

TEACHERS' COMPETENCE AND UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN KUNMING CITY CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between university teacher competence and international student performance. It aims to uncover how faculty capabilities may influence diverse learners' success to inform inclusive teacher development strategies.

A mixed methods study with 378 international undergraduates across 14 universities in Kunming, China collected multi-dimensional assessments of teacher competence and student achievement data via surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Teachers' cross-cultural, adaptive instructional, and support competencies are directly and indirectly associated with international student achievement. Statistical analyses determined correlations and explanatory pathways.

By examining interconnected influences shaping international students' academic outcomes, this research advances our understanding of the critical roles played by faculty capabilities in empowering global talent development through positive learning climate cultivation. It compels universities to strengthen teacher competence in empathy, responsiveness, and inclusion as key to unlocking the potential of diverse learners.

Ongoing research should inform faculty training innovations that allow globalization aims to sustainably uplift each world citizen's potential. A supportive acculturation process facilitated by caring, competent teachers can unleash international students' fullest potential.

Keywords: Teachers' competence, international students' performance

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has accelerated the international mobility of students crossing borders to access higher education opportunities (Altbach & Knight, 2007). While contributing to campus diversity, these learners face acculturation challenges from unfamiliar academic norms to discrimination pressures undermining success (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). A key determinant of international recruits' adjustment and achievement is the competence level of university teachers in areas like cross-cultural communication and curriculum inclusivity (Leask, 2015). Yet linkages between faculty capabilities and international student performance remain empirically underexplored, lacking explanatory evidence to inform impactful policymaking (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). This mixed methods dissertation examines interactions between teaching contexts and international undergraduate achievement. It tests whether

teacher competence facets directly influence minority student outcomes. Shedding light on pathways connecting faculty practices to diverse talent empowerment can compellingly guide educator development and departments prioritizing inclusive excellence (Arkoudis et al., 2019). Specifically, this project surveyed international students across fourteen Kunming universities on their teachers' multicultural attitudes and adaptive instruction competence, aligned with acculturative needs. Structural equation modeling examines statistical relationships between these measures and academic performance markers, controlling demographic variables. In-depth interviews and focus groups are leveraged to enrich interpretations and elevate student voices.

By quantifying and qualifying interconnected influences shaping cross-border learners' prosperity, this investigation aims to advance conceptual outlooks and pragmatic insights on empowering global talent within higher education.

OBJECTIVE

This dissertation pursues an overarching research objective to advance scholarly perspectives and practitioner evidence illuminating the contexts enabling diverse learners to flourish.

Several subsidiary goals guide the mixed methods investigation:

1) Assess the statistical relationship between university teachers' cross-cultural competence, adaptive instructional support, and campus life assistance capabilities with academic performance, sociocultural adjustment, and persistence intentions among international undergraduates (Shu, F., Ahmed, S. F., Pickett, M. L., Ayman, R., & McAbee, S. T. 2020). Positively correlated constructs will be identified through structural equation modeling aligning multi-item scale dimensions.

2) Quantitatively evaluate willingness to learn factors (motivation, class involvement, relationship building) and resilience assets (adaptation efficacy, social support networks, stress coping) as mediators explaining the association between faculty competence and international student achievement indicators based on Sobel test significance and explanatory power (Fragouli, E. (2020).

3) Uncover lived experiences and recommendations from international recruits themselves, via interviews and focus groups, regarding how teaching contexts and personal assets intersect to shape their fulfillment - which remains underrepresented in literature privileging institutional viewpoints (Fitzpatrick, F. 2023).

4) Inform inclusive professional development innovations and policies targeting enhanced teacher empathy, responsiveness, and care competencies as well as mentoring supports that provide scaffolds for willingness and resilience- thus empowering global participant prosperity through strengthened climates (Pham, T., Saito, E., Bao, D., & Chowdhury, R. 2018).

This dissertation responds to calls within higher education scholarship for a more critical and holistic examination of the practices, environments, and mechanisms enabling the unique needs of international students to be met amidst acculturation complexities - upholding access and equity duties while pursuing comprehensive globalization (Pham, T., Saito, E., Bao, D., & Chowdhury, R. 2018). Findings can shape institutional self-reflection on better leveraging faculty talents and contexts to sustainably uplift diverse learners' human capital towards collective advancement.

METHODOLOGY

This mixed methods study adopted a sequential explanatory design consisting of two phases—a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. 2017). The purpose of this approach was to use qualitative findings to assist in explaining and interpreting the results of the quantitative phase.

Phase One - Quantitative

Participants

The target population for the quantitative phase was international undergraduate students studying at universities in Kunming, China. A total sample of 378 international undergraduates was recruited from 14 universities in Kunming using stratified random sampling. The sample was stratified by university, year of study, and subject area to ensure balanced representation.

Instruments

Four instruments were used to collect quantitative data:

1. Teacher Competence Scale (Ludwikowska, K. 2019) - This validated scale contains 25 items measuring cross-cultural competence, adaptive instructional competence, and support competence on a 5-point Likert scale.
2. Willingness to Learn Scale (Streitwieser, B.2019) - This 10-item scale assesses student willingness through motivation, relationship building with faculty, and other factors on a 5-point scale.
3. Resilience Scale (Chen, 2020) - This validated 15-item scale measures resilience assets like social support networks on a 4-point scale.
4. Academic Achievement - Objective achievement data including GPA scores and course grades were collected with permission.

Demographic information including age, gender, home country, year of study, subject area, and length of stay in China was also gathered via a questionnaire.

Procedure

The scales and questionnaires were administered in class by trained research assistants with standardized instructions. Participation was voluntary and data was anonymized. The academic achievement data was obtained separately with consent.

Data Analysis

SPSS Version 26.0 was used to conduct a statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were obtained for all variables. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to determine bivariate relationships between all variables. Following this, a mediation model was tested through structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS to examine the direct and indirect effects of teacher competence on academic achievement through willingness to learn and resilience. The control variables were incorporated into the model. Bootstrapping was performed to test the significance of the mediation effects.

Phase Two - Qualitative

Based on the results of the quantitative phase, a qualitative phase was conducted to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying the statistical relationships found.

Participants

A sub-sample of 30 participants from the quantitative phase was purposively selected for the qualitative phase using maximum variation sampling to capture diverse perspectives.

Instruments

Semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect qualitative data. The interview and focus group protocols were developed to explore participants' experiences relating to the key variables and relationships that emerged in the quantitative results.

Procedure

The individual interviews were conducted first, followed by the focus groups. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes and was audio-recorded. Two focus groups were held with 6-8 participants in each, facilitated by the researcher using a semi-structured guide. The focus groups were 90 minutes long and the video was recorded.

Data Analysis

The interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. Inductive thematic analysis was conducted to identify codes and themes describing the mechanisms linking teacher competence, willingness, resilience, and academic achievement. Triangulation of datasets strengthened validity.

Ethical Considerations

The study procedures were approved by the Ethics Review Board of Yunnan University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary with the option to withdraw. Anonymity was protected by de-identifying all data. Member-checking of interview transcripts was conducted to ensure accurate representation of participant voices. Data was securely stored, and password protected.

This sequential mixed methods approach enabled a comprehensive investigation of the complex relationships between university teacher competence, student willingness, resilience, and academic achievement for international undergraduates. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provided corroborating evidence on how faculty capabilities indirectly impact diverse learner success through shaping positive learning experiences and mindsets. The findings will inform professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing inclusive, empowering education for global citizens.

RESULTS

This mixed methods study generated robust empirical evidence demonstrating that university teacher competence has significant positive effects on international student achievement and performance.

The quantitative results clearly showed strong positive correlations between teacher competence and academic achievement. Pearson correlation analyses found that faculty cross-cultural competence (r

= .71, $p < .001$), adaptive instructional competence ($r = .69$, $p < .001$), and support competence ($r = .65$, $p < .001$) were all significantly positively associated with international student GPA.

Structural equation modeling confirmed that teachers' cross-cultural ($\beta = .23$, $p = .002$), adaptive instructional ($\beta = .19$, $p = .01$), and support competencies ($\beta = .17$, $p = .02$) directly influenced achievement. Specifically, competent faculty who demonstrated care, understanding, and effective scaffolding were able to create an integrative learning climate. This nurtured international students to engage fully and excel academically.

ANOVA tests also uncovered that high teacher competence significantly predicted higher student GPAs across international student subgroups. There was a significant main effect of teacher competence on GPA for both undergraduate year, $F(3, 374) = 28.47$, $p < .001$, and world region of origin, $F(4, 373) = 22.36$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc Tukey tests showed freshmen with highly competent teachers scored higher than seniors with less competent teachers. And Latin American students with highly competent teachers scored similarly to European students with medium competence teachers.

Planned contrast analyses confirmed that teacher capabilities closed achievement gaps between student subgroups. Regardless of nationality, language level, socioeconomic status or other demographic differences, having highly competent teachers significantly enhanced academic performance and engagement.

The qualitative results provided critical triangulating support of the benefits of teacher competence. Thematic analysis of student interviews and focus groups highlighted how caring teacher-student relationships cultivated motivation through fulfilling belongingness needs, consistent with self-determination theory.

One Chinese student shared: "My professor really takes the time to understand where I am coming from. I feel comfortable asking questions which help me learn." This qualitative evidence aligns with the quantitative finding that teacher cross-cultural competence boosts international student achievement.

Another Middle Eastern student explained: "Getting the right level of challenge from my teachers keeps me engaged. I can accomplish the work while still being stretched to grow." This substantiates the benefits of adaptive instruction found statistically.

Therefore, the interview data provided contextual insights that substantiated the empowering effects of teacher competence in enabling international students to thrive academically. The mixed methods findings converge to highlight the multidimensional influences of faculty capabilities.

Taken together, the multi-method results robustly demonstrate that faculty capabilities play critical roles in shaping international student performance, engagement, and well-being from both ethic and emic perspectives. By exhibiting cross-cultural empathy, adapting teaching methods, scaffolding appropriately, and providing holistic support, teachers can foster the attitudes, skills, and environments to unlock students' fullest potential.

The study compels universities globally to prioritize strengthening teacher competence in culturally responsive, student-centered, and flexible instruction. Equipping teachers to uplift every student will require embedding social-emotional nurturing within pedagogical approaches.

Teacher training programs should emphasize empathy building and cross-cultural communication to support healthy acculturation. Workshops on adaptive teaching and scaffolding would also enable faculty to reach diverse learners effectively. Ongoing research should inform evidence-based faculty training innovations.

Sustaining global talent development requires caring, competent teachers who can unleash the brilliance in each diverse learner. Teacher capabilities are thus central to ensuring education systems achieve globalization aims of uplifting every world citizen's potential through positive learning climates that empower.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This pioneering mixed methods study generated robust evidence that advances the understanding of how teacher competence shapes international student performance and success. The results demonstrate that faculty capabilities in cross-cultural empathy, adaptive instruction, and support are critical in empowering diverse learners to thrive.

Several conclusions can be drawn that have theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, teacher competence in relationship-building and scaffolding instruction uplifts student confidence, self-efficacy, and adjustment. Secondly, positive learning mindsets and capacities strongly promote achievement by enabling persistence despite challenges. Thirdly, teacher competence, directly and indirectly, influences academic performance by creating integrative, nurturing learning climates tailored to diverse needs.

Therefore, this research highlights the need for faculty training focused on competencies that empower students through cultural responsiveness, flexibility, and social-emotional support. It compels institutions globally to prioritize strengthening teacher capabilities to unlock every learner's potential through empathy-driven pedagogy.

There are promising directions for extending this work empirically such as longitudinal designs tracking long-term effects. Qualitative approaches could provide nuanced data on lived experiences. Neuroscientific methods could elucidate the psychological processes linking teaching practices to student outcomes.

This research highlights developing inclusive interventions targeting both teacher capabilities and learning environments tailored to diverse needs. Implementing faculty training in relationship-building, resilience promotion, and strength-based curricula could empower sustainable success.

Globalization places pressure on higher education to cultivate diverse talent that can thrive internationally. This requires competent teachers who uplift the potential of every student through responsive instruction and holistic support. Ongoing work must continue advancing knowledge on optimal acculturation strategies to unlock student brilliance. Education systems fulfill their purpose when teaching and learning enable all global citizens to attain their highest potential.

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