



Intercultural Reflection Journals as a Pedagogical Tool: Enhancing Cultural Awareness in Academic Speaking Classes

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study examines how intercultural reflection journals can support the development of students' intercultural awareness in academic speaking classes.

Methodology: Using an Ethnographic Classroom Study design, the research involved 18 EFL students at a private university. Data were gathered from intercultural reflection journals, classroom observations, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews, then examined through thematic analysis using coding, categorisation, and theme development.

Main Findings: The findings show that intercultural awareness develops gradually, moving from surface awareness toward deeper reflection. This process is shaped by classroom interaction and moments of tension, including discomfort and ambiguity.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The development is neither linear nor uniform across students. The study suggests that intercultural reflection journals are most effective when embedded in pedagogical practices that encourage dialogue, critical reflection, and meaning negotiation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, intercultural communication has come to be seen as a core competency in higher education worldwide, especially in the context of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) [1], [2] and the broader internationalisation of universities [3], [4]. As student mobility increases and classrooms become more diverse, the ability to understand, interpret, and respond to cultural differences is no longer a desirable extra; it has become an essential part of academic life. Yet being exposed to multicultural settings does not automatically foster deep intercultural awareness. Too often, diversity leads only to coexistence rather than to meaningful, reflective engagement.

Research has consistently shown that English-based learning environments can strengthen students' linguistic competence [5], [6]. Growth in the intercultural dimension, however, tends to be slower, uneven, and at times limited. Students may become more fluent in English without necessarily developing empathy [7], [8], perspective-taking [9], or the ability to critically navigate value differences [10], [11]. This points to a persistent gap between language development and intercultural development, a challenge that remains both conceptual and pedagogical within the field of intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

A similar paradox appears in research on international students and multicultural learning environments. Although students often express a willingness to engage across cultures, their actual interactions are frequently more limited than expected [12], [13]. Language barriers, cultural distance, and the pull of familiar social groups can make intercultural experiences feel shallow rather than transformative [14], [15]. In both classroom and campus life, then, intercultural learning does not simply happen on its own; it requires intentional pedagogical support.

This makes pedagogy especially important. The central question is no longer whether multicultural environments can support intercultural development, but how that development can be fostered in everyday teaching and learning, particularly in academic speaking classes. These classrooms are especially important because they are spaces where interaction, identity, and the negotiation of meaning happen directly. In practice, however, teaching still tends to prioritise fluency, accuracy, and presentation skills [16], [17], while reflective and intercultural dimensions often remain underdeveloped.

One promising way to address this gap is through intercultural reflection journals. As a reflective practice, journals give students space to articulate their experiences, interpret cultural differences, and build greater self-awareness in intercultural encounters [18], [19]. Unlike real-time classroom activities, they allow for a slower, deeper, and more personal process of meaning-making [20], [21]. Despite their long-standing role in language pedagogy, we still know relatively little about how intercultural reflection journals actually work as a mechanism for developing intercultural awareness.

Much of the existing research measures reflection through surveys or pre- and post-intervention scores [22], [23]. While such approaches can be useful, they often miss the internal processes through which students make meaning, respond to difference, and reshape their understanding of culture. Put differently, we still lack a clear understanding of how intercultural awareness is constructed in practice, especially within the shifting dynamics of classroom interaction. This points to the need for more contextual, process-oriented, and sensitive approaches to lived classroom practice.

From the perspective of intercultural communicative competence, intercultural awareness involves more than knowledge about other cultures. It also requires the capacity to reflect on one's own position, to understand others' perspectives, and to co-construct meaning in complex communicative situations [24], [25]. Because this process is situated, interactional, and socially mediated, understanding its development requires an approach that captures real classroom practices, student narratives, and the dynamics of interaction as they unfold.

This study, therefore, approaches intercultural reflection journals not simply as a pedagogical tool, but as a micro-space in which intercultural meaning-making takes place. By bringing together reflective practice and classroom interaction, the study explores how students construct, negotiate, and reshape their understanding of culture in academic speaking classes. In this view, reflection is not treated as a finished product, but as a social and discursive process grounded in classroom experience.

To examine this complexity, the study adopts an Ethnographic Classroom Study approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of learning practices in their natural context. The focus is not only on what students write in their journals, but also on how classroom experiences, interactions, and social conditions shape those reflections. In this way, the study helps bridge the gap between outcome-based research and more process-oriented understandings of intercultural learning.

More specifically, the study investigates how intercultural reflection journals contribute to students' intercultural awareness in academic speaking classes and how this reflective process is tied to their experiences of classroom interaction. By foregrounding practice and process, the study aims to contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of how intercultural competence develops, while also offering pedagogical insights for more reflective and context-sensitive language learning.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted an Ethnographic Classroom Study to explore how intercultural awareness takes shape through reflective practices in academic speaking classes. Rather than focusing primarily on measurable outcomes, the study traced processes of intercultural meaning-making as they emerged in the flow of everyday classroom interaction. The classroom was viewed not simply as a site of pedagogical intervention, but as a social space where experience, language, and reflection came together to shape cultural understanding. An ethnographic approach enabled examination of learning dynamics in a more contextualised and nuanced way. The study was based on the view that intercultural awareness does not develop instantly or in a straight line; instead, it grows through situated, reflective, and often uneven processes. For that reason, the research drew on key principles of classroom ethnography, including prolonged engagement, naturalistic observation, and thick description. At a conceptual level, the design brought together reflective pedagogy and intercultural communication. Intercultural reflection journals served both as a pedagogical intervention and as the main source of data for examining students' developing awareness. With its interpretive orientation, the study aimed to show how intercultural awareness

emerges in practice, helping to bridge the gap between outcome-based research and more process-oriented understandings of intercultural learning.

2.2. Participants

The study involved 18 undergraduate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students enrolled in an academic speaking course at a private university. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, as the class offered a particularly rich setting for intercultural engagement and was explicitly designed to strengthen students' academic communication in English within a socially and culturally diverse learning environment. For an Ethnographic Classroom Study, this number was considered appropriate because it enabled prolonged engagement, close observation, and sufficient traceability at the individual level. All participants had completed at least one semester of academic English instruction before taking the course. In terms of language proficiency, they were relatively similar, falling within the intermediate-to-upper-intermediate range based on internal placement. At the same time, they differed in the extent of their intercultural exposure, which added important variation to the study. All 18 students formed the broader participant pool. Within that group, 6–8 students were identified as key participants for more in-depth analysis, based on the depth of their reflective engagement, the consistency of their journal writing, and the range of their responses to intercultural experiences.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	n	%
Total participants	Undergraduate EFL students	18	100
Gender	Female	9	50.0
	Male	9	50.0
Year of study	First year	4	22.2
	Second year	8	44.4
	Third year	6	33.3
English proficiency	Intermediate	10	55.6
	Upper-intermediate	8	44.4
Role in analysis	General participant pool	18	100
	Key participants (pseudonym)	7	38.9
	Aira; Bima; Citra; Fajar; Intan; Luthfi; Karin		

2.3. Materials and Data Collection Procedures

This study drew on several complementary data sources to explore how intercultural awareness developed in academic speaking classes. In keeping with an Ethnographic Classroom Study, the data were viewed not simply as indicators of learning outcomes, but as traces of social practice unfolding through everyday classroom interaction. The main source of data was a set of intercultural reflection journals written regularly over one semester. Embedded in classroom activities, these journals invited students to reflect on experiences involving differences in perspectives, values, and cultural practices. As such, they served both as a pedagogical tool and as the primary means of tracing students' processes of intercultural meaning-making. To situate these reflections within their broader classroom context, the study also included ongoing classroom observations, recorded through fieldnotes that captured interactional dynamics, group discussions, presentations, and moments when cultural issues surfaced either explicitly or implicitly. Selected sessions were also audio-recorded to preserve interactional details that fieldnotes alone could not fully capture, especially during episodes of meaning negotiation, cultural tension, or shifts in perspective. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected key participants midway through and again at the end of the semester to deepen understanding of students' reflective processes. Data collection spanned one full learning cycle, approximately 12-14 weeks, enabling the tracing of the development of reflection over time within naturally occurring classroom practices.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study took an interpretive, multi-layered approach, consistent with the Ethnographic Classroom Study design and its emphasis on understanding process rather than simply reporting outcomes. Analysis began alongside data collection and continued throughout the study, allowing patterns, tensions, and shifts in meaning to be traced as they emerged within classroom interaction. The central unit of analysis was episodes of intercultural meaning-making, moments in which students encountered, reflected on, or negotiated cultural difference. These episodes were identified across reflection journals, classroom observations, and audio recordings, so that each finding could be interpreted in relation to the interactional context in which it occurred. The analytic process began with initial coding, particularly of the intercultural reflection journals, using open coding to identify recurring patterns such as awareness of difference, perspective-taking, emotional response, and self-positioning. This was followed by focused coding, in which these early codes were grouped into broader

categories informed by the framework of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The analysis then moved to a thematic analysis to explain how intercultural awareness developed in practice. The study employed data triangulation, reflexive memoing, peer debriefing, and careful attention to negative cases to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis. These strategies supported a more nuanced and credible account of how reflective practice and classroom interaction shaped students' intercultural awareness.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Surface Awareness: Recognising Cultural Difference without Deep Engagement

In the early stages of the study, intercultural reflection journals revealed a pattern best described as surface-level awareness: students noticed cultural differences. Still, they had not yet moved into deeper reflection. Most journal entries centred on descriptive observations, including differences in speaking style, discussion habits, and communication patterns in academic speaking classes. In these reflections, students often positioned themselves as observers who registered the “uniqueness” of other cultures, yet rarely went on to consider the underlying contexts or perspectives that shape those differences. In many cases, reflection remained at the level of noticing rather than developing into meaning-making. This suggests that exposure to diversity, even in an interactive classroom, does not, by itself, foster critical intercultural awareness.

“I noticed that some students prefer to speak directly and confidently, while others are more quiet and avoid eye contact. I think this is just their personality and culture, but I didn't think more about it.” (Aira, Reflection Week 2). “In group discussion, some students always interrupt and give opinions quickly. For me, it feels a bit rude, but maybe in their culture it is normal. I just accept it as a difference.” (Bima, Reflection Week 3)

These excerpts show that while students were capable of recognising differences, their reflections largely remained within the bounds of passive acceptance or surface acceptance. There was little sign of deeper perspective-taking or critical self-reflection, and the broader social or communicative significance of these differences was rarely explored. As such, this phase marks an important entry point into the development of intercultural awareness, while also underscoring the limits of reflection when it is not yet supported by more sustained experience and dialogic engagement.

Classroom observations further supported these patterns of surface-level engagement. During early group discussions, many students responded to cultural differences by briefly acknowledging them without delving into deeper exploration. Fieldnotes showed that students often used generalised expressions such as “different culture” or “different habit” without elaborating on the social meanings behind these differences. Similarly, interview data revealed that several students initially viewed intercultural communication primarily as an opportunity to encounter “unique” practices rather than as a process requiring critical reflection. One participant explained that they preferred “just accepting differences” because they felt uncertain about discussing sensitive cultural issues in English. These observational and interview findings reinforce the journal data by showing that early intercultural awareness was largely characterised by recognition without deeper interpretive engagement.

The findings also indicate that students did not develop intercultural awareness in the same way or at the same pace. While some students gradually moved toward deeper reflection, others remained at the descriptive recognition level throughout the early stages of the course. This variation appears to be shaped by several interconnected factors. Students with prior exposure to culturally diverse interactions, whether through social media, multilingual communities, or prior educational experiences, tended to demonstrate greater openness and interpretive flexibility in their reflections. In contrast, students with less extensive intercultural exposure often relied on superficial cultural observations and hesitated to examine their own assumptions critically. Differences in reflective engagement were also influenced by students' linguistic confidence and their willingness to participate in classroom interaction. Some students appeared reluctant to elaborate on sensitive cultural issues because they were uncertain about how to express disagreement or critical perspectives appropriately in English. Others engaged more actively in dialogic classroom exchanges, which provided richer experiences for reflective meaning-making. These findings suggest that the development of intercultural awareness is not solely determined by exposure to diversity itself, but also by students' prior experiences, communicative confidence, and level of participation in socially mediated reflection.

3.2. From Description to Perspective-Taking: The Emergence of Reflective Depth

As the study progressed, the analysis revealed a noticeable shift from surface awareness to reflective depth, with students moving beyond simply describing differences to engage in perspective-taking. At this stage, intercultural reflection journals were no longer limited to observation alone; instead, they started to reflect students' efforts to understand the reasons behind other people's behaviours, values, and ways of thinking. Students began to question their initial assumptions and relate their interactional experiences to broader cultural

contexts. This shift was often prompted by classroom discussions, speaking tasks, and feedback from both the teacher and peers, all of which encouraged them to reconsider events from multiple perspectives. Reflection, in turn, became less a record of experience and more a space for negotiating meaning.

“As I first I thought some students were rude because they speak directly, but after our discussion I realized they are just being clear and efficient. Maybe in my culture we value politeness differently, so I misunderstood their intention.” (Citra, Reflection Week 6). *“When my friend disagreed with me openly, I felt uncomfortable. But after thinking about it, I see that it is actually a good way to exchange ideas. I start to understand that different communication styles are not wrong, just different.”* (Fajar, Reflection Week 7)

These excerpts point to the emergence of perspective-taking: students were not only noticing differences, but also reworking their understanding by taking others' viewpoints into account. At the same time, a growing sense of self-reflexivity became visible, as they recognised that their interpretations were shaped by their own cultural backgrounds. This marked an important turning point in the development of intercultural awareness, with reflection moving beyond recognition toward a more critical, contextual, and interpretive process.

Evidence from classroom observations and interviews further illustrates this movement toward perspective-taking. As the semester progressed, classroom discussions became more dialogic, with students increasingly asking follow-up questions, clarifying meanings, and responding to peers' viewpoints rather than merely presenting their own opinions. Observation notes documented several instances in which students reconsidered earlier assumptions after listening to classmates' contrasting experiences. Interview data also showed that students became more aware of how their own cultural backgrounds influenced interpretation. One participant reflected that earlier misunderstandings were not caused simply by “other people's culture,” but also by their own expectations and communication habits. These findings strengthen the journal analysis by demonstrating that perspective-taking developed not only in writing but also through classroom interaction.

3.3. Moments of Tension: Discomfort, Ambiguity, and Self-Repositioning

The findings also suggest that the development of intercultural awareness is rarely smooth or straightforward. Instead, it is often shaped by moments of tension that bring discomfort, ambiguity, and a need to reposition oneself. At this point, students were doing more than simply noticing differences; they were beginning to confront clashes between their own values and the communicative practices they encountered. Such tensions often surfaced in ordinary classroom situations, including debates, contrasting ways of expressing criticism, or disagreements during group discussions. Rather than avoiding these uncomfortable moments, some students began treating them as opportunities for reflection, using them to question their own assumptions. In this way, discomfort became not just an obstacle but a meaningful catalyst in the process of intercultural learning.

“I felt really uncomfortable when my ideas were challenged directly. In my mind, it felt like a personal attack. But later I realized maybe they were not attacking me, just questioning the idea. It made me think about how I react to disagreement.” (Intan, Reflection Week 8). *“There was a moment when I didn't know how to respond because I was confused. I wanted to be polite, but also needed to express my opinion. I realized I don't really know how to balance these in different cultural contexts.”* (Laila, Reflection Week 9)

These excerpts illustrate how ambiguity and uncertainty can open up space for deeper reflection. Students began to see the limits of their own interpretive frameworks and to recognise the need to adapt their communication practices. This often led to self-repositioning, as they stopped viewing themselves as fixed representatives of a single culture and instead began to see themselves as individuals capable of negotiating meaning more flexibly across contexts. Taken together, this phase marks an important move from cognitive recognition toward a more critical, adaptive form of reflective awareness.

Classroom observations revealed that moments of tension frequently emerged during spontaneous interaction rather than through planned instructional activities alone. For example, fieldnotes documented situations in which students became visibly hesitant, silent, or uncertain when encountering disagreement during discussions on sensitive social or cultural topics. In several observed interactions, students paused before responding or shifted from direct disagreement to more cautious language strategies. Interview findings further suggest that these moments of discomfort played an important role in prompting reflection. Some students described feeling “confused,” “awkward,” or “afraid of misunderstanding others,” particularly when communicating with peers whose perspectives differed significantly from their own. Yet many also explained that such experiences later encouraged them to rethink their assumptions while writing their journals. These triangulated findings indicate that discomfort and ambiguity were not peripheral experiences, but central mechanisms through which deeper intercultural awareness began to develop.

3.4. Reflection as Pedagogically Mediated: The Role of Classroom Interaction

The findings show that intercultural reflection does not develop in isolation through writing alone; rather, it is shaped in important ways by the dynamics of classroom interaction. In this context, reflection journals serve as an extension of the classroom experience, with discussions, peer feedback, and speaking tasks as key prompts for deeper reflection. Analysis of fieldnotes and audio recordings shows that interactional moments, especially those marked by disagreement or meaning negotiation, often serve as the starting point for more critical reflection in the journals. Put simply, intercultural awareness is not only “written” but actively constructed through participation in communicative practice. This highlights an important pedagogical point: meaningful reflection depends not merely on assigning reflective tasks, but on creating interactional conditions that make such reflection possible.

“During the class discussion, my friend said my idea was too general and asked me to explain more. At that moment, I felt a bit challenged, but later I realized it helped me think deeper. When I wrote my journal, I could see how that moment changed my understanding.” (Karin, Reflection Week 10). *“After listening to different opinions in class, I started to see the topic from many sides. Before, I only focused on my own perspective. The discussion made me realize that there is no single correct way to think.”* (Bima, Reflection Week 11)

These excerpts underscore the close relationship between interactional experience and reflective process. Reflection does not arise from instruction alone; it grows out of social experiences that are later revisited and reinterpreted in writing. Teacher mediation also appears to play an important role, particularly through open-ended questions and feedback that invite students to think more deeply. In this sense, intercultural reflection journals are most effective when embedded in a pedagogical environment that encourages dialogue, difference, and collective meaning-making.

Observation data further demonstrate the important mediating role of classroom interaction in shaping reflective development. Fieldnotes showed that students’ journal reflections were often connected directly to specific classroom events, particularly peer discussions, presentation feedback, and teacher questioning strategies. In several observed sessions, the teacher encouraged students to elaborate on differing viewpoints by asking open-ended questions such as why certain communicative behaviors might be interpreted differently across contexts. Interviews with students also revealed that reflective writing became easier and more meaningful after interactive classroom exchanges, as these interactions provided concrete experiences to think about and reinterpret. Rather than emerging independently through writing alone, reflection appeared to develop through a recursive relationship between interaction, dialogue, and subsequent meaning-making in the journals.

3.5. Reframing Self and Others: The Development of Intercultural Awareness

At a more advanced stage, the findings point to a process of reframing self and others, reflected in a shift in how students understood both themselves and those around them as part of developing intercultural awareness. Reflection was no longer focused primarily on “their differences.” Instead, students began to recognise that their own perspectives were also partial and shaped by culture. Communication, in turn, came to be seen less as a simple exchange of information and more as an ongoing process of negotiation. At this stage, a more developed form of self-reflexivity became visible, marked by students’ growing ability to question personal assumptions, acknowledge bias, and adapt their interactional strategies with greater flexibility. Even so, this development was not uniform: some students showed more evident transformation, while others appeared to remain in transition.

“I used to think my way of communicating was the most polite and appropriate. But now I realize it is just one way among many. I start to question why I judge others based on my own standards.” (Intan, Reflection Week 12). *“Now I feel more open when I talk with others. I don’t try to ‘correct’ them anymore, but try to understand first. I think communication is not about being right, but about understanding each other.”* (Luthfi, Reflection Week 13)

These excerpts reflect a fundamental change in how students make sense of intercultural interaction. Rather than treating themselves as the central point of reference, they began to see themselves as part of a broader system of meaning. At the same time, the findings suggest that intercultural awareness develops unevenly, with some students still clinging to more fixed interpretations. What emerges, then, is not simply an endpoint but a reminder that intercultural learning is a layered, ongoing process shaped by sustained reflection over time.

This process of reframing the self and others was also evident in classroom interactions and interview narratives. Observation data showed that some students gradually became more flexible in responding to disagreement and more attentive to how their words might be interpreted by others. Compared to the earlier stages of the course, later classroom discussions involved more negotiation, clarification, and collaborative meaning-making. Interview findings similarly reflected shifts in students’ self-positioning. Several participants explained that they had begun to realise that their own ways of communicating were culturally shaped rather than universally

“normal.” Others described becoming more cautious about making immediate judgments toward unfamiliar communicative styles. These findings reinforce the journal data by showing that intercultural awareness was reflected not only in written reflection but also in students’ evolving interactional practices within the classroom.

3.6. Asymmetrical Development

The findings of this study indicate that the development of intercultural awareness through intercultural reflection journals is non-linear, processual, and deeply shaped by the context of classroom interaction. Looking across the themes, a consistent pattern emerges: students move from surface awareness toward reflective depth, but this progression is far from automatic or uniform. While some students demonstrated significant shifts in perspective-taking and self-reflexivity, others remained within more descriptive or observational modes of reflection. The asymmetrical nature of this development appears to be influenced by several interconnected factors, including students’ prior intercultural experiences, their level of engagement in classroom interaction, and the ways they approached reflective practice itself.

Students with prior exposure to cultural diversity, whether through multilingual environments, online intercultural communication, or earlier educational experiences, generally appeared more capable of interpreting cultural differences in contextual and relational ways. These students tended to move more quickly beyond surface observation and showed greater willingness to question their own assumptions. In contrast, students with more limited intercultural exposure often relied on fixed interpretations and required longer periods of interaction before engaging in deeper reflection. Differences also emerged in classroom participation. Students who actively engaged in discussions, negotiated meaning with peers, and responded to moments of disagreement or ambiguity often produced more critical and dialogic reflections in their journals [26], [27]. Meanwhile, students who participated less frequently tended to produce reflections that remained descriptive and less self-reflexive.

The findings suggest that reflective development itself was shaped by differences in students’ reflective orientation. Some students approached journal writing as a space for personal exploration and critical questioning, whereas others treated it primarily as a task of reporting classroom events. This indicates that intercultural reflection journals do not operate uniformly across learners; rather, their effectiveness depends on how students interact with the reflective process and how classroom experiences are transformed into meaningful reflection. Consequently, asymmetrical development should not be viewed as a limitation of intercultural learning, but as evidence that intercultural awareness develops through individualised, socially mediated, and context-dependent trajectories.

This study shows that intercultural reflection journals serve a function far beyond that of a simple pedagogical tool. Rather, they operate as a site of intercultural meaning-making in which intercultural awareness develops gradually, unevenly, and in close relation to the dynamics of classroom interaction. Although students appeared to move from surface awareness toward reflective depth, this shift was never automatic. Instead, it emerged through experience, moments of tension, and interactional processes that created opportunities for meaning negotiation [28], [29]. In this sense, intercultural learning cannot be understood as a straightforward outcome of exposure or reflective writing alone [2], [30]; it is better seen as a socially mediated process that unfolds through sustained engagement over time [31], [32].

From a theoretical perspective, the study adds to current understandings of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) by framing intercultural awareness not as a fixed individual trait, but as a contextual and discursive process. The movement from description to perspective-taking, together with the emergence of self-repositioning, suggests that reflection plays an important role in helping students internalise intercultural experience. Just as importantly, the findings show that discomfort and ambiguity can act as productive triggers for critical reflection. In other words, intercultural awareness may grow not through smooth progression [33], [34], but through moments of tension that unsettle existing assumptions and open space for rethinking [8], [35].

These findings also align with earlier research that has questioned whether exposure alone is sufficient to foster intercultural competence. In line with studies on EMI and international student mobility [1], [4], the present study shows that multicultural settings do not automatically lead to meaningful intercultural engagement. At the same time, it goes beyond outcome-oriented perspectives by showing how reflection, when supported pedagogically, can connect lived experience with deeper understanding [36], [37]. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by illuminating the micro-level processes through which intercultural awareness is formed in classroom life.

The implications are clear for pedagogy. If intercultural reflection journals are to be effective, their value lies not in the format itself. Still, in the way they are embedded in classroom interaction, teacher mediation, and dialogic spaces, where difference can be openly explored. This suggests that teaching should move beyond isolated reflective tasks and instead create learning designs that link reflection with authentic interactive experience, especially in academic speaking classes where students continually negotiate ideas, perspectives, and identities.

At the same time, these findings need to be read within the limits of the study. The research was conducted in a single EFL classroom at a private university, and the patterns identified here are therefore shaped by a specific institutional, participant, and instructional context. In addition, because reflection journals served as the main data

source, some cognitive and emotional processes may have remained invisible, particularly when students were unable or unwilling to express them fully in writing. The findings, then, are intended to provide rich contextual insight rather than broad generalisation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that intercultural reflection journals are more than just a pedagogical tool; they function as a site of intercultural meaning-making where intercultural awareness develops gradually, unevenly, and through interaction. Rather than serving simply as a writing task, reflection becomes a space in which students notice difference, experience discomfort, engage in perspective-taking, and slowly reposition themselves in relation to “the Other.” The findings, therefore, suggest that intercultural awareness does not emerge automatically from exposure or reflective tasks alone, but rather through sustained participation in social practices that enable ongoing negotiation of meaning. At a conceptual level, the study contributes to the understanding of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) by highlighting reflection as a central mechanism in intercultural learning, understood here as a contextual and discursive process. In practical terms, the value of reflection journals lies not simply in the format itself, but in how they are woven into classroom interaction and supported through pedagogical mediation. For that reason, academic speaking instruction should be designed not only to strengthen language proficiency but also to create reflective spaces where students can engage critically and thoughtfully in intercultural communication. Future research could examine how intercultural reflection develops in other settings, including more diverse classrooms or more intensive EMI contexts. Longer-term longitudinal work would also be valuable in showing whether gains in intercultural awareness are sustained over time. Finally, incorporating approaches such as interaction analysis or multimodal data may offer an even fuller picture of how reflection and interaction work together to shape meaning in intercultural communication.

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USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The author declares that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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