

The interconnection of culture and learning in shaping educational practices

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how culture and learning are deeply connected and how this relationship shapes education across the world. It shows that the way students learn, and teachers teach is strongly influenced by cultural values—whether it is independence and creativity in the West, or community, respect, and cooperation in many Asian, African, and South American settings. The study also points out that colonial histories and globalization have often sidelined indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions, creating challenges for inclusivity and equity in schools. At the same time, it highlights the power of cultural pride, tolerance, human rights, and social justice in making education more meaningful and fairer for everyone. By weaving local traditions together with global skills, schools can create learning spaces that not only build knowledge but also nurture empathy, respect, and a stronger sense of shared humanity.

Keywords: culture and learning, education, inclusivity, indigenous knowledge, cultural pride, equity, tolerance, social justice, intercultural awareness

Date Submitted: July 31, 2025
Date Accepted: September 3, 2025
Date Published: October 2, 2025

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404490>

Recommended citation:

Duhaylungsod, A. D. & Galigao, R. P. (2025). The interconnection of culture and learning in shaping educational practices. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 4 (4), 5285-5295.
<http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404490>

INTRODUCTION

Learning and culture are deeply connected, each shaping and influencing the other. Learning can be understood as the process of gaining knowledge, skills, and attitudes through study and experience, while culture refers to the shared traditions, beliefs, practices, and social norms of a community (Wan et al., 2013). These two concepts are interdependent: education helps sustain and transform culture, while culture provides the foundation for how learning takes place (Fayomi, et al., 2024). Research shows that cultural values such as perseverance, autonomy, collectivism, and respect for authority directly influence how teaching is structured, how students approach learning, and what motivates them across different countries (Awanis, et al., 2017) (Lam, et al., 2022) (Akanji, et al., 2020). (Laaksonen, 2010). For example, individualistic cultures often highlight independence and self-directed study, whereas collectivist cultures emphasize teamwork and group achievement (Hamamura, 2012) (Tan, et al., 2021).

Because of this close relationship, understanding the link between culture and learning is vital for addressing educational challenges worldwide. However, international studies reveal that many gaps remain in how cultural perspectives are included in schools. Education systems often carry colonial legacies that devalue indigenous knowledge and impose foreign teaching models, leading to the erosion of cultural identity and the silencing of diverse perspectives (Ferwerda, 2022) (Malagón et al., 2025). Persistent inequalities—such as discrimination, unequal access to resources, and resistance to cultural diversity—continue to limit global learning outcomes (Robbin, et al., 2025) (Paudel, 2024). At the same time, globalization offers opportunities for cross-cultural exchange but also risks cultural homogenization and misunderstanding, which may weaken collaboration and inclusivity in classrooms (Mamlok, 2023) (Aderibigbe, 2023).

To bridge these gaps, integrating culture into education is crucial. When schools embed cultural pride, tolerance, equality, and intercultural understanding into their systems, they not only enhance cooperation and mutual respect but also reduce prejudice and promote global peace (Yuen, 2022) (Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2025) (Nuruzzaman, et al., 2023). Prioritizing indigenous knowledge, human rights education, and fair access to learning ensures that students from all backgrounds can thrive in inclusive environments that respect diversity (Sangha, et al., 2019) (Johnston, 2010) (Raislele, 2021). Globally, this approach helps dismantle systemic inequalities, prepares learners to participate meaningfully in interconnected societies, and addresses urgent issues such as intolerance, inequality, and cultural loss (Oyeyipo et al., 2024) (Akintayo et al., 2024).

Statement of the problem

This research analyzes the interconnection of culture and learning in shaping educational practices worldwide. It investigates how people's values, traditions, and experiences influence education, and how schools in different parts of the world respond to cultural diversity. Specifically, this study aims:

1. To explore how values such as autonomy, personal independence, and perseverance shape the way students approach learning and how teachers design classroom practices.

2. To examine how collectivism and reverence for authority influence relationships in education, from collaboration among students to respect for teachers and community elders.
3. To understand the role of cultural pride, indigenous knowledge, and customs in preserving identity and strengthening meaningful learning experiences.
4. To investigate the lasting effects of colonization and globalization on educational systems, particularly in how they shape curriculum, language of instruction, and cultural inclusion.
5. To analyze how principles of equality, fair access, tolerance, and human rights are integrated into schools to reduce prejudice, promote respect, and ensure every learner has opportunities to succeed.
6. To highlight the importance of social justice, intercultural awareness, and goal setting in preparing learners to become compassionate, responsible, and globally minded citizens.

In summary, this study will provide a deeper understanding of how culture and learning interact in education. It answers the questions: how do cultural values shape the way people learn, how can schools honor and integrate diverse perspectives, and what benefits do students, teachers, and societies gain from an education that respects culture and promotes inclusion.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design with a comparative lens. The aim is to explore how cultural values shape learning and how educational systems across different parts of the world either integrate or overlook cultural diversity. A descriptive approach is well suited for this purpose as it allows the researcher to present clear and detailed accounts of cultural practices, their impact on education, and their relevance to current global challenges. To ensure credibility and balance, sources were carefully chosen based on their reliability and their contribution to the discussion on culture and learning. The review spans six continents—Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, and Oceania—offering a truly global perspective.

For analysis, this study uses a data mining approach to review and interpret information from existing literature. Large collections of academic texts were examined to highlight meaningful themes, recurring patterns, and the ways cultural factors shape education. The process involved four main steps: Firstly, the researchers will collect relevant information of materials from academic and institutional databases. Secondly, to organize the information around core cultural dimensions (such as autonomy, collectivism, cultural pride, tolerance, equality, indigenous knowledge, and respect for authority). Thirdly, to identify trends and connections between cultural practices and educational outcomes. Lastly, to synthesize findings into insights on how culture and learning interact across regions.

This research is limited to a review of secondary literature and does not include fieldwork or direct surveys. As such, the findings are analytical and interpretive rather than statistical. While the study considers cultural and educational interactions worldwide, the emphasis is placed on the cultural values and challenges that most directly influence educational practices.

Since this study relies solely on previously published studies, no direct human participants were involved. All references were properly acknowledged to uphold academic honesty and ensure the study avoids plagiarism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, incorporating a comparative global review of literature that examined the interconnection between culture and learning in shaping educational practices. The researchers systematically mined data from academic and institutional sources across six continents—Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America, and Oceania—to identify patterns, recurring themes, and significant correlations between cultural values and educational practices. Although no direct human participants were involved, the study maintained strict ethical compliance, giving due credit to all authors and ensuring academic integrity. The process followed four key phases: collecting relevant literature from trusted databases, organizing the information around core cultural dimensions such as autonomy, collectivism, perseverance, cultural pride, respect for authority, equality, tolerance, and indigenous knowledge, identifying trends and regional variations, and synthesizing the findings into an integrated analysis that reflects how these factors influence education globally.

Autonomy

One of the most dominant themes that emerged from the analysis is autonomy, which refers to the learner's ability to direct their own learning through self-motivation, decision-making, and reflection (Boud, 2012). In North America, autonomy is considered a cornerstone of individualistic education. It is closely associated with personal freedom, creativity, and the belief that independent study fosters innovation and psychological well-being (Rudy et al., 2007). European systems similarly prioritize autonomy, associating it with cultural diversity, democratic participation, and self-realization (Laaksonen, 2010). Policies and programs in these regions encourage critical thinking, debate, and the pursuit of personal interests, resulting in students who are equipped to engage actively in social, political, and cultural life.

In contrast, autonomy within Asian contexts remains influenced by long-standing traditions of collectivism and hierarchical educational structures (Codreanu, 2024). Historically, Asian learning environments have been teacher-centered, emphasizing deference and discipline. However, recent reforms and global exposure have begun integrating student-centered approaches that balance self-directed learning with cultural norms of cooperation and respect. In South America, autonomy is intertwined with self-determination and cultural identity, promoting educational reforms that preserve indigenous traditions while empowering communities to design contextually relevant learning systems (Brayboy et al., 2009). In Africa, autonomy symbolizes liberation from colonial educational systems. It supports cultural preservation, indigenous knowledge integration, and the creation of curricula grounded in local realities (Vrdoljak, 2008). Similarly, in Oceania, autonomy reflects both resistance to colonial influences and advocacy for self-reliance and indigenous empowerment in education (McLaughlin, 2018). Across all regions, autonomy thus emerges as a dual force—promoting individual growth in some contexts and collective empowerment in others.

Collectivism

Collectivism, another recurring theme, emphasizes interdependence, cooperation, and group harmony over individual achievement (Awanis et al., 2017). It is deeply ingrained in Asian societies, influencing educational methods and teacher-student relationships. In countries like Japan, Korea, and China, learning often occurs in groups where students collaborate to achieve shared goals (Huda et al., 2020). Teachers are respected authority figures, and the classroom is viewed as a microcosm of the community. Collectivism also dominates African educational traditions, where learning is seen as a communal responsibility. The African philosophy of Ubuntu—"I am because we are"—illustrates how education fosters solidarity and mutual respect (Banwo, 2023).

In South America, collectivism underscores family unity and respect for elders. Educational systems highlight moral values and social cohesion, emphasizing relationships over competition (Krys et al., 2022). In Europe and North America, collectivist principles exist alongside individualism, creating hybrid models that combine collaboration and self-expression. Even within predominantly individualistic contexts, minority and immigrant communities often maintain collectivist norms that influence classroom interactions (Hamamura, 2012). Thus, collectivism remains a universal counterbalance to modern hyper-individualism, nurturing empathy, teamwork, and cultural continuity in educational systems.

Perseverance and goal setting

Perseverance—the ability to persist despite obstacles—is a universal educational value (Kern, 2017). In Asia, it is a deeply cultural expectation linked to diligence, humility, and respect for effort rather than innate ability (Lam et al., 2022). Students are trained from an early age to endure challenges and maintain discipline, viewing perseverance as a moral virtue. Similar patterns are observed in European settings where perseverance supports academic achievement and lifelong learning (Xu et al., 2023). In North America, perseverance or “grit” (Duckworth’s concept) is tied to motivation, growth mindset, and accountability (Smith et al., 2005). In South America, perseverance combines resilience with passion, helping learners overcome systemic barriers such as poverty and inequality (Jaramillo-Rincón et al., 2024).

Goal setting, as a companion concept to perseverance, provides structure and motivation across regions. In Asia, it aligns with family expectations and collective progress (Lee et al., 2015). In Europe and North America, goal setting emphasizes self-regulation and personal responsibility (Mahoney et al., 2021). African and Oceanic traditions view it through a communal lens, integrating personal development with social contribution (Adeniyi et al., 2024; Hooper, 2005). In all contexts, perseverance and goal setting strengthen student resilience, improve outcomes, and bridge the psychological gap between cultural values and academic behavior.

Cultural Pride and the legacy of colonization

Cultural pride emerged as a vital theme across continents, signifying emotional attachment to one's heritage, traditions, and identity (Wan et al., 2013). In Asia, cultural pride reinforces national identity, patriotism, and shared values (Yuen, 2022). In Africa, it functions as a source of motivation, unity, and empowerment in postcolonial societies (Oluwatosin et al., 2023). In South America, it sustains communal harmony and fosters intercultural respect (Cruz-Saco, 2008). In Europe and North America, cultural pride strengthens multiculturalism and inclusivity, enriching learning environments through diverse perspectives (Dessel, 2010; Vasta, 2013).

However, the research also underscored colonization's long-lasting effects. Colonial powers-imposed languages, curricula, and values that marginalized indigenous knowledge (Pihama et al., 2018; O'Brien, 2006). In Asia, Africa, and Oceania, colonial education systems replaced native epistemologies with Western ideologies, leading to cultural erosion. European colonization within its own territories exported hierarchical educational systems and prioritized imperial needs (Kicza et al., 2016). In North America, colonization stripped Indigenous communities of their languages and cultural autonomy (Ward, 2011). In South America, the suppression of indigenous traditions continues to shape socio-economic inequalities (Stavenhagen, 2002). Reclaiming cultural heritage through decolonized education remains essential for healing, justice, and cultural survival (Ferwerda, 2022; Malagón et al., 2025).

Equality, human rights, and fair access

Educational equality ensures that learners from all backgrounds receive fair opportunities to succeed (Yildirimer, 2024). In Asia, inclusive education policies aim to reduce poverty and gender disparity (Ali & Zhuang, 2007). Europe's systems emphasize equity as a human right, advocating universal access and multicultural representation (Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2025). North America's frameworks integrate anti-discrimination laws and inclusive pedagogy (Johnston, 2010), while South America continues to battle class and ethnic inequalities despite educational reforms (Guisan et al., 2010). In Africa, equality in education connects directly to empowerment and nation-building (Lumadi, 2020), and in Oceania, equitable access preserves indigenous identity while promoting sustainability (Raisele, 2021).

Linked closely to equality is the integration of human rights education (Barton, 2020). Human rights principles promote dignity, tolerance, and democratic participation across regions (Brander, 2012; Albulescu & Simut, 2024). In Asia and Africa, it strengthens civic awareness and social justice (Attahakul, 2025; Christie, 2010). In the Americas, it helps students recognize systemic injustices and become advocates for reform (Grant & Gibson, 2013). In Oceania, human rights learning promotes intercultural coexistence and reconciliation between indigenous and colonial populations. Guaranteeing fair access, therefore, means not only providing education but ensuring that the learning environment is inclusive, empowering, and free from discrimination.

Indigenous customs and integration of cultural viewpoints

The analysis revealed that indigenous customs are living systems of knowledge central to sustainable education (Bruchac, 2014). In Asia and Oceania, indigenous traditions emphasize

ecological stewardship and intergenerational learning (Vargas, 2000; Sangha et al., 2019). African and South American indigenous systems are deeply community-based, blending spirituality, language, and moral codes into education (Onwuatiegwu et al., 2023; Alava Loza, 2025). European and North American movements increasingly seek to reintroduce indigenous frameworks into mainstream curricula as a form of cultural justice (Kalfas et al., 2024; Tsosie, 2018). Incorporating diverse cultural perspectives (Sruthi et al., 2024) enriches pedagogy, fosters empathy, and helps dismantle the dominance of Western epistemology. Schools that embed indigenous knowledge foster a stronger sense of belonging and cultural competence among students (Rodríguez, 2018; Rigney, 2019).

Tolerance, intercultural awareness, and social justice

Tolerance and intercultural awareness are essential in modern education systems. In Asia, teaching empathy and mutual understanding reduces prejudice and fosters harmony (Nuruzzaman et al., 2023; Firdaus et al., 2025). Europe's emphasis on intercultural education strengthens social cohesion amid migration and diversity (Mamlok, 2023; Staub, 2013). In North America, inclusivity and diversity awareness help reduce bias and encourage collaboration across cultural lines (Aderibigbe, 2023; Barrett, 2018). South American and African contexts show that intercultural education mitigates historic inequalities and promotes peace (Paudel, 2024; Manojlovic, 2017). Oceania's multicultural landscape relies on intercultural competence to reconcile indigenous and modern educational paradigms (Soobratty, 2016; Dessel, 2010).

Social justice, closely aligned with tolerance, ensures that learning environments are equitable, participatory, and empowering. In Asia and Africa, social justice frameworks help correct structural imbalances left by colonialism and promote equal access (Shaeffer, 2019; Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2025). In Europe and the Americas, these principles underpin civic education, human rights, and democratic citizenship (Zeichner, 2011; Oyeyipo et al., 2024). Oceania uses social justice-oriented education to heal colonial wounds and build inclusive, sustainable societies (McLaughlin, 2018). Globally, the data highlight that social justice transforms education into an engine of change, cultivating compassion and critical awareness among learners.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that culture and learning are inseparable forces that continuously shape and redefine educational practices across regions and generations. The synthesis of global literature revealed that educational systems do not exist in isolation but are deeply embedded within the cultural, historical, and social fabric of each society. The ways learners acquire knowledge and the methods teachers employ to facilitate understanding are profoundly influenced by cultural values such as autonomy, collectivism, perseverance, equality, tolerance, and respect for authority. These values, while universally acknowledged, manifest differently depending on the context—highlighting that education, though global in its aspirations, remains local in its expression.

In Western societies such as those in North America and Europe, education tends to emphasize autonomy, independence, and critical thinking, fostering creativity and self-directed learning. Conversely, in Asia, Africa, and South America, collectivism, reverence for authority, and interdependence guide both teaching and learning processes, creating classroom environments where cooperation and community well-being are prioritized. These differences do not represent opposing philosophies but rather complementary approaches that reflect distinct cultural orientations. The findings suggest that effective education systems are those capable of balancing individuality with social harmony, and self-reliance with collective responsibility.

The study also revealed the enduring influence of colonial legacies on contemporary education. In many postcolonial nations, the dominance of Western languages, curricula, and pedagogical models continues to overshadow indigenous knowledge systems and cultural traditions. This imbalance has led to the gradual erosion of cultural identity and the marginalization of local epistemologies. Nonetheless, movements toward decolonization and cultural reclamation are gaining strength in Africa, Oceania, Asia, and Latin America, signaling a collective effort to restore dignity to indigenous education and redefine what constitutes valid knowledge. By recognizing and integrating indigenous customs, languages, and ecological wisdom into formal education, societies are beginning to construct more inclusive, equitable, and contextually relevant systems of learning.

Equity, fairness, and human rights also emerged as central themes throughout the analysis. While many Western and European nations have advanced frameworks that promote inclusivity, gender equity, and multicultural representation, systemic inequalities persist in other regions due to socioeconomic, linguistic, and ethnic barriers. Ensuring fair access to quality education therefore remains a global challenge that demands sustained policy reform, teacher training, and resource allocation. True educational equality goes beyond physical access; it requires environments where every learner—regardless of background—feels valued, empowered, and represented. This commitment must be anchored in principles of social justice that aim to dismantle discrimination and promote compassion, empathy, and solidarity among learners.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of perseverance and goal setting as universal motivators that transcend cultural boundaries. Across continents, from Asia's emphasis on diligence to North America's focus on grit and Europe's prioritization of long-term effort, perseverance emerges as a defining quality that sustains academic growth and personal development. When coupled with meaningful goal setting, it empowers learners to overcome barriers, maintain focus, and achieve a sense of accomplishment. These psychological and cultural strengths not only shape individual success but also foster resilience within communities facing adversity.

Tolerance, intercultural awareness, and cultural pride were also found to be vital in building inclusive and harmonious learning environments. Education that promotes empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and mutual respect becomes a powerful tool for reducing prejudice and conflict. By celebrating cultural diversity rather than merely accommodating it, schools contribute to the creation of socially cohesive and peaceful societies. Cultural pride, particularly in postcolonial settings, reinforces self-worth and motivates learners to engage meaningfully with both their heritage and the global community. Through intercultural education, students are

equipped not only with academic competencies but also with moral and social sensibilities necessary for thriving in a pluralistic world.

Drawing from these insights, the study emphasizes several directions for educational reform. First, there is a pressing need to make curricula more culturally inclusive by weaving local knowledge systems, traditions, and languages into teaching and learning. Decolonizing education is essential for restoring balance between global and indigenous perspectives, ensuring that local heritage is preserved alongside 21st-century skills. Second, equity must be operationalized through concrete mechanisms—scholarships, infrastructure development, teacher empowerment, and inclusive policies—that enable marginalized groups to access and benefit from quality education. Third, educators must be supported through continuous professional development that strengthens their capacity to apply culturally responsive pedagogy, balancing the nurturing of student independence with the preservation of communal values. Finally, global collaboration among governments, universities, and organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD is vital in sharing best practices, building cultural competence, and ensuring that educational systems evolve in harmony with both global standards and local realities.

In conclusion, the interconnection between culture and learning stands as one of the most powerful determinants of educational success. When cultural diversity is acknowledged as a source of strength rather than difference, education transforms from a system of transmission into a process of empowerment. The study ultimately reaffirms that culturally grounded education cultivates empathy, equity, and social cohesion—qualities indispensable to a just and interconnected world. By embracing this interdependence, schools and policymakers can design learning systems that not only equip learners with knowledge and skills but also nurture their humanity, sustain their heritage, and prepare them to become active, compassionate, and globally minded citizens.

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