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CAPTURING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS IN TEACHING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature in Davao de Oro, Philippines. Specifically, it examined the challenges instructors encountered, the instructional responses they employed, and the insights they gained from teaching multicultural literary texts. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with college English instructors handling literature courses. Using thematic analysis, the study identified key themes related to difficulty interpreting unfamiliar cultural contexts, unequal student participation and understanding, emotional strain during sensitive discussions, instructional preparation, pedagogical flexibility, and the use of varied learning resources. The findings further revealed instructors' growing recognition of their roles as cultural mediators, reflective practitioners, and facilitators of culturally inclusive learning environments. Multicultural literature was viewed not only as a language-learning tool but also as a transformative medium for developing cultural awareness and critical understanding among students. The study highlights important implications for teaching practice, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive instruction, thorough preparation, flexibility, and collaboration among educators. It also offers recommendations for future research to further examine multicultural literature instruction from both instructor and student perspectives. Overall, the study contributes to the field of teaching multicultural literature by providing context-based insights in culturally diverse classrooms.

KEYWORDS: *Multicultural Literature, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Qualitative Inquiry, College English Instructors, Davao De Oro, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural education in the classroom celebrates the diverse backgrounds of people. It is both an idea and an ongoing process that promotes inclusion, fairness, and equal opportunities for everyone. One particular way of multicultural education is teaching multicultural literature. This educational process introduces students to different perspectives, helps them understand and respect other cultures, builds empathy, and prepares them for a diverse world. However, despite the undeniable potential of multicultural literature to enrich the teaching experience, its full integration remains a recurring challenge. Instructors are more practiced in teaching literature with an emphasis on the analysis and reflection of the content while struggling to balance the cultural sensitivity and awareness it offered to heterogeneous classrooms.

In China, some dedicated teachers were concerned about the lack of appropriate texts, the difficulty of teaching sensitive topics, and the potential for cultural misunderstandings (Wang & Liu, 2021). This was also realized in the context of Nigeria, specifically in Tlemcen University, as some professors struggled to teach multicultural literature because students might elicit negative attitudes towards certain aspects of the target culture which could eventually lead to an intercultural clash. Additionally, these professors saw the possibility that learning the target culture might threaten learners' identity, particularly concerning their religion and faith (Bagui & Adder, 2020). In addition, at St. Francis Episcopal School in Houston, Texas, teachers faced struggles in bridging the gaps between reading diverse literature and connecting to them because students could not learn empathy and cultural understanding by simply exposing them to multicultural literature. Furthermore, they experienced difficulties in dismantling stereotypes as multicultural literature sometimes tended to impose misconceptions in their minds (Semião, 2023).

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, specifically in the National Capital Region, teachers faced difficulties in achieving successful learning results such as providing sufficient support for the students to understand multiculturally defined texts, limited knowledge of different cultures, and hesitancy to discuss sensitive topics (Sali, 2021). Moreover, handling literature subjects, especially conferring about multicultural literature, led instructors to rethink their pedagogical skills, and confined them in their capacity to carry similar teaching loads. Thus, teaching

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multicultural literature in the modern educational landscape constrained teachers to face several challenges, including increased workload and stress. This made it difficult for them to effectively implement new approaches and programs for language acquisition and literature appreciation (Abarquez, 2021).

In Davao de Oro, teachers struggled when teaching multicultural literature in their classroom instructions for fear of offending students or their families about their cultures or practices. As such, these teachers were hesitant to include texts that included multicultural content. Furthermore, teachers might struggle to effectively teach multicultural literature in their discussions due to a lack of training and exposure to teaching culturally-driven literary content (Atong & Escote, 2023). Time constraints and language barriers were additional problems identified in teaching multicultural literature in the classroom within the locality. Due to the increasing demands of the new curriculum, teachers might not have enough time to effectively teach multicultural literature.

The references above highly related to international studies of Rohmat et al. (2023) on Multicultural Education for Strengthening Harmony in Diversity' and of Wu et al. (2023) on 'The Study of Multicultural Education and Teachers' Multicultural Teaching Competency in Singapore and South Korea'. However, these studies focused on promoting social action programs for teachers and highlighted an emphasis on sociopolitical context in developing a government's consideration to multicultural education. In this study, on the other hand, the researcher concentrated on the lived experiences of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature. Moreover, the researcher went through researches and had not come across enough studies in the province of Davao de Oro that concerned about teaching multicultural literature as part of improving instructors' and learners' language and culture sensitivity, which urged him to undergo further investigation on the topic.

More importantly, the findings of this research were intended to enhance the teaching implementations of instructors within Davao de Oro through culturally responsive teaching of multicultural texts. Lastly, the results of this study would be shared through the public tertiary educational institutions' reading enhancement programs in Davao de Oro to strengthen their teaching of multicultural literature in a fair and considerate means.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights encountered by the college English instructors in public tertiary educational institutions of Davao de Oro who experienced teaching multicultural literature in their classes.

At this phase, the lived experiences of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature were generally defined as concerns and insights about the teaching practices that they faced in teaching multicultural literature, which were properly documented and given central focus.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the experiences of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature?
2. How do college English instructors cope with the challenges of teaching multicultural literature?
3. What are the insights of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature that can be shared to others?

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used qualitative design, particularly the phenomenological approach. Qualitative research design is used for exploring and understanding human experiences, problems, and circumstances (Tenny et al., 2022). Creswell and Creswell (2018) asserted that the process of qualitative research involves consolidating questions and procedures, data that are commonly earned from participants' experiences, data analysis from its specific to general thematic arrangements, and the researcher who is responsible for interpreting the collected data.

Research Participants

The study consisted of 14 college English instructors from the public local colleges of Davao de Oro who experienced teaching multicultural literature in their English classes. These participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique, which was composed of seven participants for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and seven participants for In-Depth Interview (IDI).

Furthermore, these participants were identified using the following selection criteria: (a) must be tertiary college English Instructors from different public local colleges within the province of Davao de Oro; and (b) must have experience in teaching multicultural literature in English subjects for three years.

Data Analysis

The study employed a thematic analysis by comparing the participants' common responses to generate themes like patterns in the data that were essential or interesting through the help of a data analyst. Thematic analysis involves coding or organizing related types of data into categories. To be clear, coding refers to the process of organizing the material into chunks before arriving at the general meaning of those chunks (Stuckey, 2013).

In this study, the researcher based such process on the steps proposed by Creswell (2009) namely organizing and preparation of collected data, thorough data reading, conducting thematic analysis, classifying and organizing data, and identifying codes for the organization of themes.

RESULTS

Experiences of College English Instructors in Teaching Multicultural Literature

Table 1 presents themes and core ideas derived from thematic analysis. After analyzing the experiences of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature, five major themes

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emerged: (a) Difficulty Interpreting Unfamiliar Cultural Contexts, (b) Mediation of Cultural Confusion, (c) Unequal Student Participation and Understanding, (d) Emotional Strain in Sensitive Cultural Discussions, and (d) Instructional and Classroom Constraints

Table 1
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of College English Instructors in Teaching Multicultural Literature

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Difficulty Interpreting Unfamiliar Cultural Contexts	• Limited instructor familiarity with foreign cultural backgrounds • Difficulty interpreting culturally specific practices and values in texts • Uncertainty in explaining culturally diverse embedded meanings • Need for additional cultural background understanding before instruction • Risk of misrepresenting or oversimplifying unfamiliar cultural content
Mediation of Cultural Confusion	• Disruption of lesson flow due to extended explanation • Frequent student confusion when encountering unfamiliar cultural elements • Provision of guidance for students from different cultures to respect one another • Possession of sufficient knowledge on varied cultures before teaching it to students
Unequal Student Participation and Understanding	• Different student responses and understanding during culturally diverse discussions • Varied levels of student openness to multicultural texts • Unequal student participation in culturally varying lessons • Differences in students' interpretive readiness and sensitivity
Emotional Strain in Sensitive Cultural Discussions	• Fear of offending students or reinforcing stereotypes • Emotional discomfort when addressing sensitive cultural issues • Tension during classroom conversations connected to personal or cultural values • Pressure to manage personal emotions during instruction
Instructional and Classroom Constraints	• Limited time for in-depth cultural discussion • Curriculum restrictions affecting text selection • Necessity to compromise depth due to practical limitations • Need for constant adjustment within classroom realities

Coping Mechanisms of College English Instructors in Teaching Multicultural Literature

Table 2 presents themes and core ideas derived from thematic analysis. After examining the coping mechanism of college English instructors in teaching multicultural, (6) themes emerged: (a) Engaging in Thorough Instructional Preparation, (b) Maximizing Learning Resources, (c) Improving Pedagogical Flexibility, (d) Applying Linguistic Simplification, (e) Seeking Collaboration, and (f) Maintaining Emotional Self-Regulation.

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Table 2
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanisms of College English Instructors in Teaching Multicultural Literature

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Engaging in Thorough Instructional Preparation	• Having instructional preparation through advance reading • Checking the background through several reading • Anticipating potential questions of the students and areas of difficulty • Immersing into whole content of the books, articles, and other instructional materials
Maximizing Learning Resources	• Consulting multiple reference materials related to literary texts • Utilizing different resources to support instruction • Supplementing primary texts with contextual materials and examples • Looking for updated and relatable alternative learning references
Improving Pedagogical Flexibility	• Varying instructional strategies in response to students' needs • Making real-time instructional adjustments during lessons • Practicing adaptive teaching in response to classroom dynamics • Being flexible to adjust one's role
Applying Linguistic Simplification	• Simplifying instructional language to enhance comprehension • Providing context for simpler explanation • Employing code-switching or vernacular language to clarify meaning and cultural context • Preventing student confusion through explicit linguistic explanation
Collaborating with Colleagues	• Engaging in peer consultation for instructional support and validation • Sharing ideas and challenges with colleagues • Practicing cultural sensitivity through shared professional dialogue • Learning from peers through shared experiences and reflection
Maintaining Emotional Self-Regulation	• Avoiding offensive words through controlled reactions • Managing stress arising from culturally sensitive discussions • Maintaining emotional preparedness when addressing complex cultural issues • Establishing safe classroom spaces for respectful and inclusive dialogue

Insights of College English Instructors in Teaching Multicultural Literature

Table 3 presents themes and core ideas derived from thematic analysis. After examining the insights of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature in English language teaching, five major themes occurred namely (a) View Multicultural Literature as Transformative, (b) Recognize Instructors as Cultural Mediators, (c) Understand Students as Culturally Diverse Learners, (d) Become Reflective and Intentional Educators, and (e) Acknowledge Classroom Constraints and Realities.

Table 3
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of College English Instructors in Teaching Multicultural Literature

Major Themes	Core Ideas
View Multicultural Literature as Transformative	• Shifting multicultural literature from supplementary to value-laden instruction • Bringing the class alive through sharing relatable stories and learning together • Seeing multicultural literature as a connecting element for learning English and understanding cultures • Teaching literature to shape values and perspectives
Recognize Instructors as Cultural Mediators	• Providing guided cultural interpretation during instruction • Preventing cultural misinterpretation in classroom discussions • Moving beyond neutral facilitation toward cultural mediation • Drawing on instructors' cultural knowledge and awareness
Understand Students as Culturally Diverse Learners	• Exploring uneven student responses to multicultural texts • Recognizing the influence of cultural background on comprehension • Managing varied levels of openness and sensitivity among students • Acknowledging the limitations of one-size-fits-all approaches
	• Engaging in deliberate and ethical text selection

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Become Reflective Educators	• Developing heightened awareness of instructional impact • Practicing continuous self-reflection in teaching • Exercising intentional instructional decision-making
Acknowledge Classroom Constraints and Realities	• Managing Time limitations during classroom discussions • Teaching within curriculum and institutional constraints • Responding to differing levels of student engagement • Making instructional compromises due to practical limitations

DISCUSSION

Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings of this study carry significant implications for teaching practice in multicultural literature within English language classrooms. These implications extend across several domains of teaching, including instructional preparation, cultural mediation, student engagement, pedagogical flexibility, linguistic support, professional collaboration, emotional well-being, and awareness of classroom constraints. Taken together, the results revealed that teaching multicultural texts moved beyond simple content delivery and required college English instructors to respond thoughtfully to cultural diversity, varied learner readiness, emotional classroom dynamics, and practical instructional realities. Effective teaching in multicultural settings therefore depended not only on what was taught, but also on how instructors prepared, facilitated discussion, supported emotional balance, and reflected on their instructional decisions.

Across the generated themes, the findings further suggested the importance of using varied literary criticism approaches or interpretive lenses suited to students' readiness and cultural familiarity. Approaches that emphasize contextual understanding, reader response, cultural analysis, and critical reflection may help learners interpret multicultural texts more meaningfully at appropriate developmental levels. Applying different lenses allows instructors to guide students from basic comprehension toward deeper cultural and social interpretation. In teaching practice, this implies that literary criticism should function as a flexible instructional tool that supports inclusive understanding rather than as a rigid analytical requirement. When used thoughtfully, these approaches can reduce confusion, manage emotional sensitivity, and promote reflective engagement with multicultural texts.

One major implication of the study was the importance of thorough instructional preparation. Unfamiliar cultural contexts, sensitive themes, and limited reference materials often made instruction more complex. This indicates that college English instructors must invest time in careful reading, cultural research, and anticipation of possible student misunderstandings before discussion. Preparation should therefore be viewed as an essential component of instruction. When instructors are well prepared, they can explain meanings clearly, manage sensitive dialogue with confidence, and support deeper student engagement.

The findings also highlighted the instructors' role as cultural mediators. Students may lack sufficient cultural knowledge to interpret multicultural texts accurately, particularly when texts originate from unfamiliar contexts. Instructors therefore need to clarify references, explain authorial background, and situate texts within appropriate cultural frameworks. Active mediation prevents misinterpretation and promotes respectful, informed discussion. This expands the role of college English instructors beyond language teaching toward guiding cultural understanding. Another implication concerned uneven student engagement and interpretive readiness. Students responded differently to multicultural texts; some participated actively while others hesitated due to unfamiliarity or low confidence. This suggests that instructors must recognize learner diversity and avoid assuming equal readiness. Varying questioning strategies, providing guided explanation, and allowing multiple participation formats can help ensure inclusive engagement.

The findings further emphasized the need for pedagogical flexibility. Classroom discussions often shifted due to confusion, unexpected reactions, or emotional responses. Instructors must therefore adjust teaching approaches in real time by modifying pacing, shifting discussion formats, or providing clarification. Flexibility supports productive learning environments when addressing culturally complex material.

Linguistic simplification also emerged as essential. Complex, archaic, or culturally distant language hindered comprehension. Simplifying explanations, breaking down sentences, and strategic code-switching helped students follow discussions. Prioritizing clarity supports understanding without reducing intellectual depth.

Importantly, the study underscored the role of emotional well-being in multicultural literature instruction. Sensitive cultural discussions sometimes created tension for both students and instructors. Managing emotions through respectful dialogue, supportive classroom climate, and reflective facilitation is therefore necessary. Attention to emotional well-being allows meaningful cultural exploration without escalating conflict or discomfort.

The value of professional collaboration also became evident. Sharing experiences with colleagues provided reassurance, alternative perspectives, and reflective growth. Ongoing dialogue among instructors can strengthen confidence and improve strategies for handling multicultural texts.

Finally, the findings highlighted the importance of recognizing classroom constraints and realities, such as limited time,

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curriculum demands, and diverse learner needs. Awareness of these limits helps instructors set realistic goals and prioritize essential cultural and linguistic learning. Constraints should be treated not as failures but as guides for intentional instructional decision-making.

Based on these implications, continued professional development in multicultural literature teaching is strongly recommended. Training should address cultural awareness, emotional facilitation, literary criticism approaches, instructional flexibility, and inclusive engagement strategies. Institutions should also expand access to diverse learning resources that support preparation and instruction. Through these supports, college English instructors can create classrooms that are more inclusive, reflective, emotionally balanced, and culturally meaningful for diverse learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored the lived experiences of college English instructors in teaching multicultural literature, particularly focusing on challenges, instructional responses, and insights gained from classroom practice. While the findings provided meaningful understanding of these experiences, future research might further expand and deepen the scope of investigation. One recommendation was for future researchers to explore similar topics using a larger and more diverse group of participants across different institutions. Including college English instructors from various regions, academic disciplines, or levels of education might provide a broader perspective on how multicultural literature was taught and experienced in different teaching contexts.

Future studies might also focus on the students' perspectives in learning multicultural literature. While this study centered on college English instructors' experiences, examining students' views might help provide a more holistic understanding of how multicultural texts are interpreted and experienced in the classroom. Investigating students' emotional responses, levels of engagement, and cultural awareness could help determine how instructional strategies influence learning outcomes. This approach might also help future researchers identify gaps between college English instructors' intentions and students' actual learning experiences.

In addition, future researchers might consider using different research methods or combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. For instance, classroom observations, reflective journals, or survey instruments may complement interview and focus group data. These methods might allow researchers to capture instructional practices as they occur and to examine patterns across a larger sample. Expanding the methodological approach could strengthen the reliability of findings and provide deeper insights into teaching and learning processes in multicultural literature classrooms of future studies.

Concluding Remarks

Conducting this phenomenological study had been a meaningful and challenging journey for me, as the researcher. Throughout the research process, I gave careful attention to understanding the lived experiences of college English instructors who teach multicultural literature. From data collection to analysis, I encountered both academic and personal challenges, including managing extensive qualitative data, ensuring accuracy in interpretation, and remaining faithful to the participants' voices. Despite these challenges, the process was a valuable learning experience that deepened my appreciation of qualitative inquiry and educational research.

One of the most memorable aspects of this study was listening to the college English instructors' honest reflections about their struggles and insights in teaching multicultural literature. Their experiences helped me realize that teaching culturally diverse texts was not a simple instructional task but a complex process that required preparation, sensitivity, flexibility, and reflection. As the researcher of this study, I learned that instructors often faced cultural, emotional, and instructional challenges that were not always visible in traditional classroom settings. Through these insights, I was able to understand the importance of recognizing teachers' experiences as central to understanding the teaching and learning process.

Most importantly, this study helped me realize that multicultural literature played a significant part in shaping both teaching practice and student learning. From the findings, I learned that in teaching multicultural texts, it was important to encourage college English instructors to become more reflective and intentional educators; to recognize students as culturally diverse learners; and to acknowledge classroom realities that would influence instruction.

I also gained a deeper understanding of how educational practices must adapt to culturally diverse learning environments, since the study revealed that effective teaching involved not only content mastery but also the ability to mediate cultural meaning, as well as respond flexibly to student needs, and create respectful learning spaces. These realizations could contribute to the broader field of educational research by emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices, particularly in English language education.

In conclusion, this study could contribute valuable insights to the field of education by highlighting the realities of teaching multicultural literature from the perspective of college English instructors. The findings underscored the need for continued reflection, support, and professional growth among educators working in culturally diverse classrooms. I hoped that the results of this study would serve as a useful reference for educators, researchers, and institutions seeking to improve teaching and learning practices in multicultural contexts. Through continued research and reflective practice, the teaching of multicultural

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literature could become a more inclusive, meaningful, and transformative educational experience.

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