The Correlation between Digital Multicultural Content Exposure and Intercultural Communicative Competence of EFL Learners in Universitas Negeri Semarang

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ABSTRACT
In the context of digital globalization, English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners are able to access informal digital spaces publishing various cultural content. The objective of the research is to explore if a positive relationship exists between exposure to multicultural digital media and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among EFL learners. This research was quantitative with a descriptive-correlational approach, which includes the forty undergraduates of Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) who were surveyed using Likert-scale questionnaire. The results have shown that the correlation between the two variables was positive and moderate ability (> r = 0.674, p = 0.000 < 0.05) which means, it is believed that more intensive students engage in multicultural contents by digital technology, so much better achievement of students' intercultural awareness and skills they would have in such manner. The implications of the research are that informal digital learning should be considered as a positive pedagogical strategy to enhance students' formal intercultural education in the EFL context.

Keywords: *Digital Media Exposure, EFL Learners, ICC*

INTRODUCTION

In the current global village, proficiency of English has transcended to not only mastery of language but also the ability to navigate diverse cultural landscapes (Shenbagam, 2024). For EFL learners, especially university students, the success of communication cannot be attained with only grammar and vocabulary mastery (Humayrah et al., 2024). The overarching aim of 21st language learning is to realize the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Jiang et al., 2022; Abdulhasan, 2024; Nava, 2024), or the capacity to interact with others in effective and culturally appropriate ways transcending cultural borders (Byram, 1997). It also includes attitudes, awareness, and knowledge of the world, interpreting and relating capabilities as well as discovery and interaction abilities (Byram, 1997). These skills are becoming more and more important for EFL learners in order to understand and cooperate with other cultures that support the development of their speaking proficiency attributed to their awareness about the culture (Omar, 2023). Nevertheless, there is a serious problem for EFL learners in Indonesia. The best way to gain ICC is by direct culture immersion, or exposure through living in or studying in English-speaking countries (Khrin, 2023; Laskowska, 2024). Meanwhile, not all students have the possibility to go abroad, for both geographical and financial reasons (Vidal, 2023). This issue creates challenge where learners are linguistically capable but culturally isolated. The cultural gap between language abilities and cultural integration is an educational gap that need to be filled. One way to address this gap is through the availability of digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X) and other social networking sites as “proxies” for cultural immersion. These digital platforms allow learners to view a window into the target culture via their screens, thus allowing them to view and learn about authentic social norms, non-verbal cues (body language), and varying worldviews. While a large number of university-aged students use media extensively, there continues to be unanswered questions on the educational effectiveness of using media as a form of exposure to a culture. While students use many hours per week in English-language media consumption, it is unclear whether

this form of exposure translates into an increase in measurable levels of intercultural intelligence. A large number of students may use media only as a source of entertainment and may not be processing the cultural differences or nuances presented in the media in a critical manner. Therefore, there is a critical need to determine if the consistent use of digital "proxies" has increased the learners' attitude, knowledge, and skill necessary for engaging in intercultural communication.

Literature Review

1. Digital Educational Resources

According to a research study conducted by Morozov and Mikhaleva (2023), the result indicate that digital multicultural content can significantly increase EFL learners' understanding on different cultures and improve their ICC. The research shows that digital media can be an innovative tool in language education by connecting the gap between linguistic ability and cultural understanding. Similarly, Basantes-Andrade et al (2025) indicate that collaborative online intercultural learning (COIL) through digital tools can greatly increase students' intercultural competence by enabling them to collaborate internationally while providing the opportunity for them to have meaningful interactions with peers from different cultural backgrounds.

2. Cultural Exposure and Communication Skills

Haikuo (2025) has shown on their study that by integrating digital media within the language education process students develop both linguistically and interculturally, thus helping to overcome the barriers created by cultural isolation for EFL students. Moreover, Greenberg (2023) found that online programs lasting only a few weeks were successful in increasing students' intercultural communicative competence, promoting empathy, and developing greater cultural awareness.

However, while many researchers have theorized the value of digital exposure, there is still limited empirical research data quantifying the direct relationship between frequency of digital exposure and ICC levels among Indonesian EFL learners. Therefore, this study occupies a gap in the literature through the provision of empirical data on the

correlation between informal digital learning and ICC in higher education context. Eventually, this study aims to determine if there is a significant correlation between the frequency of media engagement and students' ICC.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative correlational research design, with data collected from undergraduate students of the English Literature and English Language Education programs at Universitas Negeri Semarang. The data collection process was conducted using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms, which was designed to measure digital multicultural content exposure and intercultural communication competence (ICC). The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items that allowed participants to repost the frequency of their engagement with multicultural English digital media as well as their levels of cultural awareness, knowledge, and intercultural communication skills. After collecting the data, the responses were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The researcher first conducted validity and reliability test to determine whether the questionnaire items used to measure and obtain data were appropriate. Validity was assessed by comparing the calculated r with the r table, followed by a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha. Furthermore, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted to determine the normality of the data distribution. Subsequently, Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between multicultural digital media consumption and learners' ICC. The result of the analysis will be use to address the research adjectives and to provide a comprehensive description of the correlation between both variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a basis for all the analysis, the findings are provided in the table form bellow:

Table 1. Validity Test Result for Multicultural Digital Media Exposure (Variable X)

Correlations

		X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	Total
X1	Pearson Correlation	1	.436**	.361*	.447**	.672**	.773**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005	.022	.004	.000	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
X2	Pearson Correlation	.436**	1	.530**	.492**	.369*	.723**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005		.000	.001	.019	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
X3	Pearson Correlation	.361*	.530**	1	.529**	.509**	.750**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022	.000		.000	.001	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
X4	Pearson Correlation	.447**	.492**	.529**	1	.490**	.752**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.001	.000		.001	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
X5	Pearson Correlation	.672**	.369*	.509**	.490**	1	.825**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.019	.001	.001		.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
Total	Pearson Correlation	.773**	.723**	.750**	.752**	.825**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Validity Test Result for ICC (Variable Y)

Correlations

		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Total
Y1	Pearson Correlation	1	.687**	.301	.480**	-.113	.179	.000	.053	.121	.200	.087	.180	.251	.400*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.059	.002	.488	.269	1.000	.746	.456	.215	.595	.266	.118	.011
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y2	Pearson Correlation	.687**	1	.554**	.616**	-.017	.125	.057	.159	.244	.402*	.142	.040	.326*	.531**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.918	.441	.726	.328	.129	.010	.381	.805	.040	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y3	Pearson Correlation	.301	.554**	1	.591**	.136	-.076	-.046	.043	-.012	.357*	-.113	.212	.091	.377*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.059	.000		.000	.402	.640	.777	.793	.939	.024	.488	.188	.576	.017
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y4	Pearson Correlation	.480**	.616**	.591**	1	.102	.151	.099	.183	.089	.555**	.104	.211	.166	.555**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000		.531	.353	.543	.257	.584	.000	.522	.191	.306	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y5	Pearson Correlation	-.113	-.017	.136	.102	1	.494**	.561**	.195	.447**	.274	.387*	.062	.235	.567**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.488	.918	.402	.531		.001	.000	.229	.004	.087	.014	.702	.144	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y6	Pearson Correlation	.179	.125	-.076	.151	.494**	1	.668**	.546**	.630**	.449**	.448**	.035	.106	.696**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.269	.441	.640	.353	.001		.000	.000	.000	.004	.004	.831	.516	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y7	Pearson Correlation	.000	.057	-.046	.099	.561**	.668**	1	.540**	.448**	.368*	.407**	.102	.219	.652**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	.726	.777	.543	.000	.000		.000	.004	.019	.009	.531	.175	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y8	Pearson Correlation	.053	.159	.043	.183	.195	.546**	.540**	1	.580**	.341*	.490**	.236	.051	.637**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.746	.328	.793	.257	.229	.000	.000		.000	.031	.001	.142	.756	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y9	Pearson Correlation	.121	.244	-.012	.089	.447**	.630**	.448**	.580**	1	.347*	.655**	-.100	.303	.681**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.456	.129	.939	.584	.004	.000	.004	.000		.028	.000	.539	.057	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y10	Pearson Correlation	.200	.402*	.357*	.555**	.274	.449**	.368*	.341*	.347*	1	.286	.188	.346*	.708**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.215	.010	.024	.000	.087	.004	.019	.031	.028		.074	.245	.029	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y11	Pearson Correlation	.087	.142	-.113	.104	.387*	.448**	.407**	.490**	.655**	.286	1	.107	.359*	.623**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.595	.381	.488	.522	.014	.004	.009	.001	.000	.074		.510	.023	.000
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y12	Pearson Correlation	.180	.040	.212	.211	.062	.035	.102	.236	-.100	.188	.107	1	.440**	.341*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.266	.805	.188	.191	.702	.831	.531	.142	.539	.245	.510		.005	.031
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Y13	Pearson Correlation	.251	.326*	.091	.166	.235	.106	.219	.051	.303	.346*	.359*	.440**	1	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.118	.040	.576	.306	.144	.516	.175	.756	.057	.029	.023	.005		.001
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Total	Pearson Correlation	.400*	.531**	.377*	.555**	.567**	.696**	.652**	.637**	.681**	.708**	.623**	.341*	.498**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.000	.017	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.031	.001	
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The validity test of all questionnaire items, including 5 items from variable X and 13 items from variable Y, showed that all item were valid. The result shows that all calculated r were

higher than the r table, which known that the r table for a sample size of N = 40 is 0.312; thus, the calculated r values are higher than the respective critical value at the 0.05 significance level ($p < 0.005$). furthermore, all 18 items from the questionnaire were validated, because their respective r values were higher than the critical value of 0.312 with a corresponding p value of 0.000.

Table 3. Reliability Test Result for Variable X

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.819	5

Table 4. Reliability Test Result for Variable X

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.822	13

the reliability test for each variable shows a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.819 for variable X and 0.822 for variable Y. since both scores were above 0.60, the instrument was considered highly reliable for data collection.

Table 5. Normality Test Result

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		40
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	4.03862965
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.095
	Positive	.095
	Negative	-.086
Test Statistic		.095
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200[c,d]

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test yielded a significance value of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$), which would validate that the collected data conformed to a normal distribution and allow for parametric testing using Pearson Correlation Test.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Test Result

Correlations

		Multicultural Content Exposure	Students' ICC
Multicultural Content Exposure	Pearson Correlation	1	.674**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
Students' ICC	Pearson Correlation	.674**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The main statistical analysis using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation shows the sig. (2-tailed) value at 0.000, which lower than 0.05. This result indicates a strong positive correlation between these two variables. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) was 0.674, which based on the coefficient interval guidelines (0.61 – 0.80) indicate a strong positive correlation.

CONCLUSION

The finding of a strong positive correlation indicates that the frequency and depth of exposure to multicultural digital media play a significant role in enhancing students' intercultural communicate competence. This result implies that as students' engagement with diverse digital content increases, their ability to navigate intercultural interactions significantly improves. In the context of Indonesian higher education, particularly among EFL learners at UNNES, this "virtual immersion" serves as an effective substitute for traditional cultural exchange. The strong correlation underscores the fact that modern digital habits, such as consuming social media like TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube content, international social media interactions, and digital storytelling, are not only entertainment but also play a vital role in fostering empathy, knowledge, and skills needed for global communication.

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