Cross-Cultural Interaction and Its Role in English Language Acquisition: A Case Study at the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Abstract. this research examines the students' first-hand experience with multicultural cross-cultural engagement at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL). This dissertation examines the value of such multicultural educative experiences for the students in relation to their English language skills acquisition. English language and culture learners achieve Communication Competence. This study adopted the qualitative case study approach, classroom adjacencies, and in-depth, one-on-one interviews with students and teachers for data collection. The study purposely sampled six students and cross multicultural engagement, intra, and extra school activities. Authentic experiences and reflections were the objectives of the study, and data was collected over one month. It has been shown that students who routinely partake in cross-cultural interaction have better English vocabulary, speaking fluency and overall confidence when using English in everyday scenarios. The participation of teachers was central in enriching these experiences by incorporating cultural elements of the lessons as well as promoting cooperative learning of students with different cultural backgrounds. The research provides evidence on the relevance of multicultural interfacing and its relation to cross cultural interaction in enhancing learners' language proficiency.
Keywords: Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language, Multicultural Education Cross-Cultural Competency, Indonesian School, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Introduction

The ability to speak, read and write, and communicate in any given language simultaneously is a demonstration of the same skill and is a given in any successful endeavor in life (Vijayakumar et al, 2020). In today's era of globalization, mastery of English, along with other skills, is critical because it facilitates cross-cultural communication and serves as a global lingua franca (Mutia, 2025; Xie and Fang, 2025). Improving students' other achieved academic levels, English language literacy is a case of, and true in many other global learning, international schools (Xie and Fang, 2025). This is true in international institutions like the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur (SIKL). The teaching of English at SIKL is not limited to the teaching of language skills of structure and grammar in isolation (Yuliani et al., 2023) but should also include the integration of those skills in a greater real-life multicultural context (Hajarudin, 2025). One approach that is receiving increasing attention in language teaching is cross-cultural interaction, where students communicate with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Dzhubanova, 2024); Kawar & Michael, 2025). One of the approaches to language teaching that is gaining popularity is the students' participation in cross-cultural interactions, that is, the students' communication, collaboration and exchange of ideas with peers of different cultures and languages (House & Kádár, 2024). The primary aim of these

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activities is to equip students with a greater lexical repertoire, increased oral fluency, and the ability to empathize, as well as awareness of the global and intercultural world (Siregar, 2022). One of the many by-products of cultural understanding that modern society has created is the emphasis of language learning.

The term cross-cultural communication involves the transfer of information, which entails communication and understanding the primary components of a culture, which may include its language, the subtext of gestures, and the major symbols of that culture (Silitonga et al, 2025). In informal social situations, students get opportunities to develop their language competence to expand their vocabulary and gain the confidence to employ the English language in their everyday social encounters (Rosmita 2025). This coincides with the social Constructivism theory of Vygotsky which outlines the social context and its importance in language learning (Mc Leod 2024). At SIKL, it is not only the students from Indonesia who partake; students from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan also join. They often partake in social and educational collaborations with Malaysian communities, which allow cross-cultural encounters. Where two diverse cultures meet, it is critical to create an atmosphere of harmony in order to foster advanced communication. The type of advanced interaction that is desired is a result of the appropriate and suitable methods that are employed in certain cross-cultural interactions (Effendi 2024). Regardless of the opportunities these students are given, improving their English, in particular vocabulary and spoken fluency, is a challenge with many language learners of this type (Parawangsa et al 2024). This indicates that even in the presence of a cross-cultural environment, there is an urgent need for appropriate pedagogical intervention.

Even with the advantages of cross-cultural contact, some students remain grappling with such issues as limited vocabulary and lack of confidence in their speaking ability (Intensivo et al., n.d.). Yet, the students consistently made attempts to employ their skills, as the encouraging atmosphere created by their peers and instructors facilitated their social engagement during the learning activities. (Aziz et al., 2021). Facilitating consistent engagement among learners and instructors paves the way for the development of constructive classroom dynamics. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between the ability of learners to shift their behaviours and the awareness of the instructors of the students' needs. (Maelasari et al., 2020). One of the participants mentioned, "Sometimes I am shy, but my friends always encourage me to keep speaking in English" (S3, interview, 2025). The ability to speak, read, and write, and communicate in any given language simultaneously is a demonstration of the same skill and is a given in any successful endeavour in life (Vijayakumar et al 2020). In today's era of globalization, mastery of English, along with other skills, is critical because it facilitates cross-cultural communication and serves as a global lingua franca (Mutia, 2025; Xie and Fang, 2025). Improving students' other achieved academic levels, English language literacy is a case of, and true in many other global learning, international schools (Xie and Fang, 2025). This is true in international institutions like the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur (SIKL).

Though students encounter challenges such as unfamiliarity with a new vocabulary and lack of confidence in speaking, the benefits of multicultural interactions are clear. As a result of the naturally positive socialization within the classroom, the students remained motivated and practiced their speaking skills (Aziz et al., 2021). One student who participated in the study mentioned, "Sometimes I am shy, but my friends always encourage me to keep speaking in English" (S3, interview, 2025). The combination of multicultural experiences and positive structuring of the classroom at SIKL aids the students in learning English. Moreover, multicultural experiences help students enhance their self-confidence (Uglanova, 2023). Within a positive, collaborative framework, SIKL has been able to provide valuable opportunities for diverse multicultural learning. However, little is known about SIKL and other Indonesian schools abroad, which combine cultural diversity with the Indonesian national curriculum. There are almost no studies in this area.

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Another self-esteem boosting benefit from multiplier culture contact exchange is gained from learning a new language (Uglanova, 2024). Cross-cultural interactions happen in a collaborative and inclusive ambience, granting SIKL cross-cultural communication in a multidisciplinary perspective, valuable for both English language skills and cultural sensitivity (Atasheva, 2024). Due to this intricacy and relevance, this writing will elaborate on the influence of SIKL multilingual aspects in students' learning, especially the challenges and benefits of cross-cultural interactions.

English has specific challenges for students trying to learn it, as has been observed from the perspective of the importance of mentoring, and the students themselves, cross-cultural experiences; hence, it is this unique focus that justifies the learning dynamics of SIKL. Having SIKL's diverse intercultural context, the focus of this research is to self-position, and support students to meaningfully engage, and to determine the support students are offered to engage with peers from varying ethnicities. The research findings will inform the difficulties of this context, and the knowledge will contribute to the challenges in the context of specific and flexible Teaching Learning Strategy design to assist students in overcoming the challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The Integration of the Constructivist Theories of Second Language Acquisition and Intercultural Communicative Competence Regarding the Horizontal and Integrative Theoretical Framework. In this Case, Seeks to Analyze the English Language Education of Students of Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) and Their Sojourn in Another Culture.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) – Vygotsky (1978), (Shukurdinovna, 2024)

Vygotsky's conceptual scaffolding and social interaction theory show how multi-lingual classrooms utilize ZPD and negotiate autonomy. More recent works (Shukurdinovna, 2024) on ZPD's enactment on multi-lingual classrooms illustrate the increase of learners' autonomy through peer mediation and teacher mediation. Vygotsky's scaffolding conceptualizations at SIKL involve bilingual mentoring, peer task structuring, and task organization so that students can advance within ZPD.

In the perspective of the Generation Theory of SLA (Krashen, 1985; Long, 1996), (AbuSahyon et al., 2023).

SLA theory benefits from Krashen's input and Long's interaction hypotheses, which put forth the main ideas of comprehensible input and meaningful interaction in an immersive environment. In studies by AbuSahyon et al (2023) on AI learning environments, immersive interaction is advocated as an environment that enhances retention. SIKL provides a low anxiety context through group activities, narratives, and multimedia to help learners process language and output; 85\% of the students reported vocabulary increase through daily interactions with culturally diverse peers (SIKL Survey, 2025).

Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997), Kawar & Michael (2025); Ibrahim et al. (2021).

Byram's ICC Model was and still is instrumental in detailing how individuals acquire attitudes and knowledge and cultivate skills for interdisciplinary communication. More recent works from Kawar & Michael (2025) and Ibrahim et al. (2021) highlight empathy and sensitivity toward others from different cultures in multilingual contexts. At SIKL, students acquire ICC through class projects and cultural exchanges with teamwork that enhances their openness, critical reflection, and adaptability in communication.
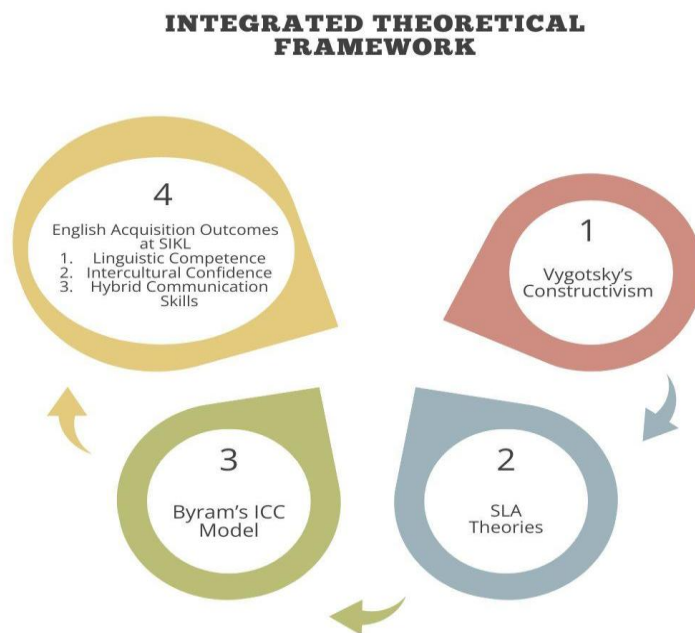
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Figure 1.
Integrated Theoretical Framework

Material and Method

Every student from the population engaged in the cross-cultural activities both in the school and out of school, or facilitated activities cross-culturally. Dalvin, Julia, Cherisse, Faiz, Zahwa, and Muhammad. Purposively sampled because of observed active participation, and because the school needed an adequate, varied sample of the researched populations (Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan), the school received participants from several nationalities. Needed for the study since the participants of the cross-cultural interaction and the study of the cross-cultural interactions for the purpose of learning the language were adequate.

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the participants' unique, complex relationships within a multicultural context. Using an intercultural and cross-cultural qualitative case study approach facilitated this consideration by allowing the participants' cross interactions within a variety of multicultural settings, where they learned the language

The participants of the study consisted of six individuals from a purposive sample due to their involvement in cross-cultural co-curricular activities. The sample created a balanced heterogeneity of the participants in the case study site school, comprising Indonesian, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani students. The various combinations of the participants remain critical to the understanding of the complexity of the cross-cultural relationships and the subsequent language acquisition.

Data obtained in one month from the research participants relied on qualitative techniques to derive a depth of understanding from the participants. Methodologically organized participant observations for cross-interactions of students and teachers were performed using intercultural interaction and communicative competence frameworks. Various parameters were taken into consideration, for instance, students' involvement in multicultural groups, the use of the English language, the rate of students' engagement with culturally responsive pedagogy, and teacher intercultural mediation. The self-perceptions of the students regarding English, English content, English fluency, vocabulary, cross-cultural relations, and the communication role of the teachers were also included in the interviews.

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The aims that were mentioned and the respective indicators were consolidated in order to serve the purpose of the study. This study provided the pedagogy of teaching intercultural communicative competence along with the second language skills.

Additional interviews were also conducted with teachers and students concerning their perceptions and experiences regarding cross-cultural encounters and English language proficiency. The amalgamation of these interviews with the observation data thickens the understanding of the complex relations in the SIKL multi-cultural context.

Apart from the classroom observations, some observations of the surroundings were also conducted, for instance, during recess and in the context of extracurricular activities. These observations were useful for capturing informal situations in which students were able to practice and develop their skills, which further enriched the data collection. To collect information related to participant students and teachers' perceptions and experiences concerning intercultural engagement and English language proficiency, interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. Exploring the interviews' possible engagements and barriers, while examining the teachers' positioning as gatekeepers to the students' language, was the goal.

Focusing on intercultural engagement and the use of the English language, the data were analysed systematically and thematically for the presence of specific indicators and patterns. The following indicators were established as a result of analysing the qualitative data: (1) improvement in vocabulary use, (2) enhancement of fluency and confidence while speaking, (3) intercultural support, (4) multiplicity and intensity of cross-cultural engagements, and (5) students' perception of English as an international language. These indicators were extrapolated from the gathered data through a combination of theoretical frames and empirical observations. Ethical approvals and registrations were obtained. Participants were fully informed and provided written consent confirming their understanding of the study and their rights. Participants were debriefed and kept fully confidential and anonymous in terms of published outputs.

This study aims to make a contribution to the understanding of the place of cross-cultural contact in learning and acquiring the English language. As with all studies, this one too has limitations. From the perspective of the authors of this study, the sample is too small to make the findings applicable even to all Indonesian overseas schools, let alone to be generalized beyond this context. Further, the study is qualitative in nature, and findings are inherently subjective and dependent on the sample of the study.

Results and Discussions
Results

This research analyses how culturally responsive teaching affects English language development in a multicultural setting: the Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur (SIKL). SIKL is a government institution for the Indonesian diaspora in Malaysia, making SIKL a peculiar configurative in the realms of national identity, language teaching, and intercultural encounter. Due to the varying national backgrounds of the students and the transnational character of the institution, SIKL is in a prime position to assess the impact of culture on language acquisition. Moreover, English is one of the languages used to bridge many disparate cultures and enhance understanding and efficient interaction among people of varied backgrounds (AbuSahyon et al., 2023).

In order to conduct the necessary groundwork for the investigation, data were collected by observing classroom engagements and from the collection of semi-structured interviews conducted with English teachers and some participants of the curriculum. This was a qualitative study; therefore, participants were subjected to a higher level of scrutiny to gain an understanding of participants' pedagogy, along with the within-context responses of their learners. This study assumes the grouping of the three theories: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the social construction of learning (ZPD) and scaffolding of peers,

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Krashen and Long's (Second) Language Acquisition (SLA) which predominantly concerns the affective and interaction facets of learning a language, and Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model which pertains to the learners' capacity to use the language (designed for learning) to transact and interact with people from diverse cultures.

ZPD, SLA, and ICC frameworks were selected with the intent to discern the nuanced complexities pertaining to language learning at SIKL. Each particular ZPD and ICC collaboratives and developmental aspects within teaching, SLA emphasizes the role of input, affect, and interaction within the teaching and learning process. Integration of these perspectives provides insights towards understanding the ways responsive teaching practices, culturally, enhance the acquisition of particular social and emotional competencies and the intercultural skills with respect to the language.

Students' experiences will be summarized in a table below, which integrates the primary themes of the interviews concerned with language development and intercultural interaction.

Table 1.
Result of the interview

No	Name	Cultural Background	Learning Support Experienced	Language Progress Noted	Intercultural Interaction
1.	Dalvin	Indonesia	Facilitating Indonesian Comprehension of content via Indonesian usage by instructors.	Enhancing competencies connecting writing and speech presentations.	Regular synchronously coordinated learning with students from Pakistan and India.
2.	Julia	India	Moderation and analysis of visual materials and collaboration with peers.	There has been a significant increase in vocabulary integration and a stronger command of English in its colloquial form.	Sequential intern-partnered with Indonesian storytelling.
3.	Cherisse	Pakistan	Teachers have been suggesting that students express and share presentations on their ethnic cultural narratives.	The advancement of storytelling and cultural fluency.	Understanding and appreciating the parallels and cultural narratives of the religion.
4.	Faiz	Bangladesh	Participatory tasks in pairs and groups include multi-linguistic usage.	Enhancing and fostering verbal and aural participation in collaborative settings.	Acknowledgment of heterogeneity with a focus on traditional gastronomy and its culinary practices and familial structures.
5.	Zahwa	Indonesia	Communicative functions of the tasks involved the	Enhancing verbal participation and	Appreciation of multiculturalism concerning folk

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			integration of several languages.	listening during collaboration.	culinary practices and domestic traditions
6.	Alif	Malaysia	Participants of the class focus on question and inquiry facilitations.	Advancing toward focused and intricate speech.	Teamwork integration of humour with diverse and expressive multilingualism.

Discussions

Vocabulary Development and Fluency

Participating in narratives and group activities in English class affects students' retention and fluency in vocabulary. Julia reminisced that discussing a particular theme with students from different parts of the world was a chance to acquire new words. Faiz noted that the activities that boosted his fluency and confidence were the speaking and listening tasks. These outcomes corroborate the Speaking Hypothesis by Krashen. The SIKL Survey (2025) states that the daily conversations with different nationalities were crucial in the vocabulary increase of 85% of the samples. The findings support the adjustment of situation and active vocabulary in a multilingual setting (AbuSahyon et al., 2023; Hu, 2024).

Getting help from the teacher and classmates

Students said that getting help from teachers and other students was important when they were trying to solve hard English problems. Dalvin and Zahwa said that teachers would switch to Indonesian during class when they were explaining difficult or abstract English concepts. This type of bilingual scaffolding made it easier for students to understand difficult English grammar and vocabulary.

Students described how Julia, during peer group work, provided vocabulary contextualization and how her classmates gave Julia vocabulary explanations when she employed unfamiliar vocabulary. Such peer interactions in the classroom facilitated the expansion of Julia's vocabulary and increased her class participation.

Participant comments captured the essence of the social mediation and scaffolded support from companions and peers, bringing to mind Vygotsky (1978) and the Zone of Proximal Development (Rahman et al., 2024; de Oliveira & Westerlund, 2023).

Understanding Other Cultures

Given the diversity of the participants, Cherisse SIKL participants, through the testimony of Cherisse, mentioned that learning English involved, as English is not only a language of instruction, but also learning about different cultures and one's identity. Cherisse further mentioned that the global traditions discussed in class enabled her to bridge the English vocabulary to her culture. Dalvin's interest in his colleagues of varying religions and cultures enabled them to relate and collaborated harmoniously.

The pillars of ICC rest under the broad umbrella of the theory Communicative Competence (CC) (Mootoosamy & Aryadoust, 2024) introduced by Hymes (1972) and later expanded by Canale & Swain (1980) and Savignon (1997). Savignon, in particular, emphasized that one of the aspects of communicative competence should be the use of language as it should be in actual discourse, and should not remain as a mere knowledge. Over these years, the models went on to incorporate intercultural aspects, which in turn shaped the ICC elements that Byram (1997) defined as the integration of language and culture.

The necessity of Cultural Knowledge in EFL classrooms, as a means of loss of cultural ignorance and ethnocentrism, is also advocated by Nafisah et al. (2024). Multicultural SIKL

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settings, through in-person interactions, nurture ICC by facilitating student participation and encouraging them to autonomously acquire the language.

The gathered data demonstrates that SIKL students improve and gain confidence in their English communication skills through the appreciation of interaction with their cultural backgrounds and the engagement they receive in the classroom. Consequently, bilingualism and global communicative competence is also developed at SIKL.

Implications and Future Directions
Educational Implications:

The current study illustrates the advantages of pedagogical and emotional outcomes of culturally responsive instruction in multi-cultural settings such as the SIKL. Though teachers incorporate intercultural sensitivity and emotional scaffolding, they will also be able to more effectively facilitate the development of meaningful language learning. Such findings imply that instruction of English as a second language should remain informed by and due to the culturally relevant and relational principles of intercultural and communicative pedagogy, as is the current trend.

Policy and Curriculum Recommended:

The implications of these findings underscore the need for updated policies and curricula. It is recommended that students' mother tongue be used in instruction and evaluation to maintain confidence and understanding. This practice of bilingual scaffolding aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework. In addition, instructional resources should reflect multicultural diversity to foster Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), where cultural openness and sensitivity are the focus. Finally, teacher training should include intercultural pedagogy and multilingual methods to enable educators to create culturally responsive environments and provide comprehensive input, as emphasized in Krashen and Long's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) hypothesis.

Future Research Directions:

Further research could reinforce these findings by focusing on three main areas: (1) Conducting longitudinal studies to measure the long-term effects of culturally responsive pedagogy on writing skills and language fluency. (2) Examining the impact of peer scaffolding on linguistic and socio-emotional outcomes, which would expand our understanding of the ZPD in multilingual classrooms. (3) Investigating the impact of culturally responsive teaching on teacher identity and perceptions of professionalism in the context of diaspora schools. This research will contribute to the Intercultural Education model with an emphasis on Language Teaching Integration.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that within SIKL's multicultural environment, the application of culturally responsive teaching strategies improves multicultural students' mastery of English under the guidance of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, which includes multilingual scaffolding, the use of culturally relevant materials, and embedded emotional support that addresses the teaching of English Language Learners.

The findings suggest that teaching in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner, as predicted by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen and Long's Second Language Acquisition Theory, and Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence theory, makes disruptive changes in the learning of a second language as it transitions to identity construction, globalization, and education empowerment.

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This approach develops learners who are inclusive and have the potential to empathize and to interact with the world in a global context. There is therefore, a case for researched models of Intercultural Education with an emphasis of Language Instruction Integration. This integrated approach should involve Teacher Education, Curriculum Design, and models of sustained student outcome and engagement. Culturally responsive teaching and it's impact also delivers a case for inclusive education fit for the 21st Century.

Acknowledgement

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