Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Collaborative Learning and Student-Lecturer Dynamics in Practice-Based Design Festival

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Abstract

This study explores Vietnam's National Architecture Student Festival as a model of collaborative, practice-based learning in design education, focusing on the dynamic partnership between students and lecturers. The festival brings together participants from various universities to engage in intensive, hands-on design challenges, fostering a unique environment where investigation, creative proposals, and learning function as interconnected processes. By examining how participants co-create, exchange knowledge, and navigate creative problem-solving within the festival setting, this study frames the event as a living laboratory for artistic research and community-driven design. It investigates how experiential, practice-based approaches strengthen design education, encouraging adaptability, innovation, and critical thinking. This research employs a qualitative, reflective approach, drawing on the author's first-hand experience at the 2024 festival in Hue, Vietnam. Primary methods include reflective inquiry – analysing personal observations and interactions – and semi-structured interviews with participating students and lecturers to capture diverse perspectives on collaboration and creative processes. Additionally, a review of festival materials will provide further context on projects and methodologies. The findings will contribute to discussions on artistic research, participatory education, and creative communities, offering insights into how collaborative learning models can be applied beyond the festival context. By positioning the festival as a site of artistic and architectural research, this paper aligns primarily with the theme of "Learning to Create with Communities", illustrating how multiple agents across education, community engagement, and creative practice can work together to shape more engaged, resilient, and innovative creative environments.

Keywords: collaborative learning, design education, practice-based pedagogy, student-lecturer collaboration, student festival

Introduction

Architectural education in Southeast Asia is increasingly experimenting with inter-institutional and interdisciplinary learning models. One notable example is the National Architecture Student Festival of Vietnam, a biannual event bringing together hundreds of students, lecturers, and experts from across the country for site-based design challenges and collaborative learning. This paper examines the dynamics of such collaboration through the perspectives of educators and students who participated in the 14th edition of the festival.

Background and Context

The 14th National Architecture Student Festival took place in Hue, Vietnam, in April 2024, under the theme "Hue – Youth with Heritage". Co-organised by the Vietnam Association of Architects and the University of Sciences – Hue University, it gathered over 700 students from 29 universities. Multidisciplinary and inter-institutional teams competed in five main fields: Architectural Design, Urban Design, Graphic Design, Illustration and Drawing, and Photography, alongside cultural and academic activities.

Beyond the competitive element, the festival acted as an intensive learning environment fostering rapid, collaborative, and experimental design-making. As a guest lecturer and team mentor, the author engaged in both formal and informal exchanges, contributing to competition preparations and supporting student groups.

Purpose of this Research

This study investigates how collaborative learning develops in short-term creative events involving diverse institutions and disciplines. It focuses on the pedagogical value, creative practice, and transformations that occur when students are placed in new contexts with complex briefs and mixed teams. The research combines the author's autoethnographic reflections as a mentor with semi-structured interviews with students and staff, framed through three theoretical lenses: Expansive Learning, Cognitive Apprenticeship, and Design-Based Learning.

Significance and Research Gap

Festivals and design workshops are widely used in creative education but remain under-explored as transformative pedagogical spaces in Southeast Asia. Existing literature tends to address outputs or organisational aspects rather than the collaborative dynamics and learning processes experienced by participants. This research addresses that gap by integrating facilitator and participant perspectives to reveal how such events can accelerate skill-building, identity formation, and cross-institutional peer learning.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon three interrelated theoretical perspectives to interpret the collaborative and learning experiences observed during the events of the aforementioned festival: Expansive Learning, Cognitive Apprenticeship, and Design-Based Learning. Each of these frameworks offers a distinct yet complementary lens for understanding how students and lecturers engaged with knowledge, creativity, and identity formation within a highly dynamic and interdisciplinary setting.

Expansive Learning and Transformative Collaboration

Developed by Engestrom (1987), Expansive Learning emerges from activity theory and focuses on how individuals and groups reconceptualise their activity systems in response to contradictions, tensions, or novel challenges. It is particularly suited to analysing collective learning in contexts where fixed roles, disciplines, and institutional structures are suspended or reconfigured – such as in inter-university, cross-disciplinary festivals.

In the case of the Festival, students were placed in mixed teams composed of peers from different universities, disciplines, and years of study, forcing them to negotiate unfamiliar social, professional, and institutional boundaries. These interactions catalysed transformations in their learning identities, encouraging students to rethink their positions not only as designers but also as collaborators and cultural agents. Through participation in thematic competitions in a new context, students moved beyond their accustomed roles, encountering the need to adjust leadership dynamics, reinterpret heritage through creative forms, and develop shared goals with unfamiliar peers. These processes reflect key features of expansive learning, including boundary crossing, collective agency, and new forms of practice (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

Cognitive Apprenticeship and Peer Learning

The second theoretical anchor is Cognitive Apprenticeship, as introduced by Collins, Brown, and Newman (1989). This model focuses on how complex skills and problem-solving are taught through modelling, scaffolding, and gradual transfer of responsibility from expert to learner. Unlike traditional apprenticeships, cognitive apprenticeship emphasises making thinking visible, encouraging articulation, reflection, and social negotiation of meaning.

In the Festival setting, mentorship was not focused on top-down instruction but emerged dynamically through peer-to-peer interaction, student leadership, and informal mentoring that did not impose ideas but suggested critical thinking instead. Students openly shared potential solutions, sketched in real time, and negotiated design choices in an iterative, dialogic manner. The presence of lecturers played a facilitative rather than directive role, often stepping back to allow students to lead. The fluid structure of the event allowed for reciprocal teaching moments, in which senior students guided juniors, and skills were distributed across disciplinary boundaries – mirroring the conditions described in the cognitive apprenticeship model.

Design-Based Learning in Compressed Collaborative Contexts

The third conceptual strand is Design-Based Learning (DBL), which emphasises learning through iterative cycles of ideation, prototyping, critique, and reflection within real-world or authentic design problems (Kolodner et al., 2003). DBL provides an apt lens for interpreting how time-constrained, competition-driven environments still support deep engagement with creative processes.

In this Festival, the compressed timeframe of each live competition demanded rapid synthesis of ideas, collective decision-making, and distributed responsibilities. Although this intensity introduced stress and sometimes unfinished outcomes, it also promoted high levels of engagement, improvisation, and self-organisation. The teams often began with sketching and site analysis, followed by multiple rounds of conceptual development, eventually producing tangible artefacts –urban plans, architectural models, illustrations, photographs, and graphic compositions. This form of fast-paced design work aligns with DBL's emphasis on doing, reflecting, revising, and learning through action. It also foregrounds how collaboration itself becomes a condition for creativity, particularly when students must negotiate how to visually and conceptually integrate distinct contributions.

Integrative Lens for Interpretation

These three frameworks are not treated in isolation but are employed in concert to interpret the data generated through autoethnographic reflection and student interviews. Expansive Learning helps trace how identities and roles shift across institutional and cultural boundaries; Cognitive Apprenticeship clarifies the mentoring and peer-learning dynamics; and Design-Based Learning captures the iterative, collaborative making process in an event-based, real-world context. Together, they allow for a multi-layered reading of how creativity, pedagogy, and professional approaches intersect during ephemeral yet impactful events like architecture student festivals.

Methodology and Approach

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretivist design, combining autoethnographic observation and reflection with semi-structured interviews to explore how architecture students and educators experience collaborative, interdisciplinary, and creative learning in the context of the Hue 2024 Festival. Drawing from models of artistic research, the study also aligns with the logic of practice-led inquiry where the event itself becomes a case for investigating educational and creative dynamics (Candy, 2006).

The research is positioned within alternative formats of inquiry, incorporating reflective practice, participatory observation, and dialogical knowledge production. As such, it does not aim to generalise across all design education contexts, but rather to offer rich, situated insight into how learning and collaboration unfold within design events. The analysis is theory-informed yet grounded in empirical detail, with particular attention to how students navigate boundaries – disciplinary, institutional, and social – through creative work. As shown

in Figure 1, the festival's competition working space was accessible and easy to document without intrusion or alteration of the student behaviour, allowing students focus on producing their designs and freely undertaking interactions with peers.

Figure 1: *Festival Competition Teams in Their Classroom.* Copyright: author of this research.



Data Collection

Two complementary sources of data inform the study:

Reflective Practice (Autoethnographic Report)

The researcher participated in the Festival as a guest lecturer and mentor, engaging directly with students and staff across several days of workshops, meetings, competition preparation, and informal exchanges. Multiple sources such as notes, sketches, photographs, and post-event reflections were collected and thematically organised. This self-reflective process follows the principles of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006), where the researcher critically engages with their own role and experience as data.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Participants

Interviews were designed to capture lecturer and student perspectives on collaboration, learning, creativity, and the negotiation of roles. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants from different universities, ages, nationalities, roles, and specialisations. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol based on themes derived from the theoretical framework and reflective findings. Interviews were conducted in online, recorded, and transcribed for analysis.

Both data sources were collected with informed consent, and participants were anonymised in reporting to maintain ethical research standards.

Data Analysis

Data analysis follows a thematic approach, suitable for synthesising insights from both autoethnographic and interview materials. The reflective practice report was first coded inductively to surface key moments, tensions, and patterns in the researcher's experience. Themes such as boundary crossing, peer mentoring, disciplinary hybridity, and collaborative design processes emerged.

These preliminary themes informed the coding of the interview transcripts, allowing for a recursive process of comparison and refinement across data sources. Thematic categories were iteratively developed, defined, and deepened until they were optimal for cross-validation between the two methods. This method aims not to quantify, but to provide grounded

interpretations of how both lecturers and students make sense of the design practice, learning, and collaboration in the specific context of the festival.

The analytical process is also informed by the three theoretical lenses presented in Chapter 2. Themes are examined not only descriptively but through the lens of the three key theories studies, offering a layered and critical reading of both student and lecturer experiences.

Results and Findings

Insights from Reflective Autoethnography

This section presents thematised insights derived from the researcher's reflective engagement with the festival. As a guest lecturer and mentor, the author observed and participated in design workshops, student mentoring sessions, pre-competition meetings, and social activities across the five-day event. The reflective account, developed using analytic autoethnographic methods, surfaces key moments that illustrate the dynamics of hybrid design learning in a highly compressed design environment. These are interpreted through the lenses of the theoretical frameworks proposed in Chapters 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries and Expanding Perspectives

One of the most striking dynamics at the Festival was the students' frequent boundary crossing – both disciplinary and conceptual. While the competition categories were formally divided (e.g., architecture, urban design, illustration, photography, graphic design), students often subverted these boundaries through interdisciplinary experimentation. Architectural models adopted sculptural forms; illustration entries resembled fine-art paintings; photography submissions integrated graphic design techniques; and graphic pieces were enriched with architectural or site-responsive motifs. On Figure 2 below is shown an example of one the participants who applied unique trans-disciplinary approaches, by using fine-arts-related painting techniques and acrylic mediums, often disregarded in architectural and urban planning representations such as master plans, which often utilise technical drawings, predominantly built based on line systems and limited presence of artistic elements such as colour, art style, brushwork, etc.

Figure 2: *Example of Student Works.* Copyright: author of this research.



As theorised in Section 2.1, these moments reflect expansive learning through role shifts and boundary-crossing, whereby learners transform their activity system through collaboration and innovation. The Festival offered a temporary "third space" (Gutierrez, 2008) in which institutional constraints – such as assessment rubrics, course modules, or departmental divisions – were suspended, allowing students to co-create shared meanings around the theme of "heritage". Notably, students also redefined the idea of heritage itself: some adopted deeply humanistic perspectives, centring communities and memory; others rendered heritage through speculative, futuristic, or technologically mediated lenses. In doing so, they blurred not only disciplinary lines, but also temporal, cultural, and philosophical boundaries.

Mentoring as Embedded Cognitive Apprenticeship

Within teams, informal mentoring and peer-based apprenticeship emerged organically. As students came from different universities, years of study, and specialist backgrounds, their skills and levels of confidence varied. Older or more technically proficient students frequently supported others in tasks such as team leadership and planning, while other students focused on digital production or model-making. Beyond technical assistance, some also provided strategic direction, facilitating group decisions or mediating conceptual debates. This dynamic aligns with Cognitive Apprenticeship models (Collins et al., 1989), where learning is scaffolded not through top-down instruction, but by guided participation and mutual observation.

Moreover, the researcher's role as a mentor embedded within the process, rather than an evaluator external to it, further contributed to this ecology of support. Informal discussions often occurred outside formal sessions – during meals, cultural visits, or while walking to events – highlighting the porous nature of learning environments during intensive festivals. These unstructured exchanges not only strengthened interpersonal bonds but also served as moments of reflection-in-action for both students and their mentors.

Testing Ideas Through Iteration and Feedback

A key pedagogical feature of the pre-competition period was the emphasis on rapid iteration. Students engaged in frequent sketching, brainstorming, and physical prototyping, especially in the early stages of the projects. The mentor observed how these sketches functioned as mediating artefacts, enabling teams to externalise ideas, negotiate meaning, and arrive at collective design directions. Even teams working in illustration or photography used drawing as a means to ideate or storyboard their concepts, and had intense discussions on how to select and elaborate a common visual project based on individual contributions.

Students appeared largely resilient in the face of feedback or critique, even when ideas were questioned or redirected. This can be attributed partly to the cultural tone of Vietnamese education – marked by humility and kindness – but also to the Festival's framing as a non-curricular learning space rather than a purely assessable one. Although only few prizes were awarded across 25 teams from 29 universities, the atmosphere remained celebratory and inclusive throughout the event. The closing ceremony, while highlighting winners, also reaffirmed participation, camaraderie, and personal growth as central outcomes.

These practices reflect a Design-Based Learning ethos (Kolodner et al., 2003), where knowledge is developed through making, testing, feedback, and revision within authentic contexts. Students' willingness to try new media, adapt their processes, and rethink their ideas in response to suggestions is emblematic of this mindset.

Social and Spatial Learning Conditions

Finally, the Festival's spatial and social setting shaped the learning ecology in significant ways. Hosted in the culturally rich city of Hue, with many activities taking place in historical venues, the festival itself became an experiential classroom. Informal learning occurred not only in conference rooms and classrooms, but also during site visits, meals, exhibitions, and social outings. The absence of rigid institutional boundaries allowed students and mentors to share space and time in fluid, immersive ways.

This open-ended format fostered community building, intercultural exchange, and a sense of collective ownership over the creative process. From the perspective of the reflective researcher, these conditions enabled the emergence of a temporary learning community: a site where shared values, practices, and goals were negotiated and embodied through design.

Insights from Interviews

The analysis of interviews with five participants from the festival – including students and lecturers from Thailand, Vietnam, and Germany – revealed a rich and multifaceted perspective on the learning, collaboration, and pedagogical value of the event. Responses across the 17-question framework underscored how the event fostered experiential learning, intercultural exchange, and professional development. These insights help clarify the perceived benefits and areas for improvement of the festival as a practice-based learning space.

One of the most frequently cited outcomes was the value of teamwork and collaborative learning. Participants across backgrounds emphasized how design solutions emerged not from individual efforts but from group dialogue. A student noted: "Everyone helped and gave a hand with any part they are given." This emphasis on shared responsibility and fluid task distribution illustrates the festival's potential to mirror real-world collaborative design contexts.

The unpredictability of the team formation process became an important factor in shaping participant experiences. As one student recalled, "Even when we arrived, we had no idea who we would team up with. Everything was kept a secret. However, once formed, we interacted openly and supported each other". This element of surprise provided an authentic test of adaptability and collaboration skills, encouraging participants to establish rapport quickly and work effectively with unfamiliar peers.

Several interviewees also pointed to the importance of learning from others, both formally and informally. The lecturer reflected: "valuable insights from other participants at the festival, such as effective teamwork methods, spatial composition thinking, presentation skills, and breakthrough ideas." Such observations show how the festival functioned as a dynamic site of peer learning, where exposure to different approaches and perspectives enriched participants' own thinking.

For some, the event prompted self-discovery and reflection on personal development. One student shared: "Through these interactions and this journey, I gained new quality friendships, and new corridors of knowledge were opened up." Similarly, one of the lecturers observed a cultural contrast in how seriously students and universities approached the competition: "We encourage them to go, network, have a meaningful time... but in Vietnam, it's much more of a competitive market." These reflections highlight both the formative impact of the experience and the different educational expectations across countries.

The interviewees also acknowledged concrete impacts on their professional or academic practice. A lecturer reported adapting to team-based work environments with more openness and awareness of diverse design thinking. Another lecturer indicated that the experience directly informed curricular revisions: "after the festival, we redesigned our programme to emphasise hand drawing skills". Based on the lecturer's experience in

education, there was a trend of shifting towards more technical and software-based education. However, witnessing the festival highlighted the effectiveness of direct visual expression, it inspired a renewed emphasis on these techniques as vital tools for creativity and communication, prompting him to advocate for their reintegration into their university educational program.

Cross-cutting Themes

When juxtaposing the personal reflections offered in Section 4.1 with the interview data analysed above, a series of interconnected themes emerge that cut across roles, national contexts, and experiences. These themes offer a more composite understanding of the pedagogical and socio-cultural implications of the Festival, reinforcing and sometimes challenging insights derived from the author's own participant observation.

The tension between collaboration and competition

A striking theme emerging across the interviews is the dual character of the Festival as both a site of cooperation and a space of institutional prestige. As shown on Figure 3, students brought their institutional pride, as they were a selected minority of their home study centre, by chanting their slogans, waving their flags, and displaying ownership and belonging at any occasion. While on interviews students repeatedly emphasised the importance of collective effort, some lecturers such as interviewee D identified the strong competitive drive embedded in the Vietnamese educational context.

This contrasted with his own university's initial positioning: "We encourage them to go, connect with students, have a meaningful experience. Which is different." This gap between expectations of festivity versus competition mirrors the author's own reflection on the Festival's ambiguous identity, oscillating between celebration and performative pressure.

Figure 3: *Students Waving Their University Flags.* Copyright: author of this research.



The role of intercultural learning

Participants across all roles acknowledged the intercultural dimension of the Festival as one of its most enriching elements. The student interviewee E described the experience as "a connection of intellect and knowledge values," highlighting the informal learning fostered through cultural immersion and shared experience. Similarly, the author's reflection in Section 4.1 stressed how being a non-Vietnamese academic in the Vietnamese context opened unexpected avenues for boundary-crossing collaboration and insight.

Temporal intensity and its pedagogical effects

Many students voiced concerns about the short time frame for meaningful design development. The student participant A noted, “two days might be so short for designing anything with this amount of people in each group,” a sentiment also echoed in the reflective report where the author expressed ambivalence about the accelerated rhythm of events and its implications for deep learning. This temporal compression may enhance bonding and experiential momentum, yet limit reflective scaffolding and critical processing. As shown on Figure 4 and 5, the students distributed the layouts occupying most of the available desks (even the floor) and got fully hands-on, dedicating all their efforts to complete the task on time and polishing the presentation until the very last minute.

Figure 4, 5: *Students Finalising Their Work.* Copyright: author of this research.



Self-awareness through exposure

Several interviewees described gaining clarity about their own abilities and aspirations through the process of working in high-pressure, multidisciplinary, and multicultural teams. The lecturer interviewee C shared that “I became more aware of my own strengths and weaknesses… and gained a clearer vision of my future career path.” This echoes the author’s own insight about "being seen while seeing others," underlining how exposure to alternative ways of designing and presenting work can produce heightened self-awareness and a shift in self-perception.

Learning as relational practice

Both the reflective report and the interviews suggest that the most enduring learning outcomes were relational rather than technical. Several students described how new friendships, team dynamics, and moments of mutual help shaped their understanding of architectural practice. The student participant E articulated this as stepping into "a new phase of confidence," facilitated by collective achievement and intercultural exchange. The author similarly foregrounded relationality as a core mode of participation, in contrast to more hierarchical or task-oriented modes of learning.

Participants consistently highlighted the willingness of team members to contribute beyond their primary skill set. One student reflected, “The thing I learned most was how they listened and discussed together for the greatest idea”. This behaviour illustrates the fluidity of contribution across disciplinary boundaries and aligns with the principles of Expansive Learning, where collaborative processes are redefined through mutual support and shared responsibility.

Implications for institutional change

One of the most powerful cross-cutting observations came from the lecturer interviewee D, who acknowledged that participation in the Festival directly informed curriculum redesign at his university: "We redesigned our programme actually to emphasise hand drawing skills. Artistic skills more." This institutional responsiveness contrasts with some of the author's own frustrations about the difficulty of converting ephemeral event experiences into structural learning reforms, as discussed in Section 4.1. Nevertheless, both voices point to the potential of such Festivals to act as triggers for rethinking design pedagogy and curricular priorities.

Discussion

One of the central observations concerns the coexistence of collaboration and competition as defining logics of the Festival. As highlighted in both the author's reflective practice and interview data, participants were required to shift quickly between roles: performer, peer, competitor, co-designer, and guest. This aligns with the notion of expansive learning, where learning emerged through negotiating contradictions and co-creating new forms of activity. The tension between festivity and institutional rivalry, for example, created a learning environment that was improvisational and situated, where cultural norms and disciplinary boundaries were temporarily suspended or reconfigured.

Furthermore, the Festival exemplified many features of cognitive apprenticeship, particularly through its emphasis on modelling, coaching, and articulation. Senior students, teachers, and even international guests served as informal mentors, while the fast-paced project work required public demonstration of skills, collaborative problem-solving, and iterative feedback loops. The compressed timeframe made these elements highly visible, yet also raised concerns – especially among students – about the depth and sustainability of the learning produced. As one student commented, the two-day design task made it difficult to "gain more insight into what we are trying to solve." Still, the pedagogical value lay not only in the product but in the process, reinforcing the point that design-based learning thrives on active, reflective engagement rather than polished outcomes.

The author's own positionality – as both a participant-mentor and observer – allowed for insight into how institutional goals, interpersonal dynamics, and personal values intersect during such events. The reflective account underscored the importance of relational learning, an element echoed by nearly all interviewees. Students spoke of gaining confidence not just in their technical ability but in their capacity to communicate, adapt, and navigate difference. Lecturers, on the other hand, reflected on how the Festival challenged them to rethink curricular priorities and pedagogical assumptions, particularly regarding the role of affect, informality, and cultural exchange in design education.

Importantly, the events appeared to catalyse transformative experiences for many participants, prompting self-redefinition and a clearer sense of professional identity. These moments were often tied to social and intercultural interactions rather than formal outputs. For example, a lecturer's decision to redesign his programme based on what he observed in Vietnam demonstrates how transnational peer-learning can extend beyond the Festival itself, feeding into broader institutional change. This finding complements the account of analytic autoethnography, where the researcher's subjectivity is not a limitation but a source of critical insight into the social structures at play.

At the same time, the data revealed ambivalences and limits. The Vietnamese context, while rich in energy and collective ethos, also imposed constraints – such as hierarchical expectations, language barriers, and implicit assumptions about roles. These were particularly visible in moments where international guests were both welcomed and subtly positioned as outsiders or symbols of prestige. The reflective and interview data thus suggest that while the

Festival offers moments of authentic collaboration, it also reproduces certain asymmetries and performative tendencies.

In summary, the Festival functions as a microcosm of design education in transition: moving from individual mastery to collective, situated learning; from standardised curricula to experiential formats; and from national isolation to intercultural entanglement. As such, it invites further exploration of how temporary, high-intensity educational events can act as laboratories for pedagogical innovation, identity work, and cross-cultural literacy.

Conclusion

This study investigated the Vietnamese National Festival of Architecture Students as a situated, intercultural learning environment. Through a practice-based and interpretive methodology – combining analytic reflective autoethnography with semi-structured interviews – it examined how the festival serves as a platform for both pedagogical experimentation and identity formation among architecture students and educators. The findings reveal a rich, multilayered educational experience shaped by the interplay of collaboration, competition, cultural exchange, and institutional logics.

Key insights highlight that learning in this context is not limited to the acquisition of design techniques or disciplinary knowledge. Instead, it emerges through lived participation, affective encounters, and shifts in perspective. Students reported developing not only technical confidence but interpersonal and intercultural competencies, often through informal interactions. Educators, in turn, experienced moments of professional reflection that led them to question and, in some cases, revise their own teaching practices. These processes resonate with theories of expansive learning and cognitive apprenticeship, underscoring the Festival's potential as a space of pedagogical innovation.

At the same time, the study acknowledges several limitations. The sample of interviewees was intentionally small to reach deeper understanding, and diverse but not representative, and the researcher's dual role as participant-observer may have introduced bias in interpretation. Moreover, the specific socio-cultural context of Vietnam played a significant role in shaping the learning dynamics observed, meaning caution is needed when extrapolating these findings to other settings.

Nonetheless, the research suggests valuable recommendations. Design educators and institutions might consider integrating similar intensive, experiential formats into their curricula – not as add-ons but as core learning opportunities. Such formats should intentionally foster intercultural dialogue, peer mentoring, and reflective practice, while also creating space to critically examine the structures and assumptions that shape participation. Future studies could build on this work by exploring longitudinal impacts on students' learning trajectories or by comparing similar festivals in different cultural contexts.

Beyond skill acquisition, the festival fostered personal growth and self-awareness. As one participant admitted, "I realised teamwork and collaboration are crucial. It showed me my own weaknesses. I placed too much pressure on my teammates initially". Such reflections underline the capacity of short-term, high-intensity collaborative environments to prompt critical self-evaluation, a process integral to both professional development and ethical practice in design.

In conclusion, the Festival offers more than a showcase of student work: it constitutes an alternative educational space where learners and mentors alike are invited to negotiate knowledge, identity, and meaning in new and transformative ways.

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