosters a growing sense of disillusionment among the youth, who feel abandoned by a system that promises but does not deliver. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that not only increases job opportunities but also provides meaningful support to those who are struggling, ensuring that the promises of education and economic participation are fulfilled.

Even if the youth are eager to pursue business opportunities rather than waiting for government job creation, they face significant barriers due to the current environment. Access to capital is a major hurdle, as many young entrepreneurs struggle to secure the necessary funds to start their own businesses. This challenge is compounded by the lack of regulation in the informal sector, where foreign-owned businesses often operate with fewer constraints. These unregulated businesses may engage in illegal activities and sell unethical merchandise, creating an uneven playing field. The South African government has attempted to support young entrepreneurs through various state programmes offering seed funding. However, corruption within many government institutions has undermined these efforts. Many promising business proposals fail to receive the necessary funding due to the prevalence of corrupt practices, effectively stalling the dreams of young, ambitious individuals. Without viable avenues for legitimate business opportunities, some young people may turn to drugs and substance abuse as an escape. This shift not only deteriorates their personal well-being but also negatively impacts societal health and stability. The influence of illegal substances can lead to harmful behaviours that further strain communities, exacerbating social issues and impeding efforts to foster a cohesive and productive society.

## **7. Conclusion**

The pursuit of multiculturalism and cultural tolerance in South Africa, often celebrated as a 'rainbow nation', requires a multifaceted approach that addresses economic, social and political inequalities. The government must implement robust policies that promote inclusivity, safeguard the rights of all residents and combat corruption. Ensuring fair employment practices, providing protection for vulnerable groups and holding individuals accountable for illegal activities are crucial steps in fostering a harmonious society. The deep-seated issues of poverty, inequality and racial discrimination significantly impact social cohesion. The economic divide exacerbates tensions, with the wealthy exploiting the poor and the disenfranchised resorting to illicit means for survival. Government policies aimed at black empowerment, such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE), often benefit a privileged few rather than addressing the broader issues of inequality. This perpetuates resentment and undermines efforts to create a cohesive society. Addressing corruption is paramount. Corruption within government structures, including the Ministry of Home Affairs and border control departments, facilitates the exploitation of vulnerable citizens and foreign nationals. This undermines trust in governmental institutions and exacerbates social tensions. Ensuring transparency and accountability in the naturalisation process and immigration policies is essential to restoring public confidence and promoting fairness.

In promoting multiculturalism, it is vital to respect and embrace all forms of cultural and religious diversity, including African traditional religions. Government policies should create a safe and inclusive environment for all residents, encouraging

mutual respect and cultural tolerance. Law-abiding citizens play a crucial role in fostering these values, and their protection and support are essential. The divide between legally and illegally residing foreign nationals highlights the need for comprehensive immigration reform. Legal residents, often better educated and integrated, contribute positively to societal harmony. In contrast, illegal immigrants, lacking legal documentation, face greater challenges in engaging with societal norms and regulations. Addressing these disparities requires a balanced approach that ensures equitable treatment and opportunities for all. To truly embody the vision of a unified, multicultural society, South Africa must prioritise the creation of a secure and supportive environment for every resident. By addressing economic exploitation, ensuring fair employment practices and promoting cultural tolerance, the nation can work towards realising the promise of unity and peaceful coexistence. The government's commitment to these goals, reflected in tangible actions and policies, is crucial in building a more inclusive and resilient society.

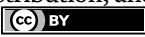
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Section 4

Maintaining Old Values and  
Customs in Modern Diverse  
Societies

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# Cultural Heritage vs. National Heritage: The Case of the Ethnographic Museum in a Culturally Diverse Society

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## Abstract

The processes of constructing the cultural heritages of non-hegemonic ethnic groups that form part of the modern nation state entail a dynamic negotiation that exists in an asymmetrical forcefield. In light of this ongoing “cultural work”, the chapter examines the case study of ethnographic museums representing non-hegemonic Jewish ethnic groups that emigrated to the state of Israel from Arab/Muslim countries (“Mizrahim”). In particular, the analysis follows the journey undertaken by Mizrahi ethnic communities to preserve their cultural heritage, as part of the national narrative and cultural heritage shaped by Jewish ethnic groups that emigrated to the state of Israel from Europe (“Ashkenazim”). The ways in which a non-hegemonic ethnic cultural heritage takes shape in the context of a hegemonic ethnic-national cultural heritage turn the spotlight on the tension between ethnicity and nationality, hegemony and margins, uniformity and multiplicity that are part of nation states in the late modern era.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage, cultural work, ethnographic museums, ethnicity, nationality

## 1. Introduction

Culture is viewed as one of the major variables that build and shape the social system in a particular time-space [1]. However, the term “culture” has been fragmented along theoretical and ideological lines, and thus perceived as both a natural-historical ethnic product that relies on common beliefs, language, symbols, and myths, and an ongoing construction that owes its existence in modern times to the social-political conditions enforced by the rise of nationalism [2]. Whether culture is perceived as a “stable” category or as a “fluid” one, culture and cultural heritage play different roles in the process of sensemaking of different ethnic-national groups. Implicit and explicit ideological forces and power relations are embedded and reflected in these processes. Homogenizing and stabilizing the collective identity of the group in light

of the national identity and cultural heritage is one of the most influential forces [3]. Ethnic subcultures can be shaped by the homogeneous forces of the dominant ethnic culture, in order to be included in the national narrative and establish intra-group social solidarity [4, 5]. Ethnic subcultures can also function as a symbolic boundary that demarcates itself as the opposite pole of the dominant ethnic-national culture and heritage, or as a “disturbing” hybrid juncture that combines different ethnic-national cultures [6]. In other words, the processes of constructing the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups that form part of the modern nation state entail a dynamic negotiation that exists in an asymmetrical forcefield.

In light of the ongoing “cultural work” involved in shaping and preserving the ethnic cultural heritage in a national ideological context, this chapter will examine the case study of ethnographic museums representing non-hegemonic Jewish ethnic groups that emigrated to the state of Israel from Arab/Muslim countries (henceforth “Mizrahim”). These waves of immigration turned the state of Israel into a distinct example of multi-ethnic nation state [7]. As opposed to multi-ethnic societies that are characterized by multi-cultural models that ensure representative rights to minorities and strive to integrate the cultures and histories of minority groups within the common national heritage [8, 9] and even create polyphonic-dynamic interconnectedness [10], the Israeli multi-culturalism is portrayed by tension and conflict that stems from the attempt to force one unified ideological-cultural narrative on various ethnic groups [11]. In light of this, I will follow the journey undertaken by Mizrahi ethnic communities to preserve their cultural heritage, as part of the national narrative and cultural heritage shaped by Jewish ethnic groups that emigrated to the state of Israel from Europe (henceforth “Ashkenazim”). As one of the largest immigrant nations in the world and as a state embroiled in constant conflict with Arab/Muslim countries, to trace the processes of constructing ethnographic museums representing the “Arab-Jewish” (Mizrahi) cultural heritage is to trace a Jewish-ethnic “clash of civilizations”, from East and West, operating in the arena of the Zionist national culture. Examining the ways in which non-hegemonic ethnic cultural heritage takes shape in the context of a hegemonic ethnic-national cultural heritage turns the spotlight on the tension between ethnicity and nationality, hegemony and margins, uniformity and multiplicity. The ways in which these tensions clash and are embodied in the shaping of the ethnographic museums are therefore a story about the complex relationships involved in representing cultural heritages that are part of heterogeneous nation states in the late modern era.

## **2. National heritage as a new cultural heritage**

The concepts of national identification and national sentiment have been perceived as the new form of ethnic/racial/religious traditions, which united and unified groups before the modern era [12]. Critical perspectives dismiss the idea of nationality as a construction that evolved on the cultural heritage platform and define cultural heritage instead as a category that owes its existence to the modern process of nationalization itself [13, 14]. The role of nationality in imagining a unifying cultural heritage negates the essentialist aspects of cultural heritage. The strenuous imaginative effort that creates the national heritages is concocted through various means: the map, the stamp, and the emblem that produce the collective cultural codes [3]. The effort to create a unified cultural heritage requires constant upkeep in

an attempt to minimize the impacts of social splits and divides. Stoking the sense of national belonging also requires creating awareness and collective consciousness [7]. Diverse social institutions, including schools, libraries, museums, commemorative sites, and the education system, are put “on guard” to sustain the project of national unification. To implement the collective heritage, a unique set of rituals, praxis, and pedagogies are recruited to the mission [15, 16].

As constructed entities, nationality and cultural heritage expose the complicated interactions between the two elements that are supposed to create a sense of belonging and national affiliation. Nationalities can be distinguished on the basis of the role that cultural heritage plays in the shaping of their identity. While a certain kind of cultural heritage can become dominant, a different kind of cultural heritage may be marginalized and even eroded. The incomplete integration of cultural minorities in the hegemonic cultural heritage may create genuine sociopolitical rifts. Hence, nationality may sharply delineate identities of subcultures or blur distinct cultural markers to avoid “third spaces” that challenge the dominant cultural heritage [17]. These collective cultural efforts that build and rebuild the identification and commitment to the nation wish to become a convention and a banal norm [18].

### **3. Cultural heritage as a national heritage in the multiethnic society/nation**

Israel is comprised of diverse ethnic Jewish communities that are divided into two main groups: Jews who emigrated from Christian countries in Europe and North America (Ashkenazim), and Jews who emigrated from Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrahim). Jewish nationality—Zionism—was conceived, mainly, in light of the central-eastern European Ashkenazi ethnic culture [19]. This Ashkenazi group was one of the main contributors to the Zionist national culture and was shaped by the Ashkenazi pioneers before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 [20]. During the 1950s, Israeli society was diversified by the big waves of migration of Mizrahi communities that left the Arab and Muslim countries due to the 1948 war. The Mizrahi migration coincided with varied interests. First, since the 1948 war, it became unsafe for Jews to live in Arab and Muslim countries. The latter wanted to get rid of the Jewish minority and confiscate their assets. Second, the Israeli state needed a demographic advantage over its Palestinian inhabitants who had not fled the country after the war, as well as faced a growing demand for an unskilled and cheap workforce [21].

Encountering the Zionist Ashkenazi ethnic-national culture, while having their own unique ethnic cultural heritage, formed in relation to and alongside the Arab/Muslim communities, caused a cultural clash between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. Furthermore, since the Mizrahi heritages were inspired by the Arab/Muslim cultures in which they were cultivated, many Mizrahim identified themselves as “Arab-Jewish” [22]. From the Ashkenazi point of view, this definition was considered a dangerous hybrid transgressing the national unifying efforts [23]. On top of that, each of the Mizrahi ethnic communities—Iraqi Jewish, Persian Jewish, Syrian Jewish, Yemenite Jewish, and so on—had a different social-cultural-political realm. The communities differed from each other in their linguistic, ritualistic, material, and visual culture. The differences also existed within certain Jewish communities themselves. Thus, Jews from the same country were divided along geographical lines; for example,

the Moroccan Jews from the Maghreb had different traditions and dialects than the Moroccan Jews from the big cities. Upon arriving in Israel, the Mizrahi Jewish communities were perceived by the Ashkenazim as having a monolithic shared cultural heritage. For this reason, the Ashkenazi Jews living in Israel called the different Mizrahi communities by generalized names: “Jews of Mizrahi extraction” and “Mizrahim” (Hebrew for East/Orient). This forced unification simplified the rich heritage of the “Mizrahi” ethnic groups. Even though these generalizations stemmed from the ignorance of the Ashkenazi Zionist Jews and from their orientalist point of view, they negatively affected the perception of the Mizrahi culture by the hegemonic ethnic-national Ashkenazi group [24].

While rejecting the Mizrahi Jewish-Arab culture, the dominant Ashkenazi Zionist group at the same time adopted the notion of the “melting pot”. The “melting pot” policy wished to re-mark the boundaries of Israeli society by integrating the Mizrahi Jews under one unifying national umbrella. This “umbrella” was shaped by the Zionist European-oriented cultural heritage, which strived to push all the non-national cultural heritages that had evolved in the diaspora to the margins and even erase them [25, 26]. For this reason, folklore did not serve as the unifying glue between the different Jewish subcultures that comprised the Jewish nation, since folklore represented a link to the Jewish cultures in the diaspora and was therefore perceived as a spanner in the wheels of the Zionist movement [27]. This approach relied on a logic that had developed in the nineteenth century that claimed that only ethnic groups that underwent a cultural evolution could succeed in solidifying into a national movement (*ibid.*).

Despite its aim to blur the cultural differences between the Mizrahi ethnic-Jewish cultural heritage and the national-Zionist one, and the efforts to “elevate” the Mizrahi cultural heritage to prevent the “Arabization” and “Levantinization” of the Israeli culture [28], the melting pot policy was perceived by its founders as colorblind. This led to the adoption of an ambiguous approach. On the one hand, the Mizrahi Jewish groups’ cultural heritage was perceived as a primordial authentic culture through which the Jewish nationality and culture were imagined. On the other hand, the Mizrahi culture, with its resemblance to the Arab/Muslim culture, undermined the validity of the modern Western national narrative and culture of the Ashkenazi ethnic-national culture [29]. The Mizrahim’s failure to adapt to/resistance against the cultural codes and heritage that were created by the Ashkenazi Jewish Zionists positioned them on the margins of the Zionist, European-based cultural heritage. The positioning of the Mizrahi ethnic culture as the dichotomous opposite of the Ashkenazi ethnic-national culture caused disappointment and anger and further described Mizrahim as having a traditional and primitive culture [30]. The de-Arabization process promised the Mizrahi ethnic group full integration into the Israeli national heritage and identity, but at the same time reproduced a sociocultural hierarchy between the Mizrahim and the Zionist culture. These hierarchies and tensions caused simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion of the Mizrahi group within the Israeli society and culture [31].

Only after the 1970s did the Ashkenazi hegemonic narrative allow the visibility of a more diverse and multiethnic culture and heritage, and the Mizrahi group gained dominance in the public sphere [32]. One of the main changes happened in the museum sphere. A large number of museums were created in communities of second- and third-generation Mizrahi Jewish immigrants. These museums represent different past legacies and different ethnic-national cultures and heritages, most of them of non-Ashkenazi communities.

#### 4. Ethnographic museums and the national heritage

The museum is a political tool. The national museum and the national art gallery were founded in most Western countries by the middle of the nineteenth century, in order to create unifying and uniting narrative and foci of identification [33].<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the national museum, the ethnographic museum exhibited foreign, remote, and “exotic” cultures. Ethnographic museums that were dedicated to particular ethnic groups that were part of the nation state appeared only sporadically. Museums of this kind mainly popped up when there was fear that a certain ethnic group, which had already been assimilated into the national cultural heritage, would lose its past heritage. The “museumization” of the historical-cultural heritage of a specific group acted as a means of conservation designed to embalm the past, rather than as a means designed to challenge the national culture or broaden its manifestations. The representation of Jewish ethnic groups in the state of Israel was no different. The Jewish ethnic culture that achieved the biggest exposure was the Zionist-pioneering Ashkenazi one, which emigrated to Mandatory Palestine before the founding of the state of Israel. Already during the British Mandate, a few ethnographic museums were built by the members of the Ashkenazi Zionist Aliyot who were documenting and conserving the material and visual culture of the present for the next generations. Among these museums are the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem (1906), Sturman House in Ein Harod (1941), and Gordon House in Degania Alef (1941). After the founding of the state of Israel, there was an enormous surge in the building of ethnographic museums [35]. In fact, Israel boasts the largest number of historical-ethnographic museums per capita in the Western world [36].

However, representing the Ashkenazi cultural heritage in these museums was not done through the ethnic lens [37]. Ashkenazim were not even described as an “ethnic” group, and the museums did not examine their culture as it had existed in Europe. The Ashkenazi group was represented in the museum solely as a national group, and even as the standard for the renewed nationalism of the Jewish people. The historical-cultural zero point presented in these museums was the time in which the Ashkenazi ethnic groups had emigrated to Mandatory Palestine and located their national home in it. Most of the museums describe the struggle of the Ashkenazi Zionist groups in building the country, “making the desert bloom”, and protecting the Zionist Yishuv [38]. The museums also exhibit the daily routine of the pioneers, as well as the material culture that served them in the nation-building project.

These museums adopted pedagogical practices that create a powerful experience by using expressive methods that stir the viewer’s imaginative and emotional world. This praxis includes testimonies, biographical accounts, role play, simulations, historical reenactments, and discussing dilemmas [39]. However, despite the openness that characterizes this pedagogical praxis, it presents a “closed” narrative. This narrative aspires to convey a coherent and linear story of the nation, that is, a narrative detached from existing power relations between different ethnic groups (pioneers/immigrants; hegemony/margins; Ashkenazim/Mizrahim), and usually praises the hegemonic national culture [40]. This ethnic-national narrative is not open to interpretations or criticism.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that some national museums have been revamping themselves and trying to address rapacious nationalism and the definition of nationality in the age of late capitalism and globalization [34].

Ethnic cultures of “other” Jewish groups, mainly Mizrahi migrants from Arab/Muslim countries, were not included in these museums, since the latter came to Israel close to or after its founding. The only ethnographic museums that were built in the first years of the state of Israel were dedicated to different communities in Europe destroyed in the Holocaust, in order to document an ethnic culture that had ceased to exist [41]. Although Mizrahim’s culture was absent from the national museums, it was integrated into museums that aspired to present the various Jewish communities under a unifying national banner. The Diaspora Museum, founded in 1978,<sup>2</sup> is an example of this model [42]. To emphasize the “ingathering of the exiles” and “melting pot” ideal, the Mizrahi ethnic groups were presented mainly in a partial and fragmented way. Some of the exhibits were even taken out of their context. Other exhibits were presented in a generalized way or flattened in order to adapt them to the unifying national narrative [43].<sup>3</sup>

Only a small number of bodies and associations attempted to document and preserve the culture of the Jewish ethnic groups that immigrated from Arab/Muslim countries in the first decade after the state of Israel’s founding. Among these associations were the Alliance of the Moroccan Exodus, founded in 1967 to collect and conserve the cultural heritage of Moroccan Jews [45]; the National Organization of Jews from Kurdistan in Israel, founded in 1971 and engaged in researching the tradition and cultural heritage of the community; the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, founded in 1973 with the aim of preserving the history and cultural heritage of Iraqi Jews; the World Organization of Libyan Jews, founded in 1984 and serving as an umbrella organization of associations engaged in preserving material and spiritual culture; the Marrakesh Jewish Association in Israel, founded in 1985 by David Vaknin Keinan with the aim of holding annual conferences in which a replica of the Jewish neighborhood in Marrakesh (the Mellah) was reconstructed [46].

In the area of education, the situation was no better as well. Only in 1974 was the cultural heritage of Mizrahi Jews integrated into the school curriculum. Pressure from Mizrahi members of the Knesset, and in particular MK Haviv Shimoni from the Mapai party who had immigrated to Israel from Kurdistan, led to the establishment of the Center for Integrating Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage. Haviv called from the Knesset podium for “urgent action to save the heritage of Mizrahi Jewry”, and chaired a committee that established the subject of heritage studies [47]. The center engaged with Jewish communities in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, India, Bukhara, Georgia, Ethiopia, Syria, and Lebanon. But the subject of heritage did not become part of the Core Studies program and remained an elected subject. These moves did not make Israeli society more pluralistic [48].

Alongside the unsatisfactory representation of Mizrahi communities through independent research and conservation associations and through the national curriculum, the state continued to make attempts to control the Mizrahi ethnic narrative and its modes of representation. In 1993, the Culture Administration proposed

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<sup>2</sup> In 2005, the museum was defined in the Diaspora Museum Law as a national center for Jewish communities in Israel and around the world. After a process of renewal that took a number of years, the museum was reopened under the name ANU—Museum of the Jewish People.

<sup>3</sup> The wish to avoid these biases led to the development of the Ecomuseum and at a later stage the Community-Based Museum, which sought to be in dialog with the community in which they were located and present it in a more holistic way that is not invested only in the past, but also directed at the contemporary social landscape [44].

building a large “Ethnic” museum that would bring together all the communities/museums of Eastern Jewry under a uniting national narrative, but this proposal was not implemented. In 2005 a proposal in this vein was even made by the Israeli government. It intended to establish “a national authority for the heritage of all the Jewish ethnic groups” [49], in which all the different ethnic groups would be represented. But this process of “nationalization” did not materialize either.

## 5. Mizrahi ethnographic museums

The first ethnographic museums dedicated to one ethnic group were a product of the political change that occurred in 1977. In this year, the ruling party of Mapai, which represented mainly the established Zionist Yishuv of European descent, was deposed for the first time.<sup>4</sup> The political turnover was preceded by increasing discontent between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, and between immigrants and established citizens. The surging intra-Jewish ethnic tension had manifested itself in extensive protests that had already broken out in 1971, by Mizrahi youngsters who were living in poor frontier neighborhoods in Jerusalem. Under the name The Black Panthers, thousands took to the streets to protest against the discrimination and social, cultural, and economic deprivation of people in Israel originating from Arab and Muslim countries [50]. In this period, the myth of national unity was broken, together with the wish to create a “melting pot” of “the ingathering of the exiles”. This led to groups that sought to found museums that would describe the cultural heritage and daily lives of Jews in the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. The result was the establishment of many museums dedicated to various communities. Among them are the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Museum (1988), the Cochin Jewry Heritage Center (1996), the David Amar World Center for North African Jewish Heritage (2011), the Museum of Libyan Jews (2003), and the Turkey Jewry Heritage Center (2005).<sup>5</sup>

Other museums dealing with Jewish communities from Arab and Muslim countries are in various stages of planning and fundraising, including the Tunis Jewry Museum, the Caucasian Jewry Museum, and the Georgia Jewry Museum. The museums already operating differ in size, status, and scope of activity. Some museums are very modest, struggling to fund their activities, and recognized only by the local authority where they are located. Other museums are large, more established, meeting the strict criteria stipulated by the Museum Law, and enjoying official recognition from the Ministry of Education.

Although the museums were established in a period in which the national narrative was broadened and became more pluralistic, the museums dedicated to various Mizrahi communities conducted themselves ambivalently for fear of being perceived as “separating themselves” from both the Jewish and the Zionist world. As a result,

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<sup>4</sup> Mapai (lit. The Party of the Land of Israel’s Workers) was founded as a socialist Zionist leftist party in 1930 and became a major factor in the Hebrew Yishuv in Mandatory Palestine, and the only ruling party from the founding of the state of Israel until 1977. The name Mapai became synonymous with the dominant pioneering Ashkenazi group.

<sup>5</sup> During this period, some museums, dedicated to cultural heritage, material culture, and the daily life of Palestinians who lived in Mandatory Palestine before 1948, were also established. Only a minority of these museums deal with national issues [51].

many museums wished to stress that they were part of the Jewish identity that had consolidated in the state of Israel. In the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Museum, the founders claimed that “Babylonian heritage” was not only the heritage of Iraqi Jews but of all Jews [21]. The historical context presented in the World Center for North African Jewish Heritage focuses on and highlights the connection with the Jewry in the state of Israel [52]. The Museum of Libyan Jews mentions the race laws enforced on the community during the Italian occupation and the Holocaust of Libyan Jews. At the same time, the museum ignores the pogroms perpetrated by the Muslims on the community’s Jews before the Second World War, thus linking the history of Libyan Jews with the history of European Jews, which is the dominant narrative in the state of Israel. Turkey Jewry Heritage Center presents the community’s life as centering around its activities at the synagogue, in order to magnify the weight of Jewishness over “Turkishness” in the community’s identity.

These museums also stress that they are part of the Zionist identity that has consolidated in the state of Israel. Thus, for example, at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Museum, the term “Babylonian Jewry” was chosen instead of the term “Iraqi Jews”, to distinguish the Jews from the (Muslim) Iraqis and emphasize their belonging to the Zionist movement [53]. Next to the museum was inaugurated a monument dedicated to Yosef Basri and Shalom Salah, who were hanged for their Zionist activities in Iraq. At the Cochin Jewry Heritage Center, an extensive part of the museum is dedicated to the community’s contribution to the army and the state [54]. In its historical narrative, the Museum of Libyan Jews stresses the collaboration between the community and the Zionist movement, and the fulfillment of the Zionist vision [55]. The history of Libyan Jewry is presented as intertwined with the Zionist history. The exhibition space reconstructs the myths originating in the Zionist-pioneering settlement, and not necessarily related to the community of Libyan Jews and its heritage.

An unusual example, though not without problems [56], is Museum in a Suitcase, created by the artist Alemu Eshetie and dedicated to the community of Ethiopian Jews. Eshetie created, in 2009, a mobile museum contained in a suitcase, with which he “performs” in many public institutions: schools, universities and colleges, museums, and so on. The museum is housed in a wooden suitcase (30/80/40 cm). The suitcase contains Eshetie’s personal story and the story and characteristics of the Ethiopian Jewish community. The community’s cultural heritage is represented through various kinds of items that had been brought from Ethiopia, including traditional pieces of clothing (“neTela”), the Amharic alphabet (“Fidel”), traditional earthenware for coffee making, musical instruments, and art objects. The material culture functions in this context both as an “authentic testimony” representing the story of the community and as a visual aide to conduct a dialog with the participants. Thus, material culture does not function only as objects for observation that decorate the narrative of the exhibition, but also as artifacts that aim to activate conversation with the viewers. This approach acts as a discursive space that holds a promise to voice different kinds of knowledge, points of view, and narratives during the exhibition.

These processes neither settle for a historical story about a cultural heritage originating in the past nor are committed to a specific ideological narrative in the present. As such, they might yield variable, open-for-discussion narratives, such as are usually not heard when it comes to the cultural heritage of disadvantaged ethnic groups.

## **6. Cultural heritage of non-hegemonic ethnic groups: Is it a different voice? Is there a “right” voice it?**

Cultural heritage is combined in the modern state with the national narrative and its political agendas. Nationality actively participates in the construction of cultural heritage by using practices of negotiation, selection, classification, assimilation, and exclusion. It seems that for the time being, the ties between nationality and ethnic cultural heritage are becoming even stronger in nation states that are embedded in ongoing national conflicts that threaten their existence.

From its foundation, heritage-making in Israel has evolved in between the poles created by ethnicity and nationality. Basing the demand for national sovereignty on the existence of a unified ethnic-Jewish cultural heritage made it possible to challenge the various Jewish-Arab hybrids and amalgams. In this trade-off, the Arab-Jews (Mizrahim) were given a national identity because of their Jewishness, while their ethnic Jewish-Arab cultural characteristics were restricted. Even though the national culture in its Ashkenazi-ethnic-group version has reconstructed the ethnic cultural heritage of non-Ashkenazi Jews to unify all the ethnic groups under one national narrative/heritage, Mizrahi heritage centers and museums have evolved over the years.

How do these museums navigate between the national culture (in its Ashkenazi-ethnic version) and the Arab-Jewish ethnic culture, and how do they influence the shaping of the cultural heritage in Israel?

Museums that represent and exhibit non-European Jewish ethnic heritage are without a doubt broadening and challenging the narrative of the national-Zionist culture. Despite this, these museums are encountering several ideological-political challenges. Firstly, the “Mizrahi” museums are devoted to presenting “popular culture” and daily life, which are perceived as an inferior genre on the margins of the cultural canon. Although museums for the history of the Zionist settlement similarly emphasized the popular culture and daily life of the Ashkenazi pioneers, the latter are perceived in the Israeli culture as representing the cultural canon. The reason is that the museums for the history of the settlement do not perceive themselves as representing “popular culture” or folklore but as tellers of a heroic and agreed-upon national narrative. Secondly, the “Mizrahi” museums are perceived as describing a specific geo-cultural context and are therefore perceived as representing particular and partial events. Museums for the history of the Zionist settlement are also embedded in a specific geopolitical context, but this context is perceived as representing general events that encompass all parts of the nation. Thirdly, the Arab/Muslim cultural context in which the cultural heritage of the Mizrahi communities is presented has embodied an integration between Jews and Arabs that has created a dissonance on the national level.

The solution of the museums presenting the Mizrahi ethnic cultural heritage to these ideological-political challenges was to construct historical continuums that began in the Arab/Muslim countries and ended in the Zionist Jewish world, and even in the Zionist cultural heritage created by the Ashkenazi Jews. As the museums constantly move between the “ethnic” past and the ethno-national present, the Mizrahi cultural heritage, in its various forms, represented its uniqueness in a new way. This movement between ethnicity and nationality leads to a reimagination of the Mizrahi cultural heritage. The result certainly does not represent a symbolic expression of an ethnic entity that is replacing the national as the locus of primary, as Nissimi

claims [57]. The result also does not represent polyphonic forms of multiculturalism that acknowledge cultural heritages as flux and dynamic entities that are not committed to one ideological-cultural narrative [58]. Other possibilities of exhibiting and acting, as in the case of Museum in a Suitcase, are still on the margins of the museal-ethnographic space in Israel as well. Only a few museums are engaging with the cultural heritage of their communities by creating an inter-group dialog/space for discussing and (re)thinking about culture and heritage in the past and present days [59].<sup>6</sup>

So how the new cultural assemblage created by the ethnographic museums of Mizrahi Jews can be understood? Critical reading of this assemblage might blame the museums/communities for adopting a “false cultural consciousness”. But this claim represents a hegemonic reading in itself since it is downplaying the discursive agency of the museums/communities. The same goes for imposing on the ethnographic Mizrahi museum models of shared practices, such as research-based projects that engage the viewers and the community. Even though the current literature suggests that this mode of representation is ideal and even moral since it extracts the museums’ discourse from the power relations/structures in which it is trapped [60], the case of the ethnographic Mizrahi museums suggests a different path of interpretation. Democratizing the museum’s discourse does not always coincide with the interests and needs of non-hegemonic communities. In the case of the ethnographic Mizrahi museums, the need to frame old-new cultural heritages by using the Jewish and national narratives was more important than the need to imply shared praxis. This conclusion blurs the sharp distinction that the shared praxis model is drawing between representation (of a cultural heritage) and action (about the cultural heritage). Ethnographic museums do not have to become an open arena of negotiation. Understanding and acknowledging the museum’s interests and needs might be the “right” ethical lens through which we should interpret Other peoples’ cultural heritage in the heterogeneous nation states in the late modern era.

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<sup>6</sup> “Tarasa Digital Initiative” is an open, non-institutional, digital platform that encourages Palestinians and Jews living in Israel to share memories of everyday life activities that stem from their cultural heritage. The platform also offers engagement between participants through the lenses of cultural heritage, in order to create dialog between the two ethno-national groups.


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# Balancing Luxury and Sustainability: Insights into Consumer Behavior across Countries

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## Abstract

This chapter presents empirical research findings to explore the complex relationship between luxury and sustainability and its impact on consumer behavior. The study investigated whether consumers naturally associate sustainability with traditional motives to purchase luxury. It was conducted across diverse cultural backgrounds (i.e., UK and Kuwait) and luxury categories. The research revealed that consumers' perception of luxury as sustainable (regardless of being labeled as sustainable) positively influences their perceptions of luxury quality and material aspects, thereby boosting their intention to purchase luxury items. However, an interesting finding emerged—while perceived sustainability enhances specific dimensions of luxury, it also diminishes others. It was observed to reduce consumers' perceptions of pleasure, self-expression, traditional values typically associated with luxury goods, and various social values. These findings were consistent across cultural contexts. The research suggests that luxury brands can leverage this connection to advance their international branding strategies by aligning superior quality and durability with perceived sustainability. It also advises emphasizing the hedonic aspect of purchasing sustainable luxury to mitigate potential backlash from a perceived significant disconnect between sustainability and pleasure, providing practical guidance for luxury brand managers.

**Keywords:** luxury sustainability, luxury values, luxury branding, culture, cross-country

## 1. Introduction

The complex relationship between luxury and sustainability has been a subject of ongoing debate, revolving around whether luxury brands should proactively communicate their sustainability initiatives or if sustainability should be an inherent quality of luxury. This ongoing discourse further complicates the landscape of luxury consumer behavior. Indeed, the global shift toward sustainability has prompted many

luxury brands to showcase their transformation toward sustainable production methods [1, 2]. However, it is essential to acknowledge that some consumers may expect luxury brands to inherently align with sustainability principles due to their reputation for crafting high-quality, durable products [2], while others may negatively evaluate sustainable luxury products [3–5]. The ambiguity surrounding luxury sustainability, coupled with the practice of luxury brands pricing their sustainable products at a premium [6], emphasizes the need to understand how consumers perceive luxury sustainability and how this perception affects their evaluation and purchasing behavior.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has added further complexity to this discourse [7–9]. It has compelled consumers to reevaluate their values and choices in the face of profound global changes, emphasizing the significant role of sustainability in consumer decision-making [7, 9]. Accordingly, the luxury landscape is shifting toward ethical considerations, environmental consciousness, and social responsibility [9, 10], which necessitates a deeper understanding of how consumers now perceive and interact with incorporating sustainability and luxury [11]. Such insights remain scant in the existing literature. The present study seeks to address this gap in the current literature by delving into the impact of perceived luxury sustainability (PLS) on consumers' perception of traditional luxury personal and social values (i.e., buying motives), subsequently shaping their purchase intentions (PI). These dynamics have remained largely unexplored in the existing literature.

Prior research has predominantly focused on the influence of specific luxury values on consumer behavior exclusively toward sustainable luxury products [12, 13]. Much of this research has been limited to particular demographics [5, 14–16], explicitly involving actual consumers [12, 13, 17–19] or specific luxury product categories [9, 12, 20]. This specialization in previous studies, while valuable in its own right, has restricted the generalizability of findings. Besides, cultural diversity among nations plays a pivotal role in consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward luxury and its sustainability [13, 21, 22].

For instance, cultures characterized by a heightened sustainability awareness exhibit more interest in luxury brands' sustainable practices [20]. Additionally, cultural dimensions, like individualism and collectivism [11], are pivotal in shaping consumer behavior concerning sustainable luxury. Nonetheless, the issues post-COVID global awakening to sustainability present an opportunity for luxury sustainability to transcend cultural boundaries and become a universally appreciated phenomenon [9]. Cross-cultural empirical studies in this field are scarce. In addressing the noteworthy gaps within the current body of literature, the present research aims to answer three central questions:

1. How do consumers perceive the connection between sustainability and traditional luxury purchasing motives (i.e., perceived values)?
2. How does this connection impact their PI across distinct countries?

The foundation of this study draws inspiration from prior research that has underscored the impact of luxury sustainability and a brand's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer behavior, revealing both direct and indirect effects. Notably, former studies highlighted direct negative influences on consumers' PI [5] and willingness to pay premium prices [23]. However, these effects are also indirectly positively attributed to luxury brands' functional and symbolic values [23]. Thus,

this study seeks to understand the influence of luxury sustainability on consumer PI through various personal and social values traditionally associated with luxury. This research proposes a dual theoretical framework suggesting that consumers' perceptions of luxury values, which significantly influence their PI, can be anticipated by their perception of luxury sustainability. This pioneering perspective provides a holistic view of the key sustainability driven determinants of luxury consumption.

This study extends beyond examining consumer behavior toward explicitly labeled sustainable luxury products. Considering the multifaceted nature of sustainability within the luxury industry, reaching beyond environmental concerns to encompass ethical sourcing, fair labor standards, and a comprehensive commitment to social responsibility throughout the entire supply chain [13, 18, 22], some consumers may naturally perceive luxury products as sustainable [24], our research takes a distinctive approach by delving into the examination of the indirect influence of PLS on consumers' PI, even when these luxury products are not explicitly labeled as sustainable.

The study also addresses the lack of cross-cultural nuances in consumer perception of luxury sustainability (for exceptions, see references [13, 25–27]) by comparing the relatively underexplored Kuwaiti market with the more extensively studied UK market. Research efforts have primarily been concentrated in developed countries, with a dedicated focus on studying education sustainability. However, it is worth noting that the pandemic has presented more substantial challenges to developing nations' sustainable development than their developed counterparts. Interestingly, developing countries have demonstrated a heightened emphasis on sustainability during the pandemic, surpassing the attention given to this aspect in developed countries [13]. Hence, our research seeks to gain insight into the role of country culture as a moderating factor in the relationships we are investigating, in line with Wang and others [13]. We aim to provide empirical evidence that bolsters the argument that luxury sustainability possesses the potential to become a universally valued phenomenon [9].

Unlike former research, which often concentrated on specific segments, our research capitalizes on a diverse pool of respondents and distinguishes itself by encompassing a broad spectrum of luxury categories. It ensures a comprehensive view that promotes a deeper understanding of consumer behavior within the realm of luxury and their nuanced perceptions of sustainability, transcending narrow demographics, and niche segments.

The subsequent sections of this paper will delve into the literature, theory, hypotheses development, research methodology, results, discussion, implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.

## **2. Sustainability and luxury in a post-COVID world: A paradigm shift**

Once considered unlikely, the combination of sustainability and luxury [6, 26] has become a captivating concept in today's consumer culture. Lately, there has been much attention on incorporating sustainability into luxury products [11, 16, 28]. Nevertheless, some studies have found that consumers resist buying sustainable luxury items or negatively perceive them despite increasing ethical and environmental concerns [5]. Some consumers believe sustainable luxury is lower quality [3, 11, 29]. Sustainability may also clash with traditional values like symbolism, exclusivity, and lavishness, making some consumers view sustainable luxury less glamorous [3, 7].

According to Hemonnet-Goujot and others in Ref. [4], demand for innovations using materials with past identities is unfavorable for luxury brand consumers. These findings highlight the complexities and challenges of consumer perceptions of sustainable luxury, emphasizing the need for luxury brands to address these issues in their marketing strategies [30]. Although sustainability is confirmed as a secondary selection criterion when the core luxury consumption values are encountered [6], it is utterly irrelevant to decision-making [26]. However, recent research shows consumers now see sustainability as a fundamental luxury attribute [31]. Luxury items are thus valued for their brand ethics, eco-friendly practices, and contributions to social well-being [22], making them more appealing to many customers [9, 28].

The significant transformation in consumer perceptions can be attributed to the undeniable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has unmistakably reshaped global views on sustainability [7, 9, 28]. Consumers are showing a growing demand for sustainable luxury products [7, 8, 32, 33], extending beyond a mere desire for luxury products with reduced environmental impact. Ethical considerations have risen, with consumers scrutinizing luxury brands for their social responsibility [9]. Factors such as transparency, localism (involving locally sourced and crafted luxury items), product durability, and a sense of community and solidarity have profoundly influenced consumer expectations regarding the credibility of luxury brands [2, 22, 32]. Circular practices, such as second hand and vintage luxury sales, renting, leasing, and exchanging, also contribute to the sustainable image of luxury [2, 10]. This global shift presents a unique opportunity to bridge the perceived gap between luxury and sustainability [7–9].

Within the luxury consumption literature, it is firmly established that consumers are primarily motivated to purchase luxury products through their perceptions of both personal and social/interpersonal values associated with luxury [34, 35]. Personal values emphasize the importance of luxury in achieving personal satisfaction and encompass distinct facets:

1. Perfectionism, highlighting the quest for superior product or service quality, performance, and design.
2. Materialism, revolving around the use of possessions to create impressions, showcase achievements, and establish social status.
3. Self-expression (Self-identification), reflecting the use of luxury purchases to express one's identity and personality.
4. Hedonism, tied to the emotional value of luxury consumption, where it provides self-reward, pleasure, and gratification.

In contrast, social values are influenced by external factors and encompass:

1. Conspicuousness, where individuals opt for high-value items to enhance their social image and status within social groups.
2. Uniqueness, reflecting the pursuit of exclusive and rare products to distinguish oneself.
3. Social conformity (also labeled as group belonging) involves purchasing luxury products already owned by reference group members, aiming to gain acceptance, approval, and conformity with others' expectations.

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) [1] offers a valuable framework for comprehending how their perception of luxury sustainability influences consumers' evaluation and PI within the context of luxury. Consumers' attitudes, a fundamental element of the TPB which encompasses their evaluations of a brand or product, are expected to be significantly shaped by their perception of luxury sustainability. Furthermore, subjective norms come into play as consumers consider the influence of their social circles and reference groups. As a result, consumers' PLS is expected to shape their perspective on the social aspects of luxury consumption.

This interconnectedness extends to the self-congruity concept, where consumers align their consumption behavior with the norms and values associated with their desired identity [15, 34, 35]. Notably, ethical and sustainable consumption is increasingly becoming a part of this desired identity [1]. In this intricate web of relationships, consumers who positively perceive luxury sustainability are more inclined to value luxury products that align with sustainability objectives [1, 36]. On the other hand, negative perceptions of sustainability, particularly in how it influences identity, can significantly impact consumer behavior [3]. For instance, some consumers may intentionally avoid sustainable products to distance themselves from the associated identities, such as being labeled as feminine, hippy, or part of marginalized groups. These negative stereotypes and the desire to maintain a more conventional or socially accepted identity can lead consumers to steer clear of sustainable choices [3].

Furthermore, cultural values have been identified as pivotal drivers of variations in consumers' orientations toward sustainable luxury consumption across diverse countries [23, 25–27]. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a universal shift toward sustainable practices among consumers, compelling luxury brands to adapt to this evolving landscape [9]. Thus, consumers adapt their attitudes and subjective norms to these global changes that reshape consumers' evaluation of luxury products and behavioral intentions. They also seek to harmonize their values and identities with these evolving norms. These intricate mechanisms collectively illustrate how consumers intertwine personal, social, and cultural values with sustainability, profoundly influencing luxury consumption behaviors.

### **3. Sustainability and luxury: A paradigm shift in a post-COVID world**

The existing literature underscores the profound interrelation between luxury values and sustainability in shaping consumer behavior. In Ref. [37], Hennigs and others noted that sustainable luxury value encompasses various values traditionally associated with luxury, such as functional, financial, individual, and social values. In a complementary vein, Jain [1] demonstrates that consumers' PI toward sustainable luxury is shaped by personal (including hedonic, utilitarian, and self-expression), social (encompassing prestige, conformity), cultural, and economic values. Thus, it is vital to assess how the values of luxury align with and or contradict sustainability [38]. In light of these insights, we propose that PLS serves as a predictive factor for the values consumers attribute to luxury, and we extend this effect to anticipate their PI toward luxury products. While luxury sustainability is a relatively recent concept and warrants further investigation, prior research has explored the connections between specific luxury values and sustainable luxury, a topic we meticulously examine in this section.

- *Perfectionism*: Some studies have pointed out that consumers perceive sustainable luxury as lower quality [3, 11, 24, 29]. However, it is crucial to note that a substantial body of research in the field [1, 17] collectively illustrates that the driving forces behind sustainable luxury goods purchases are anchored in the pursuit of perfection. Consumers have an inherent expectation that luxury brands are renowned for offering exceptional quality products at premium prices and exhibiting sustainability [6, 29, 36].
- *Materialism*: Since luxury embodies timelessness at its core, it transcends fleeting trends and stands as a testament to durability. It enables extended use over generations, mirroring the ideals of sustainability and resource-consciousness [8, 11]. The prolonged use of luxury items, thus, contributes to waste reduction and responsible resource management [25]. Remarkably, materialism plays a role in augmenting the perceived functional value of sustainable luxury products, thereby enhancing PI [39].
- *Self-expression (Self-identification)*: Sustainability effectively conveys consumers' dedication to environmental and social causes [1, 27]. For example, vintage luxury consumption, acknowledged as a sustainable practice, is undeniably geared toward enhancing consumers' perception of their desired and ideal self-image [18].
- *Hedonism*: As highlighted earlier, sustainable luxury introduces a spectrum of values stemming from its inherent sustainability, including the pleasure of guilt-free indulgence [27]. Consumers, thus derive a distinct pleasure from the awareness that their luxury purchases not only fulfill personal desires but also contribute positively to society and the environment, reinforcing their consumption [1, 12, 17].
- *Conspicuousness*: Sustainable luxury possesses its own form of conspicuousness, as owning and showcasing sustainable luxury items symbolizes one's commitment to responsible living and ethical values, thereby making a conspicuous statement [12, 25, 27]. Moreover, the appeal of pride enhances consumers' intentions to engage in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication, driven by motives related to status attainment [40]. This perspective underscores sustainable luxury consumption as a conspicuous symbol and fuels social engagement and communication.
- *Uniqueness*: When a luxury product is perceived as scarce and enduring, it tends to be associated with a heightened sense of responsibility, cultivating positive attitudes toward sustainable consumption [41]. Although Wang and others [13] indicate that the desire for exclusivity in sustainable luxury items is negatively related to PI, Alghanim and Ndubisi [12] support the positive relationship between perceived luxury uniqueness and sustainable luxury product consumption. Also, Eastman et al. [15] confirm the mediating effect of the desire for unique products on the relationship between value and socially related consumers' attitudes and sustainable behaviors.
- *Social conformity*: Sustainable luxury fosters a collective sense of social conformity toward shared environmental responsibility [12]. Consumers embrace

sustainability as a collective value within this framework and conform to it within their social networks [13, 17]. Thus, subjective norms (i.e., the influence of social groups) exert social pressure on individuals, compelling them to engage in environmentally responsible behaviors [1].

In line with findings and discussions in the literature, we predict that PLS positively shapes consumers' perception of luxury personal (i.e., self-expression, perfectionism, hedonism, and materialism) and social values (i.e., conspicuousness, uniqueness, and social conformity), influencing luxury products PI (H1).

#### **4. Cross-cultural differences**

Studies examining consumer attitudes toward sustainable luxury consumption have revealed intriguing insights into purchasing behaviors across different societies. These insights are particularly apparent when comparing collectivist and individualist cultures [11]. Building upon insights from previous studies [15, 27], it is evident that collective environmental and social drivers motivate consumers to allocate more resources toward products that positively impact society. This, in turn, fosters more favorable attitudes toward sustainable business practices. Along the same line, Eastman et al. [15] confirm that collectivism moderates the relationship between uniqueness and ecological consciousness within the context of luxury consumption. Wang and others [13] further emphasize that in collectivist cultures, the need for conformity exerts a positive influence on sustainable luxury purchase intentions, while these effects are reversed in individualist cultures.

Despite the acknowledged cultural variances, the COVID-19 pandemic has orchestrated a profound global transformation, spotlighting the paradigm shift in sustainability perception that has become increasingly evident worldwide. This transformation is particularly notable in luxury consumption, where sustainability considerations have taken center stage [10, 28, 42]. However, amid the growing interest in sustainable luxury values, it is crucial to acknowledge the existing gaps in the literature and the pivotal role of cross-cultural explorations in validating the universal impact of the pandemic on consumer perceptions and the adoption of sustainability in the luxury sector.

While distinctions in consumers' perception of sustainable luxury endure across diverse cultures [13, 21], the global pandemic has acted as a catalyst, unfurling a heightened collective awareness of environmental and ethical concerns that transcend geographical boundaries. The heightened global awareness has triggered a significant shift toward a greater acceptance of sustainable luxury as an integral facet of contemporary luxury consumption [9]. The implications of this shift are profound, hinting at the prospect of a gradual emergence of similarities in the appreciation of sustainable luxury products across various countries and cultures. However, it is noteworthy that empirical studies investigating these cross-cultural shifts in sustainable luxury consumption remain relatively scarce.

Notably, a few such attempts have provided valuable insights. An earlier study conducted with cross-cultural groups [20] sheds light on the challenges of communicating luxury sustainability. It highlights that sustainability may be socially desirable in a highly individualistic culture like Germany and a collectivistic culture like South Korea, but it fails to increase PI. This finding aligns with results in Ref. [23], which found that the impact of CSR actions on the willingness to pay premium prices for

luxury items does not exhibit statistically significant differences between Tunisia and France. A recent study [10] indicates that consumers from diverse regions such as India, Mexico, Thailand, and the UAE exhibited cultural sensitivity during the pandemic. These consumers, witnessing the hardships many encountered during the pandemic, are inclined to avoid overt displays of social status through luxury brands. Instead, they seek to demonstrate sensitivity to the struggles and suffering of individuals in their local communities and society.

The mentioned studies underscore the importance of in-depth cross-cultural explorations to validate further the universal impact of COVID-19 on consumer perceptions and the adoption of sustainability within the luxury consumption landscape. Such research endeavors will be instrumental in elucidating the nuanced interplay between cultural contexts and the evolving dynamics of sustainable luxury consumption, thereby offering valuable guidance to luxury brands seeking to navigate this shifting landscape effectively. In light of the discussion above, we anticipate that while PLS consistently influences luxury consumers' PI, the mediating role of luxury personal and social values varies across countries with distinct cultural and sustainable development contexts (H2).

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Research design**

To gather our data during the COVID-19 pandemic, we administered an online questionnaire to individuals aged 18 and above who were part of paid consumer panels, specifically using YouGov in Kuwait and Prolific in the United Kingdom. The choice of Kuwait as a research location was driven by its representation of a relatively under-researched market with unique characteristics. According to Hofstede Insights, Kuwait distinguishes itself through its collectivist nature, as reflected by an Individualism (IDV) score of 25. Moreover, Kuwait's high-income levels underscore its potential significance as a market for luxury brands [34]. In contrast, the United Kingdom was selected to represent Western individualist society, with a notably high Individualism (IDV) score of 89, where sustainability is a well-established and ingrained concept [43]. On the other hand, Kuwait has recently embarked on a sustainable transformation, demonstrating a solid commitment to a sustainable future [44]. These distinctive cultural orientations and varying levels of sustainable development make the selected countries captivating candidates for a comparative approach in our study.

### **5.2 Participants**

We collected 600 completed questionnaires, equal to 300 responses from each country. It is worth noting some key demographic differences within our sample. In Kuwait, there was a higher representation of male respondents (76%) compared to the United Kingdom (46%), with this difference being statistically significant ( $X^2(1, N = 600) = 54.3, p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, the age distribution showed that 80% of respondents in Kuwait were above 30 years old, while in the United Kingdom, 60% were below 30 years old. Regarding educational background, a substantial portion of respondents in Kuwait (80%) and the United Kingdom (66%) held bachelor's degrees or higher. Again, this difference was statistically significant ( $X^2(5, N = 600) = 69.3,$

$p < 0.001$ ). When examining income distribution, we found that the average income in Kuwait fell within the range of 4900–6500 \$USD ( $SD = 3.14$ ). In the United Kingdom, the average income ranged from 2660 to 3990 \$USD ( $SD = 2.87$ ). Our sample remains highly relevant to our study, as a significant proportion of respondents in Kuwait (79%) reported having purchased or experienced luxury brands compared to 91% in the United Kingdom. A minority of respondents, comprising 21% in Kuwait and 9% in the United Kingdom, had not yet experienced either type of luxury ( $X^2(1, N = 600) = 16.6, p < 0.001$ ).

### 5.3 Measures

The questionnaire was designed in English and Arabic to accommodate the national language spoken in Kuwait. To ensure the equivalence of meaning, an independent researcher conducted a back-translation of the Arabic version into English. Respondents were allowed to select their preferred language to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was meticulously developed, drawing upon prior research, and tailored to the specific context of this study. Initially, participants were asked to provide information about their demographics and experiences with various luxury categories [13, 25]. These categories encompass cars, clothing, bags and shoes, home linens, makeup and perfumes, hotels, and concierge services. Our definition of luxury included high-end items, typically exclusive and priced significantly above the average market rate, and mass luxury items, still priced above average but more accessible to a broader group of middle-market consumers [12].

Some questions were given to gauge participants' perception of various luxury values, including perfectionism, materialism, self-expression, and hedonism as personal brand values, and perceived conspicuousness, social conformity, and uniqueness and brand social values [34]. Then, the participant indicated their PLS through Kapferer and Laurent's [45] measures of consumers' attitudes toward luxury sustainability and their general (not brand-specific) PI for luxury products within the categories mentioned earlier [34]. All items were measured using a multi-item 7-point Likert scale for all questions.

Cronbach's alpha for each construct is higher than the level of acceptability, except in the case of uniqueness, where Cronbach's alpha is marginal. AVE and composite reliabilities of the constructs present satisfying values above the threshold, thus deemed acceptable and confirming the scales' reliability [46]. In this study, all HTMT values are well below the suggested threshold of [47]. Thus, discriminant validity is established. CMV effect is negligible in this study.

## 6. Findings

This section analyses our data using the PROCESS macro version 3.5 [48]. Our analytical journey comprises two pivotal stages [7]. While continuously including consumers' income as a control variable, the first stage scrutinizes the anticipated influence of PLS on the perceived luxury values that underpin consumers' PI. To test H1, we employed Model 4 of the PROCESS macro. The results in **Table 1** reveal that PLS significantly positively impacted perceived perfectionism. However, the effect on perceived materialism, while positive, was found to be statistically insignificant. Moreover, PLS significantly negatively influenced luxury values: perceived self-expression, hedonism, conspicuousness, uniqueness, and social conformity.

Effect	Coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
PLS -> Perfectionism	0.121	0.047	2.584	0.010	0.029	0.213
PLS -> Materialism	0.041	0.055	0.752	0.453	(0.066)	0.149
PLS -> Self-expression	(0.116)	0.045	(2.599)	0.010	(0.203)	(0.028)
PLS -> Hedonism	(0.234)	0.043	(5.446)	0.000	(0.318)	(0.149)
PLS -> Conspicuousness	(0.200)	0.039	(5.080)	0.000	(0.277)	(0.123)
PLS -> Uniqueness	(0.163)	0.037	(4.402)	0.000	(0.236)	(0.091)
PLS -> Social conformity	(0.324)	0.037	(8.870)	0.000	(0.396)	(0.252)

**Table 1.**  
*Impact of PLS on luxury perceived values.*

In the regression model with PI as the dependent variable (**Table 2**), we observed a significant direct positive effect of the independent variable, PLS, on PI. Additionally, there was a positive indirect effect through perceived luxury perfectionism and a significant adverse effect through hedonism. However, the mediating effects of perceived materialism, self-expression, conspicuousness, uniqueness, and social conformity were insignificant. Therefore, our hypothesis, suggesting that PLS positively shapes their perception of luxury values that subsequently influence their luxury PI, is partially supported.

The second stage investigates the country’s moderating role in shaping the relationships explored in the first stage. Thus, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using Model 7 of PROCESS macro. This analysis considered perceived luxury values as mediators, PLS as the independent variable, country as the moderator (used as a proxy for cultural orientation and cultural sustainability and coded as 0 for Kuwait and 1 for the United Kingdom), and PI as the dependent variable. Income is included as a control variable.

Results demonstrated in **Table 3** indicate that PLS negatively and significantly impacts self-expression, hedonism, conspicuousness, uniqueness, and social conformity values of luxury. Furthermore, the interaction between PLS and the country was insignificant except for conspicuousness. In the United Kingdom, PLS more negatively influences the conspicuous value usually attached to luxury (than it does in Kuwait). In turn, perceived luxury values encompassing perfectionism, hedonism, materialism, and conspicuousness significantly positively affect PI.

Indirect effect on PI	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
PLS -> Perfectionism -> PI	0.036	0.015	0.008	0.067
PLS -> Materialism -> PI	0.008	0.012	(0.015)	0.033
PLS -> Self-expression -> PI	(0.006)	0.007	(0.020)	0.006
PLS -> Hedonism -> PI	(0.029)	0.011	(0.054)	(0.010)
PLS -> Conspicuousness -> PI	(0.022)	0.012	(0.047)	0.001
PLS -> Uniqueness -> PI	0.013	0.009	(0.004)	0.033
PLS -> Social conformity -> PI	(0.006)	0.014	(0.032)	0.023

**Table 2.**  
*Indirect mediated effect of PLS on consumers’ PI.*

Independent	Dependent	Coeff	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
PLS	Perfectionism	0.032	0.062	0.521	0.603	(0.089)	0.154
Interaction		0.150	0.094	1.600	0.110	(0.034)	0.334
PLS	Materialism	0.008	0.073	0.111	0.912	(0.135)	0.151
Interaction		0.014	0.110	0.130	0.897	(0.202)	0.231
PLS	Self-expression	(0.137)	0.060	(2.289)	0.023	(0.254)	(0.019)
Interaction		0.038	0.091	0.424	0.672	(0.139)	0.216
PLS	Hedonism	(0.199)	0.054	(3.700)	0.000	(0.304)	(0.093)
Interaction		0.030	0.081	0.368	0.713	(0.130)	0.190
PLS	Conspicuousness	(0.124)	0.053	(2.361)	0.019	(0.228)	(0.021)
Interaction		(0.163)	0.080	(2.037)	0.042	(0.319)	(0.006)
PLS	Uniqueness	(0.181)	0.050	(3.632)	0.000	(0.278)	(0.083)
Interaction		0.026	0.076	0.341	0.733	(0.123)	0.174
PLS	Social Conformity	(0.348)	0.049	(7.111)	0.000	(0.444)	(0.252)
Interaction		0.068	0.074	0.914	0.361	(0.078)	0.214

Note: Interaction = PLS X Country.

**Table 3.**  
 Country moderated impact of PLS on luxury perceived values.

Country moderated mediated effect	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
PLS -> Perfectionism -> PI	0.044	0.029	(0.012)	0.106
PLS -> Materialism -> PI	0.003	0.023	(0.041)	0.049
PLS -> Self-expression -> PI	0.002	0.008	(0.013)	0.021
PLS -> Hedonism -> PI	0.004	0.012	(0.018)	0.029
PLS -> Conspicuousness -> PI	(0.018)	0.014	(0.050)	0.004
PLS -> Uniqueness -> PI	(0.002)	0.009	(0.022)	0.014
PLS -> Social conformity -> PI	0.001	0.006	(0.007)	0.016

**Table 4.**  
 Conditional indirect impact of PLS on PI.

The examination of conditional indirect effects unveiled a significant and remarkable finding—an index of moderated mediation that did not reach statistical significance (**Table 4**). This pattern persisted consistently across all perceived luxury values, including perfectionism, materialism, self-expression, hedonism, conspicuousness, uniqueness, and social conformity. These findings confirm the predicted consistent influence of PLS on consumers’ PI across countries.

## 7. Discussion

This study is primarily centered on unraveling the intricate dynamics of consumer behavior in luxury products, particularly in the post-COVID transition toward emphasizing luxury brands’ sustainable practices [49]. In the post-COVID era, luxury brands take pride in promoting their sustainable products in response to the

increasing consumer awareness and demands for sustainable consumption [14, 42]. Further exploration of this phenomenon is needed due to the unique nature of luxury products [25, 30, 50], often characterized by their high prices and the use of genuine exotic resources, which traditionally conflict with sustainability principles. Although many luxury brands have responded to the global shift toward sustainability by introducing green products and packages, this transformation may not encompass all product lines and categories [51]. Luxury brands' sustainable practices can also vary throughout the supply chain and operational aspects [52], encompassing labor rights, equality, fair wages, and ethical mining, which are typically not prominently communicated but are increasingly expected by consumers [22]. Recent movements challenging brands, such as Balenciaga, for employing children in their advertisements [53] exemplify this perception.

While the literature underlines the positive impact of such an image on consumer behavior toward sustainable luxury [9, 18, 32, 54], this image might clash with some traditional values of luxury [3, 11, 24, 29], ultimately deterring purchase (intentions) of such products [5, 23, 55]. Given these considerations, the current study takes a novel approach that identifies the relationship between perceived luxury sustainability (PLS) and consumers' motives to purchase luxury across cultures. The study compares countries with distinct cultural orientations and levels of sustainable development, which may lead consumers to pursue luxury items for varying reasons. Therefore, this study aspires, for the first time to our knowledge, to empirically investigate, across distinct cultures, whether the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a global agreement on luxury sustainability, as suggested by Pelikánová et al. [9]. The findings from this study are anticipated to provide valuable insights to luxury brands, aiding them in crafting more effective international communication strategies in an evolving consumer landscape.

Results of the current research yield captivating insights. It becomes apparent that PLS enhances consumers' perception of luxury attributes such as superior quality and performance [1, 6, 17, 37, 38], durability [8, 25], and materialism [39]. When extending the effect to consumers' luxury PI, it is revealed that PIs are boosted by the connection consumers establish between luxury sustainability and such values. Notably, the positive indirect impact is predominantly significant through perfectionism. Simultaneously, PLS reduces consumers' perception of pleasure, self-expression/identification, and various social values, including prestige, status signaling, distinction, and conformity to social groups, diminishing consumers' PI (behavior) toward luxury opposing the results of previous studies [1, 8, 11–13, 16, 17, 40, 41]. Remarkably, the negative indirect effect is primarily significant through hedonism. Such contradictions with established literature align with the illustrated inherent contrasts between sustainability and traditional values closely tied to luxury [30, 55], subsequently impacting intentions to purchase luxury products.

For instance, sustainability, often associated with long-term satisfaction, may not seamlessly align with the hedonistic aspect of luxury, which primarily centers on immediate pleasure and indulgence. Luxury products have historically incorporated elements of conspicuousness and social conformity, where consumers often make purchases to signal their status or to conform to a particular social group. In contrast, sustainable practices often involve standardization and mass production to reduce waste and environmental impact, leading to fewer unique products. Therefore, when sustainability, which emphasizes long-term responsibility and a subtler approach, enters the equation, it might be less compatible with these traditional luxury values [55].

It is also worth noting that former exploration has involved different sustainable practices, like ethical, certification, donation, eco-friendly initiatives, vintage consumption, or renting [12, 18, 19, 40, 41], with a specific focus on predominantly concentrated on specific demographic groups [14–16, 38], explicitly luxury consumers [12, 13, 17–19, 27], and distinct luxury product categories [9, 12, 20]. Former conceptual studies [1, 8, 11] might not have captured the full spectrum of consumer perceptions and behaviors by examining a limited sample. Conversely, this study takes a more inclusive approach, considering a broader range of consumers and diverse luxury categories.

An interesting cross-cultural dimension emerges when comparing Kuwait to the United Kingdom. The study reveals variations in the connection between conspicuousness and luxury sustainability between the two countries. Despite being distinct cultures, it is observed that consumers in the United Kingdom tend to associate conspicuousness with luxury sustainability more negatively than consumers in Kuwait. Cultural values and orientations toward sustainable consumption and environmental consciousness in the United Kingdom could be found in this. The emphasis on sustainable living is often ingrained in educational curricula and government policies. As a result, consumers in the United Kingdom are more likely to be self-motivated to prioritize environmentally friendly practices, including their purchasing decisions. However, findings shed light on the lack of differences in the indirect influence of PLS on PI across these different cultural contexts.

## **8. Research implications**

### **8.1 Implications to theory**

In response to the growing need for a deeper understanding of consumers' perceptions and interactions with the integration of sustainability and luxury [11, 30] and the influence of cultural diversity on consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward luxury sustainability [21, 25], the present study addresses several critical research gaps. First and foremost, it advances the comprehension of the theory of planned behavior and the self-congruity by exploring the sequential impact of PLS on consumers' evaluation of luxury and PI, aiming to refine the traditional luxury frameworks [1, 34] to predict luxury PI in a world permanently transformed by the pandemic. It is important to emphasize that while previous studies have explored the relationship between specific luxury values and different forms of engagement with sustainable luxuries [e.g., Refs. 8, 12, 40], this study represents a novel approach. It empirically investigates the broader connection between consumers' perceptions of luxury sustainability and their overall evaluation and perception of luxury. This holistic approach allows us to consider multiple facets of consumer behavior and attitudes toward luxury sustainability, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how luxury sustainability impacts consumption.

The proposed framework redefines luxury values and guides the way forward in a world increasingly embracing sustainable practices, significantly influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. It provides a roadmap for luxury brands to advance their marketing, positioning, and brand communication strategies to redefine luxury for modern consumers [25, 54]. This entails the joint communication of sustainability and luxury signals through values that consumers strongly associate with luxury sustainability, thus minimizing the risk of potential backlashes. Additionally, the present

study offers a cross-country comparison, addressing a notable gap in the literature, which has been relatively lacking in sufficient cross-cultural investigations on this dynamic subject. This comprehensive approach encompasses a broader spectrum of consumers and diverse luxury product categories.

## **8.2 Managerial implications**

Based on the present study's findings, this section offers several managerial implications to assist luxury brands in effectively navigating the evolving landscape of sustainable luxury and aligning their strategies with consumer preferences and global trends. Recognizing the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable luxury, brands are recommended to continue promoting sustainable practices and communicating how they contribute to a more sustainable future, as the pandemic has accelerated the shift toward sustainability. However, luxury brands should be cautious when communicating sustainability. It is crucial to ensure that this communication aligns with the values consumers associate with luxury sustainability to avoid any potential actions or messaging that might lead to consumer skepticism or backlash.

Accordingly, luxury brands are advised to emphasize their sustainable products' superior quality and materialistic value. Consumers perceive sustainability as enhancing these aspects, making it essential to communicate how sustainability is integrated into the production process to ensure exceptional quality and longevity. While luxury brands can still offer pleasurable elements in their products, they should be careful not to overemphasize this aspect when marketing their luxury sustainable image. The study shows that an excessive focus on hedonism can reduce PI. Furthermore, luxury brand managers should be aware that social values inherently linked to luxury may not align with the brands' sustainable image.

Besides, it is key to understand the region's cultural nuances and sustainable development practices when expanding into new markets to adapt marketing strategies to resonate with specific cultural values and consumer expectations in each market. Despite this study indicating that consumers across countries share the same values regarding sustainable luxury, it remains essential to consider cultural factors. Even when values align, preferred communication styles, such as language, imagery, and tone, can differ. For example, conspicuousness is more negatively associated with luxury sustainability in the United Kingdom than in Kuwait, where consumers are interested in signaling their status by consuming luxury [3]. Thus, luxury brands should ensure that their marketing and communication strategies are culturally sensitive, tailoring marketing materials to include symbols, images, or metaphors that resonate with the specific culture.

## **9. Limitations and future research**

The current research explores consumers' perceptions of and behavior toward luxury sustainability in different countries and cultures. It is crucial to acknowledge that cultural influences are complex and diverse. Therefore, capturing all the nuances of different cultures within a single study presents a significant challenge. Hence, we advise testing our proposed model across a broader range of nations as consumer attitudes and actions vary significantly worldwide. Future research can also consider incorporating individual-level cultural orientations, such as IND-COL, as consumers within the same country may exhibit variations in their cultural orientations.

This study, focusing on the post-COVID era, provides a snapshot of consumer perceptions and behaviors at a specific time. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize luxury and sustainability's dynamic and context-dependent nature and how consumer values and behaviors constantly evolve. This is especially pertinent in a world marked by the consecutive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic and persisting conflicts, which can significantly alter how consumers perceive the intersection of luxury and sustainability.

Additionally, local market conditions, ethical regulations, economic circumstances, and cultural trends can influence how consumers interpret these concepts. For example, the ongoing Middle East conflict has prompted consumers to make choices based on luxury brands' positions on matters concerning the loss of lives, notably those of children and women, which inherently aligns with unsustainability. This behavior is closely tied to social aspects, such as committing to human rights and adhering to associated values. Significantly, these shifts in consumer behavior are anticipated to have a lasting impact on the consumption of luxury brands. In light of this, longitudinal studies are highly recommended to track how consumer behavior evolves. Furthermore, future research should consider contextual factors to comprehensively understand consumer perceptions and behaviors. By doing so, luxury brands can adapt their strategies and practices to the ever-changing landscape of luxury and sustainability.

Additional variables that affect the relationship between PLS and consumer values (purchase motives) may be at play. Thus, adding more control variables like luxury purchase frequency, purchase time, and luxury product category (e.g., cars, fashion items, jewelry, and services) to future studies can provide valuable insights. Exploring the moderating role of self-congruity on the relationship between PLS and luxury values can also offer a deeper understanding of how consumers' alignment with their self-concept influences their perceptions and value assignments related to sustainability in the luxury context. This investigation will shed light on whether consumers who perceive sustainability as congruent with their self-identity are more likely to prioritize luxury values found here to align with sustainability, finally affecting their PI and behaviors.

Future studies might also consider comparing the proposed framework across different types of luxury (premium luxury vs. mass luxury), various sustainable practices, and brands (high vs. low transparency and reporting). This could yield additional insights into the nuanced relationship between consumer perceptions and luxury sustainability.

## **10. Conclusion**

This chapter offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between luxury and sustainability in the post-COVID era. The pandemic has heightened consumer awareness and demand for sustainability, challenging traditional luxury values such as exclusivity and indulgence. Through empirical research, this chapter investigates the impact of perceived luxury sustainability (PLS) on consumer motives to purchase luxury items across different cultures, comparing Kuwait and the United Kingdom. The findings reveal that PLS enhances perceptions of luxury attributes like quality and durability but reduces the emphasis on pleasure, self-expression, and social values. This dual impact highlights the complex interplay between traditional luxury values and modern sustainability expectations. The study also underscores the

importance of cultural context, as consumers in different countries might connect sustainability to various values of luxury. Adapting marketing strategies to cultural nuances can help brands effectively navigate the evolving landscape of sustainable luxury.

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## **Conflict of interest**

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## **Acronyms and abbreviations**

PLS	perceived luxury sustainability
PI	purchase intentions


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This book considers how a sense of belonging can be established in culturally diverse and divided societies. Multiculturalism and interculturalism are discussed in 16 chapters, written by experts from different countries and cultures. Education in the digital and post-digital sphere, creating global citizens and public policies, maintaining social cohesion, and preserving old values in modern societies and today's world are discussed. The underlying themes are teaching, learning, public policy, and accepting different cultures. There are some answers to establishing a sense of belonging in a fast-changing world, but the book also asks some interesting questions and provides many thought-provoking ideas. It welcomes the reader into a changing world.

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