



## **Exploring the Interconnectedness between English-Medium Instruction and Intercultural Competence: A Systematic Literature Review**

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In today's globalised educational landscape, the relationship between English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and intercultural competence (IC) in higher education is paramount. As institutions increasingly adopt EMI, understanding its interconnectedness with IC becomes essential. This systematic literature review explores how EMI influences IC development in higher education. Through thematic analysis, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness and sheds light on mutual influence. Three key themes emerge: (1) EMI as an opportunity or objective for developing intercultural competence, (2) EMI highlighting the need for IC development, and (3) Challenges related to both IC and EMI. These findings offer insights into the dynamics between EMI and IC in higher education contexts and underscore the importance of comprehensive teacher training programmes and policy interventions to address challenges and embed IC within EMI practices. Advocating for a holistic approach to EMI, this review calls for continued research on their relationship, emphasising ongoing efforts to promote intercultural competence in higher education.

**Keywords:** English medium instruction, intercultural competence, higher education, systematic review, internationalisation

### **INTRODUCTION**

English-medium Instruction (EMI) has witnessed a remarkable surge in popularity within tertiary education globally over the past two decades (Dafouz, Haines & Pagèze, 2020; Curle et al., 2020). This upswing is intricately connected to the internationalisation thrust within higher education institutions (HEIs), driven by the imperative to attract students, lecturers, and researchers globally, thereby enhancing institutional status and revenue (Macaro et al., 2021). However, this shift towards teaching and learning in English, particularly as an additional language, brings forth a constellation of challenges that both educators and learners must grapple with.

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Lecturers engaged in EMI confront the formidable task, defined as “more arduous and demanding” by Doiz and Lasagabaster (2018, p. 659), of imparting intricate subject matter in a language that is not the students' first language. The arduous nature of teaching complex content in an L2 setting is a pressing concern that warrants thorough investigation. The challenges posed by EMI are not unidirectional; students, too, are introduced to challenges (Curle et al., 2020; Carroll, 2015; Macaro et al., 2018; Dang et al., 2021) and find themselves navigating through the intricacies of new academic content while simultaneously processing it in a language that is not their mother tongue. This dual cognitive demand places additional burdens on students as they strive to grasp and assimilate knowledge presented in an EMI context.

Recently, studies have emerged linking EMI to Intercultural Competence (IC). Aguilar-Pérez's study (2021) investigates how EMI can contribute to IC development, Maíz-Arévalo and Orduna-Nocito (2021) explore the development of IC in EMI teacher training programmes, and Huang and Fang (2023) delve into EMI lecturers' beliefs concerning IC development. The development of IC has emerged as a consequential outcome of internationalisation initiatives within higher education (Deardorff, 2006). The imperative for institutions to foster interculturally competent students is increasingly recognised, leading to a growing need to further develop the field of intercultural competence within the academic realm (Byram & Hu, 2013). Consequently, a compelling rationale exists for conducting a systematic review of the literature to elucidate the interconnectedness between EMI and IC within the tertiary education landscape.

The connection between IC and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is evident. In a literature review, Sahan and colleagues (2021) highlight that EMI programmes aim to enhance the intercultural competence of local students. Experienced EMI lecturers emphasise intercultural challenges in addition to linguistic ones commonly reported in EMI contexts (Tang, 2010). Furthermore, a literature review on students' challenges in EMI pointed out that student support systems should focus on IC (Curle et al., 2020). Comprehensive IC development is a crucial aspect for EMI programmes, highlighted as the most significant recommendation by Corrales, Paba Rey and Santiago Escamilla (2016). In summary, the integration of IC into EMI programmes emerges as a vital aspect, influencing both the academic and practical dimensions of the educational experience.

The primary objective of this paper is to undertake a systematic review of the existing literature, with a specific focus on exploring the intricate relationship between English Medium of Instruction (EMI) and Intercultural Competence (IC) in the context of tertiary education. By synthesising and critically analysing the extant body of knowledge, this review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how the literature portrays the relationship between EMI and IC, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their intersection within higher education. This prompts our research question: What is the relationship between English-medium instruction and intercultural competence in the context of higher education?

The subsequent sections of the paper are structured as follows: in the upcoming section, we provide an overview of EMI, exploring its definitions and elucidating its objectives,

benefits, and challenges. Subsequently, we delve into the internationalisation of higher education and the interconnectedness between EMI and IC. Continuing our theoretical exploration, we scrutinise IC, investigating different models and its relevance to the internationalisation process of higher education and EMI. The following section outlines the methodology utilised in this systematic review, where we conduct a comprehensive analysis of the studies on EMI and IC, examining how this relationship is portrayed in the literature. The subsequent section presents our findings, followed by a discussion of these findings in the context of the proposed research question. The paper concludes by summarising the primary research results and suggesting avenues for future research, specifically focusing on the development of IC in EMI contexts.

### **English-Medium Instruction**

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) refers to the practice of using the English language to teach academic subjects, other than English itself, in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English (Dearden, 2014; Macaro et al., 2018). Some authors prefer the designation English-Medium Education in Multilingual University Settings (EMEMUS) or, in abbreviated form, English Medium Education (EME), defined as:

“post-secondary internationalised education in multilingual settings that uses English as a medium for teaching and learning of academic subjects other than the English language itself” (Dafouz & Smit, 2023, p.02).

EMEMUS is deemed more transparent as it encompasses both 'instruction' and 'learning', explicitly centring on the tertiary level (Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Dafouz, López-Serrano & Pérez-Paredes, 2023). The discourse surrounding these terms reflects the ongoing debate and research concerning the impact of EMI in multilingual contexts. EMEMUS, therefore, with its use of the word 'multilingual', allows for a perspective in which English facilitates linguistic pluralism without displacing other languages (Hultgren, 2022). Recently, EME has become the “British Council’s ‘preferred term’, reflecting the need for a more holistic approach at macro (or systems), meso (or institutional) and micro (or classroom) level” (Veitch, 2021). In the present study, the acronym EMI is utilised, considering its prevailing use in the literature, even as the term English-Medium Education (EME) gains traction (Lasagabaster, 2022).

The significant expansion of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes is frequently associated with the internationalisation of higher education (Wilkinson, 2022). This phenomenon is described by Pérez-Paredes and Curry (2023, p. 93), who assert that internationalisation has given rise to the prevalence of English-Medium education in higher education, where English has become the language of academic instruction across various subjects in non-English-speaking contexts globally. EMI is considered both a "by-product" of internationalisation initiatives (Sánchez-García, 2023, p. 1) and a "gateway to successful internationalisation" (Aizawa et al., 2023, p. 1).

Internationalisation, as defined by Knight (2004, p. 13), involves “integrating an international, intercultural, and/or global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research and service), and delivery of higher education”. Knight (2021) also identifies four categories of rationales behind internationalisation of higher education:

academic, economic, political and social; occurring at four different levels: individual, institutional, national and regional. Hüttner and Baker (2023) further elaborate by proposing a continuum from utilitarian to humanistic. According to them, utilitarian goals include economic benefits, such as generating revenue for universities, and academic goals, such as enhancing the global standing and interconnectedness of researchers and students. On the more humanistic end of the continuum, various social rationales are encompassed, particularly citizenship development towards global citizenship. Additionally, within the academic cluster of rationales, there is an extension of the academic horizons of both staff and students through the integration of an international dimension feature.

In Europe, the integration of an international, intercultural, and/or global dimension into higher education has been influenced by supranational initiatives such as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Started by the Bologna process, which aimed to standardize degree structures and facilitate mobility within the region, it has led to the widespread adoption of EMI in European HEIs as underlined by Hultgren (2022). The author underscores the importance of a shared language for cross-border mobility, with English often being the default choice in today's linguistic landscape. The intertwining of EMI and internationalisation reflects the evolving dynamics of higher education in a globalised context.

The adoption of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is perceived as a strategic measure to enhance national competitiveness in innovation, facilitate internationalisation, and improve students' future employability (Chien & Valcke, 2020). It aims to prepare students for globalisation, attract international students and academics, elevate universities' standings in global rankings, and foster the development of 'soft skills,' including critical thinking and intercultural communication skills (Curle et al, 2024). Additionally, this adoption is purported to incidentally enhance students' proficiency in the English language (Malmström et al., 2023). While these outcomes are appealing to both universities and students, concerns have been raised regarding the potentially 'disastrous' effects on students' academic outcomes (Aizawa et al., 2023).

Implementing an additional language as the medium presents a scenario where students must navigate two highly demanding activities: grasping complex academic content and processing information in an additional language, while lecturers simultaneously face the challenge of teaching academic content in a language other than their students' native language (Kremer, 2021). Zuaro (2023) highlights fundamental differences between teaching in one's first language to a domestic audience and teaching in a second language to a culturally diverse audience. These differences encompass academic and cultural backgrounds, comfort with the medium of instruction, and expectations regarding the roles of lecturers and students.

EMI lecturers globally acknowledge challenges in presenting complex topics in a second language and note difficulties for students in comprehending new content in that language (Pérez-Paredes and Curry, 2023). In a global review of EMI-related literature, Curle et al (2020) reported on the challenges introduced by EMI for both lecturers and students. This occurs in a context where knowledge regarding the nature and extent of

challenges due to EMI is limited (Malmström et al., 2023). For instance, reported challenges for lecturers encompass not only English language proficiency but also pedagogy, understanding the challenges EMI students face, and the interactional skills needed to ensure content learning (Macaro et al., 2020). As for students, Curle et al (2020) present a comprehensive collection of challenges: difficulties in spontaneous speech production; difficulties understanding lecturers' accents; struggles with academic writing; increased workload and the need for extra time to study in English; and being communicative in class. All of these factors contribute to a situation where the literature suggests that EMI teaching and learning is "more arduous and demanding" (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2018, p. 659) and even raises the question of whether lecturers can effectively teach in a second language (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 554).

### **Intercultural Competence**

Intercultural competence, a subject of study for several decades, has given rise to influential models, primarily rooted in the North American and European traditions due to their respective contexts of emergency and development. The North American tradition encompasses models such as Jandt's "Model of Intercultural Competence" (1998), Arasaratnam's "Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence" (2006), and Deardorff's "Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence" (2006). In contrast, the European tradition includes models like Byram's "Models of Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Communication Competence" (1997, 2021) and Candelier's "Integrated Model of Plurilingual and Intercultural Competences" (2000).

Bastos (2014) argues that the North American tradition, originating in the 1950's, places emphasis on interpersonal interaction and the development of sensitivity to intercultural differences. It focuses on individual and social behaviours that enhance communication effectiveness between individuals from different cultures. However, this tradition has faced criticism for overlooking the role of languages in these interactions and often generalising results across diverse cultural contexts. In contrast, the European tradition, emerging in the 1960's in response to increasing migration in Europe, concentrates on the integration of immigrants into the host society. It also underscores the importance of respecting and valuing linguistic and cultural diversity within the European project.

Within the realm of internationalisation initiatives in higher education, fostering interculturally competent students stands as a pivotal goal (Deardorff, 2006; European Commission, 2008). Acknowledged not just as a prerequisite for international mobility but also as an essential attribute for employability in the globalised labour market (Tillman, 2012; Deardorff, 2015), intercultural competence (IC) has undergone a shift in perception. Formerly, there was a belief that IC naturally developed through language proficiency and multicultural experiences, such as exchange programmes or foreign language study. However, contemporary literature challenges this notion, highlighting the pivotal role of formal education in IC development. Byram and Hu (2013) underscore the imperative faced by academia to foster IC, incorporating principles and capabilities that furnish individuals and groups with the knowledge and predispositions for effective critical intercultural dialogue.

In higher education, the Process Model of Intercultural Competence by Deardorff is one of the most influential as understands IC as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). This includes attitudes such as openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures), respect (towards cultures and cultural diversity) and curiosity towards other cultures and languages; knowledge encompassing in-depth understanding and knowledge of cultures (including contexts, the role and impact of culture and the worldviews of others), as well as awareness of one’s own biases and cultural assumptions; and skills involving active listening, observation, empathy, and the ability to see the world from different perspectives. The synergy among these three components - attitudes, knowledge, and skills - is imperative for the development of intercultural competence, fostering adaptability, flexibility, and an ethno-relative perspective.

## **METHOD**

This section outlines the process of selecting the corpus, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and the procedure for data analysis.

### **Corpus Selection Process**

In order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature, a systematic review was carried out on the Web of Science and Scopus databases. These databases were selected for their prestige, extensive coverage of academic literature, and the ones more frequently used in the evaluation of the academic production of researchers. Initially, a timespan for publication date was set to include articles from 2000 onwards, to match the popularity of EMI adoption, but this was unnecessary as all identified articles were from 2016 onward. In June 2023, the query "English medium instruction AND intercultural competence" was employed in both databases. The initial step involved analysing titles, abstracts, and keywords, applying inclusion and exclusion criteria developed to determine study eligibility. To be included, studies had to address both English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Intercultural Competence (IC) in higher education. Articles solely focusing on English language instruction (English as a second or additional language), those not addressing IC, or investigating primary or secondary education were excluded. The inclusion and exclusion process is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1  
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Topic	English as a Medium of Instruction and Intercultural Competence	Focus on English language. E.g.: ESL/EFL Mentions but not actually about EMI or IC
Educational Level	Higher education	Primary and secondary education

The initial search was performed on Scopus, using the mentioned query and searching under “TITLE-ABS-KEY.” This yielded 27 results. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 16 articles were excluded, resulting in N = 11 articles for review. Subsequently, the same query was applied to Web of Science, employing a topic search that includes titles, abstracts, and keywords. This approach produced 24 results, and

after applying the exclusion criteria, three articles were added to the review. Therefore, the final body of articles for this systematic review was defined as N = 14.

The identification of studies is depicted in Figure 1, adhering to the Preferred Reporting of Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement by Page et al. (2021). The PRISMA statement was selected for its facilitation of "transparent and complete reporting of systematic reviews" (Page et al., 2021, p. 1).

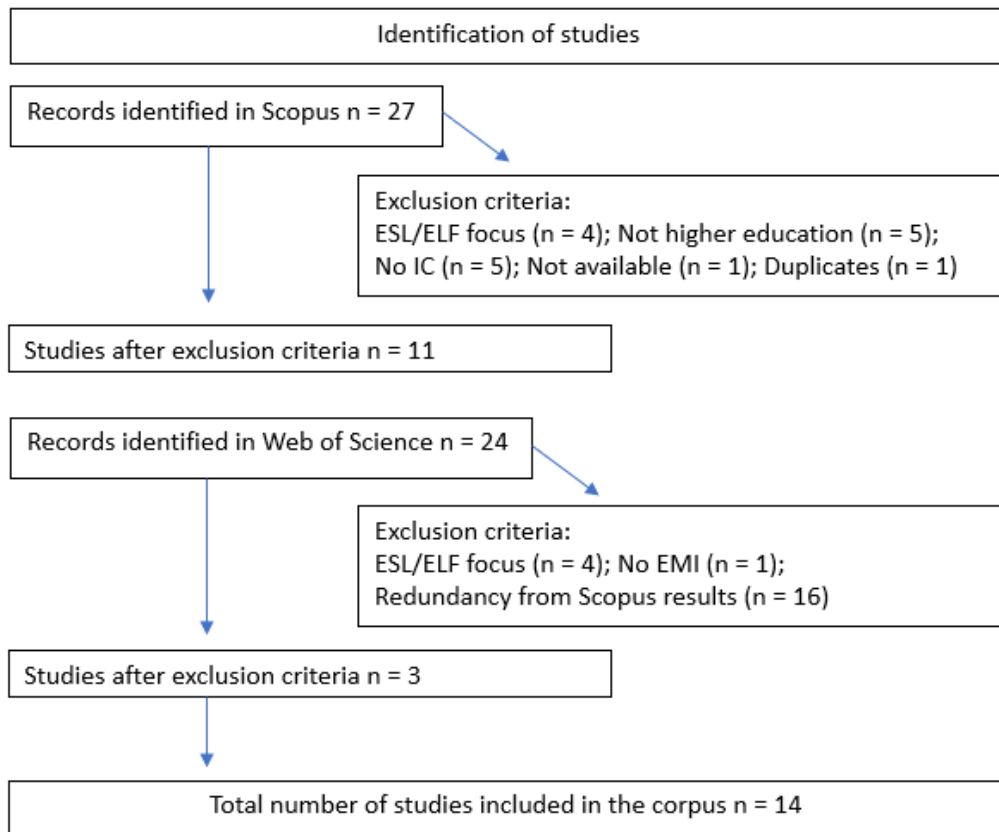


Figure 1  
PRISMA flow diagram of article selection

The fourteen articles included in the study are listed in Table 2. The "Level" column refers to the educational level investigated, BA, MA or PhD. If the study encompassed all levels in higher education, it was coded as 'general'. The "Theme" column denotes the themes identified in the thematic analysis, which are further detailed in the subsequent section.

Table 2  
Overview of included articles

Code	Author(s)/Year	Country	Level	Theme
A1	Gustafsson (2020)	Netherlands	BA	3
A2	Wang (2023)	China	General	2
A3	Qiu & Fang (2022)	China	General	2, 3
A4	Maíz-Arévalo & Orduna-Nocito (2021)	Spain	General	2
A5	De la Cruz-Cabanillas and Tejedor-Martínez (2021)	Spain	MA	2
A6	Aguilar-Pérez (2021)	Spain	BA & MA	1, 3
A7	Mišić-Ilić & Đorđević (2022)	Serbia	General	2
A8	Arnó-Macià & Aguilar (2018)	Spain	BA	3
A9	Aguilar (2018)	Spain	General	1
A10	Lourenço, Andrade & Byram (2020)	Portugal	General	1
A11	Chen (2019)	Taiwan	General	1, 2
A12	Belyaeva (2018)	Russia	General	1, 2
A13	Zhai and Razali (2022)	Malaysia	MA & PhD	3
A14	Corrales, Paba Rey & Santiago Escamilla (2016)	Colombia	BA	1

### Data Analysis Procedures

In the data analysis phase, the complete texts of the selected studies underwent a meticulous examination to ascertain their year of publication, the country under investigation, level of education, discipline, research objectives, and the portrayal of the relationship between EMI and IC. The first five categories facilitated the contextual understanding of the studies, while the last one directly addressed the proposed research question. Subsequently, a thematic analysis was conducted, to identify recurring themes and patterns. The resulting data was systematically collated using an Excel spreadsheet, enabling comprehensive organisation and analysis.

The selected articles were predominantly recent, with none published before 2016. Although just one article was published in 2023, that can be attributed to the data collection period, which occurred in June 2023. Regarding the geographical distribution, it seems to reflect well EMI adoption with most articles investigating Europe (9), 4 Asia and 1 Latin America. As for the level of education reported in the articles, 7 dealt with higher education in general (all levels), 4 BA level, 1 BA and MA, 1 MA and 1 MA & PhD. Regarding the discipline investigated, 6 articles were general and did not specify the discipline (A2, A4, A8, A10, A12, A13), 3 were from Engineering and Technology (A3, A6, A14), 2 from Education and Language (A5, A9), and 1 from the Medical Sciences (A1), 1 from Natural and Mathematical Sciences (A7), and 1 from Commerce and Social Sciences (A11). Regarding the research objectives of the studies, 7 aimed at an analysis of EMI practice (A3, A5, A8, A9, A10, A11, A14), 4 investigated EMI teacher training (A1, A4, A7, A12), 2 observed the impact of English Proficiency on EMI (A2, A13) and 2 specifically explored the impact of IC in EMI or of EMI in IC (A2, A6). It is noteworthy that A2 had two distinct objectives, leading to it appearing twice in the analysis.

To address the proposed research question, a thematic analysis was employed, chosen for its suitability "when dealing with a broad range of findings. A thematic analysis involves creating summaries of prominent and recurrent themes in the articles in a



systematic way" (Goagoses & Koglin, 2020, p. 154). Initially, the data was colour-coded to identify portrayals of the relationship between EMI and IC. Subsequently, these excerpts were subjected to further analysis and organised into themes. These themes serve as "the mechanism by which studies are compared, contrasted, and subdivided; and their findings are configured" (Gough et al., 2012, p. 184).

Through the use of thematic analysis, the following key themes emerged:

1. EMI as an opportunity or objective for developing intercultural competence.
2. EMI highlighting a need for intercultural competence.
3. Challenges related to both IC and EMI.

The subsequent section provides a comprehensive exploration of these three key themes derived from the thematic analysis, offering deeper insights into the intricate relationship between EMI and IC.

## FINDINGS

This section reports on the findings based on the research question guiding this systematic review. As outlined in the preceding section, our thematic analysis revealed three distinctive themes, and the ensuing findings are organised in alignment with these thematic insights.

### **Theme 1: EMI as an Opportunity or Objective for Developing Intercultural Competence**

Six articles report contexts where EMI is perceived either as an opportunity for developing IC or as an explicit aim (A6, A9, A10, A11, A12 and A14). As an opportunity, Aguilar-Pérez (2021, A6), shed light on the student perspective, emphasizing how the EMI environment "contributed to increasing their IC because of the opportunity to approach international students and interact with them" (p. 24). Notably, this gain was not attributed to EMI lecturers, who, in contrast, did not perceive it as their responsibility to foster students' intercultural skills. In a comparison with English for Special Purposes lecturers (ESP) in the study, the ESP lecturers acknowledged their duty to develop students' intercultural skills. This implies that, in EMI contexts, English language lecturers can play a crucial role in supporting the development of intercultural competence alongside L2 proficiency. Chen (2019, A11) reported from the lecturers' perspective, who stated that teaching in multicultural EMI environments benefits lecturers by "allowing them to keep honing their intercultural competence" (p. 995). However, this insight, derived from an interview with an experienced EMI lecturer, stands as an exception, as other participants in the study predominantly focused on language aspects of EMI rather than IC, despite the authors citing English language and intercultural skills as required EMI lecturer competences. Lastly, in Corrales, Paba Rey and Santiago Escamilla (2016, A14), stakeholders including the department director, lecturers and students reported on the influence of an EMI course on their development of Intercultural and International Competences (IIC), an objective of internationalisation of higher education in the investigated context. However, stakeholders provided feedback in general terms, without specifying the dimensions of IIC they felt they had developed. While all participating students agreed

that EMI assisted them in developing IICs, they struggled to identify the specific aspects developed. Similarly, when asked about IIC, lecturers primarily focused on language, and the department director stated that cultural aspects could not be addressed due to the technical nature of the topics. These responses indicate a lack of clarity in the concept of IC and IIC. Consequentially, the authors recommended institutions to define “overarching international and intercultural competences that create a clear foundation for the implementation of EMI courses” (p. 336), enabling stakeholders to understand their relevance and work towards achieving IC-related goals.

Here, it is essential to address the use of the expression “international and intercultural competences.” While the term selected for study inclusion was “intercultural competence,” the participating studies employed various expressions, including intercultural competence, intercultural competences, intercultural communication, intercultural communicative abilities, intercultural component, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural communicative competences, international and intercultural content, intercultural skills, international and intercultural competences. As noted by Wang (2023), there are several terms used to refer to intercultural competence, each with its specific emphasis. This diversity was evident in the analysed studies, where ‘Intercultural Competence’ served as an umbrella term with specific variations. However, authors of the selected studies often did not clarify their choice of terminology to address specific aspects of IC, with the exception of Maíz-Arévalo & Orduna-Nocito (2021, A4) who explored definitions and differences between IC and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Wang (2023, A2) aforementioned. Similarly, participants in these studies frequently used these terms interchangeably, raising questions about their full comprehension of the terms and their respective definitions.

Other articles reported on contexts where EMI adoption was accompanied by setting IC development as a learning objective. Aguilar (2018, A9) provided a framework that accounts for the reasons why IC should become a learning outcome and how English for Special Purposes (ESP) and EMI emerge as allies that act as drivers of intercultural competence. The author stated that neither ESP nor EMI inherently focuses on IC development and how integrating it as a learning goal demonstrates adaptability and resilience in the increasingly international higher educational setting. As for the how, the article proposed two broad types of activities—Promoting Reflection and Interaction. These were selected due to their ease of implementation and their capacity to foster both content mastery and discipline-specific language skills. In Lourenço, Andrade, and Byram (2020, A10), the investigated internationalisation initiatives of a higher education institution, encompassing EMI adoption, centred on the development of students' intercultural competences. The study's findings indicated that, at the highest strategic level, internationalisation is deemed a key priority, aligned with initiatives such as student mobility, international research projects, and EMI. While this strategic emphasis is linked to anticipated outcomes, including enhanced revenues and increased institutional visibility, there is also a growing focus on addressing the intercultural education of students.

Lastly, in the context of reporting on EMI teacher training courses delivered in the MOOC format, Belyaeva (2018, A12) highlighted their objective of developing

intercultural skills. The courses addressed this objective by discussing the role of language in intercultural communication and exploring how to identify challenges for effective intercultural communication. The author concluded that, despite some missed opportunities, there is evidence suggesting that both investigated courses have a strong potential to enhance participants' sensitivity to aspects related to intercultural communication.

### **Theme 2: EMI Highlighting a Need for Intercultural Competence**

Theme 2 encompasses studies that reveal how EMI has highlighted a need for IC development among lecturers and students (A2, A3, A4, A5, A7, A11, A12). Specifically, five studies highlighted the imperative for lecturers to cultivate their own IC in response to EMI. Qiu and Fang (2022, A3), Mišić-Ilić and Đorđević (2022, A7), Belyaeva (2018, A12) and Chen (2019, A11) underscored how EMI lecturers' competences must extend beyond language proficiency to include IC, however, no specific dimensions of IC were mentioned. Qiu and Fang (2022, A3) reported on an EMI programme in which employed both Chinese and English native speaker lecturers. While students appreciated the interactive teaching approaches, diverse activities, and varied communication methods of international lecturers, they noted a lack of intercultural competence and understanding of the local Chinese context among these lecturers. This deficit could potentially hinder students' knowledge of the domestic market, where they are likely to seek employment in the future. This led students to favour courses taught by local lecturers. Mišić-Ilić and Đorđević (2022, A7) presented an EMI training course that recognised the need for EMI lecturers to go beyond language proficiency and include specific pedagogy and intercultural communicative competences. The syllabus addressed "intercultural academic behaviour in an EMI class" (p. 27), considering intercultural awareness as a resource EMI lecturers should possess to convey meaning in class. In addition to what was presented in the previous section, Belyaeva (2018, A12) also listed intercultural skills among the necessary knowledge and skills for EMI lecturers to effectively manage multicultural and multilingual groups.

After listing intercultural skills as necessary competences of EMI lecturers, Chen (2019, A11) compared the perceptions of teaching in English between novice and experienced lecturers. The results revealed that experienced lecturers reported a more positive teaching experience with EMI. This perception was attributed to two reasons; first, their awareness of English as a lingua franca, which acknowledges English as a means used by individuals from diverse linguacultural backgrounds to communicate, and second, the adoption of a student-centred pedagogy.

An in-service training module with the aim of developing EMI lecturers' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) was the object of study in Maíz-Arévalo and Orduna-Nocito (2021, A4). The study reported that although participants were willing to learn about ICC before training, they were not aware of its importance. After the training had taken place, participants became aware that changes related to EMI go beyond language and recognised that it is crucial to develop their intercultural competence to successfully advance the internationalisation of higher education.

Notably, the training module included a section on interculturality, focusing on the concept of culture and its implications when working in a multicultural classroom.

Two articles underscore that IC is needed to properly deliver content knowledge. Wang (2023, A2) reported that lecturers' language proficiency and intercultural competence contribute to EMI lecturers' classroom leadership and EMI content delivery in an engaging and competence manner. The study recommended that EMI training should address the development of lecturers' IC, defined based on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000) as comprising five components: Interaction Engagement, Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness. Lastly, De la Cruz-Cabanillas and Tejedor-Martínez (2021, A5) emphasised the need to raise awareness towards IC in the MA in Teacher Training analysed in the study. According to the authors, the students, as future teachers, due to the interaction between local and foreign students, must show sensitivity towards other people's culture and foster reflection towards acquiring IC, ultimately contributing to the development of democratic citizens within a culturally diverse world.

### **Theme 3: Challenges Related to Both IC and EMI**

The third emerging theme comprises articles addressing challenges associated with IC and EMI (A1, A6, A8, A13). In a study conducted in Spain, Aguilar-Pérez (2021, A6) highlighted how students acknowledged the contribution of an internationalised environment to improving their IC, despite perceiving EMI as a challenge. This challenge is attributed to the agreement among both students and lecturers that IC was not adequately catered for in the class, resulting in students feeling unsupported by lecturers in enhancing their IC. Zhai and Razali (2022, A13) reported on Chinese students in Malaysia who identified intercultural communication as a challenge in studying in English. The authors linked these EMI challenges to the students' "poor English communication competence" (p. 9). Despite scoring high on the IELTS proficiency test, the students struggled to speak English confidently and fluently in academic contexts. To overcome these challenges, the authors suggested several strategies, including preparations in the home country (e.g., discipline specific English and introduction to the host country' teaching approach), oral academic English training, prejudice-reducing measures, English communication activities, and the development of self-learning methods.

Addressing the need for IC support alongside English language proficiency, Gustafsson (2020, A1) reported on an EMI teacher training programme in the Netherlands. The study delved into the debate surrounding the competence needed for teaching in EMI Higher Education. It underscored the challenge of defining EMI teaching competence linguistically, which poses difficulties in monitoring, training, and certifying it. The study aimed to delineate linguistic needs of EMI teachers in Medical Education programmes. Participants formed a supportive and collaborative community of practice, and despite the primary focus on linguistic needs, the study noted a parallel emphasis on intercultural communication. In a study by Arnó-Macià and Aguilar (2018, A8), it was emphasised that policies place the responsibility for language and intercultural competence entirely on content lecturers who may not consider IC learning outcomes. This is evident in the focus on International and Intercultural Content (IIC) in subjects

in the Humanities and Social Sciences, with minimal attention in Engineering or Science degrees. The authors highlighted those policies neglect ESP lecturers, who are trained and experienced in enhancing intercultural awareness. Taking a more extreme stance, another study in Spain (Aguilar-Pérez, 2021, A6) reported that lecturers refused any accountability for IC development. Their justifications revolved around the idea that promoting IC development is unnecessary, as they perceive local and international students to be similar, given the worldwide homogeneity of higher education.

## DISCUSSION

The proposed research question aimed to find out what the relationship between English-medium instruction and intercultural competence in the context of higher education is. From the thematic analysis conducted with the selected studies, three key themes were revealed.

The first theme emerging from the analysis encompasses studies portraying English-Medium Instruction as either an opportunity for developing intercultural competence or setting it as an explicit objective. These studies highlighted contexts where the adoption of EMI is perceived as a catalyst for IC development. This result aligns with the findings of Sahan and colleagues (2021) in a global literature review that EMI programmes aim to enhance the intercultural competence of local students. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the explicit aim of developing IC must be set, as "simply taking part in study abroad does not result in interculturally competent students. In fact, some research has shown that students may return more ethnocentric and close-minded" (Deardorff & Jones 2022, p. 232).

Byram (1997; 2008; 2021) proposes the intercultural speaker as the aim of intercultural communicative competence, opposing the unattainable and inappropriate native speaker (2021, p. 96), such idea fits better the objectives set by higher education institutions and could be used as guidance. Additionally, Baker (2022) emphasises the necessity of making learners aware of the intricacies involved in intercultural and transcultural communication processes. This acknowledges the impracticality of expecting learners to possess comprehensive knowledge of the diverse linguacultural backgrounds of all potential interlocutors and the corresponding variations in linguistic and cultural practices. Such awareness enables learners to adeptly adjust their linguistic and communicative resources to suit the specific demands of each communication instance.

The findings of this systematic literature review revealed how stakeholders see EMI as a catalyst of IC development. It is mentioned that EMI provides local students with the opportunity to interact with international students and allows lecturers to continue honing their IC skills (A6, A11, A14). That view reported by participants (students, lecturers and a department director), however, seems to reflect a superficial understanding that IC is developed simply through multicultural experiences, disregarding academia's responsibility to foster IC (Byram & Hu 2013). In contrast, A9 highlighted the importance of integrating IC development as a learning goal, while A12 provided an example of successful integration of support for lecturers to develop students' IC in EMI teacher education. A14 emphasises that IC competences, as described by Deardorff, are essential skills for future professionals and therefore a responsibility of universities. Additionally, in Lourenço, Andrade and Byram (2020,

A10), the path in higher education is clearly outlined, as internationalisation initiatives tend to lead to EMI, which, in turn, highlights the need for IC development. The main concerns of HEIs regarding IC are visible through actions that prioritise citizenship education and student integration.

The second theme (A2, A3, A4, A5, A7, A11, A12), which delves into how English-Medium Instruction (EMI) underscores the necessity for intercultural competence development, aligns with current literature (Lasagabaster, 2022; Huang & Fan Fang, 2023), where authors emphasise the growing significance of intercultural competence among EMI practitioners as they engage with increasingly diverse student cohorts. Our findings resonate with a prevailing trend observed in European universities, where there is a shift in focus from solely English language proficiency to a broader, more comprehensive training that includes an intercultural perspective (Ackerley, Guarda, & Helm, 2017). This alignment between our research outcomes and existing literature reinforces the acknowledgment of intercultural competence as a pivotal aspect of EMI (Aguilar-Pérez, 2021, A6; Tejada-Sánchez & Molina-Naar, 2020), emphasising the importance of interculturally competent EMI lecturers and students (Maíz-Arévalo and Orduna-Nocito, 2021, A4). The TAEC EMI Handbook (2019) aptly notes that while proficiency in the English language may appear sufficient for teaching and learning in EMI settings, linguistic skills alone are inadequate for effective intercultural communication, and a classroom with international students does not automatically lead to intercultural learning. The handbook outlines various scenarios wherein EMI necessitates IC among lecturers: instances where jokes or interactions deemed appropriate in a first language might not be so in English; situations where students observe and emulate lecturers' behaviours concerning intercultural matters; the imperative to acknowledge and bridge differences in academic cultures; and the specificities surrounding providing feedback to students from diverse educational backgrounds.

The third theme addresses the challenges associated with both intercultural competence (IC) and EMI, as highlighted by various studies (A1, A6, A8, A13). Of particular concern is Aguilar-Pérez's (2021, A6) revelation that lecturers often expect international students to assimilate into the local academic culture without recognising the need for reciprocal behavioural adaptation. This oversight indicates a lack of awareness of the potential benefits of developing intercultural competence for students' future careers. To address these challenges, stakeholders must be informed about the complexities of EMI adoption, and policies should explicitly prioritise the development of intercultural competence. Moreover, teacher training programmes must extend beyond English language proficiency to sensitise lecturers to the importance of intercultural competence and equip them with pedagogical strategies tailored to diverse teaching contexts. A comprehensive approach to EMI that integrates intercultural competence is essential to mitigate scenarios reported by Aguilar (2018, A9), where heightened interaction with international students exacerbated prejudice among local students, leading to communication difficulties.

Our theoretical background (Pérez-Paredes & Curry, 2023; Curle et al, 2020; Macaro et al., 2020; Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2018) highlighted a plethora of challenges faced by EMI lecturers, and our findings indicate that the development of intercultural

competence may further compound these challenges, as evidenced by lecturers in study A6 (Aguilar-Pérez, 2021) who did not see it as their responsibility to develop students' IC, a view opposed to that of ESP lecturers in the same study. This scenario presents an opportunity for language specialists to contribute to integrating IC development into EMI through student support, EMI in-service and pre-service teacher training, and collaboration (Aguilar, 2018, A9). As highlighted by Macaro (2022), EMI lecturers express dissatisfaction with their pedagogy and recognise the need for change in EMI contexts, which may come in the form of comprehensive training and support, and partnerships with English language specialists.

### CONCLUSION

This systematic review significantly contributes to the field by advancing understanding of the intricate relationship between English-medium instruction (EMI) and intercultural competence (IC) in higher education. By synthesising findings from fourteen selected studies, the review unveils three key themes that provide novel insights: first, the perception of EMI as an opportunity or having the explicit objective of fostering IC; second, EMI highlighting a need for intercultural competence among lecturers and students alike; and third, the multifaceted challenges posed by the interconnectedness of EMI and IC. These findings underscore the pressing need for higher education institutions to comprehensively integrate intercultural competence into EMI curricula.

As the implementation of English-medium instruction has become a global trend in higher education, understanding its connection to intercultural competence development has emerged as a crucial area of inquiry. Therefore, a systematic review of the literature in these areas constitutes a significant contribution to this evolving field of knowledge. Our analysis illuminates the interconnectedness between English-medium instruction and intercultural competence, highlighting themes that have been extensively researched separately but remain under-investigated in terms of their connection. Consequently, this study provides a nuanced understanding of these concepts and stresses relevant factors as portrayed in the literature.

The context explored in this study stems from the internationalisation of higher education, which has led to the widespread adoption of EMI globally (Wilkinson, 2022). Based on the findings of this review, we argue that internationalisation is a complex process that must go beyond its common misconceptions, such as equating it simply with teaching in English and increasing international student income (Aguilar-Pérez, 2021). In response to the demand for graduates with international and intercultural perspectives in our interconnected world (Jones, 2022), the development of intercultural competence has become a key aim of EMI initiatives. This review contributes to the current body of literature that recognises that studies addressing EMI and IC are still in their early phases (Huang & Fang, 2023).

Through a comprehensive thematic analysis of fourteen selected studies, our review aimed to answer the research question: What is the relationship between English-medium instruction and intercultural competence in the context of higher education? Three key themes emerged, shedding light on various aspects of the EMI-IC relationship. The first theme highlights the perception of EMI as both an opportunity

and an objective for developing intercultural competence. While some stakeholders still view EMI as a means to naturally enhance IC through multicultural experiences, others advocate for the explicit integration of IC development into EMI curricula. This underscores the need for higher education institutions to establish clear objectives regarding IC development within the context of EMI, aligning with broader internationalisation initiatives. The second theme highlights how EMI accentuates the need for intercultural competence development among both lecturers and students. As EMI expands globally, there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of intercultural competence alongside English language proficiency. The findings emphasise that there is a pressing need for comprehensive training that includes an intercultural perspective for EMI practitioners, as well as the integration of intercultural competence as a core component of EMI programmes. Lastly, the third theme addresses the challenges associated with both IC and EMI adoption, including issues related to lecturer expectations, student assimilation, and communication difficulties. These challenges underline the complexity of navigating intercultural interactions in EMI settings and highlight the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address them effectively.

In conclusion, this review brings to light the intertwined nature of EMI and IC in higher education and emphasises the importance of recognising and addressing the challenges and opportunities inherent in this relationship. Moving forward, higher education institutions must adopt a holistic approach that integrates intercultural competence into EMI curricula, provides adequate support for stakeholders, and fosters a culture of inclusivity towards international students and diverse groups, as well as promoting cultural awareness within academic communities. This approach will not only benefit the institutions but also better prepare students for a globalised society and job market. Additionally, the involvement of English language specialists in EMI is essential to foster IC development and overcome reported challenges. The theoretical contributions of this review address the call for greater theorisation in EMI (Curle, Rose & Yuksel, 2024), highlighting the importance of considering intercultural competence in this discourse.

Addressing the limitations of this study, it is important to note that only articles written in English were included, potentially leading to a limitation in capturing the full breadth of diverse contexts explored in other languages. Moreover, alternative keywords such as "intercultural communicative competence" could have been considered to capture a broader range of relevant studies. While "intercultural competence" is often used as an umbrella term in the EMI literature, it may not encompass all relevant studies published.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Corpus of analysis

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