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The Role of Intercultural Pragmatics and Informal Digital Learning of English in Promoting Intercultural Global Citizenship

دور التداولية بين الثقافات والتعلّم الرقمي غير الرسمي للغة الإنجليزية في تعزيز المواطنة العالمية بين الثقافات

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- **Abstract:**

Digital globalization can foster EFL learners' Intercultural Global Citizenship (IGC) through access to intercultural communication in informal digital contexts. The current research aims at exploring EFL learners' views about the role of intercultural pragmatics and Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) in reinforcing IGC. It further investigates the tools and platforms of informal learning used by EFL learners in the Algerian context. To reach this aim, the present research adopts a qualitative approach through conducting a structured interview with 20 third-year students at 8 May 1945 University, Guelma. Findings indicated that learners exhibit favorable attitudes towards IDLE and the effective role of intercultural pragmatics in fostering intercultural global citizenship. Significantly, the adoption of ICT tools and digital globalization has provided learners with new opportunities to practice English in Virtual Learning Environments. Thus, it is highly recommended to integrate learners into the global community and raise their awareness of the importance of Global Citizenship Education and ICG.

Keywords: Digital globalization, Digital Language Learning, Global Citizenship Education, Informal Digital Learning of English, Intercultural Global Citizenship, Intercultural Pragmatics.

الملخص:

يمكن للعولمة الرقمية أن تعزّز **المواطنة العالمية بين الثقافات (IGC)** لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من خلال تمكينهم من التواصل بين الثقافات في سياقات رقمية غير رسمية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف آراء متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حول دور **التداولية بين الثقافات** و**التعلّم الرقمي غير الرسمي للغة الإنجليزية (IDLE)** في دعم المواطنة العالمية بين الثقافات. كما يتناول الأدوات والمنصّات الرقمية غير الرسمية التي يعتمدها المتعلمون في السياق الجزائري.ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، اعتمد البحث المنهج النوعي من خلال إجراء مقابلات منظّمة مع **20طالبًا من السنة الثالثة بجامعة 8 ماي 1945 – قالمة** .أظهرت النتائج أنّ المتعلمين يُبدون مواقف إيجابية تجاه التعلّم الرقمي غير الرسمي ودور التداولية بين الثقافات في تعزيز المواطنة العالمية بين الثقافات. ومن اللافت أنّ اعتماد أدوات تكنولوجيا المعلومات والاتصال والعولمة الرقمية قد وفّر للمتعلمين فرصًا جديدة لممارسة اللغة الإنجليزية في بيئات تعلم افتراضية. وعليه، يُوصى بدمج المتعلمين في المجتمع العالمي وزيادة وعيهم بأهمية **التربية على المواطنة العالمية** و**المواطنة العالمية بين الثقافات.**

الكلمات المفتاحية :العولمة الرقمية، تعلم اللغة الرقمي، التربية على المواطنة العالمية، التعلّم الرقمي غير الرسمي للغة الإنجليزية، المواطنة العالمية بين الثقافات، التداولية بين الثقافات.

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- **Introduction**

In the age of digital globalization, embracing Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) can profoundly foster EFL learners' Intercultural Global Citizenship (IGC). By maintaining a solid bridge of intercultural pragmatics, IDLE has the potential to facilitate online interaction and ensure deep cultural understanding through the Global Network. Recently, digital interaction across global cultures has provided learners with unlimited opportunities to exchange ideas and practice critical thinking skills with their peers from different communities. Exploring various cultural values and norms has increasd learners' cultural awareness and raised their tolerance of other cultures. Embracing intercultural communication in informal digital learning contexts is not just about mastering a foreign language; it is about preparing learners to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. It equips them with the pragmatic competence and life skills necessary to become active, empathetic, and responsible global citizens, capable of contributing to the demands of the global world.

The aim behind the current research is to foster Intercultural Global Citizenship through Intercultural Pragmatics in Informal Digital Learning contexts. Within this scope, the current research tackles the following two main research questions:

-Could EFL learners achieve Intercultural Global Citizenship through Intercultural Pragmatics and Informal Digital Learning of English?

-What are the applications and platforms used by EFL learners in informal digital learning contexts?

1. Literature Review

1.1 Intercultural Global Citizenship

The idea of citizenship gained much importance in 1943 through the work of Brew[1] who encouraged clubs' membership to promote the knowledge and skills necessary for becoming a citizen. She further stressed the *appreciation* of culture and the importance of collaboration between club members to reach the stage of *creativity and innovation*. In essence, Brew's work laid the foundation for a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of citizenship, one that values cooperation and cultural diversity, in addition to active participation in community clubs. However, good citizenship in today's globalized world involves not only participating in one's own culture but also appreciating other cultures. Accordingly, intercultural citizenship is defined by Stavenhagen[2] as:

> [T]he building of political and social institutions by which culturally diverse communities within a multiethnic and multilingual nation can solve their differences democratically by

[1] Brew, J. Macalister. *In the Service of Youth: A Practical Manual of Work among Adolescents.* Faber, 1943.

[2] Stavenhagen, Rodolfo. "Building Intercultural Citizenship through Education: A Human Rights Approach. " *European Journal of Education,* vol. 43, no. 2, 2008, pp. 161-179, p. 176.

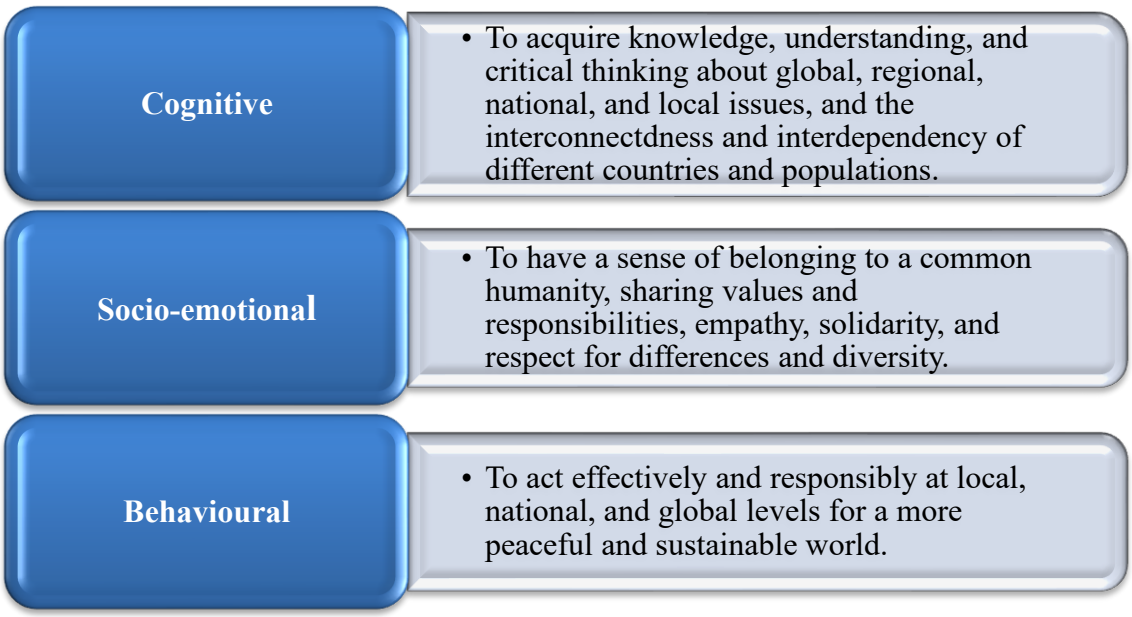
consensus without tearing apart the common structures and values or having to abandon their particular cultural identities, such as language, culture and ethnicity.

The above quote implies that global tolerant dialogue is a necessity that goes hand in hand with multilingualism and multiculturalism. Hence, the term *Intercultural Global Citizenship* is used in this article to refer to intercultural global communication across cultures that can lead to integration and create a sense of belonging among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This could be achieved through Intercultural Citizenship Education (ICE) by reinforcing intercultural competence. ICE is based on creating a balance between one's culture and others' culture, in addition to viewing the learner as a global citizen who respects diversity. In this respect, UNESCO has introduced the concept of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) in 2011 to indicate a new type of education that refers to citizens who have to contribute effectively to their local as well as global community. GCED is related to goal 4 (quality education) of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically target 4.7:

> **Target 4.7:** ensure that all learners are provided with the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non violence, *global citizenship* and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development[3]

As shown in the above quote, lifelong learning ensures sustainability in education through the prominent role of culture and the acceptance of cultural diversity in the global community. Within this scope, GCED has three domains as illustrated below:

Fig. 1. Domains of Global Citizenship Education



Source: (UNESCO, 2015, qtd. in *Promoting Global Citizenship*, 2022**)**

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[3] *Promoting Global Citizenship Education in Arab Universities: Proposals for Action.* The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2022, p. 3.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the cognitive domain of global citizenship education encompasses a critical evaluation and judgement of different interrelated communities on the basis of one's understanding and knowledge. The socio-emotional domain is based on a shared sense of humanity and solidarity. It reflects a feeling of being integrated in the global community by sharing the same values and accepting the other. The behavioural domain necessitates civic action to cope with the global demands and challenges and achieve peace and sustainability.

1.2 Intercultural Pragmatics

Pragmatics came as a response to Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar and structuralism. It emphasizes language use and interaction in real-life settings. Intercultural pragmatics, which is a subfield of pragmatics, originated from the socio-cognitive approach which stipulates cooperation as an influential factor in communication. According to Kecskes [4], intercultural pragmatics centers around language use in intercultural settings and focuses on interaction between different cultures.

Effective communication necessitates pragmatic competence, a term introduced by Chomsky[5] in 1980 to refer to the ability to use language appropriately. Significantly, Thomas[6] introduced the term 'cross-cultural pragmatic failure' in 1983 to indicate miscomprehension of spoken messages due to cultural differences. To reduce the risk of pragmatic failure, communication should be based on understanding the target culture; therefore, fostering intercultural competence is highly recommended for EFL learners.

1.3 Informal Digital Learning of English

Informal Learning was coined by Brew[7] in 1946 to highlight the necessity of education beyond schools by taking learning to 'social units' such as libraries and clubs. Later, Knowles[8] focused in his research on adult learning, self-direction, and practice of what has been learned in formal contexts. After that, Tough[9] used the term *self-teaching* to refer to adults' self-instruction and self-improvement. McGivney[10] defined informal learning as "learning that takes place outside a dedicated learning environment, which arises from the activities and interests of individuals or groups but which may not be recognized as learning (learning by doing, listening, observing, interacting with others, and so on)". He further described those activities as non course-based and intentional. Accordingly, informal learning is a type of non-institutional experiential learning that takes place beyond the classroom. It is unplanned, unstructured, and self-controlled in contrast to

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[4] Kecskes, Istvan. *Intercultural pragmatics*. Oxford UP, 2014.

[5] Chomsky, Noam. *Rules and Representations*. Columbia UP, 1980.

[6] Thomas, Jenny. "Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure." *Applied Linguistics,* vol. 4*,* 1983, pp. 91-112. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91

[7] Brew, J. Macalister. *Informal Education: Adventures and Reflections*. Faber, 1946.

[8] Knowles, Malcom Shepherd. *Informal Adult Education*. Association Press, 1950.

[9] Tough, A. (1967). *Learning without a teacher: A study of tasks and assistance during adult self-teaching projects.*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

[10] McGivney, Veronica. *Informal Learning in the Community: Trigger for Change*. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, 1999, p. 1.

formal learning which is structured, classroom-bounded and teacher-guided. Nonetheless, Coffield[11] argued that informal learning should not be marginalized when compared to formal learning because the principal goal of the former is "to act as the precursor of formal learning; it needs to be seen as fundamental, necessary and valuable in its own right".

In the twenty-first century, Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE)[12] emerged as a subfield of Computer Assisted Language Learning. IDLE gained much attention through the use of digital technologies in informal digital contexts. Significantly, learners can use some digital tools, applications, and platforms to facilitate learning in virtual environments. Lee identified four qualities of IDLE as informal, out-of-class, naturalistic, and self-directed learning. All these attributes make learning beyond the classroom a flexible, dynamic and interactive process.

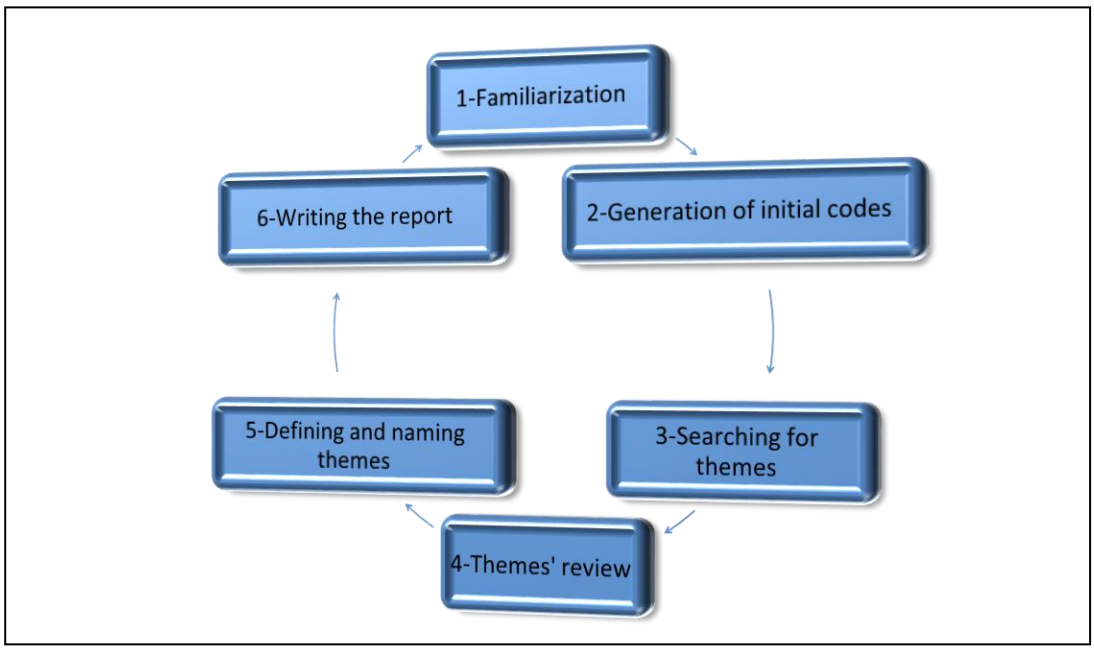
2. Research Methodology and Design

To achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions, the qualitative approach was adopted by conducting a structured interview with 20 third-year students at the Department of English, University of 8 May 1945-Guelma. The aim was to get in-depth information and details about the role of intercultural pragmatics and Informal Digital Learning of English in promoting Intercultural Global Citizenship. Inductive thematic analysis was used to code and identify themes and patterns emerging from interviews' transcriptions. Analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's six phases[13]. First, familiarization with the collected data is reached through immersion and active reading of the transcribed data. Second, generation of initial codes that represent the most interesting elements. Third, searching for themes by categorizing similar themes and sub-themes. Fourth, themes' review includes a reflection and revision of the gathered themes. Fifth, defining and naming themes is to identify themes' titles. Sixth, writing the report that centrers around the final analysis of the patterns in the form of a detailed account based on the researchers' arguments. The six steps are illustrated in the following figure:

Fig. 2. Thematic Analysis as a Cyclical Process

[11] Coffield, Frank. *The Necessity of Informal Learning.* Policy Press, 2000, p. 8.
[12] Lee, Ju Seong. *Informal Digital Learning of English.* Routledge, 2021.

[13] Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology, vol. 3, no.* 2, 2006, pp. 77–101.



Source: (*Adapted from* Braun and Clarke, 2006)

3. Results and Discussion

Initial codes of the transcriptions have been generated, refined and reviewed to specify final themes that are indicated in Table 1:

Table 1. Emerging Themes and Sub-themes from the Interview

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Learners' Attitudes towards Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE)	
2. Intercultural pragmatics in informal digital learning contexts: The role of interaction in digital environments	2.1. The role of Virtual Learning Environments in promoting intercultural and cross-cultural communication 2.2. The role of the Social Media, YouTube, and other applications 2.3. The role of AI-powered tools
3. Effects of Digital globalization	3.1. Digitalizing English learning 3.2. Use of ICTs beyond the classroom 3.3. Emergence of new modes of learning 3.4. Intercultural communication through technology

4. Lack of Awareness about Global Citizenship Education (GCED)	
5. Aspects of Intercultural Global citizenship	5.1. Engagement and integration in the global community 5.2. Online Collaboration 5.3. Solidarity between different communities and cultures. 5.4. Access to culture and Intercultural awareness 5.5. Global responsibility

Five main themes have emerged from the interview's qualitative data. The first theme is '*Learners' Attitudes towards Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE)*'. Although the participants asserted that they have positive attitudes towards IDLE, many of them admitted that they are not independent enough to implement it without teachers' guidance and support, and that IDLE cannot replace formal learning in the classroom. The results are consistent with the study of Dressman and Lee[14] who found that IDLE is not an alternative to Face-to-face learning, and suggested its adaptation for the classroom. Conversely, they argued that the learning context beyond the classroom is conducive to promoting autonomy. Consequently, a significant number of the population acknowledged their dependence on teachers for direction, indicating a lack of self-reliance and autonomy. This suggests that they may not possess the necessary skills and qualities to navigate learning independently.

In the second theme '*Intercultural pragmatics in informal digital learning contexts: The role of interaction in digital environments'*, the majority of informants stressed the effective role of interaction in digital environments as an influential indicator of IDLE. Communication across cultures is based on intercultural exchange among diverse communities. The participants stressed the significant role of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in promoting intercultural and cross-cultural communication because they are extensively exposed to the target culture. Immersion plays an important role in fostering learners' intercultural competence in VLEs, as confirmed by Shadiev et al.'s [15] quasi-experimental study. Furthermore, VLEs make learning personalized and individualized as learners create their own learning environment that can satisfy their own needs. A student explained: "*...because VLEs give me a chance to learn relevant and needed knowledge at my own pace, and help me achieve my own goals*". However, many informants maintained that cultural shock often arises when they do not know much about the culture of the other, which can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication. Furthermore, the participants argued that they use the social media platforms to communicate with other communities such as: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. Some participants indicated that they use Duolingo and YouTube to improve their general English proficiency and raise their communicative competence. One student explained that instant messages and video calls have improved her linguistic as well as

[14] Dressman, Mark, and J. Seong Lee, J. S. "IDLE in the Classroom: Learner-Driven Strategies for English Language Learning." *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas,* vol. 94, no. 4, 2021, pp. 181-87.

[15] Shadiev, Rustam, et al. "Effects of Immersion and Interactive Strategies on Students' Intercultural Competence in Virtual learning environments. " *Education and Information Technol*ogies, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-13030-1

intercultural competence. Additionally, some informants stressed the importance of AI-powered tools in facilitating cross-cultural communication. Within this scope, they concurred that they use AI-driven translation tools to understand more about cultural aspects, norms, and taboos, which aligns with the results of the study conducted by Kasawneh[16] who administered a questionnaire to investigate the role of AI-based translation in enhancing cross-cultural communication.

The third theme 'Effects of Digital globalization' has four sub-themes:

-Digitalizing English learning.

-Use of ICTs beyond the classroom.

-Emergence of new modes of learning.

-Intercultural communication through technology.

Digital globalization has brought significant changes to the learning landscape. In this regard, all the respondents claimed that digital globalization has digitalized English learning either in or beyond the classroom. It has accelerated the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) outside the classroom. As reported by Hiradhar and Bhattacharya[17], students are using different software applications and platforms beyond the classroom. Accordingly, learners can have a plenty of chances to practice the language through technological devices outside the classroom as some classrooms are not well-equipped with technology. Furthermore, the participants uncovered that digital globalization triggered the adoption of new modes of education especially after the emergence of pandemics (e.g., Online Learning and Blended Learning). The interviewees indicated that they have new opportunities for interaction that facilitate meeting native speakers of English like Facebook groups, Messenger, Twitter…etc. One participant stated: "*I think that digital globalization affected learning English in many ways, it has given more opportunities for the learners cross the world to discover other countries' cultures and exchange knowledge*". Thus, the shift from face-to-face contexts to online platforms has significantly transformed intercultural communication. Given this fact, EFL learners can have access to unlimited opportunities to practice the language with native speakers.

The fourth theme '*Lack of awareness about Global Citizenship Education (GCED)*' introduces GCED as an efficient factor that can foster learners' sense of global belonging and citizenship. The majority of the participants indicated that they feel integrated in the global community through the use of Internet. A student claimed: "*yes, I feel I am a member in the global community because I study English which is an international language*". However, all the informants ignored the concept of GCED. Hence, students' awareness about this issue should be raised.

The fifth theme tackles '*Aspects of Intercultural Global Citizenship'* which encompasses four sub-themes:

-Engagement and integration in the global community.

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[16] Kasawneh, M. A. Saleem. "The Potential of AI in Facilitating Cross-cultural Communication through Translation. " *Journal of Namibian Studies,* vol. 37, 2023, pp. 107-130.

[17] Hiradhar, Preet., & Bhattacharya, Atanu. "ICT beyond the Classroom: New Media and Learning." *ICT in English Language Education: Bridging the Teaching-Learning Divide in South Asia,* edited by P. Hiradhar & A. Bhattacharya, Springer. *2022*, pp. 63-74.

-Online collaboration.
-Solidarity between different communities and cultures.
-Access to culture and Intercultural awareness.
-Global responsibility.

Concerning engagement and integration in the global community, the interviewees declared that they are integrated in the global community through online engagement in different platforms. They have Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in online settings. They further indicated that they are collaborative whenever help is needed by any member of the global community. A student argued: "*The English language is an effective tool to enhance our intercultural global citizenship. This could be done through engaging in collaborative projects, online debates or discussions about common issues, and working in groups and teams*". This shows learners' high engagement as global citizens. Besides, the informants insisted that solidarity is needed between different communities and cultures. In this respect, the informants explained that they are cooperative and eager to know different cultures and accept as well as help others because these qualities are at the heart of humanity. One participant explained: "*what language unites, culture cannot separate*". This implies that language is more powerful than culture, and that English is a vehicle of communication while culture is the conveyed message or the content of communication. Moreover, the participants reported that access to culture is important to know more about the target culture. They further argued that the Net has facilitated access to the target culture; however, they claimed that EFL learners have to be aware of cultural differences and similarities to reach reconciliation and tolerance. One informant clarified that by saying: "*as a student of English, I think that having access to culture through the online platforms, and developing intercultural awareness is incredibly essential in today's globalized world*". Furthermore, global responsibility is an important aspect within intercultural global citizenship. The interviewees clarified that their sense of global belonging has led to feeling responsible for maintaining peace and preserving the environment. A student explained: "*As members of the globe, we share responsibility of the well-being of the globe*". Eventually, global responsiblity is based on global cooperation and interest in global concerns.

Overall, it is observed that learners exhibit favorable attitudes towards IDLE and the effective role of intercultural pragmatics in fostering intercultural global citizenship. Additionally, the adoption of ICT tools and digital globalization have provided learners with new opportunities to practice English in VLEs, and made global cultures more accessible. The integration of learners into the global community highlights the importance of digital literacy and intercultural global citizenship. Hnece, educational institutions should prioritize raising EFL learners' awareness of GCED and its integration into the curriculum.

• Conclusion

The current research aims to highlight the role of intercultural pragmatics and IDLE in promoting Intercultural Global Citizenship. Qualitative data from the structured interview indicated that both IDLE and intercultural pragmatics can promote intercultural global citizenship as learners can communicate across cultures easily due to the use of ICTs beyond the classroom. However, IDLE should not replace the traditional mode of learning where face-to-face interaction with the teacher plays a significant role in consolidating comprehension. Hence, fostering learners' higher-order thinking skills in the classroom can guarantee effective learning beyond the classroom.

To promote intercultural pragmatics, learners should focus on activities that promote intercultural exchanges outside the institutional setting. However, the practical implementation of IDLE and intercultural pragmatics remains a challenge. The current research proposes the following pedagogical implications for teachers:

-Enhancing learners' intercultural pragmatic skills is a priority in Foreign Language Learning.

-Encouraging learners to improve their level through IDLE plays a significant role in enhancing their overall English proficiency on the one hand, and autonomy on the other hand.

-Informing learners about the role of AI-powered tools either in the classroom or in informal digital learning contexts is a necessity in the digital age.

-Teachers should always guide students in the context of IDLE by providing online feedback and support especially for low-achievers.

-IDLE is not an end in itself, it is a tool to enhance learners' pragmatic competence and prepare them for future global demands and challenges.

-Listening to students' voice when they reflect on their intercultural experiences and exchanges in the context of IDLE plays a paramount role in making them feel emotionally-supported.

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- **Appendices:**

Appendix A: Students' Interview

1-What do you think of digital learning? Justify your answer.
2-Which one is better for you : formal or informal digital learning? Which one is more effective ? How?
3-Could you explain what is meant by intercultural pragmatics?
4-What do you think of Informal Digital Learning of English as a tool to enhance intercultural pragmatics? Which applications and platforms do EFL learners use for IDLE?
5-How has digital globalization affected learning English as a Foreign Language?
6-Do you know global citizenship? What about intercultural global citizenship? Explain please
7-Do you think you are a global citizen who is able to interact with people from different cultures?
8-Do you know Global Citizenship Education (GCED)? Is it effective or not ? How?
9- Do you feel you are integrated in the global community through practicing English in Virtual Learning Environments? Why?
10-How can you improve your intercultural global citizenship?
11-How can intercultural pragmatics in IDLE contexts promote intercultural global citizenship?
12-Do you feel that there is a shared sense of humantity and solidarity between different communities and cultures (the globe)? If yes, illustrate please
13- As a citizen, do you think you are able to cope with the global demands and challenges of the world? How?
14-As a student, how can global citizenship education provide students with the skills and values they need to cope with the challenges of the 21st century like achieving peace and sustainablity?
15-Can Informal Digital Learning of English through online interaction and collaboration help you enhance your intercultural global citizenship? How?