

Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory in Cross-Cultural Teaching Management in Guangxi Universities, China: A Theoretical Framework and Hypothetical Model

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ABSTRACT

As a conceptual study, this research aimed to: (1) Construct a systematic theoretical framework for cross-cultural teaching management in Guangxi universities aligned with China-ASEAN educational cooperation; (2) Clarify core dimensions and variable relationships centered on Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory; (3) Propose testable hypotheses for subsequent empirical research. Through a four-step process—theoretical anchoring, conceptual deconstruction and synthesis, model deduction, and situational verification—the model integrated one core and five associated theories with local practical features. Results showed: (1) The model included six core dimensions, with Synergy Mechanism as the mediating variable and Inclusive Leadership as the moderating variable; (2) It overcame fragmented research limitations, with 13 hypotheses delineated direct, mediating, and moderating effects. Practically, it provided actionable guidelines for cross-cultural cooperation. Future empirical testing will employ survey data collected from more than 200 teachers across three representative universities in Guangxi, selected to reflect institutional diversity and China-ASEAN cooperation involvement. Overall, the model offered a standardized analytical framework with theoretical innovation and practical value.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Teaching Management, Cultural Integration and Synergy, Synergy Mechanism, Guangxi Universities, China-ASEAN Educational Cooperation

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of advancing globalization in higher education and deepening China-ASEAN educational cooperation, Guangxi—China's frontier gateway to ASEAN—has seen its universities emerge as key venues for cross-cultural education practices (Liu, 2022). However, frequent cross-cultural interactions, while offering opportunities for educational resource integration, also pose complex challenges to teaching management.

At the micro-teaching level, instructors must address ASEAN students' distinctive culture-shaped learning styles (e.g., collectivist tendencies) and adapt to cultural differences in digital tool information reception (e.g., demand for multilingual digital resources). At the macro-organizational level, misconceptions

about internationalization, unbalanced resource allocation, and lack of inclusive management mechanisms hinder teaching effectiveness (Islam, M. A. et al., 2023; Arndt et al., 2021). This study explicitly identifies the core research problem: In the context of China-ASEAN educational cooperation, Guangxi universities face fragmented cross-cultural teaching management, inadequate response to the dual characteristics of "proximity to ASEAN and multi-ethnic composition," and lack of systematic integration of digital technology into management frameworks, leading to inefficient resource utilization and suboptimal teaching outcomes. There is an urgent need for an integrated theoretical mechanism tailored to regional characteristics. Thus, developing a systematic theoretical model to address these practical dilemmas holds significant theoretical and practical value.

Existing cross-cultural teaching management research has notable limitations: most focus on isolated factors without a comprehensive integrated analytical framework, overlook teachers' pivotal role as primary implementers, lack region-specific models, rely on universal theories that fail to account for Guangxi's dual uniqueness, and inadequately explore digital technology integration (Liu, 2022; Islam, M. A. et al., 2023; Arndt et al., 2021). To systematically present research gaps, three key aspects are highlighted: first, theoretical fragmentation—lack of integrated mechanisms connecting curriculum, teachers, support services, and digital competence; second, contextual mismatch—universal frameworks ignoring regional needs of China-ASEAN cooperation hubs; third, technological gap—Digital Intercultural Competence not systematically incorporated into management frameworks. The core gap between practice and theory is: while Guangxi universities urgently need targeted integrated management mechanisms, existing research lacks frameworks that align with regional characteristics and integrate digital technology, resulting in a disconnect between practical needs and theoretical support.

Drawing on these research gaps and practical needs, this study constructs a multi-dimensional analytical framework centered on Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory, integrating five associated theories (Superdiversity Theory, Glocalization Education Model, etc.) to align with the real-world scenarios of cross-cultural teaching management in Guangxi universities, laying a solid theoretical foundation for subsequent empirical research. To strengthen the logical progression from background to research objectives, the following is explicitly stated: Based on the identified core problems of cross-cultural teaching management in Guangxi universities, the systematically organized three research gaps, and the theoretical foundation of six integrated theories, this study establishes three core research objectives: (1) Construct a systematic theoretical framework for cross-cultural teaching management in Guangxi universities aligned with China-ASEAN educational cooperation; (2) Clarify the core dimensions and variable relationships centered on Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory; (3) Propose testable research hypotheses to lay the groundwork for subsequent empirical studies.

Theoretical Basis

1. Core Evolution of Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory

Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory provides a core framework for addressing management issues in cross-cultural interactions. Its evolutionary trajectory is closely tied to the central question of “how to transform cultural differences into organizational advantages” (Adler, 1980).

Emerging from early systematic cultural perspectives (Malinowski, 2013; Parsons, 1951), the theory took shape as a coherent framework primarily during the 1980s and 1990s. Adler (1980, 1991) made landmark contributions by transcending dichotomous views of cultural opposition, systematically proposing three major models—Cultural Dominance, Compromise, and Synergy—and establishing the foundational principle that cultural differences should be treated as sources of creative potential. Hofstede’s (1999) Cultural Dimensions Theory supplied a crucial analytical tool for identifying and quantifying cultural differences, greatly enhancing the theory’s empirical applicability. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) further advanced the concept of synergy, highlighting the possibility of achieving transcendent innovation through the reconciliation of deeply held values. The theoretical breakthroughs of this period culminated in a comprehensive methodological system encompassing “diagnosis–strategy–principle,” thereby laying a solid foundation for the field of cross-cultural management.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the theory has gradually extended into the domain of education, where the Cultural Synergy Model has demonstrated particular value: effective cross-cultural teaching management demands creative integration rather than assimilation or mere compromise. These insights directly inform the present study—the ultimate aim of cross-cultural teaching management should be the pursuit of synergy, rather than one-sided dominance or superficial compromise. In recent years, the discourse on cultural integration and synergy has been further expanded within the broader context of higher education internationalization. Marginson (2022) argues that global higher education is increasingly characterized by multi-centered knowledge networks rather than unidirectional flows, thereby requiring structured institutional collaboration rather than informal cultural accommodation. Similarly, De Wit and Altbach (2021) emphasize that sustainable internationalization depends on systematic governance frameworks and coordinated policy mechanisms. These contemporary developments suggest that cultural synergy must be operationalized through formalized institutional arrangements and organizational coordination processes. This theoretical progression provides strong justification for positioning Synergy Mechanism as a core mediating construct in the present study.

2. Adler’s Three Major Cultural Management Models

Adler’s (1980) three major Cultural Management Models remain classic analytical tools in cross-cultural management. Their core meanings and contemporary applications reflect an evolutionary progression from unidirectional control toward collaborative innovation. Far from being isolated approaches, these three models constitute a continuous strategic spectrum for managing cultural differences, offering a valuable theoretical lens for analyzing cross-cultural teaching management.

2.1 Cultural Dominance Model: One-Way Assimilation with Priority on Efficiency

This model is characterized by the unidirectional imposition of the dominant culture upon the subordinate culture, emphasizing efficiency through the uniform application of a single management standard (Adler, 1980). A common practice involves the direct transplantation of the home country’s

management system into cross-cultural settings. However, contemporary research has exposed the limitations of this approach. Arndt et al. (2021) observed that pure cultural dominance tends to provoke latent resistance from the dominated group, often resulting in merely formal or superficial compliance. Consequently, most current practices adopt a hybrid Dominance-Adaptation Model, which mitigates cultural conflict while preserving core objectives.

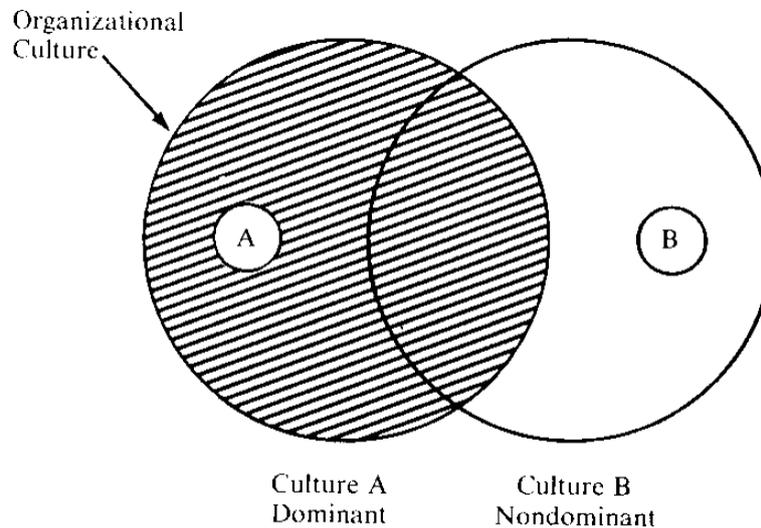


Figure 1 Cultural Dominance Model

2.2 Cultural Compromise Model: An Expedient Strategy of Seeking Common Ground While Preserving Differences

Drawing on shared cultural elements, this model creates space for cooperation by relinquishing certain cultural characteristics on both sides (Adler, 1980). At its core, it seeks compromise amid differences and is therefore best suited to situations involving short-term collaboration and moderate levels of conflict. Nevertheless, prolonged reliance on the Compromise Model risks suppressing distinctive cultural traits in the pursuit of superficial harmony, which may ultimately undermine long-term innovation capacity (Adler, 1991).

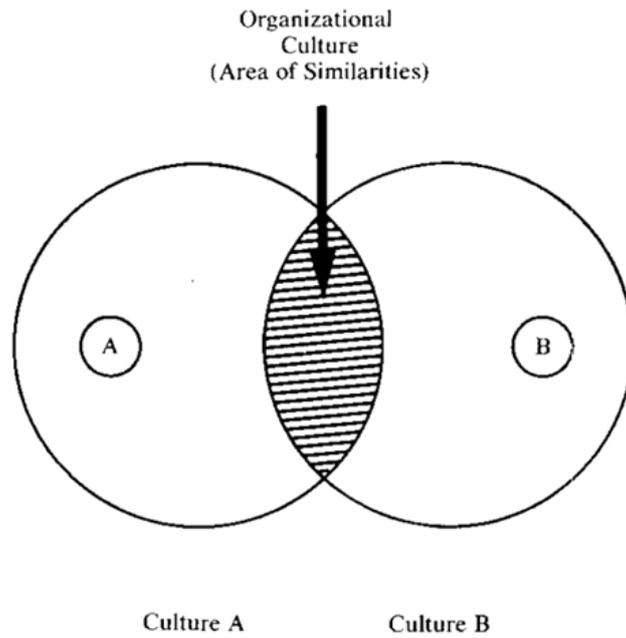


Figure 2 Cultural Compromise Model

2.3 Cultural Synergy Model: Value Creation Driven by Differences

As an advanced approach to cultural management, this model stresses the development of innovative management practices through the creative integration of cultural differences (Adler, 1991). Its central tenet is to view diversity not as a managerial burden but as a source of innovation. In the field of education, the Synergy Model has shown particularly strong applicability.

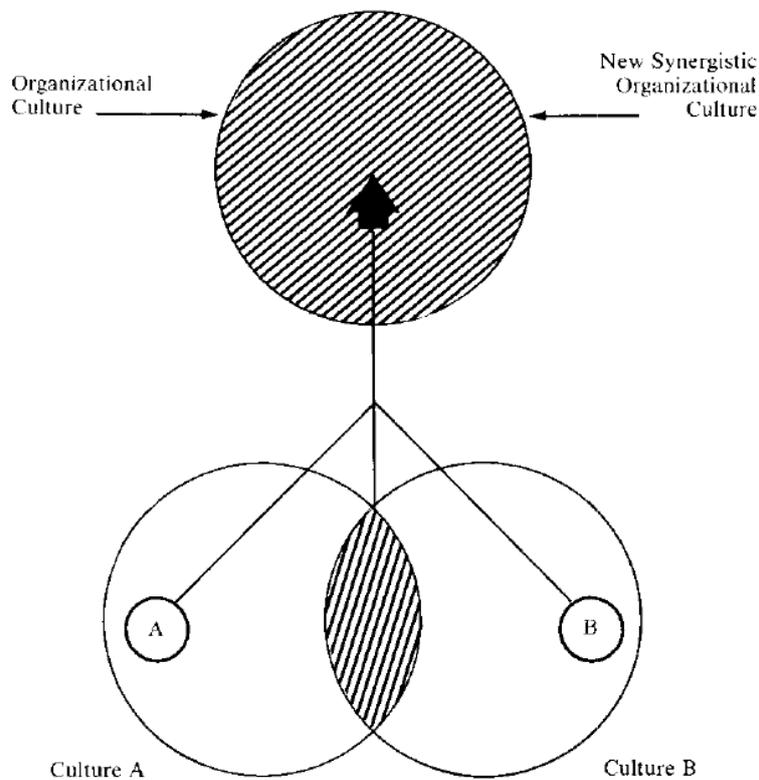


Figure 3 Cultural Synergy Model

This characteristic makes it highly compatible with the cross-cultural teaching context examined in this study. The model not only respects differences among teachers and students from varied cultural backgrounds but also fosters collaborative integration to create a unified force in teaching management, thereby providing theoretical support for resolving cultural conflicts and enhancing teaching effectiveness.

In summary, Adler's three models—Cultural Dominance, Compromise, and Synergy—form a continuous strategic system for addressing cultural differences in cross-cultural management. Among them, the Cultural Synergy Model offers the most promising route to sustained high performance in multicultural settings by capitalizing on the creative potential of differences. However, synergy does not emerge automatically in organizational practice; its effective realization depends on appropriate institutional arrangements and operational mechanisms. Accordingly, this study contends that, in the context of cross-cultural teaching management in Guangxi universities, diverse factors such as curriculum design, teacher capabilities, support services, and digital technology can only be transformed into stable and sustainable teaching effectiveness through institutionalized and actionable **Synergy Mechanisms**. It is for this reason that the present study designates Synergy Mechanism as the core mediating variable linking multiple input factors to cross-cultural teaching management effectiveness.

3 Associated Theoretical Framework

3.1 Superdiversity Theory and Its Teaching Implications

Superdiversity Theory (Vertovec, 2019) transcends single-dimensional approaches to cultural analysis by emphasizing the complex, interwoven nature of multiple identity dimensions (e.g., legal status, language proficiency). It offers a valuable lens for understanding the heterogeneity within the ASEAN student population at universities in Guangxi. The theory highlights the limitations of a “one-size-fits-all” approach: even students from the same nationality may exhibit diverse needs due to differences in educational backgrounds and language proficiency. Consequently, teaching management must shift from broad group-based classifications toward individualized attention, allowing flexible adjustments in curriculum design, support services, and evaluation methods (Votava, 2024). Recent empirical research further demonstrates that superdiversity in higher education has intensified in the post-pandemic era due to digital mobility and hybrid transnational identities. Brooks and Waters (2009) note that international students' identities are shaped not only by nationality but also by linguistic capital, digital learning trajectories, and socio-economic positioning. Scott (2020) similarly argue that traditional nationality-based management approaches are insufficient to address the intersecting dimensions of diversity present in contemporary classrooms. These findings reinforce the necessity of establishing flexible institutional coordination and data-informed decision-making mechanisms to effectively manage complex forms of diversity in cross-cultural teaching contexts.

3.2 Core Connotation and Practical Value of the Glocalization Education Model

The Glocalization Education Model (Robertson, 1995) overcomes the traditional dichotomy between globalization and localization by stressing their creative synthesis in educational contexts (Bantimaroudis, 2017). It critiques the tendency toward cultural homogenization in conventional internationalization processes (Patel, 2026) and provides a theoretical foundation for Guangxi universities to balance global standards with regional characteristics within the framework of China-ASEAN educational cooperation. In practice, the model's core lies in the creation of a “third cultural space” (Patel & Lynch,

2013): curricula should integrate cutting-edge international theories, cases of China-ASEAN cooperation, and distinctive local elements (e.g., Zhuang culture), while teaching decisions must be attuned to the cultural backgrounds of learners (Zhenling, 2024).

3.3 Inclusive Leadership Theory and Its Teaching Application

Inclusive Leadership Theory (Shore & Chung, 2022) emphasizes the simultaneous promotion of a sense of belonging and the recognition of individual uniqueness, while fostering equitable resource allocation and open communication. It serves as an organizational safeguard for collaborative management mechanisms. In the development of the theoretical model proposed in this study, Inclusive Leadership Theory provides essential support by directly validating the inclusion of the “Collaborative Management Mechanism” (or Synergy Mechanism) as a core dimension and enriching its conceptual depth. In the past five years, inclusive leadership has been increasingly associated with innovation performance and knowledge-sharing behaviors in diverse organizational settings. Randel et al. (2018) highlight that inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety and a sense of belonging, both of which are critical for effective collaboration in multicultural environments. Randel et al. (2018) further demonstrate that inclusive leadership enhances organizational outcomes through mediated pathways such as knowledge sharing. In higher education institutions undergoing internationalization and digital transformation, such leadership practices play a crucial role in strengthening collaborative governance structures. These empirical insights substantiate the moderating role of Inclusive Leadership proposed in this study.

3.4 Digital Intercultural Competence Theory and Its Teaching Integration

Building on Byram’s (2020) Intercultural Competence Model, Digital Intercultural Competence Theory (also referred to as Digital Intercultural Competence, DCCC) incorporates digital technology as a new dimension. Cordeiro (2018) argued that digital environments demand specialized information-processing skills and adaptive communication abilities, thereby driving the evolution of intercultural competence toward greater technological empowerment.

The theory’s three-dimensional framework—cognition (digital analysis of cultural differences; Shen, & Croucher, 2018), behavior (digital narrative competence; Guo, 2024), and emotion (technological cultural empathy; Yang, 2025)—underscores the importance of critical digital literacy combined with cultural sensitivity. In the post-pandemic educational landscape, digital technology has become a structural mediator of intercultural interaction rather than merely a supplementary tool. Czerniewicz et al. (2020) demonstrate that emergency remote teaching exposed and intensified digital inequalities, highlighting the intersection between technological access and cultural adaptation. Moreover, Czerniewicz et al. (2020) argue that digital intercultural competence encompasses not only technical proficiency but also online communication strategies, virtual identity construction, and culturally responsive engagement in digital spaces. These recent developments suggest that digital competence must be conceptualized as an integrated socio-technical capacity within cross-cultural teaching management systems. This theoretical evolution strongly supports the inclusion of Digital Intercultural Competence as an independent structural dimension in the present model.

3.5 Application Value of Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model in Cross-Cultural Contexts

Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick, 1959), centered on the four-level logic of “reaction – learning – behavior – results,” offers a standardized framework for assessing the effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching management (Arndt et al., 2021). Its four levels are well suited to the context of Guangxi universities, enabling multi-perspective measurement of teaching adaptability—including curriculum acceptance, knowledge acquisition, behavioral change, and overall outcomes. The model clarifies the impact of constructing a “third cultural space” and provides empirical data to guide management optimization.

As one of the six core theories underpinning this study, Kirkpatrick's model supplies a direct foundation for defining and operationalizing the dependent variable “cross-cultural teaching management effectiveness,” converting the vague notion of “teaching effect” into measurable four-level dimensions. Together with the other five theories, it forms a comprehensive theoretical support system for the proposed model.

Theoretical Model Construction and Hypothesis Proposal

1. Theoretical Construction Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design and develops a preliminary theoretical model through a four-step process. The subsequent empirical phase will employ a quantitative survey approach targeting over 200 teachers from three representative Guangxi universities engaged in China–ASEAN educational cooperation, in order to validate the proposed model.

Step 1: Theoretical Anchoring and Screening Based on a systematic literature review, six core theories are identified: Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory serves as the central framework, while Superdiversity Theory defines the complexity of the problem, the Glocalization Education Model guides curriculum design, Inclusive Leadership Theory provides organizational support, Digital Intercultural Competence Theory addresses the technological context, and Kirkpatrick's (1959) Evaluation Model clarifies the dimensions for assessing management effectiveness. These six theories fulfill distinct yet complementary functions, collectively ensuring the rigor, systematicity, and scientific validity of the model.

Step 2: Conceptual Deconstruction and Synthesis The core theories are deconstructed into their constituent dimensions (e.g., cultural integration is broken down into the “dominance–compromise–synergy” pathways, and Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model is divided into the four levels of “reaction–learning–behavior–result”). Key conceptual linkages are then identified (e.g., the alignment between Superdiversity Theory's emphasis on “identity complexity” and Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory's focus on “difference identification”; the congruence between the Glocalization Education Model's “integration” principle and the “synergy” objective in Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory; and the direct correspondence between the “result” level in Kirkpatrick's model and overall cross-cultural teaching management effectiveness). Through conceptual matrix analysis, a unified conceptual network is constructed. This synthesis establishes the conceptual foundation for subsequent model construction.

Step 3: Model Deduction and Hypothesis Formulation Drawing on the conceptual synthesis, six core dimensions are extracted, corresponding to Hypotheses H1–H6. Variable relationships are established in accordance with theoretical logic: direct effects (H1–H6) stem from the explicit propositions of the

respective theories regarding the variables and teaching management effectiveness (with Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model providing a standardized measurement foundation for "cross-cultural teaching management effectiveness"); mediating effects (H7–H12) draw on Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory to highlight the transformative role of Synergy Mechanism; and the moderating effect (H13) delineates the boundary conditions created by Inclusive Leadership based on Inclusive Leadership Theory. Together, these hypotheses structurally operationalize the proposed theoretical model.

Step 4: Logical and Situational Verification The preliminary model is cross-checked against existing empirical studies to ensure theoretical consistency. It incorporates the multi-ethnic cultural features of Guangxi universities and the specific context of ASEAN cooperation (e.g., the "reaction" dimension of Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model is well suited to assessing ASEAN students' acceptance of cross-cultural courses). This enhances the model's contextual relevance, adaptability, and practical significance. This verification further confirms the internal coherence and contextual applicability of the model.

2. Core Dimensions and Variable Design

Grounded in Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory and the practical realities of cross-cultural teaching in Guangxi universities, this study constructs a comprehensive theoretical model encompassing core independent variables, a mediating variable, a moderating variable, and an outcome variable—a total of nine key variables. Specifically, six core dimensions function as independent variables that directly influence cross-cultural teaching effectiveness; one mediating variable serves as the transmission mechanism; one moderating variable regulates the strength of the mediating effect; and one outcome variable captures the ultimate practical effectiveness measured by the model. The definitions and logical roles of each variable are as follows:

2.1 Core Independent Variables (6): Core Input Elements of the Model

The core independent variables represent the primary antecedents of cross-cultural teaching effectiveness, providing foundational support for the model. Their definitions are as follows:

- **Curriculum Cultural Integration:** The extent to which multicultural elements (local Chinese, ASEAN, and global) are integrated into curriculum content, instructional methods, and evaluation systems. It includes three sub-dimensions: content integration, method adaptation, and multi-dimensional evaluation.
- **Teachers' Intercultural Competence:** The overall professional literacy of teachers in multicultural classrooms. It includes three sub-dimensions: cultural cognition, teaching adaptation, and digital application. This variable represents a core teacher-level influencing factor in cross-cultural teaching management.
- **Classroom Conflict Resolution:** The effectiveness of strategies for preventing, identifying, mediating, and resolving cognitive and behavioral conflicts arising from cultural differences in multicultural classrooms. It includes three sub-dimensions: sensitivity to conflict identification, communication and coordination skills, and adaptability of solutions.
- **Teaching Support Services:** A systematic support system provided by universities for teachers and students in cross-cultural teaching contexts. It includes three sub-dimensions: academic support, cultural adaptation support, and resource support.
- **Digital Intercultural Competence:** Teachers' ability to leverage digital technology to bridge cultural gaps and meet the needs of multicultural teaching. It includes three sub-dimensions: proficiency in

technical application, capacity for designing cross-cultural digital scenarios, and control over digital teaching ethics.

- **Local Context Adaptation (Guangxi Characteristics):** The degree to which curriculum design, practical teaching, and management mechanisms are adapted to Guangxi's multi-ethnic culture and the China-ASEAN cooperation context. It includes three sub-dimensions: cultural linkage, alignment with regional demands, and situational localization.

2.2. Synergy Mechanism: The institutionalized coordination system that integrates multiple cross-cultural teaching elements into a coherent operational process. It includes three sub-dimensions: decision-making synergy, coordination mechanisms, and evaluation synergy. This variable functions as the mediating bridge between the six core independent variables and Cross-Cultural Teaching Management Effectiveness.

2.3 Inclusive Leadership: A leadership approach that simultaneously promotes belongingness and respect for individual uniqueness in cross-cultural teaching management. It includes four sub-dimensions: open communication, equitable resource allocation, respect for multiculturalism, and tolerance of errors. This variable positively moderates the relationship between Synergy Mechanism and Cross-Cultural Teaching Management Effectiveness.

2.4 Outcome Variable (1): Practical Effectiveness Ultimately Measured by the Model Cross-Cultural Teaching Management Effectiveness:

2.4 Cross-Cultural Teaching Management Effectiveness: The overall effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching management as reflected in institutional and instructional outcomes. It is assessed across four levels based on Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model: reaction, learning, behavior, and result. It includes four sub-dimensions: reaction level, learning level, behavior level, and result level.

3. Theoretical Model

The theoretical model clearly delineates the internal relationships and operational mechanisms among the variables: the six core dimensions—Curriculum Cultural Integration (X1), Teachers' Intercultural Competence (X2), Classroom Conflict Resolution (X3), Teaching Support Services (X4), Digital Intercultural Competence (X5), and Local Context Adaptation (X6)—are hypothesized to exert a direct positive influence on Cross-Cultural Teaching Management Effectiveness (Y). Synergy Mechanism (M1) is hypothesized to play a mediating role between the six core dimensions and Y, while Inclusive Leadership (M2) is hypothesized to positively moderate the relationship between Synergy Mechanism (M1) and Y.

The theoretical model proposed in this study is presented in Figure 4, and its validity will be empirically tested in future research.

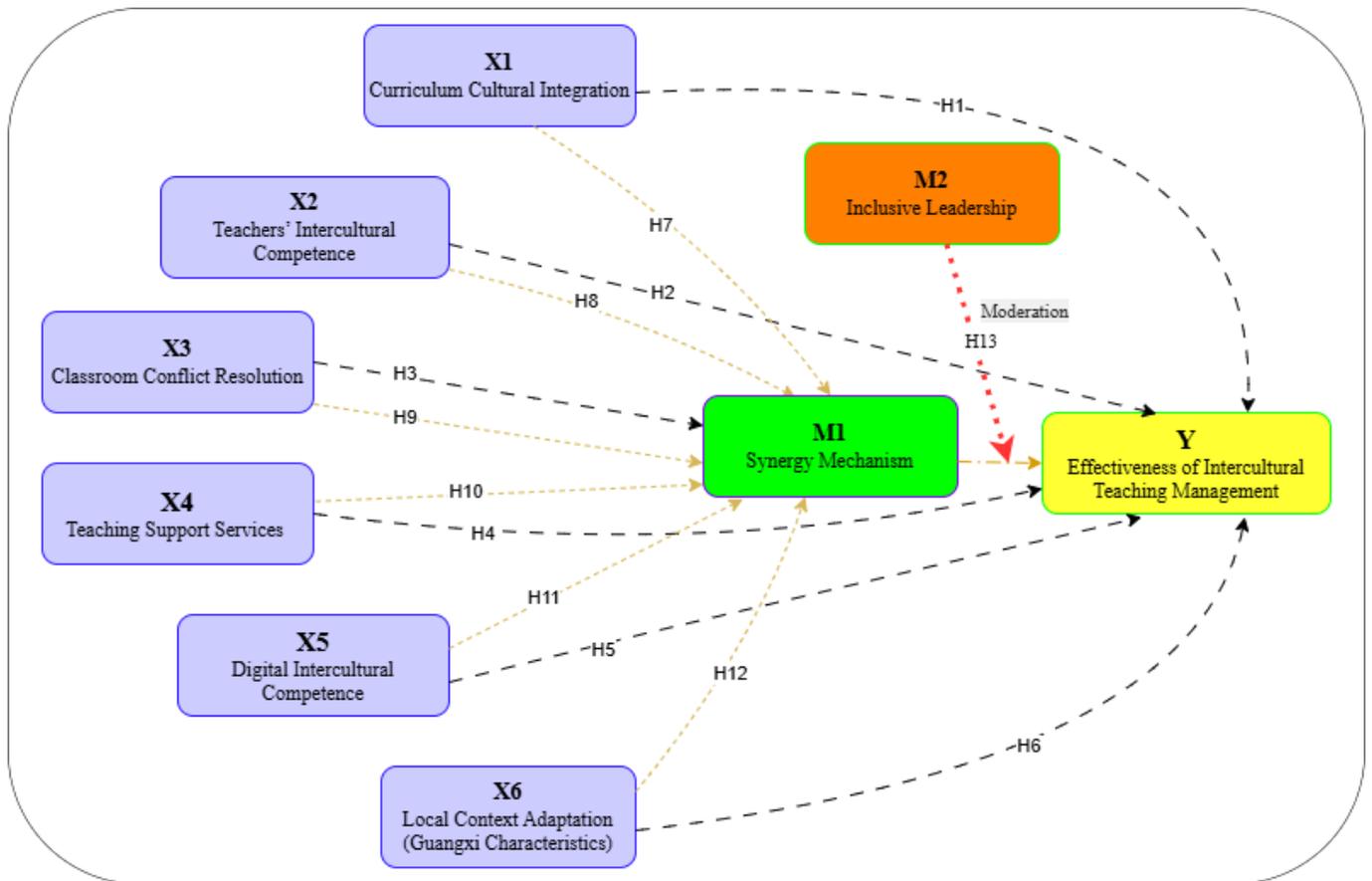


Figure 4 Theoretical Model of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management in Guangxi Universities (Theoretical Hypothesis Stage)

Note: 1. Variable correspondence: X1 = Curriculum Cultural Integration, X2 = Teachers' Intercultural Competence, X3 = Classroom Conflict Resolution, X4 = Teaching Support Services, X5 = Digital Intercultural Competence, X6 = Local Context Adaptation (Guangxi Characteristics), M1 = Synergy Mechanism, M2 = Inclusive Leadership, Y = Intercultural Teaching Management Effectiveness; 2. All arrows represent untested hypothetical paths. H1–H6: direct effect hypotheses, H7–H12: mediating effect hypotheses (X → M1 → Y), H13: moderating effect hypothesis of M2 on the path “M1 → Y”.

4. Research Hypotheses

To facilitate subsequent empirical testing, the path relationships in the model are converted into specific verifiable research hypotheses, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis No.	Hypothesis Type	Variable Relationship and Impact Description
H1	Direct Effect	Curriculum Cultural Integration (X1) has a significant positive impact on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management (Y).
H2	Direct Effect	Teachers' Intercultural Competence (X2) has a significant positive impact on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management (Y).
H3	Direct Effect	Classroom Conflict Resolution (X3) has a significant positive impact on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management (Y).
H4	Direct Effect	Teaching Support Services (X4) has a significant positive impact on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management (Y).
H5	Direct Effect	Digital Intercultural Competence (X5) has a significant positive impact on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management (Y).
H6	Direct Effect	Local Context Adaptation (X6) has a significant positive impact on the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management (Y).
H7-H12	Mediating Effect	As a transformative process, Synergy Mechanism (M1) converts inputs at the curriculum, teaching, and institutional levels into the effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching management.
H13	Moderating Effect	Inclusive Leadership (M2) positively moderates the relationship between Synergy Mechanism (M1) and the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Teaching Management (Y).

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Significance

1. Theoretical Contributions

The contributions of this study to theories of cross-cultural education and management are primarily evident in the following three aspects.

First, it proposes a systematic analytical framework for cross-cultural teaching management centered on Synergy Mechanism, thereby transcending the conventional “factor-overlay” research paradigm. Most existing studies examine the effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching management through isolated or parallel factors (e.g., curriculum design, teachers' intercultural competence, or support services), often implying that the mere addition of multiple factors will naturally enhance overall effectiveness. Drawing on Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory, this study explicitly argues that diverse elements in cross-cultural teaching do not automatically translate into positive outcomes; their impact depends on institutionalized integration and transformation through Synergy Mechanism. Accordingly, the study incorporates six dimensions—Curriculum Cultural Integration, Teachers' Intercultural Competence, Classroom Conflict Resolution, Teaching Support Services, Digital Intercultural Competence, and Local Context Adaptation—into a unified framework, with Synergy Mechanism serving as the key mediating variable. This results in a

“mechanism-driven” model of cross-cultural teaching management that overcomes the limitations of fragmented factors and unclear operational pathways characteristic of prior research.

Second, it deepens and extends the explanatory power of Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory within the domain of higher education. Whereas most previous studies have remained at the level of normative assertions that “cultural synergy promotes improved management effectiveness,” this study elucidates the internal operational logic of cultural synergy—from abstract concept to concrete practice—through rigorous modeling. It clarifies that synergy does not arise spontaneously but requires specific organizational systems and operational mechanisms. Furthermore, by introducing Inclusive Leadership as a moderating variable, the study reveals the boundary conditions under which leadership behavior influences the functioning of Synergy Mechanism, thereby advancing Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory from conceptual advocacy toward a more robust mechanism-based explanation.

Third, it achieves a mechanistic integration of multiple theoretical perspectives, offering a transferable methodological paradigm for cross-cultural education research. With Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory as the central thread, this study organically synthesizes Superdiversity Theory, the Glocalization Education Model, Inclusive Leadership Theory, and Digital Intercultural Competence Theory. Synergy Mechanism serves as the structural link connecting these diverse theoretical elements, addressing the persistent problem in cross-cultural education research of “abundant theories but insufficient mechanisms.” This integrative approach is not only relevant to the context of Guangxi universities but also provides a theoretically generalizable framework for cross-cultural teaching management studies in other multicultural higher education settings.

2. Practical Significance

The proposed model offers concrete and actionable guidelines for the practice of cross-cultural teaching management in Guangxi universities and, more broadly, within the framework of China-ASEAN educational cooperation:

- Teachers can strengthen their conflict mediation and pedagogical adaptation skills—in alignment with the dimensions of Teachers’ Intercultural Competence (X2) and Classroom Conflict Resolution (X3) identified in the model—through ASEAN language study and discussions of cross-cultural case studies.
- For curriculum developers and university administrators: Jointly advance Curriculum Cultural Integration and Local Context Adaptation. Curriculum development should move beyond the superficial “content addition” approach—for example, by incorporating cases from the Guangxi-ASEAN Free Trade Area into courses such as “International Economy and Trade”. Additionally, include a “regional adaptability” criterion in curriculum evaluation processes—consistent with the dimension of Local Context Adaptation (X6) proposed in the model.
- For university administrative departments: Establish an interdepartmental working group comprising the International Office, Academic Affairs Office, and Information Center to deliver one-stop services (including cultural adaptation support) for newly arrived ASEAN students. Develop and maintain a cross-cultural resource repository (incorporating Guangxi-specific local cases) and implement regular data sharing to continuously refine and optimize management strategies.

Policy Implications, Research Limitations, and Future Directions

1. Policy Implications

From the perspective of regional educational governance within China–ASEAN cooperation, the model developed in this study provides structured and operational implications for policymakers at national, provincial, and institutional levels.

First, policymakers should promote a structural shift from short-term “project-based cooperation” toward long-term “institutionalized co-construction.” Instead of focusing primarily on exchange programs and joint degree initiatives, regulatory frameworks should support the co-development of cross-cultural teaching management systems. Provincial education authorities may establish special funding mechanisms tied explicitly to the six core dimensions of this model, require inter-university governance coordination plans, and integrate cross-cultural management indicators into institutional evaluation systems.

Second, a formal “cultural synergy” governance orientation should be embedded into policy design. Government guidelines may require universities engaged in China–ASEAN cooperation to develop institutional Synergy Mechanisms, including cross-departmental coordination structures, shared evaluation platforms, and joint decision-making processes. Performance assessment standards for university leaders should incorporate Inclusive Leadership indicators to ensure that multicultural respect, equity, and collaborative governance become measurable administrative responsibilities.

Third, digital transformation policies must incorporate cultural equity considerations. Policymakers should ensure equitable access to multilingual digital resources, promote the development of regionally relevant digital teaching repositories, and provide targeted funding for Digital Intercultural Competence training. Digital infrastructure development should be aligned with cultural adaptation goals to prevent structural digital exclusion among ASEAN students.

Through these multi-level policy adjustments, cross-cultural teaching management can move from fragmented implementation to system-level governance integration.

2. Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study, being primarily theoretical in nature, has the following limitations that warrant further attention in future research:

First, as a conceptual construction study, neither the proposed model nor its hypotheses have been subjected to empirical validation. Future work should involve data collection—primarily through questionnaires—for rigorous testing, verification, and potential refinement of the model. In particular, future studies should clearly operationalize each core variable (e.g., Local Context Adaptation, Synergy Mechanism, and Digital Intercultural Competence) by developing measurable behavioral indicators and validated scales, and apply structural equation modeling (SEM) to test direct, mediating, and moderating effects within a systematic empirical framework.

Second, the model is developed with a specific focus on the context of Guangxi universities. Its generalizability to other geographical regions and cultural settings remains to be examined. Future research should conduct cross-regional comparative studies (e.g., other border provinces in China or ASEAN partner institutions) and employ multi-group analysis or measurement invariance testing to evaluate the structural stability and universality of the model across different institutional and cultural contexts.

Third, the treatment of digital technology is preliminary. While Digital Intercultural Competence is included as an independent dimension, the study does not yet deeply explore the interactive dynamics among digital technology, Synergy Mechanism, and Local Context Adaptation. Future research should investigate specific application models of digital technologies in cross-cultural teaching (e.g., VR/AR-based cultural scenario simulations) and their mechanisms of cultural integration and synergy. Moreover, emerging trends such as AI-assisted teaching, hybrid learning environments, and data-driven educational management should be incorporated into the model to examine how digital transformation reshapes intercultural collaboration mechanisms.

Fourth, the present theoretical model is primarily constructed from the perspective of teachers as frontline implementers of cross-cultural teaching management. Although this focus enhances clarity in operationalizing instructional variables, it inevitably limits the representation of other key stakeholders, including university administrators and ASEAN students. Future research should adopt multi-source data collection strategies incorporating teacher, student, and administrative perspectives, and may employ multi-level modeling techniques to examine cross-level interactions among institutional governance, leadership practices, and student intercultural outcomes. Such expansion would strengthen the structural robustness and external validity of the model.

Future research directions may include the following:

- Expanding the sample to encompass a broader range of institutions in Guangxi (including vocational colleges), ASEAN educational entities operating in China, and China-ASEAN collaborative education programs;
- Employing longitudinal designs combined with multiple qualitative methods to investigate the dynamic evolution of relationships among the variables; and comparing cross-sectional and longitudinal findings to enhance causal inference robustness;
- Moving beyond the single-teacher perspective by integrating the voices of international students and administrators into a multi-stakeholder framework;
- Conducting discipline-specific studies in underrepresented fields, such as engineering, to generate more targeted insights; and refining variable definitions and empirical test designs to establish a clearer and more operational research pathway for intercultural teaching management studies.

Conclusion

Amid the ongoing globalization of higher education and the deepening of China-ASEAN cooperation, universities in Guangxi are uniquely positioned to convert cultural diversity into a strategic educational advantage. Grounded in Cultural Integration and Synergy Theory and drawing on complementary frameworks such as Superdiversity Theory, this study constructs a comprehensive theoretical model encompassing six core dimensions: Curriculum Cultural Integration, Teachers' Intercultural Competence, Teaching Support Services, Digital Intercultural Competence, Synergy Mechanism, and Local Context Adaptation (Guangxi Characteristics).

The model elucidates the internal interconnections among these dimensions, clarifies the mediating role of Synergy Mechanism, and highlights the positive moderating effect of Inclusive Leadership. By articulating these structural relationships, the study demonstrates how diverse cross-cultural teaching inputs

can be systematically transformed into institutional effectiveness through coordinated governance mechanisms.

The proposed model is not only directly applicable to the practical context of Guangxi universities but also provides a valuable theoretical reference for cross-cultural teaching management within broader China-ASEAN educational cooperation. With both strong theoretical innovation and clear practical relevance, it lays a robust foundation for future empirical investigations.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the model offers a structured framework for practical implementation at the institutional level. Universities may operationalize the model by establishing cross-cultural teaching management systems aligned with the six core dimensions, integrating Synergy Mechanisms into interdepartmental coordination processes, and embedding Inclusive Leadership principles into administrative evaluation and professional development systems. In curriculum design, institutions can systematically incorporate China-ASEAN contextual cases and regional cultural elements into course content and assessment structures. In faculty development, targeted training programs focusing on intercultural competence, digital pedagogy, and conflict mediation skills can be developed to strengthen teachers' adaptive capacity in multicultural classrooms. Through such institutional alignment and coordinated implementation, the model positions cultural diversity as a strategic resource for sustainable cross-cultural teaching development in Guangxi and comparable higher education contexts.

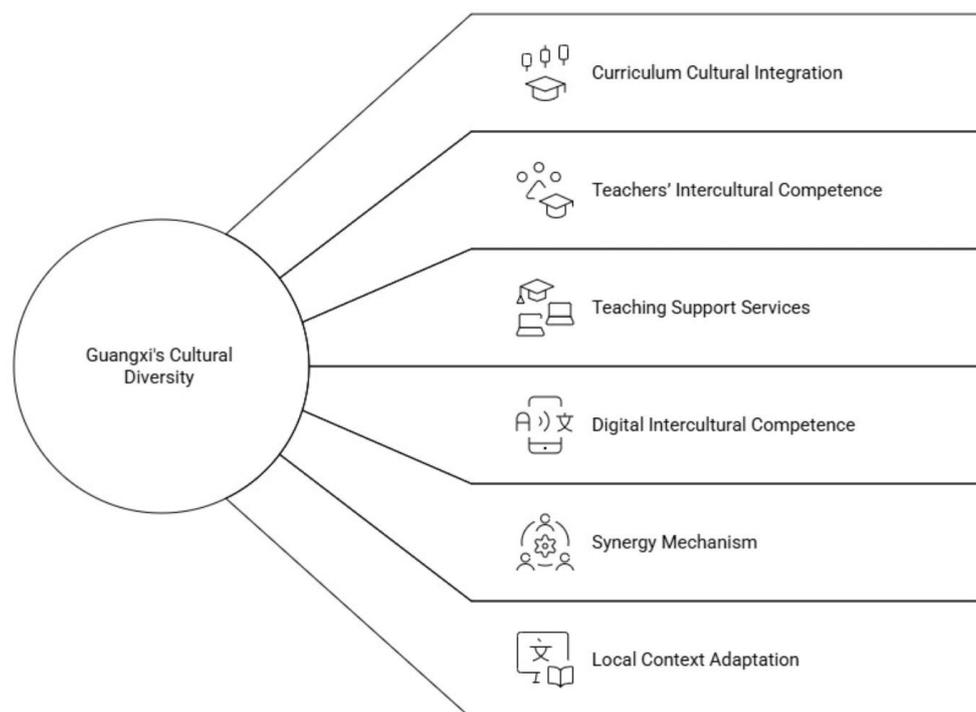


Figure 5 Guangxi's Cultural Diversity

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