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## A SCOPING REVIEW FOR DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE STRATEGIES MODULE FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN ESL CLASSROOMS IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

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**Abstract:**

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is increasingly recognised as a critical component of English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher preparation in multicultural higher education settings. This scoping review maps current evidence on ICC strategies for pre-service teachers and identifies promising practices and research gaps. Guided by the Arksey and O'Malley framework, studies published between 2020 and 2025 were retrieved from ProQuest, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), and Semantic Scholar, with 30 articles retained as the final included studies after screening. Findings indicate that constructivist learning, problem-based learning, virtual exchange, and service learning are commonly reported to support intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and reflective practice. However, fragmented curriculum integration and limited practical implementation persist. Evidence from Malaysia remains limited, particularly regarding the systematic integration of ICC strategies into teacher preparation. The review highlights the need for structured, context-sensitive ICC modules to better prepare pre-service teachers and informs the development of an ICC strategies module for higher education institutions.

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**Keyword:**

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC); ESL Teacher Education; Pre-Service Teachers; Scoping Review; Instructional Strategies; Higher Education



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## Introduction

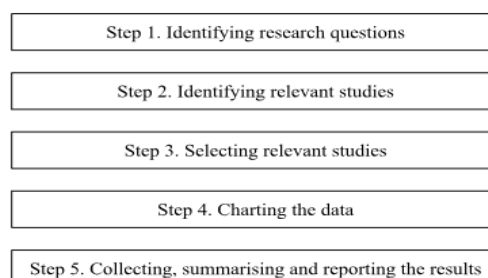
In the modern world, cross-cultural communication has become necessary particularly for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. In the globalised world, English serves a crucial function in enabling intercultural contact among individuals from various local cultures. It is utilised by millions of both native and non-native speakers and serves as a common language in worldwide communication among individuals with diverse first languages (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). According to Corbett (2003), intercultural communication competence is the ability to understand the language and behaviour of the target community and explain it to members of the 'home' community and vice versa. For ESL classrooms, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is essential for personal progress and for creating an inclusive and successful classroom environment that enables students from many cultural backgrounds to achieve their full potential. However, there is a gap in pre-service teachers' professional preparedness because many ICC strategies are not designed to train them effectively.

ICC refers to learners' ability to recognize, comprehend, and navigate cultural differences (Byram, 1997). Pre-service teachers must critically assess their biases, engage in cultural discussions, and develop sensitivity towards diverse populations as they address ethnic and socioeconomic gaps (Westerlund et al., 2019). A study by Avifah and Sari (2024) recommends that the university's English education and teacher programme include the study of deep culture into its curricula to adequately prepare qualified future teachers for the global teaching landscape, rather than merely providing superficial cultural knowledge to pre-service teachers. Consequently, including ICC in teacher preparation programmes is important to provide pre-service teachers with the cultural competence necessary for working in diverse classrooms and building inclusive learning environments.

Evidence from Malaysia remains limited, particularly regarding the systematic integration of ICC strategies into teacher preparation. Accordingly, this scoping review aims to map the current literature on ICC in ESL education and identify commonly reported approaches for integrating intercultural competence into teacher training. It also examines the strategies, skills, research designs, and reported findings in studies involving pre-service teachers in higher education institutions. The review is intended to identify gaps in the literature and inform the development of a structured, context-sensitive ICC strategies module for pre-service teachers in a multilingual ESL environment.

## Research Methodology

A methodological approach by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) was used as a guide to finish this scoping review. The framework is made up of 5 stages(1) identifying research questions; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) selecting relevant studies; (4) charting the data; and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results.



**Figure 1: Methodological Framework (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005)**

### *Identify the Research Question*

Table 1 lists the basic research questions developed using the study objectives of the Population-Concept-Context (PCC) framework.

**Table 1. Research Questions Based on PCC**

| Research Questions                                                                                                                                          | Specified Objectives                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How are past studies on ICC Strategies Modules for Pre-Service Teachers in ESL Classrooms distributed?                                                      | To explore the temporal and geographical relationship distribution and the settings of past studies.                                                  |
| Which research designs have been used in studies addressing ICC Strategies Modules for pre-service teachers in higher institutions over the past few years? | To determine the research methods/ designs used from 2020-2025.                                                                                       |
| What are the research's aims regarding ICC strategies for dealing with pre-service teachers in ESL classrooms in higher institutions over the past 5 years? | To analyse the research purpose/aim of past studies on ICC strategies for dealing with pre-service teachers in ESL classrooms in higher institutions. |
| What skills was the study found in the past on ICC strategies for pre-service teachers in ESL classrooms?                                                   | To investigate the skills that have been researched in past studies.                                                                                  |
| What are the findings of past studies on ICC Strategies for pre-service Teachers in higher institutions?                                                    | To report the results of past studies on ICC strategy modules for dealing with pre-service teachers in higher institutions.                           |

### *Identifying Relevant Studies*

An extensive search of publications from 2020 to 2025 was conducted in ProQuest, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), and Semantic Scholar. The search focused on studies

related to intercultural competence, ICC, ESL classrooms, and pre-service teacher education. Table 2 presents the search strings used in the three databases. Boolean operators such as “OR” and “AND” were used to refine the search and retrieve relevant studies.

**Table 2. Search String/Keywords**

| Database         | Keywords                                                                                  |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ProQuest         | (Intercultural competence OR ICC) AND (ESL classroom) AND (pre-service teacher education) |
| ERIC             |                                                                                           |
| Semantic Scholar |                                                                                           |

### ***Study Selection***

The third stage involved the selection of studies and the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Table 3 presents the criteria used in the screening process. The research team screened the titles and abstracts of the retrieved records according to the predefined criteria. Following screening and eligibility assessment, 30 articles were retained as the final included studies for this scoping review.

**Table 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

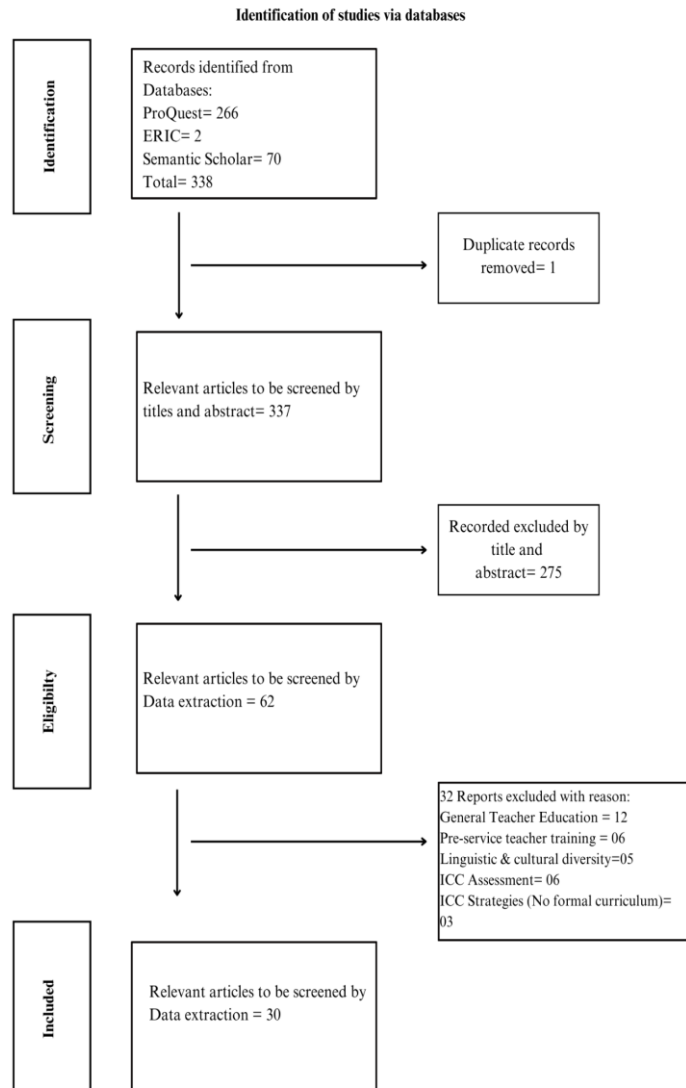
| Inclusion                            | Exclusion                      |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Articles Published from 2020 to 2025 | Articles published before 2020 |
| Related to ICC                       | Not related to ICC             |
| Text in English Language             | Other languages                |
| Full text available                  | Without full text              |

### ***Data Charting***

The fourth stage is data charting. The final data extracted from the eligible study included the article title, publication year, author, reference, country of origin, design, participants, aims of the study, and results. The senior author finalized and modified the completed data extractions and charting form through a repeated process.

### ***Collating, Summarising, And Reporting The Results***

Compiling, summarizing, and reporting the findings together form the last stage of the process. Additional analysis was applied to the articles contained in the literature matrix in order to determine if they meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as the purpose of the scoping review. After that, the research team gave the data their last touches so that it could be included in the report. This is done to guarantee that the data that was provided is up to the requirements and objectives of the research that were discussed before.



**Figure 2. Flow Diagram for a Scoping Review**

## Results and Findings

Three databases provided 338 papers for this scoping review. As seen in Figure 2, 266 articles were obtained from ProQuest, 2 from the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), and 70 from Semantic Scholar. The various search strings decided the articles retrieved applied. 1 duplicate was discovered, leaving 337 titles for eligibility screening. After screening, 275 were rejected based on their titles and abstracts. As a consequence, 62 papers were reviewed for eligibility using data extraction. Twelve publications were unrelated to the scope of the scoping review. Twelve papers discussed general teacher education, six about pre-service teacher training, five about linguistic and cultural diversity, six about assessment, and three about additional curriculum. As a result, 30 article titles were finalised and selected for consideration in this scoping review.

### ***Distribution Of Past Studies***

The articles that were reviewed were published from 2020 to 2025 across the world. In 2020, a total of  $n=2$  articles (Vu, 2020; Ruales et al., 2020) were published. Additionally,  $n=3$  studies were identified in 2021 (Nurazizah et al., 2021; Grainger & Willis, 2021; Alshuaifan, 2021) from the three databases. The year 2022 observed a significant rise in research by  $n=5$  (Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Chien, 2022; Syahrin et al., 2022; Nindya et al., 2022; Amery et al., 2022). In 2023 there was a decrease with only 1 article Permatasari, (2023). Lastly, in 2024, a total of  $n=2$  titles were (Mahaputri et al., 2024 and Avifah & Sari, 2024). Lastly, in 2025, a total  $n=17$  were (Siribud, 2025, Yimmy & Jaime, 2025, Anuas et al., 2025, Tavakoli et al., 2025, Terantino & Hicks, 2025, Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025, Mahyaw, 2025, Naumoska, 2025, Hassan et al., 2025, Tagala & Rabago, 2025, Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025, Musarrat, 2025, Qizi, 2025, Angelini, 2025, Beazidou et al., 2025, Gui & Kew, 2025, Sert & Ishino, 2025).

According to the article distribution by country, Indonesia had the highest number of studies, with  $n=9$  (Nurazizah et al., 2021; Nindya et al., 2022; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Permatasari, 2023; Avifah & Sari, 2024; Mahaputri et al., 2024; Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025; Mahyaw, 2025; Beazidou et al., 2025). Malaysia had  $n=4$  studies (Anuas et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2025; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025; Gui & Kew, 2025). The Philippines had  $n=2$  articles (Ayunon & Haloc, 2021; Tagala & Rabago, 2025). The USA had  $n=2$  articles (Terantino & Hicks, 2025; Musarrat, 2025). The additional countries from which articles originated were South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Taiwan, Australia, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Colombia, Iran, North Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Spain, and Japan.

### ***Research Design***

Ten of the thirty articles that were identified used the qualitative method as a research design (Vu, 2020; Nurazizah et al., 2021; Amery et al., 2022; Permatasari, 2023; Mahaputri et al., 2024; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025; Tagala & Rabago, 2025; Mahyaw, 2025; Terantino & Hicks, 2025; Yimmy & Jaime, 2025). Additionally, four of the articles used the quantitative method (Alshuaifan, 2021; Ruales et al., 2020; Syahrin et al., 2022; Anuas et al., 2025). Six of the articles utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Grainger & Willis, 2021; Chien, 2022; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Nindya et al., 2022; Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025; Gui & Kew, 2025).

There was a total of four investigations that were conducted using the method of interviews (Vu, 2020; Mahaputri et al., 2024; Amery et al., 2022; Nurazizah et al., 2021). Moreover, it has been discovered in  $n=3$  publications that the strategy that was utilised was a combination of surveys and T-tests. (Ruales et al., 2020; Syahrin et al., 2022; Alshuaifan, 2021). For a total of three studies (Grainger & Willis, 2021; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Permatasari, 2023), the thematic analysis was utilised. Each of the methodologies consisted of one of the following: the Case Study Approach, Content analysis, Systematic Review research, and Conceptual research (Chien, 2022; Nindya et al., 2022; Avifah & Sari, 2024; Permatasari, 2023).

### ***Aims Of Past Studies***

According to the articles, the importance of ICC for pre-service teachers was investigated for several reasons. Evaluation of ICC levels, teaching strategies reported for ICC development, the impact of international experiences on ICC, the influence of online and digital learning on

ICC, integration of ICC in ELT and teacher preparation programmes, and understanding of pre-service teachers were among the various areas of focus for each article. Table 4 shows that n=8 articles focused on teaching methods reported for ICC development (Vu, 2020; Chien, 2022; Mahaputri et al., 2024; Avifah & Sari, 2024; Yimmy & Jaime, 2025; Tavakoli et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2025; Musarrat, 2025). Also, n=5 prioritised the impact of international experiences on ICC (Nurazizah et al., 2021; Grainger & Willis, 2021; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Mahyawati, 2025; Tagala & Rabago, 2025). Next, there were n=9 articles that concentrated on the integration of ICC in ELT and teacher preparation programmes (Alshuaifan, 2021; Amery et al., 2022; Permatasari, 2023; Anuas et al., 2025; Terantino & Hicks, 2025; Siribud, 2025; Beazidou et al., 2025; Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025). Furthermore, there were n=7 articles that focused on the influence of online and digital learning on ICC and the understanding of pre-service teachers (Ruales et al., 2020; Syahrin et al., 2022; Sert & Ishino, 2025; Qizi, 2025; Gui & Kew, 2025; Naumoska, 2025; Angelini, 2025), and n=1 article concentrated on evaluating ICC levels (Nindya et al., 2022).

### **Specific Skills Targeted or Developed**

Prior research has used ICC to target a variety of skills for pre-service teachers in ESL classes. Intercultural awareness and respect for other cultures are focused on (Ruales et al., 2020; Grainger & Willis, 2021; Chien, 2022; Yimmy & Jaime, 2025; Hassan et al., 2025; Tagala & Rabago, 2025). Other targeted skills include critical thinking and problem-solving, which were highlighted (Vu, 2020; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Mahaputri et al., 2024; Tavakoli et al., 2025; Musarrat, 2025; Mahyawati, 2025, and intercultural communication as seen in Syahrin et al. (2022) Nurazizah et al., 2021; Siribud, 2025; Sert & Ishino, 2025; Qizi, 2025; Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025). In order to improve teaching strategies for ICC Integration, introduce curriculums, lesson planning, and teaching practices (Avifah & Sari, 2024; Permatasari, 2023; Anuas et al., 2025; Naumoska, 2025; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025; Gui & Kew, 2025). Teachers must also have self-reflection and personal growth to assess personal bias, and their role in promoting ICC (Amery et al., 2022; Nindya et al., 2022; Amery et al., 2022; Terantino & Hicks, 2025; Beazidou et al., 2025; Angelini, 2025).

### ***Past Studies' Reported Findings on Intercultural Communication Competence for Pre-service Teachers***

Based on the findings of this scoping review, four broad patterns were identified across the 30 included articles. First, n=9 articles reported findings related to ICC teaching approaches (Vu, 2020; Syahrin et al., 2022; Mahaputri et al., 2024; Avifah & Sari, 2024; Yimmy & Jaime, 2025; Tavakoli et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2025; Gui & Kew, 2025; Musarrat, 2025). Results from n=8 articles (Amery et al., 2022; Chien, 2022; Permatasari, 2023; Siribud, 2025; Beazidou et al., 2025; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025; Naumoska, 2025; Mahyawati, 2025) indicated challenges in ICC implementation and instructional gaps. A further n=9 articles reported on the impact of ICC strategies on pre-service teachers (Ruales et al., 2020; Nurazizah et al., 2021; Grainger & Willis, 2021; Terantino & Hicks, 2025; Anuas et al., 2025; Sert & Ishino, 2025; Tagala & Rabago, 2025; Qizi, 2025; Angelini, 2025). Meanwhile, n=4 articles reported on pre-service teachers' perceptions of ICC (Alshuaifan, 2021; Nindya et al., 2022; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025).

## Reported ICC Teaching Approaches

### *ICC Teaching Methods*

Some studies have examined different strategies for developing ICC among pre-service teachers. Constructivist learning was reported to support intercultural sensitivity and ICC (Vu, 2020). Likewise, problem-based learning was reported to support ICC awareness, critical thinking, and intercultural reflection (Mahaputri et al., 2024). Virtual exchange programmes provided opportunities for intercultural interaction, with reported improvements in cultural understanding, adaptability, and communication (Syahrin et al., 2022). Furthermore, teaching approaches that address deeper cultural perspectives enabled pre-service teachers to engage with less visible cultural aspects rather than only surface-level knowledge (Avifah & Sari, 2024). These findings indicate that active and experiential learning approaches are commonly reported in the literature on ICC development. A Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-oriented instructional package was reported to support students' understanding of cultural diversity and substantive intercultural interaction (Hassan et al., 2025). Gui and Kew (2025) reported a correlation between teacher support, technology integration, and ICC outcomes within English Language Teaching. Furthermore, Musarrat (2025) presented a learner-centred pedagogical approach using task-based activities and digital tools to cultivate language fluency, learner autonomy, and intercultural engagement. Yimmy and Jaime (2025) incorporated local knowledge and resources into EFL instruction through community mapping and the Connect, Extend and Reflect routine. Tavakoli et al. (2025) reported that pragmatic learning strategies in task performance supported speech-act production.

### *Challenges in ICC Implementation and Instructional Gaps*

Though the importance of ICC has been acknowledged, several articles have found implementation limitations. A systematic review discovered gaps in ICC instruction, namely in the instructional methods implemented in programs for teacher preparation (Permatasari, 2023). According to Amery et al., (2022), intercultural education was part of the teaching programs, however, it was not properly planned which led to limited practical application. In addition, ICC teaching activities were found it a challenge to be created by pre-service teachers, as their culture knowledge was more incidental rather than it was systematically developed (Chien, 2022). The gap between teachers' positive ideas and their actual classroom practices, as shown in this analysis, represents a continuous gap that hinders ICC implementation because of a rigid curriculum and the unavailability of authentic cultural resources (Beazidou et al., 2025). Another significant policy-to-practice disparity highlighted in this case study pertains to vocational English environments, where the incorporation of ICC is compromised by test-oriented pedagogical cultures (Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025). Additionally, academic research on digital collaborative projects reveals disparities in digital competency and institutional constraints as prevailing challenges that hinder instructional innovation (Naumoska, 2025). Moreover, the accent bias is identified as a systematic issue in language testing, as both instructional and assessment frameworks continue to prioritise so-called native-like pronunciation over linguistic clarity and effective communication (Siribud, 2025). Overall, this highlights the need for improved arrangement in ICC instruction and practical teaching methodologies.

### ***Impact of ICC Strategies on Pre-Service Teachers***

Research examining ICC development reported differences in the intercultural proficiency of pre-service teachers, often in relation to their prior experiences with different cultures. Respondents in the SEA Teacher Project reported improvements in cross-cultural understanding, although language barriers and cultural adaptation remained challenges (Nurazizah et al., 2021). Online courses were also reported to support favourable attitudes and intercultural sensitivity among pre-service teachers (Ruales et al., 2020). Grainger and Willis (2021) reported that service learning and field-based activities provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in real-world cultural exchanges and develop ICC. Taken together, the reviewed studies indicate that both virtual and face-to-face intercultural encounters are commonly reported as opportunities for ICC development. Mahyawati (2025) reported that teaching abroad supported pre-service teachers' pedagogical confidence, adaptability, and multicultural learning abilities. Sert and Ishino (2025) found that telecollaboration supported student-teachers in recognising and using instructional gestures, contributing to classroom interactional competency. Furthermore, exchange programmes were reported to support pre-service teachers' intercultural competency and student-centred pedagogy (Tagala & Rabago, 2025). Action research on virtual tandem projects reported potential benefits for prospective educators' professional readiness and language adaptability. Angelini (2025) also reported that simulation-based learning supported critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and teacher identity development. Finally, Terantino and Hicks (2025) suggested that culturally responsive pedagogy courses fostered a more critical perspective among pre-service teachers.

### ***Teachers' Perceptions of ICC***

Pre-service teachers must comprehend how to construct successful teacher training programs as they conceptualise ICC. A study conducted by Atmojo & Putra (2022) found various understandings of ICC between pre-service teachers in Indonesia, some saw it as a collection of social behaviours, in the meantime while others viewed it as a set of framework of principles and beliefs. Alshuaifan's (2021) comparative analysis of ICC integration in Saudi Arabia and Singapore revealed that, although both nations incorporated ICC teacher preparation, Singapore exhibited a more structured approach and a higher degree of ICC integration. Conversely, despite possessing substantial theoretical understanding of ICC principles, numerous pre-service teachers have encountered challenges in its practical application within their classrooms (Nindya et al., 2022). In South Africa, student teachers acknowledged that their training included concepts related to intercultural education. However, they believed that more structured activities were needed to improve their learning (Amery et al., 2022). Although ICC is generally accepted, pre-service teachers still have difficulties in putting it into practice. In this study, Indonesian pre-service teachers know intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is important, but most of them focus on surface-level cultural knowledge rather than critical aspects (Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025). According to Anuas et al., (2025), the Fuzzy Delphi technique highlights experts' viewpoints by identifying the essential components of culturally sensitive education, which focus on teachers' professional competence and interaction.

### ***Research Gap and Future Directions***

In line with the previous studies, several gaps were identified including methodological, geographical, theoretical, and practical. Firstly, previous studies were mostly conducted in

Southeast Asian (SEA) countries (Vu, 2020; Nurazizah et al., 2021; Ruales et al., 2020; Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Mahaputri et al., 2024; Avifah & Sari, 2024; Permatasari, 2023; Nindya et al., 2022; Siribud, 2025; Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025; Mahyawati, 2025; Tagala & Rabago, 2025; Beazidou et al., 2025) and a few in Malaysia (Anuas et al., 2025; Hassan et al., 2025; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025; Gui & Kew, 2025). Secondly, the majority of the earlier research methodologies were qualitative studies. (Amery et al., 2022; Chien, 2022; Nurazizah et al., 2021; Vu, 2020 Yimmy & Jaime, 2025; Terantino & Hicks, 2025; Mahyawati, 2025; Tagala & Rabago, 2025; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025). A study was used for a mixed-methods approach (Gui & Kew, 2025). More mixed-methods could be used to provide an improved understanding. Thirdly, the existing research has mostly concentrated on the topics of restricted sample sizes, teacher training for practical implementation, planning, and integration of ICC lessons, and the limited depth of literature reviews. Lastly, the majority of the earlier research concentrated on individuals who were from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Nindya et al., 2022; Alshuaifan, 2021; Avifah & Sari, 2024; Vu, 2020; Atmojo & Putra, 2022). According to Mahaputri et al. (2024), problem-based learning and teaching ought to be integrated into language classrooms to help pre-service teachers challenge assumptions, challenge stereotypes, and gain a better awareness of cultural variety. There is not enough research on how theoretical knowledge is put into practice (Beazidou et al., 2025; Yinyin & Ambotang, 2025; Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025). The prior study emphasised the importance of intercultural communicative competence for pre-service teachers by examining the impact it has on students' adaptation to cultural diversity in higher institutions. As a consequence, previous findings point to inconsistencies that need to be addressed in further study.

## Conclusion

The findings of this scoping review indicate that ICC strategies have been examined across a range of approaches, including mixed-methods, systematic review, qualitative, quantitative, action, and conceptual research designs. The reviewed literature also showed an uneven geographical distribution, with substantial representation from Southeast Asian contexts and comparatively limited evidence from Malaysia. Across the included studies, constructivist learning, problem-based learning, virtual exchange, service learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and other active learning approaches were commonly reported in relation to ICC development. These findings highlight the potential value of structured, context-sensitive ICC strategies for Malaysian ESL pre-service teachers and provide a basis for informing the development of an ICC strategies module for higher education institutions. As a scoping review, the study maps reported practices and research gaps rather than establishing the causal effectiveness of particular interventions.

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- Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)** The author(s) declare that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used during the preparation of this manuscript. The following tool(s) were used: ChatGPT and Grammarly for language editing and grammar improvement purposes. All AI-assisted content was reviewed and verified by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.
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