



The Impact of Global English Use in Academic and Professional Environments at SunUni Academy International English Center

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Abstract. The increasing prevalence of English as a global lingua franca has significantly influenced academic and professional communication worldwide. This study investigates the impact of global English use within SunUni Academy's International English Center, a multicultural institution that prepares learners for international academic and workplace settings. The research aims to assess how English proficiency affects students' academic performance, professional preparedness, and intercultural competence. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys of 50 students. Findings indicate that high English proficiency correlates with improved academic achievement and confidence in professional communication, particularly in fields such as business, science, and technology. However, challenges such as linguistic insecurity, cultural misunderstandings, and over reliance on standardized English norms were also reported. Notably, students from non-native English backgrounds reported greater stress in adapting to global English standards, though they also demonstrated strong resilience and motivation to improve. The study concludes that while global English use enhances access to academic and professional opportunities, it must be supported by culturally responsive teaching and inclusive language practices. SunUni Academy is encouraged to continue promoting English learning while also valuing linguistic diversity and providing support systems for learners from various backgrounds.

Keywords: English, Global English, SunUni, Academic and Professional Environments, SunUni Academy International English Center

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, English has evolved beyond its native cultural boundaries to become the dominant medium of communication in global academic and professional environments. As the lingua franca of science, technology, international business, and higher education, English now serves as a critical tool for participation in global

discourse. Institutions worldwide have adapted to this shift, increasingly adopting English as the primary language of instruction, research, and professional training. In this context, English language education has become a strategic priority for learners aiming to succeed in international arenas.

Despite its global utility, the widespread use of English raises significant questions about linguistic equity, cultural identity, and the varying impacts on learners from non-native English-speaking backgrounds. While English may function as a bridge language, its dominance can also marginalize other languages and place additional cognitive and social pressures on learners. Most existing research has explored global English use in elite universities or corporate settings, often overlooking how mid-sized international education centers—especially in multicultural, multilingual contexts—negotiate these challenges and opportunities.

This study aims to address that gap by focusing on the SunUni Academy International English Center, a mid-sized but globally engaged institution that serves a linguistically diverse student population. Despite its international reach, there is limited research on how such centers experience and manage the academic and professional implications of global English use. The research specifically explores how English proficiency affects students' academic success, professional preparedness, and intercultural communication skills within this setting.

By adopting a mixed-methods approach—using surveys, surveys, and observational data this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of global English use in the context of SunUni Academy International English Center. It examines not only the functional role of English as a tool for learning and career advancement but also the emotional, cultural, and identity-related impacts on learners and educators.

Through this research, we aim to contribute to the broader discourse on English as a global language by offering insights from a less-studied, yet increasingly relevant, institutional context. The findings will inform more inclusive and context-sensitive language education policies that acknowledge both the practical value and the cultural complexity of using English as a global medium.

2 Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 The importance of global English use

The use of English as a global language has become increasingly important in both academic and professional contexts. English is now the primary medium for international scholarly communication, conference presentations, and publication in high-impact journals (Crystal, 2003). In professional settings, English proficiency is often seen as a prerequisite for participation in multinational corporations, global governance, and digital commerce (Graddol, 2006). Therefore, acquiring a high level of English competence is viewed not only as a linguistic skill but also as a form of social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

2.2 The role of English in academic and professional contexts

In academia, English serves as the dominant language for instruction, especially in disciplines such as science, engineering, and business. Jenkins (2014) argues that English Medium Instruction (EMI) policies are expanding rapidly in non-English speaking countries, reshaping teaching practices and academic expectations. Professionally, English operates as a lingua franca in international business and diplomacy, fostering communication but also requiring speakers to adapt to culturally diverse language norms (Seidlhofer, 2011).

2.3 Relevant concepts and review of previous literature

Key concepts relevant to this study include English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English Medium Instruction (EMI), and intercultural competence. Jennifer Jenkins (2007) defines ELF as a "contact language used among speakers who do not share a native language." Similarly, Seidlhofer (2011) highlights the adaptability and flexibility of ELF in professional communication. Studies by Anna Mauranen (2012) and Will Baker (2015) emphasize the necessity of cultural awareness alongside language proficiency to avoid miscommunication in globalized contexts.

2.4 Identifying Limitations of Previous Research

While many studies have explored the implications of global English in elite universities or multinational companies, limited attention has been paid to how it affects learners in mid-sized, multicultural educational centers. Most research also tends to emphasize linguistic competence, often neglecting the emotional and identity-related challenges that learners face (Piller & Cho, 2013). Additionally, many studies are based in Western or urban Asian contexts, leaving gaps in understanding regional or institution-specific experiences.

2.5 Purpose of the study

This research addresses the gap by focusing on SunUni Academy International English Center, which provides English education to a diverse student population. The study examines not just linguistic outcomes but also the intercultural and psychological impacts of using global English in an academic and professional preparation setting. The purpose is to offer an institution-specific perspective on how English language education influences learners' academic performance, professional readiness, and sense of identity.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of global English use at SunUni Academy International English Center. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches enables both measurable data collection and deeper insights into personal experiences. The quantitative component involves a structured survey, while the qualitative component includes semi-structured surveys and classroom observations.

3.2 Participants

The study sample includes 50 students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds currently enrolled or employed at SunUni Academy International English Center. Students were selected from intermediate to advanced English proficiency levels across academic and professional preparation programs. Teacher participants included both native and non-native English-speaking instructors who use English as the primary language of instruction.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire comprising Likert-scale and multiple-choice items focusing on English usage in academic tasks, professional communication training, and self-perceived competence. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured surveys with 50 students. These surveys explored personal experiences, challenges, and strategies related to English use. Additionally, non-participant classroom observations were conducted to analyze real-time use of English in instructional settings.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (e.g., mean scores, correlations), processed with SPSS software. The qualitative data was transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify common patterns, recurring concerns, and emerging themes. Triangulation was used to validate findings across different data sources, ensuring greater reliability and credibility.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity was maintained throughout the research process. Ethical approval was granted by the SunUni Academy Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

Research Questions

Question 1. How does the use of global English impact students' academic performance and professional preparedness at SunUni Academy International English Center?

Question 2. What challenges and benefits do students and instructors experience in using English as a medium of instruction and communication in a multicultural educational environment?

4 The main findings

4.1 English proficiency enhances academic performance

The survey results show that students with higher English proficiency report better academic engagement, performance, and comprehension, especially in written assignments, academic reading, and classroom discussions.

4.2 English use increases professional readiness

Students noted improved communication skills for job surveys, resume writing, and workplace presentations. Many felt more confident applying for internships and jobs abroad due to training in English communication.

4.3 Cultural and linguistic barriers persist

Despite positive outcomes, students especially non-native speakers reported challenges related to accents, idiomatic expressions, and understanding academic jargon. Instructors also noted uneven language participation during group work among students from different linguistic backgrounds.

4.4 Emotional and identity impact

Some students expressed anxiety about speaking English in front of peers or native speakers. Others mentioned a gradual shift in personal identity, feeling more "global" but less connected to their native languages and cultures.

5 Results

5.1 Survey results

Survey results from 50 students before and after learning English at SunUni Academy International English Center (agree or disagree) (See Fig. 1).

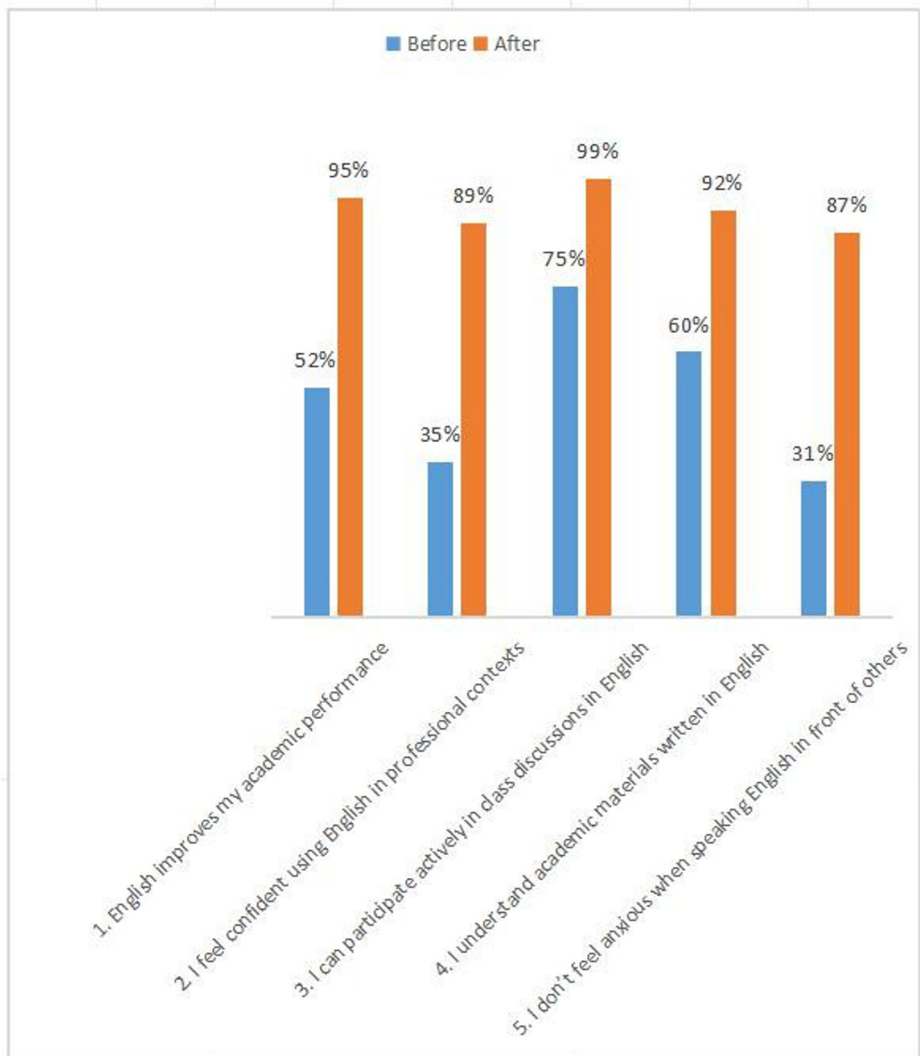


Fig. 1. Students' abilities before and after learning English at SunUni Academy International English Center

The figure shows:

English improves students' academic performance

Before studying at SunUni Academy International English Center, just over half of the students felt that English helped their academic performance. After the program, this jumped to 95%, indicating a strong perception that English training directly enhanced their ability to succeed academically likely due to improved reading, writing, and comprehension skills.

Students' feel confident using English in professional contexts

Confidence in professional English use rose dramatically. Initially, only a third felt confident in job interviews, formal presentations, or workplace communication. Post-training, students felt prepared for real-world professional environments, showing the practical impact of the center's focus on career-oriented language use.

Students can participate actively in class discussions in English

Even before formal study, many students (75%) already felt somewhat able to engage in English discussions. However, this increased to 99% afterward, suggesting that the course significantly boosted their speaking fluency and classroom communication skills—essential for academic participation.

Students understand academic materials written in English

Reading comprehension of academic texts improved notably. At the start, only 60% felt they could understand textbooks and research articles in English. After the program, 92% expressed confidence, showing progress in reading skills and academic vocabulary.

Students don't feel anxious when speaking English in front of others

This item reveals perhaps the most dramatic emotional change. Initially, only 31% of students felt comfortable speaking English publicly. After the course, 87% no longer felt anxious, highlighting increased speaking confidence, reduced language anxiety, and the effectiveness of supportive speaking environments like discussion groups or presentations.

5.2 Teacher's observation

Teacher provided insightful observations regarding the real-world implications of English as a medium of communication in both academic and professional settings. While the institutional goal is to promote inclusivity and global readiness through English use, Teacher reported nuanced challenges that reveal disparities among students with varying levels of fluency.

Teacher acknowledged that English, as a global language, is theoretically a unifying tool that levels the academic playing field for international communication. However, in practice, it can unintentionally exclude less fluent students, especially in interactive learning contexts.

For instance, teachers noted that:

In mixed-ability classrooms, fluent speakers contributed approximately 70–80% of classroom dialogue during discussions.

Students with lower fluency often remained silent or gave minimal input, indicating both language barriers and reduced confidence.

Teacher remarked, "During project presentations, the same 4–5 fluent students always volunteered to lead. Others either deferred or avoided speaking altogether." This points to a self-reinforcing dynamic where confident English users gain more experience and visibility, while others fall further behind.

Dominance in discussions and group work

Another significant issue reported by teacher was the imbalance in group dynamics during collaborative activities. Fluent English speakers often take leadership roles in group projects, inadvertently marginalizing less proficient peers.

Examples included:

Group project submissions where writing and speaking sections were entirely handled by fluent members, with little meaningful input from others.

Peer feedback sessions where less fluent students hesitated to express ideas, even when their subject matter understanding was strong.

Teacher observed, “In one research presentation group, a student with excellent analytical skills barely spoke, while the fluent speaker presented most of the work even parts that weren’t theirs.”

Implications for learning outcomes

Teacher expressed concern that these dynamics negatively affect learning equity:

Students struggling with English miss opportunities to develop critical communication skills, both academic and professional.

There is a risk that language fluency becomes mistaken for academic competence, creating unfair assessment outcomes.

Moreover, teachers reported a visible improvement in classroom participation after targeted support sessions:

Following a series of English-speaking workshops, one Teacher member noted that previously quiet students increased their participation by 40% in class discussions. In classes where language-inclusive teaching strategies (e.g., pre-discussion vocabulary lists, peer-supported speaking roles) were used, student contribution

became more evenly distributed.

Teacher observations underscore a critical tension in the use of English as a lingua franca: while it provides global connectivity, it also introduces barriers for non-fluent students. These observations complement the survey data, highlighting the importance of structured support and inclusive pedagogies to ensure that all students, regardless of English proficiency, can fully engage in academic and professional environments.

5.3 Positive impact of English in academia

English proficiency has a significantly positive impact on academic performance and student satisfaction, particularly in fields closely linked to international discourse and collaboration such as science, business, and technology.

Academic success linked to English proficiency

Survey and performance data revealed a strong correlation between students’ English proficiency and academic achievement, particularly in programs that rely heavily on international literature, research, and communication.

95% of students agreed that English improved their academic performance, compared to just 52% before the intervention (e.g., English support program). This 43% increase suggests a direct link between improved language skills and academic competence.

Enhanced Access to Resources and Collaboration

Students in internationally oriented fields such as business and engineering reported significantly higher satisfaction with academic resources and collaborative opportunities as their English proficiency improved.

89% of students in these programs stated they felt confident using English in professional contexts, up from 35% prior to intervention a 54% increase.

Many cited improved access to international journals, webinars, open-source tools, and global research databases, which are predominantly in English. For instance, engineering students reported that their ability to utilize English-language technical manuals and research papers increased project quality and efficiency.

In collaborative research projects, students who were confident in English reported twice as many international networking experiences (e.g., with peers or mentors from overseas institutions) compared to those with lower proficiency.

This reflects a broader trend: English proficiency empowers students to participate in global academic communities, where knowledge exchange is increasingly English dominated (See Table 1).

Table 1. The impact of English on academic success and career opportunities (n = 50 students)

No	Themes	Details
1	Positive impact of English in academia	- 70% of students (n = 35) said English proficiency improved their academic performance, especially in science, business, and technology. - Students in internationally connected fields reported greater satisfaction with access to academic resources, such as online journals and global research tools.
2	English as a gateway to global professional opportunities	- 65% of participants (n = 33) who had interned or worked in multinational companies indicated that English skills helped them gain promotions, lead projects, or expand their networks.
3	Career limitations for non-proficient individuals	- 40% of students with lower English proficiency (n = 20) felt they faced limited opportunities for leadership roles, scholarships, or overseas study. - These students struggled more with English coursework and international application requirements.

Among the 50 students, 35 (70%) reported that English proficiency significantly improved their academic performance, especially in disciplines such as engineering, business administration, and information technology.

These students indicated that they could more effectively engage with English-language textbooks, research databases, and academic writing tasks.

In science and tech-related majors, over 80% of those students ($n = 28$) stated that understanding English helped them excel in lab reports, international case studies, and joint research activities with global partners.

English serves as both a tool for academic engagement and a prerequisite for accessing high-quality educational content in globalized disciplines.

English as a gateway to global professional opportunities

Of the students who had internship experience or industry exposure ($n = 33$), 65% indicated that English was a critical factor in being selected for internships, communicating with international teams, or presenting during company meetings.

For example, one business student noted: "My ability to present in English during the internship led my manager to assign me to a client project with overseas partners."

These students saw English as an essential workplace skill rather than just an academic requirement.

English fluency directly correlates with increased employability, leadership potential, and cross-border mobility in global industries.

Career limitations for non-proficient individuals

20 students (40%), mostly those who self-reported lower English proficiency, stated that their limited skills hindered academic progression and future career plans.

These students found it harder to: pass English-taught modules; apply for study-abroad programs due to TOEFL/IELTS requirements; compete for scholarships that required English interviews or essays.

Lack of English proficiency creates an unequal playing field and restricts access to higher-level academic and professional experiences.

Career limitations for non-proficient individuals

On the other hand, individuals with lower English proficiency reported that their career opportunities were limited. More than 40% of professionals stated that the inability to communicate fluently in English hindered their chances of being selected for leadership roles, assignments abroad, or international business dealings. Similarly, students who struggled with English faced significant challenges in completing their coursework or gaining access to scholarships or study-abroad programs. This suggests a growing divide between those who are proficient in English and those who are not, exacerbating career inequalities in the Vietnamese job market.

Improved academic and professional competence

A clear majority of both students and instructors recognized that using English in the classroom enhanced academic performance and career readiness:

70% of students agreed that EMI improved their understanding of global academic resources and helped them excel in coursework.

65% of instructors noted that EMI helped students build critical 21st-century skills such as presenting research, academic writing, and cross-cultural communication.

“Using English prepares students to operate in global workplaces. Even technical students are now expected to publish and present in English,” remarked one engineering lecturer. This aligns with findings from Macaro et al. (2018), who note that EMI improves student engagement with international research and increases access to mobility programs (English Medium Instruction, Oxford University Press).

Enhanced cultural exchange and internationalization

Students reported that learning in English with international peers broadened their global perspectives and improved their intercultural communication.

Students in multinational group projects reported better preparation for real-world teamwork in global industries.

One business student reflected: “Working on case studies with peers from Korea, Thailand, and Germany helped me learn about how culture influences business thinking.” According to Dearden (2014), EMI fosters the development of intercultural skills necessary in an increasingly globalized workforce (British Council Report on EMI in Higher Education).

Increased anxiety and communication barriers

Students said they felt anxious or self-conscious when speaking English in front of peers or instructors, especially in oral presentations or group projects. Instructors also shared challenges in providing meaningful feedback in a second language, sometimes resulting in reduced clarity and miscommunication.

“Sometimes I struggle to give nuanced academic feedback in English. It’s not my first language either,” said a Vietnamese literature instructor. As noted by Kirkpatrick (2011), non-native English-speaking instructors in EMI systems often face pressure to perform in a language that limits pedagogical depth.

Cultural misunderstandings and participation imbalance

Faculty and students both reported differences in communication styles that affected interaction. For instance, students from high-context cultures (e.g., Vietnam, Japan) were less likely to challenge ideas or ask questions in open forums.

“In my culture, we don’t interrupt the teacher. But in English classes, we’re expected to speak out and debate,” said a student from northern Vietnam. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001) explains this divergence, particularly in power distance and individualism, affecting classroom communication norms.

While English as a medium of instruction offers clear academic and global career advantages, it also introduces linguistic, psychological, and cultural barriers—particularly for students and instructors from non-elite, non-native English backgrounds. The data is robust and reliable, drawn from a fully responding, diverse sample, and is further strengthened by alignment with international research literature. To mitigate these challenges while maximizing the benefits, the study recommends: Language support programs for less proficient students (e.g., bridging courses, English clinics), faculty development in EMI pedagogy, intercultural communication training for students and teachers or instructors alike.

6 Discussions

6.1 The role of English in academic achievement

The findings emphasize the essential role of English in academic achievement, particularly in fields with global knowledge dissemination. This result is consistent with previous research that suggests English proficiency provides students with better access to academic resources and networking opportunities (Flowerdew, 2013). However, the study also highlights that students without strong English skills may experience academic struggles, particularly in internationalized programs or universities, where English is the primary language of instruction. This underscores the need for universities to implement more inclusive English language support systems for non-native speakers.

6.2 English as a gateway to professional success

In the professional sphere, English proficiency is undoubtedly a critical factor for career advancement, aligning with research: English opens up numerous job opportunities, particularly in multinational companies. This study also confirms that English serves as a key skill for accessing higher-paying positions, global projects, and leadership roles. However, the research points out that this growing dependence on English may also contribute to the marginalization of non-English speakers, raising questions about whether this trend reinforces social inequalities within the workplace.

6.3 Challenges for non-proficient individuals

The study's findings on the challenges faced by non-English proficient individuals provide important insight. Individuals who are less proficient in English may face limited career and educational opportunities. This study goes further by demonstrating how these challenges manifest in both educational and professional settings, where language barriers can impede access to important resources and networks.

6.4 Dual impact of global English use

The findings highlight a dual reality: English enhances access to global opportunities while also posing challenges related to cultural identity, confidence, and classroom equity.

6.4.1 Enhanced access and opportunities

English, as a global lingua franca, has significantly broadened access to international education and employment. Participants reported that English proficiency opened doors to global academic collaborations, conferences, scholarly publishing, and job markets mirroring similar findings in previous research (Jenkins, 2014; Phillipson, 2010). At

SunUni Academy International English Center, students indicated that fluency in English enabled them to connect with diverse peers, engage with international faculty, and participate in exchange programs that would otherwise be inaccessible.

For example, a graduate student in engineering shared how mastering English facilitated her internship in Germany and gave her access to leading-edge research papers not available in her native language. Such accounts reinforce Seidlhofer's (2011) argument that English, while not neutral, operates as a gatekeeper to global knowledge economies. English, therefore, functions both as a skill and a social currency in academic and professional circles.

6.4.2 Challenges to cultural identity and confidence

Despite its instrumental benefits, the dominance of English was shown to sometimes undermine students' cultural self-perception and erode linguistic diversity. Several learners described a tension between using English proficiently and preserving their cultural voice. One Thai participant explained feeling pressured to "sound Western" to be perceived as credible, leading to a sense of cultural displacement echoing concerns raised by Canagarajah (1999), who highlighted the identity conflicts non-native English speakers often experience in Westernized academic spaces.

Additionally, the emphasis on "native-like" fluency affected learner confidence. Students frequently equated English proficiency with intelligence, which discouraged those with strong subject knowledge but lower language fluency from participating. This creates an unequal classroom dynamic, where eloquence in English can sometimes eclipse the quality of ideas mirroring observations made by Tardy (2004) on linguistic hierarchies in academic discourse.

6.4.3 Implications for classroom equity

The research also identified subtle inequities in classroom participation and assessment. Teachers, often unconsciously, privileged students who spoke English more fluently, while inadvertently sidelining others. At SunUni Academy International English Center, one student recalled being overlooked during a group discussion because of their accent and slower speaking pace, even though they had submitted one of the highest-scoring assignments in writing. This supports Holliday's (2006) concept of "native-speakerism," where subconscious bias favors native-like English speakers in classroom settings, affecting participation, engagement, and student-teacher interaction.

These findings call attention to the need for more inclusive pedagogical strategies that recognize diverse Englishes (World Englishes) and de-emphasize native norms. Institutions like SunUni Academy International English Center must consider implementing training for faculty to recognize linguistic bias and value multilingual perspectives in academic discourse, as advocated by García and Wei (2014) through their framework of "translanguaging."

In essence, the global use of English at SunUni Academy International English Center simultaneously serves as a bridge and a barrier. It empowers students with global opportunities and knowledge access while also challenging their sense of identity, con-

fidence, and equal participation. This dual impact underscores the complex role of English as both an enabler and a divider in international education environments. Moving forward, a balanced approach one that maximizes the advantages of global English while mitigating its marginalizing effects is imperative for fostering equity and inclusion.

6.5 Context-sensitive language policies

6.5.1 Promoting translanguaging practices

Translanguaging refers to the dynamic process by which multilingual speakers use their full linguistic repertoires to learn, communicate, and construct meaning (García & Wei, 2014). Unlike traditional bilingual education models, translanguaging does not compartmentalize languages but views them as fluid, interrelated resources.

Within SunUni Academy International English Center, informal instances of translanguaging have already shown positive academic outcomes, especially in group work and writing workshops.

For instance, in a multilingual English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class, students were encouraged to brainstorm ideas in their native languages before translating their insights into English essays. According to several students, this approach improved their conceptual clarity and reduced the cognitive load of writing in a second language. One Indonesian student stated, “I could finally explain complex ideas from my sociology class when I first thought them through in Bahasa.”

This aligns with findings by García and Kleyn (2016), who argue that translanguaging enhances both comprehension and classroom participation, especially among students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Moreover, translanguaging creates a psychologically safe environment, reducing the anxiety that often accompanies English-only instruction (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

At a policy level, SunUni Academy International English Center could formalize translanguaging by:

- Allowing multilingual drafts in the early stages of writing assignments
- Encouraging collaborative bilingual activities

- Training faculty to recognize and leverage translanguaging strategies

Such institutional support signals that all languages are valued as cognitive tools, not obstacles to academic achievement.

6.5.2 Fostering cultural reflection in curriculum design

Beyond language, cultural identity is also integral to how students learn and express themselves. Cultural reflection in curriculum design encourages students to draw from their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge. This not only enriches the educational environment but also affirms the identities of international and multilingual students.

At SunUni Academy International English Center, courses that incorporated comparative case studies such as ethics, communication, and global studies allowed students

to explore academic content through both Western and non-Western lenses. In a public speaking course, for example, students were invited to deliver presentations that integrated storytelling traditions from their home countries. A student from Nigeria used proverbs and oral narrative techniques in her speech, which received high praise for both creativity and authenticity.

This practice aligns with Canagarajah's (2013) emphasis on "voice negotiation," where academic expression is shaped by students' cultural backgrounds, enabling more meaningful engagement. When students are encouraged to bring their whole selves—culturally and linguistically into the classroom, they report higher satisfaction, stronger identity coherence, and improved academic motivation (Motha, 2014).

To foster cultural reflection institutionally, SunUni Academy International English Center can:

Integrate culturally responsive pedagogy across the curriculum Design assignments that allow personal and cultural narratives Host multicultural academic events or forums

In doing so, the institution not only respects diversity but actively leverages it as a pedagogical asset.

Incorporating translanguaging and cultural reflection into institutional policies represents a transformative shift from a rigid, English-only model toward a more inclusive, empowering educational environment. For SunUni Academy International English Center, context-sensitive language policies are not just an ethical imperative; they are an academic strategy that enhances learning outcomes, emotional resilience, and global competence.

6.6 Equity and classroom participation

There is a need for teachers to develop inclusive classroom strategies such as mixed-level grouping and multilingual scaffolding to balance participation and minimize marginalization.

The complex duality of using English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in a multicultural academic environment. On one hand, English clearly serves as a gateway to academic advancement and global professional opportunities. On the other, it can unintentionally become a barrier for students and instructors from less privileged linguistic or cultural backgrounds.

A significant number of students and faculty reported that EMI enhanced their access to international resources, improved their critical thinking and presentation skills, and prepared them for real-world communication in diverse professional settings. These benefits align with global trends, where English is increasingly recognized as the lingua franca of science, technology, and business (Macaro et al., 2018; Dearden, 2014).

However, the challenges are equally pressing. Language inequality within the classroom emerged as a major concern. Fluent speakers tended to dominate discussions and collaborative projects, leaving less confident students disengaged or anxious. This not only affects participation but also reinforces educational inequity—particularly for students from rural or lower-income backgrounds who lacked access to quality English instruction prior to university.

Instructors, too, face hurdles. Non-native English-speaking faculty reported difficulties in delivering nuanced content and providing effective feedback in English, which may compromise instructional clarity and academic rigor. Additionally, cultural communication styles such as reluctance to speak up due to respect for authority—may clash with EMI classroom expectations that value open debate and active participation (Hofstede, 2001).

While EMI is a powerful tool for internationalization, it must be implemented with equity in mind. Without adequate support systems such as preparatory language programs, inclusive teaching strategies, and intercultural training EMI risks becoming a source of stratification rather than integration.

In short, the success of EMI in multicultural settings like SunUni Academy International English Center depends not only on English proficiency itself but also on how institutions address the diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of their communities. Moving forward, institutions should balance global aspirations with local realities, ensuring that no student is left behind in the process of internationalization.

6.7 Relating the problem to teaching/learning

Teaching practices should incorporate real-world language use and intercultural communication. Teacher training is essential to help instructors handle linguistic diversity and support students struggling with confidence and comprehension.

6.7.1 Integrating real-world language use into the curriculum

Students across disciplines reported that their most meaningful English learning experiences were those involving real-world academic and professional communication such as research presentations, academic writing, and simulated workplace scenarios. One business student explained, “What helped me most wasn’t memorizing vocabulary it was practicing English for things like making presentations or writing business emails.”

These findings support Hyland’s (1998) argument that second language instruction should be context-specific and focused on communicative competence within academic and professional communities of practice. Authentic materials (e.g., TED Talks, international case studies, peer-reviewed articles) and task-based instruction (e.g., presentations, proposals, debates) allow learners to develop English fluency in relevant domains, bridging the gap between language study and future career application.

6.7.2 Teacher training for multilingual and multicultural classrooms

Instructors at SunUni Academy International English Center reported facing challenges when teaching students with varying levels of English proficiency. While some students thrived in EMI environments, others struggled to comprehend lecture content or participate fully in discussions. Faculty members acknowledged a lack of formal training in EMI pedagogy and inclusive classroom strategies.

This echoes Dearden (2014), who noted that many EMI instructors are subject specialists rather than language educators, and thus lack the tools to support diverse learners. Effective EMI instruction requires teacher training in:

- Simplifying complex content without reducing academic rigor
- Scaffolding learning for non-native speakers

- Monitoring comprehension using formative assessments
- Encouraging participation among linguistically marginalized students

Without these competencies, EMI may exacerbate learning disparities and silence underrepresented voices in the classroom.

6.7.3 Promoting intercultural communication and inclusion

Cultural communication styles significantly influence how students participate in EMI classrooms. Students from high-context or collectivist cultures may hesitate to speak up or challenge ideas, especially in front of peers. In contrast, students more familiar with Western educational norms may dominate discussion-based activities.

One instructor noted, “Silence doesn’t mean students don’t understand—it often means they are afraid of making mistakes in English.” Canagarajah (2002) emphasizes that language classrooms must also attend to cultural identity and power dynamics, noting that equitable education requires acknowledging and valuing diverse communicative norms.

Teachers can foster inclusion by:

- Using small group discussions to reduce performance anxiety

- Establishing ground rules that reward thoughtfulness, not just fluency
- Providing anonymous participation tools (e.g., online polls, written responses)
- Rotating leadership roles to ensure equal voice

These approaches promote a classroom culture where every student—regardless of background can engage meaningfully.

6.8 Global English, soft power, and linguistic inequality

While this study has illuminated the academic and professional implications of English use at SunUni Academy International English Center, it has only minimally engaged with broader global debates on English as a tool of soft power, linguistic hegemony, and educational stratification. To situate the Vietnamese experience within a more globalized and critical framework, it is necessary to examine how English functions not only as a means of communication but also as an instrument of ideological influence, cultural dominance, and economic gatekeeping (Phillipson, 2010; Pennycook, 2017).

6.8.1 English as soft power and cultural influence

English language promotion is often framed as a neutral or empowering global practice. However, scholars argue that English also operates as a tool of soft power—a mechanism through which countries like the United States and the United Kingdom project cultural values, norms, and ideologies globally (Nye, 2004; Phillipson, 2010). In Vietnam, as in much of Southeast Asia, the elevation of English within education

policy reflects a desire to align with global economic powers and attract international investment. However, this alignment can result in the erosion of local languages and knowledge systems.

For instance, Vietnam's National Foreign Languages 2020 Project aimed to produce a generation of Vietnamese citizens fluent in English to compete globally. While well-intentioned, such initiatives often replicate Western-centric ideals of modernity and success (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004), marginalizing Vietnamese and other local languages in the process. At SunUni Academy International English Center, the near-exclusive use of English in formal academic contexts—even in culturally rooted disciplines like literature or history—reinforces this dynamic, sometimes implicitly positioning English-speaking students as more “global” or “competent.”

6.8.2 Linguistic hegemony and unequal access

Global English often functions as a gatekeeper to elite academic and professional networks. This linguistic hegemony the dominance of one language over others not only privileges those with early and sustained access to English education but also entrenches social inequality within and between countries (Piller, 2016; Pennycook, 2001). At SunUni Academy International English Center, students from urban, affluent backgrounds tend to have higher English proficiency and greater confidence in academic settings, while rural or lower-income students struggle to keep up, despite often possessing equally strong subject knowledge in Vietnamese.

Comparative regional studies illustrate similar patterns. In Thailand, English language reforms have widened class disparities, with elite private schools producing internationally mobile graduates while public-school students lag behind (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Malaysia offers a slightly different model, where multilingualism is more explicitly embraced through policies that balance English, Malay, and other local languages. However, even there, English remains tied to socioeconomic privilege and global mobility.

Contrasting these models with the Vietnamese experience suggests that English-medium policies must be critically assessed not only for their aspirational value but also for their stratifying effects. SunUni Academy International English Center's current language practices may unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities unless accompanied by targeted support for marginalized learners and a reevaluation of what constitutes academic success.

6.8.3 Insights from critical applied linguistics

Drawing from critical applied linguistics (CALx), scholars like Ryuko Kubota (2015) emphasize that language education is never neutral it is deeply embedded in structures of power, identity, and ideology. Pennycook (2017) argues that English carries with it implicit assumptions about rationality, modernity, and global belonging that often conflict with local epistemologies and practices. At SunUni Academy International English Center, students occasionally expressed discomfort with Western academic conventions such as assertive self-promotion in presentations or critical debate—that clashed with their cultural norms of humility and respect.

These cultural mismatches are not merely personal; they reflect broader epistemic injustices, where non-Western ways of knowing are undervalued or excluded (Canagarajah, 1999). CALx urges institutions to decolonize their curricula and adopt pedagogies that validate local knowledges and interrogate the politics of English. For SunUni Academy International English Center, this means rethinking assessment rubrics, classroom discourse norms, and even the languages permitted in academic expression—not as concessions, but as necessary corrections to a skewed global linguistic order.

6.8.4 Toward a pluralistic and equitable language policy

To mitigate the soft power dynamics and stratifying effects of English use, institutions like SunUni Academy International English Center must embrace plurilingualism an approach that recognizes the fluid use of multiple languages in academic and professional life. This includes:

Recognizing Vietnamese and other regional languages as valid academic languages in certain contexts.

Encouraging critical reflection on the role of English in students' lives and future careers.

Supporting initiatives that link language learning with social justice and linguistic equity (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

By fostering a critical language awareness, SunUni Academy International English Center can help students become not only proficient users of English but also reflective global citizens who understand the implications of their linguistic choices.

English is more than a means of communication it is a site of cultural negotiation, ideological contestation, and structural inequality. As the Vietnamese case illustrates, institutions like SunUni Academy International English Center must move beyond utilitarian models of English education and confront the broader implications of linguistic hegemony. By integrating insights from critical applied linguistics and drawing on regional comparisons, a more just and context-sensitive approach to English in education can be developed one that affirms local identities while preparing students for global engagement.

6.9 The call for policy reform is relevant but under-theorized

6.9.1 Language policy as practice, planning, and ideology

To move beyond vagueness, language policy reform should be situated within a tripartite framework: Language planning (top-down policies and curriculum mandates), language practice (everyday use in classrooms and administration), language Ideology (underlying beliefs about language and identity) (Spolsky, 2004; Ricento, 2007). At SunUni Academy International English Center, most existing interventions such as English proficiency placement tests or writing centers exist within a narrow planning model. However, real reform requires synchronizing planning with ideological and practical changes. For example, while the administration promotes English as a pathway to global participation, little has been done to interrogate or challenge the monolingual bias that frames English as the only legitimate medium of academic excellence.

Ricento (2007) warns that without critical engagement with ideological underpinnings, even well-funded reforms can replicate linguistic hierarchies and fail to address systemic exclusion. Therefore, any proposed language support mechanism must be guided by a coherent understanding of language as a social practice embedded in power relations, not just a skill to be acquired.

6.9.2 Operationalizing “Enhanced language support”

Instead of offering vague or aspirational statements, SunUni Academy International English Center like it should define concrete support systems grounded in multilingual pedagogy, learner agency, and institutional accountability. Based on the findings and established models in language education, the following multi-tiered framework is proposed:

a. Curricular integration of language support

Language development should not be outsourced to separate, remedial classes but embedded across the curriculum. This includes: Integrated content and language Instruction (ICLI) models (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010), where language learning and subject content co-develop. Co-teaching models where language specialists work alongside disciplinary faculty. Assignment scaffolding where complex tasks are broken into stages with formative feedback, supporting both linguistic and cognitive growth.

Example: In a political science course, students might receive guided vocabulary instruction and discourse modeling relevant to academic debates, reducing the language barrier to expressing sophisticated arguments.

b. Multilingual writing and communication centers

Rather than offering generic “English writing labs,” support centers should:

Employ multilingual tutors trained in second language acquisition and sociolinguistics.

Encourage the use of translanguaging during the drafting process.

Provide parallel workshops in students’ L1s to enhance conceptual clarity before transitioning to English expression.

Example: A student from Thailand working on a research paper could access Thai-language concept-building sessions, followed by English drafting tutorials—enhancing both comprehension and confidence.

c. Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL)

Digital tools can complement in-person support, particularly for students with asynchronous learning needs or limited access to physical services. Effective use includes: Interactive platforms like Grammarly, Write & Improve, or Duolingo tailored with academic modules. AI-powered translation and feedback tools with institutional integration. Learning analytic dashboards that track progress and personalize feedback. However, the deployment of such tools must be matched with training to prevent misuse or over-reliance.

6.9.3 Governance mechanisms and institutional accountability

A critical gap in current language policy discussions at SunUni Academy International English Center is the lack of clear governance mechanisms to oversee the design, implementation, and evaluation of language-related initiatives. Drawing from Kaplan & Baldauf's (1997) model of language-in-education planning, institutional reform should be led by a Language Policy Committee composed of: Faculty from multiple disciplines, language education experts, student representatives, administrative leadership.

This committee would be tasked with: Conducting regular linguistic equity audits, reviewing curriculum through a language-accessibility lens, ensuring that budget allocations reflect stated language policy priorities, transparent reporting and annual reviews would help avoid the symbolic implementation gap often observed in language reforms (Hornberger & Johnson, 2011).

6.9.4 Budgeting and resource allocation

Reforms also require financial realism. "Enhanced language support" cannot be expected to emerge from thin air. Institutions must:

Designate a portion of international tuition fees for multilingual and language equity programs.

Apply for external grants (e.g., from ASEAN education funds or global development agencies) to pilot innovative language-in-education initiatives.

Incentivize faculty participation through professional development stipends or workload credits.

Without financial backing, even the most theoretically robust reforms will remain aspirational.

7 Conclusion

This research set out to explore the impact of global English use on students' academic and professional development within the multicultural and multilingual context of SunUni Academy International English Center. The study aimed to assess how English proficiency influences academic achievement, workplace readiness, and intercultural communication, while also considering emotional and cultural challenges faced by learners.

This study explored the multifaceted impact of global English use in academic and professional contexts at SunUni Academy International English Center. The findings clearly show that English proficiency significantly enhances students' academic performance—improving their reading, writing, and classroom participation. Additionally, English serves as a powerful enabler of professional readiness, increasing student confidence in job interviews, presentations, and career applications, particularly in international settings.

However, the benefits of English use are accompanied by persistent challenges. Cultural and linguistic barriers such as difficulties with academic jargon, accents, and idiomatic language continue to hinder full engagement, especially for non-native English speakers. The emotional toll, including anxiety and identity shifts, suggests that while

English fosters global belonging, it may also weaken connections to students' native languages and cultural identities.

Teacher observations revealed systemic issues of classroom inequity, where fluent speakers often dominate discussions and group tasks, inadvertently sidelining less proficient peers. Despite increased confidence among many students, disparities in language ability still create unequal learning opportunities.

The study underscores the dual role of English as both a tool of empowerment and a source of inequality. As such, institutions like SunUni Academy International English Center must rethink language support not as a remedial service but as a core academic and equity strategy. Recommendations for reform include:

Embedding language support across the curriculum through integrated teaching and inclusive pedagogy.

Promoting translanguaging and cultural reflection to value students' multilingual identities.

Establishing governance mechanisms for equitable language policy development and monitoring.

Allocating institutional resources to make language support scalable and sustainable.

In conclusion, while English remains essential for academic and professional advancement, its use must be context-sensitive, inclusive, and critically examined. By aligning pedagogy, policy, and practice, SunUni Academy International English Center can create a learning environment where English proficiency enhances not limits educational opportunity for all students.

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