RESEARCH ARTICLE

Developing an Intercultural Teaching Competencies Training Program for Educators in Application-oriented Universities in Anhui Province, China

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Abstract: The internalization of higher education in China has necessitated the development of intercultural competencies among educators. This study aimed to design a professional development program for application-oriented university educators in Anhui Province. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study utilized both qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative data was collected to analyze the demographic profile and intercultural teaching competencies of participants. Qualitative research was used to interpret and contextualize the quantitative findings.

Based on these findings, the "Interculturally Responsive Teaching Institute" program was developed to enhance intercultural teaching competencies through a comprehensive and inclusive approach. The study revealed the demographic characteristics of participants and assessed their existing intercultural teaching competencies in three key areas. It concluded that the program emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and professional development to meet the diverse needs of students in an increasingly globalized higher education landscape. Ongoing support is crucial to ensuring educators remain engaged, motivated, and equipped to effectively navigate intercultural teaching challenges.

Keywords: Applied-oriented university; Opportunities; Teaching practice; Mix-method study; Sino-foreign cooperation; Interculture teaching competencies Program

1. Introduction

In a globalized landscape, competition and cooperation among countries are intensifying. Especially with the deepening of China's reform and opening up, participation in international activities has become more frequent, the international status has continued to rise, and the demand and requirements for relevant talent have become higher and higher. The internationalization of higher education has become an important direction of China's education system, paving the way for China to shape a higher internationalization pattern. In this process, Sino-foreign cooperation in running educational programs has become one of the important paths. The objective of this type of cooperation is to enrich talents, both internationally

and professionally (Lin, 2021). Basically, the Sino-foreign cooperation educational system intends to provide high-quality international educational resources to Chinese students without going abroad. Further, bilateral academic certificates are given upon graduation. These certificates are honored by the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE) of the Ministry of Education.

Teachers working in international schools must be able to interact correctly and successfully with students, other teachers, administrators, and parents, as well as be able to provide a curriculum that is culturally relevant and responsive. Students learn best when taught by teachers who are interculturally competent (Taleisnik, 2016). However, the reality is that faculty members lack knowledge about culturally sensitive teaching methods. They lack the capacity to successfully communicate since they do

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not reply in culturally sensitive ways and work with students who are culturally diverse (Paige & Goode, 2009).

This paper aims to analyze the opportunities and teaching practices of educators of Sino-foreign cooperative schools that are application-oriented and related them to the intercultural competencies of global educators. The experiences of educators, whether considered as opportunities or teaching practices for them, may reflect their intercultural competencies as global teachers. Further, the researcher attempted to design a training program on the intercultural competencies of educators in this type of higher education institution, particularly in Anhui Province in China, using the results of this study.

Application-oriented universities

Application-oriented universities refer to institutions of higher learning that place a strong emphasis on undergraduate programs that address the needs of the local economy and society (Pan, 2009). These institutions place a strong emphasis on discipline-based education, foundational application-oriented education, and the development of high-level vocational talents based on the demand for social talent. These universities tend to be freshly founded undergraduate institutions with brief histories, and they actively explore the running orientation that best suits their missions (Lv & Zheng, 2011). Although the bullk of   newly founded high education institution had no experience of runing Sino-foreign cooperation programs, they soon realized that is crucial to run Sino-foreign cooperation programs   as a mean of enhancing college's internationalization.

Intercultural teaching competence

According to a very broad definition of perceived difference and group identity, intercultural teaching competence is the ability of instructors to interact with students in a way that supports the learning of students who are linguistically, culturally, socially, or in other ways different from the instructor or from each other (Dimitrov et al., 2014). In order to facilitate learning and encourage student engagement, instructors need to be interculturally competent in order to successfully communicate across disciplinary cultures; bridge cultural, linguistic, and other differences in the classroom; and build meaningful relationships with and among students.

According to Deardorff (2009), intercultural competence is the capacity of an individual to interact responsibly and effectively across cultural boundaries based on intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and abilities. There are three components of the Intercultural Teaching Competence Model which are: Foundational Competencies, Facilitation Competencies and Curriculum Design Competencies.

Objectives of the Study

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
   1.1   age,
   1.2   gender,
   1.3   baccalaureate course,
   1.4   nationality,
   1.5   native tongue spoken,
   1.6   foreign language/s spoken,
   1.7   number of years in teaching,
   1.8   number of years in teaching in this school,
   1.9   highest educational attainment, and
   1.10   English proficiency certification?

2. What is the level of intercultural teaching competencies of educators in Sino-foreign educational cooperation of application-oriented universities in terms of the following:
   2.1   foundational,
   2.2   facilitation, and
   2.3   curriculum design?

3. What training program on intercultural teaching competencies for educators of Sino-foreign educational cooperation of application-oriented universities could be proposed based on the results of the study?

Research Methodology

For answering the research questions, the researcher used mixed method sequential explanatory design that targeted the educators as participants. Mixed method is a process of gathering, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative research. The specific type of mixed method used was sequential. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed first. Then, qualitative data were collected and analyzed based on the quantitative results. The qualitative data were used to explain quantitative data (Creswell, 2018).

This study used Anhui Province as the locale where the selected universities were chosen as participants of this study. The selected universities are application-oriented universities. All of them have Sino-foreign educational cooperation. The higher education institutions (HEIs) that participated in this study are the following:
   1.   University A
   2.   University B
   3.   University C

The subjects of the qualitative and quantitative study are those educators who are teaching or managing in these universities under the Sino-foreign educational cooperation that are application-oriented in Anhui province. For the quantitative research, 90 educators were used, meaning 30 educators per school. All the educators were part of the samples. Thus, complete enumeration was used to examine the

entire population. By complete enumeration, all members of the whole population are used. For the qualitative research, 90 participants were, likewise, used, meaning 30 from each university.

The researcher used a self-made survey and a structured key informant interview questionnaire for the data gathering from the respondents.   Survey strategy is the most common and popular way being utilized for descriptive research design in collecting data to answer the "what", "who", "where", "how much" and "how many" questions. This popularity of using survey instruments lies in the fact that it is efficient and simple to carry out, particularly for massive population sizes.   On the other hand, a structured key informant interview questionnaire may provide important and specialized information about the research problem.

Before gathering the data, the instruments were validated by 3 expert professors from the Education Department of De La Salle University – Dasmarinas - Dr. Gladiolus Gatdula, Dr. Fanny Cuyos, and Dr. Paterno Alcartado. The researcher modified the instruments based on the comments made by the validators. The researcher conducted data gathering procedure after approvement was obtained.

In the course of the research, the author protects privacy of the participants, respects their rights, and ensures that the communication and dialogue between them are not disclosed without consent.

2. Results and Discussion

In response to the research objectives, the study's results and the discussion that go with them are shown below.

Table 1: Demographics Profile of the Respondents

Demographic variables	Content	Frequency
1. Age	30-35	19
	36-40	27
	41-45	34
	46-50	10
2. Gender	Male	18
	Female	72
3. Nationality	China	90
4. Native Tongue Spoken	Mandarin	90
5. Foreign Language/s Spoken	English	90
6. Number of Year/s in Teaching	1-5	4
	6-10	33
	11-15	36
	16-20	17
7. Number of Year/s in Teaching in this university	1-5	21
	6-10	41
	11-15	27
	16-20	1
9. Highest educational attainment	Masteral degree	90

Table 1 provides a whole picture of the demographic composition and experience levels of educators at the university. There are 18 male participants and 72 female respondents.   The age groups are categorized into 30-35, 36-40, 41-45, and 46-50.

All the respondents (90) come from China. All

the respondents use Mandarin as native language and English as foreign language. All the respondents have a master's degree. Experience in teaching is categorized into several ranges: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 16-20 years.   Likewise, teaching experience, specifically within the university, is categorized similarly to overall teaching experience. The respondents are reluctant to provide information about their baccalaureate and English proficiency certification.

The following table are results and discussion of problem 2, that is, what is the level of intercultural teaching competencies of educators in Sino-foreign educational cooperation of application-oriented universities.

Table 2: Level of Intercultural Teaching Competencies of Educators-Foundational

No.	Foundational Competencies	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1	Become more conscious of my positionality in the classroom, including my cultural and disciplinary identities.	4.98	0.15	Highly competent
2	Create cultural safety and trust by anticipating, appreciating, and accepting variations in learners and instructional approaches.	4.81	0.39	Highly competent
3	In the classroom, practice perspective-taking and promote it.	4.50	0.50	Highly competent
4	Discuss cultural, social, or other forms of differences in a nonjudgmental manner, which should be modeled and encouraged.	4.70	0.46	Highly competent
5	Demonstrate ambiguity tolerance and assist students in navigating the uncertainty that comes with examining differences.	4.92	0.27	Highly competent
	Over-all foundational competencies.	4.78		Highly competent

4.21-500 - Highly competent; 3.41-4.20 – Competent; 2.61-3.40 – Somewhat competent - 1.81-2.60; Somewhat incompetent; 1.00-1.80 – Incompetent.

Foundational competencies are a collection of skills related to a teacher's intercultural awareness and capacity to serve as role models for their students.

Table 2 demonstrates a high level of competence of educators in becoming conscious of their positionality in the classroom, including their cultural and disciplinary identities. With the highest mean score of 4.97, educators are considered highly competent in this aspect. This indicates their ability to reflect on their own cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, which is crucial for understanding and addressing potential biases in teaching.

In delineating the essential abilities of cross-cultural education professionals based on the key informant interviews performed, there is a wide spectrum of skills and competencies expressed. Some emphasize cross-cultural communication, underscoring the significance of effective interaction and collaboration with diverse cultural backgrounds. Conversely, others highlight cross-cultural cognitive abilities, such as understanding and analyzing cultural characteristics and patterns. Additionally, while some stress cross-cultural sensitivity,

acknowledging the impact of cultural differences on teaching, others emphasize cross-cultural appreciation, respecting and embracing cultural diversity. One participant claimed, "I have strong cultural sensitivity.   I can adapt my teaching style and communication to respect diverse cultural values and learning preferences. Since I was educated abroad, I have empathy and understanding of other cultures." Then, another participant stated, "one of my foundational competencies is that I possess a strong awareness of my own cultural biases and assumptions and strive to understand and appreciate the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of my students." Despite these differing perspectives, all underscore the importance of continuous learning and improvement in cross-cultural competence. Furthermore, while some mention cross-cultural teaching proficiency, designing and implementing instructional content suitable for multicultural learning, others focus on cross-cultural critical abilities, objectively analyzing and evaluating cross-cultural behaviors and phenomena. Nonetheless, there is a shared recognition of the need for ongoing reflection and adaptation to enhance cross-cultural awareness and effectiveness. Additionally, while some highlight cross-cultural coordination skills in managing cultural conflicts and facilitating collaboration, others emphasize cross-cultural leadership in fostering talent development and value creation. Ultimately, the common goal among cross-cultural education professionals is to cultivate an inclusive and enriching educational environment through a diverse range of skills and competencies.

While fostering cross-cultural understanding must start with the instructor's mindset (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004, cited in Gopal, 2011), the university that sends the faculty members must also be involved. It is imperative to recognize the significance of providing them with the opportunity to enhance their comprehension of the culture in which they are being dispatched to teach abroad. Without it, anxiety, frustration, confusion, and disorientation could surface (Gopal, 2011).

Table 3: Level of Intercultural Teaching Competencies of Educators-Facilitation

No.	Facilitation Competencies	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1	Encourage conversation among my students who have different communication philosophies.	4.40	0.55	Highly competent
2	Provide feedback on several methods that bridge cultural boundaries.	4.61	0.55	Highly competent
3	Adapt my messages to the varied linguistic proficiency levels of my audience.	4.82	0.38	Highly competent
4	Identify any obstacles my students may have when trying to participate in class.	4.82	0.38	Highly competent
5	Determine the risks that my students may experience while participating in class activities.	4.44	0.50	Highly competent
6	Provide opportunities for my various learners to engage and learn from one another.	4.88	0.33	Highly competent
7	Create and manage connections with my students who perceive power distance differently.	4.61	0.49	Highly competent
8	Explain and mediate cultural variations in the roles of teachers and students.	4.72	0.45	Highly competent
9	Encourage my students as they adjust to new fields and societies.	4.50	0.60	Highly competent
10	Explain what academic integrity means for their fields of study.	5.00	0.00	Highly competent
	Over-all facilitation competencies.	4.68		Highly competent

4.21-500 - Highly competent; 3.41-4.20 – Competent; 2.61-3.40 – Somewhat competent - 1.81-2.60; Somewhat incompetent; 1.00-1.80 – Incompetent.

Facilitation competencies that include the capacity to detect learners' needs, foster community in the classroom, establish shared academic goals, and encourage active learning with a variety of audiences are all examples of facilitation competencies. Table 3 reveals that educators demonstrate a high level of competence in facilitation competencies related to intercultural teaching.

Firstly, teachers excel in explaining academic integrity for their fields of study. With the highest mean score of 5.00, educators demonstrate exceptional facilitation skills. This underlines their ability to uphold academic standards and promote ethical conduct among students, ensuring the integrity and credibility of academic pursuits.

Furthermore, teachers excel in providing opportunities for various learners to engage and learn from one another. With the second highest mean score of 4.88, educators demonstrate exceptional facilitation skills. This underscores their commitment to fostering collaborative learning experiences that promote peer interaction and knowledge exchange, enriching the overall learning environment.

Generally, educators exhibit exceptional competence in various aspects of intercultural teaching facilitation, fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive academically and personally. Their exceptional competence in intercultural teaching in facilitation competency is instrumental in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment where students from diverse backgrounds can thrive academically and personally. Through their dedication and proficiency, educators contribute significantly to fostering a culture of

respect, understanding, and collaboration in the classroom, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all students.

Across various perspectives coming from the interviews on core competencies in cross-cultural education, there is a consensus on the importance of understanding, communication, teaching, and guidance. Some emphasize cross-cultural knowledge, focusing on understanding and comparing different cultural backgrounds, while others highlight cross-cultural awareness, stressing the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity. Similarly, while some underscore cross-cultural communication skills, emphasizing effective interaction with learners from diverse backgrounds, others emphasize cross-cultural adaptability, stressing the flexibility to adjust to different cultural environments. Moreover, while some prioritize cross-cultural teaching abilities, focusing on designing suitable content and methods for diverse learners, others stress cross-cultural guidance skills, focusing on providing support and fostering learners' independence. One instructor said, "I have core abilities in intercultural education, including identifying learners' needs and adapting teaching methods. I believe I can perform these tasks quite well and strive for continuous improvement." Despite these differences, all acknowledge the need for continuous improvement and learning to enhance professional competence. Additionally, while some highlight innovation skills for promoting cultural exchange and development, others emphasize evaluation skills for assessing teaching effectiveness and learner progress. Nonetheless, both emphasize the importance of utilizing appropriate tools and methods to achieve desired outcomes. Finally, while some discuss community-building activities to foster interaction and trust among learners, others focus on motivation strategies to inspire learning autonomy and engagement. Yet, both underscore the significance of creating a conducive learning environment.

Because foreign professors are not familiar with the English proficiency and cognitive capacities of Chinese students, unsystematic and incoherent education sometimes results. Foreign instructors' emphasis on knowledge teaching and their acceptance of the traditional teacher-centered teaching methodology, such as the cramming method, impede the growth of Sino-foreign cooperative education. Due to the intensive and condensed nature of the resulting teaching schedule, students detest

studying (Yan & Volodymyr, 2022).

Table 4: Level of Intercultural Teaching Competencies of Educators - Curriculum Design

No.	Curriculum Design	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1	At the course and curriculum levels, include learning objectives linked to intercultural, global, or cosmopolitan learning.	4.86	0.35	Highly competent
2	Provide learning resources and content in my classes that reflect a range of disciplinary viewpoints and paradigms.	4.40	0.80	Highly competent
3	Develop educational activities that provide my students the chance to examine diversity and develop perspective-taking skills.	4.26	0.59	Highly competent
4	Create evaluations that take cultural differences in writing and communication styles into account.	4.89	0.31	Highly competent
5	Provide my students the chance to consider and better comprehend their own varied cultural, personal, and disciplinary identities.	4.54	0.50	Highly competent
	Over-all curriculum design.	4.59		

4.21-500 - Highly competent; 3.41-4.20 – Competent; 2.61-3.40 – Somewhat competent - 1.81-2.60; Somewhat incompetent; 1.00-1.80 – Incompetent.

To support students in achieving overall learning objectives, curriculum design competencies include the capacity to synchronize learning activities and assessments across the curriculum. Educators could incorporate learning objectives that promote intercultural understanding and global perspectives into their courses as Table 4 displays the findings. With a total mean score of 4.59, educators demonstrate a high level of competence in curriculum design.

The assessment on educators' ability to design educational activities encourages students to explore diversity and develop perspective-taking skills. With the lowest mean score of 4.26, educators demonstrate a high level of proficiency in this area. They create opportunities for students to engage with diverse perspectives, enhancing their critical thinking and empathy.

Overall, educators exhibit exceptional competence in curriculum design, incorporating intercultural perspectives, diverse learning resources, and activities that promote students' understanding of diversity and their own identities. These competencies contribute to creating inclusive and enriching learning environments where students can thrive academically and develop intercultural competencies. One interviewee answered, "I am fully aware that the curriculum needs to be flexible and adaptable to meet the diverse needs and interests of my students and keep pace with the rapid technological advancements. Therefore, I actively collect feedback and adjust my curriculum remains relevant and engaging and prepares students for the globalized workforce. Furthermore, I recognize the importance of keeping up with technological advancements. In today's digital age, students need to be equipped with the latest technological tools and skills to succeed in their future careers. Therefore, I

continuously update and modify the curriculum to incorporate emerging technologies, digital literacy, and innovative teaching methods."

Song & Wang (2020) highlight that Sino-foreign cooperative education should learn from cutting-edge international teaching approaches to improve students' pleasant experiences while adhering to the current curriculum teaching mode in colleges and universities. In contrast to China's customary educational framework, international colleges possess extensive expertise in fostering student growth. For example, in the information age, educators can make full use of new media technologies to visually represent the knowledge structure system through images, videos, and other teaching resources. In addition, educators can present actual examples, bring up meaningful inquiry subjects, facilitate group debates among students, and lead engaging lessons.

The following tables are results and discussion about problem 3, that is, what training program on intercultural teaching competencies for educators of Sino-foreign educational cooperation of application-oriented universities could be proposed based on the results of the study.

The "Culturally Responsive Teaching Institute: Empowering Educators for Inclusive Classrooms" is a pioneering professional development initiative dedicated to equipping intercultural educators with the essential competencies needed to foster inclusive learning environments. Grounded on the principles of cultural responsiveness, this comprehensive training program addresses foundational, facilitation, and curriculum design aspects of intercultural teaching. By empowering educators with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to navigate cultural diversity effectively, the institute aims to promote equitable and enriching educational experiences for all students.

Table 5: Over-all Intercultural Teaching Competencies Training Program for Educators in Application-oriented Universities in Anhui Province

Program Title	Rationale	KRA (Key Results Area)	Objectives	KPI (Key Performance Indicator)	Time frame	Program implemented Strategies	People involved	Responsible person
Culturally Responsive Teaching Institute: Empowering Educators for Inclusive Classrooms	1. Diverse Student Population 2. Equity and Inclusion 3. Cultural Competence 4. Effective Communication 5. Global Citizenship 6. Preparation for the Workforce	1. Foundational Understanding 2. Facilitation techniques 3. Curriculum Design	1. Enhancing Cultural Competence 2. Promoting Inclusive Teaching Practices 3. Developing Intercultural Communication Skills 4. Empowering Educators	1. Duration of study participation 2. Survey responses and assessment scores 3. Feedback from student and stakeholders	Continuous (1 year time frame)	1. Pre-Assessment 2. Workshops and Seminars 3. Case Studies and Role-Playing 4. Collaborative Learning Communities 5. Action Planning and Implementation 6. Ongoing Support and Reflection 7. Post-Assessment and Evaluation	Educators related to the Sino-foreign education cooperation, Students and Stakeholders	Human Resource Department, Training Facilitator, External Experts

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has been able to gives a clear picture of the opportunities and teaching practices of educators of Sino-foreign educational cooperation in applied universities in Anhui Province. It also shows the level of intercultural teaching competencies of these educators. Further, it discloses the relationship between the opportunities and teaching practices and intercultural teaching competencies of educators in the same type of schools. As its output, there is an attempt to establish a program that can be used to develop educators' interculture teaching competencies. The followings are conclusions for the results of this study:

A. Summary of the key components and outcomes of the professional development program.

1. Key components of the program include foundational, facilitation, and curriculum design competencies, addressing essential aspects of intercultural teaching such as understanding cultural diversity, conflict resolution, and integrating cultural content into curriculum design.

2. Outcomes of the program include increased cultural awareness, improved pedagogical practices, and enhanced ability to create inclusive learning environments.

B. Emphasis on the importance of ongoing support and professional growth for intercultural educators.

1. Ongoing support and professional growth opportunities are essential for intercultural educators to continue developing their skills and competencies.

2. The "Culturally Responsive Teaching Institute" underscores the need for continuous learning and professional development to meet the evolving needs of diverse student populations.

3. Emphasizing ongoing support ensures that educators remain engaged, motivated, and equipped to effectively navigate the complexities of intercultural teaching.

C. Call to action for the institutionalization of intercultural teaching competencies within educational institutions.

1. There is a critical need for educational institutions to prioritize the institutionalization of intercultural teaching competencies to create inclusive and equitable learning environments.

2. The "Interculturally Responsive Teaching Institute" calls upon educational leaders and policymakers to integrate intercultural teaching competencies into teacher preparation programs, curriculum development initiatives, and institutional policies.

3. By institutionalizing intercultural teaching competencies, educational institutions can foster a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion that benefits both educators and students, ultimately

enriching the quality of education for all.

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