

Original Research Article

Examining Cultural Awareness and the Effects of Meta-Cultural Competence-Based Instruction among EFL Students at Sai Gon University

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Abstract: Meta-cultural competence plays a significant role in fostering deeper cultural awareness in EFL contexts, where learners are expected not only to acquire cultural knowledge but also to critically reflect on and interpret diverse cultural perspectives. However, existing studies have largely focused on surface-level cultural instruction, leaving the role of meta-cultural competence in cultural awareness education underexplored, particularly in Vietnam. This study aims to examine the level of students' cultural awareness and explore the relationship between meta-cultural competence-based instruction and different dimensions of cultural awareness among EFL learners at a Vietnamese university. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 247 English-major students through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive results indicated moderate to relatively high levels of cultural awareness, with reflective awareness showing the highest mean (up to 3.85), while analytical and interpretive dimensions remained moderate. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between meta-cultural instructional practices and all dimensions of cultural awareness, particularly reflective awareness ($r = .318, p < .001$) and analytical skills ($r = .287, p < .001$), while interpretive awareness showed a weaker but still significant relationship ($r = .162, p < .05$).

Keywords: Meta-Cultural Competence, Cultural Awareness, EFL Learners, Intercultural Communication, Language Education, Instructional Practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of cultural awareness has long been recognized as a fundamental component of language education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Traditionally, the development of cultural awareness has focused on the transmission of cultural knowledge, including facts, values, and behavioral norms associated with different cultural groups (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). Such approaches have enabled educators to introduce learners to diverse cultural perspectives and have provided a foundation for intercultural communication. However, these practices often emphasize surface-level understanding, limiting learners' ability to critically engage with and interpret cultural complexity (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006).

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on more dynamic and reflective approaches to cultural learning. Scholars have argued that effective intercultural competence requires not only knowledge acquisition but also higher-order cognitive skills, such as critical reflection, analysis, and interpretation of cultural phenomena (Byram, 2008; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Within this perspective, meta-cultural competence has emerged as a key construct, referring to learners' ability to examine cultural assumptions, evaluate multiple perspectives, and adapt their understanding in diverse contexts (Chiu & Hong, 2006; Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). Despite its theoretical relevance, the integration of meta-cultural competence into classroom practices remains limited, particularly in EFL settings in Vietnam.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the incorporation of reflective and analytical practices into language instruction offers opportunities to move beyond traditional cultural teaching methods. Similar to broader discussions in higher

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education that call for more holistic and transformative learning experiences, cultural awareness education is increasingly viewed as a process that shapes not only learners' knowledge but also their identities, attitudes, and communicative abilities (Dewey, 1938/1997; Barnett, 2011). This perspective aligns with the view that learning is not merely the accumulation of information but a transformative process that influences how individuals perceive themselves and others in a globalized world (Mezirow, 2000).

However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence examining how meta-cultural competence-based instruction affects different dimensions of cultural awareness. Existing studies have largely focused on general intercultural competence or isolated aspects of cultural learning, without systematically investigating the relationships between instructional practices and learners' reflective, analytical, and interpretive awareness (Fantini, 2009; Deardorff, 2006). This gap is particularly evident in the Vietnamese EFL context, where research on culturally responsive and reflective pedagogy remains underdeveloped.

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to examine the level of cultural awareness among EFL learners and investigate the effects of meta-cultural competence-based instruction on its multidimensional development. Specifically, this study explores the relationships between instructional practices and key dimensions of cultural awareness, including reflective, analytical, and interpretive awareness. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural learning can be enhanced through pedagogical innovation and identify the following research questions:

1. To what extent do EFL students at Sai Gon University demonstrate cultural awareness?
2. What is the relationship between Meta-Cultural Competence-based instruction and the development of students' cultural awareness?

Overall, this study responds to the growing need for research that moves beyond traditional cultural instruction toward more reflective and transformative approaches. It provides empirical insights into the role of meta-cultural competence in shaping learners' cultural awareness and offers implications for designing more effective, learner-centered practices in EFL education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework and Model Development

Cultural awareness has been conceptualized in the literature under various related constructs, including intercultural competence, cultural sensitivity, intercultural communicative competence, and global competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009). More recent discussions have increasingly emphasized reflective and critical dimensions of cultural learning, highlighting the need to move beyond static knowledge toward dynamic and interpretive engagement with culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Baker, 2015). Within this evolving perspective, cultural awareness is now viewed as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements that interact to shape learners' intercultural understanding.

In line with these developments, meta-cultural competence has emerged as an overarching *meta-construct* that captures learners' ability to reflect upon, evaluate, and adapt across cultural frameworks (Chiu & Hong, 2006; Morris *et al.*, 2015). As a meta-level capacity, it enables learners to transcend surface-level cultural differences and engage in deeper meaning-making processes. Similar to conceptualizations of engagement in higher education as an ecosystem of interacting elements, meta-cultural competence can be understood as integrating cognitive, reflective, and interpretive processes that collectively shape cultural awareness.

Drawing on prior research, cultural awareness in this study is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of three interrelated dimensions: reflective awareness, analytical awareness, and interpretive awareness. Reflective awareness refers to learners' ability to examine their own cultural assumptions and perspectives; analytical awareness involves the capacity to critically evaluate cultural similarities and differences; and interpretive awareness reflects learners' ability to understand and adapt to diverse cultural meanings in communication (Byram, 2008; Deardorff, 2006). These dimensions collectively represent a progression from self-awareness to critical analysis and ultimately to adaptive intercultural understanding.

Furthermore, meta-cultural competence-based instruction is conceptualized as a set of pedagogical practices that foster higher-order cultural learning. These practices include reflective teaching activities, analytical learning tasks, and interactive or experiential learning approaches. Reflective teaching practices encourage learners to question assumptions and engage in self-examination; analytical tasks promote critical thinking about cultural phenomena; and interactive activities provide opportunities for applying cultural knowledge in communicative contexts (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Baker, 2015). Together, these instructional components are expected to facilitate deeper engagement with cultural content and enhance learners' cultural awareness.

2.2 Model Development

Based on the theoretical foundations outlined above, this study proposes a model in which meta-cultural competence-based instruction serves as the key independent variable influencing the development of cultural awareness across its three dimensions. The model assumes that instructional practices that emphasize reflection, analysis, and interaction will positively contribute to learners' ability to develop deeper cultural understanding.

Specifically, reflective teaching practices are expected to have a strong influence on reflective awareness, as they directly encourage learners to examine their own cultural perspectives. Analytical learning activities are anticipated to enhance analytical awareness by fostering critical evaluation skills. Similarly, interactive and experiential learning approaches are expected to support interpretive awareness by providing opportunities for learners to engage in authentic or simulated intercultural communication.

In addition, consistent with prior research emphasizing the interconnected nature of intercultural competence, the three dimensions of cultural awareness are expected to be positively interrelated (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009). This suggests that the development of one dimension may reinforce the others, contributing to a more holistic understanding of culture. Based on the proposed model, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Meta-cultural competence-based instruction has a positive effect on reflective awareness.
- H2: Meta-cultural competence-based instruction has a positive effect on analytical awareness.
- H3: Meta-cultural competence-based instruction has a positive effect on interpretive awareness.

2.3 Meta-Cultural Competence

Meta-cultural competence is the ability to understand, navigate, and negotiate diverse cultural conceptualizations during intercultural interaction, rather than merely knowing facts about a specific culture. It acts as a framework for managing communication across different cultural perspectives and is increasingly recognized as vital for human communication in globalized contexts and for enhancing cultural awareness in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire was designed by adapting well-established scales from previous studies to measure the key constructs in the proposed model, including cultural awareness and meta-cultural competence-based instruction (Byram, 2008; Deardorff, 2006; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). The questionnaire consisted of multiple items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument included constructs representing three dimensions of cultural awareness (reflective, analytical, and interpretive awareness) and three dimensions of instructional practices (reflective teaching practices, analytical learning activities, and interactive learning).

Data were collected from first-year English-major students at Sai Gon University, a large metropolitan university in Vietnam. The university offers a wide range of academic programs and attracts students from diverse educational backgrounds. A total of 247 valid responses were obtained for analysis. The sample is considered appropriate for quantitative analysis and broadly representative of first-year EFL learners in Vietnamese higher education contexts.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the sample included both male and female students, with the majority aged between 18 and 21 years old. Most participants reported intermediate levels of English proficiency, and a considerable proportion had prior exposure to cultural-related English courses. These characteristics reflect a typical profile of EFL learners at the tertiary level in Vietnam.

The data were analyzed using a quantitative approach. First, descriptive statistics were employed to examine the overall levels of cultural awareness and instructional practices. Second, the reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with all constructs exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Third, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between meta-cultural competence-based instruction and the dimensions of cultural awareness.

Unlike studies employing structural equation modeling (SEM), this study focuses on correlation analysis to identify significant relationships between variables. This approach is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research and the sample size. The analysis aims to provide empirical evidence on how instructional practices relate to students' reflective, analytical, and interpretive awareness.

Overall, the methodological design ensures the validity and reliability of the findings while providing a clear framework for examining the role of meta-cultural competence in cultural awareness education.

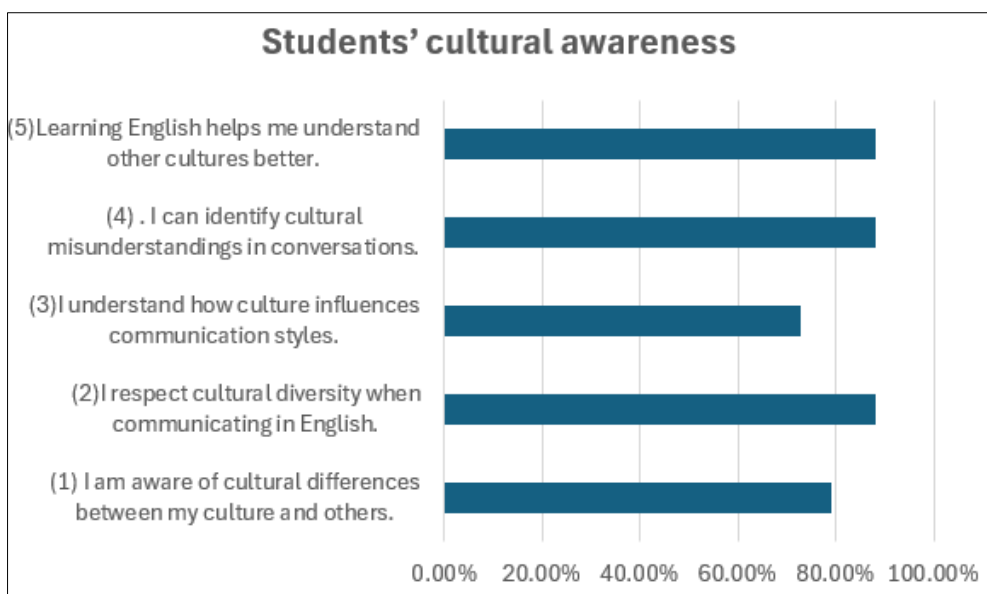
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Profile

Attributes	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	69 %
	Female	31%
Age	18–20	72%
	21–22	28%
Major	English linguistics	40.5%
	English teacher education	59.5%
Year	Third-year	70.4%
	Fourth-year	27.9%
	Other	1.6%

The demographic profile of the participants is presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents were male (69%) and aged between 18 and 20 (72%). Most participants were third-year students (70.4%) and majoring in English teacher education (59.5%). The diverse concentrated demographic profile of the participants ensures that the findings reflect the perspectives of students at a critical stage of their academic and professional development in English language studies.

4.2 Students' Cultural Awareness (CA)



The chart titled “*Students’ cultural awareness*” indicates that students generally show a high level of agreement with statements related to cultural awareness in learning English.

Firstly, statement (5) “*Learning English helps me understand other cultures better*” receives the highest level of agreement, at over 90%. This suggests that most students clearly recognize the role of English learning in broadening their cultural understanding.

Similarly, statement (4) “*I can identify cultural misunderstandings in conversations*” also records a very high agreement rate (around 85–90%), indicating that students feel confident in recognizing cultural misunderstandings during communication.

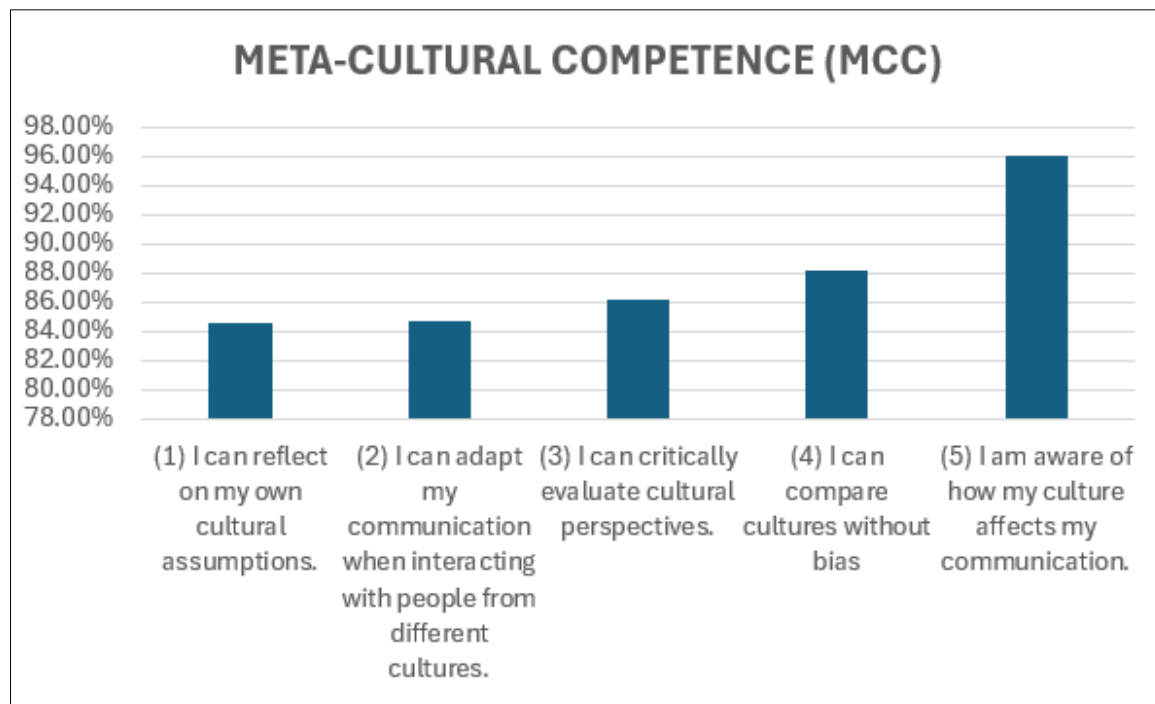
Statement (2) “*I respect cultural diversity when communicating in English*” shows a high level of agreement (approximately 85–90%), reflecting students’ positive attitudes toward cultural diversity.

Meanwhile, statement (1) “*I am aware of cultural differences between my culture and others*” has a slightly lower agreement rate (around 80%), but it still demonstrates a strong awareness among students.

Notably, statement (3) “*I understand how culture influences communication styles*” has the lowest level of agreement (about 70–75%). This implies that although students have general cultural awareness, their deeper understanding of how culture affects communication styles remains somewhat limited.

Overall, the findings reveal that students possess good cultural awareness and positive attitudes; however, more emphasis should be placed on helping them better understand the impact of culture on communication styles.

4.3 Meta-Cultural Competence (MCC)



The chart titled “Meta-Cultural Competence (MCC)” shows that students demonstrate a relatively high level of agreement across all components of meta-cultural competence, though with some variation.

Firstly, statement (5) “I am aware of how my culture affects my communication” records the highest level of agreement, at approximately 96%. This indicates that most students have a strong awareness of the influence of their own cultural background on communication.

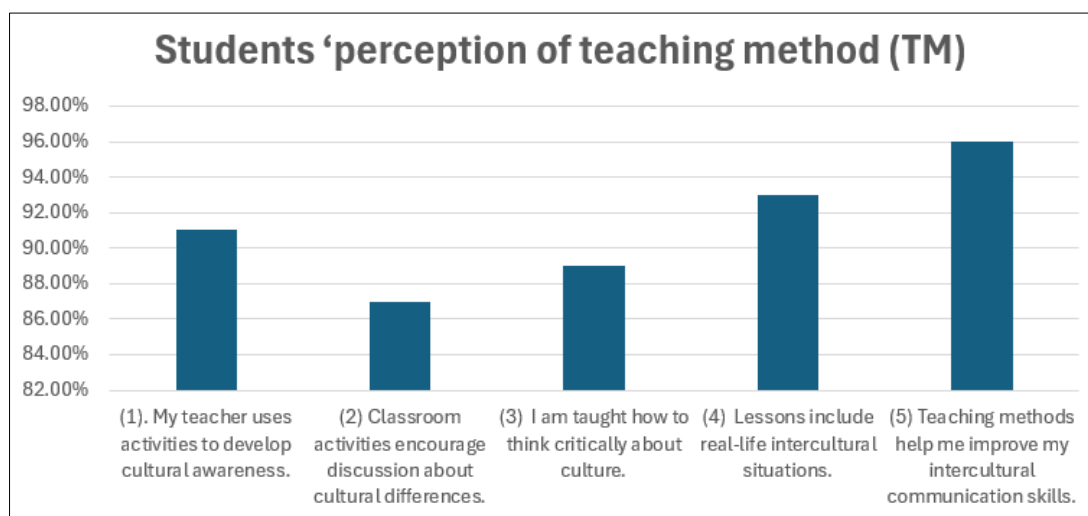
Statement (4) “I can compare cultures without bias” follows with a high agreement level of around 88%, suggesting that students are generally सक्षम in evaluating cultural differences objectively.

Statement (3) “I can critically evaluate cultural perspectives” reaches about 86%, reflecting a fairly strong ability among students to think critically about cultural issues.

Meanwhile, statements (1) “I can reflect on my own cultural assumptions” and (2) “I can adapt my communication when interacting with people from different cultures” both show slightly lower but still high agreement levels, at approximately 84–85%. This implies that while students are capable of reflection and adaptation, these skills may not be as fully developed as their general awareness.

Overall, the findings suggest that students possess a solid level of meta-cultural competence, particularly in cultural self-awareness. However, skills such as self-reflection and communication adaptation could be further strengthened to achieve a more balanced competence across all dimensions.

4.4 Students 'Perception of Teaching Method (TM)



The chart titled “*Students’ perception of teaching method (TM)*” shows that students hold very positive views toward the teaching methods used to develop cultural and intercultural communication skills.

Firstly, statement (5) “*Teaching methods help me improve my intercultural communication skills*” receives the highest level of agreement, at approximately 96%. This indicates that students strongly believe the current teaching methods are effective in enhancing their intercultural competence.

Similarly, statement (4) “*Lessons include real-life intercultural situations*” records a high agreement rate of around 93%, suggesting that practical and authentic contexts are well integrated into classroom instruction.

Statement (1) “*My teacher uses activities to develop cultural awareness*” also shows a high level of agreement (about 91%), reflecting that teachers actively incorporate cultural elements into their teaching practices.

Meanwhile, statement (3) “*I am taught how to think critically about culture*” reaches approximately 89%, indicating that critical thinking about cultural issues is fairly well addressed, though not at the highest level.

Notably, statement (2) “*Classroom activities encourage discussion about cultural differences*” has the lowest agreement (around 87%), although it is still relatively high. This suggests that while discussions are encouraged, there may be room for more interactive or student-centered discussion activities.

Overall, the findings reveal that students perceive teaching methods very positively, especially in terms of improving intercultural communication skills and incorporating real-life contexts. However, increasing opportunities for discussion and deeper critical engagement could further enhance the effectiveness of these methods.

4.5 Effectiveness of MCC Based Instruction (EFF)

4.5.1. Meta-Cultural Competence Activities

Meta-cultural competence activities improve my cultural understanding					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	5	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Disagree	16	6.5	6.5	8.5
	Neutral	92	37.2	37.2	45.7
	Agree	92	37.2	37.2	83.0
	strongly agree	42	17.0	17.0	100.0
	Total	247	100.0	100.0	

The data from 247 respondents reveal students' perceptions of the effectiveness of meta-cultural competence activities in improving their cultural understanding.

A majority of students expressed positive attitudes toward these activities. Specifically, 37.2% of respondents agreed and 17.0% strongly agreed, meaning that 54.2% of students held favorable views. This indicates that more than half of the participants perceive meta-cultural activities as beneficial in enhancing their cultural understanding.

However, a substantial proportion of students (37.2%) selected the neutral option. This suggests a degree of uncertainty or inconsistency in how these activities are experienced, possibly due to variations in implementation or limited exposure.

In contrast, only a small percentage of respondents expressed negative opinions, with 6.5% disagreeing and 2.0% strongly disagreeing (a total of 8.5%). This relatively low level of disagreement indicates that negative perceptions are not widespread.

4.5.2. Confidence in Intercultural Communication

I feel more confident communicating with people from different cultures.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	4	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	12	4.9	4.9	6.5
	Neutral	55	22.3	22.3	28.7
	Agree	118	47.8	47.8	76.5
	Strongly agree	58	23.5	23.5	100.0
	Total	247	100.0	100.0	

The data from 247 respondents indicate students' self-reported confidence when communicating with people from different cultures.

A strong majority of students expressed positive perceptions. Specifically, 47.8% agreed and 23.5% strongly agreed, resulting in a total of 71.3% of respondents who feel more confident in intercultural communication. This suggests that most students perceive a noticeable improvement in their confidence levels.

Meanwhile, 22.3% of participants selected the neutral option, indicating that a considerable group of students remain uncertain about their confidence. This may imply that their experiences are not yet sufficient to form a clear perception or that confidence development varies among individuals.

In contrast, only a small proportion of students reported negative perceptions, with 4.9% disagreeing and 1.6% strongly disagreeing (a total of 6.5%). This low percentage suggests that lack of confidence is not a major issue for most students.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that a significant majority of students feel more confident communicating across cultures. This indicates that current learning experiences and instructional approaches have had a positive impact on students' intercultural communication confidence. However, the presence of neutral responses suggests that further efforts may be needed to ensure more consistent confidence development among all learners.

4.5.3. Ability to Avoid Cultural Misunderstandings

I can avoid cultural misunderstandings better after the course.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	2.4	2.4	2.4
	Disagree	22	8.9	8.9	11.3
	Neutral	54	21.9	21.9	33.2
	Agree	113	45.7	45.7	78.9
	Strongly agree	52	21.1	21.1	100.0
	Total	247	100.0	100.0	

The data from 247 respondents reflect students' perceptions of their ability to avoid cultural misunderstandings after completing the course.

A substantial majority of students reported positive outcomes. Specifically, 45.7% agreed and 21.1% strongly agreed, resulting in a combined 66.8% of respondents who believe they can better avoid cultural misunderstandings. This indicates that the course has had a meaningful impact on students' intercultural awareness and practical communication abilities.

Meanwhile, 21.9% of participants selected the neutral option, suggesting that a notable proportion of students are uncertain about their improvement. This may reflect differences in learning experiences or the need for more practice-based activities.

On the other hand, a relatively small percentage expressed negative views, with 8.9% disagreeing and 2.4% strongly disagreeing (a total of 11.3%). Although this group is minor, it still indicates that some students may not have fully benefited from the course.

Overall, the findings suggest that most students perceive an improvement in their ability to avoid cultural misunderstandings after the course. However, the presence of neutral and negative responses highlights the need for more consistent and practical instructional strategies to ensure that all students can effectively develop this skill.

4.5.4. Perceived Effectiveness of MCC-Based Instruction

I think MCC-based instruction is more effective than traditional methods.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	6	2.4	2.4	2.4
	Disagree	11	4.5	4.5	6.9
	Neutral	54	21.9	21.9	28.7
	Agree	101	40.9	40.9	69.6
	Strongly agree	75	30.4	30.4	100.0
	Total	247	100.0	100.0	

The data from 247 respondents illustrate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of Meta-Cultural Competence (MCC)-based instruction compared to traditional teaching methods.

A strong majority of students expressed positive evaluations. Specifically, 40.9% agreed and 30.4% strongly agreed, resulting in a combined 71.3% of respondents who believe that MCC-based instruction is more effective than traditional approaches. This indicates a high level of student endorsement for this instructional model.

Meanwhile, 21.9% of respondents selected the neutral option, suggesting that a notable proportion of students remain undecided. This may reflect limited exposure to MCC-based activities or difficulty in directly comparing it with traditional methods.

Only a small minority expressed negative perceptions, with 4.5% disagreeing and 2.4% strongly disagreeing (a total of 6.9%). This low percentage indicates that opposition to MCC-based instruction is minimal.

Overall, the findings strongly suggest that MCC-based instruction is perceived as more effective than traditional methods by the majority of students. The high level of agreement supports the value of integrating meta-cultural competence into teaching practices. However, the presence of neutral responses indicates a need for clearer implementation and more consistent student engagement to maximize its perceived effectiveness.

4.5.5. Increasing MCC Activities in the Courses

I would like more MCC activities in future courses.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	.8	.8	.8
	Disagree	10	4.0	4.0	4.9
	Neutral	65	26.3	26.3	31.2
	Agree	115	46.6	46.6	77.7
	Strongly agree	55	22.3	22.3	100.0
	Total	247	100.0	100.0	

The table presents students' attitudes toward the statement "*I would like more MCC activities in future courses.*" Overall, the results indicate a clearly positive trend among respondents.

Specifically, 46.6% of students reported that they *agree*, while 22.3% *strongly agree*. In total, 68.9% of the participants expressed supportive attitudes toward increasing MCC activities in future courses. This suggests that the majority of students recognize the value of these activities and would like to see them implemented more frequently.

Meanwhile, 26.3% of respondents selected the *neutral* option, indicating that a considerable proportion of students may be undecided, possibly due to limited exposure to or unclear perceptions of MCC activities.

In contrast, only a small percentage of students expressed negative attitudes, with 4.0% *disagreeing* and *0.8% *strongly disagreeing*. Altogether, just 4.8% of respondents opposed the idea, suggesting minimal dissatisfaction.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate a strong overall preference for incorporating more MCC activities into future courses. This implies that educators and curriculum designers should consider expanding these activities to enhance student engagement and learning experiences.

4.6. The Relationship between Cultural Awareness and Teaching Method

Correlations			
		TEACHING_M ETHOD	CULTURALA WARENESS
TEACHING_METHOD	Pearson Correlation	1	.420**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	247	247
CULTURALAWARENESS	Pearson Correlation	.420**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	247	247

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the Pearson correlation analysis, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between Teaching Method and Cultural Awareness.

Specifically, the correlation coefficient is $r = .420$, indicating a moderate positive correlation. This suggests that as the effectiveness or implementation of the teaching method increases, there is a corresponding increase in cultural awareness among the participants.

The relationship is highly significant at the $p < .01$ level (specifically, $p = .000$), with a total sample size of $N = 247$. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the teaching method plays a meaningful role in shaping cultural awareness in this context.

4.7. The Relationship between Meta-Cultural Competence and Teaching Method

Correlations			
		TEACHING_M ETHOD	MCC
TEACHING_METHOD	Pearson Correlation	1	.352**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	247	247
MCC	Pearson Correlation	.352**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	247	247

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between Teaching Method and MCC ($r = .352$, $p < .01$, $N = 247$). The positive correlation coefficient suggests that as teaching methods improve or are more effectively implemented, there is a corresponding increase in MCC levels. Although the strength of the relationship is considered moderate, the results provide empirical evidence that the teaching method is a significant factor associated with MCC.

4.8. Hypotheses Testing

4.8. Hypotheses Testing

Drawing on the proposed research model, a set of hypotheses was formulated to examine the relationships between meta-cultural competence-based instruction and the multidimensional construct of cultural awareness, including reflective, analytical, and interpretive awareness.

Meta-cultural competence-based instruction is hypothesized to positively influence students' capacity for reflective awareness, enabling them to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and lived experiences. Furthermore, such instructional approaches are expected to foster analytical awareness by enhancing students' ability to critically analyze cultural phenomena. In addition, meta-cultural competence-based instruction is assumed to strengthen interpretive awareness, allowing learners to appropriately interpret cultural meanings and perspectives across diverse contexts.

Regarding the interrelationships among the three dimensions of cultural awareness, reflective awareness is conceptualized as a foundational component that underpins higher-order cognitive processes. Specifically, as students engage in critical self-reflection, they are more likely to develop stronger analytical capabilities. In turn, analytical awareness is expected to facilitate interpretive awareness by equipping students with the necessary skills to make informed interpretations of cultural contexts. Moreover, reflective awareness may also exert a direct effect on interpretive awareness, as deeper self-understanding can enhance one's ability to comprehend and interpret other cultures.

Overall, this study contributes to the theoretical advancement of cultural awareness by proposing a more integrated and empirically grounded framework. It underscores the importance of incorporating reflective, analytical, and interpretive

dimensions within meta-cultural competence-based instruction to promote meaningful, transformative, and sustainable intercultural learning experiences.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to examine the current state of cultural awareness and the impact of Meta-Cultural Competence (MCC)-based instruction among EFL learners at Sai Gon University. Based on the empirical findings, several key conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, the results indicate that EFL students possess a recognizable level of cultural awareness, which serves as a vital foundation for their language learning journey. Secondly, the correlation analysis confirms a statistically significant and positive relationship between the implementation of MCC-based teaching methods and various dimensions of student outcomes, including cultural awareness ($r = .420$) and behavioral engagement ($r = .332$). These findings suggest that when instructors integrate meta-cultural competence into their teaching, students tend to demonstrate higher levels of sensitivity and adaptability toward cultural diversity.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of shifting from traditional language instruction to a more culturally integrated approach. By fostering Meta-Cultural Competence, educators can better equip students with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of global communication. The findings provide a strong justification for the integration of MCC-based instruction into the EFL curriculum at Sai Gon University to enhance both the academic and intercultural proficiency of the learners.

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