The Effect of Cultural Diversity on Mental Well-being of Non-local Students in Higher Education and Teachers' Cross-cultural Teaching Strategies

Qile Xu

Foreign Language, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, China
xuqile2013@126.com

Abstract: In the context of globalization, cultural diversity in higher education has emerged as a significant phenomenon, impacting the mental well-being of non-local students. This study examines the influence of cultural diversity on the mental well-being of non-local students in higher education and explores the role of cross-cultural teaching strategies in enhancing their adaptation. And it reveals that cultural diversity offers both psychological benefits, like enhanced cultural intelligence and resilience, and challenges, including difficulties with belonging and adaptation. In diverse environments, some students excel at, while others struggle with issues such as social isolation and language barriers, which can impact their mental health. Besides, cross-cultural teaching strategies, including Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and culturally responsive teaching, are proven to improve students' cross-cultural competence. However, challenges such as the lack of systematic application and teacher training remain. The study provides recommendations for enhancing cross-cultural teaching frameworks and improving support for non-local students to foster better mental well-being and academic success.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, Teaching strategies, Non-local students, Mental well-being

1.   Introduction

In higher education, cultural diversity significantly influences the experiences of non-local students. Though exposure to different cultures provides opportunities for personal growth and development, it also poses challenges that impact students' mental well-being and their adaptation to academic environments. The mental well-being of these students is a crucial in their academic success and overall experience, influenced by elements like social integration, psychological resilience, and cultural adaptability. However, cultural diversity can lead to difficulties such as feelings of isolation, anxiety, and a lack of belonging, particularly for students from culturally minority backgrounds. As such, cross-cultural teaching strategies have been designed to assist non-local students in navigating both their academic and social environments. These strategies aim to bridge cultural gaps, enhance communication, and foster an inclusive learning atmosphere. However, despite their potential, the effectiveness of these strategies is hindered by limitations in their implementation, including inadequate teacher training and the lack of a systematic approach to cross-cultural education. This study aims to explore the dual impact of cultural diversity on the mental well-being of non-local students and investigate the effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching strategies in promoting their

adaptation and psychological health. Through a quantitative approach, it provides insights into the impact of cultural diversity on students' well-being and examines the role of teaching strategies in supporting cross-cultural adaptation.

2. Literature review

2.1. The impact of cultural diversity on non-local students' mental well-being

The mental well-being of non-local students in higher education is significantly affected by cultural diversity. Cultural backgrounds differences can present both positive psychological benefits and challenges in adaptation and social integration. On the positive side, students with a bicultural background often exhibit greater cultural adaptability, being more open to embracing linguistic and cultural differences while avoiding prejudice and stereotypes [1]. This cultural adaptability not only enhances students' cross-cultural communication skills but lays the foundation for the development of their cultural intelligence. The cultural intelligence is defined as an individual's ability to interact effectively in multicultural environments [2]. Research has shown that students with higher cultural intelligence are better able to establish cross-cultural social connections, gain emotional support, and achieve better adaptation both academically and socially [3].

In addition, cross-cultural experiences can strengthen students' psychological resilience, helping them maintain emotional stability and adapt to their environment in the face of academic pressure and social challenges [4]. Prior studies demonstrated that cultural intelligence is closely related to psychological resilience, helping students better cope with cultural shock and academic challenges [4]. However, cultural diversity also brings significant challenges, particularly in terms of belonging and adaptability. Non-local students often face language barriers, cultural gaps, and social isolation, which may lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness [5]. Furthermore, students from cultural minorities generally experience silence in the classroom and a sense of social exclusion, which exacerbates these psychological difficulties [6]. Therefore, while cultural diversity offers non-local students rich opportunities for cross-cultural communication and self-development, it also comes with challenges such as adaptation pressure and a lack of belonging [7,8]. The mental well-being of these students largely depends on how effectively they manage these challenges in the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

2.2. The impact of cross-cultural teaching strategies on student adaptation

To help non-local students better adapt to cultural diversity and promote their mental well-being, cross-cultural teaching strategies have become particularly important in higher education. Through effective teaching strategies, educators can help students to overcome language and cultural barriers, thus fostering a sense of belonging and improving their psychological health in academic settings. In language instruction, cross-cultural teaching strategies are commonly employed. For instance, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emphasizes improving language skills through meaningful tasks and problem-solving, while culturally responsive teaching integrates diverse cultural elements to enhance students' cultural awareness and understanding of different cultures [9]. Additionally, the scaffolding approach is commonly used to break down complex tasks into smaller steps, helping students gradually overcome challenges in the cultural adaptation process [9]. In other disciplines, strategies like the cross-cultural communication framework and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) have been proposed and applied [10,11].

Previous research indicates that cross-cultural teaching strategies play a key role in enhancing students' cross-cultural competence and psychological adaptability. In particular, studies conducted in Chinese higher education suggest that these strategies are effective in promoting both language development and cultural adaptation [9,12]. Despite these advances, existing cross-cultural teaching

strategies still face a number of challenges. One major issue is the lack of systematic and practical application in teaching practices, with many students struggling to transfer classroom knowledge to real-world cross-cultural contexts [10]. Another challenge is the need for improvement in educators' cross-cultural communication skills and teaching techniques, particularly due to inadequate training in cross-cultural teaching for pre-service teachers [13]. In addition, research on strategies like CLIL, particularly in terms of quantitative analysis, remains limited [11]. Although cross-cultural teaching strategies have made progress in promoting students' cross-cultural adaptation, there is still room for improvement in their implementation. Future research should enhance the practical effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching strategies, and optimize teacher training in cross-cultural competence, further exploring how these strategies can be effectively integrated into various disciplines to help non-local students better adapt to cultural diversity and improve their mental health.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a quantitative approach, collecting and analyzing numerical data through a questionnaire survey of a large sample of students to identify patterns, relationships, and trends. The questionnaire used a Likert scale to measure several constructs related to cross-cultural differences, enabling respondents to indicate their degree of agreement with statements, with response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The Likert scale covered four key dimensions: cultural diversity perception, overall well-being, cultural adaptation, and expected support, with 4-5 items in each dimension to measure respondents' attitudes. Also, the first part of the questionnaire was grounded in Hofstede's cross-cultural theory, providing a structured framework to quantify respondents' cross-cultural perceptions. By referring to Hofstede's cultural dimensions like power distance and individualism versus collectivism, it systematically assessed respondents' awareness of cultural differences in their academic and social experiences.

3.2. Data collection and analysis methods

The sample was randomly drawn from a range of universities in Shanghai, including comprehensive universities, normal universities, and science-and-technology-focused institutions, thus ensuring its representativeness while accounting for factors such as students' geographical origins. In terms of academic backgrounds, students from different grades (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) and various majors were included, with domestic students coming from various provinces across China. The total sample size was 100. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. The reliability of the scale was verified with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.901, indicating good internal consistency. The validity was confirmed with a KMO value of 0.860, demonstrating that the scale effectively measured the intended cross-cultural dimensions. To investigate the relationships between different variables, correlation analysis was performed, and regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive relationships among variables. This approach helps to understand how one or more independent variables could predict the dependent variable, which was the overall well-being of non-local students impacted by cross-cultural environments.

3.3. Variable definition and measurement

Cultural diversity refers to the presence of multiple cultural forms within an academic environment, a concept that has been widely discussed in existing literature [3]. In this study, it was measured via students' reports of their exposure to and experiences with different cultures at the university, including interactions with teachers and students from diverse cultural backgrounds, participation in

cultural events, and study of diverse cultural materials. Through these dimensions, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of students' cultural diversity experiences in academic settings and their potential impact on mental well-being.

Mental well-being, according to the World Health Organization, is a positive mental state that enables individuals to cope effectively with life's stresses, realize their potential, perform well in learning and work, and contribute to society. In academic contexts, mental well-being encompasses emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and social adaptation. In the study, these aspects were measured through three dimensions: emotional well-being (assessed by students' self-reports on feelings such as happiness, anxiety, and stress), psychological resilience (measured by students' ability to cope with cross-cultural challenges and recover from setbacks), and social adaptation (gauged by students' integration into the local campus community, including their relationships with peers and participation in campus activities).

Cross-cultural teaching strategies refer to methods aimed at bridging cultural differences and promoting effective learning in diverse cultural environments [9,10]. These strategies include TBLT, culturally responsive teaching, and scaffolding. In this study, cross-cultural teaching strategies were integrated into students' expected support, exploring their expectations of different cross-cultural teaching approaches and analyzing how these strategies affect their adaptation process and potential impact on mental well-being.

4.   Results

A total of 100 student questionnaires were collected, and the measurement scales were evaluated for reliability and validity. The reliability analysis indicated that the Cronbach's Alpha values for all dimensions and the overall scale were high, ranging from 0.813 to 0.913, with the overall scale yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.901, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Additionally, the KMO value was 0.860, and Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a significant result (p=0.000), further confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The detailed results are presented below.

4.1.   Reliability and validity tests

The results of the reliability and validity tests are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The Cronbach's Alpha values for all dimensions were stable and met high standards, indicating strong internal consistency of the scale. In the validity test, the KMO value was 0.860, which met the requirements for factor analysis, and Bartlett's test of sphericity also indicated that the data was suitable for further factor analysis.

Table 1: Reliability test

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Cultural Diversity Perception	0.913	5
Mental Well-being	0.860	4
Cultural Adaptation	0.813	4
Expected Support	0.850	4
Overall Scale	0.901	17

Table 2: Validity test

KMO Value	0.860	
Bartlett's Test	Approximate Chi-Square	952.346
	Degrees of Freedom	136
	Significance	0.000

4.2. Descriptive statistical analysis

The descriptive statistics presented the mean and standard deviation of the 17 Likert-scale items, illustrating the distribution of students' responses across dimensions like cultural diversity, mental well-being, and cultural adaptation. Specifically, items related to cultural diversity (e.g., Q8, Q9) revealed that students generally felt that, in certain situations, cultural diversity may hinder learning. Moreover, Q15 highlighted that students exhibited a strong desire for cross-cultural learning. The standard deviations indicated a moderate level of variation in students' responses, thus reflecting the diverse nature of their experiences in cross-cultural environments. The mean scores for emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and social adaptation in the mental well-being dimension were within a moderate range, thereby reflecting considerable individual differences in the mental health experiences of non-local students in cross-cultural contexts. While some students demonstrate good adaptation and reported higher mental well-being, others encountered greater challenges in terms of psychological and cultural adjustment.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

Question	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	3. 19	1.285
Q2	3.26	1.194
Q3	3.31	1.220
Q4	3.21	1.274
Q5	3.38	1.221
Q6	3.01	1.352
Q7	3.23	1.370
Q8	3.29	1.409
Q9	3.31	1.220
Q10	3.46	1.352
Q11	3.22	1.260
Q12	2.92	1.269
Q13	3.05	1.242
Q14	3.27	1.072
Q15	3.68	1.348
Q16	3.33	1.256
Q17	3.33	1.341

4.3. Correlation analysis

Spearman's rank correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between cultural diversity perception and mental well-being. For instance, students' awareness of cultural differences in the learning environment (e.g., Q1) was positively correlated with their learning motivation (e.g., Q7) (r=0.223, p=0.025), as illustrated in Table 4. This suggests that increased awareness of cultural differences may enhance students' motivation to learn. In order to increase student engagement, universities could create more opportunities for cross-cultural interactions, such as organizing study groups with international students or inviting guest speakers from various cultural backgrounds. Moreover, students' mental well-being was found to significantly influence their support needs. The analysis revealed that students with poorer mental health were more likely to seek additional educational support, with a positive correlation between Q6 and Q15 (r=0.351, p<0.001), as shown

in Table 5. This highlights the importance for universities to address mental health issues and offer tailored psychological counseling and academic support to students with lower mental well-being.

Table 4: Correlation analysis 1

Spearman's Rho	Q1 (to measure awareness of cultural differences in the learning environment)	Q7 (to measure learning motivation)	
		Correlation	0.223
		Significance	0.025

Table 5: Correlation analysis 2

Spearman's Rho	Q15 (to measure students' needs for cross-cultural teaching strategies)	Q6 (to measure negative impact of cultural differences)	
		Correlation	0.351
		Significance	0.000

4.4. Hofstede's cultural dimensions analysis

Based on Hofstede's cross-cultural theory, 92.45% of respondents believed that people in Shanghai could quickly adapt to changes in language learning, reflecting the low uncertainty avoidance characteristic of Shanghai's culture. Moreover, 77.55% of respondents felt that people in Shanghai emphasize long-term goals when formulating language learning plans, indicating a strong long-term goal orientation in Shanghai's culture. The results show that cultural differences in a cross-cultural environment significantly influence students' learning motivation, mental well-being, and their expectations for support. Therefore, universities should focus more on students' cultural adaptation processes in cross-cultural teaching and provide more effective assistance to promote non-local students' mental health and academic success.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of cultural diversity on non-local students' mental well-being in higher education and explored teachers' cross-cultural teaching strategies. The findings indicate that cultural diversity has a dual effect, enhancing students' cultural intelligence and psychological resilience while also posing challenges such as a lack of belonging and adaptation difficulties. For instance, survey results show that while some students' learning motivation increases due to cultural diversity, others face communication and self-expression issues. In terms of cross-cultural teaching strategies, they have shown certain effectiveness in promoting students' language proficiency and cross-cultural competence. However, problems like a lack of systematic frameworks, insufficient practical applications, and a shortage of well-trained pre-service teachers still exist. Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has limitations. The relatively small sample size of 100 students and the focus on Shanghai may limit the generalizability of the results, as the situation can differ in other regions. Future research could broaden the sample size and geographical scope to obtain more comprehensive results and conduct longitudinal studies to track student's long-term adaptation and development. Besides, more in-depth research on cross-cultural teaching in non-English languages and the development of practical frameworks is essential to improve cross-cultural education for non-local students.

References

[1] Wu, X. and Veronis, L. (2022) English-speaking international students' perceptions and experiences in a bilingual university: A geographical approach to linguistic capital. The Canadian geographer, 66 (3): 542-555.

[2] Wagstaff, M.F., et al. (2020) Individual bicultural identity and cultural intelligence: Increasing positive attitudes toward diversity. Management research (Armonk, N.Y.), 18 (1): 29-45.

[3] Daddow, A., et al. (2020) Hopeful Cross-Cultural Encounters to Support Student Well-Being and Graduate Attributes in Higher Education', Journal of studies in international education, 24 (4): 474-490.

[4] Chu, K. and Zhu, F. (2023) Impact of cultural intelligence on the cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China: The mediating effect of psychological resilience. Frontiers in psychology.

[5] Ahn, M.Y. and Davis, H.H. (2023) Are local students disadvantaged? Understanding institutional, local and national sense of belonging in higher education', British educational research journal, 49 (1): 19-34.

[6] Peng, F., et al. (2023) Cultural Distance, Classroom Silence and Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Education: Evidences from Migrant College Students in Shanghai', Behavioral sciences, 13 (3).

[7] Alshammari, M.K., et al. (2023) Exploring How Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging Influence the Psychological Adjustment of International Students', Egyptian academic journal of biological sciences. Physiology & molecular biology, 15 (1), 251-257.

[8] Li, X., Rahman, M.S. and Yu, L. (2023) Is University Support Effective? A Longitudinal Study of Cultural Adaptation of South Asian Students in Chinese Universities. Journal of studies in international education.

[9] Xin, W. C., Zhang, Q. and Luo, X. Y. (2024). Promoting Language Acquisition and Cross-Cultural Competence in Multilingual Environments: Effective Teaching Strategies and Educational Support. Advances in Humanities Research, 9, 51-54.

[10] Cheng, Z.L. and Luo, T. (2024) Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies for English Teaching in Sports Management under the Context of Globalization: Theoretical Exploration and Educational Reflection. Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities Research, 2(6), 1-6.

[11] Zhang, X. (2021) The localization of CLIL teaching strategies in the German language major programmes at Chinese universities: A study of intercultural communication course. Foreign Language Education in China, 4(3), 57-64.

[12] Qin, H.M., Li, D.Y. and Li, X. (2022) An Analysis on the Effectiveness of Classroom Intercultural Teaching in Promoting Students' Intercultural Competence-A Meta-Analysis Based on 26 Empirical Studies. Journal of Educational Science of Hunan Normal University, 21(6), 97-104.

[13] Lei, W. (2021) A Survey on Preservice English Teachers' Intercultural Communicative Competence in China. English Language Teaching, 14(1), 37-45.