The Green ASEAN Culture Festival as a Strategic Educational Instrument for Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract: This study investigates the implementation of cross-cultural communication through the Green ASEAN Culture Festival at Universitas Padjadjaran, positioning it as a strategic pedagogical tool for fostering intercultural competence in higher education. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research integrates data from 15 semi-structured interviews with student organizers and performers representing five academic programs, as well as faculty members. These were complemented by direct participant observation during all key phases of the festival and a comprehensive analysis of official festival documents to ensure methodological triangulation and data validity. The findings reveal that the festival transcends its role as a cultural showcase, functioning instead as a reflective and collaborative learning environment where intercultural skills are actively cultivated. Students develop three core components of intercultural communicative competence: empathy and openness, culturally contextual understanding, and the capacity for interpretation and collaboration. Moreover, the festival fosters bridging social capital, encourages the co-construction of inclusive collective identities, and strengthens university–community engagement. The study concludes that such cultural events offer a replicable and adaptable model for post-pandemic hybrid education by combining experiential learning with ecological and cultural objectives. This integration promotes not only intercultural understanding but also institutional strategies aligned with sustainability and inclusivity. The research underscores the potential of cultural festivals as transformative educational platforms and offers actionable recommendations for universities seeking to enhance global competence, civic engagement, and cultural responsiveness among students.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication, Cultural Festival, Intercultural Competence, Cultural Intelligence, Transformative Learning, Social Capital, Hybrid Education

1. Introduction

In today's increasingly interconnected world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries is essential for strengthening social, political, and economic relations. Intercultural communication involves the exchange of ideas, values, beliefs, and traditions among individuals and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby building crucial bridges between communities (Peng, 2024). This process facilitates mutual understanding and collaboration, contributes to conflict resolution, and enables individuals to approach cultural differences with empathy and respect (Woodgate & Busolo, 2021; Zhang, 2023).

Empirical evidence underscores the importance of integrating intercultural understanding across various sectors, including business and education. Such integration not only enhances interpersonal relations but also fosters cross-border cooperation (Nwankwo et al., 2024; Sánchez & Arndt, 2020). Through cultural sensitivity and targeted training, individuals and organizations can strengthen their adaptability and performance in multicultural environments, thereby contributing to the formation of a more inclusive and effective global society (Renzaho et al., 2017; Nwankwo et al., 2024).

This significance is particularly pronounced in social and educational settings, where a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics is critical for fostering meaningful engagement. Approaches that emphasize flexibility and cultural adaptability can improve the quality of relationships and reinforce cohesion across diverse groups (Smith, 2024; Zhang, 2023). At its core, intercultural communication empowers individuals to interact constructively and respectfully, enriching both personal and collective experiences in the context of globalization (Smith, 2024; Nwankwo et al., 2024).

Despite growing recognition of cultural festivals as sites of intercultural engagement, there remains a substantial research gap regarding their role as pedagogical tools in Southeast Asian higher education, particularly in contexts that intersect cultural heritage and environmental education. While previous studies have examined the relationship between festivals and intercultural communicative competence (ICC), they often overlook the communicative processes within events that, like the Green ASEAN Culture Festival, intentionally integrate cultural celebration with sustainability goals. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring

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how a hybrid festival model can function as a site for developing ICC. Its novelty lies in examining the festival as a replicable educational framework that responds to the demands of post-pandemic hybrid learning and digital intercultural exchange, areas that remain underexplored in the current literature.

Cultural festivals provide vital platforms for advancing intercultural dialogue. They go beyond entertainment to convey deep-seated cultural narratives, artistic expressions, and collective identities. International cultural events offer immersive environments in which participants can develop empathy, curiosity, and an appreciation for cultural diversity (Fu et al., 2018). However, their potential is sometimes hindered by challenges such as cultural appropriation and insufficient opportunities for meaningful interaction, factors that must be addressed to fully realize their educational and social value (Davies & Ritchie, 2021).

Moreover, cultural festivals play an important role in promoting social cohesion by preserving heritage and fostering a sense of belonging among diverse demographic groups. They encourage intercultural dialogue, help dismantle stereotypes, and contribute to the development of shared identities and mutual respect (Rutagand, 2024). As informal learning environments, festivals offer participants the opportunity to engage with cultural narratives and co-create shared experiences, key to enhancing ICC and building empathetic social connections (Giles et al., 2019).

Far from being merely celebratory events, festivals exert significant influence on community relationships and social integration. They foster local pride and strengthen social ties by promoting intergenerational engagement with communal traditions (Davou, 2018; Banda et al., 2024). As such, festivals serve as dynamic drivers of both intercultural communication and social unity.

The Green ASEAN Culture Festival at Universitas Padjadjaran presents a particularly valuable case of academic and social relevance. It merges two dimensions often treated separately in scholarly discourse: the celebration of Southeast Asian cultural heritage and the promotion of ecological consciousness. As a result, the festival embodies efforts to embed sustainability into cultural practices, aligning with global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), Goal 13 (climate action), and Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Figure 1: Atmosphere of the Green ASEAN Culture Festival at Universitas Padjadjaran.

As an educational platform, the Green ASEAN Culture Festival highlights the cultural richness of ASEAN countries, including performing arts, cuisine, handicrafts, and traditional rituals, while embedding ecological messages related to climate change, environmental conservation, waste management, and sustainable consumption. For instance, past festivals have featured eco-friendly utensils, plastic reduction campaigns, and tree-planting activities as symbolic commitments to sustainability (Mulya et al., 2024; Yamagishi & Ocampo, 2022). Thus, the festival not only functions as a cultural showcase but also as a site of social learning that cultivates awareness of the need to balance cultural preservation with environmental responsibility.

Academically, this festival offers significant contributions to interdisciplinary scholarship in intercultural communication, cultural ecology, and environmental education. A critical analysis of this case can illuminate how intercultural interactions take place in public spaces, how ecological messages are communicated to diverse audiences, and how festival experiences influence participants' attitudes and behaviors. The study also offers practical insights for organizers, educators, and policymakers on designing inclusive and impactful cultural events.

In a global context increasingly shaped by environmental degradation, climate challenges, and the erosion of local cultural practices, the Green ASEAN Culture Festival emerges as a valuable "social laboratory." It illustrates how local cultural values and environmental consciousness can be integrated to build more inclusive, sustainable, and globally engaged communities. Consequently, this research is both academically significant and practically relevant to regional and international sustainable development efforts.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates the intersection of cultural representation, ecological awareness, and intercultural communication within the context of the Green ASEAN Culture Festival. It is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the Green ASEAN Culture Festival function as a strategic pedagogical platform for implementing and enhancing intercultural communicative competence (ICC)?

2. Through what specific processes and interactions does the festival contribute to mutual understanding, cultural appreciation, and the reduction of cultural barriers among participants?

3. In what ways does the festival promote social harmony, multicultural integration, and the development of a shared collective identity within a diverse academic community?

By addressing these questions, this research seeks to provide meaningful insights into how cultural festivals can foster intercultural communication and support a more inclusive, cohesive, and globally responsive society. Ultimately, the findings aim to contribute to ongoing scholarly and practical discourse on cultural events as transformative tools for education, social empowerment, and sustainable development, both within the ASEAN region and beyond.

2. Literature Review

This literature review is organized into three thematic areas: first, theoretical models of intercultural communication; second, the role of cultural festivals in fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC); and third, the application of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) in educational contexts. This structure facilitates a critical synthesis of the core concepts that inform the study.

2.1. Theoretical Models of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural communication is a complex and multidimensional field that examines how individuals and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and form relationships. Scholars have broadly defined intercultural communication as the process of conveying information, values, and perspectives across cultures, an essential skill in today's globalized society. Song and Wu (2023), for instance, provide a comprehensive overview of intercultural communication within educational partnerships, emphasizing theoretical models such as Culture Shock Theory and the U-Curve Adaptation Model. These frameworks offer insights into how individuals adapt to unfamiliar cultural environments and are particularly relevant for understanding how participants in festivals navigate new cultural terrains.

A central theoretical anchor for this study is Byram's (2021) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence, which highlights the ability to interpret and engage respectfully with other cultures. However, this model has faced criticism for being overly idealistic, occasionally downplaying the influence of power asymmetries and the potential for conflict in intercultural encounters. To address this limitation, the present study integrates Byram's model with Allport's (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory, which outlines conditions necessary for constructive intergroup interactions, namely equal status, shared goals, and cooperative engagement. This theoretical synthesis suggests that cultural festivals can create the experiential conditions needed to translate Byram's abstract components of ICC into tangible outcomes (Blaylock & Briggs, 2023).

Intercultural communication is also challenged by linguistic differences, divergent cultural norms, and entrenched stereotypes. In this context, Cultural Intelligence, or Cultural Quotient (CQ), has emerged as a crucial construct. CQ refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations. Multiple studies have demonstrated that educational programs emphasizing intercultural differences significantly enhance students' CQ, thereby improving their interpersonal effectiveness across cultural contexts (Alexander et al., 2021; Fang et al., 2018).

Research has identified four key dimensions of CQ: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral, each contributing to intercultural adaptability (Van Dyne et al., 2017; Fang et al., 2018). Additionally, the growing prevalence of digital communication tools in intercultural exchanges presents new challenges and opportunities. While digital platforms can expand global connectivity, they may also exacerbate misunderstandings when used without intercultural sensitivity. Thus, CQ offers a useful framework for analyzing how individuals use technology to enhance, or hinder, their intercultural competence (Zhang, 2023).

2.2. Cultural Festivals, Intercultural Competence, and Education

The literature on cultural festivals consistently identifies them as vibrant expressions of cultural identity and diversity. These events often feature traditional music, dance, cuisine, rituals, and crafts, serving not only as cultural exhibitions but also as informal learning environments. Yuwita (2023) emphasizes the role of such activities in academic settings, noting their ability to foster interpersonal skills and reduce intercultural misunderstandings.

Authenticity is a recurring theme in festival scholarship. Supriono et al. (2023) argue that authentic cultural representation enhances both visitor satisfaction and intercultural engagement, contributing to long-term connections with cultural traditions. Conversely, Intason (2024), in an investigation of the Lanna Songkran Festival, illustrates the tension between maintaining authenticity and responding to tourism-driven demands. This challenge is directly relevant to the Green ASEAN Culture Festival, which must navigate similar tensions in order to remain inclusive and culturally respectful while appealing to broad audiences.

Laksmi et al. (2023) further expand the conversation by analyzing how sustainability and creativity can be incorporated into festival design, as seen in the Denpasar Festival. Their findings demonstrate that festivals can support urban sustainability goals and foster intercultural connectivity through collaborative and artistic expression. These insights offer a valuable regional framework for analyzing the Green ASEAN Culture Festival within a Southeast Asian context.

On a broader level, Gibson (2024) underscores the need for cultural self-awareness and contextual understanding as prerequisites for intercultural competence. Embedding these principles into the planning and execution of cultural festivals allows organizers to shape environments that promote inclusive, transformative learning. This reinforces the idea that festivals are not only celebratory gatherings but also strategic educational spaces that can cultivate global citizenship.

2.3. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) in Intercultural Education

While the transformative potential of cultural festivals is increasingly recognized, notable gaps remain in the literature. Much existing scholarship focuses on Western or commercialized contexts, leaving the pedagogical implications of Southeast Asian festivals, such as the Green ASEAN Culture Festival, relatively underexplored. Additionally, previous studies often prioritize outcome-based metrics, such as increased empathy or improved attitudes, without sufficiently analyzing the communicative mechanisms that produce these outcomes. Key elements such as language use, nonverbal interaction, and co-creative acts are frequently overlooked.

Moreover, there is a lack of research critically examining the intersection of cultural celebration and environmental education within the festival context. This is especially relevant given the global urgency surrounding sustainability. The present study addresses these gaps by investigating how the Green ASEAN Culture Festival facilitates intercultural communication, fosters environmental awareness, and supports the construction of cultural meaning within a hybrid educational environment.

The reviewed literature highlights the multifaceted nature of cultural festivals as sites of intercultural dialogue, empathy, and collaboration. Viewed through the lenses of authenticity, sustainability, CQ, and social impact, festivals emerge as powerful vehicles for informal learning and intercultural engagement. By situating this study within these theoretical and empirical foundations, while incorporating recent contributions from Southeast Asian scholars (e.g., Intason, 2024; Peng, 2024), the research aims to advance the evolving discourse on how cultural events function as platforms for ecological awareness, cultural negotiation, and regional cooperation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research framework, employing a case study methodology to investigate the Green ASEAN Culture Festival at Universitas Padjadjaran (Unpad) as a platform for fostering intercultural communication and promoting sustainable development. The case study approach is particularly suitable for providing a holistic, in-depth understanding of complex, real-world phenomena, especially the interplay between culture, education, and environment within a specific sociocultural context.

The choice of the Green ASEAN Culture Festival as the focal case is justified by its unique integration of cultural and ecological elements, positioning it as an exemplary model for examining intercultural dialogue within a hybrid educational setting. The methodology is further supported by existing scholarship that views cultural festivals as significant venues for informal learning, intercultural competence development, and community engagement (Gustafsson, 2024; Stake & Visse, 2023).

This approach enables a nuanced exploration of both individual and collective experiences at the festival, capturing the critical processes through which cultural and environmental objectives are interwoven into its design and execution. Moreover, it aligns with emerging research that emphasizes the pedagogical potential of festivals in fostering meaningful intercultural understanding (Gibson, 2024).

3.2. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected over a three-month period encompassing the pre-festival planning phase, the main event, and post-festival reflections. A triangulated approach was employed to ensure the credibility and depth of the findings.

a. Participant Observation The research began with participant observation, allowing the lead researcher to engage directly with the festival environment by attending planning meetings, rehearsals, and all major events, accumulating over 20 hours of field engagement. Participant observation immerses researchers in cultural contexts, enabling deep understanding of behaviors, interactions, and nonverbal communication by observing and engaging with people over time (Da Costa et al., 2024). Through immersive participation in performances, workshops, and exhibitions, the researcher observed how individuals from diverse backgrounds co-created meaning, navigated cultural differences, and engaged in shared learning experiences.

Table 1: Participant Demographics (N=15)

Participant Category	Number	Role
Student Organizers	5	Involved in planning and execution
Student Performers	5	Participated in cultural showcases
Faculty Members	3	CCC course lecturers and academic advisors
External Attendees	2	Members of the general public

Source: By the Author

b. Semi-Structured Interviews Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with festival stakeholders, including organizers, performers from different cultural backgrounds, and faculty advisors. This interview format ensured consistency in core questions while allowing flexibility to explore emergent themes. The discussions focused on participants' motivations, experiences, and interpretations of intercultural communication and sustainability within the festival context. This flexible structure is well-suited for capturing complex and subjective experiences (Eppich et al., 2019; Peters & Halcomb, 2015).

c. Document Analysis To complement primary data, a document analysis was conducted using official festival programs, promotional content (e.g., press releases, social media), student reflection papers, and media coverage. This analysis provided insight into how concepts such as interculturalism and sustainability were framed by organizers and interpreted publicly. It also offered a longitudinal perspective on the festival's evolution, contributing to a deeper understanding of how its aims and narratives have developed over time (Bowen, 2009).

d. Secondary Data Secondary sources were also examined, including scholarly articles, reports, and online resources. These materials served to contextualize the findings within existing literature, reinforce empirical insights, and broaden the analytical perspective (Sarhan & Manu, 2021). Academic databases were instrumental in sourcing peer-reviewed content that informed the theoretical framework and methodological design (Manu et al., 2021). The inclusion of secondary data enhanced the overall comprehensiveness of the analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns across interviews, observations, and documentary data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, the researcher undertook: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) theme generation, (4) theme review, (5) theme definition, and (6) report production. For instance, initial codes such as "negotiating conflict," "sharing food," and "explaining symbols" were later clustered under the broader theme of "Collaborative Meaning-Making."

Thematic analysis was chosen for its adaptability and ability to accommodate diverse qualitative data types. It allowed the study to generate rich, nuanced insights directly aligned with the research questions (Alkhawaldeh et al., 2023). In addition, a cross-case analysis was conducted to compare the Green ASEAN Culture Festival with similar cultural events in the ASEAN region. This comparative approach illuminated both shared practices and distinctive features in the integration of sustainability and intercultural dialogue. As emphasized by Chereau et al. (2022), cross-case comparisons support the development of thick descriptions while enabling broader generalizations about common patterns, particularly within educational and policy-relevant contexts.

3.4. Researcher Positionality and Ethical Considerations

The research team acknowledges their status as academic insiders at Universitas Padjadjaran, which facilitated access but also required critical reflexivity to avoid potential bias. The lead researcher, though familiar with the institutional context, was not affiliated with the Faculty of Communication Sciences, allowing for a degree of analytical distance.

A reflective journal was maintained throughout the research to document assumptions, observations, and reactions. This practice ensured that interpretations remained grounded in participants' perspectives rather than researcher expectations. Ethical procedures were rigorously followed: all participants provided informed consent, were guaranteed anonymity, and were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

4. Analysis and Findings

The analysis of the data revealed three prominent themes that directly address the research questions: (1) The Festival as a Site for Experiential Learning and Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Development; (2) Collaborative Identity Formation Through Symbolic Representation; and (3) The Festival as a Catalyst for Bridging Social Capital and Community Cohesion. These themes replace the previous narrative structure to provide a more organized, data-driven presentation of the findings.

4.1. Theme 1: The Festival as a Site for Experiential Learning and Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Development

Since its inception in 1987, the Cultural Festival organized by the Faculty of Communication Sciences at Universitas Padjadjaran has evolved from a routine event into a strategic platform for advancing cross-cultural communication. It is formally embedded in the curriculum through the Cross-Cultural Communication (CCC) course, reflecting the university's commitment to utilizing cultural expression as a pedagogical tool for experiential and transformative learning.

As one CCC course lecturer noted during an interview, the festival epitomizes contextual learning:

"They read about Byram's model in class, but here, they live it. They are forced to be curious, to interpret, to relate. It's where the theory stops being abstract."

This immersive process encourages the practical application of classroom theories to real-life social settings and promotes critical awareness, particularly around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Brendel, 2022). Students engage not as passive observers but as active participants, co-constructing intercultural narratives through performance and dialogue.

These findings align with Hoff's (2020) research, which emphasizes the transformative potential of real-world, immersive learning experiences in developing intercultural competence. Hoff argues that authentic intercultural engagement fosters empathy, perspective-taking, and adaptive communication skills that are difficult to cultivate through traditional, lecture-based methods. In this sense, the festival functions as a "living laboratory" where cognitive understanding is translated into behavioral application. This underscores the importance of experiential pedagogy in higher education, particularly in fostering intercultural reflexivity.

Festival organizers intentionally design performances that integrate at least two cultural traditions to reflect the complexity of intercultural communication. One organizer explained:

"Each group faces the challenge of integrating local folklore with global influences, such as intertwining Minangkabau legends with Southeast Asian cultural symbolism."

A student performer shared:

"We had a big argument about whether one Indonesian culture's character should be adopted into Southeast Asian symbols. This forced us to discuss the meaning of the symbols and how they could be combined, while still respecting both cultures. It was difficult, but we learned more in that one hour of discussion than in weeks of reading literature on culture."

This experience illustrates how the creative process becomes a site of negotiation, fostering intercultural sensitivity, meaning-making, and collaborative problem-solving.

The findings suggest that the festival plays a central role in cultivating all four components of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral (Ang et al., 2024). During the preparation phase, students conduct cultural research, deepening their understanding of norms and practices (cognitive CQ). In collaborative settings, they adapt communication styles and behaviors (behavioral CQ) and sustain engagement despite cultural misunderstandings or logistical challenges (motivational CQ). Most importantly, the festival nurtures metacognitive reflection. One student wrote:

"I realized I was getting frustrated because my group members were not as direct as I am. I had to stop and think about my own communication style, not just theirs. That was a turning point."

Such reflection fosters self-awareness and adaptability, hallmarks of effective intercultural communicators.

Another performer described their group's conflict-resolution strategy:

"There were times when we couldn't agree on what to present. We decided to hold a vote and go with the majority. It helped us move forward and stay united."

This response demonstrates how students not only engage in content negotiation but also in process negotiation, balancing differing expectations while working toward a common goal.

These reflections illustrate the development of both metacognitive awareness and behavioral flexibility, core elements of CQ. The findings are further supported by Teixeira and Zanela Klein (2024), who emphasize the importance of reflective practices and adaptive communication in multicultural team settings. Their study shows that metacognitive CQ, awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, serves as a necessary precursor to behavioral CQ, where individuals modify actions to bridge cultural gaps.

Similar to the student experiences in this study, Teixeira and Klein (2024) observed that navigating interpersonal tensions in diverse groups often triggers deeper self-reflection, enabling team members to recognize and adjust for implicit biases. This iterative process not only enhances group cohesion but also strengthens individual intercultural competence.

Therefore, the festival's collaborative and performative environment functions as a dynamic context for developing all dimensions of Cultural Intelligence. It bridges theory and practice, creating opportunities for students to critically engage with cultural diversity through lived experience, thereby reinforcing the theoretical framework with practical, embodied understanding.

4.2. Collaborative Identity Formation Through Symbolic Representation

The festival served as a vibrant tapestry of symbolic communication, where the fusion of diverse cultural elements enabled participants to negotiate and co-create new, hybrid identities. Performances, such as the blending of traditional Indonesian dance with contemporary K-pop choreography (see Figure 3), were not mere showcases, but rather *dialogues in motion*, illustrating the evolving nature of cultural expression. As depicted in Figure 2, the use of traditional costumes and instruments became a source of cultural pride, while their innovative recontextualization allowed for creative reinterpretation.

Field observations revealed that cross-cultural communication extended far beyond verbal exchanges. It was powerfully conveyed through visual and performative elements such as costumes, music, stage props, and gestures. For instance, the fusion of Balinese dance with modern red attire (Figure 2) exemplified how non-verbal modes of expression became sites of symbolic negotiation and collaborative meaning-making. These dynamics align with the concept of *cultural hybridity* (Ning, 2023), which posits that cultural identity is not fixed, but constantly reshaped through intercultural encounters.

Figure 2: Traditional dance performance in red costumes and yellow sashes

By framing the festival as a space for both exploration and critical reflection, participants were encouraged to reconceptualize cultural differences not as obstacles, but as valuable resources for personal growth and shared understanding. The immersive nature of the experience enabled students to engage authentically with cultural material, thereby fostering collective identity construction. For example, the performance featuring conical hats (Figure 3), originally a Vietnamese cultural symbol, was adopted by a group of Indonesian, Malaysian, and Thai students. Through their collaborative creative process, the hat evolved into a shared emblem of regional solidarity and cultural synthesis.

Figure 3: Collaborative dance performance with conical hats

This process resonates with Xu's (2024) framework of Intercultural Communicative Competence, which highlights the interplay of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Within the context of the Green ASEAN Culture Festival, these elements are activated through experiential engagement: students cultivate respect and openness (attitudes), conduct cross-cultural research (knowledge), and develop practical competencies through performance and collaboration (skills).

The dynamics can also be analyzed through the lens of *Cultural Fusion Theory* (Croucher & Kramer, 2017), which views intercultural adaptation as a reciprocal, co-creative process rather than a unidirectional form of assimilation. Rather than merely juxtaposing discrete cultural markers, the performances at the festival actively fused them, resulting in new, hybrid cultural forms that held meaning for both participants and audiences. According to Kramer (2019), such acts of fusion are not merely aesthetic choices but are also embedded in deeper processes of meaning-making, identity negotiation, and cultural power relations. The festival's creative reinterpretation of traditional elements within contemporary frameworks exemplifies how intercultural engagement can move beyond superficial encounters toward more profound and dialogic forms of understanding. In this sense, the festival becomes a "living laboratory" for cultural fusion, demonstrating that innovation and tradition are not oppositional, but can mutually enrich one another through sustained, respectful engagement.

A compelling example of this process emerged from the bamboo instrument performance (Figure 4). As the group leader explained:

"None of us knew how to play the angklung at first. We had to learn together, relying on the two Sundanese students to teach us. It broke down the 'expert' versus 'novice' barrier and made us a real team."

This account illustrates how the festival promoted intercultural learning not only cognitively, but also socially and emotionally. In such moments, students were not simply studying intercultural competence, they were embodying it through collaborative, experiential practice.

Figure 4: Musical group playing bamboo instruments in traditional attire.

The visual and performative dimensions of the festival played an essential role in fostering both individual reflection and collective meaning-making. By merging cultural elements within a single performance, students created semiotic spaces where audiences could actively interpret and emotionally engage with culture. Diversity, in this context, was framed not as a fixed identity marker, but as a dynamic and celebratory construct (Chivallon, 2018; Li et al., 2018).

However, these collaborative processes were not without tension. One group encountered external criticism for potential cultural appropriation. While initially unsettling, this episode prompted a reflective and constructive dialogue among group members about representation, authenticity, and respect. Ultimately, this challenge deepened their understanding of intercultural sensitivity and strengthened the quality and integrity of their final performance.

4.3. Theme 3: The Festival as a Catalyst for Bridging Social Capital and Community Cohesion

Evidence from intergroup interactions suggests that the Green ASEAN Culture Festival functions as a powerful catalyst for building bridging social capital, that is, networks of trust and collaboration that span diverse cultural, ethnic, and ideological boundaries (Ahmad et al., 2023). Rather than encouraging interaction solely within familiar peer groups, the festival intentionally fosters collaboration among students from markedly different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. This inclusive environment challenges participants to confront their preconceptions and cultivates the adaptability needed for intercultural engagement.

From the standpoint of intercultural communication theory, these dynamics align closely with Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis (1954). This framework posits that intergroup prejudice can be reduced when interactions occur under specific conditions: equal status among participants, cooperative interdependence, common goals, and institutional support (Blaylock & Briggs, 2023). The festival meets these criteria through its structured, collaborative format. One organizer noted:

"The goal is the final show. Everyone has to rely on everyone else. The dancer needs the musician, the musician needs the scriptwriter. Their grades depend on it. That shared goal is the magic ingredient."

This shared objective not only promotes interdependence but also reinforces a sense of collective responsibility, encouraging participants to value and depend on one another's contributions.

Beyond building interpersonal trust, the festival plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity. It provides a symbolic and experiential space where students can express and negotiate their cultural identities in a safe, inclusive, and dynamic setting. Oliveirra (2024) emphasizes that cultural festivals act as powerful vehicles for social reconciliation and the co-construction of shared identities, enabling participants to transcend cultural boundaries through sustained, meaningful interaction. The Green ASEAN Culture Festival's ability to reduce creative tensions and promote

intercultural understanding through dialogue reinforces these broader pedagogical insights. As Dong et al. (2023) note, experiential and collaborative activities are particularly effective in fostering social cohesion in multicultural environments.

At the institutional level, the festival enhances Universitas Padjadjaran's identity as a forward-thinking, inclusive academic institution. By engaging both internal and external communities, the festival extends its influence beyond the campus, linking academic learning with broader societal practices. The participation of the general public further amplifies its socio-cultural impact, reinforcing ties between the university and the surrounding community.

This dynamic reflects Flavian's (2024) concept of *community-based interculturalism*, which emphasizes the creation of inclusive and dialogical educational spaces that engage learners in culturally responsive ways. In this light, the Green ASEAN Culture Festival serves as a practical and replicable model for promoting social integration, intercultural solidarity, and academic excellence grounded in inclusivity.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Green ASEAN Culture Festival has functioned as a strategic and impactful platform for facilitating cross-cultural communication through contextually grounded, collaborative, and reflective engagement. This discussion interprets the results through the lens of the theoretical framework and prior literature, highlighting how the festival transforms intercultural learning from abstract theory into lived, embodied practice, consistent with Brendel's (2022) model of experiential learning.

Theoretically, the study reinforces and extends Xu's (2024) assertion that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is grounded in three interrelated components: attitudes, knowledge, and skills. This research goes further by illustrating that these dimensions are not developed in isolation, but emerge simultaneously and interactively within a task-based, real-world context. The festival acts as a pedagogical ecosystem in which collaborative performance fosters empathy (attitudes), deepens understanding of cultural practices (knowledge), and sharpens communication adaptability (skills). Students move beyond intellectual engagement with cultural concepts to internalize them through emotional, social, and experiential pathways.

From a social standpoint, the festival fosters the development of bridging social capital, networks of mutual trust and collaboration that span cultural and ethnic divisions (Ahmad et al., 2023). The collaborative structure of the event compels students from diverse religious, linguistic, and national backgrounds to work together toward a common goal. This environment supports the conditions outlined by Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory (Blaylock & Briggs, 2023), which posits that intergroup bias can be reduced when participants share equal status, cooperate toward shared objectives, and are institutionally supported. The shared objective of delivering a successful cultural performance provides the necessary interdependence and accountability that drives genuine intercultural connection. Diversity, in this context, becomes more than a challenge to be managed; it becomes a collective asset that enhances the richness of collaboration.

The festival also plays a crucial role in shaping a communal campus identity that is inclusive, participatory, and reflective of cultural diversity. More than a site of cultural exchange, the festival serves as a collaborative space where shared identities are forged through collective experiences, storytelling, and co-creation. As Oliveirra (2024) argues, cultural festivals act as agents of social reconciliation, enabling the formation of flexible and reflective collective identities in multicultural societies. In line with this view, the Green ASEAN Culture Festival serves as both a symbol and a mechanism for forging intercultural solidarity on campus.

At the institutional level, the festival exemplifies Universitas Padjadjaran's commitment to embedding diversity as a core element of its educational mission, beyond symbolic gestures and into the realm of actionable, transformative practice. The inclusion of public participants, as both audience members and co-creators, enhances the university's societal relevance, bridging the divide between higher education and civil society. This is consistent with Flavian's (2024) concept of community-based interculturalism, which emphasizes dialogical and inclusive learning environments that extend beyond the classroom to engage wider communities in reciprocal cultural education.

The implications of this research are both theoretical and practical. For curriculum design, the findings suggest that universities should integrate credit-bearing, experiential learning modules grounded in cultural participation to promote global competencies and intercultural resilience. From a policy perspective, institutions across the ASEAN region could replicate similar festival models to support regional integration, soft diplomacy, and cross-border educational collaboration. The outcomes of this study also provide a compelling rationale for incorporating culture-based pedagogical interventions as tools for fostering civic values, social cohesion, and human development in pluralistic societies.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, as a single case study, the findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable across other institutions or cultural settings. Second, the study's data sources primarily include student and faculty participants, thus underrepresenting broader public or community perspectives. Third, the study does not capture the long-term impact of the festival on participants' intercultural attitudes, professional development, or civic engagement. Lastly, the researcher's presence during participant observation may have introduced some degree of observer bias, potentially influencing behavior or responses.

Future research should seek to address these limitations. A mixed-methods or longitudinal approach could assess shifts in intercultural sensitivity or CQ before and after festival participation. Comparative studies across multiple ASEAN universities could differentiate between universally effective practices and those influenced by local context. Additionally, a post-graduation tracking study would yield valuable insights into the enduring effects of experiential intercultural learning on participants' professional and personal trajectories.

6. Conclusion

The Green ASEAN Culture Festival at Universitas Padjadjaran has proven to be an effective platform for the integrated and holistic application of cross-cultural communication. More than a celebratory event, the festival functions as a pedagogical mechanism that connects theoretical models with lived, reflective, and socially transformative practices. Its collaborative and interdisciplinary structure fosters key dimensions of intercultural communicative competence, including openness to diversity,

contextually grounded cultural knowledge, and interpretive and cooperative skills. This study's principal contribution lies in its in-depth examination of a hybrid cultural-ecological festival within a Southeast Asian university setting, positioning it as a replicable educational model with relevance across the region.

The findings affirm that intercultural communication is a dynamic and evolving process shaped by lived experience, identity negotiation, and critical reflection. Students not only engage with cultural diversity but are also prompted to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and communicative behavior. Their active participation in the festival facilitates inclusive and meaningful intercultural encounters, which in turn contribute to the formation of bridging social capital and foster enhanced social cohesion, an outcome consistent with the conditions outlined in intergroup contact theory.

The festival further contributes to the cultivation of a resilient, dialogic, and diversity-responsive campus identity. It reflects Universitas Padjadjaran's institutional commitment to embedding cultural diversity as a central pedagogical principle aimed at producing globally competent, socially conscious graduates. Viewed through the lens of community-based interculturalism, the festival nurtures horizontal, participatory, and mutually enriching relationships among students, faculty, and the broader public, thus bridging the gap between academic institutions and surrounding communities.

Based on these insights, this study proposes several implications for pedagogy, policy, and research. From a pedagogical standpoint, higher education institutions should consider developing a "Festival as Pedagogy" framework that includes instructional resources and assessment tools for embedding such experiential learning within various academic disciplines, not solely within communication studies. From a policy perspective, university leadership should allocate sustainable funding and structural support for student-led intercultural initiatives, recognizing them as high-impact educational practices that enhance global competencies, institutional reputation, and student retention. For future research, scholars are encouraged to explore the adaptability of this model to online and hybrid learning environments, especially in light of the evolving post-pandemic educational landscape. Additionally, future studies should examine the specific influence of the festival's ecological dimensions on participants' environmental awareness and behaviors, an aspect that remains underexplored in the current research.

In conclusion, the Green ASEAN Culture Festival represents not only a robust medium for fostering intercultural communication but also a scalable model for transformative cultural education. It demonstrates how principles of diversity and inclusion can be operationalized into meaningful social engagement and illustrates the potential of higher education institutions to cultivate globally responsible, empathetic, and interculturally competent citizens.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution statements: RKA and RA jointly conceptualized the study and designed the overall research framework for the Green ASEAN Culture Festival project. IMK and RA were responsible for data collection and analysis, including the review of relevant literature and documentation. RKA prepared the initial draft of the manuscript, with critical input and revisions from RA and IMK. All authors contributed to the interpretation of the findings and the refinement of the final manuscript. IMK supervised the entire research process and ensured compliance with academic and ethical standards throughout the project. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Data availability statement: Data is available upon request. Please get in touch with the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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