



Internationalization of Curriculum: Developing Cross-Cultural Competence in Teacher Education Programs through Service Learning

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ABSTRACT

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Curriculum Internationalization, Service Learning, Intercultural Communication Skills, Cross-Cultural Competence, Institutional Support, Teacher Education Programs.

Purpose: This study investigates the interplay among curriculum internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, institutional support, and teachers' cross-cultural competence. It specifically assesses how curriculum internationalization and service learning impact teachers' cross-cultural competence, with a focus on the mediating effect of intercultural communication skills and the moderating influence of institutional support. A qualitative methodology was utilized, involving 24 semi-structured interviews with secondary school

teachers in China. Thematic analysis was performed in three phases to uncover patterns and themes pertinent to the research objectives. Data collection continued until saturation was achieved, ensuring comprehensive and insightful findings. **Findings:** The findings indicate substantial relationships among curriculum internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, institutional support, and teachers' cross-cultural competence. Both curriculum internationalization and service learning were found to have a positive effect on teachers' cross-cultural competence, with intercultural communication skills serving as a mediating factor in these relationships. Furthermore, institutional support was recognized as a critical moderating variable that enhances the development and application of intercultural communication skills among teachers. **Implications/Originality:** This study enriches the literature by elucidating the intricate dynamics between educational practices and teachers' cross-cultural competence. The results offer valuable implications for educational practice and policy, guiding the creation of interventions and strategies designed to enhance intercultural competence among both teachers and students. Furthermore, the research underscores the critical role of institutional support in cultivating inclusive learning environments that embrace and respect cultural diversity.

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Introduction

Teacher development in contemporary global education emphasizes the integration of global perspectives, service learning, and cross-cultural fluency. Internationalizing the

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curriculum involves incorporating global viewpoints, concepts, and resources (Teshome et al., 2024). This initiative aims to equip educators to manage an increasingly interconnected and networked world by fostering global citizenship and cross-cultural awareness (Noguerón-Liu, 2020). Teachers with cross-cultural competence are adept at navigating diverse cultural contexts, appreciating various cultural perspectives, and adapting their pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Iwu et al., 2021). Collaborative efforts between academic institutions and community organizations underpin service learning, which engages students in significant community service to enhance civic participation and personal growth (Bringle & Clayton, 2023). This engagement helps students develop intercultural communication skills, empathy, and a deeper understanding by interacting with community members from different cultural backgrounds (Belda-Medina, 2022). For students to thrive in a globalized world, curricula must be internationalized. Exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives fosters intercultural competence, empathy, and cultural awareness (Aponte & Jordan, 2020). Such exposure enables students to critically evaluate global issues and appreciate the interconnectedness of nations and cultures. Internationalizing the curriculum also encourages communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills necessary for a globally integrated workforce (Kunaviktikul & Turale, 2020). Incorporating foreign perspectives is crucial for preparing students for a globalized environment and promoting multicultural competence, which is vital for creating an inclusive learning atmosphere and working effectively with diverse learners (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020). Teachers with strong multicultural competencies enhance intergroup harmony, educational equity, and student engagement. Teacher education programs should focus on developing these competencies to prepare educators to address the diverse needs of students in multicultural societies (Schick et al., 2023). Programs that emphasize cultural diversity can produce culturally sensitive teachers who foster inclusive and equitable learning environments. Additionally, service learning bridges classroom learning with real-world application, allowing students to address community issues while applying their academic knowledge (Ledger & Fischetti, 2020). Active participation in community service with individuals from various cultural backgrounds enhances students' intercultural communication skills, empathy, and self-awareness, while also examining their own biases (Louie & Sierschynski, 2020). Service learning not only enriches students' cultural appreciation and social fairness but also contributes to developing teachers' cross-cultural competencies by complementing theoretical learning with practical experiences.

Research indicates that institutional support is crucial for helping instructors develop and utilize intercultural communication skills (Elshami et al., 2022). Institutions that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion enhance learning and encourage engagement with diverse cultures. However, there is limited research on how curriculum internationalization, service learning, and intercultural communication skills interact to affect teachers' intercultural competence. Existing studies have explored these elements separately, but their combined impact on teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices remains underexplored (Fondo & Gómez-Rey, 2021). Furthermore, while institutional support is known to improve intercultural communication skills, its overall effect on teachers' intercultural competence is not well understood (Huang et al., 2022). This study aims to investigate the relationships among curriculum internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, institutional support, and teachers' cross-cultural

competence.

- To examine how foreign curriculum influences instructors' cross-cultural competence.
- Assess service learning's influence on teachers' cross-cultural competence.
- Examine how intercultural communication skills impact international perspectives, service-learning, and teachers' cross-cultural competency.
- Examine how institutional support affects educator cross-cultural competency and intercultural communication abilities.

This study aims to investigate how educational practices promote intercultural understanding and inclusion within diverse educational environments. It examines the impact of curriculum internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, institutional support, and teachers' cross-cultural competency on creating inclusive learning settings. The findings are expected to inform the development of evidence-based interventions that enhance intercultural competence among both students and teachers. Additionally, the study may influence academic policies and practices by emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion, thereby fostering positive learning environments that support the success of all students.

Literature Review

Modern education increasingly incorporates internationalized curricula to prepare college students for a globalized world. Scholars advocate for including diverse perspectives, cultures, and worldviews in educational courses to help students develop intercultural competence and cross-cultural knowledge (Chang, Chen, & Chau, 2023). The internationalization of the curriculum reflects the complexities of globalization and the increasing interactions among cultures. Academic institutions must adapt their curricula to equip graduates for varied global environments (Teshome et al., 2024). Integrating work-based learning with academic and community service can enhance the internationalization and cross-cultural competence of teacher preparation programs (Cahen & Borini, 2020). Service learning promotes the development of empathy, cultural humility, and global awareness among teacher candidates, who can engage with social justice and cultural diversity through domestic and international service projects (García-Carrión & Allotey, 2023). It also facilitates collaboration with educators, community members, and students from diverse backgrounds, fostering mutual knowledge exchange (Habibi et al., 2019). Reflective practices within service learning enable pre-service teachers to create inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments (Arantes, 2022). Consequently, service learning supports the internationalization of curricula and the development of cross-cultural competencies, preparing future educators to address the needs of diverse student populations in an increasingly interconnected world.

Internationalization of Curriculum

Curriculum internationalization represents a significant shift in educational paradigms, reflecting the increasing expectation for students to engage effectively in a globalized society (Siegel, 2022). This approach integrates diverse academic, linguistic, and cultural perspectives into curriculum frameworks to expand scholarly viewpoints (Paric et al., 2021). By emphasizing global competencies, curriculum internationalization addresses the

interconnected nature of modern economies and societies. Recent global developments, such as increased student mobility and advancements in communication technology, have driven academic institutions to intensify their internationalization efforts (Zollo, 2019). Internationalization not only exposes students to different cultures but also equips them with the critical and ethical skills necessary to address global challenges. It provides students with the intellectual, practical, and emotional capabilities needed to navigate complex cultural contexts, communicate across languages, and collaborate with diverse individuals (Biswas et al., 2022; Schmied et al., 2024). Developing intercultural competency—defined as the ability to communicate effectively across cultures—requires more than tolerance and understanding; it includes empathy, respect, and adaptability (Klarin et al., 2021). Incorporating these intercultural skills into curricula necessitates intentional pedagogical strategies, such as using international case studies, intercultural literature, and facilitating classroom discussions (Bers et al., 2023). Teachers are encouraged to offer virtual exchanges, study abroad opportunities, and collaborative projects to expose students to various cultures (Karina et al., 2022; Schwarzenhal, Daumiller, & Civitillo, 2023; Xiaofei et al., 2023). Through these experiences, students gain an appreciation for cultural diversity and develop skills in active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution. Ultimately, curriculum internationalization fosters cultural humility, open-mindedness, and global citizenship, preparing students to thrive in an interconnected world.

Service Learning

Service learning is a transformative educational approach that integrates academic study with impactful community work, enhancing both learning and civic engagement (Gordon et al., 2022). Rooted in social responsibility and experiential learning, it allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in community settings (Arslan & Curle, 2024). Unlike traditional community involvement, service learning emphasizes self-reflection and collaboration, encouraging students to critically assess the social, cultural, and ethical impacts of their work (Bay & Atherton, 2021). It fosters civic duty, empathy, and cultural awareness, alongside academic skills, and is most effective when it promotes communication, critical thinking, and teamwork (Yanagawa, 2024). By addressing real-world problems, students enhance their problem-solving abilities and knowledge application (Eutsler et al., 2023). Structured reflection helps students analyze their experiences, understand social issues, and develop solutions, improving their metacognition and social responsibility (Bhatia et al., 2023). Service learning also builds intercultural competency by exposing students to diverse perspectives and challenging their assumptions (Gassull, de Reizábal, & Sanvisens, 2023; Lin & Hsu, 2020; Pourramzan, 2022). Additionally, it benefits communities and institutions by addressing social issues, fostering civic involvement, and enhancing institutional reputation through demonstrated social responsibility (Garcia, Mendez, & Kirsch, 2022).

Cross-Cultural Competence

Cross-cultural competence, or cultural proficiency, is increasingly important in our interconnected world. It encompasses the ability to collaborate, communicate, and build relationships across diverse cultures (Tang et al., 2019). This competence involves empathy, respect, adaptability, tolerance, and cultural knowledge. It is crucial in various fields, including education, business, healthcare, and international diplomacy. Essential to cross-

cultural competence is cultural self-awareness, which requires an understanding of one's own cultural beliefs, attitudes, and biases (Sabet & Chapman, 2023). Reflecting on one's cultural identity and experiences helps individuals recognize how their background influences their behaviour and perspectives, fostering humility and openness in international interactions (Loi & Thanh, 2022). Cross-cultural competency also necessitates knowledge of other cultures' histories, customs, and communication styles, which enhances effective communication and collaboration (Huang et al., 2022). Key attributes for cross-cultural competence include empathy, conflict resolution, and active listening, which are vital for building trust and successful relationships across cultures (Diller & Moule, 2005). Effective cross-cultural individuals manage interactions diplomatically, encouraging cooperation and understanding. Flexibility is crucial for adapting behaviour and communication to align with cultural norms, and it involves persistence and a willingness to learn from mistakes (Alghazali et al., 2022; Belda-Medina, 2022; Wilkinson, 2020). Additionally, cross-cultural competence includes the ability to manage and resolve culturally-based conflicts respectfully and effectively, contributing to an inclusive environment that values cultural diversity.

Intercultural Communication Skills

Intercultural communication skills are crucial in today's globalized and multicultural environment, involving the effective exchange of thoughts, emotions, and information across different cultures (Louie & Sierschynski, 2020). These skills necessitate the adaptation of one's communication style to bridge cultural differences and foster mutual understanding. They are vital in various domains, including academia, industry, healthcare, and diplomacy, where interactions among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds are common (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023). Effective international communication requires proficiency in verbal skills, including the use of appropriate linguistic styles, dialects, accents, and idioms (Melzi, Schick, & Wuest, 2023). Understanding cultural variations in explicitness, appropriateness, and nonverbal communication is essential for promoting cross-cultural dialogue (Çingöl et al., 2021). Nonverbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures, plays a significant role in conveying emotions across cultures, and differences in nonverbal cues can lead to misunderstandings (Cohen & Calderón-Aponte, 2021). Successful intercultural communication also demands empathy and active listening, as it involves attentively engaging with others' opinions, feelings, and concerns. Empathy, compassion, and respect for diverse beliefs and cultural norms are critical in building trust and facilitating effective international negotiations (Louie & Sierschynski, 2020). Intercultural competence encompasses problem-solving abilities, cultural self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and a deep understanding of other cultures (Del Pino et al., 2022; Migala, Chałubińska-Fendler, & Zielińska, 2022). This competence enables individuals to interact, collaborate, and form connections with people from various cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing global integration and inclusion.

Institutional Support

Institutional support is vital across various sectors, including education, business, healthcare, and non-profit organizations. It encompasses the policies, structures, rules, and

resources that facilitate the achievement of organizational goals (Bangani & Dube, 2023). Effective institutional support is crucial for fostering innovation, excellence, a positive organizational culture, and employee well-being. Strong leadership is essential for providing this support. Effective leaders articulate a strategic vision and align organizational objectives with the needs of their members, motivating and guiding them towards the organization's mission (Javed et al., 2021). They promote accountability, transparency, and trust by encouraging members to contribute their ideas and skills. Resource allocation is a key component of institutional support, involving the provision of financial, human, and material resources necessary for success. This includes funding for administrative, technological, research, training, and professional development (Falola et al., 2020; Kapturkiewicz, 2022). Institutions must also establish effective processes for resource allocation, decision-making, and accountability to support collaboration and innovation (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2022). Additionally, institutional support involves implementing policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Institutions must develop guidelines and practices that ensure fair treatment and opportunities for all members, including initiatives for employee training, recruitment, and retention. A commitment to diversity fosters an inclusive environment that supports personal and professional growth (Gitonga, Visser, & Mulwa, 2020; Li, Xi, & Huang, 2024). Moreover, institutions should facilitate open communication and feedback, promoting collaboration and shared goals. Effective communication channels and teamwork enhance organizational resilience, cohesion, and trust, contributing to the successful achievement of objectives.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study employed phenomenological research methods to explore individuals' lived experiences and perspectives. Phenomenology is particularly suited for investigating subjective phenomena and understanding how individuals perceive and interpret their experiences. By examining participants' perceptions, beliefs, and interpretations, the study aimed to uncover the meanings attributed to their experiences. The use of phenomenology allowed researchers to highlight participants' viewpoints on research challenges and identify underlying meanings and patterns through their subjective experiences. The study concentrated on understanding the nuances of participants' perspectives and interpretations to gain insight into their subjective experiences.

Participants

This qualitative study involved 24 secondary school teachers from China. The selection of these participants was deliberate due to their significant influence on student education and adherence to Chinese educational regulations (see Table 1). Participants were required to be actively engaged and knowledgeable to provide valuable insights into the study's focus. A minimum of two years of teaching experience was stipulated to ensure adequate expertise and understanding of the educational framework, allowing for detailed and informed feedback. To support a thorough analysis, participants were encouraged to offer candid and reflective accounts of their experiences.

Table 1*Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Respondent ID	Gender	Age	Years of Teaching Experience
R001	Female	34	8
R002	Male	42	15
R003	Female	29	5
R004	Male	37	12
R005	Female	45	20
R006	Male	31	6
R007	Female	39	18
R008	Male	28	4
R009	Female	35	10
R010	Male	41	14
R011	Female	32	7
R012	Male	38	16
R013	Female	30	3
R014	Male	36	11
R015	Female	43	19
R016	Male	33	9
R017	Female	40	13
R018	Male	27	2
R019	Female	44	21
R020	Male	26	1
R021	Female	37	17
R022	Male	25	0.5
R023	Female	42	22
R024	Male	29	8

Individuals not meeting the study's criteria were excluded to maintain focus and ensure that contributions were valuable. Teachers outside the secondary school sector were excluded as their perspectives did not align with the study's objectives (see Table 2). Additionally, those with fewer than two years of teaching experience were omitted to emphasize participants with substantial knowledge of Chinese secondary education and pedagogy. Exclusion criteria were established to uphold data quality and depth, ensuring that participants possessed the requisite skills and expertise to contribute meaningfully to the study.

Table 2*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Employment Status	Currently employed as secondary school teachers	Not currently employed in secondary schools
Teaching Experience	Minimum of 2 years of teaching experience	Less than 2 years of teaching experience
Willingness to Engage	Willingness to participate in open and reflective dialogue	Lack of willingness to engage in research dialogue

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit secondary schools in China through educational networks and existing relationships. School administrators were briefed on the study's objectives and methods and were asked to assist in identifying suitable volunteers. Following approval from the schools, eligible teachers were selected based on predefined criteria. These teachers received

personalized invitation letters outlining the study's goals and methodologies. Potential participants were contacted via email or phone to address any questions and facilitate their decision to participate. After obtaining written consent from interested teachers, semi-structured interviews were scheduled at convenient times and locations to minimize disruption to their teaching responsibilities and enhance research participation.

Data Collection

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers across China to explore their perspectives and experiences (Table 3). Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility and consistency, facilitating in-depth exploration of participants' views. Interviews, held in private or neutral settings, lasted 45-60 minutes each, balancing thoroughness with respect for participants' time. Data collection continued until saturation, indicated by no new themes emerging. Researchers ensured data rigor by checking for duplication and repetition, using probing questions to explore key themes, and taking field notes on non-verbal cues and context. Member checking allowed participants to review and validate their transcripts, enhancing data quality and trustworthiness.

Table 3

Interview Guidelines

Variable	Interview Questions
Cross-Cultural Competence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you describe any experiences you have had interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds? 2. How do you perceive the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences in your work environment? 3. Can you provide an example of a situation where cultural differences affected communication or collaboration in your professional life?
Intercultural Communication Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you typically communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds? 2. Can you describe a time when you encountered challenges in communicating across cultures? 3. What strategies do you employ to enhance cross-cultural communication in your interactions?
Institutional Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe the level of institutional support for diversity and inclusion initiatives within your organization? 2. Can you provide examples of specific policies or practices that promote diversity and inclusion in your workplace? 3. How do you think institutional support for diversity and inclusion impacts the overall organizational culture?
Service Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What motivated you to participate in service-learning activities? 2. Can you describe a memorable service-learning experience you have had? 3. How do you think service learning contributes to the development of cross-cultural competence?
Internationalization of Curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In what ways do you incorporate international perspectives into your curriculum or teaching practices? 2. How do you think exposure to diverse cultural perspectives benefits students' learning experiences? 3. Can you discuss any challenges you have encountered in internationalizing the curriculum?

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) three-step thematic analysis guided this qualitative study. Thematic analysis, known for its flexibility and rigor, is used to identify patterns and themes in qualitative data. The first step, familiarization, involved verbatim transcription of interviews and repeated review to understand the data (Table 4). Researchers then engaged in coding, systematically examining the data line by line to identify early trends and themes, using inductive coding to allow themes to emerge naturally. After coding, themes and subthemes were developed through iterative analysis, ensuring relevance and consistency across interviews. Researchers ensured consistency and rigor by comparing data, reflecting on biases, and discussing theme development issues within the team. Analytical reliability was further enhanced through member checking, peer debriefing, and data source triangulation.

Table 4

Thematic Analysis

Step	Description
Step 1: Data Familiarization	Transcribing audio-recorded interviews and reviewing transcripts multiple times to gain familiarity with the data.
Step 2: Initial Coding	Systematically coding the data line-by-line to identify patterns, concepts, and themes.
Step 3: Theme Development	Organizing coded data into overarching themes and sub-themes through iterative analysis.

Findings

The study explores factors influencing teachers' cross-cultural competence by interviewing twenty-four Chinese secondary school teachers. It examines how curriculum internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, and institutional support impact teachers' ability to manage cultural diversity and foster cross-cultural competency. The findings highlight significant implications for educational policy, practice, and research, emphasizing the importance of integrating cross-cultural competency into various academic contexts. This research enriches the understanding of educator cross-cultural competency by analysing the interplay of multiple factors and provides practical strategies to enhance international understanding, empathy, and cultural sensitivity in schools. The following sections present key findings and participant quotations to illustrate the diverse experiences and perspectives teachers encounter in developing cross-cultural skills.

P1: *Internationalization of Curriculum influences Cross-Cultural Competence.*

The study highlights various ways in which internationalizing the curriculum influences teachers' cross-cultural competence. Participants reported that incorporating international topics and perspectives into their teaching enhanced their understanding of cultural diversity and improved interactions with international students. Key findings included increased cultural awareness and appreciation, as internationalizing the curriculum introduced students to a range of cultures through educational resources on culture, history, and global issues. Respondent R008 noted that integrating global materials into their lessons significantly boosted

students' cultural knowledge. Teachers also emphasized the importance of international collaboration and exchange programs in developing cross-cultural skills. Exposure to multicultural colleagues through international conferences and seminars provided them with valuable insights into diverse communication styles and cultural practices, as highlighted by R022: "My involvement in international exchange programs has provided me with valuable insights into diverse communication styles and cultural practices." The study concluded that intercultural communication skills are enhanced by an internationalized curriculum, which facilitates cross-cultural dialogue and interactions. Teachers observed that global concepts, multicultural presentations, group discussions, and collaborative projects improved students' international communication skills. R017 remarked, "Communicating with students of diverse cultural backgrounds improves communication skills and fosters mutual understanding." Overall, the research underscores that an internationalized curriculum fosters intercultural communication, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. Teachers highlighted the importance of integrating cultural awareness, social responsibility, and global citizenship into education. Community service, global critical thinking, and social justice advocacy were identified as key goals to empower students. Respondent R020 observed, "An internationalized curriculum fosters a commitment to social justice and equity and cultivates students' sense of global interconnectedness." The study aligns with [Teichler \(2023\)](#) and [Monroe and Ruan \(2018\)](#), who note that internationalized curricula and exchange programs enhance students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding.

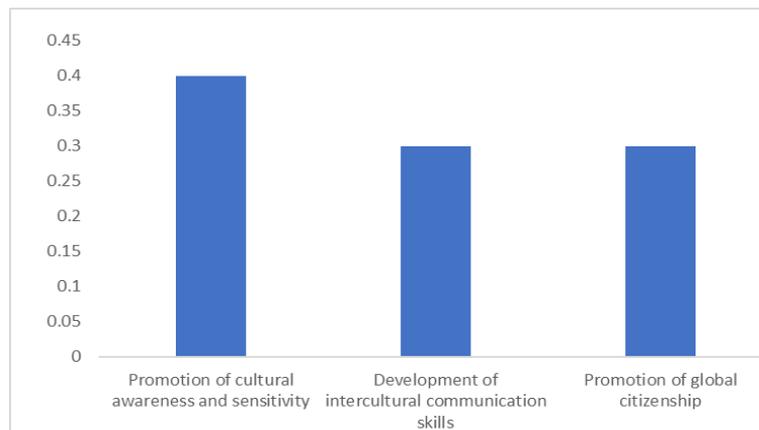


Figure 1: Weightage Analysis of Internationalization of Curriculum Influences Cross-Cultural Competence.

P2: Service-Learning Influences Cross-Cultural Competence.

The study indicates that service learning can enhance teachers' cross-cultural competence. Participants reported that service-learning facilitated interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds and deepened their understanding of various cultures. Key findings include the promotion of empathy and cultural knowledge. Teachers noted that service-learning fosters empathy and compassion for different nationalities. As R011 stated, "Working alongside community members from diverse backgrounds has helped me gain a better understanding of their experiences and challenges." R018 added, "Service-learning experiences have opened my eyes to the

cultural richness and diversity within our community." Additionally, service-learning improved teachers' intercultural communication skills. Engaging with community members in service projects enhanced their ability to navigate cultural differences. R015 observed, "Service-learning projects require effective collaboration and communication with community members of various backgrounds; this has improved my intercultural communication abilities." R024 remarked, "My proficiency in managing cultural disparities and engaging in dialogue with community members has been honed through service-learning endeavours." The study also highlighted that service learning encourages cultural humility. Teachers developed a respectful and open approach towards different cultures by acknowledging their own biases and limitations. R007 noted, "Service learning necessitates a modest and respectful approach towards communities, acknowledging our substantial capacity to gain from their cultural insights and life experiences." These findings corroborate existing research, such as [Huertas-Abril and Palacios-Hidalgo \(2023\)](#) and [Qiu and Luo \(2022\)](#), which demonstrate that service learning enhances intercultural communication, empathy, and cultural awareness among students.

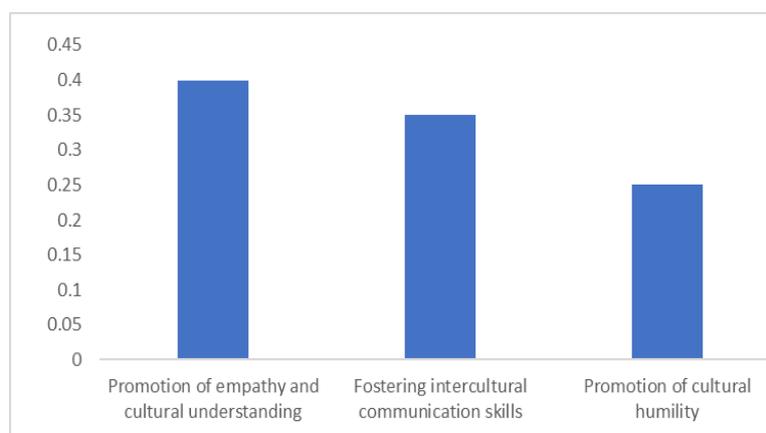


Figure 2: Weightage Analysis of Service-Learning Influences Cross-Cultural Competence.

P3: *Intercultural Communication Skills Influences the Relationship between Internationalization of Curriculum and Cross-Cultural Competence.*

The research highlights the interconnectedness of intercultural communication skills, curricular internationalization, and cross-cultural competency. Teachers emphasized the importance of intercultural communication skills for enhancing an internationalized curriculum and fostering cross-cultural competency in students. Effective communication skills facilitate meaningful educational interactions and promote an inclusive learning environment. As R009 stated, "Effective intercultural communication skills are essential for fostering open and respectful dialogue among students from diverse cultural backgrounds." R014 added the need to respect ethnic diversity to create a supportive classroom. Teachers also noted that intercultural communication skills bridge the gap between curriculum internationalization and cross-cultural proficiency. R019 remarked, "The development of intercultural communication skills empowers students to actively interact with global issues and viewpoints." R022 supported this, stating, "By promoting intercultural communication skills, we can bridge the gap between internationalization of

curriculum and students' ability to navigate cultural diversity." The study also emphasized the role of cultural reflexivity in developing cross-cultural competency. Teachers encourage students to critically examine their own cultural biases and communication styles. R005 noted, "Cultural reflexivity fosters a more profound comprehension and admiration for cultural diversity." R012 added, "Through the promotion of cultural reflexivity, we inspire pupils to engage in cross-cultural exchanges with modesty, inquisitiveness, and esteem." Prior research supports that intercultural communication skills are crucial for overcoming cultural barriers and fostering cross-cultural collaboration. The study concludes that integrating intercultural communication skills into an internationalized curriculum is essential for building students' cross-cultural competency.

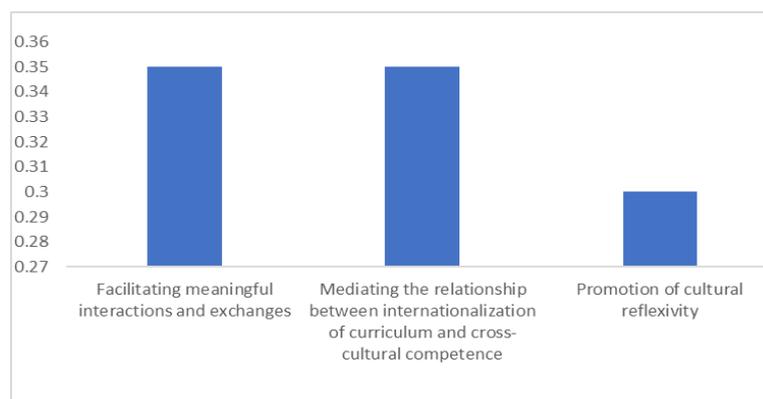


Figure 3: Weightage Analysis of Intercultural Communication Skills Influences the Relationship between Internationalization of Curriculum and Cross-Cultural Competence.

P4: Intercultural Communication Skills Influences the Relationship between Service Learning and Cross-Cultural Competence.

The study revealed a dynamic link between cross-cultural competency, service learning, and intercultural communication. Teachers emphasized that intercultural communication skills are crucial for students' cross-cultural proficiency and maximizing service-learning benefits. Effective communication is vital for building relationships during service learning, with R008 noting, "Intercultural communication skills are essential for building trust and rapport with community members." R015 added, "Encouraging active listening and empathy helps forge significant connections with diverse cultural backgrounds." Teachers also highlighted how intercultural communication skills bridge service learning and cross-cultural competency. As R019 stated, "Intercultural communication skills enable students to effectively collaborate with community members from diverse backgrounds." R022 emphasized, "Promoting these skills bridges the gap between service learning and navigating cultural diversity." The study also found that service learning fosters cultural humility, encouraging respectful engagement with different communities. R007 mentioned, "Service learning requires a modest and respectful approach, acknowledging our ability to learn from diverse cultural insights." R020 noted that cultural humility inspires students to approach service learning with openness and a willingness to learn. Overall, the study shows that integrating intercultural communication skills into service-learning activities is vital for enhancing students' cross-cultural proficiency.

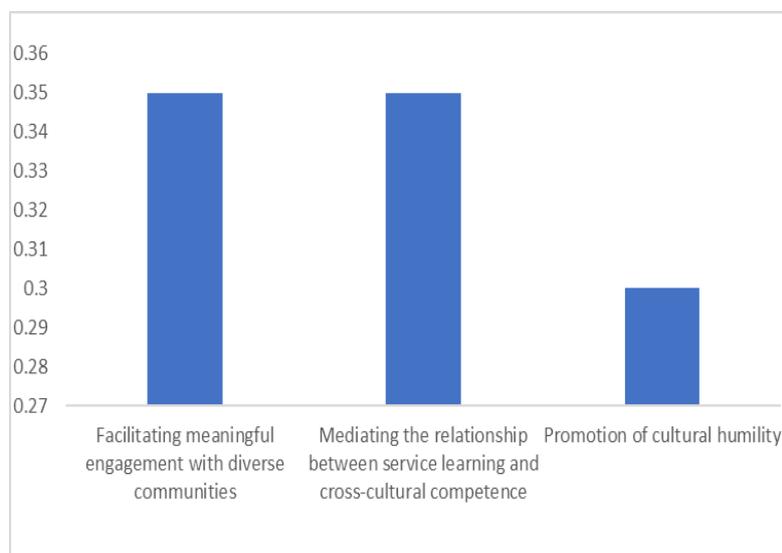


Figure 4: Weightage Analysis of Intercultural Communication Skills Influences the Relationship between Service Learning and Cross-Cultural Competence.

P5: Institutional Support Moderates the Relationship between Intercultural Communication Skills and Cross-Cultural Competence

The study highlights the critical role of institutional support in connecting intercultural communication skills to cross-cultural competency. Teachers emphasized that institutional resources, policies, and professional development are essential for enhancing their intercultural communication abilities. The research underscored the necessity of such support in equipping teachers with the tools and training needed to effectively implement intercultural communication strategies. Participants valued institutional support through workshops, training, and professional development. R004 noted, "Professional development opportunities provided by the institution have significantly improved my intercultural communication skills and allowed me to integrate culturally responsive practices into my teaching." R012 added, "Access to resources such as teaching materials and technological tools has facilitated meaningful cross-cultural interactions with students and colleagues." Teachers also highlighted the importance of institutional support in fostering a welcoming learning environment. R017 observed, "Support for diversity and inclusion initiatives creates an environment where students feel valued and respected for their cultural identities." R020 remarked, "A supportive organizational culture promotes open dialogue and collaboration, which aids in the development of intercultural communication skills." The analysis concluded that institutional support enhances cultural competence by promoting policies and practices that foster cultural sensitivity among students and staff. R009 stated, "Institutional support for cultural competency programs contributes to a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment," while R014 noted that such programs facilitate collaboration across cultures. Overall, the research demonstrates that institutional support is vital for teachers to acquire and apply effective intercultural communication skills.

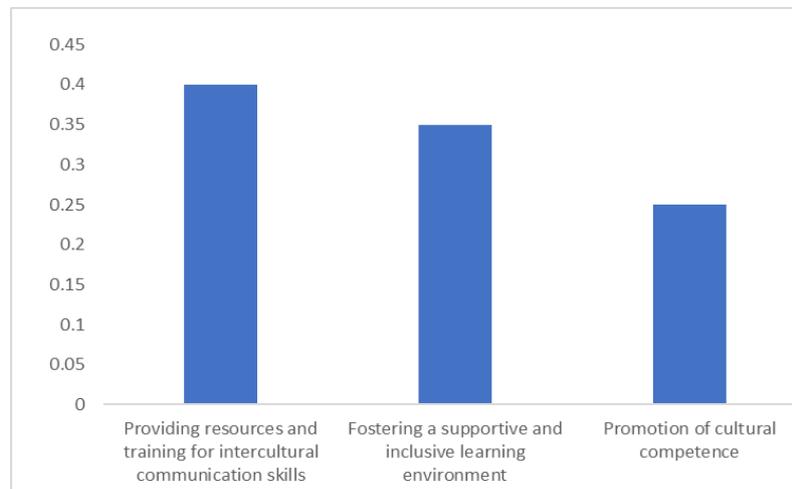


Figure 5: *Weightage Analysis of Institutional Support Moderates the Relationship between Intercultural Communication Skills and Cross-Cultural Competence.*

Discussion

The discussion chapter integrates the study's findings with existing literature to elucidate the interplay between curriculum internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, institutional support, and educators' cross-cultural competence. This analysis employs empirical data, theoretical frameworks, and prior research to contextualize the study's results and advance cross-cultural education in diverse settings. Curriculum internationalization is shown to enhance teachers' understanding of cultural diversity and broaden their perspectives by incorporating global resources, viewpoints, and pedagogies (Myers & Rivero, 2020). This approach fosters a more inclusive and culturally aware classroom, corroborating previous findings that curricular internationalization increases students' cultural awareness, empathy, and intercultural communication. Service learning further supports cross-cultural competence by enabling teachers to engage with diverse community members, thereby enhancing intercultural communication and empathy. This study reaffirms earlier research indicating that service learning develops cross-cultural competence (Vauhkonen et al., 2024) and provides teachers with practical skills and cultural insights beyond the classroom. It promotes civic engagement, social responsibility, and social justice, complementing the effects of internationalizing curricula (Fondo & Gómez-Rey, 2021). Both strategies collectively enhance teachers' cross-cultural proficiency and offer students practical applications of theoretical knowledge. The findings emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to cross-cultural education that integrates both intellectual and practical components (Teichler, 2023). Institutional support is crucial for the successful implementation of curriculum internationalization and service learning. Teachers require institutional policies, resources, and professional development to effectively teach global perspectives and engage in service learning. The study highlights that institutional support enhances both teachers' and students' intercultural communication and competence, promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion within educational environments.

Intercultural communication skills significantly mediate the relationship between curricular internationalization and teachers' cross-cultural competence. An internationalized curriculum equips teachers to manage cultural differences and understand diverse perspectives through effective intercultural communication. Skills such as active listening, empathy, and cultural awareness enable instructors to engage meaningfully with students from various backgrounds, enhancing their cross-cultural interactions. This finding supports recent research indicating that intercultural communication skills bolster student cross-cultural competence (Aponte & Jordan, 2020). By linking curricular internationalization with students' intercultural communication skills, educators can foster a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment. The connection between service learning and teachers' cross-cultural competencies also relies on effective intercultural communication. Community-based educational initiatives promote empathy, cultural awareness, and effective communication. The study corroborates previous findings that service learning enhances students' cross-cultural proficiency (Hickson, 2023). Improved intercultural communication through service learning enables teachers to guide students in understanding social issues and cultural diversity. The research explores the reciprocal benefits of teacher cross-cultural competency, curricular internationalization, service learning, and intercultural communication skills. Intercultural communication facilitates the integration of global perspectives and supports meaningful service learning experiences. Teachers are encouraged to promote active listening, empathy, and cultural reflexivity to foster inclusive learning environments where students' cultural identities are valued. Intercultural communication skills, integral to the curriculum and service learning, help students manage cultural diversity, connect across cultures, and develop into global citizens (Kang & Lee, 2020). These findings also highlight the necessity for institutional support and professional development to effectively teach intercultural communication. Institutional policies, resources, and training are essential for educators to cultivate intercultural competence. School values emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion further support the development of cross-cultural skills among students. The study concludes that institutional support plays a crucial role in promoting intercultural understanding and inclusivity in educational settings.

Teachers need institutional policies, resources, and professional development to enhance intercultural communication. Training, seminars, and resources are essential for improving cross-cultural skills, as highlighted in previous research (Huang et al., 2022). Diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools promote multicultural understanding and create supportive environments. Institutional support fosters a positive, inclusive culture that helps teachers build meaningful cross-cultural relationships and teach cross-cultural proficiency. Leadership and organizational culture are vital for promoting academic inclusion and diversity. Institutions that support diversity enable teachers to engage in cross-cultural discussions, share best practices, and use diverse resources. This support helps teachers develop students' cross-cultural competencies by creating inclusive and respectful learning environments. The study's findings underscore the importance of institutional support in advancing multicultural education and inclusivity. Based on this discussion, we propose the following framework (Figure 6).

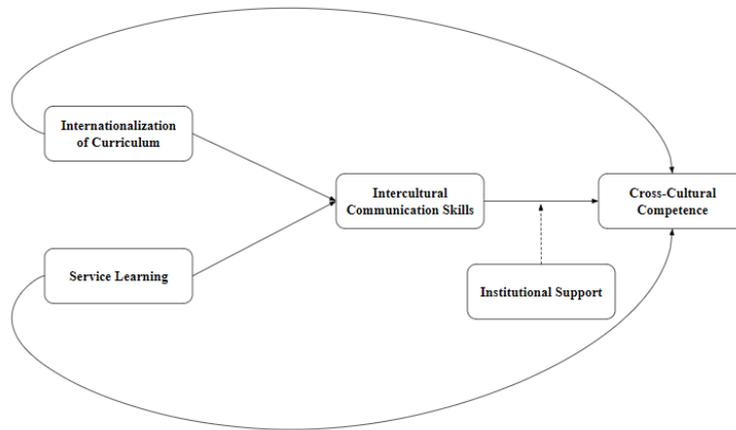


Figure 6: Proposed Framework.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research offers valuable theoretical and practical insights for education scholars and practitioners. It enhances the literature on cross-cultural education by theoretically linking service learning, intercultural communication skills, curricular internationalization, institutional support, and teachers' cross-cultural competence. By integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical data, the study advances our understanding of how educators manage cultural diversity and promote intercultural understanding within educational settings. The findings highlight the creation of a comprehensive framework that combines theoretical and practical aspects to enhance intercultural competency among both students and teachers. This research refines conceptual frameworks and theoretical models, shedding light on the complex relationships between the identified factors. The developed theoretical framework can guide the design of interventions aimed at boosting intercultural competency across various educational contexts and inform future research. The study underscores significant implications for educational policy and practice. It demonstrates how internationalizing curricula, implementing service learning, developing intercultural communication skills, and providing institutional support can transform educational environments.

Emphasizing the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, the findings suggest that practitioners can use this research to design effective cross-cultural education interventions. Educational authorities may leverage these insights to advocate for policies that foster inclusivity and fairness, creating supportive learning environments that enhance both teaching and learning. Professional development and teacher education are also impacted by this research. The study suggests that cross-cultural education courses and programs focusing on cultural competency and intercultural communication are essential for preparing teachers for diverse classrooms. By investing in such professional development, institutions can equip educators to manage cultural diversity effectively and promote inclusive teaching practices. Moreover, the study informs academic service learning and internationalization efforts. Integrating service learning with curriculum

internationalization can enhance student engagement and apply academic knowledge to real-world situations. By incorporating global perspectives, service learning can broaden students' cultural horizons and foster intercultural communication, empathy, and understanding. This approach helps teachers create meaningful learning experiences that prepare students for a globalized world.

Limitations and Future Direction

While this study provides valuable insights, it has several limitations. Firstly, its focus on Chinese secondary institutions may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural and educational contexts. Further research is needed to assess the applicability of curricular internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, institutional support, and cross-cultural competency across diverse settings. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data from semi-structured interviews, which may be influenced by participants' biases or social desirability, potentially affecting the results. Future studies could enhance reliability by employing multiple data collection methods, such as surveys and observations. The small sample size of 24 secondary school teachers also limits the generalizability of the results. A larger, more diverse sample could provide a broader understanding of the relationships studied. Additionally, this research primarily focused on teachers, overlooking the perspectives of students, parents, and other stakeholders. Including these viewpoints could offer a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural education outcomes. Lastly, while the qualitative approach provided in-depth insights, it does not establish causal relationships. Complementary quantitative research could further explore the connections between curricular internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication, institutional support, and cross-cultural competency.

This research suggests several avenues for further investigation despite its limitations. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to explore how curricular internationalization, service learning, intercultural communication skills, and institutional support influence teachers' cross-cultural competency over time. Such studies would help examine the evolution and interaction of these factors in enhancing educators' cultural proficiency. Additionally, research should investigate the role of technology in developing teachers' cross-cultural skills. As educational technology evolves, understanding how digital platforms and tools can enhance intercultural communication and competency becomes crucial. Future studies should also consider the impact of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender on teachers' cross-cultural competency. By exploring how these intersecting identities influence educators' perspectives and practices, researchers can deepen their understanding of cross-cultural competence. Finally, comparative research examining cross-cultural education practices across different countries and cultures is needed. Such studies could provide insights into global challenges and solutions related to cross-cultural competency in education.

Conclusion

This study examines the complex interplay between service learning, curricular internationalization, teacher cross-cultural competency, institutional support, and intercultural communication skills. It shows that service learning and internationalized

curricula enhance teachers' ability to manage cultural diversity and develop intercultural competence. By engaging with diverse cultures and perspectives, educators improve their empathy, cultural awareness, and communication skills, which helps in creating inclusive learning environments where students from varied backgrounds feel valued. The research underscores the importance of intercultural communication skills for effective service learning and teaching, advocating for active listening, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. Institutional support, including policies, resources, and professional development, is essential for teachers to develop and apply these skills effectively. Institutions that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion can help educators introduce students to global perspectives and foster a supportive learning environment. Overall, the study highlights that service learning, intercultural communication, curriculum internationalization, and institutional support are critical for advancing cross-cultural education. It calls for educational institutions to actively promote inclusion and diversity to create an enriching environment for both teachers and students.

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