



# Teachers' Perceptions of Collaborative Learning in Intercultural Settings: The Case of Highgate Private School in Windhoek, Namibia

Linus Sitomiso Chata

Faculty of Education, Open University of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania  
Email: sitchata12@gmail.com

**How to cite this paper:** Chata, L.S. (2025) Teachers' Perceptions of Collaborative Learning in Intercultural Settings: The Case of Highgate Private School in Windhoek, Namibia. *Open Access Library Journal*, 12: e14525.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1114525>

**Received:** October 31, 2025

**Accepted:** November 21, 2025

**Published:** November 24, 2025

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Open Access Library Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

Namibia's cultural diversity is prominently reflected in its classrooms, where both learners and teachers come from various cultural backgrounds. While educational policies promote inclusivity and collaborative learning through learner-centered pedagogy, implementation challenges persist. This qualitative case study explores teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning in intercultural settings and the challenges they face in facilitating it. The study draws on interpretivist paradigms and involves semi-structured interviews with ten (10) purposively selected teachers from a private school in Windhoek. The participants represented diverse nationalities and had experience teaching culturally mixed classes. The findings revealed that teachers perceive collaborative learning as a catalyst for fostering intercultural communication and relationship building among learners. It also contributes to reducing stereotypes. Furthermore, it promotes the appreciation of cultural differences and a sense of belonging. However, teachers encounter challenges such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and a lack of professional development. This study underscores the need for policy support to equip teachers with effective strategies for managing intercultural collaborative learning. These insights contribute to efforts aimed at strengthening inclusive education practices in Namibia's multicultural schools.

## Subject Areas

Education Administration, Educational Technology

## Keywords

Collaborative Learning, Intercultural Education, Teacher Perceptions, Learner-Centred Pedagogy, Namibia, Multicultural Classrooms

## 1. Introduction

The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms epitomizes education in the 21st century and marks a shift in pedagogical leadership that capitalizes on diversity as a resource for learning. One of the more widely advocated strategies for engaging this diversity learning in learning environments is Collaborative Learning (CL) with the goal of not only enhancing students' academic achievement but also developing crucial intercultural competencies such as empathy, perspective taking, and plurality [1] [2]. This shift not only reflects a change in the teacher's role from a knowledge transmitter to a facilitator of complex social and cognitive processes [3] [4]. While CL is theoretically guaranteed, teachers' perceptions and preparedness for CL, particularly in the complexity of intercultural contexts, determine its success in practice.

This issue is particularly relevant in the Republic of Namibia, which has embraced an educational philosophy based on inclusion and unity since independence to rise above the detrimental history of cultural racial and segregation [5]. Namibia has endorsed a learner-centered policy for over 30 years now [6], which, by nature, promotes CL and participatory methods. However, a significant and persistent gap remains between this national policy hopes and grassroots-level implementation. Scholars have argued that learner-centered education principles have not yet been fully implemented in Namibia and that teachers are still facing persistent challenges in implementing them [7] [8]. This problem is compounded in urban classrooms, such as Windhoek classrooms that are a microcosm of the diversity of the nation, with learners and teachers hailing from multiple cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups.

Literature presents ample evidence of the influence of culture on learning [9], the general problems of CL [10] [11], and the importance of intercultural communication [12]. However, there remains a significant and critical gap in the empirical literature: a blatant lack of empirical research investigating teachers' implicit beliefs about how to make CL happen in multicultural and intercultural contexts [13] [14]. These beliefs are the basis for teachers' pedagogical decisions, management of classroom interactions, and connections and relationships with students. Unless we develop a more complete understanding of how teachers interpret and respond to the challenges, barriers, and affordances of CL in the context of their diverse classrooms, professional development support will remain generic and of little relevance to their context. We have previously noted a disconnect between macro-level policy intentions and micro-level implementation. This describes the nexus of teacher readiness and developing culturally responsive pedagogy for and with learners [15].

Therefore, the current study investigates teachers' perceptions of CL and the challenges they encounter in facilitating CL in an intercultural setting at Highgate Private School in Windhoek, Namibia. By exploring teachers' perspectives and lived experiences, this research is well-positioned to contribute to several important areas. Theoretically, this study builds on and fills the gap in the literature

by providing rich data on teachers' perceptions at the intersection of CL and intercultural education in a Southern African context. Practically, the results will provide evidence for school administrators and national policymakers to design targeted professional development programs and curriculum reforms that realistically develop intercultural competence for teachers and learners. Socially, this study will contribute to the establishment of Namibia's national plans for fostering social cooperation and unity [16] and support the development of an inclusive society that leverages its diversity as a unique strength.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study uses Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) as a theoretical construct to examine the complexities that accompany the social and cognitive processes of Collaborative Learning (CL) in intercultural classrooms. A key idea of SLT is that learning occurs through observation, modelling, and imitation within a social context, not just through direct reinforcement [17]. Bandura identified the continuous reciprocal contributions of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors, which he called reciprocal determinism. Each of these three elements is moving at all times in an environment of CL: a student's personal cognitions (*i.e.*, beliefs, attitudes) influence their behaviour in a collaboration, which influences their group environment, which then feeds back to influence their cognitions.

In classrooms, teachers and peers are powerful models. Students learn academic content, problem-solving strategies, and appropriate social behavior by observing others. Observational learning applies four important cognitive processes that are essential for effective modelling: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation [18] [19]. Students need to pay attention to the modelled behavior, retain a mental representation of the behaviour, be able to reproduce the behavior, and be motivated to perform the behaviour. Often, we learn, in part, through vicarious reinforcement (*i.e.*, we observe the model receiving a reward or punishment for performing the behaviour).

SLT is significant for this study because of its ability to address the distinctive difficulties and benefits that exist when these learning processes occur within an intercultural context. In a culturally diverse milieu, students model not only academic skills but also interpret culturally embedded communication styles, conflict approaches, and interactional norms present in the environment. With the teacher as the primary model and architect of the environment, the teacher must model inclusive behaviours, mediate misunderstandings, and create an environment where cross-cultural observation ultimately results in learning and not conflict. For this reason, this theoretical framework does more than just support CL; it enables an examination of how culture impacts practices and learning.

From this perspective, this study examines how teachers perceive CL in intercultural situations and the challenges they face in facilitating collaboration among learners from culturally distinct backgrounds. Social Learning Theory directs the

study toward understanding this model and motivation in a complex environment. This study poses the following questions from the framework of SLT:

1) From the teachers' perspectives, how does the process of social modeling and vicarious learning within collaborative groups seem to impact intercultural relationship development among learners?

2) What challenges do teachers face in facilitating the core processes of SLT (attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation) in an intercultural collaborative learning classroom, where any or all learners may come from culturally different backgrounds?

### **3. Literature Review**

This study reviewed the literature related to Collaborative Learning (CL) and focused on CL in intercultural settings and teachers' influence. The study begins by defining CL as a pedagogical approach, followed by a discussion of the difficulties CL can pose in cultures of difference, and then examining the existing literature on teachers' ideas and experiences in working in CL, finally pointing to the significant absence of literature that our study attempts to fill.

#### **3.1. The Nature and Principles of Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning is broadly defined as a pedagogical approach that allows groups of learners to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product [20]. Le, Janssen and Wubbels describe CL similarly as a set of strategies that facilitates student collaboration in small groups to maximize both individual and collective learning [21]. Essentially, CL is a pedagogical turn away from teacher-centered instruction towards a student-centered approach focused on active participation, social interaction, and shared cognitive responsibility [22] [23]. CL positions teachers as facilitators not as presenters of knowledge. It allows them to create the learning environment, lead and support the group process, and assist students in collaborating with one another [24] [25].

Collaboration does not simply happen by putting students in a group; it must have a structure that defines the interaction among them and has to include positive interdependence and individual accountability [26]. The process requires higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and compromise, as students must communicate effectively and negotiate well to achieve shared outcomes [27] [28]. When structured well, CL acts as a potent driver of critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills for the 21st century [29]. When learners actively engage with content and one another, they construct ownership of their learning, which has been shown to improve motivation and the overall depth of their learning [30].

#### **3.2. Teachers' Perceptions of Collaborative Learning in Intercultural Contexts**

Although teachers often indicate a positive stance towards CL, their perceptions

become increasingly nuanced when applied to intercultural classrooms. Teachers' beliefs are important because they impact teachers' openness to adapting their practices based on the need to create an inclusive environment based on principles such as intercultural humility [31]. In a study of EFL teachers, Alzubi *et al.* found an overwhelmingly positive perception of implementing CL [32]. Nevertheless, limited implications or informants from other factors (e.g., teaching experience and gender) were significant, resulting in a general acceptance of the inherent value of the pedagogy.

However, other studies indicate considerable variability. Gao's study of teachers of Chinese in Australia indicated that inconsistent perceptions of effective intercultural strategies were moderated by teacher experience and educational setting [33]. Puntzi & Dingel further identified specific obstacles to facilitating CL: a lack of skills for collaborative learning, personal attitudes, and behaviours to focus on learning, effective communication, and goal setting [31]. A number of transformative studies have observed that teachers are not pedagogically prepared for CL in a Culturally Linguistic Diverse (CLD) class [34]-[36]. In this context, it was found that teachers did not have the translingual skills and culturally relevant knowledge to facilitate students' collaborative teamwork. In fact, teachers can impede intercultural CL as they hold particular culturally relevant knowledge that could help scaffold discussions among students or suggest communicative strategies; however, feedback provided by a teacher in a CL context does not shift the learners' interactions. Certainly, CL with cultures and languages intended as part of CL pedagogies appears to signify a cultural hierarchy. In contrast, researchers consistently find CL pedagogies valuable for educators and students to engage in essential reflective aspects of learning collaboratively, which has transformative potential [37].

The barriers and realities of (re)thinking collective efforts, knowledge construction, and the complexities of learning collaboratively across diverse cultures are clear. All of these conditions had to be taken into consideration in the domains that marginalized students have to navigate; they were denied the opportunity to engage in authentic and identity-focused CL pedagogies. To help develop an understanding and conduct expansive knowledge stages of learning, collaborative pedagogies seek to enhance group planning around knowledge construction for learners. These actions are potentially difficult to implement in practice, which highlights the importance of pedagogically preparing interventionist educators. When viewing interventions as an ongoing transformation for practice, these suggestions require professional partnerships, reflective thinking, continual learning, critical insights for developing practice, and engagement with a clearer sense of collective purpose across several initiatives. When teachers believed they could manage, intervene, and connect the discussions made in practice, and observe the transformation of students from Lesotho for their own development, it produced a marked change. These takeaway messages are significant and capture the sentiment in a quantitative study undertaken by Quintero *et al.* [38]. They suggest that

language is significant in this regard. Acharya, Sigdel & Poudel also noted several practical issues facing teachers, including a diversity of language levels, cultural variances of communication, equitable participation, and too little time and space [39]. In this cluster of studies, the authors divided their findings into categories that suggest that low-quality professional development and a lack of professional development are major recurring issues that further complicate other challenges. This means that teachers are doing their best but are not finding systematic ways to address the demands of the intercultural classroom [40].

### 3.3. Synthesis and Identifying the Research Gap

The literature review affirms that CL is a viable and sustainable pedagogy. However, CL, like any pedagogy, in intercultural contexts is deeply reliant on the capacity of the teacher to navigate the surrounding challenges associated with learners' skillsets, group work dynamics, and cultural differences. Therefore, while the research has generally characterized teachers' perceptions and documented varying levels of implementation challenges, there are two marked gaps in the literature. First, there is a geographic and contextual gap. There is some interesting research from other African contexts [41], however, most of the research comes from Asia, Europe, or North America. While some research has focused on some of these dynamics in the specific socio-historical and educational context of Southern Africa, particularly Namibia, a gap remains. Second, while prior research has identified the challenges, there is comparatively less research that has employed in-depth qualitative approaches to understand how educators perceive these challenges. In particular, understanding how teachers perceive CL's impact on intercultural relationships and the challenges that remain most salient to them as educators is important for generating contextually relevant solutions. This study aims to address these gaps by utilising a qualitative approach to understand how teachers perceive CL in a multicultural private school in Windhoek, Namibia. Ultimately, this study provides a deep understanding that is lacking in the current academic literature.

## 4. Research Methodology

This study is embedded in interpretivist thinking, where meaning is determined through experience. Interpretivists discover meaning through the perceptions and experiences of participants' lived experiences [42]. This qualitative research method was used to explore teachers' perceptions of CL in intercultural settings and the challenges they encountered when facilitating CL among learners from different cultural backgrounds.

### 4.1. Participants

Ten teachers from a small private school in Windhoek participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 23 to 45 years old. There were four females and six males. Four teachers were Namibians, five were Zimbabweans, and one was German. All

teachers use English as the medium of instruction, which is the language of instruction in the country. Learners in all classes are culturally diverse.

#### **4.2. Sampling Strategy**

Owing to its ability to target participants who possess specific characteristics critical to addressing the research objectives, the purposive sampling method was selected for this study. This approach is particularly suitable for qualitative research, where the goal is to gain rich, in-depth insights rather than generalize findings to a broader population [43]. By focusing on teachers with experience with CL in intercultural settings, this method ensured that the data collected were highly relevant. In this study, the diversity of cultural backgrounds among teachers and learners added another layer of complexity, requiring participants familiar with the intricacies of implementing CL in such settings. Furthermore, the method allowed for flexibility in selecting participants who met the evolving criteria as the study progressed, which is particularly valuable in exploratory research.

#### **4.3. Procedures**

The school principal granted permission to conduct the research. Ten teachers voluntarily participated in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the selected participants. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The questions were developed by the researcher and tested with two teachers in pilot exercises. The outcome of the pilot exercise helped sharpen the questions to ensure clarity, thus strengthening the validity and reliability of the instrument. The interview sessions were scheduled at each teacher's convenience in terms of time and location. The interview sessions were as relaxed as possible. Each session was recorded. The voice material was subsequently transcribed.

#### **4.4. Data Analysis Techniques**

Data coding and thematic analysis techniques were applied to analyze the transcribed data. Data coding was used first to help the researcher become familiar with the data. Once the data were coded, thematic analysis was applied to identify and highlight emerging themes within the data. AI technology was used to thematically analyze the data.

#### **4.5. Ethical Considerations and Reliability**

The school authorities where the study was conducted granted approval. The researcher observed ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants [44]. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw their participation, at any time, should they feel like doing so. Reliability was assured by applying similar procedures (consistency) to every semi-structured interview session. A systematic approach to data collection was applied consistently throughout the study.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Perception of CL and Learners' Intercultural Relationships

The data analysis revealed teachers' perceptions of CL and its influence on intercultural relationships among learners. The data revealed interlinked themes that demonstrated CL's transformative role in fostering intercultural understanding within Highgate Private School classrooms.

#### ***Intercultural interaction and communication through collaborative learning***

Intercultural communication and interaction among learners emerged as a major perception by teachers. Participants observed that CL significantly improved the communication skills of students from different cultures. This facilitates a more open and constructive dialogue. For example, Participant TM10 stated, "*CL sessions create an environment where learners from different cultural backgrounds can sharpen their communication skills. They learn through verbal and non-verbal cues what is culturally acceptable behaviour by their peers.*" Participants highlighted that sharing cultural knowledge and perspectives was a natural part of group collaboration (Participants TM5 and TF4). Moreover, CL was valued for its ability to accommodate individual learning differences. For example, Participant TF3 stated, "*Collaborative learning is progressive. It allows learners to learn via individual differences.*"

#### ***Building relationships through group work***

The data analysis revealed that the participants perceived CL as not only encouraging friendships but also nurturing cultural appreciation. For example, Participant TM5 stated, "*When learners mix quite often during collaborative learning activities, they begin to create friendships.*"

Participant TF4 said: "*Learners build friendships and as they engage in various activities together they learn to appreciate cultural differences, in the classroom and outside the classroom.*"

Participant TF7 further stated, "*Through shared projects, such as art or cultural activities, learners form bonds. This shows that collaborative environments naturally foster social connections and break down cultural barriers.*"

Furthermore, the participants believed that CL cultivates mutual respect and empathy among learners. Participants emphasized that students were able to learn from differences. For example, Participant TF3 put it this way: "*Learners become more informed citizens about cultural differences through the collaborative learning approach.*" It has been reported that learners shift their perceptions of others through direct interactions with culturally different peers. Participant TM5 said this: "*Learners appreciate other cultures after experiencing them through their interactions with fellow learners from other cultures.*" Participants further reported that CL learners develop both cognitive understanding and emotional sensitivity toward peers from other cultures (Participants TF4 and TM1).

#### ***Change in learners' attitudes towards cultural differences***

Data analysis showed that teachers perceived CL as facilitating a positive shift

in learners' attitudes towards cultural diversity. There was a marked improvement in inclusivity as learners became more accepting and collaborative. For example, Participant TF4 put it this way: *"After frequent interactions with peers from other cultures, learners are more accepting and inclusive."* Participant TM6 elaborated further by saying, *"Learners learn to respect each other's cultures, values, and norms. I often observe in that there is an increase in the respect for cultural values and norms among different learners in my class. There is evidence of behavioural change, with previously withdrawn learners beginning to engage more openly with peers."*

#### ***Reduction of stereotypes and biases***

Data analysis revealed that participants perceived intercultural CL as leading to the reduction of stereotypes and cultural biases among learners. Through frequent interactions, learners can debunk misconceptions about each other's cultures. For example, Participant TM1 stated, *"My view is that collaborative learning reduces stereotypes because it promotes empathy. Empathy in the sense that learners begin to tolerate each other's behaviour because they develop understanding of their peers' behaviours."* Participant TF3 put it clearly by stating that: *"As learners engage first-hand with diverse groups, they begin to debunk negative stereotypes about other cultures."*

#### ***Promotion of a sense of belonging***

The findings revealed that participants see CL as an essential vehicle for promoting belongingness. Participants emphasized that CL gives every learner a role, voice, and platform to be heard. For example, Participant TM1 stated, *"When every learner is given a role in group activities, they feel valued. Group work environment fosters participation and inclusivity thus helping learners to feel accepted, important, and connected to their peers and the classroom as a whole."* Participant TF4 was succinct and expressed it this way: *"Collaborative learning gives all learners a voice and helps them feel included."* (TF4).

In summary, the thematic data analysis presented above shows that CL is a powerful educational strategy for enhancing intercultural relationships among learners. This improves communication and understanding among learners. It also builds respect, inclusivity, and a strong sense of belonging among students. Participants believed that when CL is implemented well, it can dismantle stereotypes, foster empathy, and prepare students to engage in multicultural activities with openness and confidence.

## **5.2. Challenges Teachers Face in Intercultural CL Classrooms**

Data analysis showed that teachers encounter several challenges when implementing CL in culturally diverse classrooms. The data revealed how cultural and linguistic diversity, clashes in cultural norms, systemic limitations, and insufficient teacher support hinder the effectiveness of CL practices at the Highgate Private School.

#### ***Communication and language barriers***

The data revealed that language and communication differences are a persistent

challenge that participants face in intercultural CL classrooms. Participants reported that learners often struggled to express themselves due to low English proficiency. This leads to shyness, reduced participation, and misunderstandings among learners. For example, Participant TM2 stated, “*Learners prefer not to talk much in the group due to language difficulties. They are unable to express themselves in the official language of instruction.*” Participant TF7 said, “*Some learners want me to translate English into their language. But I cannot speak the languages of some learners, which presents a problem.*” Some participants pointed out that collaboration in the classroom is complicated by linguistic nuances, which leads to confusion in some instances when words have different meanings across cultures (Participants TM3, TF1, TF3, and TM6).

#### ***Power imbalances and clashes in cultural norms***

The findings showed that the participants were concerned about the unequal distribution of power and clashes in cultural norms. Learners from larger cultural groups sometimes dominated discussions, leaving others feeling inferior or disengaged from the discussion. Participant TM5 remarked as follows: “*Some learners have an inferiority complex because they come from minority tribes. This gives chance to other learners to dominate the group activities.*” (TM5). Participant TF4 said this: “*When I see that some learners are shy, I tell them that all their opinions matter. I also give equal distribution of opportunities for participation in group activities.*” However, some participants were of the view that these efforts were often reactive rather than systemic (TM2, TF3).

Participants revealed that the divergence in cultural norms posed additional challenges for them. Participant TF4 stated that, “*Certain learners were raised in cultural contexts that discourage speaking out, which is in conflict with the interactive nature of CL. Moreover, topics in specific subjects sometimes exposed cultural sensitivities or taboos requiring teachers to navigate these moments carefully.*” Participant TM6 stated: “*Sometimes, in order to avoid alienating some learners, I have to tread softly on some topics because some norms are accepted in one culture but are taboo in another.*”

#### ***Challenges in assessing group work***

The findings showed that teachers face challenges in the area of assessment. They noted the difficulty in evaluating individual contributions within group settings. According to Participant TF4, cultural differences in work styles, communication patterns, and assertiveness levels made it difficult to assess learners fairly. Participant TM6 stated:

*Due to their cultural orientation, some learners might be shy and fail to express themselves fully. This may not be a sign that they have not mastered the content. When a teacher fails to recognize this, such learners may be graded poorly or their value in group work be perceived lowly.*

#### ***Need for professional development and institutional support***

The final major theme that emerged from the data was the need for training and support systems. The participants expressed a desire for intercultural compe-

tence training. Participant TM1 stated, “*We need intercultural competence training. Teachers should be taught about important aspects of each culture.*” Participants believe that institutional support that affects student behavior and resources for inclusive classroom management are critical for their development (TM1, TF2, and TM6).

In summary, the thematic analysis revealed that while CL has the potential to promote intercultural engagement, many factors hinder it. Highgate Private School teachers are strongly committed to creating respectful and inclusive learning environments. However, they require targeted training and institutional support. Addressing these challenges is essential for unlocking the full benefits of CL in culturally diverse classrooms at the Highgate Private School.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Teachers’ Perception of CL and Learners’ Intercultural Relationships

The findings highlight how CL is perceived by the teachers at Highgate Private School. They perceive it as a vital pedagogical strategy for enhancing intercultural relationships among students. Drawing on Bandura’s [45] Social Learning Theory, the data revealed that CL creates a social environment in which learners engage with peers from different cultures. These interactions enable them to learn through observation, imitation, and meaningful interactions.

#### *Intercultural interaction and communication among learners*

The observation that CL facilitates open dialogue and the exchange of cultural perspectives among learners supports Bandura’s [17] notion of observation learning. In observational learning, individuals acquire new behaviors and attitudes by observing others within their social environment. The process of sharing cultural knowledge in group settings mirrors the modeling process described in Social Learning Theory. During CL, learners internalize culturally appropriate behaviors through repeated social exposure. Similarly, one scholar highlights that CL offers platforms for intercultural dialogue [46]. Intercultural dialogue enhances learners’ social and cultural competencies. In the long term, peer interactions reinforce SLT’s principle of the SLT that learning is a function of both behavior and social context [17].

#### *Relationship building and vicarious reinforcement*

Sustained group interaction encourages the development of interpersonal bonds and cultural sensitivity. This phenomenon is consistent with the concept of vicarious reinforcement. Vicarious reinforcement suggests that when learners are motivated to emulate positive behaviors, the result is social approval or acceptance [45]. This process was particularly evident in projects involving shared tasks at Highgate Private School, such as cultural presentations and collaborative art projects. The activities in these projects naturally reduce cultural distance. Collaborative tasks in multicultural classrooms serve as vehicles for trust-building and shared identity development [33] [32].

### ***Mutual respect and attitudinal change through direct interaction***

The development of mutual respect and shifts in learners' attitudes toward cultural differences reflect Bandura's principle of reciprocal determinism [45]. Teachers noted that through CL, learners gained cognitive understanding and developed emotional sensitivity. The findings indicate that teachers at Highgate Private School perceive that learners appreciate other cultures after experiencing them through interactions in CL activities. This finding supports argument that intercultural learning is most effective when learners are actively engaged in shared problem-solving and reflection [46]. Similarly, it buttresses the importance of real-life intercultural engagement in dismantling prejudicial attitudes [32].

### ***Reduction of stereotypes and cultural biases***

The finding that CL helped reduce stereotypes and cultural biases among learners was attributed to direct and sustained engagement with culturally diverse peers. Engaging with culturally different peers allows learners to challenge preconceived notions and develop empathy. The SLT explains this shift as a function of cognitive rehearsal. Cognitive rehearsal suggests that repeated exposure to diverse behaviors and perspectives alters learners' internal scripts and attitudes [45]. They reported that when learners participate in structured intercultural group work, they begin to view cultural differences as enriching rather than threatening, which leads to more inclusive social behavior.

### ***Promotion of a sense of belonging***

The finding that CL promotes a strong sense of belonging and inclusivity entails that giving every learner a meaningful role in group tasks contributes to their feelings of being valued and accepted by peers. This supports Bandura's [45] emphasis on the importance of self-efficacy. When learners are given roles in CL activities, they feel valued. Similarly, another study found that inclusive CL practices cultivate a sense of shared identity and group cohesion [46].

In summary, the findings on the perceptions of Highgate Private School teachers reinforce the relevance of Bandura's Social Learning Theory in understanding how CL influences intercultural relationships in educational settings. Through mechanisms such as modeling, vicarious reinforcement, and reciprocal interaction, CL enables learners to develop empathy, respect, and a sense of belonging. These outcomes are consistent with the view that advocates CL as a transformative pedagogical approach in multicultural classrooms [32] [33]. Thus, intentional CL implementation can play a pivotal role in promoting intercultural understanding and preparing students for active, respectful participation in diverse societies.

## **6.2. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Intercultural CL Classrooms**

The findings of this study highlight the challenges teachers face when implementing CL in culturally diverse classrooms. The findings reflect broader concerns in the literature regarding how intercultural dynamics can complicate otherwise beneficial CL practices. Drawing on Bandura's [45] Social Learning Theory, this discussion focuses on how challenges such as language barriers, cultural clashes, as-

assessment complexities, and institutional limitations impede the effectiveness of CL, despite teachers' efforts to foster inclusive collaborative environments.

#### ***Communication and language barriers in CL***

A core principle of Bandura's Social Learning Theory is that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and interaction in social settings. However, the findings revealed that language barriers significantly hindered these processes in intercultural classrooms. When learners struggle to express themselves due to limited English proficiency, their participation in CL activities is reduced. This undermines peer modeling and interaction, which are core elements of the Social Learning Theory. These findings echo previous research, which found that effective CL is dependent on students' ability to communicate freely with each other [10]. Similarly, other researchers noted that poor communication reduces learners' capacity to engage meaningfully in group activities [47]. Modeled behaviors are critical for the internalization of social norms. Without language as a common medium, learners miss the opportunity to model culturally diverse behavior.

#### ***Power imbalances and conflicts in cultural norms***

When learners from dominant cultural or linguistic groups overshadow others during group activities, they limit equal participation in the group. This reduces the opportunities for reciprocal learning, which is a tenet of SLT. It is argued that cultural identity and group hierarchies can affect how learners position themselves in CL [48]. Similarly, it was found by another scholar that learners from minority cultures often experience exclusion or marginalization in the classroom. Learners who feel excluded or marginalized are less willing to engage [49].

Furthermore, cultural differences complicate CL implementation at the Highgate Private School. Some learners come from cultures that discourage open speaking. This clashes with the collaborative dialogue, which is necessary in CL. Cultural expectations regarding communication and authority directly influence learner engagement in group settings [21]. These challenges limit the ability of all learners to participate equitably in the observational learning process.

#### ***Complexities in assessing intercultural group work***

Differences in communication styles, assertiveness, and cultural values make it difficult for teachers to evaluate students' performance fairly. Bandura's SLT posits that learning is not always overt and that cognitive engagement can occur internally. Learning may not always manifest as visible participation. Thus, traditional group assessment methods may undervalue learners whose contributions are culturally coded. These concerns are consistent with the findings of one study where researchers cautioned that traditional assessment criteria might fail to account for the cultural nuances in group interactions [47]. Without culturally responsive assessment tools, teachers may unintentionally penalize learners who do not conform to the dominant communication styles. This reduces fairness and effectiveness in CL environments.

#### ***Need for intercultural training and systemic support***

Teachers consistently expressed the need for training in intercultural competence and conflict-sensitive classroom management skills. This aligns with the ar-

gument that teacher development in multicultural CL settings must include not only pedagogy but also cultural awareness and socio-emotional skills [48]. Without systemic support (access to teaching resources and clear diversity policies), teachers are often left to address complex intercultural challenges using reactive individualized strategies. This may not be sufficient for effective CL. It was further emphasized by one researcher that institutions must integrate intercultural competence into school culture rather than treat it as an add-on [49]. Supportive structures enable teachers to model inclusive practices more effectively.

In summary, the challenges identified above underscore the importance of contextual and cognitive dynamics in CL environments. Language barriers, cultural norms, assessment limitations, and lack of teacher support all act as barriers to the modeling, imitation, and reciprocal interactions necessary for effective CL. To maximize the benefits of CL in multicultural settings such as the Highgate Private School, teacher training must incorporate cultural fluency and inclusive facilitation. Furthermore, institutional policies and assessment practices must evolve to support equitable participation and learning across cultural boundaries. Doing so would not only reduce the burden on individual teachers but also create classrooms in which collaborative learning fosters both academic success and intercultural understanding.

## 7. Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

This study examined teachers' perceptions of CL and the challenges they face in implementing CL in culturally diverse classrooms in Windhoek, Namibia. Grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the findings reveal that while teachers perceive CL positively, its implementation is hindered by several barriers. These challenges compromise the social processes that underpin successful learning in CL environments. Thus, this study underscores the need for systemic interventions that empower teachers to navigate intercultural complexities effectively and realize the full pedagogical benefits of collaborative learning. Theoretically, the findings of this study reinforce Bandura's Social Learning Theory by emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive social interactions in learning environments. Learners from marginalized or linguistic minority backgrounds are often excluded from full participation, diminishing opportunities for reciprocal learning.

The practical implications of the study for teachers are that they require more than general pedagogical skills to facilitate CL effectively in diverse classrooms. They must be adept at managing cultural sensitivities, promoting inclusive dialogue, and navigating power asymmetries within student groups to achieve this. Without such competencies, well-intentioned CL strategies may inadvertently reinforce exclusion rather than inclusion.

At the institutional level, the study's implications are that institutions play a critical role in creating enabling environments for intercultural CL. This includes establishing practices and support systems that prioritize diversity and inclusive-

ness. Without institutional commitment to intercultural education, the responsibility falls unfairly on individual teachers to adapt and improvise, often without sufficient tools or support. Hence, schools should provide continuous training focused on intercultural competence and inclusive instructional strategies in diverse learning environments.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### References

- [1] Volet, S. and Vauras, M. (2021) *Interpersonal Regulation of Learning and Motivation: Methodological Advances*. Routledge.
- [2] Baker, W. and Fang, F. (2021) "A World of Many Cultures": Interculturality and the English Language in a Chinese University. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, **21**, 754-767.
- [3] Cheng, X. (2021) The Role of Teachers in Promoting Collaborative Learning in Diverse Classrooms. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, **29**, 581-597.
- [4] Laal, M. and Ghodsi, S.M. (2012) Benefits of Collaborative Learning. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, **31**, 486-490.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.091>
- [5] Ministry of Education and Culture (1993) *Towards Education for All: A Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training*. Gemsberg Macmillan.
- [6] Ministry of Basic Education, Sports, and Culture (2001) *The National Curriculum for Basic Education*. MBESC.
- [7] Amakali, A. (2017) *Learner-Centred Education in Namibia: A Critical Analysis of Its Implementation*. University of Namibia Press.
- [8] Kandjeo-Marenga, H.O. and Ilukena, A. (2023) Bridging the Divide: Policy Enactment and Teacher Agency in Namibian Basic Education. *Journal of Education in Southern Africa*, **41**, 45-61.
- [9] Ramburuth, P. and Tani, M. (2009) The Impact of Culture on Learning: Exploring Student Perceptions. *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal*, **3**, 182-195.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/17504970910984862>
- [10] Gillies, R.M. and Boyle, M. (2010) Teachers' Reflections on Cooperative Learning: Issues of Implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, **26**, 933-940.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.10.034>
- [11] Popov, V., Brinkman, D., Biemans, H.J.A., Mulder, M., Kuznetsov, A. and Noroozi, O. (2012) Multicultural Student Group Work in Higher Education: An Explorative Case Study on Challenges as Perceived by Students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, **36**, 302-317. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.09.004>
- [12] Hofstede, G. (1986) Cultural Differences in Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, **10**, 301-320.  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(86\)90015-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90015-5)
- [13] Ferguson-Patrick, K. and Jolliffe, W. (2018) *Cooperative Learning for Intercultural Classrooms: Case Studies for Inclusive Pedagogy*. Routledge.
- [14] Tran, T.Q. (2019) Challenges of Teachers in Facilitating Intercultural Collaborative Learning: A Case Study in a Vietnamese University. *Journal of Studies in Interna-*

- tional Education*, **23**, 126-144.
- [15] Alsubaie, M.A. and Al-Hattami, A.A. (2022) Exploring the Readiness of Teachers for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: A Mixed-Methods Study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, **115**, Article ID: 103721.
- [16] Tapscott, C. (1993) National Reconciliation, Social Equity and Class Formation in Independent Namibia. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, **19**, 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079308708345>
- [17] Bandura, A. (1977) Social Learning Theory. Prentice-Hall.
- [18] O'Rorke, K. (2006) Social Learning Theory & Mass Communication. *ABEA Journal*, **25**, 72-74.
- [19] Lawal, M.B. and Obebe, B.J. (2011) Introduction to Social Studies. National Open University of Nigeria.
- [20] Laal, M. and Laal, M. (2012) Collaborative Learning: What Is It? *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, **31**, 491-495. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.092>
- [21] Le, H., Janssen, J. and Wubbels, T. (2017) Collaborative Learning Practices: Teacher and Student Perceived Obstacles to Effective Student Collaboration. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, **48**, 103-122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764x.2016.1259389>
- [22] Zhou, X., Chen, L.H. and Chen, C.L. (2019) Collaborative Learning by Teaching: A Pedagogy between Learner-Centered and Learner-Driven. *Sustainability*, **11**, Article No. 1174. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11041174>
- [23] Panitz, T. (1999) The Case for Student Centered Instruction via Collaborative Learning Paradigms.
- [24] McWhaw, K., Schnackenberg, H., Sclater, J. and Abrami, P.C. (2003) From Cooperation to Collaboration: Helping Students Become Collaborative Learners. In: *Cooperative Learning*, Routledge, 69-86.
- [25] Burns, M., Pierson, E. and Reddy, S. (2014) Working Together: How Teachers Teach and Students Learn in Collaborative Learning Environments. *International Journal of Instruction*, **7**, 17-32.
- [26] Keiler, L.S. (2018) Teachers' Roles and Identities in Student-Centered Classrooms. *International Journal of STEM Education*, **5**, Article No. 34. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-018-0131-6>
- [27] Alharbi, S.M., Elfeky, A.I. and Ahmed, E.S. (2022) The Effect of E-Collaborative Learning Environment on Development of Critical Thinking and Higher Order Thinking Skills. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, **6**, 6848-6854.
- [28] Brindley, J., Blaschke, L.M. and Walti, C. (2009) Creating Effective Collaborative Learning Groups in an Online Environment. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, **10**, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v10i3.675>
- [29] Loes, C.N., Henderickx, J. and De Laet, T. (2021) The Effect of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Students' Transversal Skills. *Education Sciences*, **11**, Article No. 233.
- [30] Lee, E. and Hannafin, M.J. (2016) A Design Framework for Enhancing Engagement in Student-Centered Learning: Own It, Learn It, and Share It. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, **64**, 707-734. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-015-9422-5>
- [31] Puntì, G. and Dingel, M.J. (2023) Rethinking the Foundations of Intercultural Competence in Education: A Case for Intercultural Humility. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, **27**, 513-529.

- [32] Alzubi, A.A.F., Nazim, M. and Ahmad, J. (2024) Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of EFL Students' Engagement in Collaborative Learning: Implementation Issues and Suggestions. *Qubahan Academic Journal*, **4**, 250-264. <https://doi.org/10.48161/qaj.v4n1a383>
- [33] Gao, X. (2020) Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Strategies for Developing Intercultural Competence. *Global Chinese*, **6**, 333-358. <https://doi.org/10.1515/glochi-2020-0017>
- [34] Volknant, S. and Licandro, U. (2024) Preparing Teachers for Linguistically Diverse Classrooms—A Systematic Review on Interventions and Intersectional Perspectives. *Education Sciences*, **14**, Article No. 846. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14080846>
- [35] Lucas, T. (2010) *Teacher Preparation for Linguistically Diverse Classrooms: A Resource for Teacher Educators*. Routledge.
- [36] Osipova, A.V. and Lao, R.S. (2022) Breaking the Cycle of Failure for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners with Exceptional Needs: Recommendations for Improvement of Teacher Preparation Programs. *Journal of Multicultural Education*, **25**, 1-25. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1360921.pdf>
- [37] Chata, L.S. (2025) Collaborative Learning in a Private Secondary School in Windhoek: Teachers' Perceptions and Challenges Faced. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, **7**, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i06.59239>
- [38] Quintero, E. (2017) Elevating Relationships: How Collaboration Shapes Teaching and Learning. *American Educator*, **41**, 18-21. [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae\\_summer2017\\_quintero.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ae_summer2017_quintero.pdf)
- [39] Acharya, B., Sigdel, S. and Poudel, O. (2024) Analysis of Effectiveness of Collaborative Pedagogy Practices. *NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, **1**, 172-185. <https://doi.org/10.3126/nprcjmr.v1i4.70965>
- [40] Crozet, C. and Liddicoat, A.J. (1999) The Challenge of Intercultural Language Teaching: Engaging with Culture in the Classroom. In: Lo Bianco, J., Liddicoat, A.J. and Crozet, C., Eds., *Striving for the Third Place: Intercultural Competence through Language Education*, Language Australia, 113-125.
- [41] Molla, S. and Muche, M. (2023) Teachers' Belief and Actual Classroom Practice of Implementing Cooperative Learning. *Cogent Education*, **10**, Article ID: 2176410.
- [42] Geduld, B.W., Sikwanga, H.S. and Lubbe, E. (2020) Juxtaposing South African and Namibian Teachers' Perceptions and Teaching Practices to Develop Self-Regulated Learning: Do They Practice What They Preach? *Perspectives in Education*, **38**, 138-154. <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593x/pie.v38.i2.09>
- [43] Creswell, J.W. (2014) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th Edition, Sage.
- [44] Maree, K. (2016) *First Steps in Research*. 2nd Edition, Van Schaik.
- [45] Bandura, A. (1986) *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- [46] Zhao, Y. (2024) Exploring the Role of Social Media Platforms in Facilitating Collaborative Learning among EFL Students: A Case Study Approach in Vocational Colleges. *International Journal of Instructional Cases*, **8**, 209-232.
- [47] Chiriac, E.H. and Granström, K. (2012) Teachers' Leadership and Students' Experience of Group Work. *Teachers and Teaching*, **18**, 345-363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2012.629842>
- [48] Hämäläinen, R. and Vähäsantanen, K. (2011) Theoretical and Pedagogical Perspectives on Orchestrating Creativity and Collaborative Learning. *Educational Research*

*Review*, 6, 169-184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.08.001>

- [49] London, B., Anderson, V. and Downey, G. (2012). Experiences of Exclusion and Marginalization: A Study at the Individual Student Level. In: *Diversity in American Higher Education*, Routledge, 195-204.