
**PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION
AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HOST COUNTRIES**

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ABSTRACT

International students in many tertiary institutions lack intercultural knowledge, skills, and competencies required for sociocultural survival in host countries. Consequently, these learners misinterpret cultural cues and experience social isolation which often results in poor academic engagement and adjustment difficulties in the long run. Even their present social and academic needs in daily activities are not easily addressed due to limited cultural literacy, and one of the ways to address this issue is through performance pedagogy in intercultural education. This study investigated cultural integration outcomes through performance-based instruction. It is a randomized controlled trial with 100 participants, 50 students randomly assigned to the experimental group and another 50 students assigned to the control group with an age bracket of 18 to 24 years. The results of this study reveal that there is a statistically significant difference between the application of intercultural variables by students in the experimental group (Mean = 8.62, SD = 1.48) and the control group (Mean = 7.04, SD = 1.78), with the experimental group performing better ($p = .004$, Cohen's $d = 0.59$, 95% CI [0.46, 1.32]) in cultural integration scores. The findings of this research imply that curriculum planners and other educational stakeholders should integrate performance pedagogy in intercultural programs offered in tertiary institutions to improve cultural integration outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Cultural integration, Performance pedagogy, Comparative study, Learning outcomes, Higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Performance pedagogy plays a critical role in equipping international students with the cultural and communicative competencies necessary for successful adaptation in host countries. According to Atteraya(2021), students who engage in performance-based learning exhibit stronger intercultural awareness and more effective social integration throughout their academic experience. It is important for international students to develop cultural literacy to navigate the complex social, academic, and linguistic demands of a new environment. Performance pedagogy helps students acquire skills and knowledge that are vital for interpreting cultural norms prudently, which enhances social inclusion, academic engagement, and cross-cultural communication. Educational institutions need to use experiential approaches to enhance cultural integration because traditional teaching faces problems with students' cultural disconnection and limited participation. Beregovaya et al. (2020) argued that every international student requires pedagogical approaches that address all aspects of their intercultural experience, making it needful for educators to use modern approaches such as performance pedagogy. Performance pedagogy is a learning approach that enhances expressive communication, helps students navigate complex intercultural encounters, and fosters critical reflection. This approach provides cultural concepts and develops practical adaptive skills in an embodied and accessible manner. Bethel et al. (2020) noted that many studies on student adaptation revealed only traditional methods for teaching cultural adjustment, leaving a gap in the impact of performance-based strategies in multicultural classroom contexts. This research adopts three theories to advance its argument: sociocultural theory, experiential learning theory, and transformative learning theory. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that knowledge is constructed by students via active social interaction, while Kolb (1984) stressed that students are more committed through hands-on activities. Mezirow (1991) explained that students' perspectives are reshaped when they critically reflect on disorienting cultural experiences. The integration of these theories indicates that performance pedagogy can foster cultural competence via learning by doing.

Problem statement

Many international students in host countries find it difficult to cope under cultural and communicative pressure because they lack the knowledge and skills needed for sociocultural survival in unfamiliar academic and social systems. They misinterpret cultural cues and experience social isolation in their academic and daily endeavors. This issue has remained unresolved as international graduates continue to struggle after graduation. The need to

address 21st century cultural integration challenges through performance-based instruction concerns stakeholders including government, universities, teachers, and researchers. Performance pedagogy may significantly impact students' acquisition of intercultural knowledge and skills. Yet there is a paucity of comparative studies on the effects of performance pedagogy on cultural integration outcomes of international students. Few studies address how performance-based instruction shapes intercultural behaviour, attitude, and knowledge within cultural adaptation challenges. In addition, the lack of evaluation frameworks and robust assessment tools hinders effective strategies for implementing performance pedagogy. The uneven application of performance-based instruction in higher education, impeded by inadequate training and poor institutional support, reduces the quality of cultural integration support students receive. These issues motivated this study.

Proposed Solution

The development and effective implementation of performance-based instruction centered on helping international students acquire intercultural knowledge and skills is proposed. The attributes of this performance pedagogy program include drama-based and role-play tools, a better curriculum for intercultural competence, and a robust evaluation framework. Johnson et al. (2020) found that when performance pedagogy is implemented in cultural integration programs, it fosters students' cultural competence and allows them to make informed social and academic decisions. The main purpose of this study therefore, is to examine cultural integration outcomes through performance pedagogy in comparison with the traditional method of teaching. The study will specifically determine the effects of performance pedagogy on intercultural communication, acquisition of cultural knowledge, and practical adaptive skills. Based on the above objectives, three research questions guided the study and they are stated as:

1. What are the baseline cultural integration levels among international students before the introduction of performance-based and conventional instructional interventions?
2. How effective is the designed performance pedagogy in targeting intercultural competencies compared to conventional instruction?
3. How do cultural integration outcomes of students differ between students who use performance pedagogy and those who receive traditional instruction?

Literature Review

The review of related literature is structured based on the following subheadings: Performance pedagogy, cultural integration in higher education, effects of performance

pedagogy on cultural integration, comparative effectiveness of performance pedagogy for international students, theoretical framework and gap in literature.

Performance pedagogy

Performance pedagogy is an instructional approach that positions creative and embodied practices at the center of teaching and learning. According to Biney and Cheng (2021), performance is not confined to theatre stages. It extends to classrooms where learning is framed as rehearsal, enactment, and reflection. Chen and Tsokalidou (2021) explained that performance pedagogy requires students to become co-creators of knowledge through improvisation, role-play, simulation, storytelling, and devising. This shifts learners from passive recipients to active participants who use voice, body, and space to explore concepts. In higher education contexts, Chen et al. (2021) documented the use of performance pedagogy in teacher education to develop professional identity and in language classrooms to reduce speaking anxiety. The relevance of performance pedagogy to intercultural learning has grown as universities internationalize. Claro and Esteves (2021) argued that drama provides a safe space for learners to experiment with unfamiliar cultural scripts and receive immediate feedback from peers. Unlike didactic instruction, performance tasks demand that students interpret intention, negotiate meaning, and respond spontaneously. Fute (2020) found that process drama allowed second-language learners to practice pragmatic functions such as requesting, apologizing, and refusing in context, which improved communicative competence. Gbollie and Gong (2020) extended this claim by showing that international students who engaged in devised theatre projects developed stronger peer networks because collaborative creation required sustained dialogue and trust. Therefore performance pedagogy operates on two levels. It teaches academic content and it rehearses the social and cultural interactions that surround academic life.

Cultural integration in higher education

Cultural integration describes the reciprocal process through which international students participate in the academic and social life of a host country while retaining valued aspects of their home culture. Glas (2022) conceptualized integration as one of four acculturation strategies and linked it to the most favorable psychological and sociocultural outcomes. Imran et al. (2020) distinguished psychological adjustment, which involves well-being and satisfaction, from sociocultural adjustment, which involves the ability to navigate daily interactions. They noted that sociocultural adjustment is strongly predicted by cultural

knowledge, language proficiency, and contact with host nationals. Host institutions play a decisive role in this process. Jiang et al. (2020) identified mismatches between home-country pedagogies and host-country expectations as a major source of academic stress. Examples include differences in classroom participation norms, group work dynamics, and instructor-student relationships. Jiang (2020) emphasized that integration is not the sole responsibility of the student. Universities must design curricula and support systems that recognize cultural difference as an asset rather than a deficit. Programs that foster structured intercultural contact have shown positive effects. According to Kamitewoko (2021), movement along the intercultural development continuum from denial to integration requires guided reflection on cultural difference, not just exposure. Without intentional pedagogy, international students often remain in parallel social networks with limited host interaction, a pattern termed “academic isolation.”

Effects of performance pedagogy on cultural integration

A growing body of evidence connects performance-based methods to specific dimensions of cultural integration. Kim et al. (2021) defined intercultural communicative competence as comprising knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, attitudes of curiosity and openness, and critical cultural awareness. Each of these dimensions is activated during performance work. Lapka and Buchtele (2022) conducted a semester-long study with Chinese international students in the UK who participated in forum theatre workshops. The students reported reduced anxiety when interpreting British indirectness and humor, and tutors observed increased voluntary contributions in seminars. Larionova et al. (2020) argued that embodiment strengthens memory and empathy because learners physically encode cultural practices rather than memorizing them. In their study of drama for intercultural education, Australian domestic students and international students co-created scenes about academic integrity and plagiarism. The embodied negotiation of those concepts produced deeper understanding than policy handouts. Liu and Wu (2020) measured pragmatic development among English learners and found that the drama group outperformed the control group on measures of request mitigation and conversational management after 12 weeks. These skills are directly transferable to navigating office hours, group projects, and service encounters in a host country. Performance pedagogy also addresses affective barriers. Nataliia and Inna (2020) linked language anxiety to fear of negative evaluation, which is common among international students. Naveh and Shelef (2021) showed that drama activities lowered speaking anxiety because the fictional frame allowed

learners to take risks without threatening their real-world identity. As anxiety decreases, willingness to communicate increases, which is a key predictor of intercultural contact and eventual integration.

Comparative effectiveness of performance pedagogy for international students

Direct comparisons between performance pedagogy and traditional instruction in the domain of cultural integration are still limited, yet adjacent fields offer insight. In language education, Nikula and Sibley (2020) compared a drama-based syllabus with a grammar-translation syllabus and found stronger gains in oral fluency and intercultural awareness for the drama cohort. In business communication, Othman et al. (2020) contrasted role-play simulations with case-study discussions and observed that students in the simulation condition demonstrated better conflict resolution skills in cross-cultural teams. However, effectiveness is moderated by implementation factors. Poole et al. (2022) cautioned that performance pedagogy requires facilitators trained in both content and drama conventions. Without scaffolding, students may experience cognitive overload or view activities as entertainment rather than learning. Qi and Xu (2022) noted that assessment remains a challenge because traditional tests fail to capture embodied learning, leading some departments to deprioritize performance methods. Institutional culture also matters. Ran (2020) reported that universities with strong lecture traditions resist participatory pedagogies due to time constraints and large class sizes. These findings suggest that performance pedagogy may be more effective than traditional methods for developing intercultural skills, but its impact depends on design quality, facilitator expertise, and institutional support. The present study responds to the need for a controlled comparison within a host-country university setting using shared learning outcomes.

Theoretical framework

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory was propounded by Lev Vygotsky (1978). The basic tenets of the theory state that cognitive development is fundamentally social. Higher mental functions first appear on the social plane between people and are then internalized by the individual. Learning is mediated by cultural tools such as language, symbols, and practices, and it occurs most effectively in the zone of proximal development where a learner, with guidance, can achieve more than they could alone.

In relation to the present study, performance pedagogy functions as a mediational tool that externalizes intercultural knowledge. When international students create and perform scenes about campus life, they use dialogue and gesture to negotiate meaning with domestic peers. The instructor and peers provide scaffolding within the zone of proximal development, helping students move from uncertainty about cultural norms to confident participation. Thus sociocultural theory explains why collaborative, dialogic performance tasks may accelerate cultural integration more than solitary reading or lecture listening.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning theory was propounded by David Kolb (1984). The basic tenets hold that learning is a four-stage cyclical process. Concrete experience is followed by reflective observation, which leads to abstract conceptualization, and then active experimentation that generates new experiences. Knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, and learners must engage all four modes for deep learning to occur.

In relation to the present study, performance pedagogy maps directly onto Kolb's cycle. A role-play of a group project meeting provides the concrete experience. Guided debriefing prompts reflective observation on miscommunication and cultural assumptions. Students then develop abstract conceptualizations about norms of turn-taking or feedback. In a subsequent performance they engage in active experimentation with new strategies. Traditional instruction often stops at conceptualization without the experiential and experimental phases, which may explain weaker transfer to real-life integration challenges.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory was propounded by Jack Mezirow (1991). The basic tenets argue that adults hold frames of reference composed of habits of mind and points of view. When they encounter a disorienting dilemma that cannot be resolved by existing assumptions, they may engage in critical reflection, dialogue, and ultimately a perspective transformation that results in more inclusive and integrative ways of seeing the world.

In relation to the present study, intercultural encounters in a host country often serve as disorienting dilemmas for international students. Performance pedagogy deliberately stages these dilemmas through scenarios such as challenging a grade, joining a club, or navigating housing rules. The fictional frame provides psychological safety to examine the dilemma, while post-performance dialogue supports critical reflection on cultural values and power. This process can lead to perspective transformation, where students revise their frames of

reference about authority, communication, and identity. Therefore transformative learning theory accounts for the deeper attitudinal shifts that performance pedagogy seeks to produce beyond skill acquisition.

Gap in literature

Despite promising findings, three significant gaps remain. First, most studies of performance pedagogy and international students are qualitative, small-scale, and situated in language centers rather than degree programs. There is a lack of semester-long, curriculum-embedded interventions with measurable pretest and posttest designs. Second, research is concentrated in Anglophone Western host countries. Less is known about how performance pedagogy operates in other host contexts where pedagogical traditions and cultural distance differ. Third, few studies employ multidimensional measures of cultural integration that capture knowledge, behavior, and psychological adjustment, nor do they compare results with a traditional instruction control group. Without such comparisons, institutions cannot make evidence-based decisions about adopting resource-intensive performance methods. By implementing a structured performance pedagogy module within regular coursework and measuring its effects against conventional instruction, the present study addresses these gaps. It contributes empirical data on whether and how performance pedagogy enhances intercultural communication, cultural knowledge, and practical adaptive skills among international students, and it identifies pedagogical, contextual, and institutional factors that moderate effectiveness in a host country setting.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a randomized controlled trial design. The design comprised a pre-test and a post-test with two groups. International students assigned to the control group received instruction through conventional teaching methods, whereas students in the experimental group participated in performance pedagogy instruction. Both the experimental and control groups operated within the same university setting in the host country to isolate the effect of the instructional approach.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of 100 international students enrolled at the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, across different degree programs. Participants were randomly allocated to either the control group or the experimental group using a computer-generated

random sequence in Excel with a 1:1 allocation ratio. This produced $n = 50$ participants for the traditional instruction group and $n = 50$ for the performance pedagogy intervention group. To minimize allocation bias, an instructor implemented the group assignments while a research assistant generated the randomization sequence. Group assignments were concealed in sealed envelopes. Block randomization with a block size of 4 was applied to keep group sizes balanced. Independent-samples t-tests were used to examine baseline equivalence for continuous variables and Chi-square tests were used for categorical variables. No statistically significant baseline differences were found between the experimental and control groups ($p > .05$). The groups were equivalent at baseline on cultural integration scores, demographic characteristics, and prior intercultural experience. An a priori power analysis was conducted with GPower version 3.1 to determine the required sample size. With an expected medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.5$), an alpha level of 0.05, and power of 0.80, the calculated sample size was 128 participants. Due to resource constraints, 100 participants were selected.

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of the Experimental Group and Control Group.

Variable	Category	EG	CG
Sex	Male	24 (48%)	26 (52%)
	Female	26 (52%)	24 (48%)
Age	18–20	18 (36%)	17 (34%)
	21–22	16 (32%)	18 (36%)
	23–24	16 (32%)	15 (30%)
Level	100	11 (22%)	12 (24%)
	200	14 (28%)	15 (30%)
	300	13 (26%)	12 (24%)
	400	12 (24%)	11 (22%)
Prior intercultural experience	Yes	19 (38%)	21 (42%)
	No	31 (62%)	29 (58%)

Note. EG = Experimental Group; CG = Control Group.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used for data collection. The first instrument was a pre-test and post-test Cultural Integration Assessment covering intercultural communication, social participation, academic adjustment, host culture knowledge, and adaptive behavior. It used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Scores ranged from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating higher cultural integration. The second instrument was a five-point Likert scale questionnaire that captured students' perceptions of their experiences with performance pedagogy. It was developed from Deardorff's framework of intercultural competence. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants to

obtain qualitative data on their learning experiences with performance pedagogy. All instruments were reviewed by three experts in intercultural education and drama in education. Expert feedback led to revisions before field use.

Reliability of Instrument

A pilot study with 20 participants was conducted to test the cultural integration tool and the performance pedagogy intervention. Revisions improved the clarity and relevance of the performance pedagogy guidelines and the cultural integration questionnaire. Reliability was established using Cronbach’s Alpha. The cultural integration assessment yielded 0.91, and the students’ perception questionnaire yielded 0.88. The instruments were therefore deemed reliable for the study.

Intervention

Students in the experimental group completed a 12-week performance pedagogy course consisting of four intercultural projects: campus navigation role-play, academic scenario improvisation, cultural misunderstanding forum theatre, and host community storytelling. These projects were facilitated by the researchers through in-person sessions and digital platforms. The control group received traditional instruction covering identical content domains in the same classroom setting but without performance-based components. Both groups were assessed after the intervention.

Table 2: Twelve-Week Intervention Using Four Intercultural Projects.

Week	Topic	Performance Pedagogy Instruction	Assessment/Deliverables	Digital tools or platforms
1–2	Campus Norms	Define social and academic norms and set interaction goals	Intercultural objectives statement, interaction plan	Padlet, Google Docs
3–4	Campus navigation role-play	Practice navigating services and identify areas for improvement	Reflection report, recorded role-play	Zoom, Google Forms
5–6	Academic Communication	Explore communication options and feedback strategies	Dialogue script, academic interaction plan	Flip, Microsoft Teams
7–8	Cultural	Respond to	Presentation, reflection	Canva,

	misunderstanding forum theatre	intercultural conflicts and make informed decisions	report	Padlet
9–10	Community Engagement Simulation	Engage with host community and build networks	Reflection report, community participation plan	Group discussion, case studies
11–12	Personal Integration Plan	Create comprehensive integration plans	Presentation, integration plan report	Canva, Google Docs
Week	Topic	Performance Pedagogy Instruction	Assessment/Deliverables	Digital tools or platforms

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, frequencies, and standard deviations were used to summarize the data. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess normality and guide the selection of statistical tests. Paired-samples t-tests were used to determine within-group gains, and independent-samples t-tests were used to compare between-group differences. SPSS version 28 was used for analysis. ANCOVA was used to control for pre-test differences, and Cohen’s d was used to report effect size. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data from semi-structured interviews.

Ethical Consideration

The study prioritized the dignity and rights of participants through informed consent. The research protocol was submitted to the institutional ethics board for approval to ensure compliance with ethical standards. Participant identities were kept confidential and all information was treated with privacy. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw at any time without penalty or consequences.

RESULTS

The results of this study are discussed below;

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Items. (Likert 1–5)

S/N	Questionnaire items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Campus navigation role-play enhanced my understanding of host university norms	4.18	0.79	Strongly Agreed
2	I learned about academic communication strategies through scenario improvisation	4.12	0.83	Agreed
3	Forum theatre on cultural misunderstanding helped me manage intercultural conflict	4.05	0.88	Agreed
4	I set intercultural interaction goals with the help of the	4.28	0.74	Strongly

	personal integration plan			Agreed
5	My collaboration skills improved after working on role-play projects with peers	4.08	0.86	Agreed
6	Performance pedagogy is more engaging than traditional teaching	4.22	0.80	Strongly Agreed
7	I can retain cultural knowledge because of performance-based learning	4.26	0.76	Strongly Agreed
8	Other international students should use forum theatre for integration	4.14	0.84	Agreed
9	I can achieve my social and academic goals because of the integration plan	4.20	0.81	Strongly Agreed
10	Performance pedagogy instruction is flexible	4.24	0.68	Strongly Agreed
S/N	Questionnaire items	Mean	SD	Decision

Note. SD = standard deviation. Decision is based on the mean intervals: 1.00–1.80 (Strongly Disagreed), 1.81–2.60 (Disagreed), 2.61–3.40 (Uncertain), 3.41–4.20 (Agreed), 4.21–5.00 (Strongly Agreed).

The results in Table 3 show that all questionnaire items were rated highly by participants, which indicates that students have positive perceptions of the use of performance pedagogy in enhancing cultural integration.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics and Paired-Sample t-Test Results for Cultural Integration Outcomes of Participants in Control and Experimental Groups.

Variable	N	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Effect Size (d)
Experimental group	50	51.86	10.05	81.04	11.92	9.05	< .001	[26.48, 35.88]	1.31
Control group	50	50.92	9.74	66.12	10.86	4.52	< .001	[11.54, 21.86]	0.24

Data in Table 4 show there was no statistically significant difference between the baseline cultural integration levels of international students in the experimental group and control group. Hence, the two groups had comparable cultural integration knowledge before the introduction of performance-based and conventional instructional interventions. After the intervention, the experimental group showed a significant gain in cultural integration with a large effect size. The control group also showed a significant gain but with a small effect size.

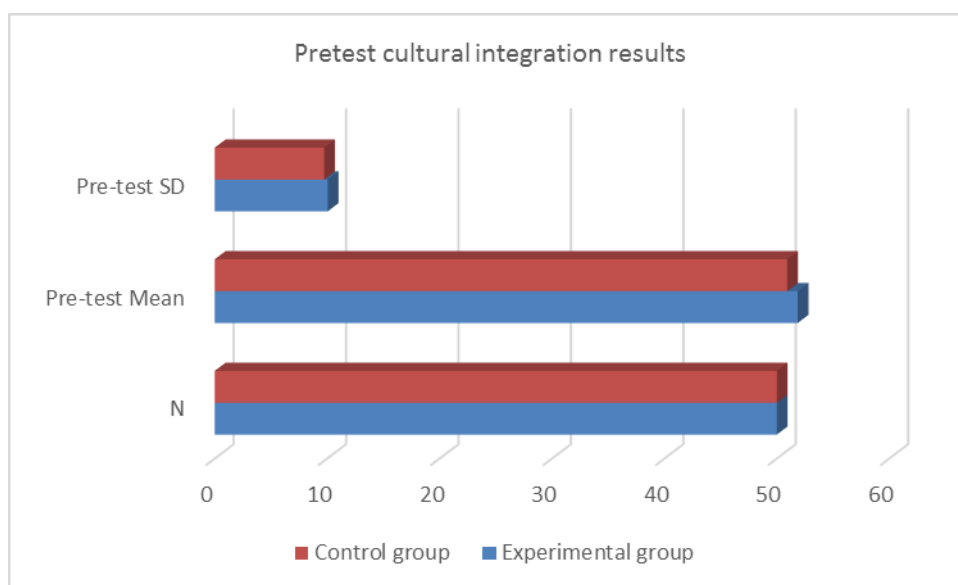


Figure 1. Pretest Cultural Integration Results of Experimental Group and Control Group

Figure 1 indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean and standard deviation for pretest scores among participants in the experimental group and control group.

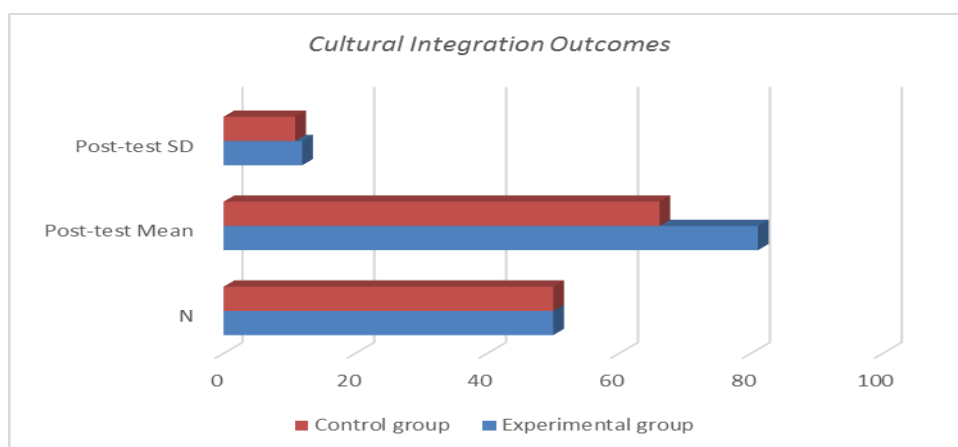


Figure 2. Cultural Integration Outcomes of Experimental Group and Control Group

Figure 2 shows that the experimental and control groups recorded significant improvements, but the experimental group obtained higher post-test scores.

Table 5: Summary of the Shapiro-Wilk Statistics.

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk W	p-value	Distribution
Scores for pretest cultural integration	0.98	0.54	Normal
Scores for post-test cultural integration	0.97	0.38	Normal
Scores for application of intercultural variables	0.96	0.24	Normal
Scores for perception of students	0.95	0.18	Normal

The Shapiro-Wilk statistics indicate normal distribution for all major variables, which justifies the use of parametric tests such as t-test and ANCOVA.

Table 6: Results for Application of Intercultural Variables Using Independent Samples t-Test.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Cohen's d
Experimental group	50	8.62	1.48	2.94	.004	[0.46, 1.32]	0.59
Control group	50	7.04	1.78				

The results in Table 6 reveal that the experimental group performed better than the control group in applying intercultural variables to real-world situations. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 8.62 with a standard deviation of 1.48, whereas the mean score of the control group was 7.04 with a standard deviation of 1.78. The p-value of .004 and the t-value of 2.94 indicate a statistically significant difference between the groups. Hence, performance pedagogy is effective in promoting students' ability to apply intercultural variables.

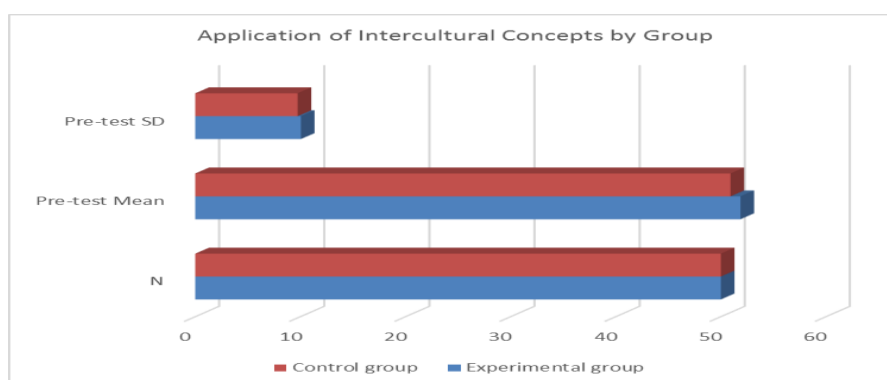


Figure 3. Application of Intercultural Concepts by Group.

Data in Figure 3 revealed that the experimental group performed better than the control group in the application of intercultural concepts. Therefore, performance pedagogy is effective in enhancing students' ability to apply cultural integration skills in real-world scenarios.

Table 7: Findings for Cultural Integration Outcomes Using ANCOVA.

Source	F-value	p-value	η^2	Cohen's d	Decision
Pre-test scores	13.04	< .001	0.19		Pre-test scores significantly impacted post-test scores
Group	19.28	< .001	0.30	0.59	Significant group effect supported performance pedagogy

In Table 7, the ANCOVA results show that pre-test scores significantly impacted post-test scores at $F = 13.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.19$. After controlling for pre-test scores, there was a significant group effect at $F = 19.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.30$, indicating that performance pedagogy was more effective than the traditional method of teaching for cultural integration. One can therefore infer that performance pedagogy moderately influenced the cultural integration performance of students.

Table 8: Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews.

S/N	Theme	Experimental group (N = 20)
1	Application of intercultural variables	78% of participants indicated improved application of intercultural variables to campus challenges
2	Critical reflection skills	65% of participants reported improved critical reflection skills
3	Academic engagement and motivation	88% of participants affirmed high academic engagement and motivation

The analysis in Table 9 indicates significant differences in the experiences of participants regarding performance pedagogy. Participants in the experimental group agreed that performance pedagogy enhanced their application of intercultural concepts to real-world problems. Participants in the control group reported fewer opportunities for practical application and lower motivation with traditional teaching. One can infer that performance pedagogy is an effective method to enhance cultural integration among international students in host countries.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study unveiled the ways students perceive the use of performance pedagogy in cultural integration. Accordingly, the result of this study revealed that many international students have positive perceptions in that regard. This means that they prefer using performance pedagogy to navigate cultural concepts as it enhances their engagement and improves their intercultural skill and competence. This is because learners in the experimental group had better scores than learners in the control group that used the traditional teaching method. Thematic analysis indicated that performance pedagogy promotes students' engagement and motivation, which moderates its effectiveness. The result of this study therefore adds to existing studies on the effectiveness and impact of performance pedagogy on intercultural education. The findings of this research are supported by Rathakrishnan et al. (2021), who stated that many students have a positive mindset regarding

the use of drama-based learning as it creates room for them to engage in practical learning and also apply their skills and knowledge in solving real-world intercultural dilemmas.

The findings of the study for research question one reveal that there was no significant difference regarding the baseline cultural integration levels among international students before the introduction of performance-based and conventional instructional interventions, but participants in the experimental group obtained a higher post-test mean score than those in the control group. The implication is that the two groups had comparable cultural knowledge at the start. The mean score of students who participated in the experimental group was 81.04 with a standard deviation of 11.92, whereas those who participated in the control group had a mean score of 66.12 with a standard deviation of 10.86, suggesting that learners who were involved in performance pedagogy indicated a significant improvement regarding their scores for cultural integration when compared with their counterparts in the control group. The results of this research are in agreement with Yilmaz, et al. (2020), who noted that when experiential learning is used to educate students about the need for intercultural competence, their intercultural behavior and attitude become better because they will have the ability to address the cultural challenges that may surface in their daily activities. Differently stated, the findings of this study contradict the position by Zhang and Zhang (2021), which states that traditional teaching methods are also effective in teaching students cultural adjustment. The outcome of this assertion could be explained by variations in the implementation of performance pedagogy, site for research, as well as socio-demographic variables. The second finding of the study shows that the designed performance pedagogy in targeting intercultural competencies is effective compared to conventional instruction. This is because learners in the experimental group outperformed learners in the control group that used the traditional approach. The result of this study therefore adds to existing studies on the effectiveness of performance-based instruction in intercultural education. The findings of this research are supported by Kim et al. (2021), who found that forum theatre is effective in enhancing students' intercultural knowledge and skills. Comparatively, the findings of the study show that students in the experimental group perform better than those in the control group in terms of cultural integration outcomes. This is because the study revealed significant differences in the performance for cultural integration among learners who participated in performance pedagogy compared with those who were taught using the conventional style of teaching. This analysis clearly agrees with studies by Stinson and Jiang et al. (2020) and Lapka and Buchtele (2022), who revealed that when students are taught intercultural skills via performance-based learning, they become better at handling intercultural issues.

There appear to be validity threats in this study, and one such threat is selection bias if participants were not assigned randomly to the control group and experimental group. The researchers addressed this issue by ensuring that international students in the control group and experimental group had the same baseline cultural integration levels. The second threat is the Hawthorne effect because of the influence of performance-based instructional approach, as the performance of students in the experimental group was better than those in the control group possibly due to the novelty of the approach. The researchers addressed this threat by implementing performance pedagogy over a period of time so that students in the experimental group would become familiar with the method of learning. The outcome of this research immensely contributes to existing literature as it gives teachers concrete evidence that the implementation of performance pedagogy is very effective in enhancing cultural integration of international students.

Limitations

There is no research without limitations. The first limitation is that the study was conducted with few study participants which could affect the generalization of study findings, as the result of this research may not be the same in larger population context. Secondly, it is difficult to determine the level of honesty of study participants in survey responses. In addition, the research relied mainly on questionnaires and a limited number of interviews which could have restricted deeper insights into students' lived experiences.

Implications

The result of this research has great implications for different educational stakeholders such as students, teachers, educational policy-makers, government, and researchers. The study reveals that performance pedagogy instruction is very effective in enhancing cultural integration of international students. This means that all educational stakeholders in higher education institutions must collectively work together to ensure effective implementation of performance pedagogy in intercultural programs otherwise international students will lack the ability to navigate cultural demands and they may find it difficult to cope when there are intercultural challenges in their day-to-day activities. In addition, there is also need for university management and teachers to understand cultural integration in host country contexts using performance pedagogy so that they can design projects that will motivate students to apply their intercultural knowledge and skills in resolving integration challenges of the 21st century. Hence, students will see the need to participate in intercultural programs

that will enable them to actively engage in social interaction, academic communication, community participation, as well as cultural adaptation. The findings of this study further imply that tertiary institutions should integrate performance pedagogy in their internationalization agenda so that students will acquire suitable knowledge, competency, and skills that are needed to address real-world intercultural scenarios. Therefore, students will have the capacity to bridge the existing gap in cultural integration. By so doing, they become better individuals that can handle the problems of sociocultural adjustment now and in the long run.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study investigated the use of performance pedagogy in fostering cultural integration outcomes of international students. The objectives of this study were to determine the baseline cultural integration levels among international students before the introduction of performance-based and conventional instructional interventions, the effectiveness of designed performance pedagogy in targeting intercultural competencies compared to conventional instruction, compare cultural integration outcomes of students who use performance pedagogy and those who receive traditional instruction, and the pedagogical, contextual, and institutional factors that moderate the comparative effectiveness of performance pedagogy for cultural integration among international students. The findings of this research agree that performance pedagogy enhances learners' comprehension of intercultural concepts. Hence, when the use of performance-based instruction is effective in teaching cultural concepts, more particularly in a host country setting, it makes students have positive perception about intercultural education and the attitude towards learning how to navigate cultural difference becomes better. This is because the experimental group outperformed the control group in their cultural integration learning scores as students who participated in the study via performance pedagogy had higher scores than those who were taught intercultural concepts using traditional teaching methods. Learners in the experimental group reported positive perception regarding the use of performance-based instruction, as they agreed that it improved the application of intercultural variables and critical reflection skills. Thematic analysis showed that performance pedagogy enhanced academic engagement and motivation of learners, moderating its effectiveness. Performance pedagogy is generally regarded as a vehicle that enhances cultural integration outcomes of international students in higher education institutions more particularly in multicultural settings. Thus, performance-based instruction makes students have positive attitude and feelings about intercultural education

programs and it motivates them to learn how to engage across cultures prudently; this is consistent with the findings by Fleming (2006) who encourages the implementation of drama-based practices in educational process. Based on the results of this research, it is recommended that teachers and administrators in higher education institutions should utilize performance pedagogy to help international students enhance their intercultural knowledge and skills. Therefore, teachers may impact the way and manner students learn by giving them assignments that will motivate them to make good use of what they have studied regarding academic communication, social participation, community engagement, as well as cultural adaptation in their day-to-day activities. When this is achieved, international students will get the practical knowledge and skills that are required for cultural integration now and in the long run. It is important for higher education institutions to provide teachers with adequate training and resources for them to implement performance-based instruction in intercultural learning effectively. There is need for curriculum planners to incorporate performance pedagogy in intercultural education programs to enhance the practical skills and knowledge of students. Researchers who will carry out similar study in the future could address some existing gap in this study by investigating the long-term impact of performance-based instruction, more particularly, in the aspect of intercultural attitude and behavior, as well as students' retention to foster better understanding of cultural integration via performance pedagogy. Secondly, research that focuses on cross-cultural and cross-institutional contexts could be conducted to validate the effectiveness of using performance-based instruction in different settings. In addition, the development and evaluation of blended performance-based learning and conventional hybrid models optimizes instruction for cultural integration. Moreover, when performance pedagogy is studied based on different populations such as school administrators, teachers, and students, as well as strategies to ensure its effective implementation in school environment, stakeholders in education would gain knowledge and insight the more.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

1. Higher education institutions should embed structured performance-based modules such as role-play, forum theatre, and scenario improvisation into orientation programs and general education courses. This will give international students early, practical exposure to host-country academic and social norms and improve sociocultural adjustment from the start of their studies.

2. Universities should organize professional development workshops that equip instructors with skills in drama facilitation, intercultural communication, and reflective debriefing. Adequate facilitator expertise was identified as a moderating factor in this study, and trained staff can implement performance pedagogy safely and effectively while managing diverse classroom dynamics.
3. Educational policymakers and researchers should collaborate to create validated instruments that measure intercultural communication, social participation, and adaptive behavior. Clear assessment frameworks will help institutions track student progress, compare pedagogical approaches, and justify resource allocation for performance-based interventions.
4. University management should provide rehearsal spaces, digital tools, and small class sizes that support collaborative and embodied learning. Access to suitable classrooms, functional internet, and digital platforms such as Padlet, Zoom, and Canva strengthens implementation and addresses the contextual factors that moderate effectiveness.
5. Course designers should structure intercultural projects that require mixed-nationality teams to co-create and perform. Regular peer interaction through guided performance tasks increases social networks, reduces academic isolation, and allows domestic students to develop intercultural competence alongside their international peers.
6. Institutions and researchers should conduct follow-up studies to track graduates' intercultural attitudes, workplace adaptation, and community engagement beyond the semester of intervention. Longitudinal data will clarify the sustained impact of performance pedagogy on cultural integration and inform continuous improvement of program design.

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