Do Students Communicate? Making Sense of Malaysian Undergraduates' Classroom Experience

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Abstract

Meaningful interactions can help establish good rapport among individuals. However, in reality, not much is known about whether students in particular, communicate with each other in class or outside of class. There is thus a need to explore student interaction to understand their communication experiences. This paper presents the Malaysian undergraduate students' narratives of their intercultural interactions in a classroom situation. As part of a larger study, data were gathered and analysed based on the focus group interviews and classroom observations with students from multicultural backgrounds in the northeast of Malaysia. The findings revealed that the intercultural interaction occurred but minimally. They conversed politely with diverse strategies. Also, the English language used varied based on their backgrounds and proficiency level. Such interactions assisted them to be acquainted with each other in the classroom environment and to be aware of their potentials and differences particularly in the understanding of cultural practices. The paper concludes with some implications that include highlighting the importance of language as an essential component that is often neglected and the need to make classroom a relevant and non-hostile realm for meaningful interactions to occur and to embrace polite and respectful language among individuals.

Keywords: Classroom experience, interaction, multicultural, Malaysia, undergraduates

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of education, effective communication is not merely a tool; it is a fundamental cornerstone that influences the overall dynamics of the classroom and the success of students. The manner in which educators and students communicate information is a critical factor in determining educational outcomes, regardless of whether they are in traditional face-to-face settings or in the increasingly digital environments.

1.1 Human Communication

Globally, the vital nature of good communication as emphasised by Deborah Tannen (2001), highlights the fact that while we are aware of the need to communicate more effectively with one other, we seldom discuss the significance of being understood in the manner we desire to be understood (p. 45). In addition, she notes that "communication is an ongoing process of balancing the competing demands for intimacy and independence" (Tannen, 1990, p. 39). Specifically in educational settings where students must negotiate the simultaneous demands of self-expression and collaboration, Tannen's observations underscore the complexity of communication. The significance of her work is particularly evident in settings where children are acquiring the skills to express their thoughts while participating in substantial exchanges with their classmates and teachers.

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Drawing upon Tannen's research, Smith and Jones (2021) investigate the changing dynamics of student communication in the era of digital technology. They emphasise that contemporary students are not only responsible for handling in-person interactions but also for acquiring expertise in digital communication platforms, which demand a distinct set of abilities and tactics (p. 67). Therefore, the significance of efficient communication cannot be exaggerated; it is crucial for promoting constructive exchanges and guaranteeing that students are adequately equipped to succeed in both conventional and digital settings.

1.2 Classroom Communication

Moreover, focusing specifically on classroom communication, it extends beyond the general educational environment to encompass the unique dynamics and interactions within the classroom itself. John Hattie (2009) emphasises the crucial importance of communication, namely through feedback, claiming that "feedback has a significant impact on learning and achievement, but it can be either beneficial or detrimental" (p. 173). Furthermore, he emphasises that "feedback is the most potent single modification that enhances achievement." An effective approach to enhance education is to provide regular and constructive feedback (Hattie, 2009, p. 174). Hattie's viewpoint strongly corresponds with Tannen's, providing further support for the idea that successful communication is essential for student achievement. In a more recent study, Brown and Smith (2021) have elaborated on this concept, highlighting that there is a heightened requirement for efficient communication and prompt feedback in contemporary digital classrooms to maintain student engagement and motivation (p. 89). These various viewpoints together emphasise the need of providing explicit and constructive criticism, therefore establishing it as a fundamental element of successful teaching and effective learning.

1.3 Communication within Malaysian Classroom

Shifting the focus to a more specific context, particularly communication within Malaysian multicultural classrooms, the significance of effective communication becomes especially clear in diverse educational settings like those found in Malaysia. Sarimah Shaik Ahmad Yusoff (2017) highlights that successful communication in the classroom must encompass not only linguistic competence but also the ability to comprehend and negotiate the cultural subtleties that shape students' self-expression and social interactions (p. 45). In the Malaysian classroom, the variability in student backgrounds presents both difficulties and possibilities for communication. Educators must be attuned to various communication styles in order to promote an inclusive and captivating learning experience (Yusoff, 2017, p. 52). Her research illuminates the distinct communication dynamics in Malaysian undergraduate classrooms, where the interaction of differing cultural backgrounds greatly influences educational experiences. Furthermore, Lee and Tan (2021) emphasise the growing significance of digital communication skills in Malaysian higher education. They note that as classrooms shift to hybrid and online formats, the capacity to communicate proficiently across various platforms has become crucial for both students and instructors (p. 88). These observations emphasise the importance of educators adjusting to cultural and technology dynamics in order to improve communication and learning in the Malaysian undergraduate environment. Thus, it is imperative that we acknowledge and tackle these changing communication requirements to guarantee that every student is well prepared to thrive in an ever-changing educational setting.

1.4 Social Cognitive Theory

This research is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), a widely used framework in education, psychology, and communication studies. SCT emphasizes the role of social experiences and interactions in shaping an individual's knowledge and development, rather than external pressures such as media. In this study, SCT is applied to explore the intercultural interactions of Malaysian undergraduate students, particularly focusing on their language use, interactional styles, and opinions in classroom discussions and social settings on campus. By examining how students from multicultural backgrounds engage with one another from the students' perspectives, this research highlights the conflicting and harmonious elements that arise in their communication. SCT's distinction between three forms of agency—direct personal agency, proxy agency, and collective agency—helps explain how students regulate their behavior in these intercultural interactions. Through their personal agency, students influence both their immediate environment and their broader social interactions, shaping the dynamics of classroom communication and fostering cultural awareness.
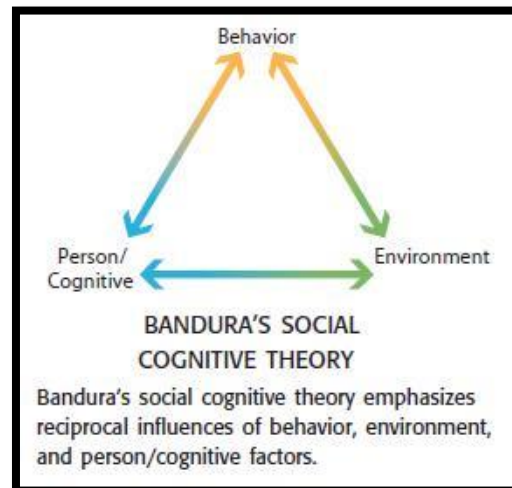
Figure 1: Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986)

Certain constructs are used in the application of social cognitive theory (Sharma, 2004). Underpinned by the skills of symbolizing, vicarious forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflection, these constructs include knowledge, outcome expectations, outcome expectancies, situational perception, environment, and self-efficacy. They also include goal setting, self-control, and emotional coping (Sharma, 2016). To create the themes of the coding process and analyze the participant replies, the constructs proposed by Sharma were modified and accepted.

Taken together, these viewpoints demonstrate that successful communication is the foundation of educational achievement. In order to promote meaningful learning and equip students to succeed in an ever more interconnected world, educators must prioritise communication, whether it be in managing face-to-face interactions, offering constructive feedback, or navigating the complexities of a multicultural and digital classroom.

Analysing cross-cultural interactions in public universities from both a Malaysian and global perspective emphasises the need of establishing inclusive learning environments that prepare students for the demands of our globalised society, while also respecting and valuing the abundant diversity present in each unique cultural context.

By analysing how multiracial students see their intercultural communication through the perspectives of Malaysian undergraduate students, this study aims to make sense of how undergraduate students understand their multicultural interaction in the Malaysian campus setting daily. This relates to the multidisciplinary research on the impact of language on social interactions. It has evolved over the last century into an area of anthropology that deals with most aspects of language usage and structure. Documenting endangered languages was the first goal (Duranti, 2004). Linguistic anthropology is the study of how language is used in social communication to create shared cultural perceptions of the social and natural worlds, to unify widely held cultural perspectives and ideologies, and to determine social identity and group membership.

In the context of intercultural interaction among undergraduates in Malaysian educational settings, it is evident that the notions of social cognitive theory and the constituent aspects of intercultural competence are pertinent factors to study. Thus, the following formulation of the research topic was made:

1. How did the students manage their intercultural communication competence campus-related work in multicultural interaction context?

2. What are some of the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes these students have toward intercultural interactional to accomplish harmony environment in campus setting?

The projected results of this research should provide more understanding of the field of intercultural competency among undergraduate students, who represent a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. As such, this newfound knowledge is well-positioned to support both students' and teachers' efforts to promote highly effective peer-to-peer academic collaboration. Moreover, these anticipated results may have consequences for improving the effectiveness of teaching strategies and learning processes, as well as fostering moral behavior. These improvements are intended to have a positive impact on education by benefiting both the undergraduate student body and the faculty.

2.   METHODOLOGY

This paper implied the qualitative approach to gain the data as considered as valuable data. The perspectives of the undergraduates' students was analysed based on their responses on the questions such as "why" and "how" they manage their undergraduate works in a multicultural interactional context. Interview skills such as building trust and language were crucial to sustaining such characteristics when bringing together the stories of the respondent.

This study takes the same methodology as Dalib's (2014) investigation, which was inspired by her own experiences. Explaining the phenomenological approach utilised in investigating intercultural competence using students' actual experiences is the primary objective of the study. For this, phenomenology is a good fit. The study covers phenomenology in general, lists Husserl's salient characteristics, and explains the rationale for the framework's selection. The study's background, participants, data collection techniques, analysis protocols, and data validation are also covered. Focus group interviews are used as a secondary way to validate findings and obtain deeper insights into intercultural competence, whereas in-depth interviews are the main method used to evaluate intercultural competence from the viewpoints of ethnically diverse students.

Numerous scholars, including Kvale (2007), Lindlof & Taylor (2011), Lofland (1995), Moustakas (1994), Van Manen (1990), Orbe (2000), and Pierson (2007), have carried out phenomenology investigations. Rather than only theorising about the lived everyday world, these studies attempt to grasp it as we experience it. By examining the expressions, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of the experiencing individual, phenomenology aims to reveal the essence of a phenomenon. Phenomenology's main goal is to investigate how people interpret and communicate the meanings of their daily experiences.

The study was carried out on the campus of a Malaysian public university. Undergraduate students in Malaysia were given in-depth interviews using a qualitative methodology. Three key factors were used to determine possible participants using a purposive sampling technique. First and foremost, the participants had to be undergraduate students who had finished at least two semesters of study on campus. This criterion was created to guarantee a fair amount of time spent on campus, which is beneficial for the growth of social networks. Second, the students had to have had previous experiences with people from different ethnic origins in Malaysia. Considering the importance of in-person encounters in our study, the criterion represented the probability that participants would regularly engage in cross-cultural exchanges. Thirdly, rather than providing hypothetical scenarios, the participants were required to provide actual stories. As a results, their stories were supposed to include real-life interactions with friends who were from different backgrounds. Most of the study data came from focus group interviews and individual responses, which together created the research dataset.

Support was sought from instructors in charge of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan's undergraduate programs to make it easier to find possible participants using the predetermined standards. For the study, a cohort of ten participants was chosen using a purposive sampling technique. Following this choice, interviews were held. This choice was motivated by the realisation that data saturation may be attained with a comparatively low number of participants, depending on the size of the population sample (Dworkin, 2012; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Mason, 2010). It is crucial to emphasise, nonetheless, that the idea of data saturation is more about the depth and richness of the collected data than it is about meeting a particular number quota (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Each focus group interviewee was invited to share their ideas about how they handle campus-related activities in the context of multicultural interactions during the focus group interview session. In addition, the participants were asked to elaborate on the many aspects of their knowledge, abilities, and attitudes related to cross-cultural relationships. The main objective was to determine how they contributed to creating a peaceful atmosphere on campus.

A detailed summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants is given in Table 1, which includes elements like gender, year of study at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, academic program undertaken, and ethnic background. Remarkably, a portion of the participants volunteered actively inside the participants group, helping recently arrived ethnic students. Their position gave them lots of chances to engage with other people;

Table 1. Participants' demographic profile

Student (S)	Ethnicity	Program	Semester	Gender
S1	Malay	Bachelor of Accounting with Honours	2	Female
S2	Indian	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Retailing) with Honours	3	Female
S3	Chinese	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Logistics and Distributive Trade) with Honours	3	Male
S4	Malay	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Logistics and Distributive Trade) with Honours	2	Female
S5	Chinese	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Retailing) with Honours	3	Male
S6	Malay	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Retailing) with Honours	2	Male
S7	Malay	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Retailing) with Honours	2	Female
S8	Malay	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Logistics and Distributive Trade) with Honours	3	Male
S9	Chinese	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Logistics and Distributive Trade) with Honours	3	Male
S10	Indian	Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (Logistics and Distributive Trade) with Honours	3	Female

3.   DATA COLLECTION

Focus groups were used to gather the study's data. To assure trustworthiness, the study's data, which came from multiple sources, were triangulated. Below is a comprehensive description of every data collection tool.

The researcher transcribed the semi-structured interviews, in which students were asked to describe how they handle their campus-related work or responsibilities in a multicultural, interactive context through individual and group reflections. To assure trustworthiness, back-translation was applied to the transcribed data. The transcripts were originally written in both Malay and English; however, they were later translated into English and back into Malay. To increase the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, the member-checking technique—also referred to as participant or respondent validation in qualitative inquiry methodology (Rager, 2005)—was also used (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Barbour, 2008). The participants received transcripts of the data gathered from the two distinct sources through mail, allowing them to verify the transcripts for accuracy. Inductive content analysis, which includes open coding, category formation, and abstraction, was applied to all the participant data that was gathered (Elo et al., 2023; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To get a sense of the overall and identify the key ideas or points that the participants were attempting to convey, the researcher and a departmental colleague with experience in qualitative data processing read the reflections repeatedly during the open coding phase. They later separated the reflections into more manageable chunks while maintaining the essential meaning to create condensed meaning units. They then created codes to identify these distilled meaning units, enabling the data to be categorized into subcategories. After that, they carried out a higher-level abstraction of the data, combining two or more categories to create recurring themes (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When they couldn't agree at any point during the inductive analysis, the researchers went back to the meaning unit and saw if the meaning unit and the category matched, or they went over the initial coding again and made changes to reach a consensus (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). They had a discussion to settle disagreements.

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3.1   Focus Group Interview

The ten (10) participants were interviewed in focus groups to learn more about how they manage their studies in multicultural settings and how they relate to peers of different races. It also aimed to find out how they perceive their own intercultural knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. The pupils were given complete freedom to speak during the non-intrusive interviews. They lasted about forty-five minutes and were held in the researcher's office. To ensure the participants had no trouble expressing themselves, they were conducted in both Malay and English. Focus groups were favoured over one-on-one interviews because they foster collaboration and provide participants the freedom to voice their opinions from a variety of angles (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

4.   FINDINGS

4.1   Research Question 1: Managing campus-related work on multicultural interactional context

This section presents the study's findings, organized according to the research questions. The findings demonstrate that while intercultural interactions among Malaysian undergraduate students were not extensive, they were impactful, leading to significant personal and academic development.

4.1.1   Theme 1: Constructive Intercultural Engagement

To address the first research question, which explored how undergraduates manage campus-related tasks in a multicultural setting, students indicated that their intercultural interactions, however limited, were significant. The aforementioned exchanges frequently resulted in the construction of new knowledge, improved problem-solving skills, and a more profound comprehension of various viewpoints.

Students emphasised that engaging with peers from other cultural backgrounds facilitated the sharing of feedback and expanded their perspectives on academic content. In addition to enhancing their learning experience, this approach developed a feeling of inclusion and mutual respect among the students in the classroom. One participant disclosed:

"*Even though we didn't talk all the time, I learned new things when we did. Having conversations with people from different races and religions helped me understand different points of view and made my college experience more useful.*"

Furthermore, participants described how these interactions often encouraged reflection and adaptation in their communication strategies. One student noted:

"*I understood that I needed to change the way I talk to people. I had to think more about what I was saying when I talked to someone from a different background. I think that has made me more polite and clear in conversations.*"

Another participant highlighted the way in which these interactions facilitated a more inclusive atmosphere, therefore encouraging greater collaboration:

"*At times, it was hard at first, but I learned a lot from them once we started sharing our thoughts. It wasn't just about the job; it was also about getting to know them and finding things you had in common, which made the whole thing more fun and educational.*"

The findings show that students weren't just passively taking in information; instead, they were actively involved in cross-cultural conversations, playing different roles to help people share knowledge and build communities. This active participation shows that they want to be polite and work together, which is good for them in college and in their social lives.

4.1.2   Theme 2: Development of a Collaborative Community of Practice

A second recurring theme identified in the data was the establishment of a cooperative community of practice. Although encounters were few, students conveyed a profound sense of belonging and hope for their participation in a varied educational setting. The students highly appreciated the chance to actively participate in the construction of knowledge and collaborate on projects with classmates from other cultural backgrounds.

This collaborative environment was not only conducive to academic success but also to personal growth. Students reported that through these interactions, they developed a deeper understanding of the cultural practices of their peers, which in turn made them more culturally aware and sensitive. For instance:

" *Making friends with people of different races taught me about both their and my own cultures. It made me more aware of how important it is to understand and accept other people's points of view.”*

Other students contemplated the ways in which these interactions enhanced their collaboration and flexibility within group environments:

“*I learned how to look at things from different points of view by working with people from different backgrounds. Not only did I need to finish the task, but I also needed to understand how each of us contributes in our own way. It changed how I think about working together a lot.”*

Another respondent highlighted how the sense of shared purpose in collaborative tasks brought the group closer, even if the interactions were brief:

An other participant emphasised that the sense of shared purpose in cooperative activities fostered closer group cohesion, despite the short duration of the interactions.

“*We felt like a team when we worked together, even if we didn't talk all the time. It made me realise how we could all be from different places and still work together as a team.”*

The findings suggest that these interactions, however minimal, played a vital role in facilitating the development of a harmonious and supportive community among students, therefore enriching their educational journey. The establishment of this cooperative community not only enhanced students' academic performance but also cultivated cultural consciousness and reinforced interpersonal relationships.

4.1.3   Theme 3: Language as a Tool for Meaningful Interaction

The role of language was crucial in enabling these interactions. Reports from students indicated that their English usage differed based on their cultural heritage and level of competence. Nevertheless, they regularly used courteous and respectful language, which played a crucial role in preserving a constructive and non-hostile classroom atmosphere.

The findings show that students were strategic in their language use, often adapting their communication style to ensure that interactions were respectful and productive. This adaptability not only improved their language skills but also helped them navigate cultural differences more effectively.

The findings indicate that students were strategic in their language use, frequently adjusting their communication style to ensure that their interactions were both respectful and productive. This adaptation not only enhanced their language skills but also facilitated their navigation of cultural differences more efficiently.

 "*I learned that the way I talk to people matters, especially when I work with people from other races. Being aware of how I talk helped me get along with others better and avoid misunderstanding.”*

Another participant described how modifying their language facilitated the establishment of connections between diverse cultural viewpoints:

"And sometimes I had to change the way I talked so that everyone could understand. But that made our talks better and easier to follow. It wasn't enough to just speak English; you had to do it in a way that made everyone feel welcome."

The findings highlight the significance of language as a crucial element in intercultural interactions, which helps to support the abstract's focus on creating a classroom environment that is both relevant and respectful for everyone.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Enhanced Motivation and Stress-Free Learning Environment

In conclusion, the research revealed that the involvement of students in intercultural interactions had a beneficial effect on their drive to acquire knowledge. The recognition of cultural disparities and the mutual respect cultivated via these interactions established a learning environment that was comparatively devoid of stress. Consequently, this encouraged students to participate more actively in their academic pursuits and establish specific learning objectives.

The students observed that the conducive atmosphere enabled them to examine many viewpoints without apprehension of criticism, therefore enriching their educational learning.

"I was more motivated to learn when I talked to students from other cultures. Because everyone was so helpful, I felt free to share my thoughts and learn from others."

According to a participant , the encouraging and courteous environment in the classroom fostered a greater sense of freedom in expressing themselves:

"It didn't bother me when I spoke up in class. It was easier for me to share my thoughts and participate in discussions when I knew my peers were polite and willing to listen."

The findings emphasize the significance of intercultural interactions in establishing a stimulating and inclusive classroom environment, where students feel encouraged to assume responsibility for their personal learning.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

Another critical theme that arose from the research was the cultivation of cultural consciousness and sensitivity among the students. While intercultural interactions were few, when they did take place, they had a profound effect on students' comprehension of cultural disparities and their capacity to appropriately negotiate these disparities.

The participants conveyed that their limited yet significant interactions with peers from other cultural origins enhanced their understanding of the intricate aspects of communication, including non-verbal signals and culturally particular customs. This awareness resulted in an increased sensitivity towards avoiding potentially offensive subjects and ensuring that all forms of interactions were carried out with mutual respect.

"Learning about other people's cultures helped me understand each other better. We are from different cultures and we can understand small things differently, like tone of voice or body language. Because of this, I became more careful about how I talk to people."

Furthermore, this cultural awareness also encompassed a more profound recognition and admiration for the many cultural customs and ideology of their fellow students. Student feedback indicated that these interactions facilitated the development of open-mindedness and reduced judgement, therefore promoting an atmosphere of inclusiveness and mutual respect inside the classroom.

"Some of my friends' habits seemed strange to me when I first met them. But after spending time with them, I realised that the things that make us different make our talks more interesting and unique. It showed that I wasn't rude, but rather kind and interested."

The findings suggest that these limited interactions contributed significantly to the development of students' cultural competency, providing them with the essential abilities to participate in meaningful and respectful intercultural interactions. This is consistent with the abstract's emphasis on the significance of language and cultural understanding in promoting a nurturing and non-impedimental classroom atmosphere.

4.2 Research Question 2: Specific Knowledge, Language, Skills and Attitudes that Students Have Towards \ Intercultural Interactional to Accomplish Harmony Environment in Campus Setting

4.2.1 Theme 1: Specific Knowledge: Awareness of Cultural Differences

The significance of acquiring knowledge about the cultural backgrounds, practices, and traditions of their peers is acknowledged by students, therefore facilitating their participation in more profound and polite exchanges.

"I had no idea that some cultures avoid direct eye contact as a sign of respect. Now I'm more careful when interacting with my friends from those cultures."

"In one of my group projects, I learned that my friend fasts during certain months. It really opened my eyes to how cultural practices can influence daily life, and I made sure we scheduled our meetings with that in mind."

"I didn't know that certain hand gestures have different meanings in other cultures. In one culture, a simple thumbs-up can be seen as offensive, so now I'm more aware of how my actions might be interpreted."

These cultural differences provide students with a greater awareness of their interactions, which in turn prevents misunderstandings and fosters mutual respect.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Language: Adaptation for Inclusivity

Students adapt their language to ensure understanding and engagement, therefore demonstrating respect for diverse degrees of English competence and cultural norms.

"I use both formal and informal English when I talk to my friends from different points of view. I'm aware that some students have trouble with slang, so I try to be understanding."

"I saw that some students are shy because of their English during group talks. To make sure they feel like they are part of the talk, I try to speak more slowly and clearly"

"I've stopped using words and metaphors that could be hard to understand. I'll say "get to know each other" instead of "break the ice." "The change is small, but it makes things clearer for everyone."

The flexibility in language use facilitates the bridging of communication barriers, therefore enhancing inclusivity and fostering a welcoming environment in the classroom.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Skills: Effective Communication and Active Listening

The students exhibit proficient communication skills by not only articulating their thoughts with clarity but also engaging in active listening, therefore augmenting comprehension and fostering rapport across different cultures.

"Asking questions with no right or wrong answer works really well for me". You could not just ask, "What do you think?" "Can you tell me more about how this is done in your culture?" It makes the talk more in-depth

"It's not always about what is said, but also how it is said. Listening and seeing how my friends move and speak tells me a lot about how at ease they are with the talk..."

" I've learned that sometimes it makes a big difference to just listen without interupting. Knowing that you're interested in what someone has to say makes them more likely to share their story. "

Proficient communication abilities are crucial for establishing courteous and engaging conversations, enabling students to traverse cultural disparities with greater efficacy.

4.2.4   Theme 4: Attitudes: Open-Mindedness and Respect

The intercultural interactions of students are characterised by a positive and open-minded attitude, therefore fostering a non-judgmental and helpful environment.

"It's not always easy for me to agree with my friends, but I've learned to listen to them without judging them. It's not about proving who's right, but about getting where they're coming from."

"There are things that people do that I used to find strange that I now see as just different. These differences have taught me to value them and to enquire rather than guess."

"I realised how different our childhoods were when my friend told me about the customs their family had. It was interesting and important, though, because I didn't focus on the differences. Instead, I asked questions to find out more."

By promoting openness and respect, a secure environment is established for students to freely express themselves, therefore facilitating mutual understanding and mitigating cultural conflicts.

4.2.5   Theme 5: Toward a Harmonious Environment

Through the integration of their knowledge , language skills, communication abilities , and respectful manner, students actively contribute to a harmonious campus atmosphere that appreciates variety and fosters cooperation.

"When we all share our cultural backgrounds, it helps us bond as a group. It's not just about getting the work done; it's about understanding each other and working better together. "

"I think our campus is unique because we all try to learn from each other. It feels like everyone is doing their part to create a space where we can share without feeling judged."

"The more I talk to people from different backgrounds, the more I see that our differences actually make us stronger as a group. We learn from each other, and that makes the campus environment so much more enriching."

5.   DISCUSSION

Through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), the results of the two research enquiries demonstrate how Malaysian undergraduate students negotiate intercultural encounters and classroom communication. These findings highlight the influence of personal, collective, and proxy agency in influencing these interactions.

With respect to research question 1, "How do undergraduates handle campus-related tasks in a multicultural setting?", the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) approach suggests that the students' personal agency is crucial in their capacity to control and govern their behaviour in a multicultural environment. The development of their knowledge and awareness of cultural differences is heavily influenced by their personal experiences and their interactions with classmates from diverse cultural backgrounds. Students effectively participate in intercultural exchanges, demonstrating sensitivity towards different viewpoints and enhancing their problem-solving abilities through these encounters. Through the utilisation of their individual agency, students effectively manage their social behaviours and adjust their communication methods in order to establish productive interaction with their peers.

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Regarding research question 2, which explores how students use language and interactions styles in intercultural classroom interactions, it is indisputable that language use in a multicultural environment is strongly linked to both individual and group agency, as proposed by Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The communication strategies used by students varied based on the cultural and language backgrounds of their classmates. The manifestation of personal agency is apparent in the manner in which students exercise control over their language usage, deliberately adjusting their communication methods to sustain a constructive and courteous atmosphere. Through this approach, they cultivate an environment that promotes inclusivity, ensuring that exchanges are both constructive and considerate of cultural disparities. This flexibility and control of language correspond to the focus of SCT on self-regulation and instruction through observation and engagement. The findings show that students were mindful of how they used English, particularly adjusting their speech to accommodate their peers' cultural backgrounds and proficiency levels. This strategic language use helped them navigate cross-cultural communication more effectively and reduce potential misunderstandings. Their actions align with SCT's concept of collective agency, where students collaborate to create a shared understanding within a group. Through their interactions, they demonstrate collective effort in creating a harmonious classroom environment where diversity is respected.

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In general, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) elucidates the dynamic and fluid character of the intercultural interactions among these students . Through the exercise of personal and collective agency, students actively shape the classroom environment and enrich their social interactions, so facilitating cultural comprehension and cultivating a more inclusive campus atmosphere. The research emphasises the active involvement of students in designing their educational experiences through their interactions and language use, in line with the concepts of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) that prioritise learning through social engagement and cooperation.

6. CONCLUSION

This research, based on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), demonstrates that the cross-cultural interactions among Malaysian undergraduate students greatly improve classroom cohesion and create a favourable learning atmosphere. The findings emphasise that engaging in respectful intercultural interactions, facilitated by the principles of personal, collective, and proxy agency in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), promotes a collaborative environment in which students enhance their social growth and cultural comprehension. The integration of intercultural communication and self-regulation into educational activities is crucial in fostering a more inclusive and peaceful campus environment.

Educational institutions should incorporate intercultural competency training into their curricula, encourage cross-cultural engagement activities, and modify teaching approaches to advance inclusivity in order to build on these discoveries. In addition, promoting cooperative learning and exploring more research on intercultural competence will enable institutions to establish conducive settings that equip students for international engagements. Implementing these strategies will improve students' capacity to accurately navigate and value various cultural environments, hence fostering a more courteous and unified educational community.

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