

Advancing intercultural communication teaching practices in universities

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Annotation. The article analyzes innovative strategies for teaching intercultural communication at three universities: Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University (Ukraine), the Romanian-American University (Romania), and the British University in Dubai (UAE). The study explores methods addressing cultural diversity and fostering cross-cultural competence: experiential learning (role-plays, case studies), digital technologies (virtual exchanges, multimedia tools), interdisciplinary integration, and reflective practices. Comparative analysis shows that TNPU focuses on theory and structured training, RAU on internationalized curricula and business-oriented tasks, while BUiD employs interactive digital approaches. Combining theory, practice, and technology creates a comprehensive framework for competence development. Recommendations are provided for enhancing curricula and digital resources in multicultural contexts.

Keywords: innovative pedagogy, digital learning tools, practice-based education, interactive teaching methods, academic mobility, multicultural environment, interdisciplinary approach

Удосконалення практики викладання міжкультурної комунікації в університетах

Анотація. Стаття досліджує інноваційні стратегії викладання міжкультурної комунікації у закладах вищої освіти шляхом порівняльного аналізу трьох університетів: Тернопільського національного педагогічного університету імені Володимира Гнатюка

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(Україна), Румуно-Американського університету (Бухарест, Румунія) та Британського університету в Дубаї (ОАЕ). У дослідженні розглядаються сучасні педагогічні практики, спрямовані на врахування культурного різноманіття студентів і розвиток міжкультурної компетентності та глобальної обізнаності. Серед основних підходів — практико-орієнтоване навчання (рольові ігри, симуляції, кейс-стаді); використання цифрових технологій (віртуальні обміни, інструменти цифрової співпраці, мультимедійні ресурси); міждисциплінарна інтеграція (освіта, бізнес, соціальні науки); а також рефлексивні практики, що сприяють розвитку критичного мислення, зворотного зв'язку та міжкультурного діалогу. Порівняльний аналіз виявив суттєві інституційні та контекстуальні відмінності: ТНПУ акцентує на міцних теоретичних засадах і структурованих практичних завданнях; РАУ робить наголос на інтернаціоналізованих програмах та бізнес-орієнтованих підходах; ВUiD використовує інтерактивні та цифрові методи, адаптовані до високомультікультурного середовища. Результати свідчать, що поєднання теоретичних знань із практичними методами, цифровими інноваціями та рефлексивними практиками формує комплексну систему розвитку міжкультурної компетентності та підготовки студентів до професійної комунікації в глобалізованому світі. Стаття пропонує практичні рекомендації щодо розробки навчальних планів, використання цифрових ресурсів та впровадження рефлексивних методів навчання. Ці пропозиції спрямовані на допомогу викладачам і освітнім управлінцям у створенні інклюзивних, гнучких і контекстно-орієнтованих програм, що забезпечують студентів навичками міжкультурної взаємодії, необхідними для академічного та професійного успіху у взаємопов'язаному світі.

Ключові слова: глобальна взаємодія, інноваційна педагогіка, вища освіта, міжкультурна компетентність, практико-орієнтоване навчання, цифрові освітні технології, інтерактивні методи навчання, мультикультурне середовище.

Introduction

Problem Statement

Intercultural communication has become an essential component of higher education in the context of globalization and increased student mobility. Universities worldwide are experiencing growing cultural diversity on their campuses due to international programs, study abroad opportunities, and migration of students and faculty [1]. Effective intercultural communication skills enable students to engage meaningfully with peers from diverse backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding, tolerance, and collaboration.

The significance of intercultural communication in higher education is not limited to social and cultural benefits. It directly impacts academic performance, teamwork, and professional readiness. Research indicates that students who develop strong intercultural competence are better prepared to work in multinational environments, navigate cross-cultural challenges, and demonstrate adaptability in professional settings [2]. Consequently, universities are increasingly integrating intercultural communication training into curricula across disciplines, from business and engineering to social sciences and healthcare.

Moreover, intercultural communication is critical for creating inclusive educational environments. By understanding cultural differences in communication styles, values, and behavioral norms, educators can design pedagogical strategies that accommodate diverse learning needs and promote student engagement [3]. The integration of innovative teaching methods, such as role-plays, case studies, and digital collaborative platforms, has been shown to enhance students' intercultural awareness and practical communication skills, which are essential for success in an interconnected world.

Globalization has transformed higher education by promoting international collaboration, cross-border mobility, and culturally diverse learning environments. Universities increasingly host students and faculty from multiple cultural backgrounds,

creating multicultural campuses that reflect global trends in education and labor markets [4]. These environments provide rich opportunities for intercultural learning but also present significant challenges, including communication barriers, differing cultural norms, and varying expectations of teaching and learning styles [5].

Literature Review of Recent Research

Student mobility programs, such as Erasmus+ in Europe and other international exchange initiatives, have contributed to the diversification of student populations. While these programs enhance global competence and intercultural awareness, research shows that many students struggle to adapt to culturally diverse academic contexts, highlighting the need for targeted intercultural training [6]. Furthermore, faculty often lack formal preparation in intercultural pedagogy, which can limit the effectiveness of traditional teaching methods in addressing cultural diversity [7].

Despite growing recognition of the importance of intercultural competence, the literature reveals a gap in practical, evidence-based approaches for teaching intercultural communication across different disciplines. Most studies focus on theoretical models or isolated case studies rather than integrated, interactive teaching strategies that can be widely implemented [8]. This gap underlines the necessity of innovative pedagogical approaches—such as role-plays, digital simulations, and interdisciplinary projects—that combine theory with experiential learning to develop students' intercultural skills effectively [3].

The rationale for innovative teaching approaches is therefore twofold: to prepare students for professional and academic success in a globalized world, and to provide educators with structured, practical methods for fostering intercultural competence within diverse classrooms. By addressing these gaps, universities can enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of their programs while promoting global readiness among graduates.

Purpose of the Article. The main aim of this article is to explore and propose innovative approaches for teaching intercultural communication in higher education institutions, focusing on the development of students' intercultural competence and practical communication skills in multicultural learning environments. By analyzing experiences from universities in Ukraine, Romania, and the UAE, the study seeks to identify strategies that effectively combine theoretical foundations with experiential learning. **Main Objectives** - to examine the current practices and challenges in teaching intercultural communication in universities with culturally diverse student populations; -to analyze innovative pedagogical methods, including role-plays, case studies, digital tools, and interdisciplinary approaches, that enhance intercultural competence; -to provide evidence-based recommendations for educators and institutions seeking to implement interactive and inclusive teaching practices.

Research Questions addressed are the following: 1. What are the most effective teaching practices for developing intercultural communication skills among university students? 2. How do experiences from universities in different cultural contexts (Ukraine, Romania, UAE) inform the design of intercultural communication curricula? 3. What challenges do educators face when implementing innovative teaching methods in multicultural classrooms, and how can these challenges be overcome?

Methodology and Approach

This study employs a comparative qualitative approach to examine innovative teaching practices in intercultural communication across three higher education contexts: Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University (Ukraine), the Romanian-American University (Bucharest, Romania), and selected universities in Dubai (UAE). The approach integrates document analysis, observation of teaching practices, and semi-structured interviews with faculty members and students, providing a comprehensive understanding of both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in multicultural classrooms [9, 10].

Presentation of the Main Material

The universities selected for this study represent diverse cultural, educational, and institutional contexts, providing a comprehensive basis for analyzing intercultural communication teaching practices.

Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University – TNPU (Ukraine) places particular emphasis on building strong theoretical foundations in intercultural communication, recognizing that a thorough understanding of conceptual frameworks is essential for preparing future educators to work effectively in diverse environments. This theoretical training is closely integrated with experiential learning opportunities across teacher education programs, ensuring that students can connect abstract concepts with real-world classroom challenges. Practical training components include interactive workshops on intercultural sensitivity, simulations designed to replicate complex communication scenarios, and role-plays that allow students to experiment with multiple perspectives. In addition, peer learning activities and guided reflection sessions help students critically analyze their experiences, identify potential barriers to intercultural understanding, and develop strategies for overcoming them. By combining rigorous academic content with active learning methodologies, TNPU equips its graduates with the pedagogical skills and cultural awareness necessary to succeed in increasingly multicultural educational settings [11].

Romanian-American University – RAU, Bucharest (Romania) adopts a curriculum model centered on internationalization and the cultivation of intercultural competence, particularly within business and management programs. Recognizing the importance of global mobility and cross-border collaboration in modern professional contexts, RAU integrates international perspectives into course design and assessment practices. Students engage in cross-cultural case studies drawn from international organizations, collaborate on projects with partner institutions abroad, and participate in joint online learning initiatives with peers from multiple countries. These activities not only broaden students' understanding of cultural diversity but also develop practical skills in managing multicultural teams, negotiating across cultural boundaries, and adapting theoretical business frameworks to diverse socio-economic contexts. Faculty members further enrich the learning process by inviting guest lecturers from international corporations and NGOs, enabling students to connect academic learning with professional practice at a global scale [5].

British University in Dubai – BUiD (UAE) operates within a uniquely multicultural environment, with students representing a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and professional backgrounds. This diversity is reflected in the university's research-focused learning model, which emphasizes inquiry-based education, critical thinking, and cross-cultural collaboration. BUiD integrates interactive and digital teaching tools, such as virtual exchange platforms, collaborative online research environments, and advanced data visualization technologies, to facilitate active participation in both local and international academic networks. Small-group teaching and individualized supervision allow instructors to provide tailored guidance while encouraging students to develop autonomy in research design, intercultural communication, and academic writing. Moreover, students regularly engage in interdisciplinary projects that require collaboration across fields such as education, engineering, and business, reflecting the complexity of real-world professional environments. These pedagogical strategies foster not only technical expertise but also the intercultural awareness and adaptability required for leadership roles in globalized professional and academic contexts [12, 13].

This comparative analysis highlights how universities in different regions adapt their curricula and teaching approaches to foster intercultural competence. While TNPU emphasizes theoretical grounding with experiential components, RAU focuses on internationalized, business-oriented applications, and BUiD leverages digital and interactive methods to meet the needs of a highly diverse student body. Together, these contexts illustrate the range of strategies available for enhancing intercultural communication teaching in higher education.

The study emphasizes several key pedagogical approaches, including experiential learning methods such as role-plays, simulations, and case studies that replicate real-world intercultural scenarios [14]; technology-enhanced learning through the use of digital platforms, virtual exchanges, and multimedia resources to promote intercultural collaboration [15]; interdisciplinary approaches integrating intercultural communication into diverse academic fields such as business, social sciences, healthcare, and STEM education; and reflective practices encompassing structured reflection exercises, discussion groups, and peer feedback mechanisms aimed at fostering critical thinking skills and deepening cultural awareness among learners [16].

Data were collected through: observation: analysis of teaching sessions across the three universities to identify methods used and student engagement levels; interviews: semi-structured interviews with faculty and students to understand perceptions, challenges, and effectiveness of teaching strategies; document analysis: review of syllabi, training materials, and institutional reports to assess the scope and structure of intercultural communication curricula. The collected data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify patterns, best practices, and areas requiring improvement. The findings provide evidence-based insights into the effective integration of intercultural communication pedagogy in diverse university settings [17].

The study's findings highlight key similarities and differences in the implementation of intercultural communication teaching practices across the three universities. Observations, interviews, and document analyses reveal how context, institutional priorities, and student demographics shape pedagogical strategies.

All three universities utilize experiential learning approaches, including role-plays, simulations, and case studies. At TNPU, experiential activities are closely tied to theoretical models, allowing students to apply concepts such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions in structured classroom settings. Students reported increased awareness of cultural differences and improved problem-solving skills in group exercises. RAU emphasizes practical applications in business and management scenarios. Students engage in multicultural team projects with peers from international partner universities, fostering cross-cultural collaboration and negotiation skills. Feedback indicated that such experiences enhanced students' confidence in navigating real-world intercultural challenges. BUiD leverages experiential learning within a highly diverse student body, combining small-group teaching and digital simulations. Students reported that these activities helped them understand multiple perspectives, adapt communication strategies in real time, and develop empathy for culturally different approaches to teamwork and decision-making.

The integration of digital tools was particularly prominent at both BUiD and RAU, where technology played a central role in supporting and enhancing intercultural learning. At these institutions, virtual exchanges, online discussion forums, and multimedia resources were systematically employed to facilitate collaboration between students from diverse cultural and national backgrounds, extending the learning environment well beyond the traditional classroom setting. Students at BUiD reported that interacting with peers from multiple nationalities through structured online platforms effectively simulated real-world multicultural workplaces, providing them with valuable practical experience in navigating cross-cultural communication challenges. Similarly, RAU leveraged digital case studies that allowed students to analyze complex business scenarios from an international perspective, thereby strengthening their intercultural problem-solving skills and preparing them to operate confidently in global professional contexts. While TNPU also incorporated technology into its teaching, the emphasis was placed on blended learning models that seamlessly combined traditional classroom instruction with digital resources. This approach ensured that students benefited from both solid theoretical grounding and hands-on experiential practice, creating a balanced and comprehensive learning experience.

All three universities integrated intercultural communication content across multiple academic disciplines, though the focus and implementation varied according to institutional priorities and student needs. At TNPU, intercultural modules were primarily embedded within teacher education programs, with particular attention given to developing pedagogical strategies that enable future educators to manage culturally diverse classrooms effectively. In contrast, RAU incorporated intercultural content into business, management, and international relations curricula, with a focus on equipping students with the knowledge and skills required to navigate the increasingly globalized professional environment. BUiD adopted a broader interdisciplinary approach that spanned business, social sciences, and education, emphasizing the development of intercultural competencies as transferable skills that students could apply across multiple professional domains. This variation in curricular integration reflects each university's unique educational context while demonstrating the widespread recognition of the importance of intercultural competence across fields of study.

Reflective exercises emerged as a critical and multidimensional component in fostering students' awareness of cultural differences and strengthening their capacity to adapt communication strategies in complex intercultural contexts. At TNPU and RAU, students engaged in a wide range of structured reflection activities, including guided journaling, collaborative group discussions, and systematic peer feedback sessions. These practices encouraged learners not only to analyze their own cultural assumptions and biases but also to recognize subtle power dynamics, implicit norms, and culturally conditioned patterns of interaction that often shape cross-cultural encounters.

BUiD expanded the role of reflection even further by incorporating individualized mentoring, one-to-one supervision, and digital self-assessment tools, enabling students to receive tailored guidance from instructors while also engaging in autonomous critical analysis. This personalized approach deepened learners' understanding of intercultural dilemmas, promoted self-awareness, and provided opportunities for students to develop more flexible and context-sensitive communication strategies.

Across all three institutions, reflective learning was consistently identified as a vital pedagogical tool for integrating experiential activities with theoretical insights. It contributed to the development of higher-order thinking skills, empathy, and intercultural sensitivity, thereby preparing students to navigate diverse global environments with confidence, adaptability, and cultural intelligence.

Comparative analysis of the three universities highlights several best practices in teaching intercultural communication. At TNPU, strong theoretical grounding provides a structured framework for understanding core intercultural concepts, ensuring that students have a solid foundation upon which to build practical skills. In contrast, RAU emphasizes an internationalized curriculum combined with real-world applications, enabling students to apply their knowledge directly within multicultural professional contexts. BUiD, on the other hand, focuses on interactive and technology-enhanced strategies, which allow students to engage with diverse, globally distributed teams and develop practical intercultural skills. Across all contexts, reflective practices play a critical role in consolidating experiential learning, fostering critical thinking, enhancing cultural empathy, and promoting adaptability. Overall, the findings suggest that an integrated approach—combining theoretical frameworks, experiential activities, digital tools, and reflective exercises—offers a comprehensive and effective method for teaching intercultural communication. Such strategies not only enhance students' intercultural competence but also prepare them to navigate complex professional and social environments successfully.

Conclusions

The comparative analysis of intercultural communication teaching practices at TNPU (Ukraine), RAU (Romania), and BUiD (UAE) reveals that effective intercultural competence

development requires a holistic, multi-faceted approach. Key findings demonstrate that combining theoretical knowledge, experiential learning, technology-enhanced methods, interdisciplinary integration, and reflective practices creates a robust framework for preparing students to navigate multicultural environments. Key Conclusions:

Integration of Theory and Practice: Theoretical grounding in cultural models (e.g., Hall, Hofstede) provides students with structured frameworks, while experiential activities such as role-plays and case studies enable practical application, reinforcing learning outcomes.

Technology as a Catalyst for Learning: Digital platforms, virtual exchanges, and multimedia resources expand opportunities for intercultural collaboration, particularly in highly diverse student populations, and allow real-time engagement with global peers.

Interdisciplinary Relevance: Embedding intercultural communication across multiple disciplines ensures that students develop transferable skills applicable in business, education, healthcare, and social sciences.

Reflective Practices Enhance Awareness: Structured reflection, discussion groups, and peer feedback strengthen cultural self-awareness, empathy, and adaptability, which are essential for effective cross-cultural interaction.

Context Matters: Institutional and cultural contexts influence the choice of teaching methods. TNPU emphasizes theory and structured experiential learning, RAU focuses on internationalized business and management applications, and BUiD leverages interactive, technology-driven strategies to address the needs of a highly multicultural student body.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest several important recommendations for educators seeking to enhance intercultural communication teaching in higher education. Designing integrated curricula that combine theoretical models with practical simulations, case studies, and role-plays is essential for fostering experiential learning and developing intercultural competence. Incorporating technology-enhanced methods, such as virtual exchanges, online collaborative projects, and multimedia learning, further facilitates student engagement and reflection, allowing learners to practice intercultural skills in dynamic, digital environments. Encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration through cross-disciplinary projects helps students acquire skills that are relevant across professional contexts and cultural settings. Additionally, reflective practices – including journaling, peer discussions, and mentoring – support students in analyzing cultural differences, recognizing personal biases, and adapting communication strategies effectively. Programs should also be adapted to local institutional and cultural contexts to ensure relevance and maximize student participation.

These insights have broader implications for higher education. Innovative and flexible teaching strategies are crucial in addressing the challenges posed by globalization, student mobility, and increasingly multicultural campus environments. By integrating experiential learning, digital tools, interdisciplinary collaboration, and reflective practices, universities can better prepare students for international careers, collaborative teamwork, and leadership roles in culturally diverse settings. Sustaining high-quality intercultural education also requires ongoing faculty development and continued research into teaching effectiveness. Ultimately, by synthesizing theory, practical exercises, technology, and reflection, higher education institutions can cultivate graduates who are culturally competent, adaptable, and fully equipped to thrive in an interconnected and multicultural world.

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