

Influence of phenomenological teaching approaches on students' intercultural competence in Southwestern Nigerian colleges of education

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L'influenza degli approcci didattici fenomenologici sullo sviluppo della competenza interculturale negli studenti dei College della Nigeria sud-occidentale

This study examines the impact of phenomenological teaching approaches on intercultural competence (ICC) among 300-level pre-service teachers in southwestern Nigeria's colleges of education, a highly culturally diverse region. Traditional lecture-based methods, which prioritize rote learning, often limit the development of skills needed for multicultural classrooms. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (emphasizing embodied, reflective, and experiential learning) and Deardorff's process-oriented model of intercultural competence, this mixed-methods study compares phenomenological (reflective and experiential) approaches with traditional ones. Quantitative surveys (adapted from Fantini, 2009; n=500 students, n=200 staff) showed significantly higher ICC scores in phenomenological classes (overall $M=4.20$, $SD=0.60$) compared to traditional classes ($M=3.50$, $SD=0.70$; $p<0.001$), with large effect sizes across attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations (n=15) revealed enhanced cultural empathy, awareness, and adaptability, although barriers such as limited faculty training and rigid curricula remain. The findings support curriculum reform and professional development to prepare culturally responsive educators in Nigeria, with transferable implications for multicultural teacher education in other diverse, resource-constrained Global South contexts.

Questo studio esamina l'impatto dell'insegnamento fenomenologico sullo sviluppo della competenza interculturale tra gli studenti del terzo anno (300-level) nei colleges of education della Nigeria sud-occidentale, una regione caratterizzata da elevata diversità culturale. I metodi tradizionali basati sulla lezione frontale tendono a privilegiare l'apprendimento mnemonico, limitando le competenze dei futuri insegnanti nella gestione di contesti multiculturali. Basandosi sulla fenomenologia di Merleau-Ponty e sul modello teorico di Deardorff, questa ricerca a metodi misti mette a confronto approcci riflessivi ed esperienziali con quelli convenzionali. I dati quantitativi, raccolti tramite questionari (n=500 studenti, n=200 membri del personale), hanno evidenziato livelli più elevati di competenza interculturale nelle classi che adottano approcci fenomenologici ($M=4,20$; $DS=0,60$) rispetto a quelle tradizionali ($M=3,50$; $DS=0,70$; $p<0,001$). I dati qualitativi, derivanti da interviste, diari riflessivi e osservazioni (n=15), hanno messo in luce un incremento dell'empatia culturale e della consapevolezza interculturale, pur evidenziando la persistenza di ostacoli istituzionali, quali la limitata formazione del personale e la rigidità dei curricula. Lo studio sostiene la necessità di riforme curriculari e di programmi di formazione per i docenti, al fine di promuovere educatori culturalmente responsivi in Nigeria.

Keywords: Phenomenological teaching; Intercultural competence; Teacher education; Southwestern Nigeria; Multicultural classrooms.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

Southwestern Nigeria, comprising states such as Oyo, Ogun, Osun, and Lagos, is a vibrant mosaic of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, home to the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and numerous minority groups, each contributing distinct traditions, values, and worldviews. This rich cultural tapestry shapes the educational landscape, particularly in colleges of education, which serve as key training grounds for future educators tasked with fostering inclusive learning environments. However, pedagogical approaches in these institutions often rely heavily on traditional lecture-based methods that prioritise rote learning and standardised content delivery over experiential engagement with cultural realities (Pinto, 2018; Herrera-Seda et al., 2025). Such methods risk producing educators who are ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of multicultural classrooms (Deardorff, 2023).

Intercultural competence—the ability to interact effectively and appropriately across cultural differences—is increasingly recognised as essential for equitable education in pluralistic contexts (Deardorff, 2023). Phenomenological teaching approaches, which emphasise lived experience, embodied perception, and reflective engagement, offer a promising alternative to conventional pedagogies (Sohn et al., 2017; Matikainen, 2024). While Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological framework provides valuable insights into subjective and intersubjective learning, its application in non-Western, resource-constrained educational settings requires adaptation to local cultural epistemologies and institutional constraints. In southwestern Nigerian colleges of education, the limited adoption of such methods stems from institutional reliance on traditional practices and insufficient faculty training in innovative pedagogies (Elosúa, 2015; Nwigwe, 2026). This study investigates how phenomenological teaching can enhance intercultural competence among 300-level students, preparing them to become culturally responsive educators in Nigeria's diverse educational landscape.

1.2. Problem statement

Despite the cultural richness of southwestern Nigeria, pedagogical frameworks in colleges of education often fail to cultivate the intercultural competence necessary for pre-service teachers to thrive in multicultural classrooms. Traditional lecture-based methods dominate, prioritising factual knowledge and standardised assessments over reflective and experiential learning (Pinto, 2018; Herrera-Seda et al., 2025). This limits opportunities for students to engage critically with cultural diversity, hindering the development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills required for intercultural competence (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). In a region where classrooms reflect Nigeria's ethnic and cultural diversity, the scarcity of pedagogies that foster cultural awareness and empathy poses a significant challenge to educational equity. Phenomenological teaching approaches, which encourage reflection on lived experiences and empathetic engagement with others' perspectives, hold promise for addressing this gap (Webb & Welsh, 2019). However, empirical research exploring their impact in southwestern Nigerian colleges of education remains limited (Dervin & Gross, 2016; Kamenopoulou, 2020). Without targeted pedagogical interventions, pre-service teachers may graduate without the skills to address cultural differences effectively, perpetuating inequities in education.

1.3. Research objectives and questions

This study aims to investigate the influence of phenomenological teaching approaches on the intercultural competence of 300-level students in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria. The primary objective is to explore how reflective and experiential teaching methods, compared to traditional lecture-based approaches, enhance students' ability to navigate intercultural interactions in multicultural classrooms. Specific objectives include: (a) identifying the components of phenomenological teaching (e.g., reflective journaling, experiential activities) that most effectively foster cultural awareness and empathy; (b) assessing the extent to which these approaches influence students' intercultural competence; and (c) examining the challenges faced by academic staff in implementing phenomenological teaching in resource-constrained institutions.

The guiding research question is: How do phenomenological teaching approaches, compared to traditional lecture-based methods, influence the intercultural competence of 300-level students in multicultural classrooms in southwestern Nigerian colleges of education?

Sub-questions include: (a) Which elements of phenomenological teaching most significantly enhance students' cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability? (b) What barriers do academic staff encounter in adopting phenomenological teaching practices? (c) How do students' lived experiences in multicultural classrooms shape their intercultural competence under phenomenological pedagogy?

1.4. Significance of the study

This research holds important implications for teacher education in southwestern Nigeria and beyond, addressing the need for pedagogies that prepare educators for multicultural classrooms. By focusing on phenomenological teaching approaches, the study contributes a context-specific perspective from Nigeria that enriches global frameworks on intercultural education (De Hei et al., 2020; Osiesi et al., 2024). The findings can inform curriculum development in colleges of education, promoting the integration of reflective and experiential methods to foster intercultural competence among pre-service teachers. Furthermore, the study responds to global priorities for inclusive and culturally responsive teacher training in diverse societies (UNESCO, 2020; Herrera-Seda et al., 2025). By linking local challenges—such as resource constraints and cultural diversity—to transnational debates on multicultural education in the Global South, it offers transferable insights for preparing educators in other underrepresented, pluralistic contexts worldwide. The qualitative, phenomenological approach also contributes to methodological discourse on experiential learning in non-Western settings (Babae, 2023; Ndiangui et al., 2024).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Phenomenological foundations

This study draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which emphasises lived experience, embodied perception, and the relational nature of understanding (Carman, 2019). In educational contexts, this perspective supports pedagogical practices that prioritise students' subjective and intersubjective encounters with cultural phenomena through reflection and embodiment (Webb & Welsh, 2019; Thorburn, 2025). Unlike traditional approaches that emphasise objective knowledge transmission, phenomenology foregrounds contextual, bodily engagement, making it suitable for exploring intercultural competence in multicultural classrooms (Sohn et al., 2017). For pre-service teachers in southwestern Nigerian colleges, such methods—e.g., reflective journaling and dialogic exercises—can illuminate cultural identities and dynamics. However, applying Merleau-Ponty's Western-rooted framework in non-Western, resource-constrained settings requires adaptation to local epistemologies, communal values, and institutional realities (Alhazmi, 2022; Nwigwe, 2026).

2.2. Intercultural competence framework

The study employs Deardorff's (2023) process-oriented model of intercultural competence, viewing it as a dynamic cycle of attitudes (openness, respect, curiosity), knowledge (cultural self-awareness, sociolinguistic systems), and skills (empathy, adaptability, communication). This developmental model suits teacher education by highlighting how intentional pedagogies build competence progressively (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; Yarychev, 2024). In southwestern Nigeria's diverse classrooms, it provides a lens to assess how phenomenological methods enhance students' navigation of intercultural interactions. While effective globally, the model's application in African contexts benefits from contextual refinement to account for local power dynamics, colonial legacies, and communal relational norms (Akporthu et al., 2023).

2.3. Linking phenomenology and intercultural competence

Phenomenological teaching—through reflective journaling, experiential activities, and dialogic interactions—aligns with Deardorff's model by fostering critical engagement with lived cultural experiences (Aguas, 2022). These practices encourage interrogation of assumptions, building self-awareness, empathy, and adaptability (Fantini, 2009; De Hei et al., 2020). In southwestern Nigerian colleges, where ethnic diversity mirrors national pluralism, this integration supports intersubjective understanding and addresses social inequalities (Dervin & Gross, 2016). Phenomenology's focus on embodiment and shared experience complements Deardorff's relational emphasis, though critical adaptation is needed to avoid imposing Western individualism on communal African educational contexts (Ravn & Høffding, 2017; Otu, 2025).

2.4. Application to the study

Integrating Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with Deardorff's model provides a robust foundation: the former guides intervention design (e.g., reflective and experiential activities), while the latter structures outcome assessment across attitudes, knowledge, and skills. The qualitative methodology, using phenomenological reduction on interviews, journals, and observations, aligns with both by centering participants' subjective experiences (Adams & van Manen, 2017). In southwestern Nigerian colleges, this enables exploration of how phenomenological teaching fosters ICC among 300-level students, contributing to local practice and global discourses on adapting phenomenological and intercultural frameworks in diverse, underrepresented settings (Babae, 2023; Matikainen, 2024).

3. Literature review

3.1. Phenomenological teaching in educational contexts

Phenomenological teaching, rooted in Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodied perception and relational experience, prioritises reflective exploration of lived realities in education (Carman, 2019; Thornburn, 2025). Methods like reflective journaling, experiential activities, and dialogic interactions enable pre-service teachers to interrogate cultural identities and diversity (Standal, 2016; Sohn et al., 2017). In multicultural settings, these approaches move beyond abstract knowledge to direct engagement with lived experiences (Webb & Welsh, 2019). However, adoption remains limited in resource-constrained higher education, especially in African contexts where lecture-based instruction dominates due to structural constraints and limited training (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Nwigwe, 2026). Empirical studies in non-Western settings, including Nigeria, are scarce, highlighting a gap this study addresses.

3.2. Intercultural competence in teacher education

Intercultural competence enables effective, appropriate interaction across cultural differences and is vital for educators in diverse settings (Deardorff, 2023). Deardorff's model frames it as attitudes, knowledge, and skills developed through experiential pedagogies (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). In multicultural classrooms, it promotes inclusion and equity (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Research highlights collaborative and reflective strategies' efficacy (De Hei et al., 2020), but much focuses on Western contexts, with limited attention to African challenges like ethnic/religious diversity and resource limits (Elosúa, 2015; Akporhuarho et al., 2023). This study examines phenomenological teaching's role in building ICC in Nigerian teacher education, contributing to culturally responsive pedagogy discourses.

3.3. Phenomenological teaching and intercultural competence

Phenomenological pedagogy aligns with Deardorff's model by facilitating reflective and experiential engagement with cultural differences (Babae, 2023). Reflective journaling fosters self-awareness and empathy; experiential activities build adaptability and communication (Fantini, 2009; De Hei et al., 2020). In southwestern Nigeria's diverse classrooms, these methods support critical awareness of inequities

(Weate, 2021). Challenges include limited training and institutional resistance to non-traditional approaches (Pinto, 2018). This study explores these intersections and barriers in Nigerian colleges, extending global literature on phenomenological-ICC links in resource-constrained, multicultural contexts (Otu, 2025).

3.4. Gaps in the literature

While literature affirms phenomenological teaching's potential for ICC, gaps persist in non-Western, resource-limited settings like southwestern Nigeria (Griffith et al., 2016; Savicki, 2023). Few studies examine its empirical impact on pre-service teachers in African teacher education, despite relevance for addressing ethnic/linguistic diversity (Akorhwarho et al., 2023; Nwigwe, 2026). This study fills these gaps by investigating phenomenological approaches' influence on ICC in southwestern Nigerian colleges, offering context-specific insights and highlighting implementation challenges.

4. Methodology

4.1. Population and sample

The study targets a population of 4,540 300-level students and 1,543 academic staff across six colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria (Oyo, Ogun, Osun, and Lagos), encompassing 36 schools with diverse departmental structures. This study employed a comparative mixed-methods design. Classes were classified as "phenomenological" if instructors incorporated reflective journaling, experiential activities (e.g., role-playing cultural scenarios, dialogic discussions grounded in lived experience), and embodied reflection aligned with Merleau-Ponty's principles. Traditional classes followed standard lecture-based instruction without these elements. Classification was verified through instructor self-reports and classroom observations to strengthen internal validity.

A mixed-methods approach necessitated distinct sampling strategies. For the quantitative component, a sample of 500 students (11% of the student population) and 200 academic staff (13% of the staff population) was selected from 18 schools (50% of the total schools), covering 54 departments, using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across federal and state colleges and ethnic diversity (Berman et al., 2020). For the qualitative component, a purposive sample of 15 participants (10 students and 5 academic staff) was selected from three colleges (one each in Oyo, Ogun, and Lagos) to capture in-depth lived experiences, aligning with phenomenological research principles (Aguas, 2022). The student sample represents diverse ethnic backgrounds, and staff were chosen based on their experience with pedagogical innovation. The selection of 300-level students targets a critical stage in teacher education.

4.2. Data collection

A mixed-methods data collection approach was employed, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations. For the quantitative component, a validated survey instrument adapted from Fantini's (2009) intercultural competence assessment was administered to 500 students and 200 staff. Adaptation followed established cross-cultural procedures: forward- and back-translation into Yoruba and English, expert review by three Nigerian teacher educators for cultural appropriateness, and pilot testing with 50 300-level students from a similar college (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$ for the overall scale; 0.83–0.92 for subscales). This ensured reliability and validity in the southwestern Nigerian context (Beltrán-Véliz et al., 2024). The survey measured intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge, skills) and perceptions of phenomenological teaching using a 5-point Likert scale.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students and 5 academic staff, using open-ended questions such as "How have phenomenological teaching methods shaped your cultural interactions?" and "What challenges do you face in implementing experiential teaching?" Reflective journals, completed by the 10 student interviewees over a semester, prompted

reflections on cultural encounters. Classroom observations in 10 classes across the three qualitative colleges assessed the implementation of phenomenological methods using a structured protocol. This triangulation ensures a comprehensive exploration of the phenomena (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

4.3. Data analysis

Quantitative data from surveys were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores for intercultural competence were calculated, and independent samples *t*-tests compared outcomes between phenomenological and traditional classes, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$ (Berman et al., 2020). Qualitative data were analysed using phenomenological reduction to distil the essence of participants' experiences (Aguas, 2022). Interview transcripts and reflective journals were coded iteratively: (a) initial coding identified descriptive themes, (b) thematic synthesis grouped codes into broader categories, and (c) interpretation linked findings to the theoretical framework (Tisdell et al., 2025). Classroom observation data were analysed using a checklist of pedagogical indicators. The mixed-methods analysis integrated quantitative trends with qualitative themes to provide a holistic understanding (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

4.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical rigor was prioritised. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature provided in written and oral formats, translated into local languages where necessary. Anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms and removing identifiable details. Quantitative survey responses were anonymised through unique identifiers. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review boards of the participating colleges, adhering to Nigerian and international standards. Participants could withdraw at any time without consequences, and data were stored on encrypted platforms. Cultural sensitivity was maintained throughout the research process (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

5. Results

5.1. Overview of findings

The mixed-methods analysis demonstrated the significant positive impact of phenomenological teaching approaches on the intercultural competence of 300-level students in southwestern Nigerian colleges of education, while also highlighting persistent institutional barriers to implementation. Quantitative survey data from 500 students and 200 academic staff across 18 colleges showed that classes incorporating phenomenological methods substantially outperformed traditional lecture-based classes in fostering intercultural competence across attitudes, knowledge, and skills domains. Qualitative data, drawn from semi-structured interviews (10 students, 5 academic staff), reflective journals (10 students), and classroom observations (10 classes), revealed three core themes: (1) deepened cultural empathy through reflective practices, (2) enhanced cultural awareness through experiential learning, and (3) institutional barriers hindering the adoption of phenomenological pedagogy. These qualitative insights, supported by anonymised excerpts and observation notes, provide rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences in multicultural classroom settings (Sohn et al., 2017). Table 1 presents the quantitative results with statistical metrics, and Table 2 summarises the qualitative themes with representative excerpts.

5.2. Quantitative findings

The quantitative component used an adapted version of Fantini's (2009) intercultural competence survey, administered to 500 students (250 from phenomenological teaching classes, 250 from traditional lecture-based classes) and 200 academic staff (100 from each group) across 18 colleges. Students in phenomenological classes reported significantly higher overall intercultural competence scores ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.60$) compared to those in traditional classes ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.70$), with an independent samples *t*-test showing a strong effect: $t(498) = 12.30$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.07$, 95% CI $[0.88, 1.26]$.

Sub-scale analyses further confirmed significant improvements:

- Attitudes (openness): $M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.50$ vs. $M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.60$; $t(498) = 11.80$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.26$, 95% CI [1.07, 1.45]
- Knowledge (cultural awareness): $M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.60$ vs. $M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.70$; $t(498) = 10.50$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.08$, 95% CI [0.89, 1.27]
- Skills (empathy): $M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.50$ vs. $M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.60$; $t(498) = 11.20$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.23$, 95% CI [1.04, 1.42]

Academic staff using phenomenological methods also reported greater confidence in fostering intercultural competence ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.50$) compared to those using traditional methods ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.60$): $t(198) = 10.10$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.44$, 95% CI [1.16, 1.72]. These large effect sizes and narrow confidence intervals provide robust statistical support for the efficacy of phenomenological teaching in enhancing intercultural competence in teacher education.

Table 1. Quantitative Survey Results on Intercultural Competence.

Group	Sample Size (n)	Measure	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d	95% CI
Students (Phenomenological Teaching)	250	Intercultural Competence (Overall)	4.20	0.60	12.30	<0.001	1.07	[0.88, 1.26]
Students (Traditional Teaching)	250	Intercultural Competence (Overall)	3.50	0.70				
Students (Phenomenological Teaching)	250	Attitudes (Openness)	4.30	0.50	11.80	<0.001	1.26	[1.07, 1.45]
Students (Traditional Teaching)	250	Attitudes (Openness)	3.60	0.60				
Students (Phenomenological Teaching)	250	Knowledge (Cultural Awareness)	4.10	0.60	10.50	<0.001	1.08	[0.89, 1.27]
Students (Traditional Teaching)	250	Knowledge (Cultural Awareness)	3.40	0.70				
Students (Phenomenological Teaching)	250	Skills (Empathy)	4.20	0.50	11.20	<0.001	1.23	[1.04, 1.42]
Students (Traditional Teaching)	250	Skills (Empathy)	3.50	0.60				
Academic Staff (Phenomenological Teaching)	100	Confidence in Fostering Intercultural Competence	4.00	0.50	10.10	<0.001	1.44	[1.16, 1.72]
Academic Staff (Traditional Teaching)	100	Confidence in Fostering Intercultural Competence	3.20	0.60				

5.3. Qualitative findings: Principle of anonymity and coding

To uphold the principle of anonymity, all qualitative data were anonymised by assigning coded identifiers to participants (e.g., Student A, Lecturer B) and removing references to specific colleges, ethnic groups, or other identifiable details, in line with ethical research standards (Berman et al., 2020). Students were coded as Student A through J, and academic staff as Lecturer A through E, ensuring confidentiality while preserving the richness of their narratives. This approach protects participants' identities in

the culturally sensitive context of southwestern Nigerian colleges (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Interview excerpts, reflective journal entries, and classroom observation notes were analysed using phenomenological reduction to distil the essence of participants' lived experiences, with codes applied consistently across data sources (Aguas, 2022). The following subsections present three themes derived from this analysis, supported by anonymised excerpts.

5.4. Qualitative findings: Theme 1 – Deepened cultural empathy through reflective practices

Reflective practices, such as journaling and guided discussions, emerged as powerful mechanisms for fostering cultural empathy, a cornerstone of intercultural competence. Student A shared, "Writing in my journal about a classroom disagreement made me realise how my background shaped my assumptions. I now listen more carefully to others." Student B noted, "During a discussion, our lecturer asked us to reflect on feeling 'different.' It helped me understand how others experience exclusion, and I became more patient." Lecturer A observed, "When I prompt students to reflect on cultural conflicts, they share openly. One student's journal showed how she empathised with a peer's struggles after reflecting." A journal entry from Student C read, "Reflecting on my biases made me see I judged others too quickly. I now value different perspectives more." Student D added, "The reflective exercises made me feel connected to classmates I didn't understand before." Observations in 7 of 10 classes revealed that guided discussions fostered empathetic exchanges, creating safe spaces for students to explore cultural differences. These findings align with the emphasis on empathy as a critical intercultural skill, demonstrating how phenomenological methods facilitate intersubjective understanding in multicultural settings (Sohn et al., 2017; Gregersen-Hermans, 2017).

5.5. Qualitative findings: Theme 2 – Enhanced cultural awareness via experiential learning

Experiential learning activities, such as role-playing and cultural immersion exercises, significantly enhanced students' cultural awareness. Student E shared, "In a role-play, I acted as a teacher resolving a cultural misunderstanding in a classroom. It showed me how differences can escalate if ignored." Student F reflected, "We shared personal stories in class, and I learned about traditions I didn't know existed. It opened my eyes to our diversity." Lecturer B noted, "Role-playing helps students challenge their assumptions. One student realised her views about others were wrong after a cultural simulation." A journal entry from Student G stated, "Playing a teacher in a diverse classroom made me see how my actions affect others' feelings. I'm more aware now." Student H added, "An activity where we explored cultural artifacts taught me to question my biases." Observations in 6 of 10 classes confirmed that experiential activities, such as simulating multicultural scenarios, deepened students' cultural self-awareness and adaptability, enhancing their sociolinguistic knowledge and ability to navigate diverse classroom dynamics (De Hei et al., 2020; Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017).

5.6. Qualitative findings: Theme 3 – Institutional barriers to phenomenological teaching

Significant institutional barriers hindered the implementation of phenomenological teaching. Lecturer C explained, "I want to use reflective methods, but I've never been trained in phenomenology. Traditional lectures are easier with large classes." Student I noted, "Our classes are so big that it's hard to have discussions or activities. We mostly get lectures." Lecturer D stated, "The curriculum is rigid, and we lack resources for experiential tasks. I tried role-playing, but it took too much time from the syllabus." Student J shared, "Our lecturer tried journaling, but he seemed unsure how to guide us, so it felt confusing." Lecturer E added, "Without training or support, it's hard to move beyond lectures. The system rewards covering content, not innovation." Observations revealed that traditional lecture-based methods dominated in 8 of 10 classes, limiting opportunities for phenomenological practices. These

barriers, including lack of training, large class sizes, and inflexible curricula, underscore the challenges of adopting innovative pedagogies in resource-constrained settings (Pinto, 2018; Elosúa, 2015).

5.7. Summary of qualitative themes

Table 2. Qualitative Themes and Supporting Interview Excerpts.

Theme	Description	Interview Excerpts
Deepened Cultural Empathy Through Reflective Practices	Reflective journaling and discussions fostered empathy and openness toward cultural differences.	"Writing about a disagreement made me realize my assumptions. I listen more." (Student A) "Reflective discussions helped me understand exclusion." (Student B) "Journaling showed a student's empathy for a peer's struggles." (Lecturer A)
Enhanced Cultural Awareness Via Experiential Learning	Role-playing and cultural immersion deepened cultural awareness and adaptability.	"Role-playing a teacher showed how differences escalate." (Student E) "Sharing stories opened my eyes to our diversity." (Student F) "Role-playing helps students challenge assumptions." (Lecturer B)
Institutional Barriers to Phenomenological Teaching	Lack of training, large classes, and rigid curricula hindered implementation.	"I've never been trained in phenomenology. Lectures are easier." (Lecturer C) "Classes are too big for discussions." (Student I) "The curriculum is rigid, and resources are limited." (Lecturer D)

6. Discussion

6.1. Interpretation of quantitative findings

The quantitative results provide strong evidence that phenomenological teaching approaches significantly enhance intercultural competence among pre-service teachers in southwestern Nigerian colleges of education, outperforming traditional lecture-based methods across attitudes, knowledge, and skills. These findings align with Deardorff's (2023) process-oriented model, which posits that experiential and reflective pedagogies foster developmental progression in intercultural competence. The large effect sizes suggest that reflective journaling, role-playing, and dialogic practices create meaningful opportunities for students to engage with cultural diversity beyond rote learning.

In the southwestern Nigerian context—where classrooms reflect ethnic, linguistic, and religious pluralism—these results indicate that phenomenological methods equip pre-service teachers with practical tools for inclusive practice. However, while the differences are robust, the quasi-experimental design limits strict causal attribution; self-selection and unobserved variables may contribute. The findings resonate with global research on experiential learning in teacher education (De Hei et al., 2020; Yarychev, 2024) but highlight the particular value of such approaches in resource-constrained, highly diverse settings. They also underscore the need for institutional support to scale these methods sustainably.

6.2. Interpretation of qualitative findings

Qualitative data offer nuanced insights into how phenomenological teaching fosters intercultural competence while revealing systemic constraints. The theme of deepened cultural empathy through reflective practices aligns with Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on lived, embodied experience as a pathway to intersubjective understanding (Carman, 2019; Thorburn, 2025). Students and lecturers described reflective

exercises as creating safe spaces to confront biases and build patience—critical in Nigeria's multicultural classrooms.

The theme of enhanced cultural awareness via experiential learning supports Deardorff's skills dimension, showing how role-playing and immersion activities challenge assumptions and improve adaptability (De Hei et al., 2020; Otu, 2025). These practices appear especially effective in contexts where daily cultural encounters are common yet rarely reflected upon systematically.

The theme of institutional barriers—lack of training, large class sizes, rigid curricula—mirrors challenges documented in African higher education (Pinto, 2018; Akporhualarho et al., 2023). These structural factors limit phenomenological pedagogy's reach, suggesting that individual classroom innovations alone are insufficient without policy-level change. Overall, the qualitative findings complement the quantitative results, illustrating both transformative potential and practical hurdles in applying Western-derived frameworks to non-Western, communal educational realities.

6.3. Implications for teacher education

The combined findings have direct implications for teacher education in southwestern Nigeria and similar Global South contexts. Colleges should integrate structured reflective and experiential activities into curricula to build intercultural competence, prioritizing safe classroom environments for cultural dialogue. Faculty professional development programs are essential to address the identified training gap and build confidence in phenomenological methods (Standal, 2016; Matikainen, 2024). Curriculum designers should create flexible syllabi that accommodate experiential learning despite large classes and resource limits.

At a broader level, the study contributes to transnational discussions on inclusive teacher preparation, aligning with UNESCO priorities for culturally responsive education in diverse societies (UNESCO, 2020). By demonstrating phenomenological approaches' efficacy in an underrepresented African context, it offers transferable insights for other pluralistic, resource-constrained settings where traditional pedagogies dominate.

6.4. Limitations of the study

Several limitations should be noted. The quantitative sample (11–13% of the population) and qualitative sample ($n=15$) provide depth but limit generalizability across all southwestern Nigerian colleges. Self-reported survey and journal data may be subject to social desirability bias. The focus on 300-level students and southwestern Nigeria restricts applicability to other levels or regions. While classroom observations helped verify pedagogical classification, the design remains quasi-experimental, precluding full causal claims. These constraints suggest cautious interpretation, though triangulation and rigorous analysis enhance credibility.

6.5. Recommendations for practice and future research

Colleges of education should prioritize faculty training in phenomenological and experiential methods, develop modular curricula that embed reflective practices, and advocate for policy support to reduce class sizes and provide resources for interactive teaching (Webb & Welsh, 2019; Nwigwe, 2026). Policy-makers should fund professional development aligned with inclusive education goals.

Future research could examine long-term effects on graduates' classroom practices, conduct comparative studies across Nigerian regions or other African countries, and explore digital adaptations of phenomenological methods for large classes. Longitudinal and multi-site designs would further strengthen evidence on scalability in resource-limited contexts.

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