

Pedagogical Strategies for Student Development in Cultural Awareness and Social Responsibility: A Mixed-Methods Study in Higher Education

Wasukree Sangpom^{1*}, Narongsak Sangpom²

¹ Faculty of Science and Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi, Suphanburi, Thailand
wasukree.s@rmutsb.ac.th

² Faculty of Industrial Education, Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi, Suphanburi, Thailand.
narongsak.s@rmutsb.ac.th

*Corresponding Author: wasukree.s@rmutsb.ac.th

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how pedagogical strategies function as cultural processes in shaping students' cultural awareness and social responsibility in higher education. Conceptualizing higher education as a cultural space, the study positions pedagogy as a site of meaning-making through which student development unfolds. A mixed-methods convergent design was employed to capture both the scope of developmental change and the meanings students attribute to their learning experiences. Quantitative data were collected through a survey measuring three interrelated dimensions of student development: values, worldview, and social consciousness. Qualitative data were obtained from in-depth interviews and students' reflective journals, allowing analysis of lived learning experiences and student agency. Integrated analysis generated meta-inferences that illuminate the cultural dimensions of pedagogical practice. Quantitative findings indicate that pedagogical strategies supported development across all three dimensions, with more pronounced changes in worldview and social consciousness and more gradual shifts in values. Qualitative findings reveal that these changes emerged through critical reflection, questioning of prior assumptions, and connections between learning experiences and broader social structures. Overall, the findings demonstrate that pedagogical strategies contribute to cultural formation by shaping students' interpretive frameworks and enhancing their potential for socially responsible and transformative action. The study underscores the role of pedagogical design in advancing cultural analysis and social change within higher education.

Keywords: cultural awareness; social responsibility; student development; higher education as cultural space; mixed-methods research; social change.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, global societies are experiencing profound structural transformations across economic, political, and cultural domains. Ethnic diversity, plural identities, and heterogeneous ways of life have become normalized features of contemporary social landscapes. At the same time, social inequalities, cultural tensions, and crises of collective responsibility have intensified and become increasingly complex. Within social science scholarship, culture is no longer understood as a passive backdrop to social life; rather, it is conceptualized as a structure of meaning that actively shapes modes of thought, perception, and power relations (Hall, 1997; Marginson, 2018). Against this backdrop of global socio-cultural dynamics, human development cannot be reduced to the accumulation of professional skills or technical competencies. Instead, it demands sustained attention to the

formation of values, worldviews, and forms of social consciousness that enable coexistence within multicultural and democratic societies (UNESCO, 2021).

In this context, higher education is increasingly theorized as a cultural space rather than merely an institutional site for the transmission of academic knowledge. Research in the sociology of higher education demonstrates that universities operate as critical arenas in which cultural and social structures are simultaneously reproduced and contested through curricula, pedagogical practices, and students' everyday interactions (Giroux, 2011; Barnett, 2018). From this perspective, teaching and learning are not neutral or purely technical processes. They function as cultural practices that shape how students relate to others, interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions, and negotiate meanings concerning their own social positioning. Such processes underscore the direct role of higher education in cultivating students as critically engaged and socially responsible citizens.

Within international educational policy and scholarship, cultural awareness and social responsibility are widely framed as core graduate attributes in an increasingly interconnected world. However, recent studies caution against conceptualizing these attributes as static dispositions or as outcomes confined to behavioral participation and surface-level recognition of difference. Instead, cultural awareness and social responsibility are increasingly understood as developmental processes grounded in students' critical engagement with social structures, power relations, and questions of social justice (Deardorff, 2020; OECD, 2022). Framed in this way, student development in these domains extends beyond individual learning contexts and becomes central to the broader transformative capacity of higher education as a cultural institution—one that contributes to the formation of citizens capable of critical reflection, collective responsibility, and social agency (Banks, 2015).

Despite growing scholarly attention to pedagogical approaches aimed at fostering cultural awareness and social responsibility, critical gaps remain in the existing literature. Many studies continue to privilege the assessment of learning outcomes in terms of discrete skills or observable behaviors, often prioritizing instructional effectiveness over critical examination of how learning processes shape students' values and worldviews. Moreover, cultural awareness and social responsibility are frequently examined as separate constructs or within narrowly defined programmatic initiatives. Such approaches limit deeper understanding of student development as an integrated cultural process within higher education (Hart & Choi, 2017; Leask, 2020).

Taken together, the existing literature reveals a persistent conceptual gap in understanding how pedagogical strategies function as cultural processes that integrate the formation of students' values, worldviews, and social consciousness. In particular, limited attention has been paid to how such strategies shape both the scope of students' developmental change and the meanings they construct through their lived learning experiences. Addressing this gap calls for methodological approaches capable of capturing not only measurable learning outcomes but also the interpretive dimensions through which students exercise agency and make sense of power, structure, and social responsibility. A mixed-methods research design is therefore well suited to examining student development as a contextually grounded cultural process and to advancing critical analysis of how pedagogical practices contribute to cultural formation and social change within higher education (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Objectives

1. To examine changes in students' cultural awareness and social responsibility in higher education following the implementation of pedagogical strategies oriented toward student development.
2. To explain student development in terms of values, worldviews, and social consciousness through interpretive analysis of students' lived learning experiences.
3. To integrate quantitative and qualitative data in order to understand the role of pedagogical strategies as cultural processes that connect student development with the potential for cultural formation and social change.

Research Questions

1. How do pedagogical strategies designed to promote cultural awareness and social responsibility influence student development in terms of values, worldviews, and social consciousness in higher education?
2. How do students interpret and make meaning of changes in their values, worldviews, and social consciousness through their learning experiences?
3. How does the integration of quantitative and qualitative data contribute to explaining the role of pedagogical strategies as cultural processes linking student development to the potential for social change?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design to examine student development as a culturally situated process shaped through pedagogical practices in higher education. Quantitative and qualitative strands were conducted in parallel and assigned equal priority in order to capture both patterns of developmental change and the meanings students attribute to these changes through their lived learning experiences. By integrating the two strands at the level of analysis and interpretation, the design enables a nuanced understanding of pedagogical strategies as cultural processes contributing to cultural formation and social change. Consistent with qualitative-oriented mixed-methods research, this study prioritizes depth of interpretation and meaning-making over statistical generalizability, aiming to provide analytically transferable insights rather than population-level claims.

Research Design

A convergent design was selected to avoid privileging either outcome-based measurement or interpretive explanation alone. Quantitative data provided an overview of the scope of change in students' cultural awareness and social responsibility, while qualitative data offered insight into how such change was experienced, interpreted, and negotiated by students. Integration of the two strands supports analysis of pedagogy as both instructional practice and cultural process.

Participants and Context

Participants were 34 undergraduate students enrolled at Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi, Suphanburi Campus, who were taking courses designed to promote cultural awareness and social responsibility through pedagogical strategies emphasizing critical reflection, dialogic learning, and engagement with social issues. The institutional context was conceptualized as an active cultural space in which pedagogical practices, institutional values, and students' lived experiences intersect, shaping student development through culturally situated learning processes.

Instruments and Measures

The quantitative instrument focused on three interrelated dimensions of student development—values, worldview, and social consciousness—conceptualized as orientations toward self, others, and society. These measures were intended to capture patterns of developmental change rather than fixed traits. Qualitative instruments, including in-depth interviews and reflective journals, foregrounded students' voices and enabled exploration of how students interpreted their learning experiences and exercised agency in making sense of change. Together, the instruments supported analysis of pedagogical strategies as cultural processes shaping both measurable change and subjective meaning.

Data Analysis and Integration

Quantitative data were analyzed to identify patterns and degrees of change across the three dimensions of student development. Qualitative analysis focused on students' meaning-making processes, including critical reflection, questioning of prior assumptions, and connections between learning experiences and broader social contexts. Data integration occurred through iterative comparison of quantitative patterns and qualitative interpretations to generate meta-inferences. This analytic process allowed examination of how measured change aligned with, diverged from, or was reinterpreted through students' narratives, thereby illuminating the role of pedagogical strategies in cultural formation and social change within higher education.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that positions pedagogical strategies as cultural processes through which student development and social change are mediated in higher education. Learning is conceptualized as a process of meaning-making, shaped by pedagogical practices, institutional contexts, and students' agency, rather than as the mere acquisition of knowledge or skills. Pedagogical strategies oriented toward cultural awareness and social responsibility create learning experiences that encourage critical reflection, dialogue, and engagement with social issues, thereby providing conditions for interpretive learning.

Within this framework, student development is understood as a dynamic and multidimensional process encompassing values, worldviews, and social consciousness. Changes in these dimensions emerge through

students' lived learning experiences and their active interpretation of those experiences. Meaning-making and student agency function as mediating processes that explain how pedagogical strategies translate into developmental change. These processes connect individual learning with the broader potential for cultural formation and social change, a relationship examined in this study through a convergent mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative and qualitative data.

RESULTS

This section reports the findings in relation to the three research questions. The presentation emphasizes analytically identifiable patterns and integrated syntheses consistent with the study's objectives and mixed-methods design. Tables function as analytical reference points, while the narrative elaborates on the characteristics of the findings within the constraints of limited reporting space.

Results related to the impact of pedagogical strategies on student development

The quantitative analysis revealed differentiated patterns of change across three dimensions of student development—values, worldview, and social consciousness—within pedagogical strategies oriented toward cultural awareness and social responsibility. The extent of change varied across dimensions, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Analytical Dimensions of Student Development in the Study

Dimension of Student Development	Analytical Focus	Conceptual Description
Values	Ethical and cultural orientations	Gradual reconfiguration of students' internal value frameworks related to ethics, social justice, and respect for cultural diversity, shaped through sustained reflection and sociocultural interaction.
Worldview	Meaning-making and interpretive perspectives	Transformation in how students interpret social reality through questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and expanding perspectives on society, culture, and others.
Social Consciousness	Awareness of social relations and structures	Heightened awareness of the interconnections between self, society, and structural inequalities, forming a foundation for social responsibility and civic engagement potential.

Changes in the values dimension were characterized by a moderate shift in indicators related to respect for cultural diversity, social responsibility, and awareness of the social implications of individual actions. When examined through the analytical framework presented in Table 1, these changes appeared incremental and less pronounced than those observed in other dimensions.

By contrast, changes in students' worldview were more evident. The findings indicated increased openness to diverse perspectives and a greater tendency to question previously held assumptions about social relations and others. These shifts reflected an expansion of interpretive frames and a more nuanced engagement with social issues. In the dimension of social consciousness, the results indicated heightened awareness of social issues and students' perceived positioning as members of society. Rather than reflecting immediate forms of social action, these changes suggested an emerging readiness to relate personal perspectives to broader public concerns.

Taken together, the findings related to Research Question 1 indicate that pedagogical strategies were associated with differentiated trajectories of student development, with changes in worldview and social consciousness appearing more pronounced than changes in values.

Results related to students' interpretations of change through learning experiences

The qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews and reflective journals indicated that students understood changes in their values, worldview, and social consciousness as a gradual process of meaning-making shaped through learning activities, classroom dialogue, and social interaction within the educational setting. With respect to values, students described how learning experiences prompted initial questioning of the origins and assumptions underlying previously taken-for-granted value orientations. Engagement with peers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds appeared to foster more deliberate and reflective consideration of personal values. Changes in this dimension were consistently framed as ongoing rather than immediate. Regarding worldview, students reported

that critical dialogue and engagement with culturally situated issues enabled them to reconsider prior assumptions and to approach social problems from more complex and plural perspectives. These accounts suggested an expansion of interpretive horizons and a broader understanding of the social world. In terms of social consciousness, students linked their learning experiences to an increased awareness of their positioning within society. Although these changes were not articulated in terms of direct social action, they reflected an emerging orientation toward recognizing and engaging with wider public issues. Key interpretive patterns across the three dimensions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Students' Interpretations of Changes in Values, Worldviews, and Social Consciousness

Dimension of Student Development	Emergent Qualitative Themes	Analytical Interpretation
Values	Reconsidering taken-for-granted values	Value development is understood as a gradual reorientation of meaning frameworks, shaped through sustained reflection and engagement with diverse perspectives rather than immediate change.
Worldviews	Questioning assumptions and expanding perspectives	Changes in worldviews reflect processes of meaning-making and cognitive transformation, enabling students to reinterpret social realities through more complex and reflexive frames.
Social Consciousness	Linking self to society	Social consciousness emerges as the formation of readiness and potential for future social engagement, grounded in growing awareness of social structures and civic responsibility.

Findings related to Research Question 2 indicate that students interpreted changes in values, worldviews, and social consciousness as **ongoing processes of meaning-making** that developed gradually through culturally and socially situated learning experiences. Rather than describing change as an immediate outcome of instruction, students emphasized reflection, dialogue, and engagement with diverse perspectives as key mechanisms through which change unfolded. Table 2 synthesizes the central themes and interpretive insights derived from qualitative data, supporting the narrative analysis and linking students' lived experiences to the study's conceptual framework of student development in higher education.

Integrated results: Mixed-methods meta-inferences

The integrated findings indicate that combining quantitative and qualitative data enabled a more comprehensive account of patterns and forms of change in student development. Rather than serving merely confirmatory functions, the two data strands complemented and extended one another. A synthesis of the mixed-methods findings is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Integrated Mixed-Methods Findings on Student Development

Dimension of Student Development	Key Integrated Findings	Meta-Inference
Values	Quantitative results indicate a moderate level of change, while qualitative findings show that students engaged in ongoing reflection and reconsideration of previously taken-for-granted values.	Changes in values represent a gradual reconfiguration of internal value frameworks, reflecting long-term developmental processes rather than immediate or surface-level shifts.
Worldview	Quantitative data reveal a pronounced change, supported by qualitative evidence of students questioning prior assumptions and expanding interpretive perspectives.	Worldview development reflects a transformative learning process characterized by meaning-making and the reconstruction of cognitive and interpretive frames.
Social Consciousness	Quantitative findings show increased awareness of social issues, complemented by qualitative accounts linking personal experiences to broader social structures.	Social consciousness is formed as readiness and potential for socially responsible engagement, providing a foundational condition for long-term social change rather than immediate behavioral outcomes.

In the values dimension, quantitative results indicated moderate change, while qualitative findings contextualized these changes as part of a longer-term process involving the reconsideration of internal value orientations. Integration of the data sources clarified the meaning of the observed quantitative patterns. For worldview, quantitative findings showed more pronounced change, and qualitative data illuminated processes of questioning prior assumptions and expanding interpretive perspectives. The integrated results revealed convergence across data types in this dimension.

In relation to social consciousness, quantitative data reflected increased awareness of social issues, while qualitative findings suggested that these changes were associated with developing readiness and self-positioning within broader social contexts. Across all three dimensions, the integrated findings highlight an overarching pattern of student development shaped through learning processes in higher education.

DISCUSSION

These findings resonate with critical pedagogical traditions that view education as a site of cultural negotiation and subject formation. Rather, they operate as **cultural and ideological mechanisms** through which meanings, values, and subjectivities are produced, contested, and reconfigured. This interpretation reinforces a critical view of higher education as a **cultural and political space** in which learning is inherently implicated in relations of power, knowledge, and social reproduction.

From a critical theory perspective, the gradual nature of change observed in the **values** dimension is particularly significant. Values are not merely individual dispositions but are embedded within dominant cultural norms and hegemonic social structures. The moderate quantitative shifts, alongside qualitative accounts of sustained reflection, indicate that value transformation involves a slow and often contested process of disengaging from taken-for-granted ideological assumptions. Consistent with critical developmental perspectives (Baxter Magolda, 2009; King & Baxter Magolda, 2015), these findings suggest that pedagogical efforts aimed at cultural and ethical development must confront deeply sedimented normative frameworks rather than rely on short-term interventions. In this sense, pedagogy functions as a site of ideological negotiation rather than moral transmission.

Building on this critical interpretation, the pedagogical processes examined in this study can be further understood as sites where power, knowledge, and ideology intersect in the formation of student subjectivities. Pedagogy does not merely facilitate individual learning but participates in regulating what can be known, questioned, or rendered legitimate within educational contexts. Learning thus operates as both a productive and disciplinary form of power that shapes students' interpretive horizons while simultaneously opening spaces for critique and resistance. The gradual and uneven patterns of change observed across values, worldview, and social consciousness may therefore be interpreted as outcomes of ongoing negotiations with dominant cultural norms rather than as linear developmental progress. As students engage in critical reflection and dialogue, they begin to recognize the ideological foundations of previously naturalized assumptions, initiating processes of conscientization that are necessarily partial and contested (Freire, 1970). These processes unfold within hegemonic structures that both constrain and enable transformation, where pedagogical practices may reproduce dominant meanings or destabilize them through critical engagement (Gramsci, 1971). Viewed through this lens, higher education pedagogy emerges as a cultural arena in which power circulates through knowledge production, yet remains open to disruption as learners develop the capacity to interrogate prevailing discourses and rearticulate their social positioning (Foucault, 1980), **a process that becomes particularly visible in the reconfiguration of students' worldviews discussed below.**

The most pronounced changes were evident in **worldview**, which emerged as the central locus of transformation. This finding aligns strongly with critical interpretations of transformative learning that emphasize epistemological disruption and the destabilization of dominant meaning systems (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Through critical dialogue and engagement with culturally situated issues, pedagogical practices created conditions for students to interrogate dominant narratives and recognize the partiality and power-laden nature of their prior assumptions. From a critical pedagogical standpoint, this shift represents not simply cognitive growth, but the reconfiguration of students' interpretive frameworks in ways that challenge epistemic conformity and open possibilities for alternative ways of knowing.

In relation to **social consciousness**, the findings reveal the emergence of awareness that links personal experience to broader social, cultural, and structural inequalities. Although this awareness did not immediately translate into overt social action, its significance should not be underestimated. Drawing on Freire's (1970) concept of **critical consciousness**, the findings suggest that students began to perceive themselves not as isolated individuals, but as subjects situated within historically and structurally conditioned social relations. This form of consciousness constitutes a necessary precondition for meaningful social engagement, as emphasized in critical scholarship that views awareness and critique as foundational to democratic participation and resistance to domination (Giroux, 2011; Banks, 2015). Importantly, this study does not claim that pedagogical strategies directly

produce social change. Such claims risk reproducing instrumental and technocratic views of education that critical theory explicitly challenges. Instead, the findings point to the formation of **dispositional readiness and critical capacity**—a latent potential through which learners may later engage in social critique and transformation. From this perspective, social change is understood as an emergent and mediated process rather than a measurable instructional outcome.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was crucial in illuminating both the **structural patterns** and the **lived meanings** of student development, thereby affirming the value of mixed-methods inquiry for critical educational research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By capturing not only the extent of change but also the processes through which meaning is constructed and contested, the study advances a culturally and critically grounded understanding of pedagogy.

Taken together, the findings position higher education pedagogy as a **critical site of cultural production**, where dominant assumptions may be interrogated and alternative subjectivities gradually formed. In the context of social change, the contribution of pedagogy lies not in producing immediate transformation, but in cultivating critical consciousness, reflexivity, and the capacity to question existing social arrangements—conditions that are indispensable for long-term and meaningful social change.

CONCLUSION

This study advances a conceptual contribution by demonstrating that pedagogical strategies in higher education function as **cultural and ideological mechanisms** that shape students' values, worldviews, and social consciousness, rather than merely producing short-term skill or behavioral outcomes. The findings support a critical understanding of higher education as a **cultural space** in which meaning-making, subject formation, and the negotiation of power-laden discourses are continuously enacted through pedagogical practice.

The mixed-methods findings reveal differentiated patterns of student development. Changes in values emerged gradually, reflecting their deeply embedded and hegemonic nature, whereas shifts in worldview and social consciousness were more pronounced. These patterns align with transformative learning processes that emphasize the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions and the reconfiguration of interpretive frameworks through critical engagement. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study captures both the **extent** and the **meaning** of developmental change within power-structured educational contexts.

From a social change perspective, this research does not claim that pedagogy directly produces social transformation. Instead, it highlights the role of higher education in cultivating **critical consciousness, reflexive capacity, and dispositional readiness**—conditions that enable learners to interrogate dominant narratives and recognize structural inequalities over time. Social change is thus conceptualized as an **emergent and mediated process** grounded in cultural and educational practices. By integrating student development, transformative learning, and cultural analysis, this study positions pedagogy as a **site of cultural production and contestation** and contributes to critical debates on higher education and social change across diverse sociocultural contexts.

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