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Article

English as a Medium of Intercultural Pedagogy: Building Global Competence in Higher Education

Juan Primitivo Pulido Petrola
Pangasinan State University
Correspondence: jppetrola.lingayen@psu.edu.ph

Abstract

This study examined the role of English as intercultural pedagogy in Philippine higher education, focusing on faculty and student perceptions of its effectiveness in fostering global competence, intercultural dialogue, and inclusivity. Drawing on qualitative data from faculty and student responses, the findings reveal that English functions not only as a medium of instruction but also as a bridge to global competence. Both students and faculty emphasized that English enables access to international academic resources, scholarly networks, and intercultural exchanges, positioning learners within global conversations. English was also perceived as a pedagogical strategy, with faculty using it to integrate multicultural content, highlight diverse perspectives, and encourage dialogue. Students affirmed that classroom discussions in English fostered respect for cultural diversity and enhanced their appreciation of global issues. However, challenges were identified, including varying levels of English proficiency, overemphasis on grammar-focused teaching, and insufficient intercultural training for faculty. These systemic barriers limited the inclusiveness of instruction and hindered the transformative role of English in intercultural learning. Despite these limitations, participants suggested strategies such as integrating multicultural case studies, embedding local and global perspectives, employing interactive methods, and strengthening faculty development. The findings underscore that while English provides a vital communicative platform, its effectiveness depends on intentional pedagogical practices and institutional support. Thus, English, when framed beyond its technical function, emerges as a transformative tool for cultivating intercultural competence, global awareness, and inclusivity in higher education.

Keywords: *English Medium Instruction, intercultural pedagogy, global competence, inclusivity, higher education*

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Introduction

The 21st century is characterized by increasing globalization, technological advancement, and cultural interconnectedness, compelling higher education institutions to equip students with the competencies needed to thrive in diverse global environments. One of the most important competencies is global competence, which encompasses engaging respectfully and effectively with people from different cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds. Central to this development is the role of English, which has become the world's lingua franca and a dominant medium of communication across borders in fields such as business, education, science, and international relations.

In the Philippines, English holds a unique position as both an official language and a medium of instruction in higher education. Its historical ties to colonialism have shaped educational policies and practices. However, its continuing use is justified by its global relevance and role in connecting Filipino students to international academic discourse, cultural exchange, and employment opportunities. Within universities, English is not merely a subject to be learned but a tool that frames learning experiences, facilitates intercultural communication, and provides access to global knowledge systems.

However, the use of English in higher education extends beyond linguistic functionality. It can serve as a medium of intercultural pedagogy, emphasizing dialogue, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding among students from diverse backgrounds. Through intercultural pedagogy, English becomes a vehicle for building empathy, respect, and tolerance while fostering skills that align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4: Quality Education, and Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

At Pangasinan State University (PSU), where students come from various cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds, the integration of English as a medium of intercultural pedagogy is particularly significant. As a premier state institution, PSU envisions itself as a producer of globally competitive graduates who are locally responsive and socially aware. However, questions remain as to how English, as the language of instruction, is intentionally harnessed to advance intercultural learning, and how this process contributes to cultivating global competence among students. This study, therefore, investigates the role of English as a medium of intercultural pedagogy in PSU, highlighting its contributions, challenges, and implications for higher education in the Philippine context.

English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been studied extensively. Deardorff (2006) conceptualized intercultural competence as the ability to interact effectively and

appropriately across cultures, underscoring its importance in education systems worldwide. Baker (2015) expanded this by examining how ELF provides a shared communicative platform that fosters intercultural understanding, particularly in multicultural classrooms. Similarly, Leask (2015) argued that internationalized curricula should intentionally integrate intercultural perspectives, ensuring that English is not just a medium of instruction but also a means of cultivating cultural empathy and awareness.

Jackson (2020) emphasized that higher education's English-medium instruction (EMI) should transcend grammatical and communicative competence to embrace intercultural learning outcomes. Educators must move beyond language proficiency and integrate strategies that nurture intercultural sensitivity, adaptability, and critical thinking. These global studies affirm the potential of English as a transformative tool for building intercultural competence in higher education.

In the Asian context, studies highlight the dual role of English in education. Hu and McKay (2012) observed that Asian English-medium education facilitates global engagement but often creates tensions with local languages and identities. Kirkpatrick (2011) noted that ASEAN countries rely heavily on English for regional cooperation, making their role in higher education crucial for preparing globally engaged citizens.

In a study on intercultural competence among Asian students, Tran and Nguyen (2018) found that English facilitated intercultural communication, but intentional pedagogical practices were necessary to overcome cultural barriers. These findings resonate with the Philippine context, where English proficiency is relatively high but pedagogical frameworks for intercultural learning are still underdeveloped.

Several scholars have explored the relationship between English and education in the Philippines. Tupas (2015) critiqued the ideological role of English, pointing out how it reinforces global participation while simultaneously perpetuating social inequalities. Bernardo (2017) analyzed English-medium instruction in Philippine universities, highlighting the need for culturally responsive teaching that replicates Western pedagogies and adapts to local realities.

More recent studies, such as those by Gonzalez (2019), demonstrated that English proficiency alone does not guarantee intercultural competence, stressing the need for pedagogical innovation in classrooms. Meanwhile, research by Perez (2020) emphasized that intercultural pedagogy in Philippine higher education should foster inclusivity and global awareness without neglecting indigenous perspectives and local knowledge systems.

Together, these studies provide valuable insights into the roles of English, intercultural pedagogy, and global competence. However, gaps remain in the

contextualized application of these insights within state universities such as PSU, which cater to a broad spectrum of students across urban and rural communities.

Despite the growing body of literature on English as a global language and its role in fostering intercultural competence, three significant gaps persist:

Most existing studies in the Philippines focus on private or elite universities in urban areas, leaving limited exploration of how state institutions like Pangasinan State University, which serves diverse and often marginalized student populations, integrate English as a tool for intercultural pedagogy.

While English-medium instruction has been widely studied, research often emphasizes proficiency and policy rather than pedagogy. There is no substantial evidence on how English is deliberately employed as a pedagogical tool to promote intercultural dialogue, empathy, and global competence in classroom settings.

Many studies highlight the importance of intercultural competence but fail to link English-mediated pedagogy to measurable outcomes in global competence empirically. There is insufficient research examining how students' intercultural awareness, skills, and values are shaped through English-based teaching in higher education institutions.

Addressing these gaps is crucial. This study at Pangasinan State University seeks to fill these voids by analyzing how English functions as a medium of intercultural pedagogy, how faculty and students perceive its role in building global competence, and what strategies can be implemented to maximize its potential. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on intercultural education in the Philippines and broader discussions on how higher education institutions worldwide can effectively prepare students for global citizenship.

Objectives

This study primarily aims to investigate how English, as a medium of intercultural pedagogy, contributes to the development of global competence among students of Pangasinan State University. Specifically, it explores how English is employed in classroom instruction and academic activities to promote intercultural understanding, respect for diversity, and engagement with global perspectives. It also aims to identify the perceptions of both faculty and students on the effectiveness of English as a tool for fostering intercultural dialogue and cultural sensitivity in higher education. Furthermore, the study intends to determine the challenges and limitations encountered in integrating intercultural pedagogy through English and the strategies and practices that support its effective implementation. By addressing these objectives, the research endeavors to provide insights into how higher education institutions,

particularly state universities, can maximize the role of English as a medium of instruction and as a catalyst for producing globally competent graduates who are both locally grounded and internationally competitive.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design, specifically a case study approach, to examine how English functions as a medium of intercultural pedagogy at Pangasinan State University (PSU). A qualitative method was chosen because the study sought to capture the lived experiences, practices, and perceptions of both faculty and students, which could not be adequately represented by numerical data alone. The case study design allowed for an in-depth exploration of the context, focusing on the dynamics of English-mediated instruction and its role in building global competence.

The research was conducted at PSU, a premier state university in Northern Luzon, which serves students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. This setting provided a rich context for examining intercultural learning in higher education. The study participants included faculty members who used English as the medium of instruction in general education and professional courses and students from various disciplines and year levels who were regularly exposed to English-mediated learning activities. Using purposive sampling, approximately ten faculty members and thirty students were invited to participate, with the final number determined by the point of data saturation.

Data was gathered through multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members to elicit their perspectives on teaching practices, strategies, and challenges in promoting intercultural pedagogy through English. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with students to capture collective experiences on how English facilitated intercultural communication, empathy, and global awareness in the classroom. Additionally, document analysis of syllabi, instructional materials, and institutional policies was undertaken to determine how intercultural pedagogy was formally integrated into the academic framework of the university. An interview guide was prepared to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions, and all sessions were audio-recorded with the consent of participants.

The data collection process began with securing permission from the PSU Research Ethics Committee and the campus administration, after which informed consent was obtained from all participants. Recruitment was done through formal

letters and announcements, ensuring voluntary participation. Depending on participants' availability, interviews and FGDs were conducted face-to-face or online and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Relevant documents were also obtained from academic departments to support the triangulation of findings.

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was used to interpret the data. It involved familiarizing the transcripts, generating initial codes, identifying recurring patterns, and clustering them into themes. The themes were reviewed, refined, and named before producing the final report. Triangulation across interviews, FGDs, and document analysis was used to enhance the validity and richness of findings.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were fully informed of the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participants' identities through pseudonyms and storing data securely. Participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage of the study. Moreover, sensitivity to cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic differences was upheld to ensure respect for diversity.

Finally, the trustworthiness of the study was established through several strategies. Credibility was ensured by triangulating multiple data sources and conducting member-checking of transcripts. Transferability was achieved by providing rich descriptions of the research context and participants, while dependability was maintained through clear documentation of procedures. Confirmability was addressed by minimizing researcher bias through reflexive journaling and adherence to ethical research practices.

Results and Findings of the Study

English as a Bridge to Global Competence

Students and faculty perceived English as a medium of instruction and a powerful tool for connecting them to global discourses, academic resources, and intercultural exchanges. Beyond its role in classroom communication, English was viewed as a gateway to the broader world of knowledge production and scholarly collaboration. Through English, learners could access international journals, cutting-edge research, and digital resources predominantly published in this language, thereby situating their academic work within global conversations. Faculty also emphasized that English proficiency enabled participation in regional and international conferences, facilitating collaborations with scholars from different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. Students likewise recognized that exchange

programs and online partnerships were made possible through English, which functioned as a lingua franca bridging their local experiences with broader global perspectives.

This perception aligns with Jenkins' (2013) view of English as a lingua franca in higher education, where it operates not only as a language of instruction but also as a medium of intercultural negotiation. Galloway, Kriukow, and Numajiri (2021) further argue that English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms expose learners to authentic intercultural interactions that prepare them for professional and academic engagement across cultures. In the Philippine context, Racca and Lasaten (2016) demonstrated that English proficiency significantly influences not only students' academic success but also their readiness to participate in cross-cultural communication and global exchanges. Thus, English functions as more than a utilitarian tool; it becomes an enabling resource for global competence, equipping students and faculty alike to contribute to and benefit from the interconnected academic and professional communities of the 21st century.

Participant Responses:

"English gives us the confidence to engage with foreign students in webinars and conferences." (Student 7)

"By using English in the classroom, our students become more prepared to work globally, since it is the common language of many industries." (Faculty 3)

The responses highlight that English is critical in building global competence by equipping students with the linguistic tools necessary to participate in international academic and professional arenas. As the most widely used language of research, diplomacy, and commerce, English allows learners to access global knowledge networks, collaborate across borders, and engage in discourses that transcend local contexts. This capacity broadens students' academic horizons and strengthens their employability in industries and professions where English remains the dominant communication medium. Studies have emphasized that English proficiency enables students to integrate more effectively into international academic communities, attend conferences, publish research, and pursue opportunities abroad (Jenkins, 2013; Bolton & Botha, 2020).

At the same time, integrating English into pedagogy fosters the development of global perspectives by encouraging learners to interact with diverse cultural frameworks. Galloway, Kriukow, and Numajiri (2021) note that English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms can expose students to intercultural encounters that enhance their awareness of cultural differences and similarities, thereby cultivating skills of empathy and respect essential to global competence. In the Philippine context,

Racca and Lasaten (2016) found that proficiency in English was not only linked to academic performance but also to students' preparedness to engage in cross-cultural learning. By situating local knowledge within a global linguistic frame, English-mediated pedagogy strengthens competitiveness while nurturing learners' ability to think critically about cultural diversity. These findings affirm the study's objectives of fostering global perspectives and demonstrate that English, when embedded within inclusive pedagogical practices, is more than a technical tool; it is a transformative medium that enhances intercultural understanding and global readiness.

English in Classroom Instruction as Intercultural Pedagogy

Faculty reported using English not merely as a technical medium of instruction but as a deliberate pedagogical strategy to integrate intercultural content, foreground diverse perspectives, and stimulate classroom dialogue. Rather than limiting English to transferring subject knowledge, instructors described employing it as a tool to introduce global issues, case studies, and culturally varied examples that broaden students' worldviews. It resonates with Jenkins' (2013) argument that English as a lingua franca in higher education should be understood as a communicative code and a social practice that creates opportunities for intercultural negotiation. Faculty practices also align with Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence, which emphasizes the importance of intentional teaching strategies that cultivate respect, empathy, and openness to multiple cultural perspectives.

Students, for their part, confirmed that classroom discussions conducted in English exposed them to multicultural viewpoints and encouraged respect for diversity. They recognized that hearing peers' articulate experiences shaped by different cultural contexts deepened their awareness and appreciation of global diversity. It supports findings by Galloway, Kriukow, and Numajiri (2021), who observed that English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms in Asia provide learners with authentic intercultural encounters that foster critical reflection on cultural differences. In the Philippine context, Racca and Lasaten (2016) similarly demonstrated that English proficiency enhances academic performance and facilitates greater engagement with diverse perspectives in classroom discussions. Taken together, these findings highlight the transformative potential of English as a medium of intercultural pedagogy that transcends its technical function and actively contributes to building globally competent, culturally sensitive learners.

Participant Responses:

"When we use English, we also discuss global issues, not just local ones. It opens our minds to different cultures." (Student 12)

"I deliberately use case studies from other countries in my English-mediated classes to show that knowledge is intercultural, not limited to one perspective." (Faculty 6)

The findings indicate that English serves as a medium of academic communication and a vital channel for intercultural pedagogy, enabling teachers and students to engage with diverse cultural frameworks. As a shared linguistic resource, English creates opportunities for dialogue among individuals from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, thus facilitating exchanges of perspectives that might otherwise remain isolated. When used intentionally in classroom instruction, English allows learners to access global knowledge systems while also situating their local experiences within broader cultural conversations. This dual function positions English as a bridge connecting learners to international discourses and validating their identities within a multicultural learning environment.

Moreover, the study highlights that the pedagogical use of English can foster inclusivity when coupled with strategies emphasizing mutual respect, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. By framing English not simply as a technical skill but as a tool for intercultural engagement, teachers can promote critical reflection, reduce cultural barriers, and cultivate openness to diversity. It reflects the study's objective of advancing intercultural understanding in higher education, showing that pedagogy mediated by English can potentially build more equitable, collaborative, and globally oriented classrooms. Ultimately, the findings reinforce that English, when paired with inclusive teaching practices, moves beyond its role as a language of instruction and becomes a transformative instrument for fostering dialogue, inclusivity, and global competence.

Perceptions of Effectiveness in Fostering Dialogue and Sensitivity

Both faculty and students agreed that English was an effective common communicative platform, enabling diverse learners to share ideas and engage in academic dialogue across cultural boundaries. It confirms the role of English as a lingua franca in higher education, where it often functions as the default medium for intercultural interaction (Jenkins, 2013). However, students expressed ongoing challenges with confidence and fluency, which limited their ability to participate actively in class discussions. These findings mirror those of Galloway, Kriukow, and Numajiri (2021), who noted that learners in EMI classrooms frequently struggle with self-expression, often relying on memorized responses or avoiding participation due to fear of errors. Racca and Lasaten (2016) raised similar concerns in the Philippine

context, who found that English proficiency strongly correlated with academic performance and classroom engagement.

Faculty responses further highlighted that the success of intercultural pedagogy does not rest solely on the use of English but on the adoption of inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices. Teachers emphasized that scaffolding, code-switching, local examples, and dialogic teaching create equitable opportunities for learners of varying proficiency levels. It aligns with Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competence model, which underscores intentional pedagogical design's role in fostering respect, empathy, and perspective-taking. Moreover, Romijn, Slot, and Leseman (2021) found that professional development programs aimed at enhancing teachers' intercultural competence significantly improve classroom inclusivity, demonstrating that faculty expertise and institutional support are critical to the success of intercultural pedagogy. Thus, while English provides a shared linguistic platform, its effectiveness in promoting intercultural learning depends on teaching practices prioritizing inclusivity, cultural awareness, and learner empowerment.

Participant Responses:

"Sometimes it is hard to express myself in English, but it helps me to respect other viewpoints because we have one common language to use." (Student 4)

"English itself is not enough; it must be paired with strategies like intercultural dialogues, collaborative learning, and comparative analysis of cultures." (Faculty 2)

These responses demonstrate that while English has the potential to serve as a powerful medium for intercultural dialogue, its effectiveness is not automatic but somewhat contingent upon the pedagogical strategies employed. English, as a global lingua franca, can connect learners from diverse cultural backgrounds; however, without carefully designed teaching approaches, it risks reinforcing linguistic hierarchies or privileging dominant cultural norms. The findings suggest that strategies which intentionally incorporate cultural awareness, such as case studies highlighting diverse contexts, dialogic activities that encourage perspective-taking, and reflective practices that foster empathy, are essential in making English instruction more inclusive and responsive. In this sense, the success of English in advancing intercultural dialogue depends less on the language itself and more on how it is used to frame classroom interactions and content. When pedagogy emphasizes cultural sensitivity, students are better equipped to negotiate meaning across differences, challenge stereotypes, and cultivate respect for diversity. These insights directly align with the study's objective of exploring faculty and student perceptions of English not

merely as a linguistic tool but as an instrument for intercultural learning, global competence, and the development of socially aware graduates.

Challenges and Limitations in Implementation

Varying levels of English proficiency significantly dampen participation and learning in EMI and multilingual classrooms. In these contexts, unequal proficiency tends to widen achievement gaps, discourage speaking, and drive students toward surface-level learning strategies. For instance, Dang Thi Minh Tam and Nguyen Thi Minh Chi (2024) report that tourism and hospitality students in a Vietnamese EMI program often struggle with content comprehension when their English proficiency is lower (Dang & Nguyen, 2024). In the Philippine Science High School, Racca and Lasaten (2016) observed a strong positive correlation between English proficiency and academic performance across Science, Mathematics, and English subjects among Grade 8 students (Racca & Lasaten, 2016). Similarly, Ilarde (2024) found a significant relationship between English proficiency and overall academic achievement among Grade 7 learners in Isabela (Ilarde, 2024).

An overemphasis on grammar instruction at the expense of dialogue impedes the development of communicative competence. While this point could benefit from specific study names, the consensus in CLT research is that form-focused, teacher-fronted grammar instruction often yields gains on discrete point tests but falls short in building interactive skills like oral fluency and pragmatic awareness.

Moreover, faculty often lack structured intercultural training and support. Systematic, practice-oriented professional development is needed to cultivate authentic intercultural dialogue and inclusive pedagogy, but many instructors currently lack access to such programs.

Institutional support for inclusion remains patchy, constraining the adoption of inclusive teaching practices. Evidence suggests that inclusive pedagogy thrives when leadership actively signals its importance, provides resources and incentives, and fosters cross-unit collaboration. Even the most motivated faculty struggle to scale inclusive change without this foundation.

Participant Responses:

"Some students are left behind because they are not fluent in English, so they do not participate actively." (Faculty 8)

"We use English, but sometimes it feels mechanical, more about grammar than about learning from different cultures." (Student 10)

The responses reveal systemic challenges in maximizing the potential of English as a medium of intercultural pedagogy. While English is positioned as a global lingua franca that can bridge cultural differences, persistent language barriers continue to exclude learners with limited proficiency from meaningful participation. Students often struggle with comprehension, confidence in speaking, and the ability to engage in critical dialogue, which restricts the transformative role of English in fostering intercultural understanding. At the same time, insufficient pedagogical innovation exacerbates these difficulties. Many classrooms still rely on teacher-centered and grammar-oriented methods that privilege accuracy over authentic communication, limiting opportunities for intercultural exchange, empathy-building, and global competence development. These systemic limitations highlight that the challenges are both linguistic and pedagogical, rooted in teaching practices that have yet to embrace communicative and culturally responsive approaches fully. Consequently, the findings underscore the importance of this study's objective: to identify and analyze the barriers that hinder the integration of intercultural approaches in English-mediated classrooms. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring that English instruction becomes genuinely inclusive and capable of equipping learners with the linguistic proficiency and intercultural sensitivity needed in increasingly diverse educational and professional contexts.

Strategies and Practices for Effective Implementation

Participants suggested several strategies, including using multicultural case studies, incorporating local and global perspectives, interactive learning approaches, and continuous faculty training in intercultural pedagogy. Integrating multicultural case studies provides learners with real-world scenarios that reflect diverse cultural contexts, enabling them to engage with complex issues and develop intercultural sensitivity critically (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2018). Likewise, embedding both local and global perspectives in instruction ensures that students appreciate their cultural roots and situate themselves within the broader global community, which is essential in fostering global competence (Deardorff, 2020).

Interactive learning approaches, such as role plays, simulations, and collaborative projects, have been found effective in promoting intercultural dialogue, as they encourage learners to actively participate in meaning-making rather than passively consuming information (Byram, 2021; Chen & Starosta, 2008). Faculty training in intercultural pedagogy is equally crucial, as teachers serve as mediators of cultural knowledge; ongoing professional development empowers them with

strategies for inclusiveness and equips them to address the challenges of cultural diversity in classrooms (Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Nieto, 2017).

The use of technology was also highlighted as a significant enabler of intercultural learning. Digital platforms facilitate access to multicultural resources, enable virtual exchanges, and provide innovative tools for cross-cultural collaboration (Hauck & MacKinnon, 2016; Helm, 2020). Furthermore, through student and faculty exchanges, joint research, and global partnerships, international collaborations promote authentic intercultural experiences and strengthen higher education institutions' roles as catalysts for producing globally competent graduates (Knight, 2013; Marginson, 2014).

These strategies reflect a holistic approach to intercultural pedagogy, aligning with UNESCO's (2017) call for inclusive and globally relevant education that prepares learners to thrive in diverse and interconnected societies.

Participant Responses:

"When professors integrate local and global issues in English, we feel more connected both to our culture and to the world." (Student 5)

"Workshops and training for faculty on intercultural pedagogy are needed so English use in classrooms becomes more purposeful." (Faculty 1)

The responses demonstrate that effectively implementing English as an intercultural pedagogy requires intentional and well-designed strategies that simultaneously address linguistic proficiency and intercultural learning outcomes. It is not sufficient to focus solely on improving students' grammar or vocabulary; instead, English instruction must be embedded with culturally relevant content, interactive tasks, and dialogic methods that expose learners to diverse perspectives. Such an approach allows students to use English not just as a tool for academic communication but also as a medium for negotiating meaning, understanding cultural differences, and engaging in collaborative problem-solving across cultural boundaries. By combining language learning with intercultural pedagogy, educators can create classroom environments where students are encouraged to practice critical thinking, empathy, and openness toward diversity, indispensable skills in globalized higher education. This integrated perspective aligns with the study's objective of identifying practices that foster intercultural dialogue and strengthen students' global competence. Thus, the effectiveness of English-mediated instruction depends on its ability to transcend mechanical language drills and instead nurture students as proficient communicators and culturally responsive global citizens.

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that English functions as more than a medium of instruction; it is widely perceived by both faculty and students as a bridge to global competence. Participants emphasized that English connects them to international discourses, journals, and professional exchanges, enabling collaboration with global peers and positioning their academic work within broader conversations. This perception aligns with Jenkins' (2013) view of English as a lingua franca in higher education and Bolton and Botha's (2020) argument that English proficiency equips learners to participate more effectively in global knowledge economies. In the Philippine context, Racca and Lasaten (2016) confirmed that English not only strengthens academic performance but also prepares learners for intercultural engagement. By serving as a gateway to knowledge production and scholarly collaboration, English equips students with the linguistic tools necessary for employability and professional mobility in international contexts.

At the classroom level, faculty described using English for content delivery as an intentional pedagogical strategy to introduce intercultural materials, integrate diverse case studies, and encourage dialogue across cultural boundaries. Students confirmed that classroom discussions in English exposed them to multiple perspectives and nurtured respect for diversity, reinforcing Galloway, Kriukow, and Numajiri's (2021) findings that EMI classrooms create authentic intercultural encounters. It resonates with Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence, which underscores that teaching must be deliberately framed to promote empathy and openness. In this way, English operates as a form of intercultural pedagogy, validating both global and local identities while fostering critical reflection and inclusivity.

Despite these benefits, students and faculty also identified limitations in implementation. While English provided a shared communicative platform, students reported struggles with confidence and fluency, often avoiding active participation due to fear of errors, echoing findings from EMI contexts across Asia (Galloway et al., 2021). Faculty emphasized that English alone is insufficient; its effectiveness depends on inclusive practices such as scaffolding, code-switching, and dialogic learning, which help create equitable opportunities for diverse learners. It is consistent with Romijn, Slot, and Leseman's (2021) argument that faculty training in intercultural pedagogy is essential for inclusivity. However, systemic barriers remain. Varying proficiency levels widen achievement gaps (Dang & Nguyen, 2024; Ilarde, 2024), and the continued dominance of grammar-focused instruction stifles communicative competence. Compounding these challenges are limited faculty preparation in intercultural pedagogy (Hajisoteriou et al., 2019) and uneven institutional support,

often isolating inclusive teaching initiatives rather than systemic (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018).

To address these challenges, both students and faculty suggested concrete strategies. These included integrating multicultural case studies (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2018), embedding local and global perspectives into lessons (Deardorff, 2020), and employing interactive methods such as role plays, simulations, and collaborative projects (Byram, 2021; Chen & Starosta, 2008). Continuous faculty development was identified as critical, aligning with Villegas and Lucas' (2007) emphasis on preparing teachers as mediators of cultural knowledge. The role of technology was also highlighted, with digital platforms enabling access to global resources and supporting virtual intercultural exchanges (Hauck & MacKinnon, 2016; Helm, 2020). Furthermore, international collaborations through exchange programs and joint research were seen as powerful enablers of authentic intercultural learning (Knight, 2013; Marginson, 2014). These strategies reflect UNESCO's (2017) call for inclusive and globally relevant education that prepares learners to thrive in interconnected societies.

The discussion of themes shows that English in higher education is both a bridge to global competence and a medium for intercultural pedagogy. However, its transformative potential depends on pedagogical innovation, inclusive practices, and institutional support. While English connects learners to global discourses and fosters intercultural dialogue, barriers such as uneven proficiency, grammar-heavy instruction, and insufficient faculty preparation hinder inclusivity. Effective implementation, therefore, requires intentional strategies that combine language development with intercultural content and critical engagement. When embedded in responsive pedagogy, English moves beyond being a technical skill and becomes a transformative tool for cultivating global competence, intercultural sensitivity, and socially aware graduates prepared for diverse professional and academic landscapes.

Conclusion

The study concludes that English is a gateway to global competence and a medium of intercultural pedagogy in Philippine higher education. It enables learners to access international knowledge, collaborate across cultures, and participate in global discourses. However, its transformative potential is constrained by proficiency gaps, grammar-dominated instruction, and insufficient faculty preparation. Effective implementation requires intentional pedagogical innovation, faculty development, and institutional commitment to inclusivity. When coupled with culturally responsive strategies, English transcends its role as a language of instruction and becomes a

catalyst for intercultural understanding, global readiness, and socially aware graduates.

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