

Navigating Power and Pedagogy: A Case Study of Student Dispositions and Instructor Dynamics in a Philippine Crop Physiology Course

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This qualitative case study explored the complex student experiences and instructional dynamics in a third year Crop Physiology course at a public university in the Philippines. Data were collected through informal conversational questioning, video recordings, field notes, and document analysis from students enrolled in the course (N = 35) and the instructor, who was an international faculty member. Data were analyzed using a two-phase approach with reflexive thematic analysis and narrative analysis. This resulted in ten emergent themes that covered a broad range of student and classroom dynamics. These themes were: 1) Attitude of Gratitude, 2) Communication Blunders, 3) Filipino Time, 4) A Holiday Per Week Ruins the Routine, 5) Information Regurgitation Versus Critical Thinking, 6) Instructional Needs of Students, 7) Respectfully Disrespectful, 8) Selfless Responsibility and Power Dynamics, 9) Will and Desire to Learn, and 10) The Wrong AI (Academic Integrity). Conclusions emphasized the need for developing strong student rapport to overcome perceived power dynamics. Recommendations included further research on classroom power dynamics, addressing a lack of emphasis on critical thinking, developing intercultural pedagogy for faculty members, and a refinement of academic integrity policies. Further, the findings of this study provided insight for informing and developing global agricultural education programs and research, while also stressing adaptability, relationship-building, and cultural competence for those in agricultural education settings.

Keywords: higher education, Philippines, pedagogy, power dynamics, case study, Fulbright, crop science, agricultural education

Introduction

Positions of power and authority, or lack thereof, impact interactions within the classroom (Aruta et al., 2019). Moreover, Western countries are seen to promote more independence, lower power distance, and assertiveness, especially when compared to East Asian countries (Aruta et al., 2019; Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015; San Martin et al., 2018). The Philippine culture has been found to have one of the greatest power distances in the world, which can lead those who do not have perceived power to be easily controlled by those in power (Aruta et al., 2019). De Leon-Carillo (2007) described this as “strongly hierarchical social system in which government, church, and school leaders are supposed to enjoy moral ascendancy akin to the parental authority observed strongly in the home” (p. 209).

In interdependent cultures like the Philippines, these cultural components are carried into the classroom (De Leon-Carillo, 2007; Elias & Mace, 2005). Aruta et al. (2019) found that Filipino students often followed and were submissive to professors due to a sense of obligation and fear of negative impacts on their future. They continued to emphasize the perceived power that an instructor held versus the perceived powerlessness of students.

Multicultural classrooms provide an opportunity for enrichment and enhanced learning, but they also come with challenges such as language, judgments, differing expectations, and potential conflict (Le Roux, 2001). Butac et al. (2025) proposed that one way to help combat some of these potential challenges in the Philippine context was through fostering an inclusive learning environment to increase student self-efficacy. By implication, this positively fostered environment can tear down some of the barriers of inequity (Weekes, 2025). Few studies exist that delve deeper into the complex instructor-student relationship as it relates to the Philippine classroom.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore student experiences and instructional dynamics within agricultural higher education in the Philippines, using a Crop Physiology course as a case context. The study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of pedagogical engagement and learning environments in the field of agriculture. This was guided by the following objectives:

1. Examine agricultural students' dispositions in the Crop Physiology course at a public university in the Philippines.
2. Explore the dynamics of student-instructor relationships in the Crop Physiology and their influence on student learning within the course at a public university in the Philippines.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative case study was undergirded by a theoretical framework that combined the Model of Community Inquiry (Garrison et al., 2000) and Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984). Garrison et al. (2000) propose that a meaningful educational experience lies within a community of inquiry made up of both teachers and students. Further, their model assumes learning takes place through the interaction of the key components that are 1) “Social Presence,” 2) “Cognitive Presence,” and 3) “Teaching Presence (Structure/Process)” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 88). These interactions result in the overall ability of both teachers and students to communicate within the classroom. Moreover, they present a cycle of education based on these components with experience at center. This suggests a nonstop process of experiential learning in which a triggering event results in perception (awareness) that leads to exploration, resulting in deliberation (applicability), which leads to integration resulting in conception (ideas), which then leads to

resolution resulting in action (practice). The cycle then returns to triggering events and perception (Garrison et al., 2000). We chose this over Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory to frame the study due to the complex relationship between instructors and students.

We then added Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory to the framework. This added the context of higher education to experiences and removed the specific content being taught, focusing on the energy shared within the classroom in combination with activities students may be engaged in within and outside the classroom (e.g., extracurriculars). Further, it reinforces the aspects of student behavior, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement, like that of Garrison et al. (2000), yet increases the depth of Garrison et al.'s domains and places a focus on student motivation. Therefore, the combination of these two theories supports this study in examining the cycle of learning, engagement, motivation, and interactions between students and instructor.

Methodology

This study was conducted in a third-year Crop Physiology course for third-year agronomy and horticulture majors during the 2024–2025 academic year at a public university in the Philippines. The course followed an established laboratory manual and textbook designed by one of our team members for a single-semester format. Our lead researcher, an American international faculty member through the Fulbright Program, served as the course instructor.

Reflexivity of Our Lead Researcher and Instructor

I have family ties to the Philippines, and I am part Filipino. Prior to this study, I visited the Philippines 12 times for two- to four-week periods. During these trips I conducted faith-based mission outreach, worked with Christian colleges, taught agriculture both formally and non-formally, and typically stayed with locals in more traditional housing. I have been to over ten provinces and gained some level of proficiency in four Filipino languages. Most of my time has been in the Visayas region, and I am nearly fluent in Cebuano, the predominant language in the Central Visayas. Because most of my experiences have been faith-based, I lacked some cultural context in the rest of society, though I had engaged with much of the country. Increasingly, I also have international agricultural development experience in Haiti and India. Entering the role for this study, I had an open mind, but I also felt I had a good grasp on the culture.

Recognizing this going in, and especially once the program began, I practiced reflexive bracketing to mitigate biases and continually examine how my experience may or may not have impacted interpretation. As an agricultural educator (formally secondary and post-secondary), I sought specifically to suspend some presuppositions about teaching and learning so that I might step into the culture of Filipino teaching and learning. I also sought to minimize the impact of my knowledge of cultural communication and power dynamics so that I might better interpret the emerging phenomena within the case and attend intentionally to the lived meanings expressed by participants.

The Case

The "case" or "phenomenon" of this study was the collective classroom experience of the students and me. Led by the theoretical framework, we used a constructivist philosophical approach wherein I, along with student-participants, co-constructed the meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I acknowledged my role in the subjective interpretation of the case, and we employed a phenomenological approach to fulfill the needs for a single-case, adaptive case study design

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Rooted in phenomenological orientation, the emphasis was on the lived experiences of the participants within the classroom context. This guided data collection and interpretation toward understanding how students and I experienced teaching, learning, and cultural interaction as phenomena. We were guided by Yin's (2018) recommendations for a case study protocol.

We followed a single-case design informed by a hermeneutic phenomenological orientation (Van Manen, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This emphasized interpretation and co-construction of meaning between all participants, focusing on the lived experience of teaching and learning within the cross-cultural classroom. Yin's (2018) case study protocol provided structure for design, data collection, and procedural rigor, while phenomenological interpretation guided the analysis toward understanding *how* participants experienced and made sense of the classroom phenomenon.

The students ($n = 35$) received face-to-face instruction on campus. They were recruited through their enrollment in the course, and all students consented to participation. Twenty-five of the students were horticulture majors (19 females and six males) and ten were agronomy majors (eight females and two males). All students were third year, native Cebuano speakers, and from a combination of two provinces in the Visayas region (field notes, 2024). Most students would be considered generationally poor, with few shopping for food beyond the wet market, few living in non-multi-generational housing, and only a couple of students having had a laptop of some kind (field notes, 2024). This is supported by Mendoza et al. (2017) who noted, though economic development has occurred, higher occasions of poverty in areas with fewer first-class municipalities (i.e., in "the provinces," where most of the students were from). When internet was required for an assignment, I sometimes provided money for "Piso-Wi-Fi" (a Wi-Fi kiosk near the classroom that allowed 15 minutes of Wi-Fi for ₱5 [approximately \$0.09]).

Trustworthiness was established through the standards of Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure rigor in interpreting participants' lived experiences. Credibility was achieved through sustained engagement with participants during the semester, frequent informal dialogue, and member checking in which students clarified meanings of statements during follow-up conversations and reviewed interpretations for accuracy. Investigator triangulation occurred amongst the research team, allowing cultural nuances to be validated and misinterpretations reduced. Dependability was addressed through an audit trail of analytic memos and reflexive journal entries documenting analytic decisions. Confirmability was enhanced through bracketing and reflective journaling, allowing me to identify personal assumptions and separate them from described experiences. Transferability was supported by thick, context-rich descriptions of the classroom environment and participants' socio-cultural backgrounds, allowing readers to judge applicability to similar settings. Authenticity was established through inclusion of participants' voices and language, ensuring perspectives were represented with fidelity and empathy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection

We used several sources for data collection. Unstructured and informal conversational questioning replaced formal interviews because this study's design was adaptive. Questions focused on whatever was of importance at the time of questioning. This allowed flexibility in the field and in building student rapport (Yin, 2012). Yin (2018) noted an unstructured approach to data collection should be more conversational following the line of inquiry rather than formal interviews. These

lines of questioning included but were not limited to asking about procedures in other classes, discussing language needs, discussing content, asking about study habits, or engaging in regular conversations. Observations were conducted during class and in one class session audio and video recordings were collected and transcribed. Other sources included submitted assignments, examinations, and course documents such as the syllabus and course manuals. Together, these analytic approaches sought to capture the essence of participants' experiences within the phenomenon of a cross-cultural agricultural learning environment.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in two phases. First, reflexive thematic analysis was used phenomenologically to reveal the underlying meanings and essences of participants' experiences rather than solely patterns of behavior. This allowed our analysis to center the experiences, emotions, and reflexivity to the case (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This step was critical in ensuring the acknowledgement of subjectivity to the interpretation of data. Second, narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) was used to provide rich descriptions of the case and intertwine the lived experiences within the case (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 2009).

Findings

Findings are presented thematically to illuminate the lived experiences of participants within the bounded case. Ten themes emerged in the study: 1) Attitude of Gratitude, 2) Communication Blunders, 3) Filipino Time, 4) A Holiday Per Week Ruins the Routine, 5) Information Regurgitation Versus Critical Thinking, 6) Instructional Needs of Students, 7) Respectfully Disrespectful, 8) Selfless Responsibility and Power Dynamics, 9) Will and Desire to Learn, and 10) The Wrong AI (Academic Integrity). To provide rich and thick descriptions and increase trustworthiness, a narrative approach was taken in expounding upon the emergent themes of the study.

Attitude of Gratitude

Teaching in the Philippines, as anywhere, is full of its challenges—from brownouts (temporary power outages) to typhoons and numerous holidays to cultural and linguistic barriers. However, one of the things that stood out in this case was the unrelenting attitude of gratitude no matter the circumstances. Despite these challenges and my shortcomings, students still expressed things like, “I appreciate your teaching techniques” or “Thank you for everything Sir Audie – for your patience and hard work” (document analysis, 2024).

Further, students expressed appreciation in the little things in class as well. The allowed use of a “cheat sheet” on an examination was a foreign concept to them, but one they did not underappreciate. Many students expressed their gratitude in conversation or on the evaluation portion of their final examination (document analysis, 2025; field notes, 2024; 2025). There were other times where assignment due dates were extended, I reached out to check on students during a typhoon. The gratitude shown by students was beyond noticeable (field notes, 2024). These students exemplified an attitude of gratitude.

Communication Blunders

Executive Order No. 210 (2003) and Department of Education Order No. 36, s (2006) placed heavy emphasis on English as a Second (or third) Language in the Philippines. According to these legislations, students are to learn ESL in elementary school, use English as the primary medium of instruction in secondary education, and colleges and universities are strongly encouraged to

make English their medium of instruction. Therefore, Filipino students should be fluent in English, especially once they reach the post-secondary level. Instead, there was a larger language barrier than expected.

Despite my proficiency in Cebuano, I felt that this was one of the biggest language challenges faced working in the Philippines and my technical vocabulary for plant physiology was limited (reflexivity, 2024). One student said, “You did very well, sir. All the discussion you teach fluently explain to the student,” while another said, “I sometimes find it hard understanding you speaking in English, but I was still able to cope with it, so it’s fine.... If you want to continue teaching here... improve speaking our language” (document analyses, 2024). Many students indicated my accent was easy to understand, but there were also concepts that translated differently. Most students were able to understand and follow when I spoke a mixture of English and Cebuano, but some still struggled, like the student who said, “My challenges are: -I can’t speak English properly” (document analysis, 2024).

These discrepancies led to occasional miscommunications with students. For example, the final exam “cheat sheet” was two pages, or one sheet front and back. This was communicated to students in the classroom, and it was also expressed in the class group chat three different times. 1) “Only this paper – front and back,” 2) “You can bring your study guide (1 sheet) full of notes, front and back,” 3) “Regarding the page. You can print the entire study guide on 8.5x11 (letter) paper and write on both sides of the page... as much as you can fit.... So, when you print, it should be one sheet of paper front and back with the study guide on it. Then, you write on that,” and in clarification 4) “You can use up to A4 size paper. Nothing longer.” (A. L. Cherry, personal communication, January 3, 2025). Despite this, two students reached out privately, unable to understand the “cheat sheet,” and multiple students came to the examination with the “cheat sheet” improperly completed (field notes, 2025).

Filipino Time

“Filipino time,” while not unique to the Philippines, is a cultural phenomenon associated with chronic, and often dramatic, tardiness (Bosano, 2024). The class started at 8:00 AM on Mondays and Wednesdays. Daily, students would arrive approximately 30–45 minutes late (field notes, 2024). One student stated on their final exam, “My challenges I had in this class is my time management because sometimes I come late” (document analysis, 2024). This was a significant issue with instruction in the class because many students could not get the instruction they needed because they were not present, or it affected the learning of other students. Other faculty also dealt with this issue. “I close my door after five minutes,” said one faculty member (one of my classroom doors would not latch; field notes, 2024).

Another piece of the Filipino Time puzzle was commuting. In the Philippines, this refers to the use of public transportation (jeepney, bus, and/or motorcycle). While many students lived near campus in a boarding house (field notes, 2024), many students also commuted daily to the campus. For some, this commute was from within the municipality and others it was from other municipalities 20 km or more away (field notes, 2024). Increasingly, many students commuted from their hometowns on Monday mornings. For some, this was 2–5 hours away from campus. In class, some students indicated that they could not travel on Sunday evenings because their parents did not feel comfortable with them traveling at dark (field notes, 2024). There were also many students who used budget-friendly mopeds or motorcycles for daily travel. They also used them to provide rides for fellow students (field notes, 2024).

However, it was not only students, but the faculty as well. At 7:45 AM every Monday was a scheduled flag raising ceremony, but after three weeks the flag raising began at 8:00 AM, when Crop Physiology was to begin. I arrived late to class a couple of times but then decided to forego the flag raising to display timeliness for my students (reflexivity, 2024). “That’s why I don’t have 8:00 AM classes” (R. R. Ollave, personal communication, September 24, 2024).

A Holiday Per Week Ruins the Routine

One of my greatest concerns during the semester was the lack of consistency regarding class schedule. The Crop Physiology class had a set schedule which was followed. Based on the academic calendar, the semester began on August 27, 2024, and ended on January 11, 2025 (the week of final exams; document analysis). The academic calendar also dedicated four weeks to examinations (preliminary, midterm, prefinal, final) that broke the semester into four approximately equal sections (document analysis, 2024). Due to my Fulbright schedule and an agricultural conference, I did not begin instruction until September 23, 2024, at which point students had not yet received any instruction (P. R. Pascual, personal communication, September 22, 2024). I chose, with the approval of administration, to forego preliminary and prefinal exams to dedicate more time to instruction. However, the week of finals was moved to one week earlier due to an end-of-semester training and celebration for faculty. This allowed for 12.5 weeks of instruction, equaling 25 class sessions. Of these 25, three were used for examinations (two for the final exam) and seven were cancelled (one for faculty orientation, one for weather [atypically low], two for campus intramurals, two for “Aggie Days”, and one for my own sickness), resulting in a total of 15 class sessions for instruction throughout the entire semester (document analysis, 2025; field notes, 2024). Additionally, final exams were completed the week of January 5, 2025, after a three-week holiday break.

None of the missed days were the fault of the students. In fact, students expressed the challenges of trying to manage their time and the need for consistency in their class schedules. Wong and Wong (2009) heavily emphasized the need for routines and procedures for students. Without routines, students can become confused and lack attentiveness to learning.

Information Regurgitation Versus Critical Thinking

In my class, I emphasized the need for critical thinking – applying and being critical of the things taught, ensuring a safe space for students to do so. This was especially emphasized due to the Philippine education system’s lack of emphasis on critical thinking and focus on concrete knowledge, and its need for increasing the integration of critical thinking into courses (Lopez, 2024; Marquez, 2017). In one instance, I observed students studying for an exam of a different class. The materials of study were approximately one-half inch thick, and the students had to memorize all the materials (field notes, 2024).

The examinations for the course included short answer questions that focused on critical thinking. I provided “cheat sheets” on tests for students to include notes to help them. This was done to reduce the amount of memorization needed, decrease student stress, accommodate language barriers, and allow them to focus on critical thinking. However, most students significantly struggled to answer questions on the short answer (not essay style) sections of exam. I heavily emphasized before every test and throughout the semester that I was looking for critical thinking and *not* for memorization (field notes, 2024). One student said, “... you encourage us to use our critical thinking and explain things in our own words for us to truly understand the topics/concepts” (document analysis, 2024).

Despite this, many of the answers did not seem to comprehend the question or simply focused on the regurgitation of recognizable terms. One question on the mid-term asked students to explain the importance of knowing a plant process (photosynthesis, respiration, transpiration, and translocation) as it pertained to their future careers in agronomy and/or horticulture. Several students responded by defining all four terms and not addressing their future careers (document analysis, 2024). One student, addressing the importance (in the same question), said, "... to be able to live... they give us food, oxygen and peace" (document analysis, 2024). On both the mid-term and final exams, I asked students to explain one of the class laboratories and what they learned. Many had memorized the results of the labs and simply listed them. One student said they learned, in reference to a photosynthesis lab experiment, "Disk 3 is a color yellow leaves of San Francisco [plant] coat with gel then is very slow floating" (document analysis, 2024).

Instructional Needs of Students

Regardless of if students are American, Filipino, or any other nationality, Fleming and Mills' (1992) VARK (visual, audio, reading/writing, and kinesthetic) modality approach applies. Students have learning needs, and I wanted to meet those needs, as with any class taught, *but how would Filipino students perceive my teaching style?* When compared with other faculty at the university, one of the strongest traits shared was "... all of you put so much effort to help us" (document analysis, 2024). Further, students often felt that all their instructors provided "comprehensive coverage of the subject matter" (document analysis, 2024) and provided knowledge, while also being "patient and [forgiving]" (document analysis, 2024). On the other hand, students' other instructors were able to effectively translate all physical materials into Cebuano and translate during class discussions to enhance student understanding.

Students preferred "breaking down concepts into easily understandable" "chunks" (document analyses, 2024). Students shared the benefits of instruction when "your PowerPoint is short but informative" (document analysis, 2024). It was also found that they appreciated "a more hands-on approach" (document analysis, 2024), and for many, their "favorite part of the class is the laboratory experiment." Students noted my enthusiasm and "always [putting] our topic in reality" (document analysis, 2024) were important parts of their needs.

Social interaction emerged as a need, something not uncommon to Filipinos (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Not only interaction, but also a sense of belonging. There was appreciation for "the group activities.... we can interact with the others and brainstorm" (document analysis, 2024). Students said, "You made us feel that we belonged to this class and are important and connected to each other" and "you're approachable" (document analyses, 2024), while another added "I appreciate your emphasis on students' participation" (document analysis, 2024). This sense of belonging was also present when addressing my motivations for student success and "[reaching] our goal in life" (document analysis, 2024).

Respectfully Disrespectful

Respect is deep-rooted in Filipino culture (Bernad, 1974). Its impacts can be seen in gestures like the *mano* (blessing of an elder), words like "po" (term of respect), or the referencing of elders as "kuya" (older brother or sir) or "ate" (older sister or ma'am). It is also true in school dynamics (Dacanay, 2008). I found this social and cultural respect to be ever-present in the classroom and on campus. I walked to class from my house each day and nearly all students, whether my own student or not, would greet me. The students in my class greeted me with respect every time I

entered the room and were thoughtful in their discussions. Some students practiced the *mano* gesture with me (field notes, 2024).

While there was a great deal of respect for me, it was noted that students often talked in a loud and disruptive manner or were engaged on their mobile devices while I was teaching. This was also the case when fellow students would speak in front of the class, many of whom were already nervous to speak, especially in English. I had a conversation with the class explaining how classroom conduct should also reflect the special culture that the Philippines possesses when it comes to respect (field notes, 2024). The behavior seemed to improve but was a struggle to manage the entire semester (reflexivity, 2024).

Selfless Responsibility and Power Dynamics

The education system in the Philippines is largely teacher-centered with a strong power dynamic in favor of professors (Estandia, 2016). While some students struggled in the course, students were often quick to assume or accept responsibility for their shortcomings, even when it may not be their own fault. Apologies were sometimes issued, and I had to correct the student and let them know they did not owe an apology. Students, despite issues with academic integrity, were very honest and able to claim responsibility even if it brought *hiya* (shame; field notes, 2024). Five students reached out after “0” grades were posted from the final examination due to cheating. Most asked for a retake or if something could be done to improve the grade. In all cases I did not accommodate the requests and explained why. The students each understood. I was surprised by the amount of responsibility taken (reflexivity, 2024).

The power dynamic sometimes affected the ability of students to be candid with me, even when it was noted that the class was a safe space to be critical. I urged students that if they had a problem with a grade, they should be willing to fight for it because no one else would (field notes, 2024). This impact was seen when, on a reflection/evaluation portion of the final exam, a student said, “I see no differences from your teacher to other teachers because you are all similar. A superior, and students should obey your rule.” Another student also noted, however, “... you don’t put pressure on us...,” while another noted, “... we encounter a foreign professor we think maybe this professor is strict, but he is not” (document analyses, 2024).

Will and Desire to Learn

“My favorite part of the class was you always gave us exit questions to test if we learned from the class” (document analysis, 2024) is not something I expected to hear. For many, the opportunity to study in college only existed because education was now free (Republic of the Philippines, 2017). Most saw a university education as an opportunity to get out of poverty and to get a career with good benefits, while some seemed to enroll simply because they could (field notes, 2024).

In class, many students were unable to express why they had chosen a degree in agriculture or what career they wanted to pursue after graduation (field notes, 2024). One student said, “I plan to decide on a career after I finish my major,” and implied that many students choose a degree and then later choose a potential career based on the degree rather than setting goals on a career and choosing their major based on that career. Many students did not have an agricultural background (field notes, 2024). Nonetheless, most students were eager to learn more about agriculture, eager to learn more about crop sciences, and eager to learn more about what types of career opportunities existed for them. This eagerness was noticeable in the classroom (reflexivity, 2024; 2025).

The Wrong AI (Academic Integrity)

At the beginning of the semester, I shared the course syllabus with students. This syllabus had a strong clause regarding academic integrity. “Cheating will not be tolerated. Any cheating found out will result in a 0 on your assignment and a referral to campus administration” (A. L. Cherry, document analysis, 2024). This concise statement was simplistic for a few reasons: 1) there was no provided university academic honesty policy, so one was created, 2) English is the second or third language for students, so keeping it simple was crucial, and 3) to provide the statement in a straightforward way that was culturally appropriate – cheating is frowned upon in the Philippines, as is failure (grade 0) and being reported to superiors (administration).

Throughout the semester, there were several occasions I suspected the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) on assignments. This suspicion was largely due to the lack of conversational English vocabulary and proper English grammar by the students in class, yet the highly scientific vocabulary and perfect grammar for writing assignments. Suspicions were confirmed by member checking with students after course completion and in conversations with other instructors on the campus (document analysis, 2025; personal communication, January 6, 2025). The use of AI has become a large problem in the Philippines regarding academic integrity for both students and faculty. Many faculty use AI to generate academic writing (field notes, 2024). Many Filipino universities are struggling to adopt a formal policy (field notes, 2024).

For these reasons, the concept of academic integrity seemed to be ambiguous amongst students. *If professors are using generative AI for their work, why shouldn't they be able to?* It is this nuance that is believed to also lend them to other forms of academic dishonesty such as blatant cheating on examinations. During examinations, cheating is very common (field notes, 2024; 2025). It is so common that students do not try to hide it but discuss examinations in the open (field notes, 2024; 2025). Other teachers also seem to have issues with cheating on examinations (field notes, 2024; 2025). On my final examination, 13 of the 35 students were confirmed to have cheated (document analysis, 2024). I monitored the classroom as best as possible, but the classroom was small for the number of students. Other instructors book a large room on campus for exams (field notes, 2024). Some instructors also moved desks outside to spread students out for examinations (field notes, 2024; 2025).

While the inclination to continue to cheat was difficult to understand, I could not completely fault the students. It was obvious to me, and other faculty, that academic dishonesty was something that they had gotten away with for years and did often in the present, despite saying they did not usually cheat (field notes, 2025). I also attributed this lack of academic honesty on the faculty's use of AI and the lack of university policy on the use of generative AI (reflexivity, 2025). Concerns surrounding the use of AI were also seen by faculty and students across the country (field notes, 2024; 2025; Villarino, 2024). Further, since post-secondary education is now completely free for all students in the Philippines, a faculty member confirmed that cultural poverty seemed to impact opportunism and haze the line of moral standards, especially in the provinces (field notes, 2025; Lewis, 1966; Republic of the Philippines, 2017).

Discussion

The impact of the findings aided in meeting our study's intentions of garnering insights into the experiences of agricultural faculty members at universities in the Philippines to further develop an understanding of the current state of Filipino agricultural education. The emergent themes address each of the study objectives.

Objective 1: Examine Agricultural Students' Dispositions in the Crop Physiology Course at a public university in the Philippines

The dispositions of students were complex, shaped by having a foreign professor and cultural norms. Timid at first, students began to get more comfortable, but the themes remained present. The theme “Selfless Responsibility and Power Dynamics” was most prevalent, reflecting power dynamics in which students would take responsibility for things beyond their control, consistent with Filipino hierarchal cultural norms (Aruta et al., 2019). The classroom functioned as a social learning space where students transitioned from peripheral participants to more engaged contributors (Wenger, 1998). Their developing sense of responsibility and evolving interaction with me can be seen as part of a trajectory of participation, in which learning and identity formation are co-constructed within the norms of the educational community. The cultural expectations around deference, respect, and hierarchy shaped how students engaged, and these power dynamics influenced their ability to assert agency and express ideas, especially in the presence of an outsider (Astin, 1984). Thus, “Selfless Responsibility and Power Dynamics” mediated other emergent themes, shaping not only how students perceived their roles, but also how they navigated the social structures embedded in their learning environment.

Objective 2: Explore the Dynamics of Student-Instructor Relationships in the Crop Physiology Course at a public university in the Philippines

The student–instructor relationship shifted notably over time. Early in the semester, students were hesitant to ask questions or engage openly, reflecting traditional norms of deference to authority (Aruta et al., 2019). However, as students perceived me as approachable and encouraging, participation gradually increased. One participant shared that I “respected our opinions even when we were unsure,” indicating how emotional safety promoted academic risk-taking.

Laboratory activities and field exercises reinforced the improved relationship. Hands-on tasks allowed students to apply concepts in real contexts, reflect on outcomes, and build confidence (Garrison et al., 2000). Students noted feeling more competent after “actually doing the measurements” or “seeing plant responses in the field.” These practical encounters, paired with my consistent feedback, helped reframe the relationship into one marked by mentorship and collaboration. Thus, experiential tasks and emotional support together facilitated both learning and a more dynamic pedagogical relationship (Garrison et al., 2000).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study is limited by its unique circumstances and case, but it still provides insights into classroom dynamics with international populations and into the Filipino college classroom as agricultural education is explored deeper in the context of the Philippines. Findings emphasize cultural aspects that exist within a classroom and highlight their importance in successfully navigating a course. Although students eventually warmed up to me, the cultural perceptions of authority figures played largely into the initial classroom dynamic. Students valued their education but sometimes lacked the self-confidence to capitalize on it. The building of strong student rapport was not only effective in this case, but also necessary.

There is great merit to the kinesthetic normalcy in agricultural education classrooms. The findings of this study in relation to student empowerment and inclusion are consistent with my personal experiences in secondary and post-secondary formal education settings, as well as other research (Gibbons et al., 2022; Harb et al., 2024; Hartmann & Martin, 2021). Therefore,

agricultural education (both formally and non-formally) should be examined and explored for its unique ability to empower students and communities and to bridge gaps in inequity.

Further research should be conducted on the power dynamics between instructors and students throughout various cultures to help understand the multicultural classroom better. Enhancing critical thinking in college classrooms where critical thinking has not been emphasized is also recommended. Further, it is recommended that instructors develop intercultural pedagogy to increase effectiveness. Lastly, all universities should refine academic integrity statements to incorporate the use of artificial intelligence.

These findings stress the need for adaptability, relationship-building, and cultural competence in diverse education settings by international faculty and extension professionals and native faculty alike. These findings also provide insights for informing and developing global agricultural education programs and research where cross-cultural sensitivity and academic rigor are increasingly essential for student success.

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