EXPLORING ETHNICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN A PUBLIC MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract:

This paper explores the Malaysian undergraduate students' narratives on intercultural competence in interactional context based on their personal reflections. Specifically, the paper attempts to make sense of how undergraduate students and their peers experience their multicultural interaction in campus setting. We argue that there is a need to understand how students manage their undergraduate work in multicultural interactional context and way of expressing opinions through the reflections of their own experience. Such a study can further assist not only students but also the educators in ensuring that students engage in a very productive academic collaboration with each other. Based on a pilot study data among selected students of multicultural background in a Malaysian campus, individual reflections and a focus group interview was conducted. The results were analysed and used to construct and fine-tune the research questions for in-depth interviews in the doctoral study proper. The study hoped to contribute to the field of teaching and learning particularly in intercultural interaction realm through the narrative inquiry in an attempt to provide harmony interaction between multicultural students. The paper concludes with several potential implications towards fine-tuning the standard of practice or ethical conduct of teaching and learning that enables to benefit both the faculty members and undergraduate students.

Introduction

In human interaction, language plays a central role. It is a distinctive mark of humans (Whinney, 2005). As far as human development is concerned, language has been a primary issue worldwide for some time. Between human cultures, languages differ significantly. Human languages are culturally transmitted in this regard by origination. (Fitch, 2011). The basic language we learn through the cultural transmission process provides us with a ready-made method of ategorizing the world around us and our experience of it, at least initially (Yule, 2009).

In Malaysia, where over 60% of the population identifies as Bumiputera, followed by approximately 23% Chinese and 7% Indian (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023), ethnic diversity is a defining national characteristic. However, meaningful intercultural interaction, especially within public universities, remains limited (Hurtado et al., 1995; Otten, 2003). Although the Malaysian Ministry of Education has emphasized multicultural unity through policies and programs (Maszlee, 2019), anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that ethnic boundaries persist in campus socialization patterns. For example, research by Smith (1997) and Deardorff (2006) highlights how diversity does not automatically lead to integration, especially without intentional intercultural initiatives.

Table 1: Malaysian Ethnic Composition by Percentage

Ethnic Group	Percentage
Bumiputera	62.0%
Chinese	23.2%
Indian	7.0%
Others	7.8%

(Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023)

This research explores how spoken language is used by multiracial students in intercultural communication through the reflections of Malaysian undergraduate students. It supports, therefore, the features of linguistic anthropology. This applies to the interdisciplinary study of how social life is influenced by language. It is a branch of anthropology that emerged from the attempt to record endangered languages and has evolved over the past century to cover most aspects of language structure and usage (Duranti, 2004). Linguistic anthropology investigates how social communication modes of language define social identity and group membership, coordinate broad cultural beliefs and ideologies, and create a shared cultural image of the natural and social worlds.

The scope of the study is confined to Malaysian undergraduates enrolled in a public university, selected from ethnically diverse backgrounds. It investigates how students navigate and manage their academic responsibilities in multicultural settings and how they reflect on their intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The specific objectives of the study are twofold:

(1) to explore how undergraduate students manage their campus-related academic tasks in multicultural interactional contexts, and (2) to identify the types of knowledge, skills, and attitudes students possess and employ to maintain harmony and collaboration in an ethnically diverse learning environment.

As a nation with a multi-ethnic population, the topic of inter-ethnic relationships is often the priority. Education in Malaysia, however, has consistently highlighted the objective of achieving unity among multi-ethnic people since independence. A number of plans to encourage harmony have been developed by education policy, especially in schools.

As suggested by Diehl (2018), interaction and culture are related to each other despite having different academic genealogies, similarly based research and linguistics in the social network have a common interest in and understand the relationship between speech, communication and society.

This paper implied the narrative approach to gain the data as narratives are considered as valuable data. Through narrative form, individuals also make sense of the world and their role in it (Bruner, 1990; Gee, 1986; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993). Stories are useful to both study participants and observers through the narrative prism, since they are a fundamental tool that people use to interact and build communication with other people and with themselves. Stories are often used to make sense of life in organisations (Weick, 1995) and to communicate the sense created (Orr, 1996)

The analysis of this study used a narrative analysis. The reflections of the undergraduates students was analysed based on their responses on the questions such as "why" and "how" they manage their undergraduate works in a multicultural interactional context. The narrative analysis is linked to how people interpret things (Bruner 1990, 51), narrative critics prefer to question why the story has been told in this way and what the narrator means by looking at form, structure, and content (Franzosi 1998). How is the narration conveyed by the narrator? What is included or omitted by him or her? Some researchers concentrate on structural relations between concepts or "semantic grammar," showing that crucial insights are uncovered by both the structuring of narratives and their substance. The narrative is analysed by some scholars as a whole, while others split it down into component pieces (Allport 1962; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zibler 1998).

Malaysia, which is a multi-ethnic country with many languages spoken by members who are culturally diverse, has made it a unique multicultural climate. The fundamental reason for this research is the challenges faced by many, particularly multiethnic students who are diverse not only in ethnic backgrounds, but also in beliefs and ways of doing things with language in classroom interactions among their peers. An in-depth research is argued here to be needed to promote necessary advances such as ethnic unity to address the societal and classroom challenges. It is therefore in the interest of this research to provide a more systematic insight into the intercultural interactions between students in the context of the classroom and campus.

Clearly, the concepts of social cognitive theory and constituent elements of intercultural competence, making them relevant factors to be investigated within the context of intercultural interaction among undergraduates' in Malaysia educational setting. Thus, the purpose of this research can be summarized with the following questions:

1. How the undergraduates manage their campus-related work in multicultural interaction context?
2. What are some of the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes these students have toward intercultural interactional to accomplish harmony environment in campus setting?

It is hoped that the results of this study would enable not only students but also educators to ensure that students interact with each other in a very effective academic collaboration. It is also hoped that it may contribute to some possible consequences for fine-tuning the quality of teaching and learning practice or ethical behaviour that allows both faculty members and undergraduate students to benefit.

Literature Review

Social Cognitive Theory

This study's structure is derived from social cognitive theory (SCT). In their studies, many researchers incorporate this theory, especially those related to educational studies. SCT is being used in psychology, education, and communication, implying that in the sense of social experiences, encounters, and outside of media pressures, aspects of an individual's development of information can be directly related to encountering others. Based on the Diagram 1 below, this research supports the Social Cognitive Theory by studying their language of interaction, the interactional styles and how they give opinion among their peers in classroom discussion contexts and other social settings on campus to provide insights into the various conflicting elements such as the discourse of multiracial undergraduate students. Three types of agency are distinguished by social cognitive theory: direct personal agency; proxy agency that relies on others to act on one's request to secure desired results; and collective agency exercised by group action. People put their power to bear directly on themselves and their world in the management of their lives in personal agencies exercised individually.

The application of social cognitive theory employs the use of certain constructs (Sharma, 2016). These constructs include knowledge, outcome expectations, outcome expectancies, situational perception, environment, self-efficacy, self-efficacy in overcoming impediments, goal setting, self-control, and emotional coping while being underpinned by the capabilities of symbolizing, vicarious forethought, self-regulation,and self-reflection (Sharma, 2016). The constructs suggested by Sharma were adapted and adopted in creating the themes of the coding process in analysing the responses given by particpants.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning this study are Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and Deardorff's Constituent Elements of Intercultural Competence (2006). Social Cognitive Theory offers an explanation for how individuals regulate their behavior and cognitive development through observation, self-reflection, and social interaction. Within this theory, Bandura identifies three forms of agency: personal agency, which refers to individuals acting directly on their own behalf; proxy agency, which involves relying on others to secure desired outcomes; and collective agency, which arises when people work together toward shared goals (Bandura, 1986). These three agencies provide a relevant lens to examine how students operate within complex intercultural classroom dynamics.
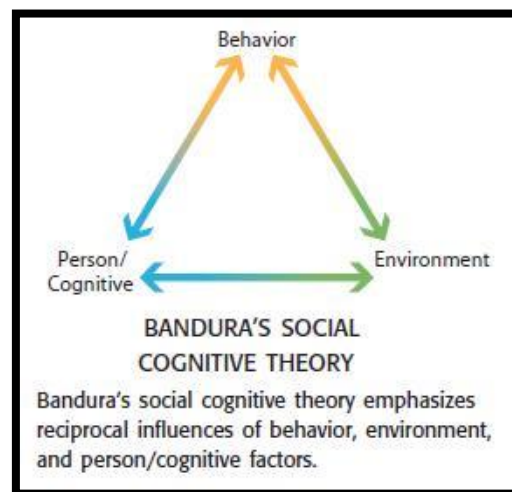
Diagram 1: Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986)

Intercultural Competence

This study espouses the Deardorff's Constituent Elements of Intercultural Competence, 2006 (refer to Diagram 2). In the debate on 'global citizenship' as a graduate trait, 'Intercultural competence' was quite prominent for several years. A great deal of study in the area has been carried out, leading to several different meanings and comprehension. Culture can be described as "the amount of a way of life shared by members of a community, including expected behaviour, beliefs, values, language and living traditions." It consists of both explicit and implicit rules that experience is interpreted.

Intercultural Learning in Diversity

As far as intercultural interaction in the educational community is concerned, some institutions have developed unique strategies to foster a campus environment of harmony. 'Diversity Plans' is one of the common strategies. Diversity plans are institution-wide approaches aimed at taking into account the social networking platforms and preferences of minorities to encourage equal opportunities and involvement and an inclusive culture that is noticeable or hidden without discrimination (Otten, 2003). Research monitors progress over time from issues of student access and higher education performance; the questions about the effect on the overall educational context of the demographic cultural and social change; student services; intergroup relations; pedagogy; curriculum; and organisational functions (Smith, 1997). Therefore, this paper is hoped to contribute to the body of knowledge in intercultural learning.

Intercultural Interaction in Education in Malaysia

Regarding the intercultural interaction in education in Malaysia, as a nation with a multi-ethnic population, the issue of inter-ethnic relationships is often given emphasis. Nevertheless, the objective of achieving unity among multi-ethnic people since independence has been continuously highlighted by education in Malaysia. A number of plans to encourage harmony have been developed by education policy, especially in schools. Schools are encouraged to provide more cultural interaction programmes for their students in order to generate better understanding among the multiracial population in Malaysia. Dr. Maszlee Malik, Minister of Education, said that in all schools, the ministry will support these programmes throughout the country (Maszlee: Hold cultural interaction, 2019). We can see Malay or Indian students

becoming part of a lion dance troupe nowadays. It's good for the students, with a Chinese school forming its own Kompang community,' he said. When they have the same ethnic climate, ethnic communication is typically smoother (Hurtado, Carter & Sharp, 1995). Nevertheless, the Malaysian educational issue is the history of secondary school students, including SK, SJKC, and SJKT, from different categories of primary schools. Various schools have developed a strong ethnic identity. According to the views of Hall & Hall (2005), students of the same ethnic group do not think they need to learn from other ethnic groups because they have a distinctive character that can be combined with friends of the same ethnicity. Therefore, it is necessary to note that prior attention should be given to education policy and the use of language in intercultural interactions in order to foster unity in this country.

Table 2: Summary of Past Studies on Intercultural Competence

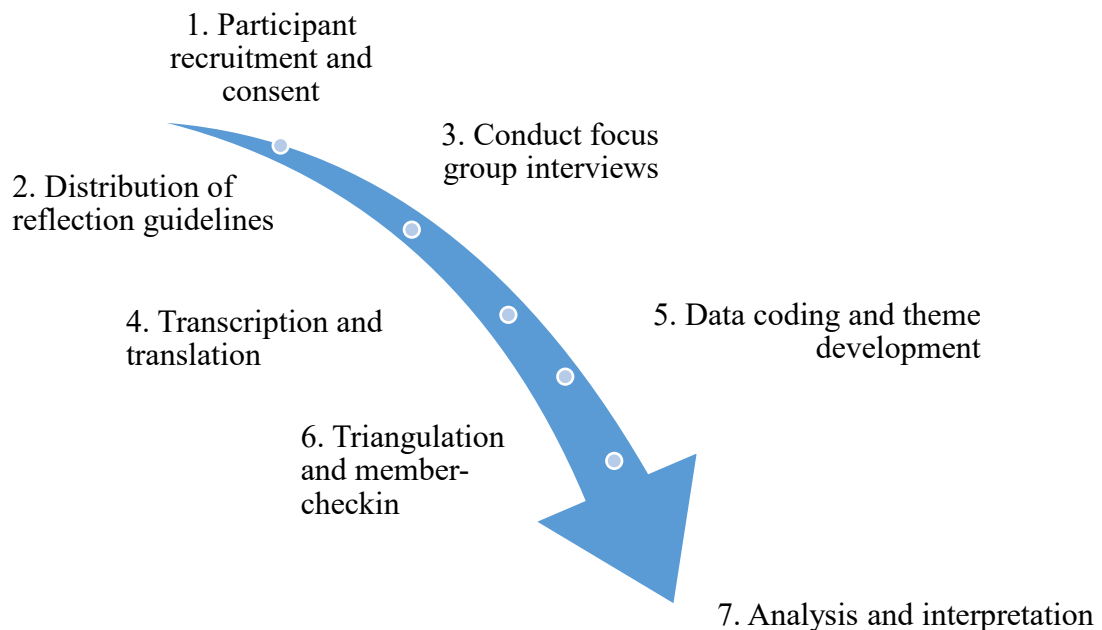| Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Methodology	Key Findings
Deardorff (2006)	Constituent elements of intercultural competence	Qualitative survey	Respect, openness, and curiosity are core to intercultural competence
Otten (2003)	Institutional diversity planning	Institutional case study	Diversity plans enhance inclusive engagement
Smith (1997)	Benefits of diversity in HEIs	Quantitative longitudinal study	Ethnic diversity improves critical thinking and empathy
Leask (2009)	Intercultural curriculum integration	Mixed methods	Curriculum fosters intercultural reflection
Jackson (2022)	Global communication practices in universities	Case study	Language use shaped by cultural identity
Ahmad & Lee (2021)	Student agency in multicultural classrooms	Narrative analysis	Agency influenced by peer norms and institutional support
Tan et al. (2023)	Interethnic peer collaboration in Malaysia	Focus group & reflections	Positive peer influence promotes harmony

Methodology

In this research, the case study research design was used as it "enables in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex problems in their real-life settings" (Crowe et al., 2011, p. 1). It is useful when seeking an in-depth understanding of an issue, an occurrence or a phenomenon in its natural context. (Crowe et al., 2011). This case study aimed to explore an in-depth understanding of the undergraduate's experience in intercultural interaction at higher educational institution and to explore the insights that they regard themselves in terms of intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The study was conducted from August to October 2024 at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. A qualitative case study design was employed to provide a rich understanding of undergraduate students' intercultural reflections.

A total of 30 participants from various ethnic backgrounds participated in the study. Data were collected through individual reflections and six focus group interviews. Each focus group consisted of 5 students and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in both English and Malay to ensure comfort and clarity.

A flowchart of the research process is illustrated below:

1. Participant recruitment and consent

2. Distribution of reflection guidelines

3. Conduct focus group interviews

4. Transcription and translation

5. Data coding and theme development

6. Triangulation and member-checkin

7. Analysis and interpretation

The interview questions were semi-structured and developed based on Deardorff's (2006) and Bandura's (1986) frameworks. Questions were adapted to the Malaysian context, such as:

- How do you feel working with peers from different races?
- What strategies do you use to handle misunderstandings?
- How do you view your role in intercultural group tasks?

Challenges in data management included ensuring accurate translation, managing bilingual responses, and maintaining anonymity. Transcripts were translated from Malay to English and back-translated to confirm consistency. Data analysis employed inductive content analysis using the Elo and Kyngas (2007) framework. Themes were derived through open coding, category development, and abstraction.

Data Collection
The data in the study were collected via individual reflections and focus group interviews. In the study, the data obtained from a variety of sources were triangulated to ensure reliability. The detailed description of each data collection instrument is provided below.

Individual Reflections

All of the participants were required to prepare 400-word individual reflections based on different aspects of the intercultural interactions between their peers of different multiracial background. They were also asked to provide any new experience that they gained in the institutional setting when they interact with their friends from different races.

Focus Group Interview

Six focus group interviews were held with the participants to explore their way to handle the undergraduates studying task in multicultural context when they interact with their peers of different races and also to explore their perceptions regarding their intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes in intercultural interaction with their peers. The interviews were non-intrusive and the students were allowed to speak without any intervention. They were held in the researcher's office and took 45 minutes. They were held in Malay Language and English Language to ensure that the participants did not have any difficulties expressing themselves. Focus group interviews were preferred as opposed to individual interviews, since the former can create synergy and empower the participants to express their ideas from different perspectives (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Data Analysis

The analysis of students' reflections and focus group interviews reveals how they manage academic collaboration in a diverse context. Their responses to open-ended questions such as "why" and "how" they approached teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution within multicultural groups were particularly informative. For instance, one significant finding involves how students developed problem-solving strategies and self-efficacy in overcoming intercultural challenges. The study reveals that students often avoided sensitive cultural topics, adopted respectful communication patterns, and consciously regulated their behavior to maintain group harmony. These findings reflect constructs such as emotional coping, goal setting, and vicarious learning;core elements in Social Cognitive Theory (Sharma, 2016).

Furthermore, the data analysis process adhered to established qualitative content analysis procedures (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), with triangulation and member-checking employed to ensure validity (Rager, 2005; Barbour, 2001). The participants' reflections indicate a heightened cultural self-awareness and a growing awareness of socio-linguistic sensitivities when engaging with peers from different backgrounds. These insights align with Deardorff's (2006) framework, which emphasizes respect, openness, curiosity, and tolerance for ambiguity as key dimensions of intercultural competence.

The data in the study; collected through the semi-structured interviews, individual and group reflections; were transcribed by the researcher. Back-translation was employed to the transcribed data to ensure reliability. The transcripts, which were originally in mix-languages which were Malay and English language, were translated into English and then back to Malay Language. The member-checking technique, also known as participant or respondent validation in qualitative inquiry methodology (Rager, 2005), was also employed to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of the semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews (Barbour, 2001; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The transcripts of the data collected from the two different sources were sent to the participants via mail so that they could check the transcripts for accuracy. All of the data collected from the participants were subjected to inductive content analysis, which incorporates open coding, category creation and abstraction (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During the open coding phase, the

researcher and a departmental colleague (experienced in qualitative data analysis) read the reflections iteratively to gain a sense of the whole and to extract the main points or ideas that the participants were trying to express. Later, they divided the reflections into smaller parts, to form condensed meaning units, by ensuring the retention of the core meaning. Next, they labeled these condensed meaning units by formulating codes, which allowed grouping the data into categories and sub-categories. Following this, they continued the process of abstracting data to a higher level, forming the recurring themes by grouping two or more categories together (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When they failed to concur at any stages of the inductive analysis, the researchers turned back to the meaning unit and checked whether there was a match between the meaning unit and the category or they revisited the preliminary coding and revised it to come to an agreement (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). They resolved areas of discrepancy via discussion.

As a whole, the paper offers valuable implications for improving academic collaboration and promoting a cohesive campus environment in Malaysian universities. The results underscore the necessity for higher education institutions to cultivate structured intercultural programs, facilitate inclusive classroom practices, and provide spaces for students to engage in reflective dialogue. These actions will not only enhance students' intercultural competence but also contribute to the larger goal of national unity

Result and Discussions

The findings obtained from the study are presented in line with the research questions in this section. Regarding the first research question, the undergraduate's experience of how they manage their campus-related work or tasks in multicultural interactional context, the main themes and sub-themes that emerged in the data analysis are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen from Table 1, the undergraduates, in general, held common views concerning the knowledge development. Regarding constructive outcome expectations, the undergraduates revealed that is the first main theme, established through intercultural active engagement between students of multicultural background can facilitate knowledge construction. The undergraduates indicated that through enhanced intercultural engagement activity, they felt they were actively engaged in knowledge sharing and reported enjoying the feedback exchange with other group members while expanding their knowledge (Godwin-Jones, 2006; Petersen et al., 2008; Sun, 2010). The following quote is revealing:

• I gained new perspectives related to course although I needed to involve with friends from different races. I also liked involving on the discussion with other members of different culture and being involved in a fruitful academic exchange of new perspectives and ideas although they are not from my own race.

In line with their active engagement in intercultural interaction, the undergraduates played a variety of roles simultaneously. Instead of being passive recipients of knowledge without any control over their interaction process with others from different culture, they prefer to be friendly and respectful towards each other.

They expressed their satisfaction and positivity in becoming part of the intercultural interaction as they have the optimistic opinion on outcome expectations through their involvement in the intercultural interaction. Being part of an interactive community of practice that are always have optimistic outcome expectancies is the third main theme covered. The undergraduates' engagement in the intercultural interaction helped in the establishment of a harmony

community of practice where they could participate in the co-construction of knowledge and collaborative content building (Sun, 2010; Sykes et al., 2008; Wang & Hsua, 2008; Xin & Feenberg, 2007). This collaborative learning experience, as Comas-Quinn et al. (2009) also suggest, reflects the tenets of situated education by emphasizing the importance of community on learning. The undergraduates pointed out they had fruitful interaction and collaboration with the other group members form the other races during the learning process in class. They reported enjoying the provision of opportunities to share their diverse perspectives. The development of negotiation and problem-solving skills promoted the fourth theme that is positive situational perception as suggested by the undergraduates in the study. The participants emphasized that the involvement in the intercultural interaction in campus improved their ability to negotiate and developed their problem-solving skills with the other races.

They also pointed out that they learned how to approach diverse perspectives, values and opinions with respect while trying to gently resolve the conflicts they faced during the learning process whenever it involve the intercultural interaction. The following quote is an illustrative example of how the participants resolved the conflicts and espouse self-efficacy in overcoming impediments they faced during learning process in campus:

• In general we had a nice relationship in our group but that does not mean that we always agreed on the decisions that we made while preparing our task when involve team members of different races. Sometimes we had a hard time making a decision as a group, particularly when deciding on the task and choosing the most appropriate materials to upload to assignments. In such cases, we discussed different alternatives together and by discussing the pros and cons of each, we tried to find the best alternative.

The definite learning goal setting is the next main theme that stands out in the study. The undergraduates pointed out that in their engagement in the intercultural interaction there was enhanced motivation to learn in a relatively stress-free learning environment as they avoid from touching any sensitive issues that can affect the intercultural interaction negatively, therefore, this was one of the strategies suggested by the participants to promote definite learning goal setting among multicultural students.

The participants emphasized that their involvement in intercultural interaction of learning process, they had a favorable influence on their motivation to learn the course content, as they were quite satisfied by the sense of control they had over their learning that the awareness that they provided for them (Comas-Quinn et al., 2009). The participants felt relaxed while interacting with other multicultural members in the intercultural learning environment that is promoting them to have emotional coping while being underpinned by the capabilities. The participants in the study indicated that the intercultural learning environment that they had in campus, fueled their motivation to strategize their way of thinking and never judge people before knowing the facts about other races. They usually had the positive vicarious forethought about the other team members who were from different races.

The intercultural interaction that occur in their classroom activity encouraged them not only to construct knowledge independently, but also to learn from their peers in a harmony atmosphere by establishing their self-regulation and respect towards each other. The participants also reported that they should always do a self-reflection in case along the learning process that involve an intercultural interaction with team members from different races.

Table 1 Themes regarding the undergraduates experience on how they manage their campus-related work in multicultural interactional context from the perspective of social cognitive constructs (Sharma, 2016) which are employed in Social Cognitive Theory perspective (Bandura, 1977)

Main Themes and sub-themes	Frequency
1. Knowledge development	30
2. Constructive outcome expectations	38
	32
3. Optimistic outcome expectancies	25
	20
4. Positive situational perception	
5. Self-efficacy in overcoming impediments	29
	26
6. Definite learning goal setting	30
7. Self-control	
8. Emotional coping while being underpinned by the capabilities	20
	32
9. Vicarious forethought	30
10. Self-regulation	
11. Self-reflection	

The themes that emerged in the study pertinent to the second research question are shown in Table 2. As Table 2 indicates, Undergraduates' View on Their Interactions in Terms of Intercultural Knowledge is the first main theme that emerged in the study from Deardorff's Constituent Elements of Intercultural Competence (2006) perspective. The participants reported that they had cultural self-awareness when dealing with directing, monitoring and managing their own learning process in the intercultural interaction context. To be more specific, they liked the idea of studying the basic information about their peers' cultures such as history, economic, communication styles, values, beliefs and practices before they start actively engaging with each other in the learning process. They enjoyed exploring their friends of different races' cultural background and increase their awareness on any sensitivity that may cause miscommunication between each other's interaction. Regarding the second subtheme of intercultural knowledge, the participants revealed that they would take some effective strategies to use proper language to converse with their peers of different races. They are aware that when it includes people of various races in their university activity. They agreed that we should have strategy and technique to encourage proper use of language while communicating with peers from different races to promote harmony in the interaction.

Undergraduates' View on Their Interactions in Terms of Intercultural Skills is the second main theme voiced by the participant from the Deardorff's Constituent Elements of Intercultural Competence (2006) perspective. The participants indicated that they listen more when their collaborative engagement took place in the learning process in intercultural interactional. While trying for obtaining relevant, informative and engaging learning process that is I harmony atmosphere, the participants indicated that they observe ones' language first before they talk to them.

Evaluating using patience and perseverance emerged as the third sub-theme in the study in relation to the perceptions of the participants regarding their intercultural skills. The participants regarded that if they find rude arguments between different races, they would deal this situation in a peaceful way. In this case, for example, they believe that they would handle their relationship with peers of different races using patience and perseverance. The participants in the study indicated that they were actively involved in the decision-making process throughout the learning process in the intercultural interactional setting activity and they treated their friends with respecty. They emphasized that they took the initiative to always be open without being judgemental towards their friends in different races. From Deardorff's Constituent Elements of Intercultural Competence (2006) perspective, Curiosity-viewing Difference as a Learning Opportunity is the third sub theme that is emphasized. Participants indicated that intercultural interaction provided them with a blended of learning opportunity. The following quote expresses the participants' views concisely:

• I think being involved with peers of different races in campuses provided us with an additional learning opportunity in terms of our social development in addition to the things we learnt in our academic sessions at university. We assume this is a process of learning about life, that this world has the beauty and colours of people's background

Participants also added that their involvement in the intercultural interaction, particularly, enabled them to gain insights into the new knowledge about others' culture and they got the chance to discover information about their peers' cultures. This reflected the construct of discovery-tolerance for ambiguity from Deardorff's Constituent Elements of Intercultural Competence (2006) perspective. The participants also reported clarifying their vague understanding related to some cultural rules and concepts of their peers' race as well as their misconceptions. The following quote is revealing in this respect:

• What I learnt from the intercultural interaction in university is I found that I heard of it before. I think I was familiar with the rules of my friends' religion and culture but I did not know what it is called and the rationale behind it. Being involved with them gave me the chance to know more something that I have been wondering all this while.

Table 2   Themes regarding the undergraduates' perception on specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that they have toward intercultural interactional to accomplish harmony environment in campus setting which are employed in Deardorff's Constituent Elements of Intercultural Competence (2006) perspective.

Main Themes and sub-themes	FREQUENCY
The Undergraduates' View on Their Interactions in Terms of Intercultural Knowledge	
1. Cultural self-awareness	32
2. Socio-linguistic awareness	25
The Undergraduates' View on Their Interactions in Terms of Intercultural Skills	
1. Listening	29
2. Observing	26
3. Evaluating using patience and perseverance	30
The Undergraduates' View on Their Interactions in Terms of Intercultural Attitudes (Respect, Openness-Withholding Judgement, Curiosity-Viewing Difference As A Learning Opportunity, Discovery-Tolerance For Ambiguity)	
1. Respect	30
2. Openness withholding Judgement	26
3. Curiosity-viewing Difference as a Learning Opportunity	29
4. Discovery-tolerance for Ambiguity	32

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how undergraduate students in a Malaysian public university manage intercultural interaction in academic contexts. The objectives of exploring how students navigate multicultural teamwork and identifying their intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes were fully achieved.

The findings contribute theoretically by extending Deardorff's model to a Southeast Asian context and practically by offering insights into how institutions can design culturally inclusive learning environments. The use of SCT further illuminated how students engage in self-regulation and goal-setting in diverse peer settings.

Future research could expand the sample size across multiple institutions to compare urban versus rural contexts. One challenge faced in the present study was the variability in language proficiency, which required careful moderation during interviews. Future improvements may include using digital storytelling tools to capture richer intercultural narratives.

Acknowledgment

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