

Reflective Practice of a Philippine Cultural Exchange Teacher in a United States Classroom

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Abstract

While international teachers in the United States often encounter adjustment challenges related to language nuances, varied classroom management expectations, and the need for building student-teacher rapport, there remains a need for reflective inquiry into the specific instructional adaptations required within the English Language Arts curriculum. This reflective study explores the instructional experiences of a cultural exchange teacher from the Philippines teaching English Language Arts at a public high school in the United States. The primary purpose is to engage in reflective practice to enhance teaching and to gain a deeper understanding of classroom cultural dynamics, which are essential for adapting to the American educational context. Using a qualitative approach, open-ended survey responses were collected from Grade 9 students as part of a professional development initiative. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring ideas in student feedback, providing meaningful insight into instructional practice. Key findings focused on student perceptions of clarity in lesson explanations, engagement in classroom activities, and the impact of the teacher's personal connection. The study discusses these findings in relation to existing literature on reflective practice and culturally responsive teaching, providing helpful insights on navigating United States classroom expectations. Significance includes practical suggestions for fellow cultural exchange educators and pinpoint areas for future research into cross-cultural teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: reflective practice, culturally responsive teaching, cultural exchange, cross-cultural teaching

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Introduction

Cultural exchange teaching offers a significant opportunity to explore and improve instructional practices through a global lens. As international teachers increasingly populate U.S. classrooms, research has documented recurring adjustment challenges related to language use, classroom management, and student-teacher rapport (Cho, 2010). These difficulties become even harder when teachers are learning and adjusting to a new curriculum and communication styles that may differ significantly from those in their home country. This study examines how educators can address cultural gaps, highlighting the need to bridge them to ensure equitable and effective instruction. By examining the experience of a Filipino teacher navigating the American public high school system, this research provides a context for examining reflective practice. This process involves deep pedagogical inquiry, drawing insights from student feedback to refine the approach to teaching English Language Arts.

A central aspect of this cultural exchange involves two distinct classroom cultures: the highly structured, teacher-directed environment commonly associated with Philippine schools and the more student-centered, expressive norms often emphasized in American secondary classrooms. In the Philippine educational system, teacher authority remains a culturally valued expectation, making learner-centered approaches difficult to implement and potentially clash with traditional expectations. Hence, participation is often understood as teacher-led recitation or a specific question-and-answer format rather than through open peer dialogue. Although the Philippine K to 12 curriculum reform aims to modernize instruction, implementation tensions persist because classroom practices are still deeply rooted in structured participation. Even when educators endorse student-centered ideals, they often report friction between these collaborative practices and the traditional standardized testing expectations common in the region.

Conversely, United States secondary classrooms are increasingly defined by dialogic, discussion-forward instruction that prioritizes student voice and peer exchange. In these settings, academically productive talk is linked to interactive formats and collaborative reasoning rather than frontal teaching or individual task completion. While structure is present in both educational contexts, the primary difference lies in who drives the classroom discourse: the United States student-centered ideal emphasizes shifting participation from teacher-controlled interactions toward student-guided participation. Such differences significantly influence an educator's ability to adapt professionally. Through systematic reflection, as advocated by scholars such as (2017) and Schon (1983), these educational systems are linked, allowing educators to align their instructional practices with the specific needs and cultural expectations of their students. This paper, therefore, uses student feedback as a primary lens for reflection, identifying which instructional adaptations most effectively foster clarity, engagement, and personal connection in a cross-cultural setting.

Literature Review

Foundational Theories of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice provides a rigorous framework for educators to critically examine their experiences and systematically improve their instructional delivery. This study is grounded in Brookfield's (2017) four lenses of critical reflection: self, students, colleagues, and literature. These lenses allow an educator to move beyond subjective assumptions by incorporating external perspectives, such as "students' eyes," into their pedagogical development. By looking

through the “students’ eyes,” the educator can move beyond subjective self-assessments to identify specific misalignments between their traditional training and their students' cultural expectations. Furthermore, Schon’s (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner supports an adaptive process of learning through teaching, where the educator engages in “reflection-on-action” to gain new insights into their practice.

This theoretical cycle is made more concrete in Kolb’s (1984) Learning Cycle, which consists of four distinct stages: concrete active experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and active experimentation. In the context of the cultural exchange educator, the “concrete experience” involves the daily delivery of English Language Arts instruction in a United States classroom. The “observation and reflection” phase begins with the systematic collection of student survey data. “Abstract conceptualization” occurs when the teacher synthesizes this feedback with theoretical models of culturally responsive teaching, and “active experimentation” involves the subsequent refinement of pacing, scaffolding, and rapport-building strategies. Through this recurring process, international educators can transform routine classroom encounters into formal opportunities for professional growth.

Culturally Responsive Teaching as an Adaptive Framework

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) provides the essential pedagogical framework for international educators to bridge the gap between their home culture and the American classroom. As defined by Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching involves utilizing the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective. This pedagogical approach is built on the premise that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within students’ lived experiences and frames of reference, they are more personally meaningful, more engaging, and more easily and thoroughly learned. For the international educator, this requires a transition toward “culturally sustaining pedagogy,” which goes beyond mere accommodation to actively support and sustain learners' diverse identities.

Such a transition is significant because, as Sharma and Phillion (2020) suggest, international teachers must navigate the complexities of global teaching within local United States classrooms where students' interactional histories differ significantly from the teacher's home country. By acknowledging and incorporating these diverse cultural expectations into instructional strategies, the educator fosters a responsive learning environment that supports both the learners’ academic and emotional needs. Furthermore, this framework aligns with the research of Zhao and Green (2022), who emphasize that emotional intelligence and empathy are instrumental in shaping meaningful relationships for international teachers. The application of culturally responsive teaching allows cultural exchange educators to move beyond a “one size fits all” instructional model and instead develop adaptations that resonate with the expressive, student-centered norms of the American secondary setting.

Teaching Across Classroom Cultures

A primary objective of this literature review is to provide explicit international connections regarding the transition from the Philippine educational system to the United States. In the Philippines, “teacher authority” is a culturally valued norm that often positions the educator as a central figure of hierarchy. Recent scholarship notes that while learner-centered reforms have been introduced, they often clash with traditional expectations of the teacher’s role. Ethnographic research further suggests that teacher authority in such contexts is frequently

enacted as a form of care and responsibility, rather than control, complicating simplistic interpretations of teacher-centered instruction (Del Valle, 2022). Consequently, participation in many Philippine classrooms is understood as “structured participation” or teacher-led recitation rather than authentic peer dialogue. Wonder (2021) characterizes this as a recitation format focused on teacher-generated prompts and limited peer-to-peer interaction. While the Philippine K to 12 curriculum reform, as discussed by Barrot (2023), frames modernization toward student-centeredness and making students future-ready, implementation tensions persist as traditional teacher-centered habits remain deeply rooted in classroom practice. Recent qualitative research on Filipino senior high school classrooms further indicates that while student-centered assessment practices are increasingly emphasized in policy, classroom implementation often remains constrained by established teacher-led routines and accountability pressures (Paderes et al., 2025).

Comparative studies of international teachers in the United States highlight the complexity of these transitions. Sun (2019) observed that Chinese exchange teachers in American high schools face significant hurdles in navigating varied classroom expectations and establishing meaningful student-teacher rapport. These educators must identify successful professional strategies to bridge the gap between their home country's pedagogical norms and the expressive, student-centered ideals of the American system. Similarly, Sharma and Phillion (2020) emphasize the unique professional hurdles faced by international educators navigating global teaching within local U.S. classrooms. United States secondary classrooms prioritize dialogic, discussion-forward instruction that emphasizes student voice and collaborative reasoning. Gutentag et al. (2022) distinguish this from “frontal teaching,” noting that academically productive talk in the American context is associated with interactive formats in which students drive the discourse. This shift is not merely a lack of structure but a change in who drives the participation. As Decristan et al. (2023) suggest, the American student-centered ideal focuses on shifting discourse from teacher-controlled interactions toward student-guided participation, which has been consistently linked to improved learning outcomes.

Organizational Challenges and the Role of Support Systems

Recent scholarship has identified that the success of reflective practice is often influenced by the school's supportive organizational culture. In an exploration of teacher educators, Akram and Mehmood (2023) found that while many educators value student feedback, they are often reluctant to use reflective practices if they perceive a lack of mutual trust or administrative support. Their study revealed that challenges such as a “less supportive organizational culture” can hinder the development of a reflection system. This underscores the necessity for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which provide the framework required for teachers to share professional experiences with colleagues and act on student feedback without fear of negative evaluation. When schools provide formal administrative training and trust, as recommended by Akram and Mehmood (2023), teachers are more likely to use reflective tools productively within their professional culture.

Using Qualitative Student Feedback and Metacognition

The integration of metacognitive strategies is a critical component of professional adaptation, as it requires educators to assess, monitor, and reflect on their own performance. Research by Browne et al. (2022) demonstrated that while quantitative measures may suggest general satisfaction, qualitative feedback is often required to expose significant gaps in communication and interaction. Their findings indicated that instructors frequently perceive their own

preparedness as positive, while students simultaneously feel a lack of clear communication or pedagogical effectiveness. Therefore, educators must utilize frequent reflective dialogue to bridge the gap between their own self-perceptions and the “students’ eyes” lens. By incorporating culturally sustaining pedagogy and focusing on emotional intelligence, international teachers can foster responsive learning environments that support both the learners’ academic and emotional needs.

The necessity of these practices became even more evident during the global shift toward virtual and hybrid instruction, which required even more intense metacognitive monitoring. Qualitative feedback is uniquely equipped to expose the “significant gaps in communication and pedagogical effectiveness” that emerge during cultural transitions. This process enables teachers to implement metacognitive strategies by assessing and monitoring their own performance to bridge these pedagogical gaps in real time. The study by Browne et al. (2022) concluded that educators must engage in frequent reflective dialogue to better understand student needs and perceptions, as it fosters a more learner-centered environment.

Methodology

Research Setting and Questions

This study adopted a reflective practice approach, treating the classroom as both a site of inquiry and professional growth. This methodical choice was informed by scholarship emphasizing that reflective practice allows educators to gain new insights into their own practice. The data collection took place within a school-based Professional Learning Community (PLC), providing the institutional support identified as vital for effective reflective practice. In this study, the PLC addressed potential barriers of mistrust by integrating the research into an initiative overseen by the school’s Curriculum and Instruction Coach. Specifically, the study utilized metacognitive strategies to assess and monitor performance through qualitative student feedback. To guide this inquiry, the study addressed the following specific research questions:

1. How do Grade 9 students perceive the clarity and accessibility of instruction provided by a cultural exchange teacher?
2. What types of engaging and interactive activities do students identify as most effective for their learning in an English Language Arts context?
3. In what ways does the development of a personal teacher-student connection influence the classroom environment for these students?

Open-ended survey questions were used to elicit student perceptions of instructional clarity, engagement, and teacher–student connection. These student-centered questions were designed as instruments for teacher reflection through Brookfield’s students’ lens, making students’ perceptions the basis for refining instruction.

Participant Selection and Ethics

The participants were Grade 9 English Language Arts students in a United States public high school who participated on a voluntary basis. Ethical conduct was followed in accordance with institutional research guidelines to ensure the protection of and respect for participants’ rights. All participants were informed of their right to provide honest feedback without academic consequences. The school’s Curriculum and Instruction Coach administered the qualitative survey independently to ensure participant anonymity and maintain objectivity. This

procedural layer provided a necessary separation between the teacher and the students to encourage honest feedback while maintaining the integrity of the data collection process. The coach functioned as the primary safeguard for objectivity, mitigating the social desirability bias that might occur if the teacher personally collected the data.

Detailed 5-Step Thematic Analysis Process

The collected data from the open-ended survey responses were subjected to a rigorous 5-step thematic analysis:

1. **Initial Reading:** A careful reading of all open-ended survey responses to gain a holistic understanding of student narratives. The researcher engaged in multiple readings of raw feedback from participants S1, S2, S3, and S4 to immerse themselves in the “student voice.”
2. **Coding:** Generating initial codes from the raw text by identifying recurring concepts and keywords. Codes included phrases like “breaking down,” “group work,” “cares,” “intelligent,” and “fun.” For example, the phrase “breaks it down in sections” from S1 was coded for structured delivery, while “makes it fun” from S2 was coded for engagement.
3. **Categorizing:** Organizing these codes into broader candidate themes based on student needs and cultural expectations. This involved grouping codes like “group work,” “quizzes,” and “involved” into a category focused on active participation.
4. **Refining Themes:** Synthesizing the data into the primary themes of Clarity, Engagement, and Personal Connection. This step involved ensuring that each theme was distinct and supported by multiple narrative data points. For instance, the theme of Clarity was solidified by feedback from students like S1, S5, S6, and S13.
5. **Linking Findings:** Connecting the refined themes back to the research questions and theoretical frameworks of Brookfield (2017) and Kolb (1984) to explain the transition from hierarchical traditions to dialogic instruction. To resolve discrepancies, the researcher consulted with the Curriculum and Instruction Coach to maintain an objective reflection.

Findings

Table 1

Thematic Analysis of Student Feedback on English Language Arts Instruction

Theme	Description	Sample Codes	Selected Student Feedback
Clarity	Students value clear explanations and structured breakdowns of concepts.	Breaking down concepts Examples Pacing	“She breaks it down in sections.” “Giving examples helps me understand.” “When she explains things slower.”
Engagement	Students favor interactive, collaborative, and enjoyable learning experiences.	Fun and active learning Involvement Teamwork	“I like how sometimes she makes it fun.” “Gets us involved.” “Group work and quizzes.”
Personal Connection	Students expressed emotional needs and a desire for teacher support and dedication.	Care and support Positive demeanor Dedication	“She cares if we learn.” “She helps me and goes over it.” “Always keep fighting and keep doing the job you love.”

Theme 1: Clarity (Scaffolded Transparency)

The survey responses indicated that students favored clear and accessible lessons delivered by the teacher. A primary recurring idea involved the teacher’s systematic method of presenting material, which students described as “breaking everything down to a better understanding” and organizing information into distinct “sections.” This structured approach facilitated the comprehension of complex concepts; for example, S5 provided critical insight, noting that “I think she explains it in a formal and intelligent [way] its really easy to understand.” This observation suggests that the teacher’s “formal” tone, likely a vestige of the authoritative Philippine system, did not hinder understanding but actually enhanced the perceived “intelligence” and precision of the lessons. S5 further noted that while material “looks hard if you pay attention enough its kinda easy.”

Furthermore, student responses highlighted that lessons were delivered “calmly” and in a “step by step” manner, which made the instruction “very neat and very understandable.” To further aid comprehension, the teacher utilized visual aids and multimodal supports. Participants noted that the teacher frequently provided “examples on the board,” used “drawings” to show “how they affect stuff,” and incorporated “videos in class” and educational “posters on the wall.” While feedback was predominantly positive, some participants identified areas for refinement. S6 expressed appreciation for instances “when she explains things slower,” and S13 suggested

that the teacher should “repeat herself more.” These responses indicate that targeted adjustments to instructional pacing and repetition may support cross-cultural alignment.

Theme 2: Engagement (Active and Collaborative Learning)

The survey responses indicated that students favored active, collaborative, and enjoyable learning experiences. This signals a shift away from the teacher-led recitation models prevalent in the Philippines. Interactive activities were frequently highlighted as essential, with participants citing “partner work,” “group work and quizzes,” “teamwork,” and “group activities like as a whole class” as preferred methods. S3 specifically highlighted “quiz and group work” as the benefit of “having to do it with others,” validating the preference for peer interaction and collaborative activities. Interestingly, S3 also utilized the survey to share personal challenges, noting “I have ADHD and anxiety so it's stressful when I'm called on,” which underscores the importance of a safe, collaborative environment over high-pressure individual recitation.

The theme of “fun and active learning” emerged from feedback suggesting the teacher “makes it fun” or delivers lessons “in a fun way.” Students expressed a desire for continued engagement through “more fun activities” or digital platforms such as “quize”. Engagement was also closely linked to specific curriculum content; the study of “Romeo and Juliet” was frequently mentioned as particularly enjoyable, with S17 stating it was their “favorite subject we worked on.” Other students found engagement through tasks like “reading in quiet” or exploring “poems.” Finally, findings demonstrated that students felt personally invested, as evidenced by S4’s observation that the teacher successfully “gets us involved” in the daily learning process, moving away from “frontal teaching.”

Theme 3: Personal Connection (Care, Support, and Dedication)

The survey responses indicated that students perceived the teacher as a caring, supportive, and positive influence. The theme of “care and support” emerged from observations that the teacher “cares about our grades” and “cares if we learn.” S10 described an emotional adjustment involved, stating, “I apologize for acting rude at first. At that time I was so nervous & afraid that I did not know how to act, thank you with all my heart for helping me in my work. THANK YOU!!!!” This apology highlights the initial resistance students may feel toward an unfamiliar international teacher and the trust earned overtime through consistent support.

Recognition of the teacher's dedication was conveyed by S5, who encouraged the teacher to “always keep fighting and keep doing the job you love,” regardless of whether students were “disrespectful or loud.” Such messages highlight that in the United States, respect is not always readily given to teachers but must be actively earned. Additionally, a “positive demeanor” served as a recurring sub-theme, with participants describing the teacher as an “amazing person,” a “nice person,” and an “inspiring teacher that cares about our futures.” Several students expressed a desire to continue their studies with the teacher, identifying her as their “favorite teacher.” These findings suggest that cultivating personal connection fostered a responsive learning environment that supported both emotional and academic needs.

Discussion

Instructional Clarity as a Form of Scaffolding

Student perceptions of clarity point to a deeper instructional function than organizational neatness or pacing alone. The recurring observation that the teacher “breaks it down in sections” reflects the role of scaffolded transparency as a pedagogical bridge between the Philippine norm of teacher authority and the American expectation for student-guided participation. In Philippine classrooms, instructional clarity is traditionally achieved through formal exposition and teacher-led control of discourse. However, as Barrot (2023) and Wonder (2021) note, such clarity often operates within hierarchical participation structures.

In this study, students interpreted structured explanations not as restrictive but as enabling. S5’s characterization of the teacher’s delivery as “formal and intelligent” suggests that clarity retained its academic authority while becoming accessible through transparency. This finding aligns with Gay’s (2010) assertion that culturally responsive teaching requires educators to connect instructional delivery to students’ frames of reference. Here, scaffolded transparency allowed students to engage with rigor while maintaining a sense of autonomy. Requests for slower pacing and repetition further indicate that clarity in a cross-cultural classroom is not merely preferred but necessary for negotiating unfamiliar instructional styles. Through Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, these student responses served as catalysts for reflective adjustment, reinforcing clarity as a dynamic and culturally responsive practice.

Engagement as Student-Guided Classroom Talk

The theme of engagement reflected a movement from teacher-directed participation toward more student-guided classroom talk. Students consistently identified group work, collaborative quizzes, and peer interaction as central to their learning experience. This preference aligns with the student-centered discussion practices in the United States secondary classrooms, where academically productive talk is generated through shared reasoning rather than individual recitation.

Student feedback, such as S3’s emphasis on collaborative learning and his disclosure of anxiety related to being called on individually, underscores how engagement is inseparable from emotional safety. Decristan et al. (2023) emphasize that student-guided participation enhances learning outcomes, particularly when discourse structures accommodate diverse learner needs. In contrast to Philippine recitation models, where participation is often evaluated through accuracy and compliance, engagement in this classroom functioned as a culturally sustaining practice that redistributed authority and validated peer reasoning.

Engagement as Shared Responsibility

Another important interpretive layer emerges when engagement is viewed as a shared responsibility rather than a teacher-driven outcome. Student preferences for group work and collaborative activities suggest that engagement was experienced as something co-constructed with peers rather than delivered by the teacher. This reframing aligns with dialogic theories of learning, which emphasize that knowledge is generated through interaction rather than transmission.

S3's disclosure of anxiety related to individual performance highlights how traditional participation structures can unintentionally marginalize certain learners. In this context, engagement strategies that prioritized collaboration redistributed cognitive and emotional labor across the group. This not only increased participation but also normalized diverse ways of contributing. Decristan et al. (2023) note that student-guided participation supports deeper engagement when students feel that their voices carry weight within the learning process. The findings of this study affirm that such engagement requires intentional design, not spontaneity.

From a reflective standpoint, this insight underscores the importance of examining whose voices are amplified by instructional routines. By responding to student feedback, the teacher adjusted participation structures to sustain engagement while honoring individual differences. This demonstrates how reflective practice enables educators to move beyond generic engagement strategies toward context-responsive design.

Personal Connection and Development of Teacher Identity

Personal connection emerged as the most transformative dimension of instructional adaptation, showing how teacher identity was shaped through relationships with students. In Philippine classrooms, respect is often embedded within institutional hierarchy, with authority granted by position. In contrast, student narratives in this study suggest that respect in the American classroom must be actively earned through rapport, empathy, and consistency.

The narrative of S10 illustrates this shift with particular clarity. Her admission that initial rudeness stemmed from fear rather than defiance reframes resistance as an emotional response to unfamiliarity. Zhao and Green (2022) emphasize that emotional intelligence is essential for international teachers navigating relational expectations, a claim substantiated by the teacher's responsive approach in this study. By fostering a supportive environment, the teacher enabled students to adjust their own interaction styles, demonstrating that personal connection facilitates both emotional safety and academic engagement.

Student affirmations of care and dedication, including encouragement to persist despite classroom challenges, further indicate that respect was constructed relationally rather than assumed. This shift reflects a move away from reliance on positional authority toward a culturally responsive identity grounded in empathy. Such a transformation aligns with Gay's (2010) assertion that effective teaching must attend to students' emotional realities as integral to learning.

Institutional Support as a Bridge for Reflective Practice

The reflective journey documented in this study was not undertaken in isolation but was mediated by institutional support through the Professional Learning Community. The PLC provided a context in which reflection was normalized and risk was mitigated, enabling the teacher to act on student feedback without fear of negative evaluation. This finding aligns with Akram and Mehmood's (2023) assertion that reflective practice is constrained in environments lacking trust and administrative support.

By embedding the inquiry within a PLC and involving a Curriculum and Instruction Coach in data collection, the study used Brookfield's colleagues' lens alongside the students' eyes lens. This structure supported reflective experimentation and reinforced the classroom as a site of shared inquiry. The teacher's ability to respond to students' requests for clearer instruction,

increased collaboration, and relational support was supported by an organizational culture that viewed improvement as growth rather than deficiency.

This institutional support suggests that culturally responsive reflection is most effective when schools provide structures that enable reflective practice. Without such frameworks, international educators may struggle to translate insight into action, particularly when navigating unfamiliar evaluative systems.

Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on a single Grade 9 English Language Arts classroom, which constrains the transferability of findings to other educational contexts or cultural exchange settings. The reliance on self-reported student perceptions collected through an open-ended survey introduces potential response and social desirability biases, although anonymity and the involvement of a Curriculum and Instruction Coach helped mitigate these effects. In addition, the reflective design centers the teacher's interpretive lens, meaning that findings are shaped by the researcher's positionality and ongoing professional development. Finally, the study captures student perceptions at one point in time and does not account for longitudinal changes in instructional practices or student engagement. These limitations are consistent with reflective qualitative inquiry and do not diminish the study's contribution to understanding cross-cultural instructional adaptation.

Conclusion

The findings of this reflective practice study indicate that instructional clarity, student engagement, and personal connection function as interrelated elements in the professional adaptation of a cultural exchange teacher within a United States secondary classroom. These elements demonstrate how instructional approaches must be adjusted to align with students' participation patterns, communication expectations, and emotional needs. By systematically examining student feedback, the teacher treated the classroom as an ongoing site of inquiry, using student perspectives to identify and respond to cross-cultural differences in instructional practice.

One key finding is the importance of scaffolded instruction as a bridge between the structured instructional norms common in the Philippine context and the student-guided participation expected in many American classrooms. Students' appreciation for lessons that were "broken down in sections" suggests that clarity supported both comprehension and confidence when navigating unfamiliar instructional styles. Student engagement further reflected a shift toward collaborative learning and peer interaction, indicating that structured instruction can coexist with discussion-based and student-centered practices when participation is intentionally designed.

The development of personal connection highlights a shift from reliance on authority toward relationship-based classroom management. Student responses suggest that respect was established through consistency, support, and responsiveness rather than assumed through role alone. This reflective process was strengthened by the support of a Professional Learning Community, which enabled the teacher to respond to feedback within a culture of professional trust. Although limited to a single classroom context, the study indicates that reflective inquiry informed by student feedback can support instructional adaptation in cross-cultural teaching environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practice- and policy-oriented recommendations are offered to support cultural exchange educators and the institutions that host them. At the classroom level, international teachers may benefit from engaging in systematic metacognitive reflection by regularly collecting qualitative student feedback. Open-ended student narratives provide insights into clarity, engagement, and relational dynamics that standardized evaluation tools often fail to capture. Such feedback allows educators to identify subtle misalignments between instructional intent and student experience, particularly in cross-cultural settings where assumptions about participation and authority may differ.

In addition, educators transitioning from hierarchical instructional traditions should intentionally employ scaffolded instruction as an adaptive strategy. Breaking down lessons into clearly articulated segments, modeling thinking processes, and revisiting key concepts through repetition and pacing adjustments can serve as culturally responsive bridges rather than constraints on student agency. Simultaneously, teachers are encouraged to design learning experiences that shift control of discussion toward students through collaborative tasks, peer discussion, and dialogue routines that sustain diverse participation styles.

At the policy level, school districts and international programs should implement structured training in reflective practice and culturally responsive pedagogy. Such training must explicitly address differences in classroom discussion practices and authority structures across educational systems. Embedding reflective tools within PLCs is highly recommended, as supportive cultures reduce fear of evaluation. Finally, qualitative student feedback should be formally integrated into professional development and evaluation frameworks for cultural exchange educators to signal that adaptation is a shared responsibility.

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The author used generative artificial intelligence tools, specifically NotebookLM (Google), during manuscript preparation to organize author notes and refine language. The author maintained full responsibility for the intellectual content, data interpretation, analysis, and conclusions presented in this manuscript and critically reviewed and revised all AI-assisted outputs. No generative AI tools were used in data collection, data analysis, coding of responses, or interpretation of research findings.

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