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Intercultural Communication in Second/Foreign Language Education Over 67 Years: A Bibliometric Review

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ABSTRACT

This bibliometric review analyzed 2,429 publications on intercultural communication in second/foreign language education from Scopus over 67 years. Findings highlight the growing integration of intercultural competence (IC) into curricula, with digital tools like telecollaboration and e-learning playing significant roles. Keywords such as “intercultural competence,” “students,” and “teaching” underscore IC’s pivotal role in shaping pedagogical strategies. The USA and China lead research output, while emerging trends include gender dynamics and technology-mediated learning. These findings stress the need for professional development, culturally responsive materials, and IC-focused learning outcomes in language education.

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Introduction

Intercultural communication (IC) has become a central focus of second/foreign language education, particularly as English continues to function as a global lingua franca in diverse cultural contexts (Huang, 2021). Previous scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of intercultural awareness, skills, and knowledge to prepare learners for effective communication in a multicultural world. Intercultural competence, “the ability to step beyond one’s own culture and function effectively and appropriately with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (Huang, 2021, p. 56), has emerged as a key component of language proficiency, complementing linguistic skills with the ability to navigate cultural differences.

The importance of intercultural competence can be traced to several key developments. One major factor is the shift towards communicative competence in language teaching, which emphasizes the ability to use language in socially appropriate ways (Pemberton, 2024; T. Q. Tran & Duong, 2018). Early models of language education, which focused primarily on linguistic skills, have been criticized for paying limited attention to sociocultural understanding (Lantolf, 2006). As a result, language scholars have increasingly advocated for a greater focus on sociocultural knowledge, particularly the ability to understand and respond to cultural norms in diverse communicative contexts.

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In response to this critique, language education has undergone a “cultural turn,” particularly with the rise of the Communicative Language Teaching (Byrnes, 2002, p. 115). This turn underscores the interrelationship between language and culture, where the former is seen not merely as a tool for communication but as a reflection of cultural realities, and teaching language requires incorporating an understanding of cultural differences in beliefs, values, and behaviours (Kramsch, 2014). Consequently, intercultural competence has been widely adopted as an integral component of language education.

Understanding IC is crucial to shaping various aspects of language education, including curriculum design, teaching approaches, learning outcomes, and student success in intercultural contexts, such as study abroad programmes and international communication (e.g. Kural & Bayyurt, 2016). Despite the increasing body of research on IC, the literature remains fragmented, with a lack of comprehensive overviews that synthesize key concepts, trends, and gaps. While some bibliometric studies, such as Peng et al. (2020), have analysed specific aspects of intercultural competence, there is a need for a broader review that encompasses IC and related concepts within second/foreign language education (L2IC). This review aims to address that gap by offering a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of L2IC research over the past 67 years.

This study specifically focuses on intercultural communication within the context of second/foreign language education to provide a more targeted and in-depth analysis. However, it is important to acknowledge that intercultural communication research also extends to other educational fields, particularly teacher education, where it plays a crucial role in preparing educators to foster intercultural competence in their classrooms.

By mapping trends, identifying influential works, and highlighting gaps in the literature, this review offers a foundation for guiding future research and practice in this critical area. Specifically, this bibliometric analysis aims to address the following research question:

How has intercultural communication research within second/foreign language education evolved over the past 67 years, and what are the key trends, themes, and gaps in the field as identified through a bibliometric analysis?

Theoretical Perspectives

Intercultural Communication and Intercultural Competence

Intercultural communication and intercultural competence are closely related concepts that have been defined in various ways throughout the literature. At their core, these concepts aim to explain how individuals navigate communication across diverse cultural contexts. Intercultural communication, for instance, can be described as “all communication between people with different linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds” (ten Thije, 2020, p. 35). Schenker (2012), drawing from Byram (1997), defines intercultural competence as “the ability to function effectively within one’s own culture as well as others, and to engage in meaningful interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds” (p. 450). Baker (2024), similarly, conceptualizes it as “communication where cultural and linguistic differences are perceived as relevant by participants or researchers” (p. 212).

Intercultural competence, or intercultural communicative competence, focuses on the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural contexts by utilizing a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to navigate cultural differences. Deardorff (2015) defines intercultural competence as the ability to engage in “communication and behaviour that is both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions,” where effectiveness relates to achieving communication goals and appropriateness refers to the manner in which these goals are pursued in a given context (p. 121). Similarly, Huang (2021) describes intercultural communicative competence as “the ability to move beyond one’s own cultural boundaries and interact effectively and appropriately with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (p. 56). More than just linguistic ability, intercultural competence requires adaptability to diverse cultural norms, critical reflection on one’s own and others’ cultural practices, and skilful navigation of the complexities that come with intercultural interactions.

In the context of second/foreign language education, the concepts of intercultural communication and intercultural competence take on a particularly significant role. Language learning is not just about acquiring the ability to communicate linguistically; it also requires learners to understand and navigate the cultural contexts that shape how language is used (Kramsch, 2014). When engaging with a new language, students also need to engage with new cultural norms, values, and social cues that influence communication (Alisoy, 2024; Kramsch, 2014). As globalized societies continue to interact, the importance of incorporating intercultural competence into language education becomes essential, ensuring that students are not only effective communicators but also culturally responsive individuals who can adapt to diverse communicative contexts.

Influential Models of Intercultural Communication in Second/Foreign Language Education

Intercultural communication is an essential component of second and foreign language education, as it prepares learners to navigate the complexities of communicating across cultural boundaries. In recent years, various theoretical models of intercultural communication competence have emerged to guide educators and learners in developing the skills necessary for effective intercultural interactions. These models provide frameworks for understanding how learners can acquire both linguistic and cultural competence in a globalized world, making them integral to modern language education curricula. The following models are particularly influential and relevant within the field.

Byram’s (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence model remains one of the most widely recognized and applied frameworks in second and foreign language education. The model emphasizes that language learning is not just about mastering linguistic structures but also about understanding the cultural contexts in which language is used. Byram’s model identifies five core components that are essential for developing intercultural competence: attitudes (openness and curiosity towards other cultures), knowledge (awareness of both one’s own and others’ cultural norms), skills of interpreting and relating (the ability to mediate between cultural perspectives), skills of discovery and interaction (the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge in real-time), and critical cultural awareness (the capacity to evaluate and reflect on cultural practices). This model has been instrumental in shaping intercultural pedagogy by encouraging

educators to integrate culture into language teaching, promoting both linguistic proficiency and the ability to navigate intercultural encounters (Huang, 2021). It is particularly relevant to second/foreign language education, as it emphasizes the need for learners to mediate between cultures, fostering both communicative and cultural competence.

In his revisited edition, Byram (2021) expands on the original model by addressing critiques and offering refinements that enhance its applicability to contemporary contexts. Notably, the updated framework places a greater emphasis on emotional and affective dimensions, such as empathy and intercultural attitudes, which were under-represented in the earlier version. These additions reflect a recognition of the holistic nature of intercultural competence, which involves not only cognitive and behavioural components but also emotional engagement. Byram also provides practical strategies for integrating the model into diverse educational settings, including virtual and technology-mediated environments, which have become increasingly relevant. Furthermore, his self-critical insights include a deeper exploration of critical cultural awareness, emphasizing its ethical implications and its role in fostering reflective, ethical decision-making in intercultural interactions.

Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence offers a complementary perspective that views intercultural competence as an ongoing, developmental process. Unlike Byram's more structured approach, Deardorff's model emphasizes the importance of attitudes such as respect, openness, and curiosity, which form the foundation for intercultural learning. Deardorff's model also highlights that intercultural competence is not a static set of skills but rather a process of continual learning, adaptation, and reflection. This developmental perspective underscores how learners evolve in their ability to connect across cultural divides. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds, integrating linguistic proficiency with cultural understanding to navigate diverse interactions. Reflection is the process of critically analysing one's experiences, assumptions, and interactions to foster deeper understanding and continual growth in intercultural contexts. Adaptation, meanwhile, is the capacity to adjust one's behaviour and communication strategies to align with the norms and expectations of different cultural environments, ensuring mutual understanding and respect. This developmental perspective is particularly suited to the dynamic nature of contemporary intercultural communication, where learners engage in diverse cultural contexts, including digital and virtual interactions.

Another significant contribution to the field is Bennett's (2004) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which provides a clear framework for understanding how individuals progress in their sensitivity to cultural differences. DMIS outlines a continuum of stages, starting with ethnocentric stages, where individuals view their own culture as central, and progressing to ethnorelative stages, where they recognize, appreciate, and adapt to cultural diversity. Ethnocentric stages are phases where individuals perceive their own culture as the standard, often viewing other cultural practices as inferior or incorrect. In contrast, ethnorelative stages involve recognizing the validity of diverse cultural perspectives and adapting one's behaviour and attitudes to engage effectively across cultural boundaries. Intercultural sensitivity, central to this progression, is defined as the capacity to notice, understand, and adapt to cultural differences, fostering meaningful and respectful communication across cultural contexts. This

model has been particularly influential in educational contexts, as it provides a roadmap for educators to help students move from a basic awareness of cultural differences to a more nuanced and flexible approach to intercultural communication (e.g. Gholami Pasand & Hassaskhah, 2024). Bennett's model is highly applicable in language education as it allows educators to assess where learners are on this continuum and tailor instruction to support their development towards greater intercultural sensitivity.

Hall's (1976) High-Context and Low-Context Communication Model offers valuable insights into how communication patterns vary across cultures. Hall distinguishes between high-context cultures, where communication relies heavily on implicit messages and non-verbal cues, and low-context cultures, where communication is more explicit and direct. High-context communication relies on shared knowledge and unspoken understandings within a group, making context critical to interpreting meaning. This style often involves reliance on non-verbal cues, implicit assumptions, and situational awareness. Low-context communication, on the other hand, depends on explicit, direct language, where clarity and precision in words carry the primary meaning. This approach prioritizes verbal articulation to ensure that messages are clear and unambiguous to all parties involved. This distinction is particularly useful for language learners, as it helps them understand how cultural norms influence communication styles and expectations. In high-context cultures, such as Japan or China, much of the meaning is conveyed through context rather than words, whereas in low-context cultures like the U.S. or Germany, clarity and directness are prioritized. Understanding this distinction allows learners to adjust their communication strategies when interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, making Hall's model a valuable tool in intercultural language education.

Lastly, Hofstede's (2001) Cultural Dimensions Theory offers a robust framework for understanding how cultural values shape communication. The six dimensions – power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint – highlight key cultural variations. Power distance refers to the degree to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect power to be distributed unequally, shaping hierarchical interactions and communication norms. This concept helps explain why some cultures may emphasize deference to authority, while others promote more egalitarian structures. Individualism vs. collectivism describes the preference for loosely knit social frameworks where individuals prioritize personal goals and independence, contrasted with tightly knit groups that emphasize collective goals, interdependence, and group loyalty. This distinction highlights how cultural orientation influences communication styles, decision-making processes, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, in high power distance cultures, communication is often hierarchical, with subordinates deferring to authority. Conversely, low power distance cultures promote equality in communication. Understanding these dimensions helps language learners navigate cultural differences by adjusting their communication styles to fit various cultural contexts (e.g. Vo, 2014). For example, learners can adapt their use of language depending on the formality, directness, or collectivism of the culture they are communicating with.

Together, these five models – Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence model, Deardorff's process model, Bennett's DMIS, Hall's high-context/low-context model, and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory – provide a robust theoretical foundation for understanding and developing intercultural competence in second and

foreign language education. Each model offers unique insights into the complex relationship between language, culture, and communication, equipping learners with the tools necessary to navigate intercultural interactions effectively. These models have played a pivotal role in advancing both research and teaching practices in language education. For researchers, they offer analytical tools to investigate the nuances of intercultural interactions, enabling deeper exploration of how cultural variables impact communication and learning. For educators, these models guide the development of curricula that foster both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness. By providing structured frameworks, they bridge theoretical insights and practical applications, equipping learners not only with communication skills but also with the cultural sensitivity required to navigate diverse contexts effectively. As intercultural communication continues to play an increasingly vital role in language learning, these models remain essential for preparing learners to engage with the globalized world.

Methodology

This bibliometric review adopts a systematic approach to analyse the research landscape surrounding intercultural communication within the context of second and foreign language education. The aim of the study was to identify key trends, research themes, and collaboration patterns in IC research, providing a comprehensive overview of its evolution within language education.

Literature Search

The Scopus database was chosen as the primary data source due to its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed academic literature across multiple disciplines, making it ideal for capturing relevant research on intercultural communication and second/foreign language education. A systematic search was conducted, focusing on the title, abstract, and keywords fields to ensure that retrieved articles specifically addressed both IC and language education.

To identify relevant publications, a comprehensive search string was developed using Boolean operators. The AND operator was employed to combine different thematic areas, ensuring that the search captured studies addressing the intersection of intercultural communication (e.g. “intercultural” OR “cross-cultural”), key elements of intercultural competence (e.g. “communication” OR “competence” OR “interaction”), and second/foreign language learning (e.g. “second language” OR “foreign language” OR “EFL” OR “ESL” OR “EAL”). This approach ensured that the search results specifically included studies relevant to both IC and language education contexts.

The search covered all available publications in the Scopus database from its inception in 1957 to March 26 2024, ensuring comprehensive temporal coverage of the field (see Appendix 1 for the full search string). No language or publication-type restrictions were applied, allowing for an inclusive dataset that encompassed journal articles, conference proceedings, and book chapters, without bias towards language or publication type. This inclusive approach ensured the analysis captured the full breadth of research focused on IC within the context of language education.

Data Analysis and Visualization

The data retrieved from Scopus were analysed using the bibliometrix R package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), a robust tool for conducting comprehensive bibliometric analyses, which are essential for quantitatively assessing the body of literature in a given field. Bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into publication patterns, key themes, and collaboration networks, making it a useful method for understanding the evolution of research in intercultural communication within second/foreign language education. Several dimensions of the data were explored to build a detailed picture of the trends and developments in this field.

A temporal analysis was conducted to examine the distribution of publications over time. This method is critical in identifying how research output has fluctuated and evolved, which helps to pinpoint significant periods of growth, stagnation, or renewed interest in L2IC research. The study also employed authorship analysis, which involved examining collaboration networks among researchers. By mapping co-authorship patterns, this analysis offers insights into the degree of international collaboration and the influence of certain authors or institutions. Authorship analysis can reveal the geographical distribution of research efforts and identify key contributors to the development of the field. It also provides an understanding of how collaborative efforts drive L2IC research, particularly across borders, which is critical in a field that inherently deals with cross-cultural interactions.

Additionally, a journal and source review was also undertaken to determine the most influential platforms for disseminating L2IC research. Identifying the key journals and sources that publish research in this field helps to contextualize where the most impactful studies are being published and which platforms are shaping the discourse around IC. This analysis contributes to understanding the broader scholarly environment in which L2IC research is situated.

Lastly, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed to uncover the relationships between frequently used keywords in the dataset. This type of analysis reveals the thematic structure of the field by identifying clusters of related topics. Co-occurrence analysis is particularly useful in mapping the conceptual landscape of L2IC research, allowing for a deeper understanding of how various themes – such as digital communication, language acquisition, and cultural identity – are interconnected (Zhang et al., 2016). It helps highlight the major areas of focus and emerging trends within the body of research.

For visual representation of the data, both bibliometrix and Matplotlib (Hunter, 2007) were used. These tools facilitated the creation of visual outputs, such as publication trend graphs, which track the growth and shifts in IC research over time, and co-occurrence networks, which visually map the relationships between frequently used keywords. In addition, collaboration maps were generated to illustrate patterns of co-authorship and international research partnerships.

Results

This bibliometric analysis spans 67 years, from 1957 to March 26 2024, resulting in the inclusion of 2,429 publications. [Table 1](#) presents key details regarding the scope of the

Table 1. Overview of the bibliometric analysis.

Timespan of the analysis	1957–March 26 2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	1014
Documents	2405
Annual Growth Rate %	5.36
Document Average Age	7.49
Average citations per doc	10.21
Average citations per year per doc	1.355

analysis and the characteristics of the dataset. The findings indicate that intercultural communication within second/foreign language education is a thriving area of research, with an average annual growth rate of 5.36% in publications over this extended period. The data further suggest that the field has a lasting impact, with each document receiving an average of over 10 citations, and a citation rate of 1.36 per year, indicating sustained academic interest. The average document age of 7.49 years reflects a balanced mix of both foundational and recent research.

Publication Trends

The chart in [Figure 1](#) shows the publication trends for research on intercultural communication within second/foreign language education. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the number of publications remained minimal, with just a handful of articles published each year. The 1990s are characterized by fluctuations in output rather than a steady rise. A more consistent upward trend began in the early 2000s, followed by a sharp increase in the 2010s, culminating in a peak around 2020. This rapid growth reflects the increasing scholarly focus on intercultural competence as a key aspect of language education.

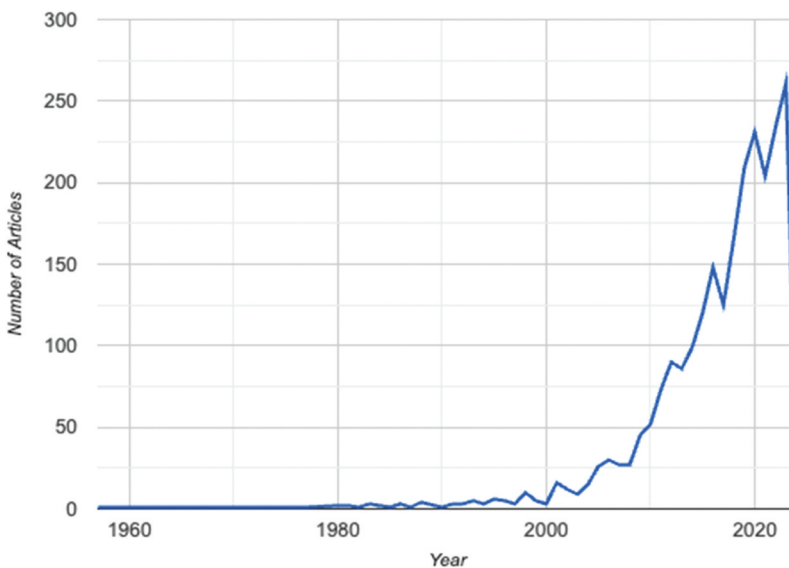


Figure 1. Annual scientific production in intercultural communications in applied linguistics (1957–2024).

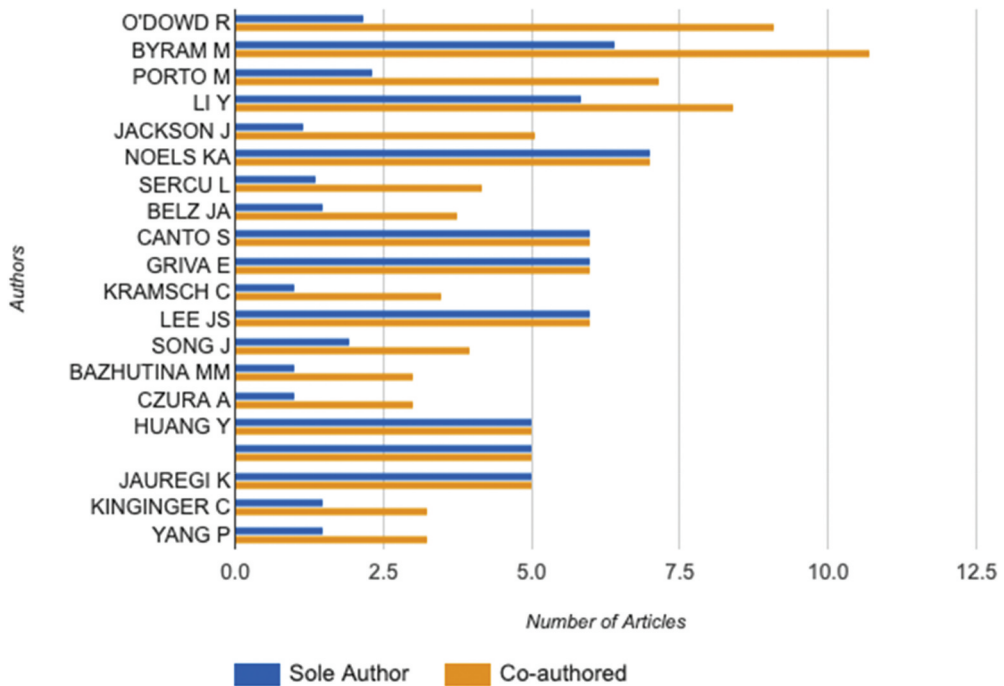


Figure 2. Most productive authors in intercultural communication studies in applied Linguistics.

Authorship Contribution

The stacked bar chart (see Figure 2) reveals a productive landscape in intercultural communication research within second/foreign language education. While a few authors stand out for their prolificacy, with R. O’Dowd leading the pack at 16 publications, the field seems to foster collaboration. The “Fractionalized” category, reaching up to 13.83 for O’Dowd, indicates significant co-authorship, suggesting a knowledge-sharing and collaborative research environment. Interestingly, several authors (M. Porto, M. Byram, Y. Li) appear clustered within a 9–12 publication range, further highlighting a collaborative approach and potentially active research groups. This distribution of authorship points towards a dynamic field with established researchers and potentially emerging scholars contributing through co-authored works.

Geographical Analysis

Table 2 and Figure 3 together provide a comprehensive analysis of the global distribution of contributions to intercultural communication research. Table 2 presents detailed metrics such as the frequency of articles, single versus multiple corresponding author publications (SCP, MCP), and the MCP ratio for each country. This allows for an in-depth examination of national productivity and collaboration patterns. Figure 3, in contrast, offers a visual summary of the same data, making it easier to identify broader trends and disparities in global representation at a glance. By combining these elements,

Table 2. Distribution of articles by corresponding authors' countries.

Country	Articles	Freq	SCP	MCP	MCP_Ratio
CHINA	155	0.1296	125	30	0.1935
USA	146	0.1221	122	24	0.1644
SPAIN	80	0.0669	73	7	0.0875
POLAND	57	0.0477	53	4	0.0702
JAPAN	56	0.0468	50	6	0.1071
UNITED KINGDOM	51	0.0426	40	11	0.2157
AUSTRALIA	49	0.041	45	4	0.0816
IRAN	45	0.0376	39	6	0.1333
TURKEY	38	0.0318	34	4	0.1053
CANADA	34	0.0284	28	6	0.1765
GERMANY	34	0.0284	25	9	0.2647
HONG KONG	29	0.0242	21	8	0.2759
KAZAKHSTAN	22	0.0184	20	2	0.0909
INDONESIA	21	0.0176	20	1	0.0476
THAILAND	21	0.0176	17	4	0.1905
FRANCE	17	0.0142	14	3	0.1765
GREECE	16	0.0134	16	0	0
ITALY	16	0.0134	14	2	0.125
MALAYSIA	15	0.0125	10	5	0.3333
SAUDI ARABIA	15	0.0125	10	5	0.3333

Note. Freq - Frequency (proportion of total articles); SCP - Single Corresponding Author publication; MCP - Multiple Corresponding Author publications; MCP_Ratio - Ratio of Multiple Corresponding Author publications to total publications.

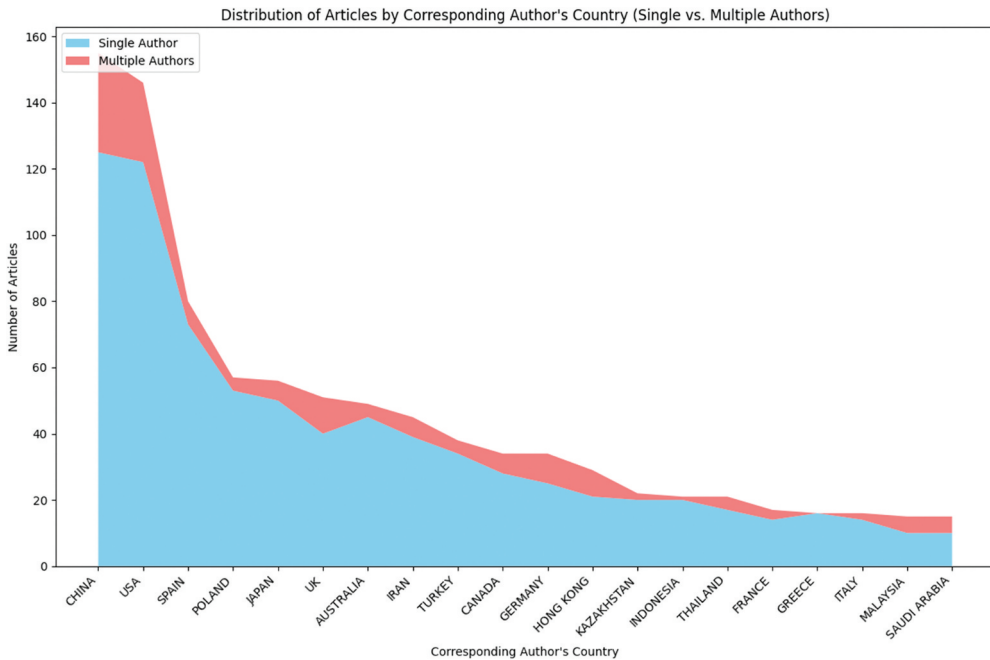


Figure 3. Contribution of articles by corresponding authors' countries.

we ensure both detailed and high-level insights are available, catering to readers with different analytical needs.

Table 2 and Figure 3 unveil interesting patterns in the geographical distribution of research output in intercultural communication within second/foreign language

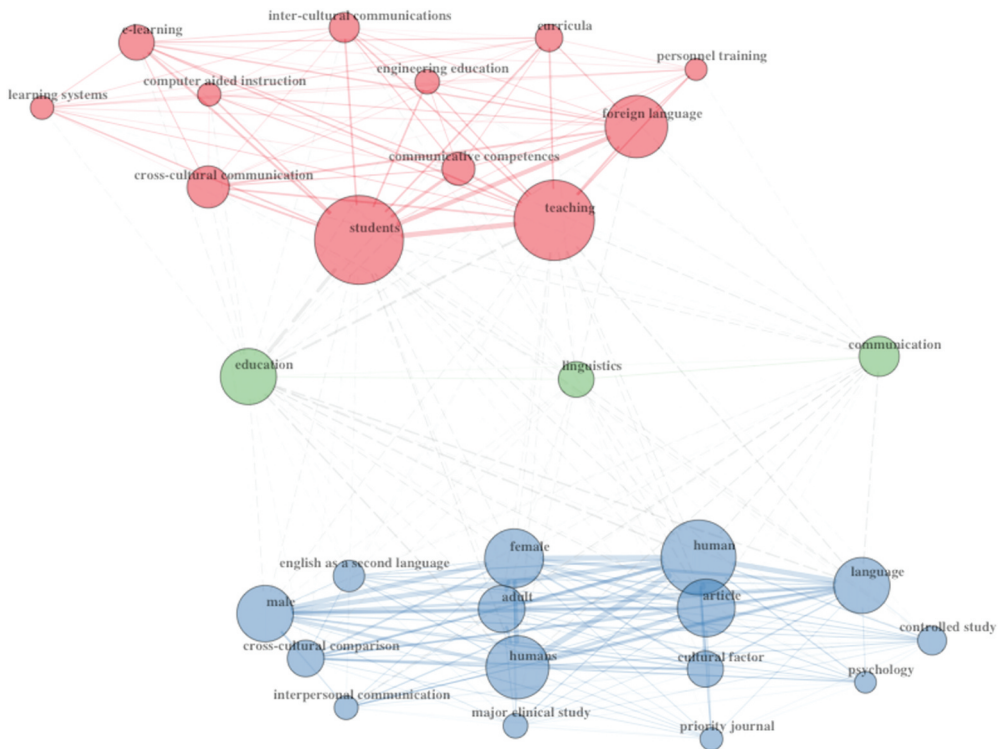


Figure 4. Keyword Co-occurrence in intercultural Communication.

education. While the United States and China lead in total publications (146 and 155 respectively), a closer look reveals a potential difference in collaboration patterns. China has a higher proportion of articles with multiple corresponding authors (125 articles with multiple authors compared to 30 single-authored). This translates to a higher MCP_Ratio (Multiple Corresponding Author Ratio) of 0.1935, suggesting a more collaborative research environment. Conversely, the USA has a lower MCP_Ratio (0.1644), indicating a potentially higher emphasis on single-authored research.

Looking beyond the top two, countries like the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany exhibit a relatively high proportion of single-authored publications (21.57% and 26.47% MCP_Ratio respectively). This suggests a strong presence of established scholars in these regions. Meanwhile, countries like Malaysia and Saudi Arabia have a much higher MCP_Ratio (0.3333), indicating a stronger emphasis on collaboration in their research output.

Overall, the chart highlights a diverse research landscape with variations in collaboration patterns across different countries. While some regions might prioritize single-authored scholarship, others seem to foster a more collaborative environment. This analysis provides a starting point for further exploration into potential cultural or institutional factors influencing these research collaboration patterns.

Most Relevant Journal Sources

Table 3 showcases the top 20 sources in the realm of intercultural communication within second/foreign language education, presenting a rich tapestry of scholarly work. This collection includes dedicated journals such as “Language and Intercultural Communication” and “Journal of Intercultural Communication,” which underscore their primary focus on this niche. Additionally, esteemed second/foreign language education journals like “Foreign Language Annals,” “System,” and “Language Learning Journal” are also featured, signifying the deep interconnection between intercultural communication and the wider theories and methodologies of language education.

The assortment also comprises educational journals like “Perspectives of Science and Education” and “Intercultural Education,” indicating the incorporation of intercultural communication principles into educational frameworks. Moreover, the presence of “Computer Assisted Language Learning” highlights the ongoing investigation into the role of technology in supporting intercultural dialogue and language learning. Furthermore, the inclusion of “Frontiers in Psychology” points to an emerging interest in the psychological dimensions of intercultural interactions.

In summary, this compilation offers valuable insights into the diverse scholarly platforms where researchers are making significant contributions to the discourse on intercultural communication within the context of second/foreign language education.

Keyword Analysis

Table 4 presents the most relevant keywords, which include both author keywords and Keywords Plus. Author keywords are provided directly by the authors to represent the key concepts of their research, reflecting the primary focus of each study. In contrast, Keywords Plus – also referred to as Author Keywords Plus or ID Keywords – are terms generated automatically by indexing services. These terms are derived from the titles,

Table 3. Journals with most articles on intercultural communication.

Rank	Sources	Articles
1	Language and Intercultural Communication	47
2	Foreign Language Annals	36
3	Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems	33
4	Perspektivy Nauki Obrazovania	28
5	Intercultural Education	27
6	Journal of Intercultural Communication	24
7	Computer Assisted Language Learning	23
8	Journal of Pragmatics	23
9	International Journal of Intercultural Relations	20
10	Language Learning Journal	20
11	Porta Linguarum	19
12	System	19
13	Theory and Practice in Language Studies	19
14	Language Learning and Technology	18
15	Second Language Learning and Teaching	18
16	Training Language and Culture	18
17	Frontiers in Psychology	17
18	Journal of Intercultural Communication Research	17
19	XLinguae	17
20	Language Teaching Research	16

Table 4. Most relevant keywords in the field of intercultural communication.

Rank	Author Keywords (DE)	Articles	Keywords-Plus (ID)	Articles
1	Intercultural Competence	288	Students	101
2	Intercultural Communication	268	Teaching	89
3	Intercultural Communicative Competence	130	Language	72
4	Culture	100	Human	68
5	Cross-Cultural Communication	62	Foreign Language	67
6	EFL	61	Female	62
7	Telecollaboration	57	Male	59
8	Foreign Language Education	52	Education	50
9	Foreign Language	49	Humans	46
10	Communication	39	Adult	43
11	Communicative Competence	39	Cross-Cultural Communication	40
12	Foreign Language Teaching	38	Article	39
13	Intercultural Awareness	35	Communicative Competences	37
14	Language Learning	35	E-Learning	35
15	Intercultural Education	34	Inter-Cultural Communications	35
16	Study Abroad	34	Communication	32
17	Intercultural Sensitivity	33	Linguistics	30
18	Motivation	33	Learning	29
19	Foreign Language Learning	32	Intercultural Competence	24
20	Interculturality	32	Cultural Factor	23

abstracts, and references of articles, capturing additional concepts that may not have been explicitly listed by the authors.

In the context of this bibliometric analysis, Keywords Plus played a critical role in broadening our understanding of the research landscape (Zhang et al., 2016). While author keywords typically reflect the authors' immediate focus, Keywords Plus reveals thematic interconnections that are not always visible at the surface level. The analysis of keyword frequency and co-occurrence allowed us to identify central themes, as well as emerging trends within intercultural communication research, particularly in second/foreign language education.

The analysis of both author keywords (DE) and Keywords-Plus (ID) provides a comprehensive view of the thematic focus in intercultural communication research, particularly within the context of second/foreign language education. While author keywords reflect the specific themes that researchers intend to highlight, Keywords-Plus captures broader thematic connections based on cited references, often revealing underlying trends and emerging topics.

Author Keywords (DE)

The author keywords reveal that the most frequently used term is Intercultural Competence (288 articles), emphasizing the central importance of developing the ability to navigate intercultural interactions. Closely related terms, such as Intercultural Communication (268 articles) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (130 articles), further indicate a strong focus on understanding how individuals communicate across cultures and how intercultural competence can be fostered, particularly through second/foreign language education.

The inclusion of Culture (100 articles) as a keyword suggests that researchers are paying attention to the foundational role of cultural norms and values in shaping communication practices. Meanwhile, Cross-Cultural Communication (62 articles)

highlights comparative studies of communication across different cultures, often focusing on the ways in which communication styles vary by cultural context. This distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural communication is critical, as the former typically emphasizes comparative analyses, while the latter focuses on interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Szkudlarek et al., 2020).

Keywords like EFL (English as a Foreign Language) (61 articles) and Telecollaboration (57 articles) emphasize the role of language education and digital platforms in promoting intercultural competence. The inclusion of EFL underscores the close link between IC and language teaching, especially in contexts where English is learned as a foreign language. Telecollaboration, on the other hand, points to the increasing use of digital tools to facilitate intercultural exchanges between learners in different geographical locations (Schenker, 2012; Yeh & Heng, 2023).

Keywords-Plus (ID)

The Keywords-Plus analysis highlights broader thematic trends, often related to educational contexts. Students (101 articles) and Teaching (89 articles) are among the most frequently occurring keywords, suggesting that a significant portion of IC research focuses on how intercultural competence is developed and taught in educational settings. This emphasis on pedagogy is further supported by terms like Education (50 articles), reflecting the centrality of curriculum design, classroom practices, and teacher development in fostering intercultural competence.

The presence of Teachers and Professional Development in the Keywords-Plus analysis indicates growing recognition of the importance of teachers' intercultural competence. Educators play a pivotal role in modelling and teaching intercultural competence, and their own development in this area is critical for creating culturally responsive learning environments. This connection between students' learning outcomes and teachers' competence is key, as it is essential for teachers to possess the necessary intercultural skills to facilitate effective intercultural learning experiences.

Other prominent terms in Keywords-Plus include Language (72 articles) and Foreign Language (67 articles), which, like in the author keyword analysis, reinforce the strong connection between intercultural competence and language education. These keywords highlight the critical role of language learning in fostering intercultural skills and suggest that much research focuses on how language curricula can be designed to integrate intercultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency.

Additionally, the inclusion of E-Learning (35 articles) and Telecollaboration further underscores the importance of digital platforms in promoting intercultural communication. Telecollaboration enables learners from different cultural backgrounds to engage in intercultural exchanges in virtual environments, offering a way to develop intercultural competence without the need for physical mobility. Similarly, E-Learning suggests that online platforms are increasingly being used to facilitate intercultural learning experiences, particularly in a globalized and digitized world.

Interestingly, the Keywords-Plus analysis also reveals gender-related terms such as Female (62 articles) and Male (59 articles), pointing to an emerging area of research focused on how gender interacts with intercultural communication. This suggests that

researchers are beginning to explore how gender influences communication styles and intercultural competence development, recognizing that gender norms and expectations can vary across cultures and impact intercultural interactions.

The frequent appearance of terms like Study Abroad (34 articles) and Motivation (33 articles) reflects the growing interest in experiential learning and its role in fostering intercultural competence. Study abroad programmes are widely regarded as valuable opportunities for students to immerse themselves in foreign cultures and develop their intercultural skills through firsthand experiences (Williams, 2005). The focus on motivation indicates that researchers are also interested in understanding what drives students to engage with intercultural learning experiences, whether through study abroad programmes or classroom-based intercultural activities.

In conclusion, the analysis of both author keywords and Keywords-Plus highlights the diverse and interconnected themes explored in IC research. While the author keywords emphasize specific research foci such as intercultural competence, communication, and educational strategies, the Keywords-Plus analysis reveals broader trends related to pedagogy, digital learning, and gender dynamics. Together, these analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of the current research landscape, underscoring the central role of both student learning and teacher development in fostering intercultural competence, and highlighting the expanding use of digital tools and global experiences to enhance intercultural communication.

Figure 4 illustrates the co-occurrence network of keywords, highlighting thematic clusters and interconnections that reveal the central and emerging areas of focus in intercultural communication research within second/foreign language education.

Discussion

This bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of intercultural communication research within second/foreign language education over the past 67 years. A notable takeaway from the study is the increasing recognition of intercultural competence as a skill set that is becoming central to effective language learning and cross-cultural interactions. The findings suggest that IC may no longer be viewed as an ancillary component of language education but increasingly considered a core competency, as evidenced by the prominence of keywords such as “intercultural competence,” “students,” and “teaching”. In addition, the rise in research output, particularly after 2010, appears to reflect broader global shifts in education and communication, such as the growing emphasis on integrating cultural awareness into language curricula. This surge may correlate with policy changes, including the internationalization of education, and the perceived need to prepare students for a globalized workforce (Thi Thu Hien et al., 2024; L. T. Tran et al., 2023). These findings are consistent with previous research (Ivenz & Klimova, 2022), which highlights the importance of equipping language learners with both linguistic and cultural competencies. Additionally, the findings highlight that culture emerges as a frequently used keyword, reflecting its central role in the discourse on intercultural communication. Based on its associations with terms like “language,” “intercultural competence,” and “intercultural awareness,” the data suggests that culture is often understood as both a foundational and integrative element in the development of intercultural skills. Specifically, culture appears to be

framed as a contextual backdrop for teaching and learning processes, as well as a dynamic construct that shapes and is shaped by intercultural interactions.

The global distribution of authors contributing to intercultural communication research in language education underscores the increasing international recognition of IC as a vital skill for learners in an interconnected world. This broad participation across regions and educational systems reflects a collective awareness of the importance of equipping language learners with intercultural competence. As the world becomes more globalized, this skillset is crucial for navigating cultural differences and fostering effective communication, making it a universal priority in language education.

The keyword analysis reveals a strong focus on pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering IC in language teaching. This marks a shift from traditional language instruction that emphasizes grammar and vocabulary, to curricula that integrate the social and cultural dimensions of communication. Increasingly, educators are adopting well-established models such as Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence model and Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Huang, 2021). The 2021 revisited edition of Byram's model addresses critiques of the original framework, particularly its earlier limited focus on emotional dimensions such as empathy and intercultural attitudes. This updated model emphasizes the holistic nature of intercultural competence by integrating these affective elements alongside cognitive and behavioural aspects. By expanding on the role of critical cultural awareness and its ethical implications, the revised framework equips educators with practical strategies to integrate intercultural competence into diverse and dynamic educational settings, including the increasingly significant virtual learning environments. These frameworks emphasize not only linguistic proficiency but also the development of critical cultural awareness and the ability to mediate between different cultural perspectives (Yeh & Heng, 2023). Such integration enriches the learning experience, enabling students to navigate real-world intercultural interactions more effectively.

An important trend observed in the analysis is the growing role of technology-mediated learning environments, particularly those that utilize telecollaboration and e-learning. The increasing prominence of terms like "telecollaboration" signals the rise of virtual exchange programmes, which provide learners with opportunities to engage in real-time intercultural exchanges (Schenker, 2012; Yeh & Heng, 2023). These programmes not only enhance language acquisition but also promote cultural understanding through direct interaction with peers from different cultural backgrounds. While these tools are valuable, there remains a need for further research to explore their long-term impact on IC development (Porto, 2021).

The findings of this study reaffirm the relevance of theoretical models such as Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence, Deardorff's Process Model, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, and Hall's High-Context and Low-Context Communication Model in addressing the complexities of intercultural communication within language education. The bibliometric analysis highlights the centrality of concepts like "intercultural competence" and "intercultural communicative competence," which align closely with Byram's emphasis on critical cultural awareness and the ability to mediate between cultural perspectives. Similarly, Deardorff's process model underscores the developmental nature of intercultural competence, resonating with the observed importance of continual learning and adaptability, especially in virtual and

telecollaborative contexts, as evidenced by the prominence of keywords such as “e-learning” and “telecollaboration.”

Hofstede’s model further illustrates how cultural dimensions like individualism versus collectivism and power distance shape communication dynamics and educational outcomes. For instance, the focus on “cultural factors” and “education” in the findings aligns with Hofstede’s framework, which helps explain how cultural values influence approaches to learning and interaction. Hall’s model, emphasizing high-context and low-context communication, complements this by providing insights into how contextual variation affects intercultural interactions. These observations are particularly relevant in virtual communication environments, where traditional non-verbal cues may be diminished.

However, the results also underscore areas where these models could evolve to address contemporary challenges. The growing focus on gender dynamics highlights a need for greater intersectionality and inclusivity within these theoretical frameworks, which are often underexplored in foundational models. Moreover, the increasing prominence of digital communication underscores the necessity of adapting these models to reflect the realities of virtual intercultural exchanges. For instance, Hall’s framework could incorporate the shifts in context and cues inherent in online communication, while Hofstede’s dimensions might be extended to account for digital cultural practices and their influence on global interactions. Such adaptations would enhance the applicability of these models, ensuring their continued relevance in addressing emerging global challenges and advancing both theoretical and practical approaches to intercultural education.

Practical implications for language educators and curriculum designers emerge from these findings. Educators can incorporate telecollaborative platforms into their teaching strategies, facilitating structured intercultural dialogues between students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Collaborative projects, reflective exercises, and intercultural role-playing can provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical intercultural concepts in meaningful, real-world contexts (Chimeva & Trenchs-Parera, 2024). These activities encourage not just language learning but also critical thinking and cultural empathy, which are essential for learners in today’s globalized world.

For curriculum designers, the findings point to the need for developing culturally responsive materials that go beyond language structure and integrate intercultural communication skills (e.g. Liao & Li, 2023). Designing curricula that include case studies, scenarios, and media from diverse cultures will foster both linguistic and intercultural competence in learners. Additionally, policymakers can play a critical role by promoting professional development programmes that equip teachers with the necessary tools to implement IC in language education, ensuring that intercultural competence becomes a standard learning outcome (e.g. Cuartas Álvarez, 2020).

Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of technology-mediated IC learning in virtual environments and intercultural workplaces. To address this gap, researchers might employ qualitative methodologies, such as case studies, to explore real-world interactions, or experimental research to measure the outcomes of interventions like telecollaborative projects. These studies would provide valuable insights into how IC develops in increasingly digital and globalized contexts.

Additionally, the analysis identifies gender dynamics as an emerging area of interest, reflected by keywords like “female” and “male.” This signals a growing recognition of the

ways in which gender roles and identities influence intercultural communication in language learning environments. Future research could investigate how gender and cultural intersections shape communication strategies and learning outcomes, contributing to more inclusive and equitable intercultural interactions. Findings from the systematic bibliometric review highlight the prominence of gender as a key dimension, suggesting an opportunity to examine how power dynamics and (dis)privileges manifest in intercultural interactions. In EFL classrooms, societal norms around gender roles may intersect with cultural practices and language proficiency, potentially creating disparities in participation, access to resources, and communication opportunities. Investigating these intersections could provide valuable insights into how inclusive pedagogies and equitable frameworks can address imbalances, empowering marginalized learners and fostering a more just and effective approach to intercultural communication in EFL settings.

While gender emerged as a prominent dimension in the bibliometric analysis, the absence of other key dimensions such as nationality, race, and religion warrants further consideration. These absences may reflect underlying gaps in the literature or biases in the research focus within the field of intercultural communication. For instance, the prominence of gender-related keywords may result from increasing attention to gender dynamics in intercultural education, but the lack of representation of other dimensions could indicate a need for more inclusive methodologies or broader research agendas. Nationality and race, as critical aspects of identity, often intersect with language and culture, influencing communication patterns and educational experiences. Similarly, religion plays a significant role in shaping cultural norms and values, yet it was not prominently visible in the dataset. Addressing these absences provides an opportunity to expand the scope of intercultural communication research, ensuring a more holistic understanding of the diverse factors that shape intercultural interactions. Future studies should aim to explore these dimensions more comprehensively to fill these gaps and enrich the field's theoretical and practical insights.

Conclusion

This bibliometric review offers a comprehensive analysis of intercultural communication research within the context of second/foreign language education, spanning over six decades. Key findings indicate that IC has evolved from a peripheral consideration to a central focus in language education, as reflected in the increasing prominence of keywords such as *intercultural competence* and *teaching*. The review highlights the significant role of telecollaboration and e-learning, emphasizing the integration of digital communication technologies in fostering intercultural competence. Moreover, the study underscores a growing global interest, as demonstrated by the diverse geographical distribution of corresponding authors, further solidifying IC's relevance in addressing contemporary global challenges, including migration, international business, and diplomacy.

The review's contribution lies in its identification of key trends, emerging areas of focus – such as gender dynamics and technology-mediated IC – and the gaps in existing research. By offering specific recommendations for future studies, such as investigating virtual learning environments and intercultural workplaces, this

review provides a roadmap for scholars and educators. The findings underscore the importance of continuing to explore how IC can be enhanced through innovative pedagogical strategies and digital tools, contributing to a more culturally aware and globally competent generation of learners. This review not only highlights the evolution of IC but also its critical role in addressing the complexities of communication in an increasingly interconnected world.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this bibliometric review. The analysis relied primarily on keywords and publication data, which may not fully capture the breadth and depth of IC research. Additionally, the focus on a specific timeframe means that some of the most recent developments in the field may not have been included. A key limitation to consider is that while bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into research trends and publication patterns, it cannot offer the depth of understanding that an in-depth qualitative review would provide. Moreover, this review focused on IC within second/foreign language education; expanding the scope to include related areas, such as teacher education, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how intercultural competence informs pedagogical practices. Future bibliometric reviews should consider incorporating these additional fields to offer a more complete view of IC research across educational contexts.

Despite these limitations, this review provides a springboard for future research endeavours. By addressing the identified gaps and delving deeper into emerging areas like the impact of social media, the role of emotions, and the interplay of power and identity, researchers can significantly contribute to building a more comprehensive understanding of IC within second/foreign language education. Ultimately, this will lead to the development of more effective pedagogical approaches and a deeper appreciation for the complexities of communication across cultures in our increasingly interconnected world.

Author contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for study conception, and manuscript preparation and revision.

Data Availability Statement

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