

Cultivating intercultural competences in digital higher education through English as an international language

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(Received 13 August, 2021. Published online 13 February, 2022.)

Intercultural competences (IC), which underscore the ability to recognise, value and work with cultural diversity, play a key role in academic, career and social-emotional development in a globalised world. Higher education needs to help students cultivate IC, and digital education offers an alternative space for engaging with difference. Our research integrates holistic IC models to promote ongoing, dynamic intercultural learning. We also explore the role of adopting English as an international language (EIL) in developing IC. In Australia, the native-speaker model of English has contributed to a divide that works against other English users. Shifting to an EIL paradigm can empower all students to take ownership of English and participate with confidence in intercultural communication. Through a systematic literature review on the development of IC and the use of EIL, we found that cultivating students' IC requires a complex view of culture and identity towards greater social cohesion. Here, enhancing learners' digital literacies is an enabling factor. Our research also highlights the critical role of EIL in celebrating diversity and prioritising the purpose of English over form. EIL practices can transform teachers' and learners' self-beliefs and relocate culture from a reified view towards more sophisticated understandings. Based on our findings, we propose practical steps institutions and educators can take to cultivate IC in their students.

Key Words: intercultural competences, intercultural communication, English as an international language, diversity-inclusive pedagogy, digital higher education, international education, global education.

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication is a vital pursuit not just for academic success in higher education but also for lifelong learning in a multicultural society and a globalised world. Institutions need to support their students in developing intercultural competences (IC), which are attitudes, knowledge and skills that allow a person to recognise, value and work with diversity (Deardorff, 2020). In Australia, however, many students have found it difficult to work in culturally diverse groups and therefore have not been able to make the most of their studies (Akanwa, 2015; Reid & Garson, 2017).

With the rise of remote learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even more challenging for students to navigate intercultural communication as the online environment often lacks non-verbal and contextual cues. At the same time, online learning provides flexible, personalised access to education to a wider range of students. Technologies have enabled Australia's institutions to build global digital campuses and to continue the internationalisation of higher education despite travel restrictions (Rizvi, 2020). Given the challenges and potential of digital education, cultivating students' IC can improve online engagement and learning by helping students to appreciate and negotiate diverse ways of thinking and working.

This paper pluralises the concept of intercultural competence in recognition of the many facets and complexities of becoming culturally competent (Deardorff, 2020). The conception of IC we adopt revolves around Matsumoto's definition of culture as "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next" (Matsumoto, 1996, p. 16). This definition is particularly useful when discussing IC because it pertains to the less obvious components of culture which are subjective and can lead to miscommunication or conflict.

Language plays a crucial role in building IC. In Australia, the native-speaker model of English has contributed to a divide that works against other English users (Pham & Tran, 2015). Adopting the ideas and practices of English as an international language (EIL) can empower all students to take ownership of English and participate in intercultural communication. EIL has emerged across the world through the widespread use of English to serve users' own purposes and facilitate the sharing of their own cultures. Therefore, EIL practices can enhance students' IC through encouraging genuine mutual learning instead of transmitting native speakers' cultures (Sharifian, 2014).

This paper examines ways to develop IC in digital education and the potential of using EIL therein. It will answer two questions:

1. How can intercultural competences be cultivated in digital higher education?
2. What role does English as an international language play in students' digital intercultural learning in Australia's higher education?

We conducted a systematic literature review on ways to develop IC and use EIL in a global context. The results of this research will inform tertiary institutions of principles and methods to intercultural learning, especially in digital environments.

2. Intercultural competences in digital education

The increasing frequency of intercultural contact at most levels of society in recent decades has prompted a range of disciplines to attempt to understand, measure and develop IC. These disciplines include leadership, international business, management and communication and personality development (Leung et al., 2014). Though diverse, they converge in viewing IC as one's ability to function effectively across cultures (Whaley & Davis, 2007). Deardorff (2006) found through applying the Delphi technique that Byram's (1997) definition was voted as the most applicable in the education space, where IC mean "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativising one's self" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). Deardorff also highlights the most common elements among definitions of IC were awareness, understanding and valuing of cultural differences, experience of other cultures and reflection on one's own culture.

Built on Byram's model, Deardorff (2009) emphasises the process by which IC progress over time with the education space in mind. By explicitly regarding attitudes as the foundation of one's IC, Deardorff centralises respect, openness, curiosity and discovery as key characteristics which enable the developmental process. Knowledge and skills are combined in this model. While specific skills include listening, observing, evaluating, analysing and interpreting, knowledges comprise deep cultural understanding, self-awareness and sociolinguistic knowledge (Deardorff,

2009). These attitudes, skills and knowledges lead to two outcomes: an internal outcome involving a shift in one's frame of reference, culminating in adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative view and empathy, and an external outcome of effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in an intercultural situation, which is the more common conception of IC (Deardorff, 2006). Inherent to this model is the ongoing process of continual development so that "one may never achieve ultimate intercultural competence" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 257).

In digital education, IC extend to the ability to communicate across multiple online media such as oral, visual, textual, synchronous, asynchronous, open and closed modes (Domingo, 2012; Helm & Guth, 2010). Encapsulating the various aspects of IC development in the digital environment, Helm and Guth (2010) adapted Byram's (1997) model to situate the learner in a responsive mode to their online world. This adaptation presents four key online literacies: technical online operation, a readiness to learn and connect online, cultural knowledge including netiquette and critical thinking (Helm & Guth, 2010). These attributes reflect the multifaceted nature of digital literacy, which "embraces technical, cognitive and social-emotional perspectives of learning with digital technologies, both online and offline" (Ng, 2012, p. 1066). It is important to observe netiquette, or the rules of engagement in an online environment, for instance demonstrating respect and using different ways to communicate clearly with others (Ng, 2012).

Our research combines the models advocated by Byram (1997), Deardorff (2009) and Helm and Guth (2010) into a rich and dynamic understanding of IC development, as visualised in Figure 1. While Byram's descriptive model details the qualities of intercultural speakers in being able to turn intercultural encounters into relationships based on respect and understanding, Deardorff contributes a holistic process for the development of IC qualities, and Helm and Guth translate these to the online environment.

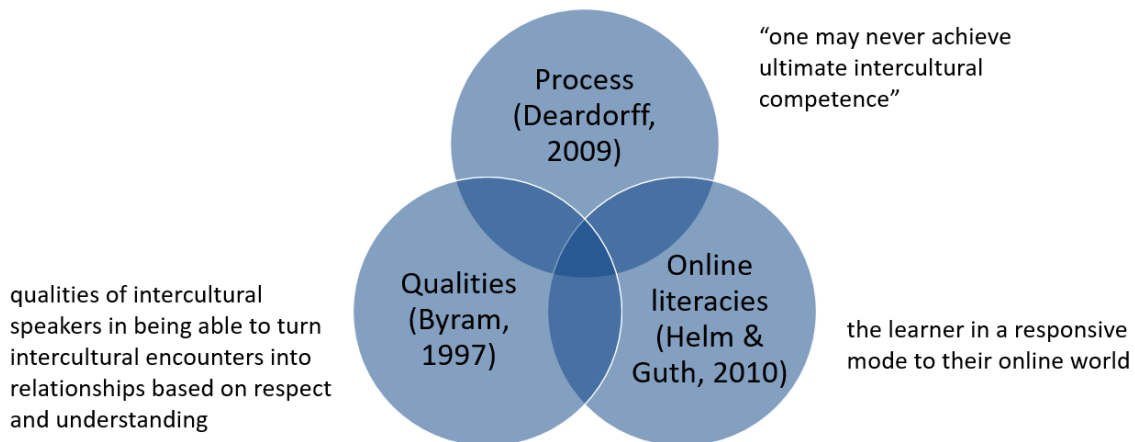


Figure 1. An integrative approach to intercultural competences.

This integrative approach can resonate in different intercultural contexts. Critiquing a linear IC framework as achievement-oriented and thus limiting, Williams (2019) demonstrates the synchronicity between a holistic view of IC and the Indigenous Canadian "medicine wheel" approach to intercultural development, which recognises a person's life cycle and changing values as well as a concept of "culture as a series of lenses" (Williams, 2019, p. 70). Our adaptive approach to IC also aligns with more complex understandings of cultural identity as a force that both shapes and is shaped by social spaces and media (Domingo, 2012). It sees IC as a developmental, cyclical lifelong learning process that encompasses a fluid sense of identity and engagement with the world.

3. English as an international language

In digital education, language acquires a new level of significance for communicating and understanding diversity, as the online environment often lacks a physical intercultural context and non-verbal cues. To help mitigate the challenges and maximise the opportunities of digital education, the language used should embrace diversity and encourage open-mindedness. English as an international language (EIL) espouses these values by working to make English serve all its users and to help them develop robust intercultural mindsets and behaviours (Chen & Le, 2020). Different from English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which focuses on patterns of interaction between second-language speakers, EIL pays attention to the local needs and backgrounds of learners with an emphasis on intercultural communication (McKay, 2018).

The EIL approach to the teaching and learning of language and culture has been gaining increasing traction in Asia and throughout the world (Chen & Le, 2020). This approach addresses the conflict between the ever-expanding status and power of English due to its international use and the inequity of concentrating this status and power in the native-speaker model. EIL offers an exciting alternative to the traditional, judgement-laden categorisation of English users into norm givers (native speakers), norm developers (second-language speakers) and norm dependents (foreign-language speakers) based on biological and geographical characteristics (Sadeghpour, 2020). With globalisation and the increasing complexity of linguistic and cultural identity, especially in a multicultural society such as Australia, this neat labelling of English users has become less accurate and useful. English is a fascinating language precisely because it lives, breathes and changes in tandem with the diverse uses it serves. This inevitable and legitimate dynamic appropriation of the language puts to question who the actual norm provider and abider is, and whether biological and geographical factors remain valid and reliable determinants of English proficiency (Sadeghpour, 2020). Furthermore, the simplistic divide projected by the native-speaker model is harmful to intercultural learning because it restricts English users to norms set by certain cultures, making it difficult for non-native speakers to express their own cultural understandings, values and beliefs (Pham & Tran, 2015). The valuation of some English varieties over others implied by this model also impedes authentic intercultural communication (Matsuda, 2017). It instead perpetuates one-way transmission of norms, which indicates a mindset detrimental to IC in both native and non-native speakers of English.

By contrast, EIL is diversity-inclusive, where difference is considered an asset, not a liability, to intercultural understanding. In the EIL paradigm, comprehensibility is a matter not of uncritical compliance with a certain set of norms but of mutual negotiation of meaning. EIL shifts the ownership of English to all its users and encourages them to appropriate the language to express, communicate and navigate their cultural identities (Marlina, 2014). This awareness and negotiation, powered by EIL, lie at the heart of building IC in all students, regardless of background. The intercultural learning embedded in the EIL paradigm nurtures an ability to recognise, respect and work with diversity, creating a “third place” to reflect on cultural differences and one’s own evolving cultural identity (Sadeghpour, 2020).

For all these reasons, the EIL approach has been researched and practised widely in Asia and many other contexts. However, Australian institutions have been slow to move away from the native-speaker discourse, despite Australia’s multicultural society and student cohorts. There is also a dearth of investigation into EIL in digital higher education with a focus on IC. Asia-based studies have embraced EIL in digital learning strategies, but mostly in cross-cultural, not intercultural, communication (e.g. Chiang, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2019).

Given the unique opportunities EIL offers for cultivating IC in an increasingly digitised education context, an investigation into this crucial intersection between language, culture and the digital mode of learning holds significant potential to transform pedagogies and beliefs about international education.

4. Systematic review parameters

We searched the literature for ways of developing intercultural awareness, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours in a global context. We looked at education activities both in and outside curriculum, across programs and contexts, with a focus on IC as an essential graduate attribute for academic, professional and personal enrichment. With this broad view, we also engaged with many papers from the English Language Teaching field as this is where the concepts of IC and EIL originated and are most frequently explored. Our engagement with this field aims at translating these concepts into broader applications across higher education. All together, we looked at 57 papers including articles and books, of which 47 were published within the past 10 years (i.e. from 2012 to 2021) and 10 were published before 2012. The older papers tend to be influential works where the theories or arguments remain current. Of the 57 papers, 12 focus on Asia, seven on Australia, eight on North America, nine on Europe and three on South America. The remaining 18 papers involve cultural exchanges between different countries around the world including Africa.

We first examined conditions, methods and technologies for IC development in digital contexts. We place IC at the centre of our investigation, and all the relevant concepts are understood in relation to how they help develop IC. For example, we only examine digital literacy with regards to how it enables IC in the digital environment and mitigates the pitfalls of digital media that might otherwise prevent IC development.

Then, we investigated the role of EIL in IC development to understand how perceptions of English and the power balance implied therein impact intercultural relationships and learning. Our approach to EIL departs from an emphasis on “English varieties”, “accents” or “Englishes”, as these concepts imply codification and attention to form while EIL is more dynamic, hybrid and function-oriented. We instead focus on the language of “diversity” and “different English uses and users”, which is both inclusive and egalitarian.

5. Findings

5.1. How can intercultural competences be cultivated in digital higher education?

5.1.1. General principles

Intercultural competences (IC) can be nurtured in digital education by focusing on developing mindsets, attitudes and behaviours that embrace the awareness and process of intercultural learning (Deardorff, 2020). According to Deardorff, this learning is lifelong and conducive to ever richer understanding. In the context of telecollaboration, which can encompass individuals or groups collaborating virtually with the aim of attaining pedagogical outcomes, Helm and Guth (2010) indicate the need for the institution and educators to scaffold learners to engage in the process of intercultural learning. This is opposed to the traditional structure in which the role of teachers and institutions is to impart knowledge. Our research has found three principles for initiating and sustaining this intercultural learning journey.

5.1.1.1. Designing digital education in a larger context of promoting social cohesion

Digital education needs to be carefully planned to facilitate IC development. Austin and Hunter (2013) show that increased contact between diverse groups of people does not naturally reduce racial prejudice; instead, they suggest that the nature of the contact makes a difference in forging genuine connections across difference. Similarly, Helm and Guth (2010) demonstrate that the use of online communication does not automatically facilitate intercultural learning. This space needs to be purposefully designed to address the tendency of online users to search for similar viewpoints (Godwin-Jones, 2019).

By supporting students to build their IC, educational institutions also contribute towards building social cohesion and equality. Austin and Hunter (2013) observe that while universities recognise the economic value of delivering intercultural programs, they are missing an opportunity to align

these programs with values such as equality and cooperation. They encourage educational institutions to identify opportunities to develop IC in their local, diverse communities, in addition to through internationalisation. Likewise, Rizvi (2020) argues that within the context of digital education, universities have an opportunity to critically analyse and decolonise traditional power dynamics between the university and students from culturally diverse backgrounds and devise more enriching approaches towards internationalisation. Together, these scholars have highlighted the necessity to design digital education in a way that opens it up to developing skills for a more just world.

5.1.1.2. Understanding culture and identity as complex and dynamic

Developing one's IC requires a recognition of the complexity of such an endeavour and appropriate pedagogies to support this development. IC involve engaging with multifarious, multi-layered and fluid interconnected constructs (Williams, 2019). When students are supported to explore their own cultural beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours in different intercultural contexts, they can often appreciate the complexity of identity in themselves and others (Williams, 2019). Similarly, Domingo (2012) points out the need for developing culturally responsive pedagogies with an emphasis on sociocultural consideration before cognitive performance. These insights resonate with Byram and Wagner (2018), who posit that digital education is sufficiently complex to afford learners an opportunity to build their cultural identity in a holistic and dynamic sense.

Educators play an important role in designing learning through engaging with difference. A common challenge of online communication is a tendency for people to focus on surface similarities over true engagement with difference (Pitts & Brooks, 2017). Using a critical discourse lens to analyse online discussions between students from the US and Singapore, Pitts and Brooks (2017) explored how the students positioned their nationalities and identities in relation to their peers. Although tensions were observed between open-mindedness and strong convictions, representing and rejecting America, and challenging and reifying stereotypes, the overall finding was that students focused on commonalities rather than engaging with difference (Pitts & Brooks, 2017). To go beyond surface-level intercultural exchange, Thorne (2016) suggests that it is useful to incorporate controversial topics for critical understandings of culture and identity. To facilitate such an exchange, Williams (2019) proposes a structured approach that progresses from topics of common interest such as culture and communication to more challenging topics such as stereotypes, unconscious bias, colonialism, power and privilege. The online discussions that this approach elicited showed remarkable growth in intercultural awareness and skills, respect and friendship across cultures and reconciliation with indigenous culture (Williams, 2019).

5.1.1.3. Developing digital literacy

Digital literacy plays a key role in cultivating IC in digital higher education. Yuan et al. (2019) found that scaffolding digital literacy in the teaching process can empower learners from diverse cultural backgrounds to become active participants in class, engage in meaningful discussion with their peers and develop a sense of connection to the learning community. Digital literacy enables students to become independent and inquisitive in using technologies and online resources to satisfy their learning needs, thus transgressing the passive role traditionally assumed for learners from non-dominant cultures (Yuan et al., 2019). This inclusive agency and connection afforded by increased digital literacy can enhance intercultural learning for all students.

In teaching digital literacy for IC development, it is important to ensure learners have equal access to digital tools and education about how to maximise their use. Limited access to digital resources can restrict learners' ability to communicate and learn in online platforms (Radovanović et al., 2015). Anthonysamy et al. (2020) found that students' frequent use of technologies for social media or other personal reasons does not mean they have the digital skills necessary for learning. Students need to be taught self-regulating strategies such as how to think critically and evaluate online sources, engage deeply with learning material, conduct themselves ethically in the online

environment and maximise social interaction for learning (Anthonysamy et al., 2020). These authors suggest these strategies need to be embedded in the digital curriculum as it requires a higher level of independence and self-discipline than a place-based curriculum.

Establishing a safe and constructive online environment is also key to engaging students in developing their IC. Despite the opportunities it provides for learning through connection, the Internet is not always “friendly or supportive”, and there is a risk of cyberbullying in online programs (Austin & Hunter, 2013, p. 6). Thus, safe practice, netiquette and a strong ethical code of conduct should be incorporated into the design and delivery of any digital education program. Orsini-Jones et al. (2017) propose a cyberpragmatic approach that promotes safe and polite behaviour in the online environment. They also point out that an effective online space must go beyond surface-level communication and not serve to compound existing stereotypes. To scaffold students’ IC development, educators need to prioritise socio-emotional skills for greater empathy and interpersonal connection (Chiang, 2020). These skills are a key component of digital literacy and can greatly facilitate online intercultural communication.

5.1.2. *Specific programs, activities and tools*

Research has emphasised the importance of integrating intercultural and global skills into curriculum so all students have access to developing them (Baroni et al., 2019). Our investigation has found that IC are best cultivated using both formal and informal, scaffolded and self-directed approaches to digital learning.

5.1.2.1. Story exchanges

Story exchanges have been used by IC practitioners to enhance intercultural learning in both digital and in-person contexts. Deardorff (2020) developed the Story Circles methodology in her UNESCO work, which enables participants to practise their IC skills by reflecting on shared personal experiences in a small group setting. This methodology requires the group facilitator to have intercultural knowledge and group facilitation experience and places emphasis on an open-minded, respectful and reflective practice. More specific to the online context, digital storytelling can support students in building their IC. Chiang (2020) defines digital storytelling as an umbrella term encompassing a diverse range of media activities, for example creating and sharing an artefact such as a video or poem which tells a story. Other communicative activities associated with digital storytelling include revising texts and ideas, conducting online research and seeking peer feedback on shared stories via social media, which contribute to critical reflection. Using a randomised control trial to test the impact of digital storytelling on critical thinking in civic engagement, Chan (2019) reported participants became less ethnocentric when engaging in digital storytelling, especially through reengaging with stories using interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue and being exposed to multimodal expression. This practice enables students to represent, through virtual means, aspects of their own identity and culture, helping the classroom to recognise the cultural diversity characterising Australia’s higher education. Furthermore, digital storytelling empowers students to become more confident and active in contributing their cultural knowledge (Chiang, 2020). These findings indicate that digital story exchanges can help institutions to draw on student diversity to support the pursuit of intercultural learning for all.

5.1.2.2. Use of diverse texts

Intercultural learning can be promoted using texts that are diverse in cultural content, form and mode. Wu and Li (2019) explored online encounters between US and Hong Kong university students. The students shared and commented on literary texts using Google Docs and were tasked with making them culturally relevant to their partners. The results showed the students developed cosmopolitan communicative competence and openness to other cultures. Concerned with a co-curricular program for undergraduate and graduate students in a Canadian university context, Williams (2019) report an effective use of media-rich material that drew on Deardorff’s (2006) cyclical concept of IC and the Indigenous holistic view of life and education. Similarly, Domingo

(2012) demonstrates the crucial role of multimodal texts in facilitating a fluid expression and understanding of cultures. Multimodality represents different modes of communication, is context-dependent and includes a wide range of media such as music, images, gestures, social interactions and tone of voice. These are all texts that should be used alongside page-bound media to ensure pedagogy can attune to learners' dynamic move across cultures and identities (Domingo, 2012). All this research emphasises the need to prompt open-minded and critical responses to texts, which encourages learners to engage deeply with their own and others' cultures.

5.1.2.3. Use of innovative and informal learning technology

Another avenue for developing IC has been the use of innovative and informal learning technology in and outside curriculum. In a Taiwanese context, Liaw (2019) used virtual reality technologies and game-based learning to enhance students' intercultural communication skills. Students were encouraged to participate in an open social virtual platform and share videos of their responses on Youtube. The study's participants showed increased learning engagement and intercultural performance. Research has also highlighted the benefits of using social media to motivate students in intercultural learning. Lee and Lee (2019) demonstrate that critical engagement in these platforms can encourage learners to adopt self-directed learning using their own devices. In other words, learners can be scaffolded to engage in online intercultural communication outside the classroom and learn in their own way throughout their lives. Lee and Lee (2019) found that supporting learners in this undertaking helped them to develop a positive intercultural perception of themselves and others. These studies suggest educators can raise learners' awareness of and strategies for tapping into the potential of innovative and informal digital learning technology for self-directed intercultural learning.

5.1.2.4. Assessment of IC

While more than 140 self-report measures of IC are available, a holistic assessment approach encompassing both self-report and multiple perspectives is recommended (Deardorff, 2014). Blair (2017) suggests that IC is too complex a construct to be assessed via a single inventory or method. To facilitate a clear articulation of IC development, he proposes that Deardorff's (2006) process model of IC be broken down into learning outcomes and specific indicators. For example, attributes such as respect and openness could be demonstrated via observable behaviours such as using inclusive language, acknowledging one's misconceptions and speaking about cultural differences in a positive way. As IC are multifaceted, clear priority is needed so that a program can focus on developing and assessing a few attributes at a time (Blair, 2017). Blair also recommends using both direct and indirect assessment methods that match the learning outcomes, e.g. assessing the ability to incorporate different viewpoints through reflective assignments and focus group work.

Assessment practices need to go beyond pre- and -post measures of IC development and provide students with opportunities to engage in authentic learning experiences, for example teamwork or project work. Deardorff (2014) advocates for IC assessments that promote multiple modes of engagement, place the learner at the centre, provide multiple ways to demonstrate knowledge, suit a broad range of learners and focus on the process rather than the product. Overviews of 29 case studies on IC assessment from different academic disciplines and countries, Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) highlight the broad range of assessments used including reflections, presentations, diaries, surveys, fieldwork, group and peer evaluation, portfolios and exams. The multimodality of e-portfolios creates a space for students to reflect and receive feedback on their IC development (Deardorff, 2014). Based on these ideas, educators can develop their own IC assessments to engage students in discussing and reflecting on their learning.

5.2. What role does English as an international language play in students' digital intercultural learning in Australia's higher education?

The principles and practices we have outlined so far all put a premium on using diversity-inclusive language. As intercultural competences (IC) embrace interaction across difference, the language

used needs to reflect and support all its users in negotiating their own places in intercultural communication (Sadeghpour, 2020). A critique of telecollaboration is that it reinforces homogenous notions of a national culture, which occurs when the native speaker becomes the cultural expert of a country (Byram & Wagner, 2018). In the case of English-speaking countries, English as an international language (EIL), as defined in Section 3, provides a robust approach to drawing on cultural diversity and connecting different users.

5.2.1. Equitable and practical paradigm

EIL goes beyond any English variety to represent a new educational paradigm that treats all users of English equitably. The EIL paradigm acknowledges differences between English varieties and English users, but it seeks to normalise and draw on these differences as a key source of intercultural learning (Marlina, 2014). EIL has begun to redress the historical hierarchy and inequity created by the notion of a standard or core use of English by recognising English speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds as legitimate users of the language (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011). Challenging the native-speaker model, Marlina (2014) demonstrates that EIL pedagogy has critically approached English as a heterogeneous language with multiple grammars, vocabularies, accents and pragmatic discourse conventions. The EIL paradigm offers a timely antidote to the worrying trend to universalising one or several types of English at the cost of subjugating all the other cultures which use English for international communication (Matsuda, 2017). This view places the value of English in it being pluricentric, dynamic and mutable, emphasising the central role of the context of use, which lends strong support to a fluid approach to IC development.

The EIL paradigm is not just equitable or ethical but also necessary in a practical sense. Marlina (2014) points out that 80% of the communication occurring in English globally has happened between bi or multilingual and multicultural English speakers. EIL pedagogy reflects this diversity and offers the scope to use it for IC development (Zacharias, 2014). An EIL approach seeks to raise students' awareness of the diversity they can expect to encounter (Matsuda, 2018) and develop their ability to communicate and work in linguistically and culturally diverse environments (Matsuda, 2018; Matsuda & Friedrich, 2011).

5.2.2. Purpose of English over form

Apart from embracing diversity, an EIL approach helps develop IC by prioritising the purpose of English over form. While trying to achieve the native-speaker model is exhausting and confidence-sapping for most non-native users of English, all learners can be supported to communicate their ideas and to connect to others. In other words, while form is elusive and prescriptive, purpose can be personalised and empowering. Bailey and Gruber (2020), through a mixed method case study of a virtual exchange project between Germany and Colombia, found that the model of non-native to non-native exchange in English had a highly positive impact on students' understanding of pluricultural concepts and communicative competence. The authors suggest that students learn more from each other when they no longer need to worry about being judged for the form of their English, and when the emphasis is on intelligibility and intercultural understanding.

Intelligibility has been consistently underscored in the EIL approach with a view to promoting mutual learning rather than adopting the native speaker's linguistic and cultural norms in an unquestioning way (Sadeghpour, 2020). Aimed at competent use of English in international contexts (Matsuda, 2017), EIL is highly flexible and adaptable at both local and global levels, dynamic in its perception of identity and nurturing of intercultural communities while discouraging discriminatory labelling of different English users (Sadeghpour, 2020). All these features align with an IC approach that espouses multiculturalism towards effective collaboration (Helm & Guth, 2010).

5.2.3. Transformative perception of self in relation to others

Through the diversity-inclusive nature of EIL and its focus on purpose over form, IC are cultivated in learners' changing view of themselves and others. Bailey and Gruber (2020) indicate that the non-native to non-native telecollaboration approach used in their case study led to decreased anxiety among English learners and improved confidence in themselves as active social agents. Similarly, a mixed methods investigation into digital storytelling at a Taiwanese university (Chiang, 2020) showed a heightened sense of competence as the EIL students came to see themselves as "legitimate user[s]" of English (p. 66). This study suggests that an EIL focus encourages students to contribute their own perspectives, which facilitates the development of authentic voice, communication skills, digital literacy and self-efficacy – all important components of IC in the digital age. Enhanced perceptions of EIL, such as elicited through informal digital practices (Lee & Lee, 2019), are linked to greater enjoyment and motivation in learning through improved self-confidence to participate in intercultural communication. Lee and Lee (2019) also provide a validated EIL perception scale that helps one to clarify their own understanding of the current status of English, varieties of English and strategies for multilingual/multicultural communication. Together, these studies have shown ways in which EIL practices have supported an intercultural view of the role of English in the world today and one's own agency in this new order.

5.2.4. The relocation of culture

Another critical contribution of EIL pedagogy to IC development has been the relocation of cultural contents and contexts from an overwhelming focus on native English-speaking cultures to local and global cultures. Zacharias (2014) examined how teacher-trainees in an Indonesian context questioned whose cultures should be taught in EIL practice and how they relocated culture in their own teaching. The results from analysing interviews, teaching journals and lesson plans showed progressively nuanced understandings of culture that were open to difference and recognised the need to include local cultures including food and social phenomena. While the student-teachers negotiated the dominant native-speaker model by bringing local cultures into the classroom, they reported challenges in deciding the content of a multicultural society. Zacharia (2014) highlighted the need to consider both the teachers and learners' cultures and to move away from a reified view of culture. This study suggests that a critical use of EIL shifts the traditional sole focus on the target culture to a broader consideration of the learners' culture, the global culture and their future interlocutors' culture, enabling learners to become cultural explorers. This contextualised relocation of culture is essential to IC development as it helps learners to recognise that no one culture, whether the target culture or the learner's own culture, is the only culture worth learning. Thus, EIL learners are enabled to move fluidly between different cultural communities with critical reflection (Canagarajah, 2005).

6. Discussion

Our research has generated important insights into general principles and specific methods for enhancing intercultural competences (IC) in digital higher education in Australia and globally. A central finding has been the need for a broad view of culture and identity that addresses the fluid complexities of an increasingly digitised global world towards greater social cohesion. Here, developing learners' digital capabilities is an enabling factor.

The cultivation of IC can become even more meaningful when international education stops being perceived solely in monetary terms. Rizvi (2020) cautions that digital technologies have been treated largely as a tool to retain the revenue from international students during COVID-19 travel restrictions. There is strong evidence that digital international education has not risen above a narrow commercial lens (Austin & Hunter, 2013; Pitts & Brooks, 2017; Rizvi, 2020). To support IC development in this context, educators need to focus on a holistic picture featuring educational and cultural offerings alongside the cognitive.

Digital education has also been viewed in deficit terms – as a lesser experience compared to in-person delivery. The cultivation of digital IC relies on moving away from this binary thinking to embrace the potential of digital education for designing a new space for intercultural learning to happen at scale, unconstrained by time, space, chance or limited student mobility programs (Baroni et al., 2019). IC development in this space requires the articulation and pursuit of a clear purpose.

Our research also indicates the critical role of practising the EIL paradigm for IC development in the online space. Embracing EIL in pedagogy can translate into diversity-inclusive programs that prioritise the purpose of English over form. EIL practices can also transform teachers' and learners' perception of themselves in relation to others and relocate culture from a reified target culture towards more pluricentric, sophisticated and dynamic intercultural understandings.

EIL pedagogy is not without its criticisms. Marlina (2014) raised important questions about the practicality of this paradigm in a world where the notion of Standard English still prevails. Our research shows that adopting EIL perceptions and practices can focus higher education agendas on the function and real-world uses of English, where users constantly negotiate meaning. Different from other languages, English has grown in status because of colonialism and imperialism on a global scale (Matsuda, 2018). Thus, the English-embracing system in education must redress the injustice the spread of English has caused rather than treating its use as an ideology-free endeavour, which could create even more injustice. The worst injustice could be that learners internalise native-speaker standards that are not attainable, sustainable or even socially constructive (Pham & Tran, 2015). English acts on a different dimension from the mainly technical concern of learning other languages because it is used as an international language to represent different users. To engage with English in today's world is to engage with the global politics of cultural superiority and subjugation. EIL brings these issues to the forefront of intercultural teaching and learning, and it is this paradigm shift that makes EIL endeavours worthwhile. EIL practices can boost IC development when educators are willing to engage with cultural complexity and move away from a prescriptive paradigm. If the concern is to retain the prestige of Anglo-Australian English and use it as a selling point for Australian institutions, EIL can offer more appeal by helping them become more progressive, inclusive and empowering.

Finally, what emerges from our research is the prevalence of the misconception that IC are for non-native speakers of English to develop, which reflects a one-way transmission model that naturalises a codified version of the native-speaker culture. Also, despite our wide scope of research, it appears the use of digital technologies and EIL for IC development largely exists within the English Language Teaching field rather than across higher education. All students, not just English learners, will benefit from a genuine, well-designed process of intercultural learning.

7. Implications for higher education

The expansion of digital education allows and necessitates the imagining of “new pedagogic possibilities” (Peters et al., 2020, p. 3), which can facilitate intercultural learning and create an equitable student experience. Deardorff (2020) cautions that online IC tools require high levels of self-motivation, and so regular support needs to be built into digital learning design. Our research has highlighted the value of well-crafted online programs, digital story exchanges, the use of diverse texts, innovative technologies and informal learning channels and multimodal assessments for learners' IC development.

An interesting question is not just how higher education can integrate diversity in its programs, but also how it can attract, engage and provide a deeper sense of belonging to students from diverse backgrounds. To this end, IC and EIL can be promoted at scale to show recognition of learners' different contexts and purposes. As English belongs to all its users, learners should be encouraged to own and appropriate the language to serve their goals.

To help achieve these desirable outcomes, institutions can:

1. run an IC development program using EIL to engage all students in working on their skills at a local and international level. This can eradicate the deficit language model and shift the attention from form to the purpose and use of English in the world. An EIL focus means articulating a clear purpose for learning, viewing learners' first language as a valuable resource in achieving this purpose and being open to translation when needed (McKay, 2018). EIL practices also involve raising awareness of different norms and strategies for responding to different intercultural contexts, preparing students for the possibility of misunderstanding and exploring the language they would need to clarify meaning. A key part of these practices is helping students to surface cultural assumptions and explore cultural content in texts and other learning materials they may not be familiar with.
3. identify opportunities within global mobility programs to enable students to develop and articulate their IC rather than simply have a cross-cultural experience.
4. ensure all learners have access to digital tools and opportunities to develop digital IC.
5. implement story exchanges to promote understanding, connection and belonging, for example during Orientation or the start of a program.
6. run an Orientation workshop on EIL.
7. institutionalise the use of disciplinary texts by culturally diverse authors.

These practices can enable students from all language and cultural backgrounds to see that they can succeed not despite, but because of their own ways of speaking, learning, being and becoming in the world.

Educators should be supported with guidelines about how to embed IC development opportunities and EIL practices into the curriculum. These guidelines could be part of the professional training offered to educators. Resources including LMS modules could be co-created with an institution's student partners and relevant bodies to support teachers and learners to develop their IC. Institutions can provide funding, such as Learning and Teaching Initiative grants, to support educators to embed IC and EIL practices in their curricula.

Effective assessment is key to engaging learners in IC development. Deardorff (2017) recommends five steps in assessment design: *define* what is being assessed, *prioritise* specific IC being developed, *align* these competences to the assessment, *identify evidence* that the learner will need to collate to demonstrate their competences and *use the assessment* to support learners to develop their IC. Assessments should emphasise the learning process over numerical outcomes and highlight how this knowledge can help learners to make a worthwhile contribution towards improving society as an engaged global citizen (Deardorff, 2017). Although educators may find the idea of promoting IC challenging, they can start small and incorporate intercultural learning in regular assessments, for example by asking students to write a brief reflection on how they have developed one intercultural skill through their coursework (Deardorff, 2017).

Future research can investigate IC and EIL practices in curriculum to provide empirical evidence of digital pedagogies across disciplines. Our inquiry also leaves open the question of how a learner's first language can be tapped into within the EIL paradigm. Despite our effort to include diverse education contexts, the papers we reviewed might still reflect a leaning towards a western view of IC. A stronger focus on indigenous perspectives can balance and enrich a future research agenda into intercultural learning. Another important avenue for future research is exploring how IC can equip both educators and learners to engage in antiracism. This involves using one's privilege to challenge policies and behaviours which are racist (Byrd et al., 2021).

Acknowledgements

We thank the Association for Academic Language and Learning for awarding us a research and resource development grant, which has enabled us to embark on this learning journey. We thank all the intercultural learners we have met along the way for their invaluable insight and feedback.

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