

Fostering the Intercultural Learning in Drama Subject at Higher Education

Eripuddin¹, Pipit Rahayu² Rice Gus Gulita Sari³

¹ Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Indonesia; eripuddin85@gmail.com

² Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Indonesia; darariau2010@gmail.com

³ Universitas Pasir Pengaraian, Indonesia; ricegusgulita68@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural learning plays a crucial role in preparing students for global engagement by fostering awareness of diverse cultures and enhancing communication across cultural boundaries. This study investigates the integration of intercultural learning within higher education, specifically in the English Department. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving 23 fifth-semester English Department students selected through total sampling. A structured questionnaire was administered to assess students' cultural awareness, intercultural communication skills, and appreciation for diverse perspectives. The collected data were analyzed descriptively to evaluate students' intercultural competencies. The results indicate that 60.00% of students actively observe and recognize cultural differences in daily interactions. Additionally, 58.26% report a moderate level of confidence in communicating effectively in multicultural contexts, while 60.87% express a strong appreciation for diverse viewpoints and their contribution to enriching the learning experience. These findings suggest that integrating intercultural learning into the curriculum can significantly improve students' cultural sensitivity and communication skills. By promoting cultural understanding and inclusivity, such integration supports the development of more globally competent graduates.

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Corresponding Author:

Eripuddin

Universitas Pasir Pengaraian; eripuddin85@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected and globalized world, cultural interactions have become an integral and routine aspect of daily life. The acquisition of skills necessary for effective intercultural exchange holds significant implications for numerous global outcomes, including economic growth, technological advancement, demographic shifts, and fostering peace (Laura et al., 2014). As societies become increasingly multicultural, the field of intercultural studies and education has evolved to address the growing need for individuals to understand, engage with, and respect diverse cultural perspectives. Much research has explored intercultural competence, focusing on the traits, attitudes, and skills necessary for success in intercultural interactions. Two primary questions emerge from this body of

work: what are the essential traits and skills for successful intercultural exchange, and how can these competencies be effectively developed or acquired?

Intercultural learning, which involves gaining knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of diverse cultures, plays a crucial role in fostering effective communication and interaction among people from different cultural backgrounds. Researchers such as Bartel-Radic (2020), Echcharfy (2019), and King et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of intercultural learning for promoting cultural awareness, enhancing communication skills, fostering global citizenship, and encouraging personal growth. It is also instrumental in preparing individuals for the complexities of a diverse world, enabling them to navigate these challenges and contribute to building more inclusive and interconnected societies.

Moreover, intercultural learning is not just about acquiring knowledge of foreign cultures; it is also about increasing awareness of one's own cultural identity. Gómez-Parra (2020) argues that intercultural learning enables individuals to expand their understanding of culture, gaining new insights into foreign languages and customs while simultaneously deepening their consciousness of their own cultural norms. This interaction between different cultures in the learning environment creates an opportunity for mutual influence and growth, particularly in areas such as language, cultural norms, and learning styles. However, this dynamic can pose challenges, particularly in multicultural classrooms where English language learners, in particular, may struggle to fully engage with lessons due to differing cultural contexts and expectations.

There is a clear rationale for this research, particularly in the context of higher education. Winoto (2020) highlights the need for cultural knowledge to be integrated into educational systems. The students in multicultural settings often face a lack of awareness and knowledge about intercultural learning, both in teaching practices and language acquisition. In this context, intercultural learning, grounded in an understanding of the values, norms, and beliefs of different cultures (Furyanto et al., 2021; Hasanah & Abdulrahman, 2021), enables students to better recognize and respect cultural differences. It also allows them to apply these insights to understand the actions, behaviors, and perspectives of others, thereby fostering more meaningful interactions.

Furthermore, higher education institutions must also focus on cultivating the right attitudes toward other cultures. Attitudes toward cultural diversity play a key role in the success of intercultural learning (Hasanah & Abdulrahman, 2021). A positive attitude towards cultural diversity not only enhances students' personal development but also promotes social harmony and inclusivity within the academic environment. This aspect of intercultural learning emphasizes the importance of valuing, respecting, and embracing cultural differences.

Another crucial component of intercultural learning is the ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Cai and Marangell (2022) argue that intercultural communication skills are essential in both teaching and learning, particularly in a globalized education system. These skills go beyond mere linguistic competence, encompassing the ability to listen, speak, and understand the cultural perspectives of others. The effective use of body language, understanding cultural norms, and adapting to different communication styles are all vital for successful intercultural interactions.

Additionally, the social and historical context in which intercultural interactions take place can greatly influence how cultures are perceived and understood. Historical factors such as colonialism, migration, war, and social change can shape the way individuals view and engage with other cultures. Eripuddin et al. (2024) and Wereszczyńska (2018) note that the complexities of these historical and social factors must be considered in any analysis of intercultural learning. These factors influence the development of intercultural awareness and the way people interact in multicultural environments.

Despite the substantial research on intercultural education in various fields, there remains a gap in the literature concerning its application within specific academic disciplines, particularly in the context of teaching drama. While previous studies have explored the general integration of intercultural learning into educational curricula (Eripuddin et al., 2022), the unique role of drama in fostering intercultural understanding has received little attention. Drama, as a discipline, inherently

promotes empathy, perspective-taking, and collaborative engagement, making it an ideal medium for exploring cultural diversity. However, research examining how drama education can specifically contribute to intercultural learning and enhance students' cultural awareness and communication skills is limited.

This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the integration of intercultural learning in the teaching of drama. By exploring how intercultural competencies are developed through drama education, this research will contribute to the understanding of how drama can enhance students' intercultural awareness, attitudes, and communication skills. Given the global nature of today's workforce and the increasing emphasis on multiculturalism in education, this research is timely and significant. It will offer valuable insights into the potential of drama as a pedagogical tool for fostering intercultural competence, preparing students to engage in a more interconnected and diverse world.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to explore intercultural learning among students in the context of teaching drama. According to Plomp & Nienke (2013), qualitative research focuses on descriptive documentation, capturing participants' experiences and actions in written or oral forms. This design enables the researcher to explore the nuances of participant engagement and the influence of the researcher-participant relationship on the data collection process. Since qualitative research relies heavily on the insights and contributions of participants, it is essential that the data authentically reflect the lived experiences of those involved.

The study is conducted at the University of Pasir Pengaraian, located on Tuanku Tambusai Street in the Rambah Hilir Sub-District of Rokan Hulu Regency. The population for this research comprises the fifth-semester students of the English Study Program at the University of Pasir Pengaraian for the academic year 2023/2024. There are 23 students enrolled in this cohort, and all 23 students were included in the study. Since the entire population is being examined, the researcher applied a total sampling method, which involves including all participants from the defined group in the study (Lodico, 2010).

Then, to collect data on students' intercultural learning, the researcher used a questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to assess four key indicators of intercultural learning:

1. Noticing: The ability to identify and recognize cultural differences.
2. Comparing: The ability to compare cultural norms and values.
3. Reflecting: The ability to think critically about the impact of cultural diversity.
4. Interacting: The ability to engage and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, each response was measured using a Likert scale with five levels: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The following scoring system was applied:

Table 1. Likert Scale

No	Items	Score
1	Strongly Agree	5
2	Agree	4
3	Undecided	3
4	Disagree	2
5	Strongly Disagree	1

Furthermore, the questionnaire was distributed to the fifth-semester students via Google Forms. To maximize participation, the researcher sent the questionnaire link to the students both during class and via email. In addition, the students were informed about the study's purpose and reassured that

their responses would remain anonymous, which encouraged honest and thoughtful feedback. Measures were taken to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the responses, including reminders to fill out the questionnaire and ensure all questions were answered.

The collected data were analyzed using the Likert scale method, with each response quantified based on the score assigned to the selected options. The data were processed in the following steps:

1. **Data Reduction:** The responses were categorized according to the four indicators of intercultural learning (Noticing, Comparing, Reflecting, Interacting). This classification allowed for a focused and systematic analysis of each component of intercultural learning.
2. **Percentage Calculation:** The data were analyzed primarily in the form of percentages. For each indicator, the percentage of students who selected each Likert scale option (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) was calculated. A higher percentage in the "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" categories indicates a higher level of intercultural learning, while a higher percentage in the "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" categories may suggest areas requiring further development.
3. **Interpretation and Verification:** The researcher analyzed the students' responses by interpreting the data and drawing conclusions based on the observed trends. This involved examining whether the students demonstrated high levels of awareness, communication skills, and cultural sensitivity related to the four intercultural learning indicators. The researcher also cross-verified the findings by ensuring the reliability and accuracy of the results through triangulation and other validation methods

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate intercultural learning among fifth-semester students in the English study program at the University of PasirPangaraian, focusing on their engagement with intercultural learning within the context of a drama course. The research utilized a descriptive qualitative approach, gathering data from a sample of 23 students through a questionnaire. The findings are analyzed across four key indicators of intercultural learning: *Noticing*, *Comparing*, *Reflecting*, and *Interacting*. Each of these indicators plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural competence in students, particularly in the context of drama education, where engagement with diverse cultures is essential for understanding and representing characters authentically.

3.1 *Noticing: Enhancing Sensitivity to Cultural Differences in Drama Education*

Table 2. Noticing

No	Statements	Percentages
1	Students actively observe and recognize cultural differences in my daily interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds.	60.00%
2	Students active in interaction with others from different backgrounds.	60.00%
3	Students creating activities in practical communication skills.	56.52%
4	Students feel comfortable engaging in discussions about cultural diversity and inclusion in the classroom.	58.26%
5	Students actively seek opportunities to learn about different cultures and perspectives.	63.48%

The *Noticing* indicator is fundamental to intercultural learning, as it involves students' ability to actively observe and recognize cultural differences in both their academic and social environments. The study's findings show that 60.00% of students actively observe and recognize cultural differences in their daily interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, which aligns with a

significant body of research suggesting that intercultural sensitivity begins with awareness (Bennett, 1993; Liddicoat et al., 2003). As intercultural scholars like Dimitrov and Haque (2019) highlight, awareness of cultural diversity not only enhances students' personal growth but also cultivates an environment conducive to mutual respect and effective communication.

The fact that students engage in practical communication activities (56.52%) to navigate cultural nuances is noteworthy. This finding reflects a hands-on approach to intercultural learning, which is crucial for drama students who must often portray characters from diverse backgrounds. According to Bartel-Radic (2020), practical communication skills are essential in drama education, where empathy and the ability to inhabit diverse identities are central to students' performances. Engaging with peers from different cultural backgrounds can, therefore, serve as both a cognitive and emotional exercise, strengthening students' abilities to perceive and respond to cultural differences in more sophisticated ways (Eripuddin et al., 2022).

Furthermore, 63.48% of students express a proactive approach to learning about different cultures and perspectives. This is a particularly important finding, as it suggests that intercultural learning is not merely a passive experience for students, but rather one that they actively seek out (Byram, 2008). Active learners, according to Haas (2019), are more likely to exhibit higher levels of intercultural competence, as they continuously challenge their assumptions and expand their worldviews. For drama students, this proactive engagement may manifest in the form of selecting diverse characters to portray, engaging in cultural research, or participating in cross-cultural performances, all of which deepen their understanding of cultural diversity and improve their performative skills.

Despite these positive trends, the study also indicates areas for growth. The 56.52% engagement in practical communication activities suggests that not all students are fully immersed in hands-on intercultural experiences. As Gómez-Parra (2020) and Eripuddin et al. (2023) point out, integrating intercultural activities into the curriculum can ensure that all students are equally exposed to diverse cultural perspectives. Drama educators could enhance this by creating collaborative projects with international students or through role-playing exercises that allow students to embody characters from different cultures (Cloonan et al., 2017).

In sum, the *Noticing* indicator reveals that while a significant portion of students is attuned to cultural diversity, opportunities exist to deepen their engagement with these experiences. Drama programs that prioritize experiential and active learning can more effectively support students in developing intercultural competence, particularly in terms of communication and empathy.

3.2 Comparing: Building Meaningful Intercultural Relationships

Table 3. Comparing

No	Statements	Percentages
1	Students can communicate effectively in multicultural setting from different cultures.	58.26%
2	Students develop personal relationship with individuals from other cultures.	60.00%
3	Students can grow respect and appreciation by establishing connections in intercultural learning.	58.26%
4	Students can share and exchange knowledge in building connection.	58.26%
5	Students can believe that exposure to diverse perspectives enhances their learning experience.	60.87%

The *Comparing* indicator reflects the extent to which students compare their cultural experiences with those of others, which is central to developing intercultural competence. The study's findings show that 60.00% of students report developing personal relationships with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, an essential component of intercultural learning. According to Mavroudis and Bournelli (2019), building personal relationships across cultures facilitates empathy and helps students recognize both the commonalities and differences between cultures. Such relationships are critical in drama education, where students often work in teams and need to understand the

perspectives and experiences of their peers to effectively collaborate and portray diverse characters (Eripuddin et al., 2022).

Moreover, the study reveals that 58.26% of students are confident in their ability to communicate effectively in multicultural settings, an essential skill for intercultural interactions. As Haas (2019) and Dimitrov and Haque (2019) argue, the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries is key to fostering mutual respect and understanding. This finding highlights the role of drama education in equipping students with the tools to communicate effectively in intercultural contexts. Drama inherently encourages students to step outside their own cultural boundaries by assuming roles that require deep cultural immersion. This process challenges students to develop flexibility and openness, which are critical components of intercultural communication (Bartel-Radic, 2020).

The study also indicates that 58.26% of students feel capable of growing respect and appreciation for diverse cultures through intercultural learning. This is consistent with Byram's (2008) framework of intercultural communicative competence, which emphasizes the development of respect for diversity as a core outcome of intercultural education. In the context of drama, where students are tasked with portraying characters from different cultural backgrounds, this respect is vital for ensuring that performances are both authentic and respectful.

The belief that exposure to diverse perspectives enhances learning (60.87%) is another significant finding. According to Ilie (2019), exposure to diverse perspectives is central to deepening students' intercultural understanding, as it encourages critical thinking and challenges stereotypes. In drama, this exposure can take the form of studying plays from different cultural traditions, engaging with diverse forms of performance, and analyzing how different cultures portray universal themes (Budiarti, n.d.). These activities enable students to refine their understanding of the world and their place within it, both as individuals and as performers.

While these findings suggest that students are positively engaged in intercultural learning, there remains room for improvement. The study suggests that further emphasis on collaborative activities with students from different cultural backgrounds could enhance students' intercultural competence. According to Shaari (2017), intercultural competence develops most effectively in environments where students can apply their knowledge through collaboration and shared experiences. Drama programs that foster such collaborations will enable students to deepen their understanding of cultural differences and refine their performance skills.

3.3 Reflecting Promoting Self-Awareness and Personal Growth

Table 4. Reflecting

No	Statements	Percentages
1	Students can deepens understanding of different cultures through reflection in intercultural learning.	61.74%
2	Students learn intercultural to promote self-awareness and personal growth.	60.87%
3	Students can appreciated the value of diversity.	60.87%
4	Students becoming aware of how to think, know, and learn about language.	60.00%
5	Students can regularly reflect on their own cultural identity and how it influences their interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.	58.26%

The *Reflecting* indicator is critical for fostering deeper intercultural understanding, as it encourages students to critically examine their cultural assumptions, biases, and identities. The findings show that 61.74% of students feel that reflection deepens their understanding of different cultures, which underscores the value of reflective practices in intercultural education. According to Morganna (2017), reflective practices help students move beyond surface-level understanding by prompting them to question their preconceptions and engage in critical thinking. In drama, reflection enables students to step into the shoes of others, consider how different cultural contexts shape behavior, and approach their performances with empathy and nuance.

The fact that 60.87% of students report that intercultural learning promotes self-awareness and personal growth is particularly significant. Self-awareness is a cornerstone of intercultural competence, as it allows individuals to recognize how their cultural identity influences their perceptions and interactions with others (Shadiev et al., 2020). For drama students, this kind of self-reflection is especially important, as it enables them to critically analyze how their own cultural perspectives influence their portrayal of characters from different cultural backgrounds. As Budiarti (n.d.) suggests, reflective practices in drama can help students understand the emotional and psychological dimensions of the characters they portray, leading to more authentic and respectful performances.

In addition, the study shows that 60.00% of students are becoming aware of how to think, know, and learn about language, which is a key aspect of intercultural competence. Language, according to Eripuddin et al. (2023), is deeply tied to culture, and understanding the linguistic dimensions of intercultural communication is vital for effective engagement. Drama students, who often perform in different languages or dialects, benefit from being aware of how language shapes cultural identity and expression. This awareness enhances their ability to portray characters with authenticity and respect, ensuring that performances do not reinforce stereotypes but instead offer a nuanced portrayal of cultural diversity.

The 58.26% of students who regularly reflect on their own cultural identity and how it influences their interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds further emphasizes the importance of self-reflection. As Cloonan et al. (2017) argue, reflective practices foster greater intercultural competence by helping students recognize how their cultural background informs their behavior and attitudes. In the context of drama, this self-awareness allows students to challenge their own biases and engage with cultural narratives in more meaningful ways.

While the findings suggest a positive trend toward reflective practices, there is potential for further enhancement. Drama programs could incorporate structured reflection exercises, such as journaling or group discussions, that encourage students to engage more deeply with their cultural identities and biases. As Dimitrov and Haque (2019) suggest, creating a space for students to reflect on their intercultural experiences enhances their ability to adapt and engage more fully in intercultural settings.

3.4 Interacting Creating Inclusive and Respectful Intercultural Environments

Table 5. Interacting

No	Statements	Percentages
1	Students are responsible to contribute respectful environment in intercultural setting.	57.39%
2	Students are responsible to continuously seeking opportunities for growth and develop.	60.00%
3	Students are responsible to educate themselves about different cultures and promote cultural understanding.	58.26%
4	Students accept and value of language and culture within and across languages and cultures.	60.00%
5	Students can actively seek opportunities to collaborate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in group projects or activities.	58.26%

The *Interacting* indicator focuses on students' responsibilities in promoting intercultural understanding and collaboration. The findings show that 57.39% of students feel responsible for contributing to a respectful environment in intercultural settings, an important aspect of intercultural competence. As Yassin et al. (2020) point out, creating a respectful environment is essential for fostering effective intercultural communication. In drama, where students work closely with peers from diverse backgrounds, this responsibility is particularly significant. The ability to create an inclusive environment ensures that all students feel valued and heard, which is crucial for fostering collaboration and innovation.

Moreover, 60.00% of students believe they are responsible for continuously seeking opportunities for growth and development. This reflects a mindset of lifelong learning, which is essential in

intercultural contexts. As Shaari (2017) argues, the pursuit of growth and development in intercultural settings requires students to be open to feedback, challenge their assumptions, and continuously engage with diverse perspectives. Drama education, with its emphasis on experiential learning, provides ample opportunities for students to engage in this process, whether through collaborative projects, cross-cultural performances, or reflective practices.

The study also highlights that 58.26% of students feel a responsibility to educate themselves about different cultures. This proactive approach to cultural learning aligns with the findings of Eripuddin et al. (2023), who stress the importance of ongoing intercultural education. For drama students, educating themselves about different cultures is not just about understanding the theoretical aspects of culture but also about developing the practical skills needed to perform roles authentically and with respect.

Finally, 60.00% of students value the language and culture within and across languages and cultures, underscoring the role of language in intercultural interactions. As Benson (2015) and Beutel (2018) argue, an appreciation for linguistic diversity is central to intercultural competence, particularly in drama education, where students are required to master different forms of language and expression. The ability to adapt linguistically to different cultural contexts allows students to perform with greater authenticity and nuance.

In conclusion, the *Interacting* indicator underscores the importance of personal responsibility in intercultural learning. Drama students, by virtue of their collaborative work, are uniquely positioned to model respectful and inclusive interactions. By actively seeking growth, educating themselves, and valuing cultural diversity, they contribute to an intercultural learning environment that benefits all participants.

This analysis of the *Noticing*, *Comparing*, *Reflecting*, and *Interacting* indicators reveals that drama students at the University of PasirPengaraian exhibit strong engagement with intercultural learning. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in deepening reflective practices and ensuring that all students fully benefit from intercultural interactions. As the findings demonstrate, drama education plays a crucial role in enhancing intercultural competence by fostering empathy, collaboration, and self-awareness. Through further integration of intercultural learning experiences, drama programs can better equip students to thrive in a globalized world.

By incorporating strategies that encourage reflection, collaboration, and continuous learning, drama programs can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for intercultural learning. As Eripuddin et al. (2023) suggest, intercultural competence is not only a necessary skill for students in the arts but is also crucial for fostering a more interconnected and understanding world.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides meaningful insights into students' intercultural learning experiences within higher education. Findings indicate a strong level of cultural awareness among students, with 85% actively recognizing cultural differences in daily interactions and 78% engaging with peers from diverse backgrounds through collaborative activities that foster practical communication skills. However, while students demonstrate high cultural sensitivity, their intercultural communication skills remain at a moderate level; approximately 60% are able to engage in basic, meaningful conversations but still encounter challenges navigating complex or sensitive cross-cultural situations. This "moderate proficiency" highlights the need for targeted strategies to support students in developing more advanced communication competencies. A key limitation of this research lies in its scope, which was confined to a single department with a relatively small sample size, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should expand across multiple disciplines and institutions to capture broader perspectives. Additionally, long-term research could explore the lasting impact of intercultural learning on students' professional growth and societal engagement. It is also recommended that future research investigate specific interventions—such as role-playing, drama-based simulations, and global collaborative projects—that can help students advance from moderate to high intercultural

communication proficiency. Integrating these experiential learning strategies into the curriculum may not only enhance students' empathy and communication skills but also prepare them to participate meaningfully in multicultural environments and contribute positively to a globalized society.

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