

## Global Trends, Gaps, and Methodological Insights: Intercultural Research in Indonesian Applied Linguistics and Language Education

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**Abstract:** Intercultural competence has become increasingly vital in multilingual, multicultural societies, especially in schools where language is used to resolve cultural differences. In Indonesia, a country with more than 700 languages and 1,300 ethnic groups, applied linguistics has enormous potential to promote inclusive and culturally responsive education. However, the state of intercultural research in Indonesian applied linguistics remains fragmented, thematically limited, and methodologically constrained. This study performed a mixed-methods systematic literature review (SLR) of 93 peer-reviewed publications from 2000 to 2024, utilizing the PRISMA framework as a guide. The results show that research output has risen sharply since 2019, but the field is mostly made up of qualitative methods and lacks experimental or longitudinal designs. The majority of published research concentrates on foreign language education, with scant emphasis on curriculum development, educator perspectives, or policy integration. Researchers rarely use established models, like Intercultural Communicative Competence and Deardorff's Process Model, and they seldom utilize advanced analytical methods. These gaps highlight the necessity for methodological diversification, theoretical integration, and expansive thematic investigation. By linking global frameworks to the Indonesian context, this study enhances international dialogue on intercultural education and provides strategic guidance for forthcoming research, policy formulation, and pedagogical advancement.

**Keywords:** Intercultural competence, Applied linguistics in Indonesia, Language education, Multilingual and multicultural context, Systematic literature review (SLR), PRISMA framework

As the world has become more connected, intercultural competence has become an important part of education, diplomacy, and global citizenship (El-Asri & Karfa, 2024; Yang et al., 2025). In multilingual and multicultural societies, the ability to communicate across cultural lines is no longer a lesser skill; it is a major requirement for teachers (Liu, 2023; Vu et al., 2025) and for students. As globalization grows stronger, schools must address the challenges of cultural diversity,

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linguistic plurality, and social inclusion (Yusra & Lestari, 2023). In this context, applied linguistics has an essential role in developing teaching methods, language policies, and ways of communicating that promote understanding between cultures (Byram, 1997; Hua et al., 2022; Wijaya, 2019; Yudhistira & Fatmawati, 2020).

Indonesia is one of the most linguistically and ethnically diverse countries in the world, making it a wonderful place to study how different cultures interact in education. The Indonesian sociolinguistic landscape is intrinsically intercultural, comprising over 700 languages and more than 1,300 ethnic groups (Zein, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2022; Siburian, 2019). Nonetheless, despite this abundant diversity, the incorporation of intercultural perspectives into applied linguistics research and educational practice is still constrained. National policy initiatives, like the Merdeka Belajar curriculum reform which focuses on learner autonomy, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness (Karmilasari et al., 2023), add to the importance of filling this gap. At present, there are limited empirical studies evaluating the impact of these policies on the development of intercultural competence.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become a significant theoretical and practical framework for comprehending cross-cultural interaction on a global scale (Sahadevan & Sumangala, 2021). Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate eloquently and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds, incorporating cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Badri, 2022; Deardorff, 2006; Wang et al., 2025; Nurmoldayev et al., 2020; Suhardi & Misbah, 2019). In applied linguistics, ICC has been implemented through several models, notably Byram's five-component framework, which encompasses attitudes, knowledge, interpreting and relating skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). These models have influenced curriculum development, teacher training, and language evaluation across various educational settings (Guo & Li, 2025).

Recent empirical studies have significantly broadened the scope of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in language education. For example, Wang et al. (2025) showed that knowing a foreign language well is a favorable predictor of ICC among pre-service teachers, demonstrating the importance of teaching language and culture simultaneously. Guo and Li (2025) discovered that ICC improves learner motivation and communicative outcomes in second language acquisition, indicating that intercultural awareness serves as both an educational objective and a facilitator of effective learning. These results emphasize the necessity of integrating ICC into applied linguistics research and practice, especially in multilingual contexts such as Indonesia.

Despite the global momentum, Indonesian research on intercultural issues in applied linguistics remains disjointed and insufficiently developed. Earlier research has predominantly concentrated on descriptive analyses of cultural diversity, frequently exhibiting deficiencies in theoretical profundity and methodological precision (Kidwell, 2021; Morganna et al., 2020; Makmur et al., 2019; Sinaga, 2022). Additionally, the predominance of qualitative methodologies and the lack of experimental frameworks constrain the generalizability and significance of current research. This methodological imbalance is exacerbated by a limited thematic concentration, as the majority of studies concentrate on foreign language education, thereby overlooking curriculum development, teacher perspectives, and cross-cultural comparisons.

From the points of view of policy and practice, it is clear that intercultural education is not being implemented consistently in Indonesia. Zilliacus (2017) observed that although national education laws promote multicultural citizenship, the implementation of these policies in educational settings is inconsistent and frequently superficial. The World Bank (Azevedo et al., 2022) also found problems with inclusive education, such as teachers not getting enough training,

schools not getting enough help, and government structures not working together. These systemic problems make it difficult to create strong intercultural pedagogies and limit the ways in which applied linguistics can help make meaningful changes in education.

Theoretical frameworks such as Interactional Sociolinguistics (Toomaneejinda & Saengboon, 2022) and Cultural Conceptualizations (Sharifian, 2011) provide significant perspectives for examining intercultural communication in linguistically diverse environments. Interactional sociolinguistics focuses on the importance of contextual cues and discourse strategies in the navigation of intercultural interactions, whereas cultural conceptualizations highlight the cognitive and cultural frameworks that influence language usage. Incorporating these frameworks into Indonesian applied linguistics research may augment analytical rigor and promote interdisciplinary discourse.

This study aims to fill the significant void in intercultural research within Indonesian applied linguistics by performing a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed publications from 2000 to 2024. The review delineates the progression of research trends, pinpoints methodological patterns and shortcomings, and underscores thematic voids in the current literature. It offers a comprehensive overview of the field and strategic directions for future inquiry through its findings from multiple databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and SINTA.

The importance of this study is that it contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it enhances the comprehension of intercultural competence in applied linguistics by amalgamating global models with the Indonesian context. It can also guide decision-making about curricula, teacher training, and policies by indicating where current research is effective and where it is lacking. This study also answers the call for more diverse methods and more rigorous research into intercultural education by pushing for mixed-methods designs, longitudinal studies, and experimental approaches.

Furthermore, this research enhances international discourse on intercultural competence and establishes Indonesian applied linguistics as a pivotal arena for innovation and change. We anticipate that the results aid educators, researchers, and policymakers in enhancing intercultural comprehension in multilingual educational environments. Incorporating intercultural perspectives into applied linguistics is not only an academic pursuit but also a societal necessity. As Indonesia deals with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, research that connects language and culture is important for creating strong and united communities. This study is a step toward that goal because it provides ideas, frameworks, and suggestions that can help future research and practice in intercultural education. Hence, this study was directed by the following questions: (1) What were the prevailing trends in intercultural research within Indonesian applied linguistics from 2000 to 2024? (2) What methodological trends and shortcomings define this body of research? (3) What thematic deficiencies are present regarding subject representation, research emphasis, and theoretical context?

## Literature Review

Over the last twenty years, the study of intercultural competence in applied linguistics has undergone considerable change. This has been driven by changes in global education, migration, and sociocultural integration. Academics are increasingly acknowledging the significance of intercultural awareness in language acquisition, educator training, and curriculum design (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). This literature review integrates principal themes within the discipline,

concentrating on three primary domains: theoretical underpinnings of intercultural competence, empirical investigations in language education, and methodological frameworks in intercultural research. It also points out important gaps in the Indonesian context that this study aims to fill.

Different theoretical models have put forward explanations of intercultural competence, each offering a different view of how people interact with people from other cultures. Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) continues to be one of the most significant frameworks in applied linguistics. It stresses five components: attitudes, knowledge, the ability to interpret and relate, the ability to discover and interact, and critical cultural awareness. This model is widely used in teacher training and foreign language classes because it supplies a structured way to teach intercultural sensitivity.

Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence enhances Byram's framework by emphasizing internal outcomes, including adaptability, empathy, and ethnorelative attitudes. It also emphasizes the significance of reflection and interaction in fostering intercultural understanding (Arasaratnam, 2007). These models have influenced curriculum development and evaluation methods in multilingual environments, especially in Europe and North America (Guo & Li, 2025; Wang et al., 2025).

Despite the global importance of these frameworks, Indonesian applied linguistics research has not systematically utilized them. Studies frequently lack clear theoretical foundations, depending instead on descriptive narratives of cultural diversity (Kidwell, 2021; Morganna et al., 2020; Rhodes et al., 2024). The lack of theoretical coherence makes it harder to conduct a thorough analysis of existing research and to create models of intercultural competence that work in specific situations. Empirical studies have shown that including intercultural competence in language education is useful for teaching. Studies across diverse contexts indicate that intercultural awareness improves learner motivation, communicative efficacy, and critical thinking (Permatasari & Andriyanti, 2021; Tleubay et al., 2020). Foreign language classrooms are essential venues for intercultural learning (Yulia et al., 2024), exposing students to various cultural norms and communicative practices.

In Indonesia, the incorporation of intercultural competence into language education is still limited. Most studies focus on students' attitudes towards cultural diversity, ignoring the analysis of instructional strategies or curriculum frameworks (Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Munandar, 2022). Despite playing a pivotal role in the execution of intercultural pedagogy, teacher perspectives remain significantly underrepresented. This gap is troubling because recent changes in education, like the Merdeka Belajar initiative (Karmilasari et al., 2023), are focused on teacher agency.

In addition, the development of the curriculum in Indonesia has not consistently integrated intercultural objectives. Harmi et al. (2022) discovered that cultural sensitivity among youth differs markedly by region, indicating the necessity for localized curriculum models. Natri et al. (2020) discussed the importance of incorporating genetic and environmental diversity into educational content; however, such interdisciplinary methodologies are infrequent in Indonesian applied linguistics. Methodological diversity is important when analyzing the intricacies of intercultural phenomena. Researchers worldwide have utilized qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches to investigate intercultural competence. Qualitative methodologies, including narrative analysis and discourse analysis, facilitate intricate interpretations of cultural interactions (Lieblich et al., 1998; Smith et al., 2009). Quantitative methodologies, such as surveys and experimental frameworks, yield generalizable insights into attitudes and behaviors (Kudo et al., 2017; Vrontis et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, intercultural research is primarily qualitative, featuring minimal application of experimental or longitudinal methodologies. The dependence on interviews and questionnaires

prompts apprehensions regarding recall bias and validity, especially in studies utilizing self-reported data (Sofyan et al., 2023). Researchers need to improve their methodological skills to incorporate greater use of advanced statistical methods like ANOVA, ANCOVA, and regression analysis (Hagqvist et al., 2020). Moreover, the participant demographics in Indonesian studies are predominantly composed of students, with limited representation of teachers, international students, or community stakeholders. This limited focus constrains the breadth of intercultural investigation and neglects the institutional and sociopolitical influences that mold educational experiences (Perry & Southwell, 2011; Noor et al., 2021).

From the review of existing literature, it is evident that there are significant deficiencies in intercultural research within Indonesian applied linguistics. First, there is insufficient theoretical integration, as few studies explicitly cite established models of intercultural competence. Second, empirical research is constrained in its focus, primarily examining student attitudes while neglecting pedagogical practices and curriculum design. Third, methodological limitations, including the lack of experimental design and sophisticated analytics, weaken the reliability of the results.

These gaps are worsened by problems within the system, such as a lack of support from institutions, uneven policy implementation, and unequal access to research resources. Consequently, intercultural competence remains a peripheral issue in Indonesian education, notwithstanding its significance to national identity, social cohesion, and global engagement. This study filled these gaps by conducting a systematic literature review of 93 peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2024. It sought to delineate research trends, assess methodological frameworks, and pinpoint thematic shortcomings within the discipline. The study can guide the formulation of a more cohesive and comprehensive research agenda for intercultural education in Indonesia through the integration of findings from various databases and the application of a stringent analytical framework.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on the theory of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which is a key idea in applied linguistics and intercultural education. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate eloquently and appropriately with people from different cultures. It includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). This framework is especially pertinent in multilingual and multicultural settings like Indonesia, where linguistic diversity converges with intricate cultural identities. Byram's (1997) model of ICC is well-known for its five interconnected parts: attitudes (being open and curious about other cultures), knowledge (of social groups and their practices), interpreting and relating skills (being able to understand and explain cultural perspectives), discovery and interaction skills (being able to acquire new cultural knowledge), and critical cultural awareness (being able to critically evaluate cultural practices). This model has been widely utilized in foreign language education and teacher training, providing a solid foundation for fostering intercultural sensitivity among both learners and educators (Foo, 2023; Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020; Perry & Southwell, 2011).

In addition to Byram's model, Deardorff (2006) put forth the Process Model of Intercultural Competence, which focuses on internal results like adaptability, empathy, and ethnorelativism. Deardorff's framework, in contrast to static trait-based models, conceptualizes intercultural competence as a dynamic process influenced by reflection, interaction, and contextual learning.

This viewpoint corresponds with experiential and dialogic methodologies in intercultural education, which promote learner-centered and contextually relevant pedagogies (Mitropoulo et al., 2014; Shadiev & Sintawati, 2020). Recently, researchers have broadened the theoretical framework of intercultural studies by incorporating sociocultural and cognitive viewpoints. For example, Sharifian's (2011) theory of cultural conceptualizations emphasizes the influence of culturally embedded schemas on language usage and interpretation. This perspective emphasizes the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication, indicating that linguistic proficiency alone is inadequate for successful cross-cultural engagement. In a similar vein, interactional sociolinguistics, as defined by Canagarajah (2020) and subsequently modified by Toomaneejinda and Saengboon (2022), illustrates the importance of contextual cues, discourse strategies, and power dynamics in intercultural interactions.

These theoretical frameworks offer significant perspectives for examining intercultural phenomena within applied linguistics. Nonetheless, their utilization in the Indonesian context is still limited. Current research frequently lacks clear theoretical foundations, depending instead on descriptive accounts of cultural diversity without integrating established frameworks (Kidwell, 2021; Morganna et al., 2020). This theoretical deficiency limits the analytical rigor of research and hinders the formulation of context-specific models that accurately represent Indonesia's distinctive sociolinguistic environment.

Because Indonesia has so many different languages and ethnic groups, it is both timely and necessary to include ICC and related frameworks in applied linguistics research. The educational policies of the nation, exemplified by the Merdeka Belajar curriculum reform, prioritize inclusivity and cultural responsiveness; however, empirical research assessing the influence of these policies on intercultural competence remains limited (Karmilasari et al., 2023). Furthermore, the absence of theoretical coherence in current research constrains its ability to guide curriculum development, teacher education, and policy formulation.

This research utilizes Byram's ICC model as its principal theoretical framework, complemented by Deardorff's process-oriented framework and insights from Cultural Conceptualizations and Interactional Sociolinguistics. These models together allow for a multidimensional analysis of intercultural research in Indonesian applied linguistics, including attitudinal, cognitive, behavioral, and contextual factors. The study employed these frameworks to conduct a systematic review of 93 peer-reviewed publications, aiming to discern patterns, gaps, and methodological trends within the field.

The theoretical frameworks also supported the study's analytical categories, such as the main theme, the research design, the demographics of the participants, and the ways data were collected. The frameworks offered a foundation for assessing the degree to which current research tackles essential aspects of intercultural competence and enhances educational practice. Moreover, the frameworks facilitated the formulation of strategic recommendations aimed at improving intercultural education in Indonesia, based on empirical evidence and theoretical understanding. In summary, incorporating established intercultural theories in this study fulfilled several objectives: it strengthened the conceptual rigor of the analysis, enabled comparative evaluation across studies, and will aid in the development of contextually relevant educational strategies. By connecting global models to local realities, this study helps move intercultural research in Indonesian applied linguistics forward and encourages a more open and responsive way of teaching.

## Method

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to examine the trends, deficiencies, and methodological patterns in intercultural research within the domain of applied linguistics in Indonesia. It utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to achieve thorough and nuanced comprehension of the data. This methodological design was chosen for its reliability and validity in synthesizing extensive academic literature and discerning patterns across various studies (Hagen-Zanker, 2022; Higgins et al., 2011; Kunto, 2019; Slebir & Zupancic, 2024).

Numerous researchers have employed SLR to evaluate the progression of research themes and to gauge the robustness of methodological frameworks in educational and linguistic studies. Historically, literature reviews have been evaluated based on thematic saturation, methodological diversity, and citation impact. Recent advancements in systematic review methodologies have enabled the exploration of research deficiencies and yielded more lucid understandings of disciplinary evolution (Krupinski, 2019). This study employed PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) to guarantee transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor in the selection and analysis of sources (Moher et al., 2009; Smith, 2009; Strech, 2012).

The data for this study were obtained from four principal academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Google Scholar, and the Science and Technology Index (SINTA). These databases were chosen because they contain a lot of peer-reviewed articles and are useful for research in both Indonesia and around the world. Scopus and WoS are well-known platforms that index high-impact journals from many fields. Google Scholar, on the other hand, provides more access to grey literature and conference proceedings. SINTA, an Indonesian national database, was included to capture locally published studies that may not be indexed internationally but are significant within the national academic landscape.

Articles were sought from the time period of January 2000 to March 2024. The criteria for selecting studies were (1) publications must concentrate on intercultural research within the realm of applied linguistics; (2) papers must be peer-reviewed and have an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN); and (3) studies must have been published within the designated time frame. Only publications that offered significant discourse on intercultural issues in applied linguistics, rather than merely alluding to them, were included in the analysis. A total of 152 papers were initially identified. These papers came from Scopus (35), WoS (26), Google Scholar (38), and SINTA (53). There were 125 unique papers left after removing 27 duplicates. After full-text screening, 38 papers were excluded because they lacked relevance. This left a final sample of 93 papers to analyze (Figure 1).

To evaluate the methodological attributes of the chosen studies, a content analysis framework was established based on Susetyarini and Fauzi (2020). Seven important things were looked at: (1) types of research; (2) types of quantitative research; (3) research area; (4) research subject or object; (5) data collection instruments; (6) data analysis methods; and (7) publication trends. The categorization of these elements facilitated structured and systematic assessment of the literature, aiding in the detection of patterns, deficiencies, and methodological biases (Table 1).

Initially, each paper was read and coded by hand based on the pre-established categories. The first step in this process involved categorizing the research design employed in each study. Recent studies have assessed intercultural research in applied linguistics through four distinct methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and research and development (R&D).

The second step employed to pinpoint research gaps entailed examining the distribution of quantitative methodologies, encompassing observational studies, correlational research, and survey research. The dataset lacked true experimental designs, pre-experimental designs, and quasi-experimental designs, highlighting a methodological deficiency in the field.

To analyze the data, we did the frequency counts and percentage comparisons by hand. The researchers employed tabulation and thematic coding to discern recurring patterns and anomalies within the dataset. Inter-coder agreement guaranteed reliability, and the research team resolved any discrepancies through group discussions. We chose this manual method to maintain the depth of interpretation and to assure that we could be sensitive to the context when looking at the subtleties of intercultural research (Chenail, 2015).

The study also examined the characteristics of the individuals and objects under investigation. Participants were drawn from diverse educational strata, encompassing junior high school students, senior high school students, university students, international students, educators, and lecturers. Textbooks were examined as cultural artifacts within the educational framework. The first sample had 93 studies. Of those, 28% were about junior high school students, 27% were about college students, and 23% were about textbooks. Only 2% of the studies included international students, indicating a deficiency in cross-cultural comparative research.

Different studies used different tools to collect data. Interview sheets (31.91%), questionnaire sheets (30.85%), and content analysis protocols (22.34%) were the tools most used. In 14.89% of the studies, observation sheets were used, but none of the papers reported using test sheets. Interviews are collaborative, which means they can obtain more nuanced views. Questionnaires, on the other hand, can be used to measure attitudes and beliefs. Nonetheless, the dependence on self-reporting instruments prompts apprehensions regarding recall bias and validity.

To discern trends in data analysis methodologies, this study examined the statistical and qualitative techniques utilized in the chosen papers. The most common method was narrative analysis (20%), followed by qualitative comparative analysis (11%), text mining (11%), and semiotics (7%). Classical content analysis, componential analysis, and discourse analysis were utilized, though less frequently. The lack of advanced statistical techniques like ANOVA, ANCOVA, and t-tests indicates a necessity for enhanced methodological sophistication in forthcoming research.

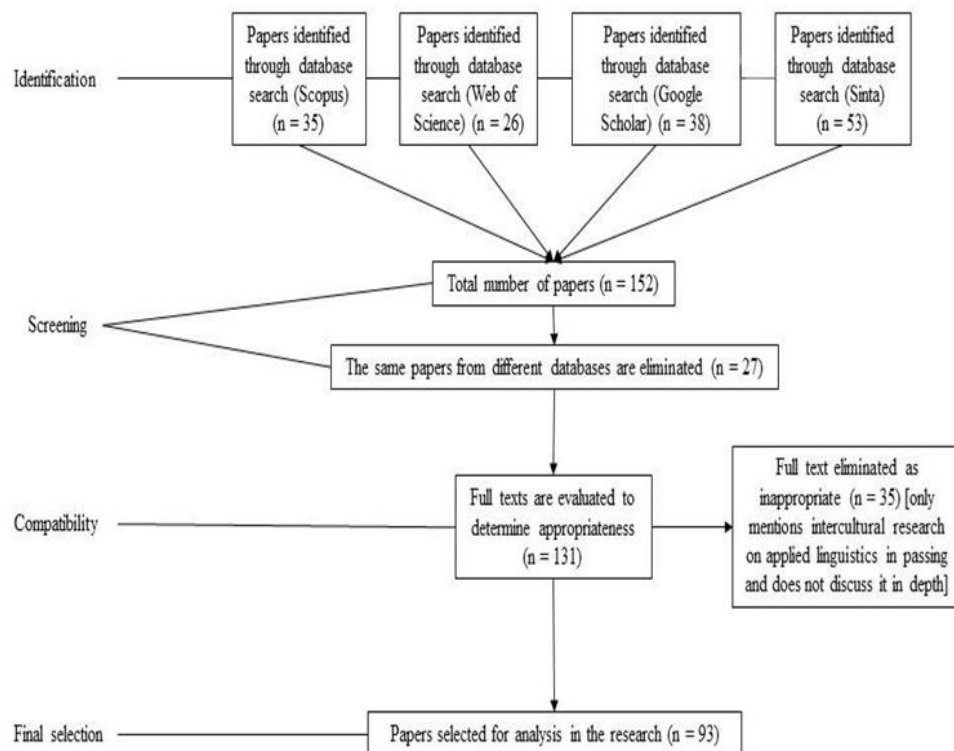
A number of problems were experienced when gathering and analyzing the data. The analysis of methodological diversity was particularly challenging because of inconsistent reporting standards among studies (Lieblich, 1998). Because the dataset was so small, it wasn't possible to look into important links between research design and publication impact. Additional data collection is necessary to ascertain the precise impact of intercultural research methodologies on educational outcomes and policy formulation.

In conclusion, this study employed a mixed-methods systematic literature review to elucidate the evolution of intercultural research within Indonesian applied linguistics. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to thoroughly elucidate the methodological landscape, identify research gaps, and propose avenues for future inquiry (Park, 2025). The results are anticipated to enhance intercultural competence within educational contexts and guide policy and curriculum development in multilingual societies.



**Figure 1**

*Flowchart of the Paper Selection Process (Adapted from Higgins et al., 2011; Mohamad Yusoff et al., 2023)*



**Table 1***The Aspects and Categories Used for Content Analysis (Adapted from Susetyarini & Fauzi, 2020)*

Aspects	Categories	
Types of research	A.1-R and D A.2-CAR A.3-Qualitative Research	A.4-Quantitative Research A.5-Mixed (Qualitative & Quantitative)
Types of quantitative research	B.1-Observation Studies (OS) B.2-Correlational Research (CR) B.3-Survey Research (SR)	B.5-Pre-Experimental Designs (PED) B.6-Quasi-Experimental Designs (QED) B.7-Ex Post Facto Designs (EPFD)
Area	C.1-First, Second, Foreign Language Teaching and Learning C.2-Language In Education C.3-Curriculum Design and Development	C.4-Multilingualism And Multilingual Education C.5-Discourse Analysis C.8-Literature And Teaching
Research subject or object	D.1-JHS Students D.2-SHS Students D.3-Textbook	D.4-University Student D.5-International Student D.5-Teacher D.6-Lecturer
Data collection instruments	E.1-Questionnaire Sheet E.2-Observation Sheet E.3-Test Sheet	E.4-Interview Sheet E.5-Content Analysis E.6-Unidentified
Data analysis methods	F.1-Mean F.2-Percentage F.3- N-Gain F.4- T-test F.5-ANOVA F.6-ANCOVA F.7-Correlation F.8-Discourse Analysis F.9-Narrative Analysis F.10-Semiotics F.11-Qualitative Comparative Analysis F.12-Constant Comparison Analysis F.13-Keywords-in-Context	F.14-Word Count F.15-Membership Categorization Analysis F.16-Domain Analysis F.17-Taxonomic Analysis F.18-Componential Analysis F.19-Theme Analysis F.20-Classical Content Analysis F.21-Secondary Data Analysis Domain F.22-Text Mining F.23-Unidentified F.24-Others

## Findings

This section presents the results of a systematic literature review of 93 peer-reviewed articles on intercultural research in Indonesian applied linguistics that were published between 2000 and 2024. The results have been grouped into five main themes: trends in publishing, patterns in methods, main themes, representation of participants, and methods for collecting and analyzing data.

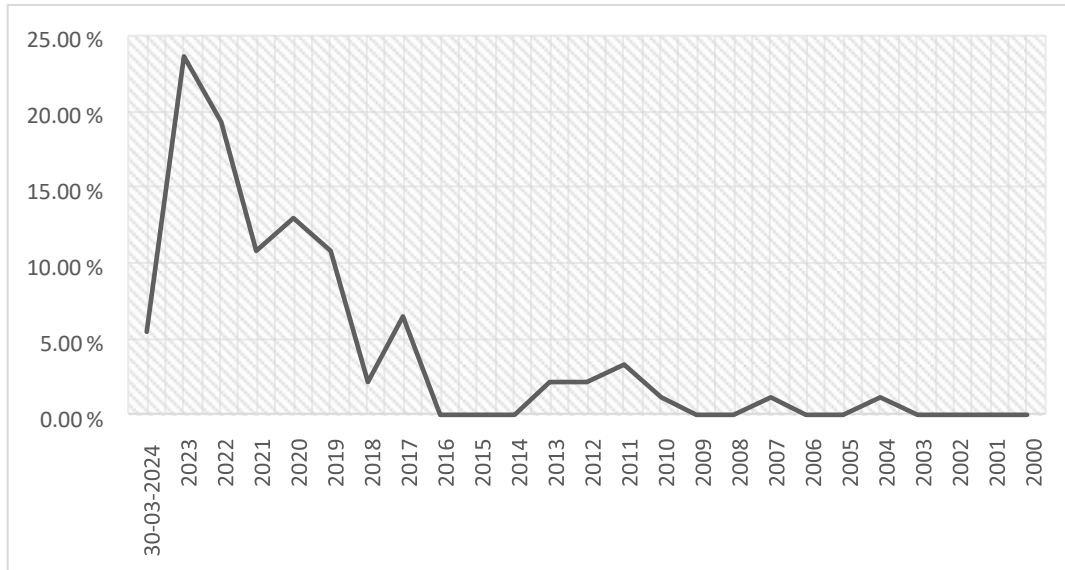
The study indicated that Indonesian applied linguistics scholars have been giving a lot more attention to intercultural issues since 2019 (Table 2 & Figure 2). Before this, the yearly publication rate was less than 7%. Meanwhile, publications on intercultural issues in 2023 accounted for 23.66 percent of the total publications and 19.35 percent in 2022. This upward trend indicates an increasing acknowledgment of the significance of intercultural competence in language education and policy (Isnaini et al., 2019; Atmojo & Putra, 2022). The recent surge in publications suggests that the field is still developing and lacks longitudinal depth.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of Annual Publication Percentage*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Papers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
30-03-2024	5	5.38%
2023	22	23.66%
2022	18	19.35%
2021	10	10.75%
2020	12	12.90%
2019	10	10.75%
2018	2	2.15%
2017	6	6.45%
2016	0	0%
2015	0	0%
2014	0	0%
2010	1	1.08%
2009	0	0%
2008	0	0%
2007	1	1.08%
2006	0	0%
2005	0	0%
2004	1	1.08%
2003	0	0%
2002	0	0%
2001	0	0%
2000	0	0%

**Figure 2**  
*Trend Distribution of Annual Publication Percentage*



A notable methodological disparity was identified among the examined studies (Table 3 & Figure 3). Qualitative methods were the most common, making up 55.91 percent of the sample. Quantitative methods comprised 26.88 percent, and mixed-methods designs constituted merely 16.13 percent of the studies. Research and development (R&D) methodologies were present in only one study, and classroom action research (CAR) was absent from all publications. The lack of methodological diversity constrains the generalizability and practical applicability of findings (Kudo et al., 2017; Vrontis et al., 2021).

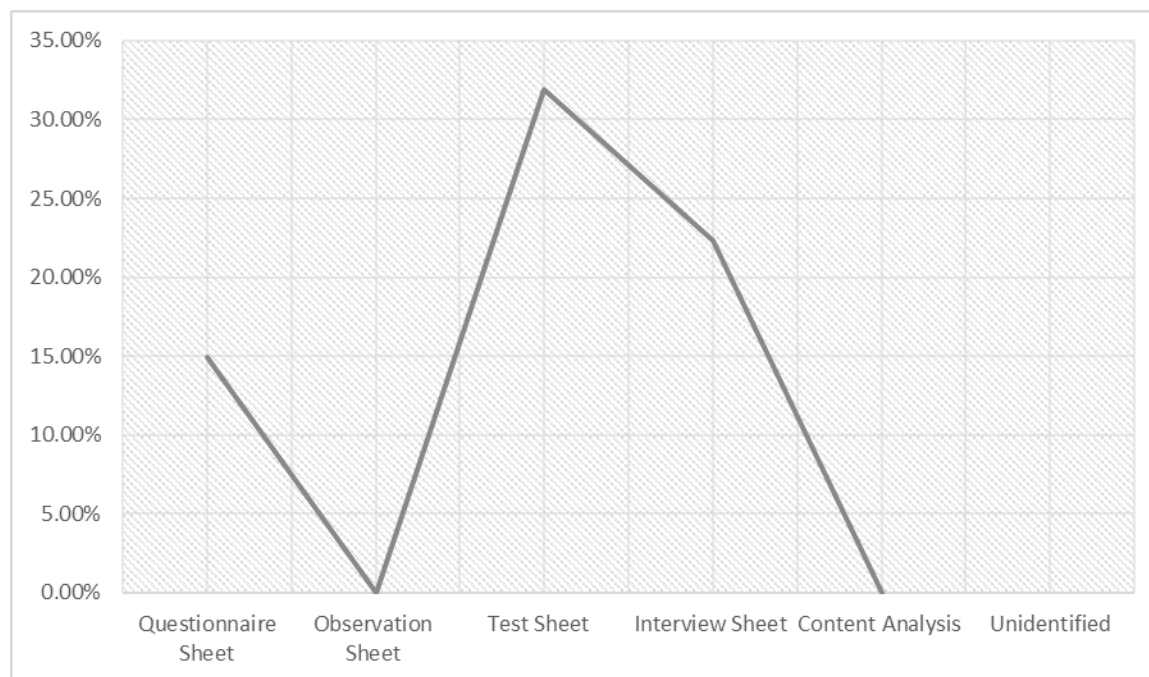
Among the quantitative studies, observational designs were the most common (48 percent), followed by survey research (36 percent) and correlational studies (16 percent). Importantly, none of the studies employed true experimental, quasi-experimental, or ex post facto designs. The lack of controlled studies hinders the establishment of causal relationships and the assessment of the efficacy of intercultural pedagogical interventions (Tleubay et al., 2020).

**Table 3**  
*Distribution of Instruments for Data Collection*

Instrument	Number of Papers	Percentage
Questionnaire Sheet	29	30.85%
Observation Sheet	14	14.89%
Test Sheet	0	0%
Interview Sheet	30	31.91%
Content Analysis	21	22.34%

**Figure 3**

*Trend Distribution of Research Instruments for Data Collection*



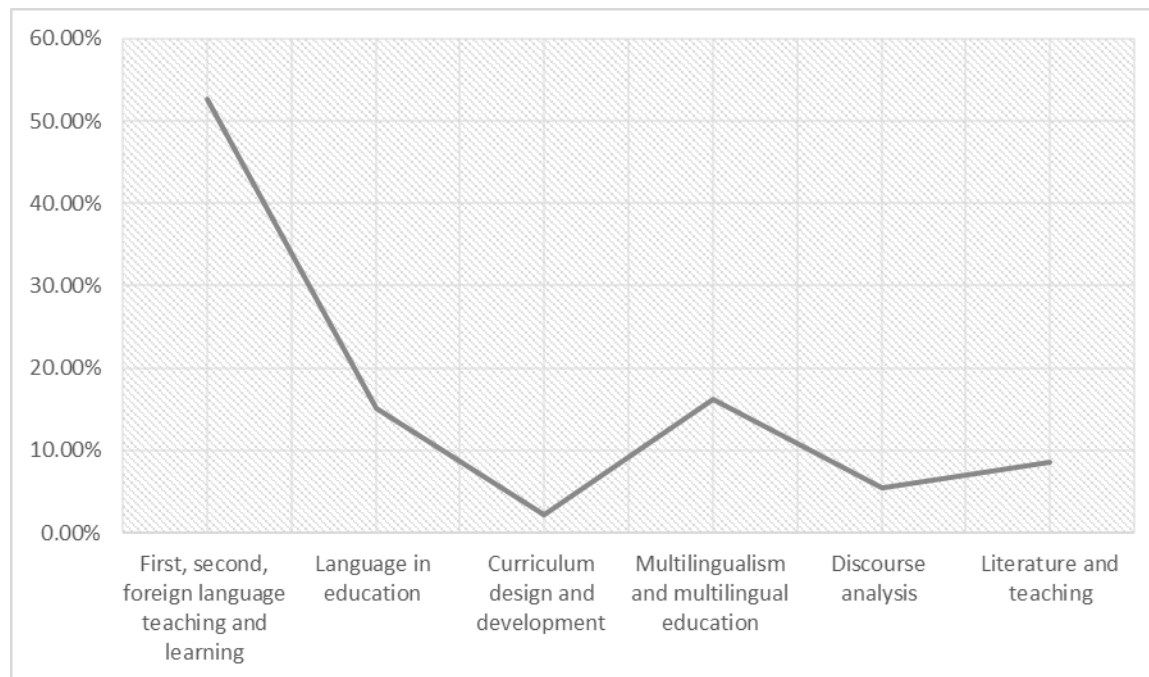
The thematic distribution of the studies indicated a significant focus on foreign language instruction and acquisition, comprising 52.69 percent of the sample (Table 4 & Figure 4). Multilingualism and multilingual education were the subject of 16.13 percent of the studies. 15.05 percent of the studies discussed the role of language in education, and there only 2.15 percent of the publications were on curriculum design and development. This thematic focus indicates that intercultural research in Indonesia is predominantly confined to language instruction, with minimal investigation into curriculum innovation and policy integration (Harmi et al., 2022; Natri et al., 2020).

The minimal representation of discourse analysis and literature-based pedagogy indicates a missed opportunity to explore interculturality through textual and narrative frameworks. The limited thematic focus highlights the necessity for a more extensive investigation into the integration of intercultural competence across educational spheres.

**Table 4**

*Distribution of Study Areas*

Area	Number of papers	Percentage
First, second, and foreign language teaching and learning	49	52.69%
Language in education	14	15.05%
Curriculum design and development	2	2.15%
Multilingualism and multilingual education	15	16.13%
Discourse analysis	5	5.38%
Literature and teaching	8	8.60%

**Figure 4***Trend Distribution of Study Areas*

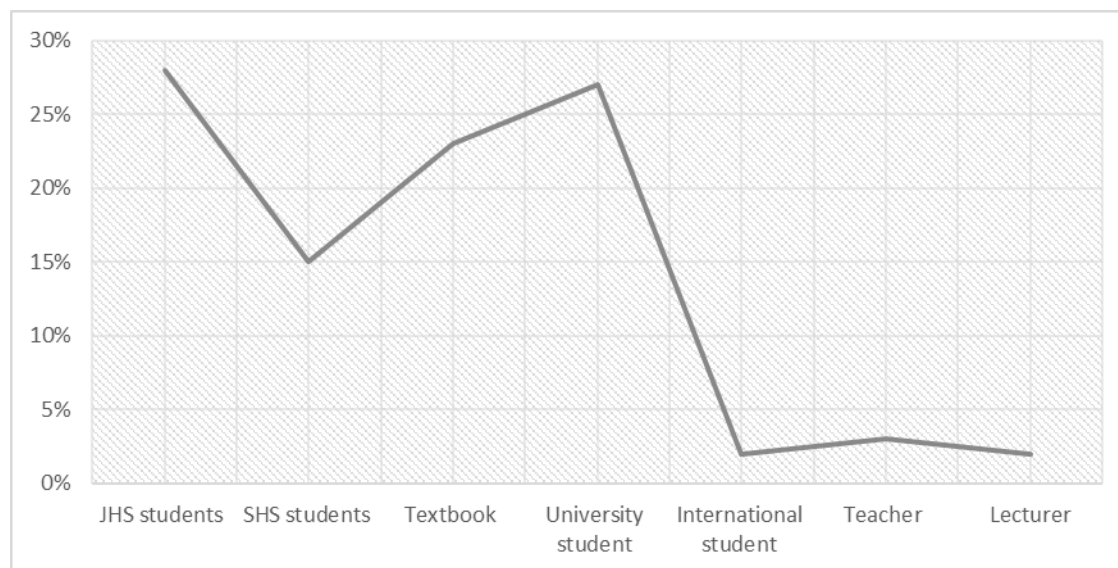
The examination of research subjects indicated an unbalanced emphasis on student demographics (Table 5 & Figure 5). The most common group studied was junior high school students (28 percent), followed by university students (27 percent) and textbook analysis (23 percent). 15 percent of the sample were seniors in high school. Less than 3 percent of the studies included international students, school teachers, and university lecturers, indicating a significant underrepresentation of these three groups.

Accessibility issues and a tendency to focus on student-centered research are the causes of this imbalance. However, it also underscores a significant deficiency in comprehending the viewpoints of educators and cross-cultural participants, who are pivotal in the execution of intercultural pedagogy (Perry & Southwell, 2011; Noor et al., 2021). The restricted incorporation of international perspectives diminishes the comparative and global significance of the results.

**Table 5***Distribution of Subject or Object of Research*

Subject or Object	Number of Papers	Percentage
Jr High School students	26	28%
Sr High School students	14	15%
Textbooks	21	23%
University students	25	27%
International students	2	2%
School Teachers	3	3%
University Lecturers	2	2%

**Figure 5**  
*Trend Distribution of Research Subjects or Objects*



Interviews (31.91 percent) and questionnaires (30.85 percent) were the most common ways to collect data. Content analysis protocols (22.34 percent) and observation sheets (14.89 percent) followed (Table 6 & Figure 6). No studies indicated the utilization of standardized test sheets, signifying an absence of formal assessment instruments for evaluating intercultural competence. The dependence on self-reporting instruments prompts concerns regarding validity and recall bias, especially in research investigating attitudes and perceptions (Sofyan et al., 2023).

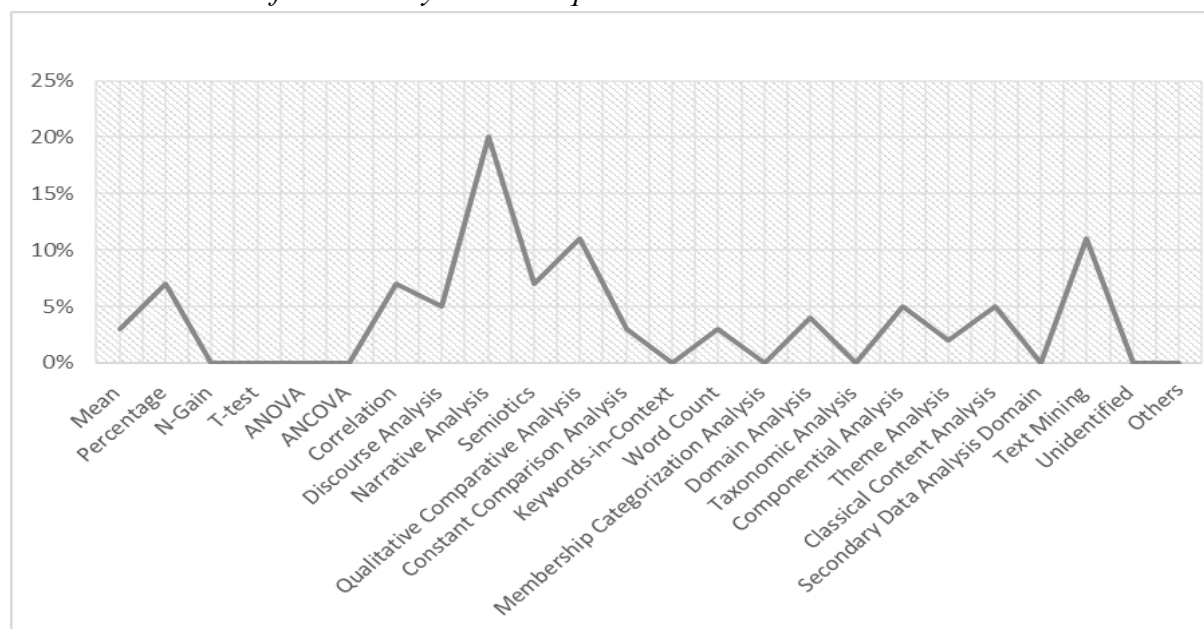
Narrative analysis was the most common method used for data analysis (20%), followed by qualitative comparative analysis (11%), text mining (11%), and semiotics (7%). About 5% of the studies used discourse analysis, classical content analysis, or componential analysis. Quantitative techniques, including mean, percentage, and correlation, were utilized, albeit minimally, while advanced statistical methods such as ANOVA, ANCOVA, and t-tests were absent from the studies. This deficiency in analytical sophistication indicates a necessity for improved methodological training and capacity development among researchers (Hagqvist et al., 2020).

**Table 6***Distribution of Data Analysis Techniques*

<b>Analysis Technique</b>	<b>Number of Papers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Mean	3	3%
Percentage	7	7%
N-Gain	0	0%
T-test	0	0%
ANOVA	0	0%
ANCOVA	0	0%
Correlation	7	7%
Discourse Analysis	5	5%
Narrative Analysis	20	20%
Semiotics	7	7%
Qualitative Comparative Analysis	11	11%
Constant Comparison Analysis	3	3%
Keywords-in-Context	0	0%
Word Count	3	3%
Membership Categorization Analysis	0	0%
Domain Analysis	4	4%
Taxonomic Analysis	0	0%
Componential Analysis	5	5%
Theme Analysis	2	2%
Classical Content Analysis	5	5%
Secondary Data Analysis Domain	0	0%
Text Mining	11	11%
Unidentified	0	0%
Others	0	0%



**Figure 6**  
*Trend Distribution of Data Analysis Technique*



## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the global trends, thematic gaps, and methodological patterns of intercultural research in Indonesian applied linguistics from 2000 to 2024. Specifically, it sought to identify (1) how intercultural competence has been investigated within the field, (2) what methodological approaches dominate, and (3) what thematic and theoretical deficiencies persist. By addressing these aims through a systematic review of 93 peer-reviewed publications, the study provides a comprehensive map of the discipline's evolution and current limitations.

The findings reveal a sharp increase in publications since 2019, signaling growing scholarly and policy attention to intercultural competence, particularly following the implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar curriculum (Karmilasari et al., 2023). This aligns with global developments where intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is viewed as essential in fostering inclusive education and global citizenship (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Guo & Li, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). However, while global scholarship has diversified methodologically and theoretically, Indonesian research remains concentrated in qualitative designs (55.91%) with minimal use of experimental or longitudinal studies. This methodological imbalance restricts generalizability and the ability to establish causal links between pedagogical practices and intercultural outcomes, an issue echoed in prior reviews by Kudo et al. (2017) and Vrontis et al. (2021).

The dominance of qualitative designs and reliance on self-reported data (interviews and questionnaires) corroborate previous findings that Indonesian studies often emphasize perception and attitude rather than observable intercultural behavior (Sofyan et al., 2023; Su). In contrast, studies in other contexts increasingly employ mixed-methods and psychometric instruments to measure cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of ICC (Tleubay et al., 2020; Hagqvist et al., 2020). This methodological gap indicates the need for greater training in research design, advanced analytics, and instrument validation among Indonesian scholars.

Thematically, the analysis shows that most studies focus on foreign language teaching and learning (52.69%), while curriculum innovation (2.15%) and teacher perspectives (3%) receive far less attention. This narrow focus mirrors earlier critiques that intercultural research in Indonesia is often confined to classroom contexts without addressing institutional or policy-level factors (Morganna et al., 2020; Kidwell, 2021). Internationally, researchers have underscored the pivotal role of teacher agency and curriculum design in embedding intercultural competence across disciplines (Perry & Southwell, 2011; Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020). The scarcity of such perspectives in Indonesia suggests that intercultural competence remains treated as an ancillary rather than integral educational objective.

Comparatively, global studies demonstrate that ICC not only enhances communicative effectiveness but also boosts learner motivation, empathy, and cross-cultural awareness (Guo & Li, 2025; Permatasari & Andriyanti, 2021). Yet, Indonesian studies seldom link their findings to established models like Byram's (1997) five-component framework or Deardorff's (2006) process model, resulting in fragmented theoretical grounding. This absence of theory-driven inquiry weakens the coherence of the field and its potential to inform pedagogical policy. Sharifian's (2011) concept of cultural conceptualizations and Toomaneejinda and Saengboon's (2022) interactional sociolinguistics, for instance, remain underutilized despite their relevance in multilingual societies.

Overall, these findings point to several directions for strengthening intercultural research in Indonesia. First, adopting mixed-methods, experimental, and longitudinal designs will enable a more nuanced understanding of how intercultural competence develops over time and in different contexts. Second, expanding research beyond foreign language instruction to include curriculum design, teacher professional development, and policy evaluation will enhance the field's societal relevance. Third, establishing standardized, culturally sensitive instruments for ICC assessment, similar to those used in global studies (Deardorff, 2006; Wang et al., 2025), will improve measurement validity and comparability across studies.

Despite its strengths, this review also recognizes its limitations. The exclusion of grey literature and non-English publications may have limited the representativeness of the dataset. Future reviews could integrate bibliometric analyses and citation mapping to assess research impact and network collaboration. In conclusion, by synthesizing trends, methods, and themes across two decades of scholarship, this study underscores both the progress and the persistent gaps in Indonesian intercultural research. The integration of established frameworks such as Byram's ICC model, Deardorff's process model, Sharifian's cultural conceptualizations, and interactional sociolinguistics provides a robust foundation for theoretical advancement. Aligning these models with context-sensitive methodologies can strengthen Indonesia's contribution to global intercultural discourse and help create more inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive educational environments.

## Conclusion

This study set out to systematically map global trends, thematic gaps, and methodological patterns in intercultural research within Indonesian applied linguistics from 2000 to 2024. Through a mixed-methods systematic literature review of 93 peer-reviewed publications, it sought to answer three key questions concerning the dominant research trends, methodological approaches, and thematic deficiencies in the field. The findings revealed a marked increase in scholarly attention to intercultural competence, particularly after 2019, reflecting the growing national commitment to inclusive and culturally responsive education in line with initiatives such as Merdeka Belajar.

Nevertheless, this increase in quantity has not yet been matched by a corresponding advancement in theoretical depth, methodological rigor, or thematic diversity.

The study demonstrates that most Indonesian research on intercultural competence remains concentrated in qualitative designs, often relying on interviews and questionnaires, with limited use of experimental or longitudinal methods. Such methodological imbalance restricts the generalizability of findings and limits the field's ability to establish causal relationships between pedagogy, policy, and intercultural learning outcomes. Furthermore, many studies adopt descriptive rather than theory-driven approaches, with minimal reference to established frameworks such as Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence model or Deardorff's (2006) Process Model. The lack of consistent theoretical integration contributes to fragmentation in the field and constrains the development of contextually grounded, evidence-based strategies for enhancing intercultural competence.

Thematically, Indonesian studies focus predominantly on foreign language learning, while areas such as curriculum design, teacher agency, and institutional policy remain underexplored. This narrow scope contrasts with global research that increasingly positions intercultural competence as a core educational outcome across disciplines. As a result, intercultural competence in Indonesia tends to be treated as a classroom-level concern rather than a systemic objective. To address this imbalance, future research must broaden its scope to include policy implementation, curriculum reform, and teacher professional development, domains that are crucial for translating intercultural awareness into sustainable educational practice.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the review reinforces the importance of grounding Indonesian intercultural research in established frameworks, particularly Byram's, Deardorff's, and Sharifian's models, to enhance conceptual coherence and global comparability. The integration of complementary perspectives, such as cultural conceptualizations and interactional sociolinguistics, can also enrich the analytical depth of future studies by acknowledging the cognitive and contextual dimensions of intercultural communication. Methodologically, the findings call for greater diversity in research designs, particularly the use of mixed-methods, quasi-experimental, and longitudinal approaches that can capture the dynamic nature of intercultural competence development. Researchers are also encouraged to design and validate culturally sensitive measurement instruments that reflect Indonesia's linguistic and cultural plurality, thereby improving the precision and applicability of intercultural assessment.

From a pedagogical and policy standpoint, this study underscores the urgent need to embed intercultural competence across all levels of education, not only within language learning but also within curriculum planning, teacher training, and institutional development. Educators must be empowered to act as agents of intercultural understanding through targeted professional development programs and reflective teaching practices. Policy makers and academic institutions should collaborate with researchers to establish national frameworks for assessing and promoting intercultural competence, ensuring that it becomes a measurable and actionable aspect of educational quality. Furthermore, future research should include bibliometric and citation analyses to map collaboration networks and trace the international influence of Indonesian scholarship, as well as extend data sources to include grey literature and regional publications to capture a more comprehensive picture of the field.

This paper offers a comprehensive and evaluative assessment of intercultural research within Indonesian applied linguistics, highlighting its advancements and shortcomings. Despite recent advancements, the area is hindered by inadequate theoretical foundations, restricted topic

scope, and a lack of methodological rigour. Enhancing these areas will not only augment Indonesia's role in global intercultural dialogue but also promote the establishment of more inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive educational settings. By integrating theoretical models with context-specific teaching practices, Indonesian applied linguistics can significantly enhance intercultural competency as a fundamental aspect of education in a multilingual and multicultural society. This report underscores the pressing necessity for a paradigm change towards more rigorous and culturally informed inquiry, encouraging future research in Indonesian applied linguistics and language teaching to embrace transformational and globally engaged methodologies in intercultural studies.

## Ethical Statement

This research does not necessitate ethical approval as it does not engage human subjects; instead, it examines publicly available research, so as to avoid potential ethical dilemmas or privacy infringements.

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