Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 5, 51-67
http://dx.doi.org/ 10.66815/ejecs/3031
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ISSN: 2149-1291

Teaching Folk Literature in an Intercultural Education Context: A Case Study in Vietnam

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Abstract: This study investigates how folk literature can be taught as a pedagogical resource for developing intercultural competence among secondary school students in Vietnam. The research is situated within Vietnam's multi-ethnic context–home to 54 officially recognized ethnic groups – and examines current classroom practices, the challenges and opportunities of integrating folk narratives from ethnic minority traditions alongside Kinh-majority literature, and the pedagogical strategies capable of translating this rich oral heritage into measurable intercultural learning outcomes. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 254 secondary students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Findings show that current instruction predominantly emphasizes Kinh-majority narratives delivered through teacher-centered lecture formats (78.3% of observed lessons), with ethnic minority content constituting only 16.7% of instructional material and leaving the intercultural potential of ethnic minority folk traditions largely untapped. However, where teachers employed comparative tale analysis, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014), and dialogic classroom practices, students demonstrated statistically significant gains across all measured dimensions of intercultural competence – cultural awareness, openness to diversity, critical thinking about culture, intercultural communication skills, and empathy across differences – and stereotypical attitudes toward ethnic minority groups declined from 67.3% to 23.6% of students. These results are consistent with Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence and Banks' (2004) multicultural education framework. The study contributes practical teaching models and recommendations for curriculum reform, teacher professional development, and educational policy in Vietnam's multicultural context, with implications for intercultural education in similarly diverse Asian societies.

Keywords: folk literature, intercultural education, intercultural competence, multicultural education, Vietnamese ethnic minorities

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In the context of globalization and international integration, developing intercultural competence has become a central educational priority (Banks, 2016; UNESCO, 2006). Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds while demonstrating respect, openness, and curiosity (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Educational systems worldwide are revising curricula and pedagogy to prepare students for meaningful participation in multicultural societies and global communities. Within this global reorientation, literature-based pedagogy– and folk literature in particular – has been repeatedly identified as an underused but potentially powerful resource for cultivating these competencies (Cai, 2002; Wiysahnyuy & Valentine, 2023), positioning the present study at the intersection of curriculum policy, pedagogical practice, and literary scholarship.

Vietnam, home to 54 officially recognized ethnic groups, presents both opportunities and challenges for intercultural education (Phan & Brebner, 2013). The Kinh majority accounts for 85.3% of the population, while 53 ethnic minority groups – such as the Tày, Thái, Mường, Khmer, Hmong, and Nùng – constitute 14.7% and maintain distinct languages and cultural traditions (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020). Concentrated mainly in mountainous and highland regions, these communities preserve rich oral heritage despite historical marginalization in mainstream education.

Folk literature – including myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, and epic poetry – embodies communal values and worldviews (Norton, 2013; Thompson, 1977; Zipes, 2012) and serves multiple functions: preserving cultural memory, transmitting social norms and moral values, explaining natural phenomena and human existence, and providing entertainment and aesthetic pleasure (Dundes, 1965; Propp, 1968). From a cognitive perspective, engagement with folk narratives enhances narrative comprehension, schema development, symbolic thinking, and pattern recognition (Applebee, 1978), while Bettelheim's (1976) psychoanalytic account emphasized these narratives' role in helping children process complex feelings and construct healthy psychological identities. Folk literature also contributes to moral reasoning by presenting ethical dilemmas and modeling virtuous behavior (Banks, 2016; Kohlberg, 1981), although critical rereadings caution that the same narratives can encode and normalize inequitable gender roles and power relations that require deliberate pedagogical interrogation rather than uncritical transmission (Haase, 2004). Recent scholarship extends these insights to critical cultural literacy – the capacity to analyze how narratives construct and perpetuate cultural meanings, challenge stereotypes, and reveal power dynamics embedded in cultural representations (Yokota & Teale, 2014) – and to non-Western pedagogical traditions, where folktales function as long-standing tools for dialogic, community-based moral and social education (Wiysahnyuy & Valentine, 2023). Taken together, this scholarship justifies treating folk literature not merely as literary content but as a pedagogical resource whose intercultural potential depends on how, not merely whether, it is taught.

This potential, however, must be situated within a clear theoretical distinction. Multicultural education and intercultural education, although closely related, stem from different theoretical and ideological traditions and are not straightforwardly complementary (Barrett, 2013; Eleni & Efcharis, 2026). Multicultural education is primarily concerned with the recognition, inclusion, and equitable representation of cultural diversity within existing curricular and institutional structures (Banks, 2004), whereas intercultural education foregrounds a critical, dialogic, and transformative engagement with cultural relations and the power dynamics that structure them (UNESCO, 2006). This distinction is especially salient in multi-ethnic Asian contexts such as Vietnam, where scholarship on interculturality has begun to move beyond a Western-derived multicultural lens toward frameworks attentive to local histories of majority–minority relations (Liu, 2023). The present study is positioned within this

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 5, 51-67
http://dx.doi.org/ 10.66815/ejecs/3031
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ISSN: 2149-1291

critical-dialogic intercultural tradition while drawing selectively on multicultural education's analytic dimensions, a distinction elaborated further in the Theoretical Framework below.

Despite this global and theoretical momentum, Vietnamese secondary education continues to emphasize Kinh folk literature, with limited integration of ethnic minority narratives and insufficient explicit attention to intercultural learning objectives (Nguyen & Hall, 2017). Recent Vietnamese scholarship on intercultural communicative competence has grown substantially, but this work has concentrated overwhelmingly on higher education and English-medium or foreign-language instruction (Gómez-Parra & Hà, 2021; Vu et al., 2025), leaving the pedagogical potential of folk literature at the secondary level largely unexamined. This gap is consequential: secondary school is a formative period for identity development and attitude formation toward cultural difference, and folk literature – already present in the national curriculum – offers an existing, culturally resonant vehicle for intercultural learning that has not yet been systematically studied or leveraged.

This study addresses that gap through a qualitative case study examining current folk literature teaching practices in Vietnamese secondary schools, the relationship between pedagogical approach and students' intercultural competence development, and the strategies that support effective integration of intercultural education principles into folk literature instruction. Grounded in Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, Banks' (2004) multicultural education framework, and Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How is folk literature currently taught in Vietnamese secondary schools, and to what extent do current practices draw on ethnic minority folk traditions and explicit intercultural learning objectives?

RQ2. To what extent does folk literature instruction that explicitly incorporates intercultural education principles influence students' intercultural competence, as conceptualized by Byram (1997) and Banks (2004)?

RQ3. What pedagogical strategies and contextual conditions support the effective integration of intercultural education principles into folk literature teaching in Vietnamese secondary schools?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three complementary but analytically distinct theoretical perspectives: Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, Banks' (2004) dimensions of multicultural education, and Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. Because multicultural and intercultural education stem from different theoretical and ideological traditions (Barrett, 2013), these frameworks are not treated here as interchangeable or as a single unified model. Multicultural education, as articulated by Banks (2004), is primarily oriented toward the recognition and equitable inclusion of cultural diversity within curriculum content and school structures; it does not, in itself, require a critical examination of the power relations that shape how cultural groups are represented and relate to one another. Intercultural education, by contrast, is defined by UNESCO (2006) and Byram (1997) as a dialogic, relational, and critically reflexive orientation that treats cultural difference not as a static object of study but as the ground for active negotiation of meaning between people. In this study, Banks' framework is used analytically, as a lens for describing curriculum content and classroom practice (e.g., which cultural traditions are included and how), while Byram's and Bennett's frameworks provide the study's primary theoretical orientation toward intercultural competence as a developmental, dialogic process. This layered use of frameworks – rather than treating multicultural and intercultural education as seamlessly complementary –

responds directly to the conceptual distinction between the two traditions and forms the analytic foundation for both the study's methodology and its interpretation of findings.

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram's (1997) influential model of intercultural communicative competence identifies five interrelated components: attitudes (curiosity, openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own); knowledge (of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and interlocutor's country, and of interaction processes); skills of interpreting and relating (ability to interpret documents or events from another culture and relate them to one's own); skills of discovery and interaction (ability to acquire new knowledge and operate in real-time communication); and critical cultural awareness (ability to evaluate critically perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures). This comprehensive framework has proven particularly valuable for designing and assessing intercultural education interventions, including in recent Vietnamese higher education contexts (Vu et al., 2025).

Banks' Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Banks' (2004) seminal work on multicultural education identifies five essential dimensions that must be integrated for effective implementation: content integration (incorporating diverse cultural examples and perspectives into curriculum); knowledge construction (helping students understand how cultural assumptions and biases influence knowledge creation); prejudice reduction (using teaching strategies to modify students' racial and cultural attitudes); equity pedagogy (employing teaching methods that facilitate achievement for diverse student groups); and empowering school culture (restructuring institutional culture to promote educational equity). While originally developed within the North American context, these dimensions provide a useful analytic lens for describing curriculum content and classroom practice in this study, provided their conceptual difference from intercultural education proper – as discussed above – is kept explicit (Barrett, 2013).

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity describes progression from ethnocentric stages (denial, defense, minimization of cultural difference) through ethnorelative stages (acceptance, adaptation, integration) of intercultural development. This developmental perspective suggests that intercultural competence emerges through structured experiences and reflection rather than occurring automatically through mere exposure to diversity. Educational interventions should therefore be designed to facilitate progression through these developmental stages systematically.

Together, these three frameworks informed both the design of the data collection instruments (interview and focus group protocols probing attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness) and the deductive coding categories used in the thematic analysis reported in in the Methodology below.

Related Empirical Studies

International scholarship demonstrates folk literature's considerable effectiveness for developing intercultural competence when taught through comparative and critical pedagogical approaches. Cai (2002) argued that multicultural children's literature, including folk literature,

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ISSN: 2149-1291

provides valuable resources for helping students develop multiple perspectives, challenge cultural stereotypes, and recognize both cultural diversity and human universality. However, Cai emphasized that these educational outcomes depend critically on how folk literature is taught rather than on its mere presence in curriculum – superficial or stereotypical treatment may actually reinforce cultural misconceptions rather than challenging them. Louie (2005) similarly documented how structured comparative analysis of folk tale variants across cultures effectively challenges stereotypes and promotes recognition of both cultural diversity and underlying human commonalities.

Evidence from other majority–minority and postcolonial educational contexts reinforce this pattern. Wiysahnyuy and Valentine's (2023) mixed-methods study of Cameroonian primary schools found that folktales function as long-standing indigenous pedagogic tools capable of teaching moral and social values dialogically, but that their intercultural potential is realized only when teachers move beyond rote transmission toward interactive, discussion-based delivery – a finding that parallels Cai's (2002) caution about superficial treatment of multicultural literature and anticipates the present study's findings regarding pedagogical approach.

Despite this robust international scholarship, Vietnamese research reveals significant gaps between intercultural education theory and actual folk literature teaching practices. Nguyen and Hall (2017) documented that Vietnamese education continues to emphasize traditional teacher-centered pedagogies focused on knowledge transmission rather than active student engagement or critical thinking development. Their research indicated limited integration of ethnic minority perspectives and insufficient attention to intercultural learning objectives in curriculum and instruction.

More recent Vietnamese research on intercultural competence has largely emerged from higher education and language-teaching contexts. Gómez-Parra and Hà (2021) found that Vietnamese primary teachers reported moderate-to-high interaction engagement but only moderate interaction confidence, suggesting that teachers' own intercultural competence – not only curriculum content – constrains classroom practice. Similarly, Vu et al. (2025) reported that Vietnamese university students' development of intercultural communicative competence through English-medium instruction varied with students' cultural backgrounds and prior experiences, echoing this study's finding that students' engagement with intercultural content is uneven and context-dependent. Neither of these studies, however, examined folk literature as a pedagogical vehicle, nor did they focus on secondary education, underscoring the specific gap this study addresses.

This review reveals substantial theoretical and empirical foundations for using folk literature to develop intercultural competence, alongside significant gaps in understanding how these principles can be effectively implemented within Vietnam's specific secondary-education context. The present study addresses these gaps by examining current practices, identifying challenges, and exploring effective strategies for teaching folk literature within intercultural education frameworks in Vietnamese secondary schools, contributing both theoretical insights and practical guidance for educational improvement.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) because the research questions ask how and why particular pedagogical approaches shape intercultural competence within a bounded, real-world instructional context – conditions under which case study is an

appropriate design, since it allows the researcher to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the phenomenon (classroom teaching practice) while treating the case boundary (participating schools within the same educational system) as a means of achieving analytic depth rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2018). The design further aligns with the study's theoretical framework: because Byram's (1997), Banks' (2004), and Bennett's (1993) models describe multidimensional, context-embedded constructs, a case study approach enabled triangulation of multiple data sources (individual interviews and focus group discussions) within a single educational setting to build a richer account than a single method could provide.

Participants and Setting

Participants comprised 254 secondary school students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Kinh majority students and students from several ethnic minority groups. Schools were selected to reflect variation in ethnic composition and in current folk literature instructional practice, consistent with the study's case study design.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with participating students. Interview and focus group protocols were informed by the study's theoretical framework, with questions designed to elicit students' cultural attitudes, knowledge, and reported classroom experiences with folk literature instruction, corresponding to Byram's (1997) attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness dimensions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six-phase framework:

1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts
2) generation of initial codes grounded in participants' own language
3) searching for themes by collating codes into candidate patterns
4) reviewing themes against the coded extracts and the entire dataset
5) defining and naming themes
6) producing the report

Coding was guided deductively by the study's theoretical framework – Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence components, Banks' (2004) multicultural education dimensions, and Bennett's (1993) developmental stages – while remaining open to inductive codes emerging from participants' accounts, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive approach to thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants (and parental or guardian consent for minors), ensuring confidentiality and anonymity in reporting, and securing institutional and school-level permissions prior to data collection.

Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 5, 51-67
http://dx.doi.org/ 10.66815/ejecs/3031
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ISSN: 2149-1291

Research Findings

Current Practices of Teaching Folk Literature in Vietnamese Schools

Analysis of current folk literature teaching practices revealed several consistent patterns across participating schools. The predominant instructional approach remained teacher-centered, with 78.3% of observed lessons following traditional lecture formats where teachers explained narrative content, historical context, and cultural meanings with limited student participation beyond answering comprehension questions. Table 1 presents the distribution of teaching methods observed during the study period.

Table 1
Distribution of Teaching Methods in Folk Literature Instruction

Teaching Method	Frequency (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Teacher-centered lecture	47	78.3
Small group discussion	8	13.3
Comparative analysis activities	3	5.0
Project-based learning	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

Note. Frequencies sum to the total number of lessons observed (N = 60).

Curriculum content analysis revealed significant concentration on Kinh majority folk literature, with ethnic minority narratives constituting only 16.7% of instructional content across participating schools. When ethnic minority folk literature was included, it typically appeared as supplementary examples rather than core curriculum content, and was frequently presented without substantive comparative analysis or explicit connection to intercultural learning objectives. Teachers reported limited access to high-quality ethnic minority folk literature materials and insufficient professional development for teaching diverse cultural content effectively.

Student engagement patterns varied significantly depending on instructional approaches. In traditional lecture-based lessons, student participation remained minimal, with students primarily assuming passive recipient roles. However, in the limited instances where teachers employed comparative analysis activities or small group discussions, student engagement increased markedly, with students demonstrating greater interest, active participation, and thoughtful reflection about cultural similarities and differences. Ethnic minority students reported feeling more engaged and validated when their cultural traditions were meaningfully incorporated into instruction rather than presented as exotic additions to mainstream content.

Intercultural Competence Development Through Folk Literature Teaching

Assessment of students' intercultural competence development revealed substantial variations corresponding to different pedagogical approaches. Students exposed to comparative folk literature analysis demonstrated significantly greater cultural awareness and more nuanced understanding of cultural diversity compared to students receiving traditional instruction focused exclusively on Kinh majority narratives. Table 2 presents student self-assessment

ratings of intercultural competence dimensions before and after participation in enhanced folk literature instruction incorporating intercultural education principles.

Table 2

Student Self-Assessment of Intercultural Competence Development (N = 254)

Competence Dimension	Pre-test *M*	Post-test *M*	Change
Cultural awareness	2.87	4.23	+1.36
Openness to diversity	3.12	4.38	+1.26
Critical thinking about culture	2.64	3.97	+1.33
Intercultural communication skills	2.93	4.11	+1.18
Empathy across differences	3.18	4.29	+1.11

Note. Ratings are on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very low, 5 = very high). All pre–post changes were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Qualitative analysis of student interviews revealed deeper insights into intercultural competence development processes. Students reported that comparative analysis of folk tales from different ethnic groups helped them recognize both cultural diversity and universal human concerns. One Kinh student reflected that ethnic minority stories, once viewed as simply different, came to be seen as expressing similar family and community values through distinct cultural forms. Ethnic minority students particularly valued seeing their cultural traditions respected and analyzed alongside Kinh majority narratives rather than positioned as inferior or exotic alternatives.

Changes in attitudes toward cultural diversity were particularly evident among students who participated in dialogic classroom discussions examining how different cultural groups address similar themes through folk literature. Students developed more sophisticated understanding of stereotypes and cultural generalizations, recognizing diversity within cultural groups and complexity of cultural identities. Pre-intervention, 67.3% of students held stereotypical views about ethnic minority groups; post-intervention, this percentage decreased to 23.6%, indicating substantial attitude transformation.

Critical thinking about cultural differences emerged as students learned to analyze how folk narratives both preserve cultural wisdom and reflect particular historical and social contexts. Students demonstrated increased capacity to examine folk literature critically rather than accepting it uncritically, recognizing how narratives can simultaneously transmit valuable cultural knowledge and reflect gender roles, power relationships, or social hierarchies specific to their time and context (Haase, 2004). This critical cultural awareness represents a sophisticated intercultural competence that moves beyond superficial multicultural appreciation toward deeper critical engagement with cultural diversity.

Enhancement of intercultural communication skills was evident in students' increased confidence and competence in discussing cultural topics, expressing appreciation for diverse perspectives, and navigating potentially sensitive cultural conversations respectfully. Students who participated in small group discussions analyzing folk literature from multiple ethnic groups reported feeling more prepared for intercultural interactions beyond the classroom, suggesting potential transfer of learning to broader social contexts.

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http://dx.doi.org/ 10.66815/ejecs/3031
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ISSN: 2149-1291

Effective Strategies and Models for Integrating Intercultural Education

Analysis of instructional practices identified several pedagogical strategies that proved particularly effective for developing intercultural competence through folk literature teaching. Comparative tale analysis emerged as the most impactful approach, wherein students examined structurally similar folk narratives from different ethnic groups to identify both cultural variations and universal themes. This strategy directly addresses Byram's (1997) intercultural competence dimensions by developing students' knowledge of diverse cultural perspectives, skills in interpreting cultural expressions, and critical cultural awareness.

Successful implementation of comparative analysis typically involved three phases: (1) individual reading and reflection on folk narratives from different cultural traditions; (2) structured small group discussion guided by explicit comparison questions addressing themes, values, cultural contexts, and narrative elements; and (3) whole-class dialogue synthesizing insights and examining implications for intercultural understanding. Teachers who provided clear analytical frameworks and discussion protocols while maintaining space for authentic student dialogue achieved the most substantial intercultural learning outcomes.

Culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014) proved essential for creating inclusive learning environments where all students' cultural identities were validated and respected. Effective teachers deliberately sought out high-quality folk literature materials representing diverse ethnic groups, invited ethnic minority students to share cultural knowledge and family traditions, and positioned ethnic minority perspectives as equally valuable rather than supplementary to mainstream content. These practices directly address equity pedagogy dimensions in Banks' (2004) multicultural education framework. Table 3 presents observed frequencies of culturally responsive teaching practices among participating teachers.

Table 3
Frequency of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices (N = 18 Teachers)

Teaching Practice	Teachers (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Use diverse ethnic minority literature	7	38.9
Invite student cultural sharing	9	50.0
Position minority views as equally valuable	6	33.3
Address cultural stereotypes explicitly	5	27.8
Create inclusive classroom environment	11	61.1

Note. Teachers could report more than one practice; percentages therefore do not sum to 100.

Dialogic pedagogical approaches that positioned students as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients proved crucial for intercultural learning. Teachers who facilitated structured discussions where students could safely explore cultural questions, express uncertainties, challenge assumptions, and negotiate understanding collaboratively created powerful learning opportunities. These dialogic practices align with sociocultural learning theory emphasizing knowledge construction through social interaction and align with intercultural education's emphasis on dialogue across difference.

Several contextual factors emerged as influencing effective integration of intercultural education principles into folk literature teaching. Adequate access to diverse, high-quality folk literature materials representing multiple ethnic groups was essential but frequently lacking.

Teachers required professional development addressing both content knowledge about ethnic minority cultures and pedagogical strategies for intercultural education. Institutional support for innovation, including administrative encouragement and adequate instructional time, facilitated teacher willingness to experiment with new approaches. School climate factors, particularly norms around cultural diversity and respect, significantly influenced student willingness to engage authentically with intercultural learning opportunities.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine how folk literature is currently taught in Vietnamese secondary schools, to assess the extent to which intercultural, comparative instruction develops students' intercultural competence, and to identify pedagogical strategies and contextual conditions that support this process (RQ1–RQ3). In brief, the findings show that current practice remains teacher-centered and Kinh-dominant, with ethnic minority folk literature confined largely to a supplementary role; however, comparative tale analysis, culturally responsive teaching, and dialogic pedagogy produced statistically significant gains across all five measured dimensions of intercultural competence. The sections below interpret these findings against the study's theoretical framework and situate them within the wider empirical literature.

The predominance of teacher-centered, monocultural approaches to folk literature instruction revealed in this study reflects broader patterns documented in Vietnamese education research (Nguyen & Hall, 2017). This finding suggests that efforts to advance intercultural education in Vietnam must address not only curriculum content but also fundamental pedagogical orientations and teaching practices. The limited integration of ethnic minority folk literature and insufficient attention to explicit intercultural learning objectives represents a significant missed opportunity given Vietnam's rich multicultural context and the educational potential of diverse folk traditions.

However, the substantial improvements in students' intercultural competence following enhanced folk literature instruction incorporating comparative analysis, culturally responsive teaching, and dialogic pedagogy demonstrates the viability and value of reform efforts. These findings align with international research documenting folk literature's effectiveness for intercultural education when taught through appropriate pedagogical approaches (Cai, 2002; Louie, 2005). The specific improvements observed across all measured dimensions of intercultural competence – cultural awareness, openness to diversity, critical thinking about culture, intercultural communication skills, and empathy across differences – suggest that comprehensive intercultural competence development is achievable through well-designed folk literature instruction.

Interpretation of these findings through established theoretical frameworks reveals important insights. From Byram's (1997) perspective, the comparative folk literature analysis strategy effectively develops multiple intercultural competence components simultaneously: knowledge (understanding of diverse cultural perspectives and practices), skills of interpreting and relating (analyzing folk narratives in cultural context), and critical cultural awareness (examining how narratives reflect and construct cultural meanings). The dialogic pedagogical approaches align with Byram's emphasis on interaction as essential for intercultural competence development, creating opportunities for students to practice negotiating meaning across cultural differences in supported classroom contexts.

Banks' (2004) multicultural education framework provides an additional interpretive lens for understanding these findings, used here – consistent with the Theoretical Framework– as an analytic tool rather than as equivalent to the study's intercultural orientation. The study demonstrates how folk literature teaching can address multiple dimensions of multicultural

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http://dx.doi.org/ 10.66815/ejecs/3031
Copyright 2026
ISSN: 2149-1291

education: content integration (incorporating diverse ethnic minority folk literature), knowledge construction (examining how different cultural groups construct and transmit knowledge through narratives), prejudice reduction (decreasing stereotypical attitudes through comparative analysis), and equity pedagogy (employing teaching methods that validate diverse student identities and perspectives) (Kaya, 14;Nieto & Bode, 2018). The limited implementation of these dimensions in current practice versus their demonstrated effectiveness when implemented suggests significant room for educational improvement.

Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity offers a framework for understanding the attitude changes documented among students. The reduction in stereotypical views and increased appreciation for cultural complexity suggests progression from ethnocentric stages (particularly minimization, where cultural differences are trivialized) toward ethnorelative stages (acceptance and adaptation, where cultural differences are recognized and valued). This developmental progression did not occur automatically but required structured pedagogical intervention – supporting Bennett's argument that intercultural competence development requires intentional educational experiences rather than mere exposure to diversity.

Comparison between Vietnamese practices and international and regional research reveals both similarities and distinctive features. Like Vietnam, many educational systems struggle with gaps between multicultural education policy and implementation (Banks, 2016). Wiysahnyuy and Valentine's (2023) Cameroonian study similarly found that the intercultural and moral value of folktales was realized only through interactive, discussion-based teaching rather than rote transmission, a pattern that closely mirrors the present study's finding that comparative, dialogic pedagogy–not the mere presence of diverse folk literature – drove intercultural competence gains. Vietnam's specific context, however – particularly the linguistic diversity of 54 ethnic groups, historical patterns of ethnic minority marginalization, and traditional emphasis on monocultural national identity – creates distinctive challenges and opportunities not fully captured by either the Cameroonian or Western literature.

This study's focus on secondary-level folk literature pedagogy also complements, rather than duplicates, the recent surge of Vietnamese intercultural competence research concentrated in higher education and language teaching. Gómez-Parra and Hà (2021) found that Vietnamese primary teachers' intercultural competence was uneven across its sub-components, with confidence lagging behind engagement and enjoyment – a pattern broadly consistent with this study's finding that teachers required explicit professional development in pedagogical strategy, not only content knowledge, to translate folk literature's intercultural potential into practice. Similarly, Vu et al.'s (2025) finding that Vietnamese university students' intercultural communicative competence outcomes varied with prior cultural background and experience echoes this study's observation that ethnic minority and Kinh students responded differently to comparative folk literature instruction, with ethnic minority students reporting particular validation when their traditions were treated as core rather than supplementary content. Read together, these studies suggest that Vietnam's intercultural education challenge spans the full educational pipeline – from secondary folk literature instruction to university language programs–and that folk literature pedagogy offers a distinctive, currently underused entry point at the secondary level.

Several contextual factors emerged as critical for effective implementation. Access to high-quality, culturally authentic folk literature materials representing diverse ethnic groups remains a significant challenge requiring systematic attention to curriculum resource development. Teacher professional development addressing both content knowledge about ethnic minority cultures and intercultural education pedagogical strategies appears essential – teachers cannot effectively implement what they do not understand. The documented

effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014) and dialogic pedagogy suggests that professional development should emphasize these pedagogical approaches rather than merely adding multicultural content to existing teacher-centered methods.

Institutional and policy contexts also significantly influence implementation possibilities. Educational policies emphasizing standardized testing and exam preparation may discourage teacher innovation with intercultural pedagogies that require substantial instructional time and may not produce immediately measurable test score improvements. However, Vietnam's recent educational reforms emphasizing student competence development rather than solely knowledge transmission create policy alignment opportunities for intercultural education initiatives. Aligning intercultural competence development with national educational goals could provide institutional support for the pedagogical innovations identified as effective in this study.

The research also reveals important implications for educational equity. Ethnic minority students' reported feelings of validation and increased engagement when their cultural traditions were meaningfully incorporated into instruction highlights how curriculum and pedagogy can either perpetuate or challenge educational marginalization. Moving from treating ethnic minority folk literature as exotic additions toward positioning diverse traditions as equally valuable core content represents not merely pedagogical improvement but educational justice – recognizing all students' cultural identities and knowledge as legitimate educational resources.

Implications for Teacher Educators

The findings carry several practical implications for teacher education programs preparing future literature and humanities teachers:

- Integrate explicit modules on comparative, cross-ethnic folk literature analysis into pre-service literature pedagogy courses, rather than treating ethnic minority content as an optional add-on.
- Train pre-service and in-service teachers in culturally responsive teaching strategies (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014) alongside content knowledge of ethnic minority cultures, since content knowledge alone did not predict effective classroom practice in this study.
- Model dialogic, discussion-based pedagogy within teacher education programs themselves, so that teachers experience firsthand the pedagogical approach they are expected to implement.
- Embed explicit intercultural competence learning outcomes (Byram, 1997) into literature methods courses' syllabi and assessment rubrics, rather than leaving intercultural learning implicit.
- Provide teacher educators and mentor teachers with curated, high-quality ethnic minority folk literature materials to model comparative teaching during practicum placements.

Conclusion

This study investigated how folk literature can be effectively taught to promote intercultural competence development in Vietnamese secondary schools, addressing a critical gap between theoretical potential and actual educational practice. Through qualitative case study methodology examining current practices, intercultural competence development

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ISSN: 2149-1291

outcomes, and effective pedagogical strategies, the research generated several key findings that contribute to both theory and practice.

Current folk literature teaching practices in Vietnamese secondary schools predominantly employ teacher-centered approaches focusing on Kinh majority narratives, with limited integration of ethnic minority folk literature and insufficient explicit attention to intercultural learning objectives. These practices represent significant missed opportunities given Vietnam's multicultural context and folk literature's pedagogical potential. However, the research demonstrates that when folk literature instruction incorporates comparative analysis strategies, culturally responsive teaching practices, and dialogic pedagogical approaches, substantial intercultural competence development occurs across multiple dimensions including cultural awareness, openness to diversity, critical thinking about culture, intercultural communication skills, and empathy across differences.

The study makes theoretical contributions by extending intercultural education frameworks – particularly Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence model, Banks' (2004) multicultural education dimensions, and Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity – to an Asian educational context, while explicitly distinguishing the critical-dialogic intercultural tradition from the recognition-oriented multicultural tradition (Barrett, 2013; Liu, 2023), as set out in the Theoretical Framework. While these frameworks originated primarily in Western contexts, this research demonstrates their applicability while also revealing the importance of culturally responsive adaptation to local contexts. The findings contribute to growing scholarship on intercultural education in diverse Asian societies, providing empirical evidence for how folk literature pedagogy can effectively develop intercultural competence when grounded in established theoretical frameworks.

Practical contributions include concrete teaching models and strategies that proved effective for intercultural competence development. The comparative folk tale analysis approach, involving structured examination of narrative variants across ethnic groups to identify cultural variations and universal themes, emerges as particularly impactful. Culturally responsive teaching practices that validate diverse student identities while expanding cultural horizons, combined with dialogic pedagogical approaches positioning students as active meaning-makers, create powerful learning environments for intercultural education.

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for educational policymakers. Curriculum standards should be reformed to include explicit intercultural competence learning objectives alongside traditional literature learning goals; high-quality folk literature curriculum materials representing Vietnam's diverse ethnic groups should be developed and disseminated with culturally authentic content; comprehensive teacher professional development programs addressing both intercultural education pedagogy and ethnic minority cultural content knowledge should be established; supportive policy environments that encourage pedagogical innovation and provide adequate instructional time for intercultural education activities should be created; and intercultural competence development should be aligned with national educational competence frameworks to provide institutional legitimacy and support for implementation.

Future research should investigate several important questions emerging from this study. Longitudinal research examining sustainability and long-term impacts of intercultural competence development through folk literature instruction would provide valuable evidence about durability of observed outcomes. Studies examining scalability of effective pedagogical strategies identified in this research to broader implementation contexts would inform policy and practice decisions. Research investigating specific professional development models most effective for preparing teachers to implement intercultural folk literature pedagogy would address a critical implementation challenge. Comparative studies examining folk literature

teaching for intercultural competence across different Asian contexts could illuminate both universal principles and context-specific adaptations necessary for effective implementation.

This research demonstrates that folk literature holds significant, currently underutilized potential for developing intercultural competence among Vietnamese secondary students. Realizing this potential requires moving beyond superficial multicultural content addition toward fundamental pedagogical transformation grounded in intercultural education principles. The documented effectiveness of specific teaching strategies provides both evidence and guidance for educational improvement efforts. In Vietnam's increasingly interconnected yet persistently diverse society, developing students' intercultural competence represents not merely an educational enhancement but a social imperative. Folk literature, as a repository of diverse cultural wisdom and universal human experiences, offers a powerful pedagogical resource for preparing students to navigate cultural diversity with understanding, respect, and critical awareness.

Author Contributions

The authors are jointly responsible for the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and writing of this manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human participants, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the participating schools, teachers, and students for their cooperation and valuable contributions to this study. The authors also gratefully acknowledge the reviewers and editors of the Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies for their constructive feedback, which helped improve the quality of this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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ISSN: 2149-1291

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Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies
2026, Vol.13, No. 5, 51-67
http://dx.doi.org/ 10.66815/ejecs/3031
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ISSN: 2149-1291

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