

INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND SDG 4 IN EFL CLASSROOMS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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This study addresses the urgent need to align English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education. Despite global advocacy, a significant gap remains between intercultural policy goals and actual classroom realities. This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aims to synthesize pedagogical strategies, instructional materials, and teacher perspectives linking intercultural communication to SDG 4. Using the PRISMA protocol, 20 selected articles from 2020 to 2025 were thematically analyzed. The findings reveal that transformative strategies such as telecollaboration and Project-Based Learning (PBL), supported by culturally responsive materials (such as picture books) and digital tools, are effective in fostering global citizenship and student empathy. However, systemic barriers such as rigid curricula and a lack of teacher training continue to hinder optimal implementation. The study concludes that achieving SDG 4 in EFL classrooms requires a holistic transformation integrating decolonial pedagogies, social justice frameworks, and strong institutional support to empower teachers as agents of change.

Keywords: *EFL Teaching; Intercultural Communication; SDG 4; Systematic Literature Review*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the approach to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has undergone a foundational shift, propelled by the pressures of globalization and international sustainability priorities. The role of English language education now extends beyond achieving linguistic proficiency or grammatical mastery, transforming into a strategic instrument for cultivating globally-minded citizens who are socially conscious and culturally aware. This shift in orientation aligns with the United Nations' vision within the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on inclusive and equitable quality education (Ngoc & Ngo, 2025). Target 4.7 explicitly calls for education systems to equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, a culture of peace, and appreciation of cultural diversity. At this juncture, English teachers act as catalysts for change, not merely instructing language but also fostering values of global citizenship and cross-cultural understanding (Ortiz-García & Ochoa-Alpala, 2025). Recent studies from various countries, such as Thailand and Colombia, note a strong institutional push to align sustainable development aims within English curricula to keep education relevant in the 21st century (Sánchez, 2023). However, implementing this global vision often encounters complex local challenges, from infrastructure limitations to gaps in teachers' pedagogical readiness. Therefore, understanding how to effectively link English teaching practices with SDG 4 targets is an urgent academic imperative.

Amid accelerating globalization, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has emerged as a core ability learners of foreign languages must develop to participate productively in global society. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that the capacity to communicate across cultural boundaries requires not only linguistic fluency but also sensitivity, empathy, and the skill to navigate cultural differences without prejudice (Sánchez, 2023). A case study in Singapore by Klayklung (2022), shows that foreign language teaching aims to shape learners who are not only "knowledgeable" about the target culture but also "capable of reflecting on" their own cultural identity. This finding aligns with results

from multinational telecollaboration projects involving countries like Turkey, Germany, and Brazil, where direct cross-cultural interaction proved capable of reducing stereotypes and building critical awareness (Karkar-Esperat, 2025). This competence grows ever more crucial as global interactions often involve complex negotiations of meaning among individuals with differing values and norms. Without adequate ICC, English proficiency alone is insufficient to prevent misunderstandings or cross-cultural conflicts detrimental to the spirit of global peace. Consequently, contemporary EFL curricula are required to provide space for substantive intercultural dialogue, where students can learn to appreciate other perspectives while strengthening their local identity. Integrating this competence into teaching syllabi is no longer merely an add-on but a fundamental necessity to realize the humanistic dimension of language education (Allehaby et al., 2025).

The adoption of digital technology and pedagogical breakthroughs has created extensive new opportunities for embedding sustainability education into the EFL classroom. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is seen to hold great potential for expanding access to quality learning materials and facilitating global connections, even in resource-limited areas (Azis et al., 2025). Approaches like Deep Learning, for instance, encourage more holistic understanding and higher social engagement by using digital tools to connect abstract concepts with real-world contexts (Alek et al., 2024). In Thailand study by Ngoc & Ngo (2025), implementing technology-supported interdisciplinary learning methods allows university students to explore complex issues like clean energy (SDG 7) and industrial innovation (SDG 9) through English, simultaneously boosting their motivation and mastery of technical vocabulary. Strategies such as telecollaboration or virtual exchanges also enable students to interact directly with peers from other countries, creating authentic and transformative learning experiences. However, literature cautions that technology use must be coupled with appropriate pedagogical approaches so it does not merely become an information delivery tool but genuinely stimulates critical thinking and collaboration (Öztürk & Ekşi, 2025). The digital divide and low technological literacy among teachers remain significant barriers to be overcome to optimize this potential. Thus, innovation in teaching methods becomes the key bridge connecting the vision of SDG 4 with the realities of classroom practice.

One of the significant developments in recent language education scholarship is the growing awareness of the need for decolonial and social justice approaches in English language teaching (Mayorga & Marcela, 2024). Scholars in Latin America, for instance, criticize the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies in curricula that often marginalize local knowledge and learner identities. They advocate for pedagogies that acknowledge epistemic diversity and empower students to critique inequitable power structures through language learning (Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024). Socially-just language education does not only teach grammar but also invites students to recognize and respond to issues of inequality, racism, and discrimination in their surroundings. In Indonesia, a similar approach is seen in efforts to incorporate multicultural values and religious moderation in Islamic higher education to counter radicalism and strengthen social cohesion (Shafa et al., 2020). This approach affirms that inclusivity in education must not remain mere rhetoric but must be realized through teaching practices that validate the lived experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Thus, English language teaching serves a dual function: as a tool for global communication and as a means of local empowerment to achieve the social justice central to SDG 4.

Alongside cognitive and social aspects, the moral and values dimension is a vital component in the framework of language education for sustainable development. A comparative study of teachers in China and Pakistan reveals that moral education is often integrated into language teaching, albeit with differing value emphases according to cultural context such as socialist values in China and religious values in Pakistan (Asif et al., 2020). This demonstrates that the language classroom is never value-neutral; rather, it is a site where student character and ethics are shaped. In Indonesia, using teaching materials that blend cultural semiotics and self-discovery aims to create compassionate education, prioritizing students' emotional and ethical well-being (Shafa et al., 2020). Literary materials, particularly global youth literature, are used in China to spark moral discussions on complex

sociopolitical issues, helping pre-service teachers develop a strong ethical compass. Integrating these values is essential to ensure the global competencies students develop are not merely technical but also grounded in moral responsibility toward fellow humans and the environment. Without a solid moral foundation, language education risks producing individuals who are linguistically competent yet indifferent to global humanitarian challenges.

Current literature demonstrates the significant role of instructional materials in shaping students' perceptions and awareness, as they are often their primary source of exposure to the wider world. This review identifies a shift in research trends from the use of rigid commercial textbooks to the analysis of teacher-designed materials that are more adaptive to local contexts. In Indonesia, studies have documented that the use of picture storybooks on the themes of poverty (SDG 1) and inequality (SDG 10) has been effective in improving empathy and reading comprehension in junior high school students (Hidayati et al., 2025). This literature synthesis demonstrates that these materials enable students to see reflections of their own lives in the texts, thus increasing engagement and motivation to learn. In Colombia, research on decolonial perspective-based worksheets helps elementary school students identify and challenge gender and social stereotypes in their communities (Mayorga & Marcela, 2024). Therefore, this Systematic Literature Review aims to map how innovation in the development of instructional materials is a key element in the implementation of a curriculum aligned with SDG 4 based on recent empirical findings.

Despite global consensus on the importance of integrating intercultural competence and the SDGs, literature consistently reveals a significant gap between policy, teacher perceptions, and actual classroom practice. Research by Allehaby (2025) Saudi Arabia, for instance, there is a striking discrepancy between teachers' high awareness of the importance of intercultural competence and its low implementation in daily teaching. Teachers often feel they lack concrete guidance on how to translate national vision into classroom activities. The study in Algeria by Chiraz (2025), a majority of university lecturers report never having received formal training on Global Citizenship Education, leading to uncertainty and hesitation in its application. A similar phenomenon is found in Colombia, where teachers are skeptical about the feasibility of global education due to a lack of professional preparation and institutional support (Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024). This gap indicates that top-down policy alone is insufficient; systemic support in the form of teacher training, curricular flexibility, and adequate resource provision is needed. Without a bridge connecting policy ideals with classroom realities, integrating SDG 4 into language education will remain merely theoretical discourse.

Given the complexity of the issues and gaps outlined, this study is designed to conduct a comprehensive Systematic Literature Review of recent scholarship. Its primary objective is to map pedagogical strategies, the utilization of teaching materials, as well as teacher perceptions and challenges in integrating intercultural communication and SDG 4 within EFL contexts. This research seeks to synthesize empirical evidence from diverse geographical settings to provide holistic and applicable insights. Based on the above background, this study focuses on answering the following three research questions; RQ 1 What pedagogical strategies are implemented in EFL classrooms to develop intercultural communication in alignment with SDG 4?, RQ 2 How are instructional materials and digital tools utilized to integrate Global Citizenship Education and SDG awareness into EFL teaching?, RQ 3 What are the perceptions and challenges faced by EFL teachers in promoting intercultural competence and sustainable development goals?.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. SLR from Kitchenham was chosen to comprehensively and impartially identify, evaluate, and interpret all available and relevant research on a specific topic. This method enables the researcher to synthesize findings from various prior studies in order to answer the formulated research questions, as well as to map recent developments in the integration of intercultural communication and SDG 4 within English language education (Torres-Carrion et al., 2018).

By focusing on 3 main research questions, as follows: RQ 1 What pedagogical strategies are implemented in EFL classrooms to develop intercultural communication in alignment with SDG 4?, RQ 2 How are instructional materials and digital tools utilized to integrate Global Citizenship Education and SDG awareness into EFL teaching?, RQ 3 What are the perceptions and challenges faced by EFL teachers in promoting intercultural competence and sustainable development goals?.

Academic data was retrieved through systematic queries across internationally recognized databases, primarily Scopus and ERIC, supplemented by Google Scholar to capture relevant grey literature, including theses, dissertations, and institutional reports. A Boolean search string was constructed to intersect three core conceptual clusters; Competence Constructs: "Intercultural Competence" or "Intercultural Communicative Competence" or "Global Citizenship Education", Instructional Context: and "EFL" or "English as a Foreign Language" or "English Language Teaching", Framework Alignment: AND "SDG 4" or "Education for Sustainable Development" or "Social Justice" or "Decolonial Pedagogy". The search was confined to publications released between 2020 and 2025 to maintain contemporary relevance to post-pandemic educational dynamics and the ongoing implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the analyzed data, the following strict selection criteria were applied:

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion (Accepted)	Exclusion (Rejected)
Topics	Articles focus on cultural integration, SDGs, or social justice in English language (EFL/ESL) teaching.	Articles focus on pure linguistics, literature without pedagogical context, or pure technology.
Document Type	Scientific journal articles (research articles) and book chapters (book chapters) that have gone through a peer-review process.	Incomplete seminar proceedings, theses, dissertations, opinion articles, or book reviews.
Language	The article is written in English.	Articles written in languages other than English.
Publication Year	Published between 2020 – 2025.	Published before 2020.
Access	Full text is available openly (Open Access) or through institutional subscription.	Only abstract or paid (not accessible) is available.

Article screening followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. The selection flow is summarized below:

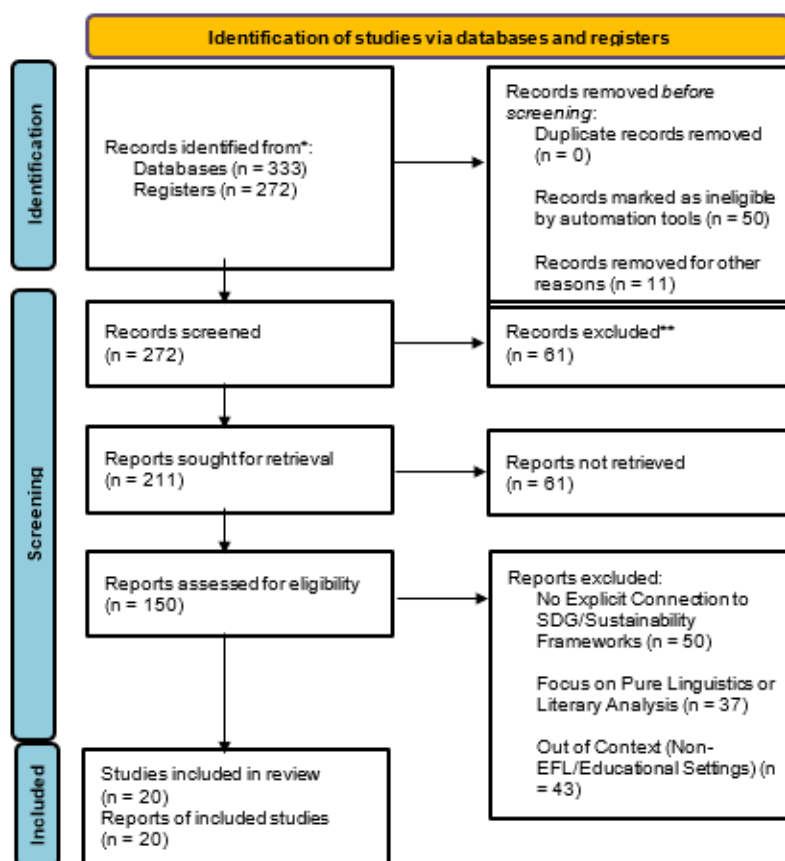


Figure 1. Prisma Protocol

The data from the 20 selected articles were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The process began with data extraction, in which key information including authors, year, country context, methodology, and main findings from each article was compiled and summarized into a systematic table. Next, coding was carried out by grouping findings based on topical similarities to identify emerging patterns and themes. In the final stage, theme synthesis was conducted, categorizing all data into five overarching themes that directly address the research questions: (1) Pedagogical Strategies, (2) Role of Materials and Technology, (3) Student Engagement, (4) Policy Challenges, and (5) Teacher Perspectives.

3. Findings and Discussion

Findings

In the identification stage, the researchers successfully recorded 380 articles and were then 16 articles removed due to duplicate records. In the screening stage, there were 364 articles included into screening based on the publication year between 2024-2025 and the determined criteria. There were 48 articles included into eligibility stages and it was identified that 332 articles were excluded. Those article were excluded since they did not meet the criteria namely the topic was not ESD practices, non-ELT context, non Indonesia context, and non researchbased articles. After doing full text review, the researcher indentified 6 articles which were included into meta-analysis. The selected articles are presented in table 1 below.

To present a structured data synthesis, this section of the findings is grouped by key themes that directly address the three research questions of this study. Table 2 below presents a systematic review of the 20 articles analyzed, detailing the geographic context, research focus, and key findings that inform the discussion of pedagogical strategies (RQ 1), the role of materials and technology (RQ 2), and teacher perceptions and challenges (RQ 3)

in the integration of intercultural communication and SDG 4.

Table 2. Included Studies

No	Author (Year)	Context	Main Focus	Key Findings
1	Hoang & Ngo (2025)	Thailand	General English Curriculum	Integrating intercultural competence (ICC) into the general curriculum is crucial for shaping global citizens, but is often hampered by differing institutional priorities.
2	Öztürk & Ekşi (2025)	Multinational	Telecollaboration & SDGs	Virtual exchanges between countries effectively build ICC and critical awareness of student teachers through discussions on sustainability topics.
3	Yusupova et al. (2025)	Uzbekistan	Project-Based Learning (PBL)	The motivational-cognitive-reflective model in PBL significantly improves pre-service teachers' teaching planning and collaboration competencies.
4	Ortiz-García & Ochoa-Alpala (2025)	Colombia	ELT Community Research	ELT research in Colombia contributes to SDGs 4, 5, 10, and 16, particularly on the issues of reducing inequality and building peace.
5	Hidayati et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Picture Books	Picture books improve junior high school students' reading comprehension and empathy towards issues of poverty (SDG 1) and inequality (SDG 10).
6	McClung et al. (2025)	Japan & Taiwan	Interdisciplinarity and SDGs	Integrating SDG topics into English classes increases students' motivation and mastery of technical vocabulary across disciplines.
7	Azis et al. (2025)	Indonesia	ICT and Continuing Education	ICT has the potential to expand access to sustainability education, but its effectiveness is hampered by digital infrastructure gaps.
8	Taif Chiraz (2025)	Algeria	Teacher Perception (GCE)	Teachers recognize the importance of Global Citizenship Education but rarely implement it due to lack of training and a rigid curriculum.

No	Author (Year)	Context	Main Focus	Key Findings
9	Ourrag & Kadri (2024)	Algeria	Cultural Teaching & GCE	Target culture teaching increases students' tolerance and empathy, but its implementation is still limited to superficial aspects.
10	Mayorga & Marcela (2019)	Colombia	Educational Ethic	Policies and curricula may unconsciously reproduce social hierarchies, exclusion, and cultural erasure inherited from colonial structures.
11	Sierra-Piedrahita (2024)	Colombia	Social Justice	Integrating a social justice perspective into language teacher education is necessary to challenge colonial power structures.
12	Asif et al. (2020)	China & Pakistan	Moral Education	Teachers in both countries still use traditional methods in moral education, with different value focuses (religious vs. socialist).
13	Prieto Ramos (2024)	Colombia	Teacher Design Material	Teacher-designed materials with a decolonial perspective empower elementary school students to recognize and challenge social injustice.
14	Lina Sun (2025)	China	Youth Literature	Global youth literature helps pre-service teachers develop critical awareness of complex sociopolitical issues.
15	Allehaby et al. (2025)	Saudi Arabia	The Belief-Practice Gap	There is a discrepancy between the perceived importance of intercultural awareness and actual practice in university classrooms.
16	Shafa et al. (2020)	Indonesia	Multicultural Education	The level of implementation of multicultural education by lecturers varies and is greatly influenced by their personal perceptions of diversity.
17	Karkar (2025)	General	Semiotics & Self-Discovery	A guide for elementary school teachers to center students' culture through semiotics to create an inclusive and compassionate education.

No	Author (Year)	Context	Main Focus	Key Findings
18	Bustamante (2023)	Colombia	Campus Experiences That Influence Global Identity	A high level of awareness of global issues and the development of complementary local-global identities. International experiences and a multicultural campus environment have been shown to enhance their intercultural skills and sense of social responsibility.
19	Democratic Values... (2024)	Indonesia	Democratic Values	Language educators play a vital role in instilling moderate values to foster social cohesion amidst ethnic diversity.
20	Klayklung (2022)	Singapore	Teacher's Perspective	Language teachers aim to develop culturally reflexive learners through engagement strategies and direct experience.

Pedagogical Strategies for Cultivating Intercultural and Sustainability Competence

The literature reveals a notable transformation in English language teaching strategies, moving from conventional methods toward more transformative and collaborative approaches that align with SDG 4. Virtual exchange initiatives, or telecollaboration, stand out for effectively facilitating direct cross-cultural dialogue without geographical constraints. A multinational study illustrated that through structured online interaction, pre-service teachers from various countries could engage deeply with sustainability topics, significantly enhancing their intercultural communicative abilities (Öztürk & Ekşi, 2025). Furthermore, Project-Based Learning (PBL), integrated with a cognitive reflective model, was successfully utilized in Uzbekistan to improve pre-service teachers' planning and collaborative skills, equipping them with competencies relevant for 21st-century education (Yusupova et al., 2025). In Indonesia, instructional methods grounded in multicultural educational values at Islamic universities were identified as a crucial approach for instilling democratic and moderate principles within diverse societies (Alek et al., 2024). Collaborative tandem learning has also been highlighted as a key strategy for teaching sustainable development goals in a post-COVID era, emphasizing the need for reciprocal learning partnerships (McClung et al., 2023). Overall, the success of these strategies heavily relies on educators' capacity to create interactive learning environments that connect with students' real-life contexts.

The Role of Instructional Materials and Technology in Contextualizing Learning

The selection and development of teaching materials play a central role in bridging the gap between abstract sustainability concepts and students' daily realities. Research from Indonesia found that using picture books addressing poverty and inequality enhanced students' narrative reading comprehension while prompting deep social reflection on their own environments (Hidayati et al., 2025). This is reinforced by a Colombian study demonstrating that teacher-designed worksheets from a decolonial perspective empowered elementary students to recognize and challenge local stereotypes and injustices (Ramos & Mauricio, 2024). Beyond print resources, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) serves as a key enabler in expanding access to quality sustainability education, though infrastructure limitations in remote areas remain a persistent challenge (Azis et al., 2025). In

contexts with specific curricular demands, integrating SDG-related themes into English materials has shown to increase motivation and vocabulary acquisition among students (Ngoc & Ngo, 2025). The use of global youth literature in China also proved effective in helping future teachers develop critical awareness of complex, globally relevant sociopolitical issues (Sun, 2025). Thus, well-designed materials function not only as linguistic input but also as powerful tools for building empathy, critical consciousness, and student agency in responding to global challenges.

Student Engagement and Identity Formation

The analyzed literature emphasizes that appropriate pedagogical interventions impact not only academic outcomes but also play a vital role in shaping student identity and emotional engagement. In the Indonesian picture book study, students formed strong emotional connections to the narratives, feeling that their own difficult life experiences such as helping parents with work were validated and acknowledged by the learning materials (Hidayati et al., 2025). Similarly, in Colombia, students interacting with culturally relevant and decolonial resources evolved from passive recipients into active agents proposing social transformation within their communities (Mayorga & Marcela, 2024). In Singapore, foreign language learning encouraged students to reflect on their own cultural identities while engaging with target cultures, creating a “third space” where local and global identities are dynamically negotiated (Klayklueng, 2022). Additionally, a compassionate education approach using students’ cultural semiotics effectively addressed disengagement by directly linking language learning to their cultural assets and identities (Karkar-Esperat, 2025). Increased motivation was also observed when lesson topics connected to real-world issues students cared about, such as social justice and the environment, which is crucial for exploring aspects of global citizenship in undergraduate students (Sánchez, 2023). Therefore, recognizing student identity and experience is a fundamental element in creating inclusive and empowering learning environments.

Curriculum and Institutional Policy Challenges

Despite global momentum for integrating intercultural competence and sustainability values, local implementation often encounters structural and policy-related obstacles. In Thailand, efforts to incorporate intercultural competence into general English curricula are frequently hindered by institutional priorities that emphasize linguistic proficiency alone, thereby marginalizing global competency development (Ngoc & Ngo, 2025). A study in Algeria reported that although teachers held positive attitudes toward global citizenship education, they faced significant constraints due to rigid curricula and insufficient syllabus flexibility to include global content (Chiraz, 2025). Furthermore, the disconnect between national policy and classroom practice is evident in Saudi Arabia, where national visions for intercultural awareness have not been effectively translated into practical guidance for teachers (Ourrag et al., 2024). In Colombia, this challenge is compounded by the colonial legacy within the education system, which often sidelines local knowledge and promotes non-inclusive Eurocentric standards (Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024). A consistent barrier across various contexts is the lack of institutional support in the form of training and adequate resources. Consequently, more flexible curricular reforms and policies that support teacher autonomy are essential to address these systemic hurdles.

Teacher Perspectives and Preparedness

Teachers are at the forefront of implementing global education; however, the literature consistently indicates they often feel underprepared or inadequately equipped for this role. In China and Pakistan, while teachers recognize their role as moral agents in shaping student character, they tend to rely on traditional teaching methods and seldom adopt research-based or modern theoretical approaches (Asif et al., 2020). In Colombia, English teachers view global citizens as critically thinking and adaptable individuals but remain skeptical about the feasibility of implementing such education in their institutions due to insufficient teacher preparation and training (Ortiz-García & Ochoa-Alpala, 2025). Meanwhile, in Colombia,

scholars stress that without a deep understanding of social justice theory encompassing redistribution, recognition, and representation teachers struggle to become effective change agents in challenging inequitable structures within schools (Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024). On the other hand, a case study of Thai language teachers in Singapore demonstrates that educators possess the agency to shape learning objectives beyond linguistic aspects, aiming to develop culturally “knowledgeable” and “reflective” learners, despite facing challenges in assessing these competencies (Klayklueng, 2022). These findings confirm that the gap between teachers’ beliefs in the importance of intercultural competence and their actual classroom practices is a global issue requiring serious intervention through sustained and relevant professional development programs.

Discussion

Based on a literature synthesis, achieving SDG 4, particularly Target 4.7, in English language education requires systemic transformation through transformative pedagogy. Findings indicate that virtual exchange initiatives, or telecollaboration, stand out for their effectiveness in facilitating direct cross-cultural dialogue without geographical boundaries. Through structured online interactions, pre-service teachers can engage deeply with sustainability topics and significantly improve their intercultural communication skills (Öztürk & Ekşi, 2025). Furthermore, Project-Based Learning (PBL) methods integrated with cognitive-reflective models have been shown to enhance educators’ planning and collaboration skills (Yusupova et al., 2025). In the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, multicultural educational values have been identified as a crucial approach to instilling the principles of democracy and moderation in a diverse society (Alek et al., 2024). Finally, collaborative tandem learning has also been emphasized as a key post-pandemic strategy for teaching the Sustainable Development Goals through reciprocal learning partnerships (McClung et al., 2023).

The selection and development of teaching materials plays a central role in bridging the gap between abstract sustainability concepts and students’ daily realities. The use of picture storybooks addressing themes of poverty and inequality has been shown to improve narrative reading comprehension while also triggering in-depth social reflection in students (Hidayati et al., 2025). This is further strengthened by the use of worksheets designed with a decolonial perspective, which empower students to recognize and challenge local stereotypes and injustices in their communities (Ramos & Mauricio, 2024). On the digital front, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) serves as a key enabler in expanding access to quality sustainability education, although infrastructure constraints in remote areas remain a challenge (Azis et al., 2025). Furthermore, the integration of global youth literature has also proven effective in helping pre-service teachers develop critical awareness of complex global sociopolitical issues (Sun, 2025).

Despite global momentum for the integration of intercultural competencies, local implementation often faces structural and policy barriers. In Thailand, efforts to integrate global competencies into the English curriculum are often hampered by institutional priorities that emphasize linguistic proficiency alone (Ngoc & Ngo, 2025). Similar challenges are found in Algeria, where teachers face the constraints of a rigid curriculum and a lack of syllabus flexibility to incorporate global content (Chiraz, 2025). Furthermore, there is a disconnect between national policies and classroom practices, as seen in Saudi Arabia, where the national vision has not been effectively translated into practical guidance for teachers (Ourrag et al., 2024). Colonial legacies in education systems also tend to marginalize local knowledge in favor of less inclusive Eurocentric standards (Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024). Overall, the lack of institutional support in the form of adequate training and resources remains a consistent barrier across contexts.

4. Conclusion and suggestion

Based on a systematic review of twenty selected articles, this study concludes that integrating intercultural communication and SDG 4 in EFL classrooms requires a fundamental shift from passive instruction to transformative pedagogy. Regarding

pedagogical strategies (RQ 1), the findings confirm that student-centered collaborative approaches, such as telecollaboration and Deep Learning, are highly effective in fostering critical cultural awareness and global citizenship skills. Concerning the use of materials (RQ 2), the use of contextualized teacher-designed materials, culturally responsive picture books, and ICT resources plays a vital role in validating students' identities and promoting social justice. Regarding teachers' perspectives and challenges (RQ 3), a significant discrepancy was found between teachers' recognition of the importance of intercultural competence and actual classroom practices. This gap is driven by structural barriers such as rigid curricula, an orientation toward technical linguistic tests, and a lack of institutional support and professional training. Overall, this study confirms that achieving SDG 4 targets in language education requires a synergy between innovative classroom practices and supportive educational policies.

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