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Current practices and future directions in Sustainable Development Goal 4 through intercultural competence in general English program curricula

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Abstract

Growing public awareness of quality education is largely driven by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which emphasizes the importance of inclusive and equitable quality education for all, including the cultivation of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence, which enables effective cross-cultural communication, is essential for promoting global citizenship and sustainable development. Because of the under exploration of research into the alignment of teaching intercultural competence in higher educational general English curricula and SDG4, this review paper aims to examine (1) the current practices of embedding intercultural competence in general English program curricula in higher education, both globally and in Vietnam, (2) the challenges and barriers to incorporating intercultural competence into these curricula to align with SDG4, and offer (3) implications for curriculum development by fostering intercultural competence for educational stakeholders. This paper is hoped to contribute to the enhancement of more effective English language programs that prepare learners for the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: intercultural competence, general English program curricula, sustainability development goal 4, SDG 4, current practices, future direction, higher education

Current practices and future directions in Sustainable Development Goal 4 through intercultural competence in general English program curricula

1. Introduction

Global education is undergoing a transformation driven by the urgent need to address pressing global challenges and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United Nations. Among these, SGD 4 - quality education - aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", which is a key force behind progress highlighting the transformational potential of education in developing the world of sustainability and equity (UNESCO, 2015). Specifically, UNESCO targets all learners who must be ensured to acquire to necessary knowledge and skills for sustainable development via "education for sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2015). As a result, education must not only focus on knowledge and skills but also cultivate the capacity for intercultural understanding and empathy.

Intercultural competence, which is defined as a set of skills allowing one to work well in a cross-cultural environment (Ashwill & Oanh, 2009), plays a pivotal role in promoting globalized citizens. From that, the need to foster intercultural competence among learners, especially ones in higher education who will become employed in overseas job markets and multinational workplaces, has arisen. Besides that, programs teaching English, which is considered a lingua franca, are essential for fostering students' intercultural competency in higher education as learning a language and its culture are "inseparable" (Mazari & Derraz, 2015, p.354). Achieving intercultural awareness has become a prerequisite for effective intercultural communication in English language instruction (Yilmaz & Özkan, 2016). By incorporating intercultural competence into these programs, institutions can equip their learners with the knowledge, attitude, and skills needed for the preparation for being a globalized citizen.

Still, there have been some problems related to teaching foreign languages and culture in the world. Even though the notion that teaching foreign languages will improve students' awareness of and pride in their own society is expressly mentioned in various education systems' declarations regarding the goals of the program, some educators and students may find it goes against their goals of focusing solely on the language and culture of the other (Byram & Masuhara, 2013). Even worse, some teachers in some parts of the world "still ignore the importance of teaching culture as a part of language study" (p.29) as they feel that they do not have sufficient time to teach culture because of very strict curriculum (Gonen & Saglam, 2012).

This review aims to address the gap by examining the current state of intercultural competence in English language curricula, both globally and in Vietnam. To achieve this objective, the current study will answer the following research questions:

- What are the current practices of embedding intercultural competence in General English program curricula in higher education in the world and in Vietnam?
- What are the implications for integrating intercultural competence into General English program curricula in higher education to achieve SDG4?

This paper first discusses the definitions and components of intercultural competence and its relevance to English language education. It then examines how intercultural competence is currently integrated into higher education curricula, the challenges faced by educators in doing so, and its impact on students' outcomes, particularly in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 4. Then, some implications are presented for developing curricula in English language education with the integration with intercultural competence. Finally,

the paper wraps up with a concluding remark.

2. Literature review

2.1 Intercultural Competence and Its Relevance to English Language Education

The concept "intercultural competence" is defined to have different core components. While some scholars define it to have 3 core components such as attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Deardoff, 2011), Barrett (2012) argues that the components of intercultural competence include behaviors in addition to attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Besides that, the concept "knowledge" as one of the core components of intercultural competence has also been elaborated upon by several scholars, emphasizing different aspects related to cultural understanding and communication. Across various definitions, a central focus lies in "knowledge of self (and own society or social group) and of the other (and their society or social group" (Byram & Masuhara, 2013, pp. 148-149). Firstly, cultural self-awareness is an understanding of one's cultural identity and how it shapes interactions. Both Deardoff (2006, as cited in Deardoff, 2011) and Barrett (2012) highlight cultural self-awareness as foundational, while Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) extend this idea by emphasizing the intersections of cultural identity with factors such as race, class, gender, and religion. In addition to self-awareness, scholars agree on the importance of recognizing differences across cultures. For instance, Deardoff (2006) and Barrett (2012) emphasize culture-specific knowledge, including understanding the perspectives, practices, and communicative conventions of particular groups. Similarly, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) address the need for awareness of similarities and differences, particularly as they relate to cultural identity and communication. Specifically, according to Byram and Masuhara (2013), the objectives of knowledge in intercultural competence focus on understanding historical, cultural, social, and institutional factors that influence interactions and perceptions between individuals from different countries. Possessing such knowledge enables individuals to recognize how national histories and perspectives shape interactions, identify causes of misunderstanding, know how social differences, geography, and institutions are perceived across cultures, and understand social norms and interactions in different countries to enhance communication.

The second core component of intercultural competence is attitude. Barrett (2012) categorizes this component as having "respect for other cultures; curiosity about other cultures; willingness to learn about other cultures; openness to people from other cultures; willingness to suspend judgement; willingness to tolerate ambiguity, and valuing cultural diversity" (p.25). In the same vein, Deardorff (2006, as cited in Deardorff, 2011) simplifies the definition of attitude with four constituents, namely respect (valuing different cultures), openness (rather than expressing judgement), curiosity and discovery (accepting uncertainty).

Skills, another important aspect of intercultural competence, are comprised of the following skills: "to listen, observe and evaluate; to analyze, interpret and relate", according to Deardorff (2006, as cited in Deardorff, 2011, p.67). Specifically, Barrett (2012) specifies this component as follows:

> *"skills of listening to people from other cultures; skills of interacting with people from other cultures; skills of adapting to other cultural environments; linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication; skills in mediating intercultural exchanges; skills in discovering information about other cultures; skills of interpreting cultures and relating cultures to one another; empathy; multiperspectivity; cognitive flexibility; and skills in critically evaluating cultural perspectives, practices and products, including those of one's own culture" (p.25).*

In terms of English language education, the integration of intercultural competence knowledge into the English language instruction curriculum is essential. According to Tran and Duong (2018, p.1), "the ultimate goals in the field of English language education are to present learners with cultural differences which help learners to be interculturally aware of their own culture and the presence of otherness as well as to appreciate and

respect them." Similarly, Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2012) state that learners in English learning programs should be well-equipped with intercultural communication competence to utilize it in an effective way to help them overcome cultural barriers and establish more cooperative relationships.

2.2 Current Landscapes: Integrating Intercultural Competence in Tertiary English Language Curricula

"The potential for intercultural understanding to be embedded in the curriculum is increasing in some countries" (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p.458). Teaching intercultural communication, as defined by Byram and Masuhara (2013) as having the knowledge of one's own culture and the others, aims to help students to investigate their own and the target language culture and explore their similarities and differences (Piątkowska, 2015). The approaches for establishing intercultural competency which have been the focus of researchers and educators in foreign language teaching are "knowledge-based approach, contrastive approach, and intercultural communicative competence approach" (Piątkowska, 2015, p.2).

Knowledge-based approach

The knowledge-based approach to teaching cultural competence in a foreign language classroom views culture as a separate domain from language competence (Thanasoulas, 2001). This approach prioritizes the learner's ability to read target language literature and emphasizes the mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and the four basic language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). The knowledge-based approach aims to transmit factual information about the target culture, encompassing high culture such as literature, arts, history, and low culture namely customs, holidays, daily life, and institutional structures (Hinkel, 2001). However, this approach has been criticized for treating learners as passive recipients of non-experiential knowledge, leading to the accumulation of facts without deeper understanding or practical application (Piątkowska, 2015).

Contrastive approach

This approach highlights the similarities and differences between the learner's own culture and the target language culture (Thanasoulas, 2001). This approach encourages learners to find connections and bridge the gap between their cultural background and the target culture (Piątkowska, 2015). However, the contrastive approach often perceives the target culture as a "monolithic" entity (Guest, 2002, p.157), overlooking the intercultural nature of most interactions, which occur between individuals or small groups rather than entire cultures. This approach and knowledge-based perspectives have been criticized for only developing factual knowledge and not helping students to develop the analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting skills of culture (Piątkowska, 2015).

Intercultural communicative competence approach

Unlike knowledge-based and contrastive approach, both of which are criticized for not helping students analyze, evaluate, and interpret cultural meanings, beliefs and values (Piątkowska, 2015), intercultural communicative competence (ICC) approach provides a more holistic perspective recognizing the interconnectedness of language and culture. This approach acknowledges English as a lingua franca which is used for communication between both native and non-native speakers and rejects the notion of a native speaker as the sole role model (Marczak, 2010).

Several methods to develop intercultural communicative competence in a foreign language classroom can be experiential learning, using new technology, integrating intercultural competency challenges into foreign language courses (Piątkowska, 2015) in which some modern English language teaching methods are ultilized (Savignon, 2001; Stathers, 2008). Experiential learning is one of the approaches for students to develop their intercultural competence (Perry & Southwell, 2011), allowing them to engage with diverse cultures, apply their knowledge, and reflect on their experiences. Firstly, learners are provided with collaborative learning environments in which they can interact with peers from diverse backgrounds (UNESCO, 2021) to foster not only their language learning but also their cultural understanding (Byram & Feng, 2004). For example, in Liu's (2017) study in Taiwan, the researcher integrates experiential learning into intercultural and language instruction by inviting several international students as guest speakers so that the students can enhance not only their

English but also their learning of culture via real interactions. Another method for experiential learning is exemplified by UNESCO Story Circles in which groups of students, especially international students, practice listening for understanding and sharing their life experiences to one another (Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2023). Secondly, repetitive visits abroad (Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002) and student exchanges (Keller, 1990; Byram et al., 2002) are found to have a close relation to fostering intercultural competence. However, these are not always possible to all language learners, so a more feasible approach is using classroom-based pedagogies to expose students to authentic tasks or activities such as simulations or role-play with the guidance from the teacher (Byram et al., 2002).

Another approach to enhance students' intercultural competence is via the use of new technologies, especially the Internet (Piątkowska, 2015). Foreign language teachers have been using web-based technologies as a tool to facilitate intercultural interactions (Perry & Southwell, 2011). Without a doubt, new technologies are frequently employed as a kind of substitute or alternative to experiential learning due to their possibility to link students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds (Piątkowska, 2015).

Other English language teaching methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Savignon, 2001) or inquiry-based learning (Stathers, 2008) currently used by tertiary educators and embedded in foreign language curriculum are also a way of promoting students' cultural awareness. Communicative Language Teaching is a method which resonates with intercultural communicative approach as it places a strong emphasis on helping students develop attitudes of tolerance, open-mindedness, and empathy for different cultures (Savignon, 2001). Besides, students are taught through inquiry-based learning that individuals might have a variety of worldviews and that it is important to consider and respect various viewpoints without necessarily agreeing with them (Stathers, 2008).

The increasing need for incorporating intercultural element into English language teaching curriculum has been recognized and proved its effectiveness in some studies in the world (Tran & Duong, 2018; Wimontham et al., 2024; Liu, 2017). In Vietnamese context, the study by Tran and Duong (2018) shows that the model of intercultural communicative language teaching is effective in significantly improving students' both their intercultural and English competence after 13-week curriculum deeply being exposed to intercultural materials in their English lessons. Similarly, the study by Wimontham et al. (2024) also focuses on developing and evaluating the ICC teaching model specially design for Thai EFL tertiary students who also show the improvements in their intercultural knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness.

2.3 *Challenges and Barriers to Integrating Knowledge of Intercultural Competence*

2.3.1. Institutional Priorities and Internationalization Efforts

Universities globally are intensifying their internationalization efforts to attract international students, foster global partnerships, and equip graduates for success in global careers. However, achieving these goals requires more than just expanding institutional reach; it demands integrating ICC into the academic curriculum. Despite its significance, ICC development is often overlooked or inadequately addressed within university frameworks, creating a gap between stated internationalization goals and students' actual readiness for global engagement. Research highlights the essential role of interdisciplinary collaboration in advancing internationalization by connecting diverse academic fields. For instance, Urata et al. (2023) underscore that higher education institutions must integrate global competencies into their curricula through interdisciplinary research and global partnerships, ensuring students acquire relevant international skills. Similarly, Melin (2014) emphasizes that connecting foreign language programs with sustainability studies can enhance students' translingual and transcultural competencies, aligning academic goals with global professional demands. These perspectives reflect the critical need for universities to rethink curriculum design by embedding ICC as a core objective of their internationalization agendas.

Further studies underscore this need. Xiuwen and Razali (2020) highlight the challenges international

students face due to insufficient ICC training, including language anxiety and cultural shock, reinforcing the urgency for integrated support systems in internationalization strategies. Similarly, Youfi and Brigui (2024) emphasize the necessity for personalized teacher training to bridge cultural understanding in EFL contexts, ensuring that educators can effectively navigate diverse classrooms.

The inclusion of ICC is also influenced by national education policies. Thieu (2024) found that in Vietnam, despite policy-level acknowledgment of ICC's importance, its implementation often relies on individual teachers due to insufficient institutional support. This highlights a disjunction between policy and practice, necessitating systemic change for sustainable ICC integration. Moreover, integrating AI-driven adaptive learning technologies can further support ICC by providing personalized learning environments tailored to students' cultural contexts (Strielkowski et al., 2024). These technologies enhance the learning experience by offering culturally relevant scenarios, thereby promoting intercultural understanding and reducing cultural barriers. Taken together, these findings suggest that universities must adopt a holistic approach that includes interdisciplinary curriculum design, personalized faculty training, supportive policies, and innovative technological integration to foster meaningful ICC development.

2.3.1. Faculty Training and Development

Faculty members are central to fostering ICC among students, yet they often lack the training or expertise needed to integrate intercultural content into their teaching. Research indicates that educators tend to rely on familiar pedagogical approaches, which may not effectively promote ICC development without targeted professional development. This challenge underscores the necessity of institutional support for continuous faculty training in culturally responsive teaching practices.

Jodoin and Singer (2019) argue that embedding Education for ESD into language teaching requires faculty training that aligns pedagogical strategies with sustainability goals, fostering intercultural learning. Additionally, Melin (2014) highlights the importance of interdisciplinary faculty collaboration in promoting ICC through curriculum reforms that bridge foreign language education with sustainability studies. These insights suggest that training initiatives should extend beyond subject-specific knowledge, equipping faculty with the skills to navigate complex cultural and interdisciplinary contexts effectively. Moreover, Jones (2020) emphasizes that structured online faculty development programs can enhance instructors' abilities to implement ICC-related content in remote teaching environments. Similarly, Nafisah et al. (2024) advocate for integrating experiential learning workshops to help educators develop cross-cultural teaching competencies. Faculty mentoring programs and international exchange initiatives have also proven effective in fostering intercultural competence among educators (Strielkowski et al., 2024) in their AI-supported training model.

2.3.3. Resource Constraints and Curriculum Overload

Integrating ICC into an already dense academic curriculum presents significant challenges, particularly when universities face limited resources. Constraints such as insufficient funding, limited time, and a lack of specialized expertise often hinder the development and implementation of ICC training programs. These challenges are especially pronounced in academic environments where traditional disciplines dominate, making it difficult to incorporate emerging fields that may not seem immediately relevant to existing curricula.

Much research has underscored these challenges. For example, El Gourari and Ed-dali (2024) demonstrate how incorporating SDGs into English language textbooks in Morocco was constrained by limited institutional resources, affecting the comprehensiveness of SDG-related content. Similarly, Vásquez et al. (2021) found that sustainability education in Chilean primary school textbooks suffered from a narrow focus on content due to time and resource limitations, highlighting the struggle of balancing emerging educational priorities with existing academic demands. These findings suggest that institutional commitments to ICC must be accompanied by targeted investments in capacity building, staff training, and curriculum development. Moreover, studies by Pasara and Ambele (2024) further highlight that ICC integration often requires educational policies that provide

direct financial support and strategic partnerships with industry experts to overcome institutional funding gaps. The deployment of AI-powered educational platforms has also been proposed as a cost-effective means of delivering customized ICC training, minimizing resource dependency while ensuring broad curriculum coverage (Chen & Wei, 2024).

2.3.4. Contextual Relevance and Cultural Sensitivity

International frameworks for ICC offer valuable theoretical foundations, but their applicability can be limited when local cultural contexts are not adequately considered. Adapting these frameworks to align with regional cultural norms and values is essential for ensuring that ICC training is both relevant and effective. This adaptation necessitates a deep cultural understanding and a commitment to embedding culturally sensitive practices into the educational curriculum.

Leite (2022) emphasizes that global citizenship education must be context-specific, noting that integrating SDGs into national curricula requires local cultural adaptations to enhance effectiveness. Similarly, Comfort (2023) highlights the need for customizing SDG-related educational content to reflect diverse cultural realities while promoting global competencies. These perspectives stress the importance of tailoring international frameworks to cultural contexts to ensure meaningful ICC development. Recent empirical studies also support this approach. Thieu (2024) notes that Vietnamese EFL curricula often lack cultural customization, limiting students' ability to develop comprehensive ICC skills. In the same vein, Nafisah et al. (2024) suggest that culturally grounded teacher training programs improve educators' capacity to address cultural diversity effectively. Technological solutions like AI-powered adaptive learning platforms can also create culturally responsive learning environments by tailoring content to specific cultural contexts (Strielkowski et al., 2024).

In short, ICC into higher education faces critical challenges, including institutional priorities emphasizing global reach over ICC development, limited faculty training in culturally responsive teaching, and resource constraints that restrict curriculum innovation. Universities struggle to align internationalization goals with students' readiness for global engagement, often overlooking ICC in academic programs. Faculty may lack specialized training and rely on familiar pedagogies, while limited funding, time, and expertise exacerbate curriculum integration difficulties. Addressing these issues requires targeted investments, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and culturally adaptive education policies.

2.4 Impact on Student Outcomes and Alignment with Sustainability Goals

ICC development positively influences student outcomes, enhancing critical thinking, empathy, and global awareness. This aligns with UNESCO's SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education. By fostering intercultural understanding, students become culturally aware global citizens capable of promoting sustainable and inclusive societies.

Research supports these claims extensively. Yu et al. (2024) found that integrating sustainability into ELT fosters critical thinking and global responsibility, enabling students to engage with environmental and social issues. Similarly, Nakamura and Fujimoto (2024) conducted a quantitative study showing that sustainability-focused curricula improved students' language skills and environmental consciousness, underscoring the dual benefits of education that targets both learning and sustainability. In addition, Martyushev et al. (2021) emphasized that incorporating digital communication tools in foreign language teaching supports interactive learning and social engagement, which are critical for developing intercultural and sustainability competencies. Besides, Maijala et al. (2023) highlighted that pre-service language teachers recognized sustainability's ecological, social, and cultural dimensions, suggesting that integrating sustainability in teacher education fosters critical thinking and empathy. Moreover, Goulah (2008) advocated for transformative language education emphasizing environmental and cultural sustainability, promoting socio-political awareness and global citizenship. Similarly, Namsaeng and Ambele (2024) argued that embedding ICC in tertiary English education fosters critical thinking by encouraging students to analyze diverse cultural perspectives and challenge

ethnocentric worldviews.

Furthermore, technological advancements have further strengthened ICC and sustainability education. Strielkowski et al. (2024) demonstrated how AI-powered adaptive learning systems can enhance cultural awareness by offering personalized, culturally sensitive learning paths. Similarly, Chen and Wei (2024) found that AI-driven educational platforms improve students' intercultural communication competencies by facilitating real-time, cross-cultural interaction in virtual environments. Additionally, Nafisah et al. (2024) emphasized that intercultural learning experiences in digital classrooms promote empathy and cooperation among diverse student groups, reinforcing sustainable communication practices. This perspective aligns with the findings of Zhang (2024), who explored the integration of AI in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), showcasing how adaptive technologies foster continuous intercultural learning.

These findings collectively underscore the pivotal role of ICC development in advancing SDG 4 through culturally responsive and sustainability-focused education. As a result, a comprehensive approach integrating digital tools, culturally adaptive curricula, and interdisciplinary teaching can significantly enhance students' global competency, empathy, and environmental responsibility.

3. Proposed implications for curriculum development by enhancing knowledge intercultural competence

To better incorporate intercultural knowledge into English language courses, curriculum designers should adopt culturally responsive frameworks that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. This includes integrating culturally relevant materials such as case studies, real-world scenarios, and localized content featuring intercultural interactions. Interdisciplinary collaboration with experts in cultural studies, linguistics, and education for sustainable development can further embed intercultural competencies holistically into language curricula (Maijala et al., 2023). Additionally, involving stakeholders such as community leaders and industry representatives can help align course content with societal needs (Bodis, 2020; Mpuangnan & Ntombela, 2024; Nesterova et al., 2022). Emerging research underscores the role of AI-driven adaptive learning platforms in facilitating personalized learning paths that align with students' cultural contexts (Strielkowski et al., 2024). For instance, Chen and Wei (2024) argue that AI-powered learning environments enhance intercultural communication by fostering adaptive learning and enabling cross-cultural collaboration. These tools can dynamically adjust learning content, making language education more culturally attuned.

However, implementing intercultural content can face challenges such as limited resources, faculty expertise, and resistance to curriculum change. To address these issues, universities should establish faculty development programs focused on intercultural pedagogy and global competency training. Partnerships with global education organizations like UNESCO or the Global Citizenship Education initiative can facilitate resource sharing and offer implementation support (Bedir, 2021; Martyushev et al., 2021). Institutional policies promoting flexibility and innovation in curriculum design can also help mitigate resistance to change (Nesterova et al., 2022). Additionally, enhancing faculty training through online modules and virtual workshops has been shown to improve teaching effectiveness in intercultural contexts (Jones, 2020). Faculty can benefit from AI-enabled professional development platforms that provide real-time feedback and tailored learning experiences.

Furthermore, digital tools can play a transformative role in fostering intercultural competence. Online language exchange platforms, virtual cultural workshops, and interactive storytelling tools can facilitate authentic intercultural communication experiences. Moreover, real-time collaborative projects with students from different countries provide immersive learning opportunities, fostering both linguistic and cultural fluency (Martyushev et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2024). Integrating AI-powered language apps can offer personalized learning paths, catering to diverse student needs and enhancing engagement (Chen & Wei, 2024). Moreover, MALL applications with AI capabilities can adjust content complexity and provide real-time feedback, significantly enhancing language skills development (Zhang, 2024). Moreover, culturally adaptive AI-driven platforms can support continuous intercultural learning by simulating real-world communication scenarios.

By aligning these strategies with knowledge-based ICC, universities can empower students with the intercultural and linguistic skills necessary for thriving in a globalized world. These approaches also directly support the achievement of SDG 4 by promoting inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education that prepares students to address real-world challenges. For example, students trained in culturally adaptive environments are better equipped to engage in international collaboration, contribute to multicultural workplaces, and support community development initiatives. To ensure effective implementation, educational leaders must prioritize capacity-building measures, such as faculty development programs and investments in digital tools. Policymakers and institutional leaders can also play a pivotal role by promoting interdisciplinary collaborations and fostering partnerships with global education initiatives. Finally, by monitoring the outcomes of these strategies through qualitative and quantitative metrics, universities can refine their approaches to ensure alignment with both student needs and sustainability goals. In short, by fostering intercultural competence within language curricula, universities not only prepare students for global citizenship but also contribute to creating inclusive societies and addressing the interconnected challenges of the 21st century.

4. Conclusion

Integrating intercultural competence intro tertiary English language curricula is increasingly recognized as essential to equipping students with the skills to thrive in a worldwide society. English language instruction is in line with the more general objectives of cultural awareness and global citizenship when teachers place a strong emphasis on intercultural understanding, which develops students' capacity to assess, analyze, and interpret various cultural viewpoints. There are three main strategies offering different frameworks for accomplishing this integration: knowledge-based, contrastive, and intercultural communicative competence approaches. The ICC approach, on the other hand, successfully connects language and culture through its holistic viewpoint and experiential learning opportunities, giving students the tools they need to interact meaningfully across cultural boundaries. Despite its potential, ICC's incorporation into English curriculum is hindered by a number of issues such as institutional priorities, a lack of faculty training, the overload of curriculum, resource constraints, and a lack of cultural customization in culture-specific contexts.

The proposed implications highlight the adoption of culturally sensitive frameworks that integrate interdisciplinary approaches, real-world scenarios, and localized content for curriculum development. Programs for faculty development that emphasize intercultural pedagogy and global competencies are essential for giving them the skills they need to promote ICC. Besides, utilizing cutting-edge technologies, such as AI-driven adaptive learning systems or MALL, provides creative ways to improve cultural engagement, customize instruction, and mimic real-world communication. Ultimately, incorporating ICC into English language courses aligns with the goals of SDG4 in enabling students to become culturally aware of their global citizenship and be a part of inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive education settings.

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