

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Pranjit Doley*; Sunil Koijam**

*Research Scholar,
Department of Mass Communication,
Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, INDIA

**Assistant Professor,
Department of Mass Communication,
Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, INDIA
Email id: sunil.koijam@rgu.ac.in

DOI: 10.5958/2249-7315.2025.00027.2

ABSTRACT

In an increasingly globalized world, intercultural communication has become a fundamental area of study within communication and cultural studies. This research article employs a systematic literature review methodology to analyze scholarly contributions on intercultural communication from diverse cultural and geographic contexts. The review synthesizes theoretical frameworks, conceptual developments and empirical findings from peer-reviewed articles, books and reports published between 1990 and 2024. Key themes include cultural identity, communication competence, context sensitivity, and intercultural conflict resolution. The study also highlights gaps in existing literature and suggests directions for future research, particularly in under-researched areas like indigenous and borderland communities. This review aims to build a theoretical and practical foundation for scholars and practitioners navigating intercultural interactions in varied settings.

KEYWORDS: *Intercultural Communication, Cultural Identity, Communication Competence, Systematic Literature Review, Globalization, Cultural Diversity, Borderland Communities.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication lies at the core of human interaction. When people from different cultural backgrounds come into contact, intercultural communication becomes essential for cooperation, understanding and conflict resolution. Intercultural communication refers to the process through which individuals from distinct cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds exchange information, negotiate meanings and build relationships (Gudykunst, 2003). In today's interconnected world shaped by migration, transnationalism, global media and digital platforms; the relevance of intercultural communication has intensified. Historically rooted in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and sociology, intercultural communication has evolved into a multidisciplinary domain. Scholars have investigated how communication is shaped by cultural values, beliefs, language systems, power structures, and historical legacies (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1999). With globalization and technological advancement accelerating cultural contact, the study of intercultural communication has taken on new urgency. This research article aims to systematically review the literature on intercultural communication to identify its core themes, theoretical models and research gaps. A systematic literature review

offers a rigorous method to map the existing body of knowledge, critically evaluate scholarly contributions, and generate insights for future inquiry. The article particularly focuses on how intercultural communication has been conceptualized and studied across diverse contexts, including western and non-western societies, workplace environments, educational settings, and borderland communities.

2. Methodology: Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

2.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a systematic review of the literature related to intercultural communication, focusing on:

- Theoretical frameworks and models commonly used
- Key dimensions and variables studied
- Empirical contexts (e.g., education, workplace, migration)
- Identified gaps and directions for future research

2.2 Inclusion Criteria

The review includes:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books and book chapters
- Published in English between 1990 and 2024
- Covering theoretical, empirical, or conceptual studies on intercultural communication
- Works that explicitly address cultural interaction, identity, or communication across cultural boundaries

2.3 Search Strategy

The following databases were searched: Scopus, JSTOR, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and EBSCOhost. Keywords used included: "*intercultural communication*," "*cross-cultural communication*," "*cultural identity*," "*intercultural competence*," and "*communication across cultures*."

An initial pool of 312 articles and texts was narrowed down to 82 relevant sources after screening titles, abstracts, and full texts. Final selections were categorized by theme, theory and region of study.

2.4 Data Analysis

Using qualitative content analysis, texts were reviewed for recurring themes, conceptual frameworks and research findings. A thematic matrix was developed to organize and synthesize the literature into broader categories such as theories, cultural values, context of communication and competence development.

3. Literature Review and Thematic Synthesis

3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Intercultural Communication

The field of intercultural communication draws upon a range of theories and models. Some of the most influential include:

3.1.1 Edward T. Hall's High-Context and Low-Context Communication

Hall's (1976) distinction between high-context and low-context cultures remains foundational. In high-context cultures (e.g., Japan, India), communication tends to be indirect and heavily reliant on context, whereas in low-context cultures (e.g., the USA, Germany), communication is explicit and direct. This framework helps explain misunderstandings in cross-cultural settings and remains widely cited in both academic and applied research.

3.1.2 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede (1991) introduced cultural dimensions such as individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, offering a quantitative approach to understanding cultural variation. His model has been applied extensively in workplace communication, organizational studies, and international business.

3.1.3 Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory

Proposed by Gudykunst (2003), AUM theory posits that successful intercultural communication depends on managing anxiety and uncertainty levels. The theory integrates cognitive and affective components of communication, providing a psychological basis for interaction across cultures.

3.1.4 Identity Negotiation Theory

Ting-Toomey (1999) developed identity negotiation theory to explain how individuals negotiate their self-identity in intercultural interactions. This theory emphasizes facework, identity affirmation, and cultural competence as key to harmonious interaction.

3.2 Major Domains of Intercultural Communication Studies

3.2.1 Intercultural Communication in Education

Educational institutions are key spaces where cultural diversity is encountered, negotiated and experienced. Research has explored how students from different cultural backgrounds interact in multicultural classrooms, focusing on issues such as communication apprehension, learning styles and teacher-student dynamics (Neuliep, 2020). The presence of international students has also prompted universities to design intercultural communication curricula to promote global competence (Deardorff, 2006).

Studies reveal that successful educational outcomes in diverse settings depend on cultural sensitivity, inclusive teaching methods and mutual respect. However, barriers such as stereotyping, ethnocentrism and language differences often hinder effective communication and learning (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

3.2.2 Intercultural Communication in the Workplace

With the rise of transnational corporations and multicultural teams, workplaces have become arenas for intercultural interaction. Scholars have studied leadership styles, team communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making across cultures (Thomas & Inkson, 2009). Intercultural communication competence has been linked to employee satisfaction, organizational efficiency and conflict management (Casmir, 1997).

However, cultural misunderstandings continue to affect performance and collaboration. Differences in hierarchy, time orientation, directness, and attitudes toward uncertainty create challenges for managers and team members alike.

3.2.3 Migration, Diaspora and Identity Negotiation

Migration studies have examined how migrants adapt to new cultural environments and negotiate their identities. Kim's (2001) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation offers a comprehensive framework to understand this process. Language acquisition, cultural assimilation and integration are central themes in this area.

Moreover, secondgeneration immigrants often face cultural hybridity and dual identities, which influence their communication behaviors and social integration. These dynamics are increasingly studied in relation to race, ethnicity, and nationalism (Berry, 1997).

3.3 Intercultural Communication Competence and Training

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) refers to an individual's ability to effectively and appropriately engage in intercultural situations. Components of ICC include motivation, knowledge, and communication skills (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Training programs designed to enhance ICC have been implemented in educational, corporateand diplomatic contexts.

Research highlights the effectiveness of experiential learning, intercultural simulations, and cultural immersion programs in improving competence (Byram, 1997). However, critiques argue that some models risk oversimplifying culture and promote static notions of identity.

In recent years, the concept of intercultural praxis; which emphasizes critical self-reflection, dialogue, and social justicehas been introduced to move beyond technical competence to more ethical intercultural engagement (Sorrells, 2016).

3.4 Contextual Studies: Indigenous and Borderland Communities

While most literature focuses on urban and transnational spaces, emerging scholarship has begun to address intercultural communication in borderland and indigenous regions. These areas often reflect unique cultural encounters, where traditional and modern values intersect.

For instance, studies of indigenous communication systems among Native American, Aboriginal, and tribal communities highlight alternative ways of knowing and communicating, rooted in oral traditions, kinship, and collective identity (Wilson, 2008). These communication patterns are often misunderstood or marginalized in mainstream discourse.

Borderland communities, such as those between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India, provide rich sites for exploring how neighboring ethnic groups (e.g., Mishing and Adi) engage in cultural negotiation, shared rituals and conflict mediation. These cases demonstrate how intercultural communication is embedded in geography, history, and politics.

4. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the richness of existing literature, several critical gaps remain:

- **Geographic Bias:** Much of the literature is dominated by Western perspectives, with limited representation from Global South contexts. There is a need for more research rooted in African, Indigenous, and South Asian paradigms.
- **Overreliance on Models:** While models like Hofstede's are useful, they can be reductive and fail to capture the dynamic, situational nature of culture.

- **Digital Communication:** With the rise of digital media, intercultural communication now takes place in online spaces. Research needs to explore how social media platforms, virtual meetings and digital diplomacy affect intercultural encounters.
- **Power and Inequality:** More critical perspectives are needed that address how power, colonial histories and systemic inequalities shape intercultural communication.
- **Intergenerational and Intra-Cultural Communication:** Not all communication between individuals of different backgrounds is "intercultural" in the traditional sense. Generational and regional diversity within the same cultural group can also lead to intercultural dynamics.

Future research should adopt **intersectional** and **context-sensitive approaches**, combining qualitative and participatory methods to capture the lived experiences of diverse communities.

5. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review reveals that intercultural communication is a vibrant and multidimensional field, enriched by contributions from diverse disciplines. Core themes include identity, competence, context and cultural negotiation. While foundational theories remain influential, there is a growing need for more inclusive, critical and globally relevant approaches.

As cultural contact becomes increasingly complex; shaped by migration, digital technology, and geopolitical shifts; the study of intercultural communication must evolve. Scholars are encouraged to bridge theory with practice, engage with underrepresented communities, and promote communication that fosters mutual understanding and equity.

REFERENCES

1. Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34.
2. Bochner, S. (1981). *The Mediating Person: Bridges between Cultures*. Schenkman.
3. Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence. Multilingual Matters*.
4. Casmir, F. L. (1997). Ethics, Culture, and Communication: An Application of Dialogic Ethics to Intercultural Communication. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 21(1), 91–110.
5. Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication Theory as a Field. *Communication Theory*, 9(2), 119–161.
6. Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266.
7. Gudykunst, W. B. (2003). *Cross-cultural and Intercultural Communication*. Sage.
8. Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. Anchor Books.
9. Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. McGraw-Hill.
10. Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-cultural Adaptation*. Sage.
11. Neuliep, J. W. (2020). *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (8th ed.). Sage.

12. Sorrells, K. (2016). *Intercultural Communication: Globalization and Social Justice* (2nd ed.). Sage.
13. Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural Interaction: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan.
14. Spitzberg, B. H., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 2–52). Sage.
15. Thomas, D. C., & Inkson, K. (2009). *Cultural Intelligence: Living and Working Globally*. Berrett-Koehler.
16. Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating Across Cultures*. Guilford Press.
17. Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Publishing.