

# LOVE ACROSS CULTURE: NAVIGATING JOURNEY OF MARRIED COUPLES AMIDST DIFFERENCES

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## ABSTRACT

*In Intercultural marriage unites individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, influencing their perspectives on commitment, love, and family life. It is a complicated but rewarding experience. In Love Across Culture: Navigating the Journey of Married Couples Amidst Differences, the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights faced by intercultural couples managing cultural differences in their relationships are examined. Understanding how couples adjust, communicate, and compromise to build a strong and enduring bond despite their differences remains a research gap, despite earlier studies examining the effects of cultural diversity in marriage. Thus, this study aims to analyze the experiences of intercultural married couples, focusing on communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and the negotiation of identities. A qualitative multiple case study research design was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to gain insights into intercultural marriages' emotional, social, and relational dynamics. Key findings suggest successful intercultural marriages are built on open communication, mutual respect, cultural adaptation, and compromise. While challenges and experiences such as language barriers and differing traditions often create tension, couples embracing cultural learning and developing a shared understanding strengthen their relationship over time. Therefore, this research underscores the significance of cultural awareness and emotional intelligence in promoting successful intercultural marriages. The findings provide valuable insights for couples, relationship counselors, and policymakers in promoting inclusivity and intercultural harmony in marriages. Future research should explore the long-term effects of cultural integration on marital satisfaction and family dynamics.*

**Keywords:** - *AB English Language, Intercultural Marriage, Cultural and Language Differences, Communication Adaptation, Multiple Case Study.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural marriages present a unique intersection of identities, values, and traditions, often bringing both enrichment and complexity to relationships. Culture, as a dynamic system of shared beliefs, language, customs, and behaviours, fundamentally shapes how individuals perceive the world and interact with others. Within intercultural unions, language and communication emerge as pivotal challenges. Differences in language proficiency, nonverbal cues, and communication styles can result in frequent misunderstandings, emotional disconnects, and conflict. Machette and Cionea (2023) argue that cultural values deeply influence intercultural marriages, with variations in emotional expression, conflict resolution, and social expectations potentially leading to discord. As couples navigate these cultural disparities, the lack of shared linguistic and social frameworks often heightens relational strain.

Beyond communication, intercultural marriages also face challenges rooted in conflicting values, beliefs, and social norms. Differing expectations around gender roles, family responsibilities, and religious practices frequently lead to disagreements. Lan (2019), in her study on Chinese wives and Japanese husbands, found high divorce rates stemming from unresolved cultural conflicts despite the increasing number of such unions. These findings underscore the importance of continuous adaptation, empathy, and mutual cultural understanding in sustaining intercultural relationships. Marital stability relies not only on love and commitment but also on the capacity to bridge cultural divides and re-negotiate shared meanings within the partnership.

In the Philippine context, intercultural marriages particularly those involving Filipinos and foreign nationals are becoming more common yet remain under explored. While studies such as Kim et al. (2014) note that Filipino spouses often face communication challenges and cultural adjustments, research in specific locales like Nabunturan, Davao de Oro is limited. This study investigates the cultural and communicative struggles faced by intercultural couples in this region. The research also highlights the relevance of intercultural understanding within the AB English Language program, promoting real-world application of linguistic skills and fostering a broader comprehension of cross-cultural communication in contemporary society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural marriages, involving partners from different cultural or national backgrounds, are increasingly common due to globalization and migration. These unions offer rich opportunities for cultural exchange but also bring unique challenges. Studies show that differences in language, values, and communication styles can cause misunderstandings and conflict (Osuji, 2024; Budyanto et al., 2022). Effective communication and cultural sensitivity are essential for managing these differences. Intercultural couples often develop adaptive strategies, such as mutual agreements on language use and cultural practices, to foster harmony (Marellia & Caropeboka, 2023). Despite societal pressures and stereotypes, many thrive by embracing patience, respect, and understanding.

Moreover, intercultural marriages present complex experiences shaped by cultural and linguistic differences that significantly impact communication, identity, and family dynamics. Language barriers often hinder emotional expression and mutual understanding, leading to misinterpretations and conflict. While these unions offer a rich blend of customs and traditions, individuals particularly children may struggle with cultural identity, caught between dual heritages and societal expectations to conform to a dominant culture (Ali, 2020; Edgar, 2022).

Navigating varying communication norms and parenting styles adds further challenges, as couples balance differing beliefs on discipline, education, and family roles (Tien et al., 2017). Despite these difficulties, intercultural couples demonstrate resilience by developing communication competencies, cultural sensitivity, and mutual agreements that foster harmony and enrich their relationships (Tili & Barker, 2015; Marellia & Caropeboka, 2023).

Consequently, intercultural marriages reveal complex dynamics shaped by language and cultural differences. Partners often face communication challenges due to varying norms, values, and linguistic fluency. Misunderstandings arise from idioms, indirectness, or non-verbal cues that differ across cultures (Nurrahmi et al., 2024; Lan, 2019). These barriers can create emotional distance, frustration, and even isolation (Tili & Barker, 2015; Stępkowska, 2022). Cultural expectations, parenting approaches, and legal complications further strain the relationship (Edgar, 2022; Wijaya, 2022). Nonetheless, couples show resilience through adaptation and open dialogue, demonstrating that intercultural unions—though challenging—can foster growth, deeper understanding, and emotional connection (Dewaele, 2018).

Moreover, coping mechanisms in intercultural marriages are vital for navigating cultural complexities. Effective communication strategies such as active listening, empathy, and non-verbal awareness strengthen relationships (Chugh, 2024; Wong & Neo, 2024). Parenting challenges are addressed through compromise and mutual understanding (Pakarti et al., 2023; Walsh, 2010). Conflict resolution strategies like collaboration and flexibility improve satisfaction (Ünal & Akgün, 2022). Emotional support and identity negotiation also foster relational resilience (Yampolsky et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2016). Despite obstacles like societal pressure and family disapproval, intercultural couples often succeed by embracing shared values and cultural sensitivity (Tili & Barker, 2015).

Furthermore, research highlights that intercultural couples face unique challenges influenced by cultural, linguistic, and familial differences. Effective communication both verbal and non-verbal is vital in maintaining intimacy and marital satisfaction. Studies emphasize the role of shared language, mutual respect, and emotional expression in resolving conflicts. While some partners adopt one another's culture or create a third shared culture, others struggle with identity, societal judgment, or familial disapproval. Despite growing acceptance, intercultural marriages remain complex, requiring adaptability and understanding. Researchers agree that intercultural relationships demand strong communication skills, cultural negotiation, and emotional resilience to foster long-term success and relationship stability.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to explore how married intercultural couples navigate cultural differences in their relationships. This design was ideal for capturing the in-depth, lived experiences of the participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by a validated researcher-made questionnaire. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Assumption College of Nabunturan Ethics Review Committee. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form, and their voluntary participation was emphasized. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to identify patterns and meaningful insights about intercultural communication and coping strategies.

Moreover, the study used non-probability purposive sampling to select participants who could provide detailed and relevant information. The target group included legally married intercultural couples who had been together for at least one year. This time frame ensured they had encountered and navigated cultural challenges. Specific inclusion criteria were established: couples must come from different cultural backgrounds, have been married for over a year, be legally married, and be willing to openly discuss their personal experiences. Exclusion criteria ruled out couples not legally married, those married for less than a year, or those unable to give informed consent. This approach ensured the richness and relevance of the data collected.

Finally, the study involved three intercultural couples who met all inclusion criteria. These couples represented diverse cultural backgrounds and had meaningful experiences with marital and cultural adjustments. Their stories were instrumental in understanding the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms used to maintain marital harmony. The multiple case study approach allowed the researchers to examine and compare each couple's experiences, providing comprehensive insights into how cultural identity, communication, and mutual understanding influence relationship satisfaction. Through this design, the study offered nuanced perspectives on intercultural marital dynamics and resilience.

### Research Questions

The goal of the researcher is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the participants being involved in an intercultural marriage?
2. What are the challenges experienced by the participant in an intercultural marriage?
3. How do the participants cope with the challenges brought by the different cultural backgrounds associated with intercultural marriage?
4. What are the insights gained by the participants from the intercultural marriage?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the study's discussion, which sought to explore the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of the researcher participants in intercultural marriage. Three married couples from the research subject were chosen to share their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights gained being in an intercultural marriage.

*Experiences in an Intercultural Marriage.* It revealed that in an intercultural marriage, both partners faced difficulties due to their differences in language, culture, and beliefs. It is disputable that every intercultural couple struggles to communicate with each other due to the language barrier. Some couples find it hard to express their emotions to their partners because they cannot put into words what they feel due to difficulties constructing words with the language they do not know. This was also pointed out by Tien et al. (2017); couples in intercultural marriage face difficulties in expressing themselves fully, especially when one of their partners is less proficient in the dominant language, which can lead to misunderstanding and fostering of isolation. This gives emphasis on how language barrier can affect intercultural marriage which can also lead to emotional stress and vulnerability.

Language plays an important role in a relationship; however, language is either a bridge or a barrier. According to Budyanto et al. (2022), language can be a significant barrier in intercultural marriages. If both partners use different native languages, this can lead to miscommunication and obstacles in expressing both their emotions and thoughts. This problem leads to existing cultural misunderstandings that can create additional challenges in the relationship.

Additionally, differences in culture and beliefs can be a hindrance to a relationship. Other participants highlighted how the differences in culture and beliefs affected their marriage. This is supported by the study of Ali (2020) which stated that mixed-race people, particularly in intercultural marriage may often experience a blend of cultural traditions, which can lead to fostering enrichment in their lives, however, they may also face difficulties with their cultural identity that can develop a feeling of pressure to conform to one culture to another, complicating of finding a balance between multiple culture.

Differing in culture and beliefs does not only affect the couples in an intercultural marriage but also their children. According to the study of Priliyanti et al. (2024), in Indonesia, children from mixed marriages, specifically from intercultural marriages, often experienced varying degrees of cultural identity confusion, which was influenced by factors such as adaptation, parenting communication, and their social environment. This can also lead to affecting their language and cultural identity experiences. Thus, the participants give emphasis on how language barrier and differences in culture and beliefs affected their marriages and how it also molds their relationship together.

*Description of Experiences in an Intercultural Marriage.* The data collected shows that in an intercultural marriage, some participants have different descriptions about their differences in language and culture. Some couples revealed that the process of learning each other's language seems fun, while some say it is confusing, and others consider it hard. They have different experiences because they also have different relationship dynamics. Stępkowska (2022) further supports this in the context of intercultural marriages, where differences in language and culture can lead to obstacles that affect communication and relationship dynamics. Differences in language can lead to situations where one of them may feel excluded from any conversations or social interactions. The inclusion they feel can result in resentment or distance between the couples, undermining the relationship's foundation.

Similarly, Oguiche et al. (2022) stated that they identify differences in language as a crucial challenge that an intercultural marriage may face, resulting in broken homes. Misunderstanding, emotional trauma, and instability of the relationship will occur if both partners cannot compromise.

Additionally, in the study of Edgar (2022), when both partners in mixed marriages have differing cultural expectations, this can lead to conflicts. In Soviet Central Asia, the Russian partner's struggles to adapt to local cultural norms, especially regarding women's role, can lead to discord and, in some other cases, may result in early divorce in mixed marriages. As stated in the study of Sappor and Affum (2024), both individual cultures have their own set of cultural norms and values, which can often lead to a clash in an intercultural marriage. These differences may not be challenging to some intercultural couples; however, some may also find these differences challenging to navigate, specifically regarding traditions, rituals, beliefs, and social expectations. This can, again, lead to feelings of alienation and confusion about how to blend their cultural practices.



*Positive Experiences in Intercultural Marriage and How They Strengthened Relationship.* The responses have shown that the participants face different positive experiences despite being in an intercultural marriage. Being different from each other did not hinder these intercultural marriages from experiencing a positive side despite all the challenges they have faced. Regardless of the lower marital satisfaction of couples from differing cultures, intercultural married couples are often seen as more open to cultural curiosity, knowledge, innovation, tolerance, and normalizing differences in their relationships (Chebotareva & Volk, 2020; Boratav et al., 2021; Cifci, 2023). According to Cifci (2023), when intercultural couples develop the skill of discussing their cultural differences, they can gain respect for each other, which can lead to satisfaction such as effective communication, mutual acceptance, and empathy for each other. That dynamic within the wedlock was expressed by the Ilongga bride, Amaya, and Bisaya groom, Bantug's, response. As different, they were able to overcome that barrier and appreciate each other's foreign dialect and culture.

Furthermore, as Abbas (2024) avers, Muslim marriages are ranked among the greatest obstacles that can ever arise within an intercultural marriage. Islam is quite paramount in the lives of most Muslim individuals. In Grace's case, the Christian wife, and Salam, the Muslim husband, they were able to reconcile those differences as they were learning about one another's practices and beliefs. As Hiew and Patrick (2017) described, an intercultural couple can improve their relationship by developing understanding and resolving cultural differences with the assistance of therapy, education, and good communication. This was observed in the reaction of the Ilongga wife, Amaya. She underscored the importance of trusting despite their difference. Through developing support and trust toward one another, they were able to resolve issues better.

*Challenges Experienced in Intercultural Marriage.* The most common issue in intercultural marriages is misunderstanding. Communication and cultural habits result in differences and conflicts. According to Delfiana et al. (2024), in successful intercultural marriages, people need to be flexible regarding cultural and language differences. Open communication, respect, and flexibility help overcome misunderstandings and promote harmony. For example, a Filipina spouse explained adapting to her Canadian husband's family, especially in taking care of his children. She emphasized the creation of boundaries and self-expression. Despite encounters with conflicts, her husband assured her again that honest communication was the secret to trouble-free solving. This resonates with Rosidah et al.'s (2024) recount of successful cross-cultural marriages based on patterns of communication that are understanding and tolerant.

Language differences also pose a great challenge in intercultural marriages since communication breakdown usually results in frustration. Both couples must endeavor to communicate and accommodate each other's language for improved communication. Language problems were cited by some of the participants in the study as one of the common difficulties. For one of the wives, the husband initially found it difficult to comprehend her dialect, and this caused issues. But with much effort and perseverance, they were able to overcome these challenges. Likewise, a Bisaya-speaking spouse narrated how his wife's family assisted him in learning their dialect, and thus made his transition simpler and even fun. Mayer (2023) is in agreement with this, advocating for cultural competency and positive acquisition of one another's language as essential in the avoidance of communication

issues. By creating a conducive climate and learning the languages, couples can overcome communication gaps and attain an enhanced emotional connection.

Religious differences are yet another area of challenge in intercultural marriages. In situations where couples had firmly held positions, religious differences had the potential to lead to conflict and tension. It is important to respect and appreciate one's own religious viewpoint for peaceful coexistence in the marriage. Study participants discussed their experiences with religious differences. One Christian wife identified religious differences as the most difficult area in her marriage which, at times, resulted in conflict. In the same vein, one Muslim husband remembered that his conversion to Islam strained his relationship with his wife initially but eventually enriched his life. Religious variations in intercultural marriages, according to Islami (2016), result in conflict since each belief and practice can be unique. Successful couples resolve differences through effective communication, respect, and compromise. Mutual tolerance of each other's religion by the two partners guarantees marital harmony and emotional well-being. Language barrier, religious differences, and miscommunication are common in intercultural marriages. However, research indicates that successful communication, cultural flexibility, and respect enable individuals to overcome these issues. Through their acceptance of each other's differences and keeping communications open, intercultural couples can potentially establish a solid and loving relationship.

*Influence of the Challenges in Marriage.* The obstacles that take place in intercultural relationships shape the relationship in various ways. They produce more respect and understanding for each other but also sometimes produce misunderstandings and highlight the importance of compromise. This is most likely to occur to couples that prioritize communication and flexibility and will prolong their bond and develop a stronger relationship even with the differences. Delfiana et al. (2024) add that couples across cultures must overcome differences in language, culture, and tradition in attempting to construct a successful marriage. Through Chen's Theory and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, their research proposes psychological flexibility, social adaptability, and communication competence in constructing harmonious relationship.

Similarly, Rosidah et al. (2024) concluded that while cultural, language, and stereotypic variations are challenging, communication freely accompanied by the tolerance and understanding attitude allow couples to fill the gap. Mutual understanding of each other's culture and language and adjusting to one another also helps in reducing misunderstandings and strengthening emotional bonds. Effective communication skills such as active listening, expressing gratitude, boundary setting, and empathy are extremely useful to intercultural couples, according to Chugh (2024). These bridge the gaps between the cultures, generate emotional intimacy, and foster respect between them. Mayer cited (2023) cross-cultural relationship studies present some of the common issues: incompatibility between cultural values, family and society disapproval, language problems, religion issues. Coping strategies such as being a team, anticipatory learning of cultures, religious use of resources, and commitment of mutual future goals reinforce solid relationships. Such coping strategies retain cultural competency and enhance the resilience of the relationship.

Additionally, Islami (2016) highlights the conflict resolution and emotional support functions of intercultural marriages. Compromising and communicating are fundamental in order to cope with variations in culture and religion. Avoidance coping can, however, interfere with communication and problem-solving. Learning about these dynamics is therefore important in order to be capable of achieving a balanced and fulfilling relationship. Even though intercultural marriages have unique challenges, they also bring possibilities for personal and relationship growth. Through the acceptance of diversity, utilization of effective communication, and building mutual understanding, couples may deal with their complexities and construct a firm foundation of love, respect, and emotional resilience.

*Ways of Coping with the Challenges Brought by Different Cultural Backgrounds.* The outcome revealed that married couples appreciated communication, practiced respect for one another, and recognized each other. The participants have varied strategies and perspectives in coping with differences between their culture and faith. Others appreciate communication, while others say that preserving and recognizing each other is a survival strategy in marriage. In spite of their faith and cultural disparities, they have varied strategies and ways of preserving their relationship and even making it better. For example, conflict resolution, emotional support, and communication skills play a significant role in coping with cross-cultural relationships.

Intercultural marriages according to various reports assisted individuals in resolving various significant issues which they would have faced by residing in the community, such as resolving cultural, religious, and family differences-based disputes. Because their respective religions believe and practice differently, interfaith marriages become problematic and lead to disputes. Marriages can enhance their conflict-solving abilities with a variety of coping abilities. Intermarriages have unique challenges and require opportunities for conflict resolution on the basis of cultural differences, communication styles, and individual conflict resolution styles. Peace and satisfaction in marriage rely upon these dynamics and thus must be understood. Certain individuals in mixed marriages might employ avoidance as their primary conflict resolution approach, hence it becomes challenging to communicate and resolve conflicts effectively (Islami, 2016). Moreover, as Delfiana et al. (2024) propose, a couple needs to surpass their cultural, linguistic, and traditional barriers to succeed in an intercultural marriage.

Likewise, Rosidah et al. (2024) have researched the trend of intercultural communication and obstacles to marriage by inter-ethnic couples. This study employed a qualitative description as its technique. While barriers were rooted in linguistic, cultural, and stereotypical differences, good communication patterns were found to be characterized by tolerance, openness, understanding, and learning the language of others. Moreover, coping techniques in international marriages typically include a range of tactics to deal with the difficulties brought on by cultural differences, role expectations, and emotional pain. To overcome obstacles like family disapproval and language and communication limitations, for example, couples in international marriages may turn to humor, social support, and professional assistance (Sappor & Affum, 2024).

*Effect of the Coping Strategies in Marriage Despite Differences.* The data collected shows that in an intercultural marriage, some participants often fought because of their language barriers, but at the same time, it



became stronger. Despite their differences, they still understand, respect, and communicate with each other. These coping mechanisms help them to build a healthy, balanced relationship that promotes development, flexibility, and emotional well-being by accepting differences as an advantage rather than challenges; they create a relationship based on love, respect, and continuous understanding. These couples employed the following processes in managing their challenge: a "fighting together" strategy, anticipatory learning about one another's cultures, using religious resources, building cultural competency, and prioritizing common future goals. Summing up the issues of cross-cultural relationships, these results provide recommendations on how to build the strength of intercultural love. Intermarriage is an exceptional challenge that requires adaptation efforts at the cultural level and effective communication (Mayer, 2023).

According to Chugh (2024), this is a healthier and happier marriage practice. Couples can use these practices to make them understand each other. These practices are active listening, appreciation, setting boundaries, and empathy. This is advice for couples who are married from different backgrounds, among others, no matter the length of time they have spent together. Jackson (2019) also gives us the definitive work on intercultural communication, critiquing stereotyping in culture and focusing on the issue of language. From this book, the reader can learn how to navigate power dynamics and sociopolitical limitations in communication processes. With an emphasis on negotiation and conflict resolution, author Bhugun (2019) outlines ways for multicultural families to manage cultural differences in parenting. Furthermore, according to Chugh (2024), effective communication is a skill that can be learned and developed through practice by an individual. As spouses, they might employ a variety of techniques to improve communication.

*Realizations from Intercultural Marriage.* Marriage, regardless of cultural background, is never perfect. One of the key realizations from the participants is that understanding and communication are essential for a successful marriage. As the Canadian husband emphasized, marriage requires constant effort, and couples must learn how to communicate effectively to navigate challenges. As indicated by Yörük (2016), language performs a key function in fostering intimate relationships on the basis of common activities between two spouses. Such common activities also play a significant function in stimulating marital happiness.

Moreover, the Filipina wife acknowledged that marriage is a continuous adjustment process. No matter how many years a couple has been together, new aspects of their partner's personality, habits, and cultural background are always being discovered. This reinforces the idea that intercultural marriage demands patience, willingness to compromise, and openness to change. Martinez et al. (2016) support this notion, stating that intercultural couples must continuously negotiate cultural differences and develop strategies to maintain a harmonious relationship. One of the Muslim husbands emphasized the importance of understanding and maintaining an open mind. He stated that ignorance will persist without understanding each other's perspectives, which can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. In an intercultural marriage, being open to different beliefs, traditions, and ways of thinking is crucial to maintaining harmony. While individuals often share common values with partners from different cultures, intercultural couples still struggle with various cultural differences within their marriages (Kaya et al., 2019). These

couples will inevitably encounter cultural differences; however, recognizing and respecting each other's cultures can significantly benefit their marriage.

Despite cultural and language differences, love remains the binding force that strengthens relationships. A Bisaya husband shared his realization that cultural differences are not a barrier when love and mutual understanding prevail. Regardless of language, customs, or traditions, what truly matters is the couple's ability to accept and respect each other. According to Lubis et al. (2020) intercultural communication processes were overall successful. Couples resolve big problems, including religion, language, and home behavior, before marriage so that harmony is ensured. In an attempt to resolve issues related to communication and cultural differences, couples tried to learn about each other's pasts and had discussions which could help to reduce conflicts.

*Suggestions to Other Married Couples Who Are Struggling to Maintain Their Relationship Due to Differences.* The Filipina wife emphasized that communication is the key to a successful marriage. She explained that they always ensure open and honest discussions in their relationship. Arguments are inevitable, but compared to before, their disagreements have become more manageable due to better communication. Likewise, the Canadian husband highlighted that understanding and communication help overcome marital challenges. Wong and Neo (2024) stated that couples may use various communication methods, including conflict resolution and non-verbal communication, to overcome the gaps somehow and generate respect towards each other.

A Muslim husband stressed the importance of being open-minded and communicating regularly. Regardless of the issue, communication is a bridge that helps couples find solutions. Similarly, an Ilongga wife noted that many marital struggles stem from misunderstandings resulting from language and cultural differences. She emphasized that mutual understanding is crucial; without it, arguments will persist. Bresnahan and Zhu (2017) stated that, intercultural couples seeking to understand their partner's communication style experience fewer conflicts and greater relationship stability. Another Ilongga wife reiterated that understanding each other's differences is the key to a peaceful relationship. She explained that conflicts will continue to arise if both partners refuse to understand each other's perspectives. A Bisaya husband added that in an intercultural marriage, one must be willing to adapt and respect their partner's background. He emphasized that the couple should not dissociate from each other's culture but should adopt it because it gives a firmer base to the marriage. Gouin and Dymarski (2024) felt that acceptance of cultural diversity in marriage leads to emotional closeness and establishes an environment for support for the two partners.

## IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

Based on the findings of the study, the following implications for practice are suggested:

*Experiences as a Married Couple in an Intercultural Marriage.* It was revealed that intercultural marriages commonly encounter various experiences such as language barriers and differences in culture and beliefs. These barriers can hinder their communication with each other, resulting to separation of the couple. Aside from language, culture also present as a significant challenge for the intercultural marriages. To navigate these, researcher suggests for these marriages to have consistent communication, patience, respect, and empathy. With constant

communication, couples can slowly learn each other's language and understand their differences in culture. As patience help them understands their complexities, empathy and respect will also promote a sense of being heard or valued.

*Description of Experiences in an Intercultural Marriage.* The participants describe their experiences with mixed emotions due to language barriers and differences in culture and beliefs, where some couples felt that their differences were tiresome. Hence, some participants find it challenging yet fun, not difficult at all, and only difficult at first. Based on the participants' responses, they have different descriptions of their experiences. These varied experiences reflect the unique dynamics of each relationship. With these, the researcher suggested active open communication for intercultural marriages about their language and cultural differences. They should understand each other's differences by seeing their partners' perspectives. Moreover, respecting and understanding each other's culture and beliefs without judgment, learning to practice cultural sensitivity, and compromising each other can help them overcome their differences.

*Positive Experiences in Intercultural Marriage and How They Strengthened Relationship.* The data revealed that despite all the challenges that the intercultural couples faced, they were able to experience positive experiences in their differences that helped them strengthen their relationship. These included overcoming misconceptions about Islam, using faith as a source of personal transformation, and developing trust despite differences, acceptance, and inclusion. With these, it was revealed that these marriages can strengthen their relationship by building trust, acceptance, and faith towards each other despite their differences. This highlights that building trust regardless of their cultural and language differences can foster a strong bond. Overcoming misconception helped them deepen mutual respect. Researchers advise intercultural couples to openly and curiously discuss sensitive topics regarding their differences, like their religion, and culture to grow and understand each other.

*Challenges Experienced in Intercultural Marriage.* The participants' responses revealed emergent themes, such as misunderstanding and language gaps, as the significant challenges intercultural couples face. Intercultural couples inevitably face misunderstanding due to their differences in culture and beliefs. Some couples expressed their frustration about their differences in culture and beliefs, leading to misunderstandings. Further, aside from misunderstanding, they also experienced language gaps, where couples have difficulty communicating because they lack vocabulary and fluency in each other's language. Researchers suggests that to navigate these challenges, couples should employ clear, respectful, and patient communication. Further, couples may try to learn each other's languages and use nonverbal cues to navigate these situations. Moreover, intercultural couples should develop shared communication strategies to help them better understand each other. Using simple language, active listening, and confirming understanding to lessen confusion and to avoid misunderstanding.

*Influence of the Challenges in Marriage.* The participants' responses reveal that despite facing various challenges, intercultural married couples were influenced positively to strengthen their marriage. Themes emerged such as deepened understanding towards each other, mutual understanding, resulting in conflicts, and learning to compromise based on the data gathered. Conflicts in marriages are inevitable, however, it should be approach with

openness and empathy. With these, researches recommend for intercultural couples to view conflicts in their marriages as an opportunity for them to reflect, understand, and compromised rather than seeing it as a sign of threat. Intercultural marriages need to develop cultural humility and practice active listening, where they are willing to adjust to their differences and expectations and navigate their challenges.

*Ways of Coping with the Challenges Brought by Different Cultural Backgrounds.* Intercultural Couples revealed how they cope with their challenges, including valuing communication, maintaining respect for each other, and understanding one another. Intercultural marriages emphasized that love is not enough for successful marriage, couples also need to have open communication, respect for each other's cultural and personal identity, and foster empathy and understanding. Research believed that these can help bridge cultural difference and build resilience, trust and growth in their marriage. Aside from that, emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity for these marriages are essential for lasting marital satisfaction. Their experiences offer hope and practical guidance for maintaining strong, enduring intercultural marriages.

*Effects of the Coping Strategies in Marriage Despite Differences.* Based on the responses of the participants, it was revealed that coping mechanisms can significantly influences the journey of intercultural marriages regardless of their cultural differences. With these, researcher suggest that flexible response to cultural differences, such as honest communication, emotional acceptance, and openness to learn each other's differences can help navigate conflicts and form closer connection. Over time, learning each other's language may symbolizes cooperation, while facing challenges together foster trust and support. These coping mechanisms promote relationship based on mutual growth and cultural understanding rather than survival. Intercultural couples also highlight that growth needs time, patience, and perseverance, advising avoidance of unbending expectation, engagement in shared activities, and genuine interest in each other's differences. Further, they also emphasized that humility can help couples recognized that they have much learn and that love involves evolving together, not changing one another.

*Realizations from Intercultural Marriage.* Intercultural marriages lead couples to realize that lasting relationships require ongoing effort, sensitivity, and emotional maturity beyond compatibility. Despite challenges, cultural differences can foster growth and closer bonds. Couples learn that strength lies in adapting, learning, and accepting each other's individuality rather than seeking perfection. These marriages offer opportunities for long-term fulfillment, deeper connection, and personal growth. Successful relationships embrace problems with openness and love, which, when combined with compassion and open-mindedness, transcend cultural boundaries and create meaningful, enduring bonds

*Suggestions to Other Married Couples Who are Struggling to Maintain Their Relationship Due to Differences.* The results emphasize how crucial proactive, deliberate efforts are to foster enduring relationships despite differences. As emphasized by intercultural couples who offers honest advice to other intercultural marriages, effective communication is the foundation for a long healthy marriage. They also point out that adjusting takes time, particularly with each other's cultural differences, and advise practicing patience. Learning their differences is

essential for expressing love and commitment for each other. Based on the participants, it was suggested for the intercultural couples that focusing on communication and embracing continuous improvement helps those struggling with cultural, personal, or situational difference build stronger, more fulfilling connections. This study, basing on the shared experiences of intercultural marriage, offers hope and practical guidance for maintaining love amid differences.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings underscore those intercultural marriages, while uniquely challenging, are equally enriching when nurtured with intentional communication, cultural sensitivity, empathy, and mutual respect. Couples who actively engage in understanding each other's languages and beliefs are more likely to build lasting emotional bonds and resilience. These insights suggest that effective communication both verbal and nonverbal is not just about fluency but about connection. For practitioners, educators, and counselors, fostering awareness of cultural humility, emotional intelligence, and adaptive communication strategies is essential in supporting intercultural couples. Ultimately, intercultural marriages thrive not despite differences, but because of how couples navigate them together.

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