



## INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE CLASSROOM: A BASIS FOR DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR THE IP LEARNERS

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### Abstract

*In an increasingly diverse educational landscape, intercultural competence has become vital for educators to ensure inclusive teaching. This study assessed the intercultural competence of public high school teachers in Cabarroguis, Quirino, Philippines during the 2025–2026 school year. It aimed to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses in managing multicultural classrooms, specifically focusing on their ability to support Indigenous People (IP) learners and promote indigenous-led development.*

*The research utilized a descriptive-inferential quantitative design. Data was collected via a researcher-developed Likert-scale questionnaire administered to 138 stratified randomly selected teachers. The instrument, anchored in Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model, measured five dimensions: cultural knowledge, attitude, communication skills, motivation of learners, and promotion of indigenous-led development. Statistical tools included mean, t-test, and ANOVA.*

*Findings revealed that teachers perceive themselves as highly competent, across all dimensions. Most respondents were female and lacked formal intercultural training. While generally consistent, significant differences were found in the recognition of indigenous contributions based on age and in highlighting indigenous leadership based on training levels*

*Despite high self-perceived competence, the lack of formal training suggests a need for institutionalized professional development. The study proposes "PROJECT BIDA ANG KULTURA," a program focusing on cultural sensitivity and the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) to enhance inclusive education and cultural sustainability.*

**Keywords:** *Intercultural competence, Indigenous People (IP) learners, culturally responsive teaching, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), teacher professional development*



## **Introduction**

The contemporary global landscape has necessitated a fundamental shift in educational environments, characterized by a burgeoning diversity within Philippine classrooms. This expansion of cultural identities requires educators to master intercultural competence the capacity to decode cultural nuances, respect varied belief systems, and calibrate pedagogical strategies to meet heterogeneous student needs. Drawing on the frameworks of Deardorff (2006) and Bennett & Bennett (2004), the transition from ethnocentrism to ethnocultural relativism through critical reflection is essential for professional growth.

True intercultural proficiency extends beyond surface-level awareness; it demands an intimate understanding of a learner's socioeconomic status, linguistic heritage, and unique life conditions. This is particularly critical for educators serving marginalized and Indigenous populations, whose perspectives often deviate from traditional academic paradigms. By adopting a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit-oriented mindset, teachers can validate student identities and foster active academic participation.

In the localized context of Cabarroguis, Quirino, Philippines high school classrooms serve as a vibrant tapestry of ethnic groups, including the Igorot and Ifugao. Educators in this region must navigate complex intersections of age, financial background, and heritage. Research indicates that instructors possessing high intercultural communication skills are significantly more effective at creating inclusive spaces that drive the academic success of culturally diverse learners. Conversely, a lack of such sensitivity often leads to pedagogical misunderstandings and the social exclusion of students.

This research evaluates the intercultural competence of public high school teachers in Cabarroguis, to identify existing proficiencies and professional gaps. By examining how educators perceive and practice cultural responsiveness, the study intends to provide a data-driven foundation for school policies and specialized training programs. Ultimately, this inquiry seeks to advance the discourse on inclusive education, ensuring teachers are equipped to facilitate an equitable learning environment for every student.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Drawing on Darla Deardorff's (2006) Intercultural Competence Model, this study defines intercultural competence as the ability to interact and communicate effectively in diverse settings, emphasizing that true proficiency requires a blend of internal attitudes, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills rather than mere factual knowledge. The model is structured around three core pillars: attitudes (openness and curiosity), knowledge (cultural self-awareness and worldviews), and skills (observation and adaptive communication). This framework serves as the structural foundation for the research, guiding the development of the survey instrument and providing a clear metric to evaluate how high school educators in Cabarroguis manage cultural diversity within their specific classroom environments.

Furthermore, the research integrates Geneva Gay's (2000) Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) framework, which asserts that education is most impactful when it is rooted in students' unique cultural backgrounds and linguistic experiences. There is a direct synergy between these two models: educators who possess high intercultural competence are significantly better equipped to implement CRT, allowing them to validate and weave students' identities into the academic curriculum. By framing cultural backgrounds as strengths rather than obstacles, this approach fosters deeper

academic engagement and reinforces cultural pride among learners, creating a more inclusive and effective educational atmosphere.

### **Methodology**

This research employed a descriptive-inferential design to investigate the intercultural competence of educators. The descriptive phase summarized demographic profiles including age, gender, and experience while the inferential phase analyzed the relationships between these variables and cultural proficiency levels. This dual approach ensures a robust, evidence-based evaluation suitable for informing future educational policy and professional training.

The study population consisted of 219 public high school teachers in Cabarroguis for the 2025–2026 academic year. Using G-Power for sizing and stratified random sampling to eliminate bias.

The study covered five core dimensions: cultural knowledge, attitudes, communication, learner motivation, and the promotion of Indigenous-led development. The tool underwent expert validation and a pilot test, achieving Cronbach's Alpha scores between 0.708 and 0.836, confirming acceptable to good reliability.

Data collection commenced following formal approval from the Department of Education. Participants provided informed consent, with strict adherence to anonymity and voluntary participation. Statistical analysis was performed using frequency counts and percentages for profiling, weighted means for competence levels, and t-tests and ANOVA to identify significant differences across demographic groups such as sex, age, and ethnicity. This methodological framework ensures the integrity and ethical soundness of the findings regarding culturally responsive teaching.

### **Results and Discussion**

Table 1: Demographic and Professional Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	107	77.54
	Male	31	22.46
Age	30 and below	34	24.64
	31–40	59	42.75
	41 and above	45	32.61
Ethnic Affiliation	Ilocano	75	54.35
	Ifugao	45	32.61
	Others (Igorot, Tagalog, etc.)	18	13.04
Intercultural Training	Without Training	100	72.46
	With Training	38	27.54
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's/Master's Units	102	73.91
	Master's Degree	22	15.94
	Doctorate Units/Degree	14	10.14

*n*=138

The respondent profile reveals a predominantly female (77.54%), mid-career workforce, with 42.75% aged 31–40. While the group is academically grounded with 73.91% holding bachelor's degrees or master's units, there is a critical deficit in specialized professional preparation, as 72.46%

lack formal intercultural training. This gap is particularly significant given the diverse ethnic composition of the group, which includes Ilocano (54.35%) and Ifugao (32.61%). Such a profile implies that while these professionals are experienced, they may rely on anecdotal experience rather than evidence-based frameworks to navigate cultural nuances.

According to Deardorff (2020), intercultural competence is not an innate trait acquired through mere exposure to diversity; it requires intentional, structured development to ensure effective and appropriate interactions in pluralistic settings. Furthermore, the high concentration of respondents with incomplete postgraduate units suggests a "career plateau." Without institutional intervention to move these individuals toward degree completion, the workforce risks stagnation. As Akkermans et al. (2021) argue, in the modern labor market, age and tenure no longer guarantee career sustainability or performance excellence without continuous, proactive professional development and specialized upskilling. Consequently, there is an urgent need for policies that provide both academic support and culturally responsive professional development to bridge these competency gaps.

Table 2: Summary of Teachers' Perceived Level of Intercultural Competence

Dimension	Grand Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Knowledge and Understanding	3.77	0.43	Strongly Agree
2. Attitude toward Other Cultures	3.76	0.42	Strongly Agree
3. Communication with Diverse Backgrounds	3.74	0.48	Strongly Agree
4. Motivation for Cultural Pride	3.77	0.43	Strongly Agree
5. Promotion of Indigenous-led Development	3.66	0.50	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	3.74	0.45	Highly Competent

The data in Table 2 reveals a paradox between the teachers' high self-perception of intercultural competence and their previously noted lack of formal training. With an overall grand mean of 3.74, interpreted as "Highly Competent," respondents express peak confidence in "Knowledge and Understanding" (3.77) and "Motivation for Cultural Pride" (3.77). This suggests a workforce deeply anchored in cultural identity. However, the slightly lower mean for "Promotion of Indigenous-led Development" (3.66) indicates that while teachers theoretically embrace interculturalism, they may feel less prepared to lead transformative, indigenous-centered initiatives.

The data highlights a paradox between teachers' high self-perception of competence and their lack of formal training. This "Highly Competent" rating, despite 72.46% of respondents lacking formal intercultural preparation, suggests a reliance on intuitive rather than pedagogical responsiveness. As Deardorff (2020) reinforces, intercultural competence is a lifelong developmental process requiring structured reflection; without formal training, individuals often reach a "perception ceiling" where high self-confidence masks a lack of technical skills needed for complex cross-cultural classroom management.

Furthermore, this gap suggests that while educators hold positive attitudes, they may struggle to implement transformative practices. Semião et al. (2023) emphasize that truly effective culturally responsive teaching requires moving beyond simple awareness toward explicit advocacy and the practical implementation of inclusive strategies within school cultures. Without bridging this gap through professional development, there is a risk that these high scores represent a superficial "cultural celebration" rather than the deep, transformative pedagogy required to serve diverse student populations effectively.

Table 3: Significant Difference in Intercultural Competence by Sex (t-test)

Dimension	Male Mean	Female Mean	t-value	p-value	Decision
Communication Adaptation	3.94	3.71	6.940	0.009*	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Advocate for IP Programs	3.77	3.51	6.480	0.012*	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Knowledge and Understanding	3.84	3.78	0.523	0.471	Accept H <sub>0</sub>
<i>*Significant at p &lt; 0.05</i>					

The t-test results in Table 3 reveal a significant gender disparity in the behavioral application of intercultural competence. While both groups share a similar theoretical foundation evidenced by the lack of significant difference in Knowledge and Understanding (p=0.471) male respondents scored significantly higher in Communication Adaptation (Mean=3.94, p=0.009) and Advocacy for IP Programs (Mean=3.77, p=0.012). This suggests that while cultural "knowing" is balanced, the "doing" specifically assertive advocacy and behavioral flexibility—is more pronounced among male educators.

This disparity implies that institutional structures and social role expectations continue to influence how educators enact their competence. The higher advocacy scores among males suggest they may feel more empowered or socially positioned to navigate institutional hierarchies. Recent research indicates that gender bias in cultural norms can significantly impact professional leadership and innovation, as women are often more constrained by traditional social expectations than men (Qin et al., 2023). Furthermore, for culturally responsive teaching to be truly effective, it must move beyond simple awareness to explicit advocacy and the implementation of inclusive strategies within the school culture (Semião et al., 2023). Consequently, since this workforce is predominantly female, institutions must actively foster environments that empower female educators to transition from theoretical understanding toward visible leadership and advocacy in indigenous-led programs.

Table 4: Significant Difference in Intercultural Competence by Age (ANOVA)

Dimension / Statement	F-value	p-value	Decision
Awareness of IP Issues	7.062	0.001*	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Recognition of IP Contributions	4.899	0.009*	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge	3.251	0.042*	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Motivation for Cultural Roots	2.115	0.125	Accept H <sub>0</sub>
<i>*Significant at p &lt; 0.05</i>			

The ANOVA results in Table 4 reveal significant generational differences in three of the four dimensions of intercultural competence. Statistically significant findings were observed for Awareness of IP Issues (F=7.062, p=.001), Recognition of IP Contributions (F=4.899, p=.009), and Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge (F=3.251, p=.042). In these cases, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that age significantly influences how individuals perceive and apply indigenous-related concepts. However, Motivation for Cultural Roots (p=.125) showed no significant difference, suggesting that the internal drive to connect with one's heritage is a universal trait that remains stable across the lifespan.

The primary implication is that while the "heart" or motivation for culture is consistent across ages, the "head" and "hands" referring to awareness and practical application are divided by generational cohorts. This disparity likely stems from the recent integration of indigenous perspectives into modern education, leaving older generations with the same motivation but fewer formal tools for engagement. To address this, organizations move beyond generic cultural sensitivity training and

implement targeted, age-specific educational interventions that bridge the gap between cultural interest and actionable knowledge.

Table 5: Significant Difference in Intercultural Competence by Training Status (t-test)

Dimension / Statement	With Training	Without	t-value	p-value	Decision
Awareness of IP Issues	3.89	3.58	11.615	0.001*	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Highlighting IP Leadership	3.74	3.50	5.378	0.022*	Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Inclusive Language Usage	3.76	3.74	0.862	0.355	Accept H <sub>0</sub>
<i>*Significant at p &lt; 0.05</i>					

The t-test results in Table 5 indicate that formal training significantly impacts specific dimensions of intercultural competence regarding Indigenous Peoples (IP). Statistically significant differences were found in Awareness of IP Issues (t=11.615, p=.001) and Highlighting IP Leadership (t=5.378, p=.022), where those with training consistently outperformed those without. In these cases, the null hypothesis is rejected. Conversely, Inclusive Language Usage (p=.355) showed no significant difference, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This suggests that while specialized training effectively boosts conceptual awareness and leadership recognition, general communication habits like inclusive language may be influenced more by broader social norms or personal ethics rather than specific training sessions.

The primary implication is that targeted professional development is essential for moving beyond surface-level sensitivity toward a deeper structural understanding of IP issues. The data suggests a "competency ceiling" for untrained individuals; while they may naturally use inclusive language, they lack the specific knowledge required to recognize IP leadership or complex socio-political issues. Therefore, institutions should prioritize structured training to bridge these technical knowledge gaps. This specialized training acts as a catalyst for professional advocacy, transforming passive tolerance into active recognition of Indigenous contributions within organizational frameworks.

Table 6: Perceived Competence in Promoting Indigenous-led Development

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Support for local culture and arts	3.83	0.40	Strongly Agree
Promoting respect for IP rights	3.81	0.39	Strongly Agree
Facilitating cultural awareness activities	3.74	0.46	Strongly Agree
Integrating indigenous success stories	3.44	0.54	Strongly Agree
Dimension Grand Mean	3.66	0.50	Strongly Agree

The data in Table 6: Perceived Competence in Promoting Indigenous-led Development presents a highly positive self-assessment among respondents, with a Dimension Grand Mean of 3.66, interpreted as "Strongly Agree." The highest-rated indicator is "Support for local culture and arts" (M=3.83, SD=0.40), closely followed by "Promoting respect for IP rights" (M=3.81, SD=0.39). While still within the "Strongly Agree" range, "Integrating indigenous success stories" yielded the lowest mean (M=3.44, SD=0.54) and the highest standard deviation. This indicates that while there is a near-universal consensus on the value of supporting arts and rights, there is slightly more variability and perhaps less practical confidence in how to curate and integrate specific success narratives into a professional or educational framework.

The primary implication of these findings is the existence of a robust affective foundation for Indigenous advocacy; the respondents possess the necessary "will" and "respect" to support IP

communities. However, the lower score in "integrating success stories" suggests a transition from advocacy to application is required. It implies that future professional development should shift away from general awareness toward content-specific integration strategies. Without specific training on how to source and teach indigenous-led successes, well-intentioned respect may remain superficial. This data validates the need for structured curriculum interventions—like those proposed in Project BIDA—to bridge the gap between "supporting" a culture and "systematically integrating" its achievements into institutional knowledge.

Table 7: Proposed Intervention Program: PROJECT BIDA ANG KULTURA

Focus Area	Objective	Key Activity	Expected Outcome
Cultural Awareness	Deepen understanding of IKSP	Seminar-Workshops on Quirino Ethnic History	Integration of local heritage in Lesson Plans
Communication	Bridge linguistic gaps	LAC Sessions on Mother Tongue-Based Dialogue	Improved teacher-student rapport in IP areas
Leadership	Promote IP Development	Community Immersion & IP Leader Dialogues	Recognition of IP leadership in curriculum
Sensitivity	Eliminate cultural bias	Inclusive Pedagogy Training	Reduction in cultural misunderstandings

Table 7 outlines Project BIDA ANG KULTURA, a strategic intervention program designed to operationalize intercultural competence within the educational sector. The framework transitions from theoretical knowledge—such as deepening the understanding of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) through workshops on Quirino Ethnic History—to practical application, specifically targeting linguistic gaps and the elimination of cultural bias through Inclusive Pedagogy Training. By focusing on community immersion and Mother Tongue-Based dialogues, the intervention shifts the educational paradigm from a top-down approach to a collaborative model. The expected outcomes, particularly the integration of local heritage into lesson plans and the recognition of IP leadership, suggest a holistic attempt to decolonize the curriculum and foster institutionalized sensitivity.

The primary implication of this intervention is that intercultural competence is not a passive trait but a skill that must be intentionally scaffolded through place-based education and communal engagement. By aligning teacher training (LAC sessions) with direct community immersion, the program ensures that "cultural awareness" translates into "cultural responsiveness." This institutional approach is critical because it addresses the systemic barriers identified in previous data—such as the gap between general motivation and practical classroom application. Furthermore, the emphasis on IP leadership dialogues implies that the program seeks to empower Indigenous voices as active contributors to the pedagogical process rather than mere subjects of study, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the cultural integration.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the study conducted several key conclusions emerge regarding the intercultural competence of educators. The demographic profile reveals a workforce predominantly composed of female Ilocanos aged 31–40. While most hold Master’s-level degrees, a significant gap exists in formal intercultural education training. Despite this lack of specialized training, teachers demonstrate a

consistently high level of intercultural competence, characterized by deep cultural awareness, positive attitudes, and effective communication skills.

Statistical analysis confirms that this competence is largely uniform across demographic variables. Factors such as sex, ethnicity, and educational attainment do not significantly alter a teacher's self-perceived ability to adapt to diverse backgrounds. Educators maintain a steadfast commitment to multiculturalism, ensuring fair treatment and the elimination of bias within the classroom. They are particularly adept at using inclusive pedagogy and motivating students to connect local traditions with national identity.

However, the study identifies specific areas where demographics and professional development do play a role. Age significantly influences the level of recognition afforded to Indigenous Peoples' (IP) contributions to national development. Furthermore, formal training is a decisive factor in practical application; teachers with specialized training show significantly higher competence in highlighting indigenous leadership and integrating indigenous success stories into their curricula. These findings suggest that while the "affective" drive for cultural respect is universal among these teachers, targeted interventions are necessary to standardize the "technical" integration of indigenous knowledge and leadership models into the formal education system.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study's conclusions, it is recommended that schools may institutionalize structured, continuous professional development programs. While teachers report high competence, formal Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and seminars may be conducted specifically on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) to move beyond general awareness toward technical and culturally responsive pedagogy.

To ensure authenticity, schools may foster direct partnerships with Indigenous communities. Community immersion and dialogues with cultural experts will deepen teachers' understanding of local issues and help refine communication styles. Furthermore, curriculum coordinators may implement systematic auditing of the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). Instead of treating cultural integration as an additive task, educators may use contextualization mapping tools to localize existing lessons, effectively bridging local heritage with national identity markers.

Finally, to sustain the high motivation levels observed, administrators may expand student-centered cultural activities, such as heritage programs and community projects. Future research transition toward mixed methods approaches or external assessments to validate self-reported data. By shifting from individual advocacy to institutionalized systems, schools can ensure that intercultural competence becomes a structural, sustainable component of the daily learning experience for both teachers and students.

### **Declarations**

**Ethics approval and consent to participate:** Informed consent was obtained from participants; confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured.

**Competing interests:** The author declares no competing interests.

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**Data availability:** De-identified data may be made available upon reasonable request, subject to ethical considerations.

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