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Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in teaching: International students' views on faculty competence

Xiaowen Chen

College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University
4400 University Dr, Fairfax, VA 22030, Virginia, USA.
Email: xchen29@gmu.edu

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated international students' (ISs) perceptions of faculty members' intercultural teaching competence in US higher education. A cross-sectional quantitative survey design was employed using a newly developed instrument called the student measure of international teaching competence. In total, 198 ISs from 21 countries participated in the study. Exploratory factor analysis and descriptive statistics revealed that specific improvements are needed while ISs generally perceived their faculty as intercultural competent. These include reducing assumptions about students' prior knowledge, enhancing their understanding of diverse learning styles, integrating cultural backgrounds into the curriculum and offering various assessment methods. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive faculty training programs and institutional policies that promote inclusive teaching practices, ultimately aiming to improve the academic experience and outcomes of ISs.

Contribution/Originality: This research innovatively develops and validates the Student Measure of Intercultural Teaching Competence (SMITC) to directly measure faculty members' intercultural teaching practices from students' perspectives. Unlike previous studies, it offers a comprehensive, empirically validated instrument that emphasizes practical insights for improving inclusive pedagogy in higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the US has been a top destination for international students (ISs), hosting nearly 30% of the global student population in the late twentieth century (Institute of International Education, 2021). According to the 2019 Open Doors Report, ISs accounted for 5.5% of students at US colleges and universities with the largest share enrolled in computer science and engineering programs where ISs accounted for over 57% of enrollment (Institute of International Education, 2019). Despite some economic, political, and health-related factors that negatively affected IS recruitment such as the 2008 global financial crisis, Executive Order 13769 in 2017, and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the US remains the top receiving country for ISs owing to the high quality of its higher education and access to job opportunities after graduation (Institute of International Education, 2019).

The continued influx of ISs into the US has positively affected the US economy. According to data from the US Department of Commerce, ISs contributed $44.7 billion to the US economy in 2018 (International Trade Administration, 2019). The increased cultural diversity of student populations enriches learning environments and provides fertile space for intercultural dialogue in higher education beyond financial benefits (Markey et al., 2023).

Educational interactions among diverse groups have been shown to yield positive learning outcomes, including enhanced classroom engagement and motivation (Jin & Schneider, 2019). Students who attend culturally diverse colleges and universities exhibit stronger critical thinking, problem-solving and writing skills (Jin & Schneider, 2019).

Despite such advantages, ISs face many challenges in adapting to academic and cultural expectations in the US (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Spack, 1997) which can be exacerbated by insufficient intercultural teaching competence (ITC) among faculty (Lee, 2007; Macfarlane, 2015). Studies examining ISs' perspectives often reveal experiences of exclusion and discrimination (Lee, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Macfarlane, 2015). Many IS participants have also expressed concerns about the cultural norms and expectations imposed by faculty members. Teachers often assume a uniform level of understanding across all students (Fox, 1994; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). ISs commonly report a lack of guidance and mentoring from faculty with regard to building and navigating positive relationships with students (Hunter-Johnson & Niu, 2019).

In light of the above, this study aimed to develop a valid and reliable instrument for understanding faculty members' ITC from the IS perspective. Understanding IS perceptions is crucial for fostering inclusive learning environments. This study can help inform the development of training programs and policies aimed at improving faculty ITC, ultimately enhancing ISs' academic success and well-being by identifying areas where faculty members excel and where improvement is needed. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on culturally responsive teaching and offers practical insights for higher education institutions seeking to support increasingly diverse student populations. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

(1) What is the underlying factor structure of ISs' perceptions of faculty members' ITC?

(2) How do ISs perceive faculty members' ITC?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Culturally Responsive Teaching and ITC

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is defined as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002). CRT requires teachers to develop positive attitudes towards students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002) culturally responsive teachers view all students regardless of background, as learners who already possess significant knowledge, experience, and concepts that can be further developed for better learning. Similar to CRT, ITC is "the ability of instructors to interact with students in a way that supports the learning of students who are linguistically, culturally, socially or in other ways different from the teacher or from each other, across a very wide definition of perceived difference and group identity" (Dimitrov & Haque, 2016). The ITC model consists of 20 teaching strategies and teacher competencies divided into three categories: foundational competencies, facilitation skills, and curriculum design competencies (Dimitrov & Haque, 2016). Compared with CRT, ITC emphasizes not only the importance of teachers being interculturally competent but also the need for students to develop their own intercultural competence through their classroom learning experiences. ITC fosters a two-way process, encouraging mutual growth in intercultural skills among both teachers and students.

Although CRT has been widely discussed and implemented in K–12 education, its integration into postsecondary education has received far less attention. The growing diversity of students in higher education necessitates the adoption of CRT and ITC principles given that the challenges faced by international diverse students often remain unaddressed. Higher-education faculty are less likely to receive formal training in CRT or ITC which could lead to a disconnect between teaching practices and the needs of diverse student populations (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2011). Consequently, there is a need for universities and colleges to adopt interculturally

responsive pedagogies that align with the diverse backgrounds of their students to ensure inclusive and supportive learning environments.

2.2. Faculty ITC in US Higher Education

Studies suggest that faculty are aware of cultural differences between native students and ISs and the effects of such differences on advising and teaching ISs (Haan, Gallagher, & Varandani, 2017; Habib, 2018; Jin & Schneider, 2019; Mantzourani, Courtier, Davies, & Bean, 2015; McKinley, Dunworth, Grimshaw, & Iwaniec, 2019; Unruh, 2015; Washburn & Hargis, 2017; Zenner & Squire, 2020; Zhang, 2015; Zhang & Dinh, 2017). They understand that ISs come from different educational systems have distinct conversational styles, and sometimes have different expectations with regard to learning and living in the US (Zhang & Dinh, 2017).

However, faculty members' perceptions might not always align with students' experiences. Research on ISs' perceptions has highlighted the various challenges students face in the classroom which is often linked to faculty members' lack of ITC. Multiple studies have shown that ISs sometimes face discrimination from both faculty and domestic students (Lee, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Macfarlane, 2015). One prevalent stereotype held by faculty, particularly regarding East Asian ISs is the belief that these students are uninterested in acculturation or improving their English proficiency (Ruble & Zhang, 2013). In terms of building positive relationships, ISs report a lack of guidance and mentoring from faculty (Hunter-Johnson & Niu, 2019). For example, in Ezeonwu's (2019) study, several African students commented that their teachers and advisors were unapproachable and unsupportive which led to feelings of fear and uncertainty when interacting with faculty. Regarding curriculum design, Arasteh (2009) highlighted the reasons for Iranian ISs' dissatisfaction with their US educational experience. Applying the skills they learnt in US graduate programs was difficult by domestic standards, although participants thought the knowledge of their work.

The incongruent views of faculty and students underscore the complexity of analyzing ITC in higher education. This disconnect also emphasizes the importance of including students' voices in related research. ISs' perspectives must be recognized as the impetus behind the research process rather than viewed as passive recipients of academic decisions. (Fielding*, 2004). When ISs actively express their experiences and challenges, their contributions become integral to understanding and improving ITC. Moreover, existing studies of ISs' academic experiences have mainly used qualitative methods (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023) which limit generalizability. This study addressed this gap by using a quantitative approach that can allow for broader inferences about the IS population. Quantitative data can complement qualitative insights, offering statistical evidence that can inform policies and practices aimed at enhancing faculty ITC and improving the overall academic experience of ISs.

3. METHODOLGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional, quantitative survey design to examine ISs' perceptions of faculty members' ITC at George Mason University. A cross-sectional design was selected to collect data at a single point in time providing a snapshot of ISs' experiences without the need for longitudinal tracking. This approach is particularly suited for studies that aim to capture attitudes, behaviors and perceptions within a defined population in this case, ISs from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds.

A structured survey instrument called the Student Measure of Intercultural Teaching Competence (SMITC) was developed specifically for this study. The survey was administered online to ensure broad accessibility. This method also ensured anonymity, encouraging participants to respond candidly regarding their experiences with faculty members.

This study used convenience sampling given the practical challenges of compiling a comprehensive target population list. Referral sampling was performed to further increase the sample size. Ethical research protocols were strictly followed. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided informed consent before data collection. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of George Mason University and ensured adherence to ethical guidelines for human subjects' research.

3.2. Research Population

The research population consisted of ISs enrolled at George Mason University, a public university located on the East Coast of the US. According to the 2020–2021 Office of International Programs and Services Data Report, ISs comprised 7.5% of the total enrollment. Nearly 40% of ISs were enrolled in the School of Engineering followed by the School of Business and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Most ISs originated from East Asia, followed by South and Central Asia and the Middle East, representing 127 countries.

A total of 198 ISs participated in the study. The sample included students at various academic levels: 74 doctoral, 100 masters, and 24 undergraduate students. The participants represented 21 countries with the majority coming from India (n=82) followed by China (n=43), Iran (n=17), Turkey (n=14), and other countries (n=42). Most participants (n=136) were science majors while the remaining 62 majored in social sciences. This diverse population provided a broad perspective on ISs' experiences with faculty members' ITC. Table 1 presents the detailed demographic information of the participants including nationality, gender, ethnicity, major, level of study, and English language proficiency.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants (N=198).

Category	Subgroup	*N*	*%*
Nationality	China	43	22
	India	82	41
	Iran	17	9
	Turkey	14	7
	Other	42	21
Gender	Male	94	47
	Female	101	51
	Non-binary	0	0
	Transgender	0	0
	Prefer not to answer	3	2
Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0
	Asian	148	75
	Black or African American	2	1
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0	0
	White or European-American	26	13
	Other	17	9
	Prefer not to answer	5	3
Major	Science	136	67
	Social science	62	31
Level of study	Undergraduate student	24	12
	Graduate student (Master)	100	51
	Graduate student (Doctor)	74	37
English language proficiency level	Low	3	2
	Moderate	66	33
	High	129	65

3.3. Instrument

The SMITC questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The SMITC was specifically developed for this study based on the three ITC sub constructs introduced in Dimitrov and Haque's (2016) ITC model. This study deductively developed additional items based on 20 articles on IS learning experiences in the US

since the ITC model does not specifically focus on student perceptions. Additionally, items from the culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy scale by Siwatu (2011) and the student measure of culturally responsive teaching scale by Dickson, Chun, and Fernandez (2016) were modified and included in the SMITC questionnaire. The final survey comprised the following 50 items: nine demographic items and 41 ITC-related items. Each item offered six-point response options: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), slightly disagree (3), slightly agree (4), agree (5), or strongly agree (6). Appendix A presents the SMITC questionnaire.

3.4. Validity and Reliability Tests

Several steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument. First, the content validity of the SMITC was assessed by six domain experts in intercultural teaching and higher education who evaluated the relevance and clarity of each item. Based on the feedback, about one-third of the items were revised for relevance and accuracy. Additionally, cognitive interviews were conducted with five ISs resulting in further adjustments to the wording of the items.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to validate the factor structure with a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.91 confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The scree plot and parallel analysis suggested a four-factor solution accounting for 51% of the total variance. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients for each of the four ITC dimensions. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.85–0.91 across the dimensions indicating strong internal consistency. McDonald's omega hierarchical and total coefficients further confirmed the reliability of the instrument.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a combination of EFA and descriptive statistics. EFA was employed to uncover the underlying factor structure of ISs' perceptions of faculty members' ITC. This method allowed for identifying latent variables that could explain the relationships between the observed variables (survey items) and grouped them into coherent factors. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and skewness were calculated for each item within each factor to assess the overall trends in the ISs' responses. Correlation matrices were also produced to examine the interrelationships among the factors.

4. RESULTS

4.1. RQ1: Underlying Factor Structure of ISs' Perceptions

The KMO measure of sampling adequacy (KMO=.91) confirmed that the sample was adequate for factor analysis. A scree plot and parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) suggested the extraction of three to four factors. Promax rotation was utilized guided by the criteria of the simplicity of structure and factor interpretability (Field, 2013). The maximum likelihood method was used as the extraction technique since the purpose of this study was to develop an instrument for future use with other datasets (Field, 2013). Items having factor loadings below.3 or communality values below.2 were eliminated from the original set of 41 items. Items cross-loading on two factors were identified where the difference between factor loadings was less than .15 (Güvendir & Özkan, 2022). Subsequently, items were removed individually starting with the item with the least difference in factor loadings (Güvendir & Özkan, 2022). Nine items were excluded from the initial dataset (see Table 2). As a result, a 32-item four-factor model was found to be adequate (see Table 3). All items had factor loadings greater than 0.4 which was considered stable (Guadagnoli & Velicer, 1988).

The four-factor solution accounted for 51% of the total variance with the first factor explaining 12% of the variance (loadings ranged from .46 to .70), the second 12% (.45–.79), the third 10% (.42–.71), and the fourth 17% (.58–.96). Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients were used to evaluate the internal consistency of the four factors identified in the EFA. All factors demonstrated good-to-excellent reliability (see Table 4). This

confirmed the robustness of the factor model demonstrating that the items within each factor cohesively measured their respective constructs, thus affirming the suitability of the model for further analysis. Inter-factor correlations were assessed to determine the extent of interdependence between the four factors identified in this study. The correlation matrix revealed moderate-to-high correlations among all factors indicating interrelated but distinct constructs (see Table 5). These correlations suggested a cohesive but complex structure within the model in which each factor shared a common underlying theme related to enhancing intercultural competence in educational settings while serving a unique role.

Table 2. Removed items.

Remove sequence	Item no.	Item narrative
1st	B12	My professor or teacher creates opportunities for peer learning and interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds.
2nd	A5	My professor or teacher helps students learn about other students and their cultures.
3rd	B18	My professor or teacher provides in-class activities about how to cite and reference.
4th	B3	My professor or teacher provides various ways for all students to participate in the class, such as small group discussion, large group discussion, and pair discussion.
5th	B6	My professor or teacher provides feedback in various ways (e.g. orally, written, video, one-on-one conferencing).
6th	A13	My professor or teacher is able to demonstrate an awareness of his or her own cultural background in relation to the topics being discussed.
7th	B1	My professor or teacher never cuts off or ignores my comments.
8th	B13	My professor or teacher helps me establish social connections with students from cultures other than my own.
9th	B17	My professor or teacher understands that different cultures see academic integrity and plagiarism in different ways.

Table 3. Factor loadings of remaining items.

Item no.	Item narrative	F4	F1	F2	F3
A1	My professor or teacher never makes assumptions about me based on cultural stereotypes or limited knowledge of my home country.	0.07	0.49	0.01	-0.06
A2	My professor or teacher understands that I have different ways of learning and thinking compared with American or domestic students.	0.06	0.69	-0.06	0.04
A3	My professor or teacher does not make assumptions about what I should know before the course begins.	0.04	0.46	0.07	0.07
A4	My professor or teacher discusses ways that students' cultures may be different from others.	0.25	0.53	0.09	-0.24
A6	My professor or teacher encourages discussions that involve an exchange of views through open dialogue.	0.01	0.17	0.52	-0.03
A7	My professor or teacher can recognize when students discuss global issues from a single cultural perspective and encourages students to consider alternative viewpoints.	0.27	0.14	0.45	-0.05
A8	My professor or teacher wants students from different cultures to respect one another.	-0.29	0.15	0.72	0.00
A9	My professor or teacher encourages non-judgmental discussions.	-0.17	0.06	0.75	0.10
A10	My professor or teacher effectively handles biased or judgmental comments from students.	0.09	-0.11	0.79	-0.03
A11	My professor or teacher teaches and encourages students to identify misunderstandings and accept people with whom we disagree.	0.12	-0.01	0.68	-0.02
A12	My professor or teacher shows that it's okay to explore different ideas and perspectives, even when things aren't clear.	-0.07	0.13	0.63	0.10
B2	My professor or teacher understands the barriers that I face in participating in class, such as cross-cultural reasons or English proficiency.	-0.10	0.61	0.24	-0.01
B4	My professor or teacher creates a safe environment in which I feel comfortable discussing culture, identity, and difference.	0.05	0.57	0.14	0.07
B5	My professor or teacher recognizes different ways that feedback is offered and received in my home cultures.	0.12	0.51	0.15	0.14
B7	My professor or teacher is able to explain academic terms and complex	-0.20	0.70	-0.08	0.36

Item no.	Item narrative	F4	F1	F2	F3
	concepts in simple language.				
B8	My professor or teacher provides explanations when he or she uses colloquial language or slang.	0.09	0.60	0.01	-0.04
B9	My professor or teacher uses things such as videos, pictures, and guests to help students learn.	-0.06	0.12	-0.03	0.71
B10	My professor or teacher uses what I already know to help me understand new ideas.	-0.04	0.32	-0.17	0.67
B11	My professor or teacher allows me to use my first language in the classroom.	0.61	0.20	-0.15	-0.11
B14	My professor or teacher works to develop a nonacademic, personal connection with me.	0.62	0.16	-0.05	-0.09
B15	My professor or teacher understands that I may be uncomfortable and shy to ask for assistance or even talk with them.	0.58	0.15	0.00	-0.03
B16	My professor or teacher reminds me the various ways (Email, office hours, virtual meeting) to reach out for assistance.	-0.16	0.05	0.01	0.67
C1	My professor or teacher uses examples from my home country.	0.83	0.03	-0.16	0.01
C2	My professor or teacher includes course readings that were written by people from various cultural backgrounds.	0.65	-0.05	0.05	0.11
C3	My professor or teacher introduces different professional practices across different countries in our field.	0.79	-0.02	0.07	0.01
C4	My professor or teacher introduces contributions that my home country or culture has made to our field.	0.96	-0.07	-0.01	-0.04
C5	My professor or teacher designs class activities to help me develop empathy and consider different viewpoints (e.g., role-plays and individual interviews)	0.66	-0.13	0.24	0.12
C6	My professor or teacher provides opportunity for us to co-design assessments and rubrics.	0.65	-0.05	-0.08	0.19
C7	When grading assignments, my professor or teacher focuses more on my ideas instead of grammar mistakes.	0.23	0.19	-0.06	0.42
C8	My professor or teacher provides a variety of choices for their assessments. (e.g., presentation, poster, essay, blog post, video recorded presentation).	0.25	-0.07	0.02	0.57
C9	My professor or teacher explains assessment criteria so that I know how I will be evaluated.	0.07	-0.21	0.28	0.54
C10	My professor or teacher breaks up deadlines for large projects into phases so that I can brainstorm, draft, revise, and edit throughout the semester.	0.13	-0.17	0.08	0.67

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients for internal consistency.

Factors	#of items	Alpha	Omega (Hierarchical)	Omega (Total)
F1: Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.	9	0.85	0.7	0.89
F2: Encouragement of multicultural dialogue.	7	0.87	0.74	0.92
F3: Culturally responsive assessment strategies.	7	0.85	0.7	0.89
F4: Cultural integration curriculum and personal connection.	9	0.91	0.76	0.93

Table 5. Correlations among factors.

Factors	F4	F1	F2	F3
F4	1.00	0.57	0.42	0.44
F1	0.57	1.00	0.60	0.49
F2	0.42	0.60	1.00	0.58
F3	0.44	0.49	0.58	1.00

The first factor, *cultural sensitivity and inclusivity* comprised nine items. This factor included items that emphasize the teacher's sensitivity and responsiveness to cultural differences, avoidance of stereotypes, and the creation of a safe and inclusive classroom environment. For example, item A2 was *my professor or teacher understands that I have different ways of learning and thinking compared with American or domestic students.* Item B4 was *my professor or teacher creates a safe environment in which I feel comfortable discussing culture, identity, and difference.* This highlights professors' competencies in adapting teaching methods and communication to accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds and learning styles.

The second factor, *encouragement of multicultural dialogue* contained seven items. The items in this factor focused on the teacher's role in fostering an environment that encourages open dialogue, respect for diverse opinions, and critical thinking about global and cultural issues. For example, item A7 was *my professor or* teacher who *can recognize when students discuss global issues from a single cultural perspective and encourages students to consider alternative viewpoints.* Item A11 was *my professor or teacher who teaches and encourages students to identify misunderstandings and accept people with whom we disagree.* This factor reflects the teacher's ability to manage classroom dynamics in a way that promotes the understanding and appreciation of different perspectives.

The third factor, *culturally responsive assessment strategy* contained seven items. This factor concerned the teacher's approach to assessments that consider ISs' diverse needs and challenges. For example, item C7 was *when grading assignments, my professor or teacher focuses more on my ideas instead of grammar mistakes.* Item C9 was *my professor or teacher explains assessment criteria so that I know how I will be evaluated.* This factor included adapting assessment methods, clarifying criteria, and providing support mechanisms that acknowledge language barriers and cultural differences in learning and expression.

Finally, the fourth factor, *cultural integration curriculum and personal connection* contained nine items. The items in this factor concerned teachers' efforts to integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, including using students' first languages, incorporating culturally diverse materials, and fostering personal connections with students. Item C1, for example, was *my professor or teacher uses examples from my home country*, and item B14 was my *professor or teacher works to develop a nonacademic, personal connection with me.* This factor emphasizes the role of the teacher in making academic content relevant and accessible through a culturally aware curriculum and personalized teaching approach.

4.2. RQ2: ISs' Perception towards Faculty Members' ITC

The survey responses were analyzed to calculate the mean, standard deviation (SD), and skewness of each item within each factor to address the second research question. The frequency distribution of the responses was also examined (see Tables 6–9 for the descriptive statistics for each item).

The average mean score across all items in *Factor 1:* cultural sensitivity and inclusivity was approximately 4.39, suggesting general agreement that faculty exhibited cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. The highest-rated item was B2 with a mean score of 4.702 indicating that the students felt that their professors understood the barriers they face in class participation. Item B5 also had a high mean score of 4.682 indicating that the students felt that their professors recognized the different ways in which feedback is given in different cultures

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for items in factor 1.

Item no.	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Sd	Skewness
A1	53	65	37	27	10	6	4.318	1.316	-0.806
A2	28	81	44	22	17	6	4.136	1.268	-0.814
A3	32	55	54	26	27	4	4.061	1.332	-0.396
A4	29	60	48	27	23	11	4.535	1.413	-0.523
B2	32	80	61	15	7	3	4.702	1.060	-0.869
B4	42	87	48	12	7	2	4.343	1.0457	-0.992
B5	27	71	64	20	11	5	4.682	1.159	-0.780
B7	34	100	41	15	6	2	4.273	1.100	-1.089
B8	32	65	55	23	17	6	4.444	1.281	-0.655

. Item A1 had the highest number of "strongly agree" responses highlighting strong positive perceptions in areas of avoiding cultural assumptions. Meanwhile, the lowest-rated item was A3 with a mean score of 4.060 suggesting that some students perceived professors as making assumptions about prior knowledge. Item A2 also had a low mean score of 4.136, indicating that faculty needs to improve their understanding of different learning

and thinking styles. Item A4 had the highest number of "strongly disagree" responses highlighting negative perceptions in the area of discussing cultural differences.

The average mean score across all items in factor 2: encouragement of multicultural dialogue was approximately 4.68 suggesting general agreement that faculty effectively encouraged multicultural dialogue. The highest-rated item was A8 with a mean score of 5.015, indicating that students felt that their professors strongly encouraged respect among students from different cultures. Item A8 also had the lowest SD indicating consistent agreement. Items A8 and A9 had the highest number of "strongly agree" responses highlighting strong positive perceptions in the areas of encouraging respect and nonjudgmental discussion. Item A6 with a skewness of 1.064, had the strongest left skew meaning a high number of respondents strongly agreed that professors encourage open dialogue. The lowest-rated item was A7 with a mean score of 4.252 suggesting that some students believed professors could improve by encouraging the consideration of alternative viewpoints. Item A11 also had a low mean score of 4.505 indicating that faculty needs to improve their competence to encourage students to identify misunderstandings and accept different ideas.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for items in factor 2.

Item no.	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Sd	Skewness
A6	41	80	54	7	12	4	4.601	1.156	-1.064
A7	28	66	60	22	16	6	4.253	1.245	-0.682
A8	71	76	39	8	3	1	5.015	0.969	-1.045
A9	39	93	49	9	6	2	4.727	0.996	-1.082
A10	25	95	50	18	8	2	4.530	1.026	-0.952
A11	28	85	57	16	11	1	4.505	1.046	-0.780
A12	36	88	54	13	5	2	4.662	0.998	-0.918

The average mean score across all items in factor 3: culturally responsive assessment strategies was about 4.75 suggesting general agreement that faculty effectively used culturally responsive assessment strategies. The highest-rated item was B16 with a mean score of 4.93 indicating that students felt that their professors effectively reminded them about the various ways of seeking assistance. Items B9 and C9 had the highest number of "strongly agree" responses highlighting strong positive perceptions in the areas of using multimedia for learning and explaining the assessment criteria. By contrast, the lowest-rated item was C8 with a mean score of 4.54 suggesting that some students believed professors could offer more variety in their assessment choices. Item C7 also had a lower mean score of 4.561, suggesting that faculty should focus more on ideas than grammar when grading.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics for items in factor 3.

Item no.	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Sd	Skewness
B9	51	95	39	9	4	0	4.909	0.902	-0.867
B10	34	99	43	16	6	0	4.702	0.949	-0.811
B16	53	97	35	8	4	1	4.929	0.932	-1.152
C7	45	72	49	19	7	6	4.561	1.215	-0.941
C8	34	83	50	19	11	1	4.540	1.088	-0.750
C9	57	82	45	11	2	1	4.899	0.951	-0.835
C10	40	93	48	10	4	3	4.737	1.003	-1.158

The average mean score across all items in factor 4: cultural integration curriculum and personal connection was about 3.95 suggesting moderate agreement that faculty effectively integrated cultural aspects and established personal connections. The highest-rated item was B15 with a mean score of 4.12 indicating that students felt that their professors understood their discomfort or shyness when asking for assistance. Item C5 had the second-highest

mean score of 4.100 and the lowest SD (1.23) showing consistent agreement that professors designed activities to develop empathy and consider different viewpoints. Meanwhile, the lowest-rated item was C1, with a mean score of 3.33 and a skewness of 0.019 suggesting that students perceived a lack of use of examples from their home countries by professors. Items B11 and C1 had significant "disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses highlighting areas where students perceived less cultural integration such as using first languages and examples from their home countries.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics for items in factor 4.

Item no.	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Sd	Skewness
B11	16	50	38	25	42	27	3.455	1.579	-0.099
B14	23	54	45	29	33	14	3.813	1.471	-0.311
B15	22	61	66	25	15	9	4.116	1.259	-0.668
C1	15	39	39	38	37	30	3.328	1.537	0.019
C2	25	54	60	29	20	10	4.025	1.338	-0.496
C3	25	47	62	38	20	6	4.005	1.273	-0.293
C4	19	40	56	39	29	15	3.677	1.399	-0.194
C5	21	61	62	30	18	6	4.096	1.232	-0.530
C6	22	51	52	33	24	16	3.828	1.436	-0.381

5. DISCUSSION

This study mainly aimed to identify the underlying factor structure of ISs' perceptions of faculty members' ITC. The analysis of student responses to the 41-item survey revealed the following four key factors: (1) cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. (2) Encouragement of multicultural dialogue. (3) Culturally responsive assessment strategies. (4) Cultural integration, curriculum and personal connection. The results indicated that ISs generally perceived faculty as competent in these domains. These results indicate that ISs generally perceive their faculty as competent in these areas. Participants recognized their professors' understanding of the barriers they faced in class participation and expressed positive views regarding faculty members' efforts to foster respect and non-judgmental discussions (Cao, Li, Jiang, & Bai, 2014; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). In terms of curriculum and assessment design, students appreciated activities that encourage empathy and multiple perspectives, as well as clear explanations of assessment criteria.

Despite these positive perceptions, areas for improvement emerged. First, some students reported that their professors made assumptions about the prior knowledge students should possess, particularly regarding English-language proficiency. Most professors believe that ESL students should already possess high English proficiency, given that they passed their language proficiency tests for admission (Zamel, 1995). Otherwise, they assume that ISs are fully responsible for improving their English before they can take content courses (Zamel, 1995). Beyond language expectations, faculty often impose other cultural and academic norms on ISs, such as using APA style, adopting a socio-communicative teaching style and possessing advanced critical thinking skills (Ogunade, Lundy, Roberts, & Benge, 2019; Palmer, Zuraikat, West, Calderone, & Shanty, 2019; Trice & Yoo, 2007).

Second, the findings emphasize the need for faculty to improve their facilitation of classroom discussion and their ability to encourage students to identify misunderstandings and engage in diverse ideas. Challenges persist in building cross-cultural communication and relationships between ISs and domestic students in classrooms. Biases against ISs' linguistic and cultural backgrounds combined with a lack of appropriate guidance from faculty often lead to domestic students' reluctance to help ISs or initiate communication with them (Sato & Hodge, 2014; Seggie & Sanford, 2010).

Third, the findings suggest that faculty should prioritize ideas over grammar when grading regarding assessment and curriculum design. The prevalent "English only" mentality in higher education continues to underpin many faculty members' attitudes (Ovando & Combs, 2018) contributing to their intercultural deficiencies

(Valdés, 1997). Some faculty believes that students must be fluent in English to complete their work. According to this concept, some teachers struggle to overcome students' linguistic barriers while assessing their work, even if they may possess the intellect to succeed in their classes (Zamel, 1995). Furthermore, students perceived a lack of cultural integration in the curriculum such as insufficient use of first languages and examples from their home countries. Studies have shown that the knowledge ISs acquire from US institutions is sometimes too specific to the US context and difficult to implement in their home countries which could lead to difficulty in finding employment in their home countries (Johnson, 1992). In some fields, the curriculum focuses heavily on theory contains limited practical knowledge, and lacks implementation (Altbach, David, & Lulat, 1985).

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored ISs' perceptions of faculty members' ITC across four key areas. The findings revealed that certain areas require improvement while ISs generally perceived their faculty as competent. Faculty should avoid assumptions about students' prior knowledge, improve their understanding of diverse learning styles and foster open classroom dialogue. In particular, in curriculum and assessment design, it is recommended that faculty incorporate diverse cultural materials and examples from students' home countries. This approach can enhance the learning experience of ISs and make learning more relevant to diverse backgrounds (Dimitrov & Haque, 2016). Additionally, faculty should prioritize content and ideas over linguistic accuracy when grading while offering a variety of assessment methods to accommodate different cultural perspectives (MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003; Park-Saltzman, Wada, & Mogami, 2012).

7. IMPLICATIONS

The study's results have implications for faculty development and higher education policies. First, SMITC offers a new tool for measuring faculty members' ITC from the perspective of ISs in higher education, filling a gap in the literature. Faculty can use student responses from SMITC to assess how their practices are perceived in terms of intercultural competence and use this feedback to guide interventions that could improve classroom activities and, thus, the learning experience and academic performance of diverse students.

Second, higher education institutions can implement faculty training programs that focus on ITC to address the areas of improvement identified in this study. Studies indicate that faculty is willing to engage in courses and activities that enhance their intercultural understanding and communication (Washburn & Hargis, 2017; Zhang, 2015; Zhang & Dinh, 2017). Such programs should aim to raise awareness of the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of ISs and equip faculty with the skills to foster inclusive classroom environments. Ongoing support and mentorship are also necessary to help faculty adapt their teaching strategies, curricula and assessments (Haan et al., 2017; Habib, 2018).

Third, at the policy level, higher-education institutions should establish clear guidelines and regular evaluations to ensure that faculty continue to develop and refine their ITC. Such guidelines could emphasize the importance of fostering inclusive, respectful, and culturally responsive classrooms. Furthermore, institutions should support research and initiatives that explore innovative ways to engage ISs and domestic students in meaningful cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. The creation of institutional policies that promote cultural inclusivity at all levels of teaching and administration is essential for the continued success and integration of ISs.

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Appendix A. Student measure of intercultural teaching competence (SMITC) questionnaire.

PART 1 Demographic

1) Your Country of Origin.
2) What is your native language?
3) Please indicate your gender.
   (a) Male
   (b) Female
   (c) Non-binary
   (d) Transgender
   (e) Prefer not to answer
4) Are you Hispanic/Latino(a)?
   (a) No
   (b) Yes
5) Please indicate your race (Select all that apply).
   (a) American Indian or Alaska Native
   (b) Asian
   (c) Black or African American
   (d) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   (e) White or European-American
   (f) Other
   (g) Prefer not to answer
6) What is your year in college?
   (a) Undergraduate Student – Freshman
   (b) Undergraduate Student – Sophomore
   (c) Undergraduate Student - Junior Year
   (d) Undergraduate Student - Senior Year
   (e) Graduate Student – Master
   (f) Graduate Student – Doctor
   (g) Language Learning Program (e.g., INTO, Pathway Program, Bridge Program, etc.)
   (h) Others
7) What is your major?
8) How long have you lived in the U.S?
   (a) Less than 1 year

(b) 1 - 2 years
(c) 2 - 3 years
(d) 3 - 4 years
(e) 4 - 5 years
(f) More than 5 years

9) Please indicate your perceived proficiency in English.
(a) Low
(b) Moderate
(c) High

PART 2. Faculty Members' Foundational Intercultural Competencies

On a scale of 1 to 6, please rate your agreement with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer as honestly as you can. (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Slightly Agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly Agree)

In my class, I generally feel that

1) My professor or instructor never makes assumptions about me based on cultural stereotypes or limited knowledge of my home country.
2) My professor or instructor understands that I have different ways of learning and thinking compared with American/domestic students.
3) My professor or instructor does not make assumptions about what I should know before the course begins.
4) My professor or instructor discusses ways that students' culture may be different from others.
5) My professor or instructor helps students learn about other students and their cultures.
6) My professor or instructor encourages discussions that involve an exchange of views through open dialogue.
7) My professor or instructor can recognize when students discuss global issues from a single cultural perspective and encourages students to consider alternative viewpoints.
8) My professor or instructor wants students from different cultures to respect one another.
9) My professor or instructor models and encourages non-judgmental discussions.
10) My professor or instructor effectively handles biased or judgmental comments from students.
11) My professor or instructor teaches and encourages students to identify misunderstandings and accept people with whom we disagree.
12) My professor or instructor shows that it's okay to explore different ideas and perspectives, even when things aren't clear.
13) My professor or instructor is able to demonstrate an awareness of his/her own cultural background in relation to the topics being discussed.

PART 3. Faculty Members' Facilitation Competencies

On a scale of 1 to 6, please rate your agreement with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer as honestly as you can. (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Slightly Agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly Agree)

In my class, I generally feel that

1) My professor or instructor never cuts off or ignores my comments.
2) My professor or instructor understands the barriers that I face in participating in class, such as cross-cultural reasons or English proficiency.
3) My professor or instructor provides various ways for all students to participate in the class, such as small group discussion, large group discussion, and pair discussion.
4) My professor or instructor creates a safe environment in which I feel comfortable discussing culture, identity, and difference.
5) My professor or instructor recognizes different ways that feedback is offered and received in my home cultures.
6) My professor or instructor provides feedback in various ways (e.g. orally, written, video, one-on-one conferencing…).
7) My professor or instructor is able to explain academic terms and complex concepts in simple language.
8) My professor or instructor provides explanations when he/she uses colloquial language or slang.
9) My professor or instructor uses things such as videos, pictures, and guests to help students learn.
10) My professor or instructor uses what I already know to help me understand new ideas.
11) My professor or instructor allows me to use my first language in the classroom.
12) My professor or instructor creates opportunities for peer learning and interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds.
13) My professor or instructor helps me establish social connections with students from cultures other than my own.
14) My professor or instructor works to develop a nonacademic, personal connection with me.
15) My professor or instructor understands that I may be uncomfortable and/or shy to ask for assistance or even talk with them.

16) My professor and instructor reminds me the various ways (email, office hours, virtual meeting) to reach out for assistance.
17) My professor or instructor understands that different cultures see academic integrity and plagiarism in different ways.
18) My professor or instructor provides in-class activities about how to cite and reference.

PART 4. Faculty Members' Curriculum and Assessment Design Competencies

On a scale of 1 to 6, please rate your agreement with the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer as honestly as you can. (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Slightly Agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly Agree)

In my class, I generally feel that

1) My professor or instructor uses examples from my home country.
2) My professor or instructor includes course readings that were written by people from various cultural backgrounds.
3) My professor or instructor introduces different professional practices across different countries in our field.
4) My professor or instructor introduces contributions that my home country or culture has make to our field.
5) My professor or instructor designs class activities to help me develop empathy and consider different viewpoints (e.g., role-plays and individual interviews)
6) My professor or instructor provides opportunity for us to co-design assessments and rubrics.
7) When grading assignments, my professor or instructor focuses more on my ideas instead of grammar mistakes.
8) My professor or instructor provides a variety of choices for their assessments. (e.g. presentation, poster, essay, blog post, video recorded presentation).
9) My professor or instructor explains assessment criteria so that I know how I will be evaluated.
10) My professor or instructor breaks up deadlines for large projects into phases so that I can brainstorm, draft, revise, and edit throughout the semester.