

Exploring Educational Beliefs and Classroom Behaviors in Different Culture: A Qualitative Study of International Students

Zidni Rizqi Kamila^{1*}, Vanesa Karin¹, Lita Nala Khisymah¹, Karima
Ibnatun Najwa¹, Maulana Fadel Rakhman¹, Hensem Alambana¹,
Muhammad Hakimul Faza¹, Abdullah Muhlish¹

¹English Education Department, Faculty of Education and Teacher's Training,
Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan

*E-mail: zidni.rizqi.kamila@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id (corresponding author)

Abstract: This study aims to explore and understand the experiences of international students from Malaysia, the Philippines, and Nigeria regarding their educational beliefs and classroom behaviors. This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate students' experiences across different cultural and educational contexts. The participants consisted of three international students representing Malaysia, the Philippines, and Nigeria. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings revealed several themes related to educational beliefs and classroom behaviors, including enrichment activities, special education, corporal punishment, student participation, cheating, beliefs about teacher authority, and absenteeism. The results indicate both similarities and differences across the three countries, reflecting the influence of cultural values, social expectations, and institutional practices on educational experiences. The study suggests that educators and policymakers should adopt culturally responsive approaches that acknowledge diverse perspectives, promote inclusive learning environments, and foster positive student engagement across educational contexts.

Keywords: Educational Beliefs; Classroom Behavior; Cultural Perspectives; International Students

INTRODUCTION

Education in every country has different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Individuals have their own cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences in educational practices (Sarı & Yüce, 2020). Culture refers to the shared knowledge, values, beliefs, attitudes, rules of behavior, and role expectations held by members of a social group (Badawi, 2024). It can also be understood as a set of shared perceptions, feelings, values, and norms developed and maintained by a group that influences individuals' behavior within that group. Culture also influences educational settings, including the roles of teachers and students in the classroom (Israelsson, 2016).

Students develop beliefs and attitudes through their personal and educational experiences. Beliefs can be defined as ideas, assumptions, or understandings about the world that individuals consider to be true (Valckx et al., 2021). Attitude can be defined as a tendency to respond positively or negatively to particular groups, symbols, or events, reflecting an individual's feelings toward their surroundings and influencing how they react

to different situations (Rohmani & Andriyanti, 2022). These beliefs and attitudes, which are shaped by cultural and educational experiences, can influence classroom interactions, participation, and learning practices. As a result, cultural backgrounds can affect perceptions of effective teaching, appropriate classroom behavior, and student engagement in the learning process (Sarı & Yüce, 2020).

Cultural differences often lead to different expectations regarding teacher authority, student participation, discipline, and classroom interaction. Some educational contexts emphasize authority and discipline, while others encourage active participation and discussion. These differences shape educational beliefs and classroom practices, resulting in diverse classroom experiences for teachers and students (Gulzar et al., 2024). Previous studies have shown that cultural norms and values play an important role in classroom management and student behavior. Factors such as teacher authority, disciplinary practices, student participation, and peer interaction are often influenced by the cultural context in which learning takes place. Consequently, students from different cultural backgrounds may hold different perspectives on classroom behavior (Badawi, 2024).

In multicultural education, classroom behaviors manifest not only in routine engagements but also in complex ethical choices. A critical, culturally influenced behavior is academic dishonesty, or cheating. This means students engage in dishonest practices during their studies to gain an easy advantage and achieve academic success (Purnamasari, 2013). Many students cheat because of heavy academic pressure, negative peer influence, and fear of failing exams. This heavy pressure forces them to do anything, including cheating, to get good grades (Murdiana et al., 2023). Students also cheat because they like to delay their work, especially when the homework is too hard or when they cannot manage their time well (Ghufron & Risnawati, 2016). In Indonesia, this high pressure and bad habit lead many students to seek help online, where social media accounts openly sell services to do daily school tasks and homework for them (Fathoni, 2024). Culture shapes daily interactions and discipline; it makes students stay quiet in class out of fear of strict teachers, defines nonverbal rules, such as the perceived impoliteness of using the left hand, and drives different reactions to school rules, ranging from accepting strict physical punishment to preferring soft communication.

Many previous studies discuss classroom behavior, but most rely on numbers and focus on general teaching methods. Few in-depth qualitative studies directly compare how international students from different countries feel about these sensitive school issues. This study wants to fill that gap. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the real experiences of international students from Malaysia, the Philippines, and Nigeria regarding their educational beliefs and classroom behaviors. By listening to their stories, this research can show how different cultural backgrounds significantly shape students' views of school rules, teacher authority, and academic honesty.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' perspectives on educational practices across different cultural backgrounds. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three participants, identified by the pseudonyms Jac (Malaysia), Philip (Philippines), and Geri (Nigeria). The interview questions were adapted from Dresser's framework of intercultural classroom and educational practices, which

includes themes such as Enrichment Activities, Special Education, Student Participation, Corporal Punishment, Cheating, Teacher Knows Best, and Absenteeism. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow participants to describe their experiences and perspectives in depth while providing researchers with sufficient flexibility to explore emerging issues during the interview process. This approach is widely used in qualitative educational research because it enables a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions (Jalilzadeh et al., 2024). Similarly, Harper and Prentice (2024) argue that interview-based qualitative methods are particularly effective for examining students' views and experiences regarding educational and academic issues.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times and compared participants' responses across the predetermined themes. The data were then organized according to Dresser's framework and interpreted in relation to relevant literature and previous studies. This analytical process is consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) view that qualitative analysis should involve careful engagement with the data to identify meaningful patterns and interpretations. Furthermore, purposive participant selection is commonly employed in qualitative studies because it enables researchers to obtain rich, relevant information from individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Shoaib & Ali, 2020). Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. All interview data were treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Enrichment Activities

The interview results showed that students in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Nigeria were involved in various learning activities outside the classroom. These activities included interviews, homework, and community-based assignments that allowed students to connect academic knowledge with real-life situations. Such experiences suggest that learning is not limited to classroom instruction but can also take place through interactions with family members, communities, and people from different cultural backgrounds. Research has shown that learning activities conducted outside the classroom can help students develop practical understanding, social skills, and intercultural awareness (Celio et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2019).

Jac shared that one of the assignments she remembered involved interviewing individuals from a different religious background.

"We once interviewed Buddhist people about how they worship God and the materials they use during their religious rituals" (Jac, interview, 2026).

Jac's experience suggests that students were encouraged to learn directly from members of other communities rather than relying only on information provided in textbooks. Through these interactions, students had opportunities to gain firsthand knowledge of cultural and religious practices different from their own. This type of activity may help students become more open to diversity and develop a deeper understanding of other cultures. According to Deardorff (2020), direct interaction with people from different

cultural backgrounds can strengthen intercultural competence and encourage students to appreciate cultural differences. Similarly, Schwarzenhal et al. (2020) found that learning experiences involving cultural diversity contribute to students' social awareness and intercultural understanding.

Phillip explained that homework was a common part of school life in the Philippines and was often completed with support from family members.

"Teachers usually gave us homework to complete at home, and we often worked on it together with our parents" (Phillip, interview, 2026).

Phillip's response highlights the important role of family involvement in students' learning experiences. Homework not only reinforces what students learn at school but also creates opportunities for parents to participate in the educational process. When students receive support from their families, learning can become a shared responsibility rather than an individual task. Research by Wilder (2014) found that parental involvement is positively associated with students' academic achievement and motivation. More recently, Barger et al. (2019) also reported that collaboration between schools and families can improve students' engagement and learning outcomes.

A similar experience was reported by Geri, who explained that some assignments required students to interact with family members and observe activities within their communities.

"We sometimes had assignments that involved our family or community, such as interviewing family members or observing activities around us" (Geri, interview, 2026).

Geri's response shows that learning activities outside school can help students connect classroom concepts to everyday life. By observing real situations and engaging with people in their communities, students can better understand how knowledge is applied beyond academic settings. These experiences reflect the principles of experiential learning, in which learning activities involving social interaction and cultural engagement can contribute to students' personal growth, communication skills, and intercultural awareness (Celio et al., 2011).

The participants' responses indicate that enrichment activities play an important role in supporting learning beyond the classroom. Through interviews, homework, and community-based assignments, students have opportunities to apply their knowledge in authentic contexts while developing communication skills and cultural awareness. These findings are supported by recent studies showing that experiential and culturally connected learning activities can enhance student engagement, intercultural competence, and meaningful learning outcomes (Celio et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2019).

Special Education

The results show different approaches to special education in the Philippines, Nigeria, and Malaysia. Phillip and Geri mentioned instances where students with special needs were welcomed and accommodated within the school community, whereas Jac shared that many students with disabilities attend separate special schools. These differences reflect the international debate about inclusive education versus segregated special education.

"In the Philippines, if there are students with special needs, they are supported, because people in the Philippines are friendlier" (Phillip, interview, 2026).

Phillip's reference to students with special needs being "supported" is consistent with research showing that inclusive environments can promote positive social relationships and acceptance among students with and without disabilities. This finding is in line with the study by Edward Asamoah et al. (2018), which found that visually impaired students generally supported inclusive education, as it allowed them to learn alongside their peers and demonstrate their abilities.

"In my school, students with special needs were generally respected. Teachers tried to support them, although the resources available were not always enough" (Geri, interview, 2026).

Likewise, educators worked to help these students and ensure they were participating in learning activities, Geri said. He added that the resources and support services provided were sometimes inadequate to address their educational needs fully. Geri's finding that teachers support students with special needs despite limited resources is corroborated by Rashed Aldabas (2020). Teachers generally felt prepared to teach students with disabilities, but challenges existed, particularly when resources, experience, and specialized support were lacking. Moreover, a meta-analysis by Françoise Guillemot and colleagues (2022) found that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are generally positive and have become increasingly positive over time. The support for inclusion was especially strong among special education teachers.

"For students with special needs, there are special schools for them" (Jac, interview, 2026).

During her school years in Malaysia, Jac said students with disabilities were generally enrolled in special schools, rather than studying with students without disabilities in mainstream classrooms. She stated, *"Students with special needs, there are special schools for them."* This finding suggests that the participant's educational system adopted a more specialized approach to special education. Research indicates that although special schools may provide specialized services, inclusive settings can promote social participation and equal opportunities when sufficient support is available (Asamoah et al., 2018).

Corporal Punishment

The interview findings revealed differing perspectives on the effectiveness of corporal punishment in addressing student behavior. The participants from Nigeria, the Philippines, and Malaysia expressed varying beliefs based on their educational experiences and cultural contexts. While some participants believed that corporal punishment remains effective in maintaining discipline and preventing students from repeating mistakes, others argued that communication and guidance are more beneficial for supporting students' behavioral development. These differences suggest that cultural values, educational practices, and personal experiences influence beliefs about discipline.

Geri from Nigeria expressed a critical view of corporal punishment. Although he acknowledged that punishment may temporarily stop inappropriate behavior, he believed it is not the most effective method for helping students improve in the long term.

"Personally, I do not think it is the best method. It may stop bad behavior for a short time, but I believe communication and guidance are more effective in helping students improve" (Geri, interview, 2026).

Geri's response suggests that behavioral improvement should be achieved through communication rather than fear of punishment. From his perspective, students are more likely to develop positive behavior when teachers explain mistakes, provide guidance, and support students in understanding the consequences of their actions. This finding reflects contemporary approaches to classroom management that emphasize positive discipline and supportive teacher-student interactions (Cipriano et al., 2024). Research has shown that positive disciplinary practices help students develop self-regulation, responsibility, and stronger relationships with teachers, thereby contributing to more sustainable behavioral improvement (Wulandari & Abdullah, 2024). Similarly, studies have highlighted that communication-based approaches encourage students to understand behavioral expectations rather than merely avoiding punishment (Eddy et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2024).

Phillip shared a different perspective from the Philippines. He believed that corporal punishment is effective because students become obedient and avoid repeating inappropriate behavior after receiving punishment.

"Effective. Students who receive punishment immediately obey and do not repeat the same mistakes because students there highly respect their teachers" (Phillip, interview, 2026).

Phillip's response indicates that corporal punishment is viewed as a disciplinary tool that produces immediate compliance. In his view, punishment encourages students to follow classroom rules because they respect their teachers and do not want to experience the same consequences again (Pan et al., 2024). This finding suggests that discipline is closely connected to teacher authority and students' willingness to obey classroom expectations. Similar perceptions have been reported in educational contexts where corporal punishment is considered a means of maintaining order and reinforcing discipline (Dhaliwal et al., 2024). However, previous studies have also found that while corporal punishment may lead to short-term obedience, it does not always guarantee long-term behavioral improvement because students may comply primarily out of fear rather than a genuine understanding of their mistakes (Visser et al., 2022).

When asked about students' feelings after receiving corporal punishment, Phillip explained that students often feel embarrassed because the punishment occurs in front of their classmates.

"Embarrassed, because their classmates see it. But the next day they are usually fine and treat it as a lesson" (Phillip, interview, 2026).

This response suggests that corporal punishment may create emotional reactions in addition to behavioral consequences. Feelings of embarrassment may encourage students to reflect on their actions and avoid repeating similar behavior (Heekes et al., 2022). Interestingly, Phillip perceived these feelings as temporary and believed that students eventually regard the experience as a lesson rather than a lasting negative experience. This finding suggests that students may view punishment as part of the learning process in their educational environment (Zhang & Qi, 2024). However, recent studies have found that public punishment can affect students' emotional well-being and classroom experiences, particularly when students perceive it as humiliating or unfair (Pan et al., 2024).

Phillip also stated that corporal punishment does not affect students' relationships with teachers.

"It does not affect the relationship because it only happens in the classroom. Outside the classroom, everything returns to normal, and people forget about it" (Phillip, interview, 2026).

Phillip's statement suggests that students in his context may separate disciplinary actions from their personal relationships with teachers. Punishment is viewed as part of the teacher's role in maintaining discipline rather than as a personal conflict. As a result, students continue to communicate normally with teachers after the incident (Zhang & Qi, 2024). This finding reflects how cultural understandings of authority can shape students' interpretations of disciplinary practices. Research has shown that students' perceptions of teacher authority influence how they respond to disciplinary actions and how they maintain relationships with teachers following corrective measures (Eddy et al., 2024). Nevertheless, other studies suggest that positive teacher-student relationships are generally associated with more effective behavioral management and stronger classroom engagement than punitive approaches alone (Cipriano et al., 2024; Wulandari & Abdullah, 2024).

Jac from Malaysia shared an experience that reflects changes in educational practices over time. She explained that corporal punishment was used in primary school, particularly when students failed to complete assignments or engaged in misbehavior.

"When I was in primary school, students could be caned on the hand for mistakes such as not doing homework or misbehaving" (Jac, interview, 2026).

Jac's experience indicates that corporal punishment was previously accepted as a disciplinary practice within her educational context. The punishment was intended to discourage inappropriate behavior and encourage students to follow school rules. However, she also explained that such practices are no longer common because educational regulations have changed, and many parents oppose physical punishment in schools.

"Now teachers cannot give physical punishment because the Ministry of Education has introduced new regulations, and many parents do not allow their children to receive such punishment" (Jac, interview, 2026).

This finding reflects broader changes in educational policies and public attitudes toward student discipline. Increasing attention to student well-being, children's rights, and positive learning environments has encouraged many schools to reduce the use of corporal punishment and adopt alternative disciplinary approaches (Wulandari & Abdullah, 2024). Similar trends have been reported in various educational systems where policymakers and parents have advocated for non-physical forms of discipline (Dhaliwal et al., 2024; Heekes et al., 2022).

Despite these policy changes, Jac believed that corporal punishment could still be effective in encouraging discipline.

"It is effective because many students become afraid of repeating the same mistakes and become more diligent in completing their assignments because they are afraid of being caned" (Jac, interview, 2026).

Jac's response suggests that corporal punishment is perceived as effective because it serves as a deterrent. Students may become more careful and responsible because they wish to avoid future punishment (Visser et al., 2022). This perspective is similar to Phillip's belief that punishment promotes obedience and discourages repeated misconduct. However, educational researchers have argued that while fear of punishment may influence behavior

in the short term, positive discipline strategies are generally more effective in supporting long-term behavioral development and intrinsic motivation (Pan et al., 2024; Cipriano et al., 2024).

Student Participation

The findings from the interviews indicate that student participation is influenced by teacher authority, classroom culture, and students' confidence in expressing their ideas. Philip and Geri emphasized the impact of teacher authority on classroom engagement. Philip and Geri explained,

"When students are afraid of teachers, they become less active in class. They may avoid asking questions because they are worried about giving the wrong answer" (Philip, interview, 2026).

"When students are afraid of strict or intimidating teachers, they tend to become quiet in class. If students know the answer, they enjoy participating. However, if they do not know the answer, everyone tends to remain silent" (Geri, interview, 2026).

These statements suggest that fear of authority and uncertainty about answers can discourage students from actively participating in classroom discussions. Students' willingness to participate appears closely linked to classroom environment and perception of authority. Philip and Geri reported that students tend to be less active when they fear strict teachers, avoiding questions or discussion to prevent mistakes. This aligns with Downing et al. (2020), who identified fear of negative evaluation as a major contributor to student anxiety in learning environments.

In contrast, Jac described a learning environment that fosters participation from an early age. Jac shared,

"Since junior high school, students have been accustomed to giving presentations in English. If a student is inactive, it will affect the group's score. Therefore, other group members usually help students who do not understand the material" (Jac, interview, 2026).

This highlights that regular presentation practices and collaborative learning can motivate students to engage more actively in classroom activities. Jac emphasized that early exposure to presentations and group-based learning encourages engagement. This supports Cooper et al. (2018), who found that active-learning practices reduce anxiety and increase participation when students perceive them as beneficial.

Students participate more confidently when they feel supported and respected. Fear of authority, however, can reduce engagement and willingness to express opinions. Teachers thus play a crucial role in creating a positive learning environment that promotes participation while minimizing students' fear of mistakes or negative evaluation.

Cheating

Academic cheating emerged as a recurring issue discussed by all participants. Although each participant described different educational experiences, their responses revealed several common factors contributing to cheating behavior, including peer influence, fear of failure, academic pressure, inadequate preparation, and classroom supervision. These

findings support previous studies that suggest academic dishonesty is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by both individual and social factors (Harper & Prentice, 2024).

Jac explained that cheating frequently occurs among students and is often influenced by friendship circles. According to Jac, adolescents are easily influenced by their peers, especially when they associate with friends who frequently engage in misconduct. Jac stated,

"If you hang out with friends who tend to make mistakes like that, you will end up doing the same thing" (Jac, Interview, 2026).

Jac further explained that students sometimes cheat because they fear failing a subject. Although some peers attempt to discourage cheating, their advice is not always effective when students are unwilling to listen. These responses suggest that peer relationships play an important role in shaping students' academic behavior. This finding is consistent with Zhao et al. (2022), who reported that students are more likely to engage in academic misconduct when cheating behavior is normalized within their peer groups.

Philip reported similar findings. According to Philip, students who struggle academically often rely on their classmates during examinations. He explained,

"Usually during exams, students who are not doing so well sit next to the smart ones so they can cheat" (Philip, Interview, 2026).

Philip also identified several factors that encourage cheating, including inadequate preparation, learning difficulties, and limited concentration during classroom instruction. He stated,

"Besides not studying, another factor is being a slow learner" (Philip, Interview, 2026).

Philip's responses indicate that students may use cheating as a coping strategy when they feel academically unprepared or unable to meet academic expectations. Similar results were reported by Harper and Prentice (2024), who found that students often justify cheating when they perceive themselves as academically disadvantaged compared to their peers.

Philip noted that teacher supervision influences students' opportunities to cheat. According to him, teachers actively monitor examinations by walking around the classroom rather than remaining seated. This practice may reduce students' willingness to engage in dishonest behavior because they are aware that their actions are being observed. Such findings align with Harper and Prentice (2024), who emphasized that classroom monitoring and teacher presence can discourage academic misconduct by limiting opportunities for dishonest behavior.

Geri emphasized academic pressure and fear of failure as the primary reasons students cheat. Geri explained,

"I think the main reasons are pressure to get good grades, fear of failing, and sometimes not being fully prepared for the exam" (Geri, Interview, 2026).

Geri's response suggests that cheating is not always motivated by a desire to gain unfair academic advantages. Instead, students may resort to dishonest practices because they experience anxiety regarding academic performance and fear negative consequences if they fail. This finding supports the study conducted by Ajit et al. (2024), which identified fear of failure as one of the strongest predictors of academic cheating. Students often perceive

cheating as a means of avoiding poor academic outcomes and maintaining satisfactory grades.

Taken together, the findings indicate that a combination of personal and environmental factors shapes cheating behavior. Across all participants, peer influence, fear of failure, academic pressure, and inadequate preparation emerged as the most prominent contributors to academic dishonesty. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that academic cheating is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by social contexts and educational environments (Zhao et al., 2022; Harper & Prentice, 2024; Ajit et al., 2024). Therefore, efforts to reduce academic dishonesty should focus not only on punishment but also on strengthening academic support, fostering ethical values, and creating learning environments that reduce students' perceived need to cheat.

Teacher Knows Best

The traditional "Teacher Knows Best" paradigm, which positions the educator as the absolute authority and primary source of knowledge within the classroom, is undergoing a profound cultural re-evaluation. Empirical data from interviews with international students from the Philippines, Malaysia, and Nigeria illustrate a collective shift away from conventional, teacher-centered methodologies toward a more democratic and open pedagogical framework. This finding is consistent with previous studies that highlight the important role of student-centered learning in encouraging students to participate more actively in the classroom. This approach has been shown to increase student engagement and improve academic achievement across different ability levels (Kaput, 2018). Student engagement itself is a complex concept that involves behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects, all of which contribute to students' active involvement in learning (Kahu, 2013). Achieving active participation is not always easy, as various challenges can hinder it in the learning process. In addition, student-centered learning, closely related to active learning, has been widely recognized as an effective approach to enhancing students' motivation, encouraging deeper involvement, and supporting a better understanding of the material, ultimately leading to more meaningful learning experiences (Prince, 2004).

In Malaysia, respect for teachers' expertise does not make students passive. Students can still actively participate in discussions and build shared understanding in class. Jac explained that,

"Yes, it is true, teachers are expected to master the subject matter well, but many of them are also willing to accept corrections from students. They do not always insist that they are right" (Jac, interview, 2026).

Jac's experience shows that an interactive learning environment where information is generated can mix with traditional respect for educators. The teacher-student connection shifts toward a balanced academic partnership rather than a one-way transfer of information. This relationship is consistent with Mercer and Dawes (2014), who contend that effective classroom discussion is crucial for enhancing students' critical thinking abilities and enhancing their intellectual understanding. Supporting such open-ended discussion immediately increases student engagement and active participation in the classroom (Sedova et al., 2019).

In the Philippines, classroom hierarchies are becoming flatter, reflecting a similar

democratic movement. In contemporary Filipino classrooms, students remain active contributors rather than merely confirming the instructor's infallibility. Philip stated that,

"In the Philippines, there is no strong belief that teachers are always right. Teachers often treat students as individuals who can share opinions and participate in discussions" (Philip, interview, 2026).

Philip's observations indicate a shift toward autonomy-supportive instruction, where students are encouraged to think independently rather than passively receive information. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes supporting students' autonomy and fostering greater self-direction in their learning, is consistent with this strategy (Whitehead, 2023). This setting encourages the confidence required for significant academic risk-taking by validating student contributions. To increase student engagement, these interactional patterns are essential for developing critical thinking and communication skills that last a lifetime (Septia et al., 2021).

This pedagogy of mutual respect is further mirrored in Nigeria, particularly through the normalization of student inquiry. Geri emphasized that questioning is no longer perceived as an insubordinate challenge to teacher authority, but rather as a legitimate tool for intellectual development. Geri explained,

"Yes, I think students should be encouraged to ask questions respectfully. It helps students think critically and understand the lesson better" (Geri, interview, 2026).

The core nuance in Geri's reflection is the concept of "respectful dissent." When the educational ecosystem redefines questioning as a mechanism for cognitive engagement rather than a threat to power, students willingly take greater responsibility for their learning. This interactional safety is crucial, as the quality of teacher-student interactions directly dictates a student's willingness to vocalize ideas and engage in deeper analytical thinking (Sedova et al., 2020). In this context, teachers' use of power is crucial in determining how students interact in the classroom. Various degrees of control can either limit or increase students' chances to actively participate (Munir, 2025).

Although the experiences of these three countries are combined, it becomes clear that student involvement and teacher authority are not incompatible. Instead, they work in tandem in contemporary learning environments. Open communication, constructive criticism, and a loose academic hierarchy are becoming more prevalent in classrooms, even as educators continue to serve as esteemed facilitators. In the end, such encouraging, conversation-focused settings successfully prepare students to meet the cooperative expectations of contemporary society (Zhao & Watterston, 2021).

Absenteeism

The findings indicate that various factors, including school policies, health conditions, family circumstances, financial difficulties, and student motivation, influence absenteeism. The interviews also reveal differences in how schools in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Nigeria address student absences.

In Malaysia, school regulations play an important role in preventing absenteeism. Jac explained that,

"I went to a Chinese school in Malaysia, and Chinese schools have strict discipline, so students do not dare skip class. If you cannot attend due to illness, you have to

have a doctor's note. If there is a family matter, permission will be granted as long as it is signed and written by the student's parents. Most schools in Malaysia implement this, but Chinese schools are even stricter" (Jac, interview, 2026).

This statement demonstrates that strict attendance policies and disciplinary practices discourage students from being absent without valid reasons. Students are required to provide clear evidence and follow formal procedures when they are unable to attend school, thereby increasing their sense of responsibility for attendance. Such regulations may also create a culture in which regular attendance is viewed as an important expectation and obligation among students. This finding supports Alias et al. (2024), who explain that monitoring systems and preventive measures can be effective in reducing truancy and absenteeism. The interview also highlights the importance of the school environment, which Syazwani et al. (2021) identified as one of the most significant factors influencing student absenteeism. The participant's experience suggests that a well-regulated school environment can influence students' behavior and encourage them to prioritize attendance.

A different situation was found in the Philippines. Philip reported that students often skipped school because they disliked strict teachers.

"Students at my school in the Philippines used to be absent because they were truant. They would come in in the morning but leave the gates in the afternoon, skipping to the computer lab. This usually happened because students did not like strict teachers" (Philip, interview, 2026).

This finding reflects the concept of truancy, as defined by Sutphen et al. (2010), as unexcused absences from school. The participant's statement also supports Cabrera et al. (2025), who found that strict teachers and unfavorable school environments can negatively affect students' motivation to attend school. Additionally, Philip explained that attendance regulations were relatively flexible at his school, unlike at Jac's.

"The most common reason is that they are sick, but they do not need a doctor's note; just a written permission slip is enough. At my school, there is also no maximum number of excuses. You can take as many leaves as you like. I once had a friend who only came in twice, for graduation. He was frequently absent but still received low grades. It is like they are given a C, but they have to clean the school and buy school supplies. However, these absences significantly impacted his performance" (Philip, interview, 2026).

The participant then described a friend of his who attended school only twice and faced academic consequences despite being given opportunities to make up missed attendance. This suggests that absenteeism can significantly affect academic performance. Such findings are consistent with Ghimire (2024), who emphasized that absenteeism negatively influences academic achievement and may increase the risk of educational difficulties. The interview also aligns with Pengpid and Peltzer's (2017) study, which reported a relatively high truancy rate of 31.4% among Filipino students aged 13–15 years.

In Nigeria, absenteeism appears to be influenced by multiple personal and socioeconomic factors. Geri stated that,

"In my school in Nigeria, common reasons for absenteeism include illness, family problems, financial difficulties, and sometimes a lack of motivation to attend school regularly" (Geri, interview, 2026).

This finding corresponds with Syazwani et al. (2021), who identified family problems and health issues as major causes of absenteeism. It also supports Ghimire's (2024) findings

that financial barriers and motivational issues contribute to students' absence from school. The mention of illness is particularly significant in the Nigerian context, where many children miss school because of preventable health conditions and limited access to healthcare services. As reported by Health for Nigeria (2025), illness often leads to prolonged absences that hinder students' academic progress.

The interviews reveal both similarities and differences in absenteeism across the three countries. Illness emerged as a common reason for absence in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Nigeria. However, the influence of school policies differed considerably. While Malaysian schools emphasized strict attendance regulations and documentation, Philippine schools were more lenient and reported truancy associated with dissatisfaction toward teachers. In Nigeria, absenteeism was more strongly linked to health, family, and financial challenges. These findings support Syazwani et al. (2021), who concluded that absenteeism is a multidimensional issue influenced by school, family, personal, and health-related factors.

CONCLUSION

This study explored students' behaviors and educational experiences through the perspectives of participants from Malaysia, Nigeria, and the Philippines. The findings revealed that culture significantly influences educational practices, student participation, discipline, special education, academic integrity, and absenteeism. While educational approaches varied across the three countries, all participants emphasized the importance of respect for teachers, positive classroom relationships, and inclusive learning environments in supporting student engagement and development. The study highlights how cultural values, social expectations, and institutional contexts shape students' experiences and behaviors in school.

The findings suggest that educators and policymakers adopt culturally responsive and inclusive approaches that recognize diverse cultural perspectives and promote meaningful student participation. Efforts to strengthen communication, support students' well-being, and address challenges such as absenteeism and academic dishonesty can contribute to more effective learning environments. Future research may include a broader range of cultural contexts and stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents, to further deepen understanding of the relationship between culture and education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their deepest appreciation to all members of the research team for their commitment and cooperation throughout this study. We are also sincerely grateful to our supervising lecturer for the invaluable guidance, encouragement, and academic support provided during the research process. Furthermore, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the international students who voluntarily participated in this study and shared their experiences. Their insights and contributions greatly enriched the findings of this research.

REFERENCES

- Ajit, S., Maikkara, A., & Ramku, W. (2024). Fear of failure: a student-facing investigation into the motivations for contract cheating and academic misconduct. *Cogent Education*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2413211>
- Aldabas, R. (2020). *Special education teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach students with severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms: A Saudi Arabian perspective*. *SAGE Open*, 10(3), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020950657>
- Alias, N., Khaw, W. F., Nasaruddin, N. H., Tan, L., Muhammad, E. N., Awaluddin, S. M., Riyadzi, M. R., Lourdes, T. G. R., Saminathan, T. A., & Lim, K. K. (2024). Truancy among School-Going Adolescents in Malaysia and Its Associated Factors: Findings from the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2022. *Iranian journal of public health*, 53(12), 2705–2713. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39759204/>
- Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 163–206. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>
- Asamoah, E., Okyere, C., & Dogbe, J. A. (2018). *Inclusive education: Perception of visually impaired students, students without disability, and teachers in Ghana*. *SAGE Open*, 8(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018807791>
- Badawi, H. (2024). Exploring classroom discipline strategies and cultural dynamics: Lessons from the Japanese education system. *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education*, 5(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v5i1.663>
- Baharman, B., Djumingin, S., Suriadi, S., & Safitri, N. A. S. (2026). *Narratives of speaking anxiety under evaluative pressure in students' classroom presentations: A communication apprehension perspective by DeVito*. *LITERA*, 25(1), 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v25i1.96165>
- Banks, J. A. (2019). *An introduction to multicultural education* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Barger, M. M., Kim, E. M., Kuncel, N. R., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2019). The relation between parents' involvement in children's schooling and children's adjustment: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 145(9), 855–890. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000201>
- Boyd, R. L., & Schwartz, H. A. (2021). Natural language analysis and the psychology of verbal behavior: The past, present, and future states of the field. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 40(1), 21-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X20967028>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publication.
- Busch, C. A., Wiesenthal, N. J., Mohammed, T. F., Anderson, S., Barstow, M., Custalow, C., Gajewski, J., Garcia, K., Gilabert, C. K., Hughes, J., Jenkins, A., Johnson, M., Kasper, C., Perez, I., Robnett, B., Tillett, K., Tsefrekas, L., Goodwin, E. C., & Cooper, K. M. (2023). The disproportionate impact of fear of negative evaluation on first-generation college students, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities in college science courses. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 22(3). <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-10-0195>
- Caballero, M. (2024). *From specialised classrooms to mainstream classrooms: A study on the inclusion of students with special educational needs from the voices of their mainstream peers*. *Education Sciences*, 14(5), 452. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050452>
- Cabrera, B. A. B., Miranda, B. L. ., Timtim, S. T. ., & Dominado, N. L. (2025). Factors Affecting the Absenteeism Among Senior High School Learners. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 6(3), 1142-1160. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.03.15>
- Celio, C. I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011). A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 34(2), 164–181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105382591103400205>

- Cipriano, C., Barnes, T. N., Piel, M. H., Rivers, S. E., & Brackett, M. A. (2024). Positive student-teacher relationships and exclusionary discipline practices. *Journal of School Psychology, 105*, 101314.
- Cooper, K. M., Downing, V. R., & Brownell, S.E. (2018). The influence of active learning practices on student anxiety in large-enrollment college science classrooms. *International Journal of STEM Education, 5*(23). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-018-0123-6>
- Deardorff, D. K. (2020). *Manual for developing intercultural competencies: Story circles*. Routledge.
- Dhaliwal, T. K., Graham, J., Chiang, Y. C., & Johnson, A. S. (2024). Spare the rod, spoil the child? A critical discourse analysis of state corporal punishment policies and practices. *Educational Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737231213040>
- Downing, V. R., Cooper, K. M., Cala, J. M., Gin, L. E., & Brownell, S. E. (2020). Fear of negative evaluation and student anxiety in community college active-learning science courses. *CBE—Life Sciences Education, 19*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.19-09-0186>
- Eddy, C. L., Huang, F. L., Prewett, S. L., Herman, K. C., Hrabal, K. M., de Marchena, S. L., & Reinke, W. M. (2024). Positive student-teacher relationships and exclusionary discipline practices. *Journal of School Psychology, 105*, 101314.
- Egunlusi, O. (2020). Teachers' authority: Strategies for instilling discipline in a post-corporal punishment era. <https://hdl.handle.net/10566/15496>
- Fathoni, A. R. (2024). Academic pressure and student unethical behavior: An empirical study of the use of thesis jockey services. *Journal of Correctional Management, 1*(2), 23-31.
- Fikri, M. Z., Putra, P. H., Pahrizal, N., & Herningrum, I. (2024). Teacher Strategies in Greeting-Based Character Education: Fostering Students' Friendly Traits at State Islamic Elementary School 1 Merangin. *Indonesian Journal of Counseling and Development, 6*(2). <https://doi.org/10.32939/ijcd.v6i2.6067>
- Françoise Guillemot, Florence Lacroix, Isabelle Nocus, Teachers' attitude towards inclusive education from 2000 to 2020: An extended meta-analysis, *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, Volume 3, 2022, 100175, ISSN 2666-3740, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100175>
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Ghimire, B. S. (2024). Causes of Student Absenteeism: A Qualitative Investigation of Students' Perception. *A Peer Reviewed Journal on Social Sciences, 2*(2), 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.3126/aprjss.v2i2.77464>
- Ghufron, N., & Risnawati, R. (2016). *Psychological Theories*. Yogyakarta: Arruzz Media.
- Gulzar, S., Din, F. U., Noor, S., & Anwar, M. M. (2024). Exploring how cultural backgrounds influence teaching methods, student expectations, and educational success across different societies. *Bulletin of Business and Economics (BBE), 13*(3), 211-218. <https://doi.org/10.61506/01.00479>
- Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin.
- Harper, R., & Prentice, F. (2024). 'We' share but 'They' cheat: student qualitative perspectives on cheating in higher education. *International Journal Education Integrity, 20*(22). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-024-00171-6>
- Health For Nigeria. (2025, July 23). *The link between child healthcare and school attendance in Nigeria*. <https://healthfornigeria.org/2025/07/23/the-link-between-child-healthcare-and-school-attendance-in-nigeria/>

- Heekes, S. L., Kruger, C. B., Lester, S. N., & Ward, C. L. (2022). A systematic review of corporal punishment in schools: Global prevalence and correlates. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(1), 52–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020925787>
- Israelsson, A. (2016). Teachers' perception of the concept of intercultural competence in teaching English [Individual research project, Stockholm University]. Department of English, Stockholm University.
- Jalilzadeh, K., Rashtchi, M. & Mirzapour, F. (2024). Cheating in online assessment: a qualitative study on reasons and coping strategies focusing on EFL teachers' perceptions. *Language Testing in Asia*, 14(29). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-024-00304-1>
- Kahu, E. R. (2013). Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in higher education*, 38(5), 758–773.
- Kaput, K. (2018). Evidence for student-centered learning. *Education Evolving*. <https://www.educationevolving.org/research/evidence/student-centered-learning>
- King, E. (2018). Understanding classroom silence: How students' perceptions of power influence participation in discussion-based composition classrooms. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 45(3), 284–305. <https://doi.org/10.58680/tetyc201829535>
- Mercer, N., & Dawes, L. (2014). The study of talk between teachers and students, from the 1970s until the 2010s. *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(4), 430–445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.934087>
- Munir, F. (2025). Functions of teacher authority in classroom interaction: Investigating contexts for language learning. *Cakrawala Pendidikan: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 44(2), pp. 388–401. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v44i2.81313>
- Murdiana, M., Efendri, E., Kisman, Z., & Kanto, D. S. (2023). The Influence of Academic Pressure, Academic Procrastination and Ability with Self Efficacy as a Moderating Variable on Student Academic Fraud Behavior. *Islamic Banking : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pengembangan Perbankan Syariah*, 8(2), 375–394. <https://doi.org/10.36908/isbank.v8i2.698>
- Muslimawati, N. S. (2022). Formal and informal language expressions used by English students of Indonesia in classroom presentation-interaction. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies*, 4(1), 12–23. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v4i1.8293>
- Nguyen, H. M., & Goto, D. (2024). Unmasking academic cheating behavior in the artificial intelligence era: Evidence from Vietnamese undergraduates. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29, 15999–16025. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12495-4>
- Nkirete, A. (2024). *The pragmatics of politeness in cross-cultural communication*. *European Journal of Linguistics*, 3(3), 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.47941/ejl.2052>
- Pan, Q., Chen, S., & Qu, Y. (2024). Corporal punishment and violent behavior spectrum: A meta-analytic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, 1323784. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1323784>
- Pengpid S, Peltzer K. (2017). Prevalence, demographic and psychosocial correlates for school truancy among students aged 13–15 in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. *J Child Adolesc Ment Health*, 29(3), 197–203. <https://doi.org/10.2989/17280583.2017.1377716>
- Prince, M. (2004). Does active learning work? A review of the research. *Journal of engineering education*, 93(3), 223–231.
- Purba, A. (2024). Analysis of sociocultural norms in language communication as efforts to preserve the Malay national identity among the Duano community in Kampung Nelayan of Kualatungkal, Jambi. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2440272>
- Purnamasari, D. (2013). Factors Influencing Academic Cheating on Students. *Educational Psychology Journal*, 2(1), 13–21.

- Rohmani, L. A., & Andriyanti, E. (2022). Culture teaching in EFL classes: Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 9(1), 237-257. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i1.21834>
- Salam, M., Awang Iskandar, D. N., Ibrahim, D. H. A., & Farooq, M. S. (2019). Service learning in higher education: A systematic literature review. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 20(4), 573-593. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-019-09580-6>
- Sarı, M. H., & Yüce, E. (2020). Problems experienced in classrooms with students from different cultures. *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 13(2), 90-100. <https://doi.org/10.7160/eriesj.2020.130204>
- Schwarzenthal, M., Schachner, M. K., Juang, L. P., & van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2020). Reaping the benefits of cultural diversity: Classroom cultural diversity climate and students' intercultural competence. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(2), 323-346. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2617>
- Šed'ová, K., Šalamounová, Z., Švaříček, R., & Sedláček, M. (2020). *Getting dialogic teaching into classrooms*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-9243-0>
- Sedova, K., Sedlacek, M., Svaricek, R., Majcik, M., Navratilova, J., Drexlerova, A., ... & Salamounova, Z. (2019). Do those who talk more learn more? The relationship between student classroom talk and student achievement. *Learning and instruction*, 63, 101217
- Şen, B. G. (2022). Teachers' views on classroom rules in basic education: Classroom rules in basic education. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 14(3), 1696-1715.
- Septia, S., Sumantri, M. S., & Hasanah, U. (2021). Hubungan Kepercayaan Diri dengan Kemampuan Komunikasi Siswa Kelas V Sekolah Dasar. *Edustream: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar*, 5(2), 152-159
- Shoaib, S., & Ali, A. Z. (2020). Other Side of Academic Dishonesty: A Teachers' Perspective. *Bahria Journal of Professional Psychology*, 19(2).
- Sutphen, R. D., Ford, J. P., & Flaherty, C. (2010). Truancy Interventions: A Review of the Research Literature. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 20(2), 161-171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731509347861>
- Syazwani, N. A., Haziera, N., & Afifahalin, s. N. (2021). *Perception of absenteeism among secondary school students in Tangkak, Johor* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Universiti Teknologi Mara. <https://ir.uitm.edu.my/id/eprint/59924/>
- Trinidad, J. E. (2020). Understanding student-centred learning in higher education: students' and teachers' perceptions, challenges, and cognitive gaps. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(8), 1013-1023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1636214>
- Valckx, J., Vanderlinde, R., & Devos, G. (2021). Measuring and exploring the structure of teachers' educational beliefs. *Studies in educational evaluation*, 70, 101018. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101018>
- Visser, L. N., van der Put, C. E., & Assink, M. (2022). The association between school corporal punishment and child developmental outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Children*, 9(3), 383. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9030383>
- Weiss, S., Markowitz, R., & Kiel, E. (2018). How to teach students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities in inclusive and special education settings: Teachers' perspectives on skills, knowledge and attitudes. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33(5), 687-702. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1369833>
- Whitehead, P. M. (2023). *Autonomy-Supportive Teaching in Higher Education: A Practical Guide for College Professors*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Wilder, S. (2014). Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: A meta-synthesis. *Educational Review*, 66(3), 377-397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.780009>
- Wulandari, D., & Abdullah, S. S. (2024). Reach out, not harm: Navigating between physical punishment and alternative strategies in addressing student discipline challenges for a

- positive learning environment. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23(8).
- Yousaf, M., Ahmad, M., Ji, D., Huang, D., & Raza, S. H. (2022). A cross-cultural comparison of ethnocentrism and the intercultural willingness to communicate between two collectivistic cultures. *Scientific Reports*, 12, 17087. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-21179-3>
- Yuxue Yue, Yuling jia, Xiuhong Wang, Self-efficacy and negative silence in the classroom: The mediating role of fear of negative evaluation, *Nurse Education in Practice*, Volume 62, 2022, 103379, ISSN 1471-5953, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2022.103379>
- Zanetti, C., & Butera, F. (2023). The chronology of collective cheating: a qualitative study of collective dishonesty in academic contexts. *Current Psychology*, 42, 27983–27997. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03885-3>
- Zhang, Y., & Liu, T. (2026). *Teacher support and classroom silence in vocational higher education: A serial mediation analysis through speaking self-efficacy and anxiety. Frontiers in Psychology*, 17, Article 1844412. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1844412>
- Zhang, Z., & Qi, C. (2024). Teachers' punishment intensity and student observer trust: A moderated mediation model. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(6), 471. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14060471>
- Zhao, L., Mao, H., Compton, B.J., Peng, J., Fu, G., Fang, F., Heyman, G.D., & Lee, K. (2022). Academic dishonesty and its relations to peer cheating and culture: A meta-analysis of the perceived peer cheating effect. *Educational Research Review*, 36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100455>
- Zhao, Y., & Watterston, J. (2021). The changes we need: Education post COVID-19. *Journal of Educational Change*, 22(1), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09417-3>
- Zheng, H., Ding, P., Liu, Q., & Xing, L. (2024). Intercultural interaction willingness: A PLS-PM approach to influencing factors and its mediation effect. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11, 876. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03396-5>