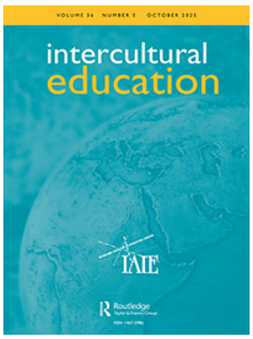

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Intercultural competence in the classroom: a systematic review of classroom-based research on teaching and learning practices for developing intercultural competence in different educational contexts

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ABSTRACT

This review provides an overview of researched classroom-based teaching and learning practices designed to enhance student intercultural competence across various educational contexts. From a total of 4904 systematically screened peer-reviewed studies, we identified 28 studies that examine teaching and learning practices focused on developing the intercultural competence of secondary and upper-secondary students within classrooms. We utilised a multifaceted analytical approach to evaluate the studies, which included analysing contextual factors and identifying researched classroom practices for intercultural competence development. The results synthesised three key teaching and learning practices studied for enhancing students' intercultural competence: learning about culture, reflecting on culture, and experiencing culture. These practices have been researched to varying extents across different school subjects, grade levels, countries, target student groups, and class sizes. The findings presented in this review enrich our understanding of researched classroom teaching and learning practices that promote intercultural competence and underscore the need for further research on how to cultivate intercultural competence in classrooms.

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Intercultural competence; classroom practice; teaching and learning; systematic review; secondary education

Introduction

The role of education in developing students' intercultural competence (IC) is underscored by prominent researchers (e.g. Deardorff 2009; Papadopoulou, Palaiologou, and Karanikola 2022; Perry and Southwell 2011) and international organisations.[1] IC is suggested to be essential for various reasons, including its contribution to promoting peace, fostering international understanding, and enhancing cross-cultural communication (Neuner 2012). The significance of implementing IC development practices in education is heightened by the growing cultural diversity across various countries and the increasing intolerance towards

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that diversity within those same countries (Isac, Sandoval-Hernández, and Miranda 2018). However, translating IC from a policy objective to teaching practice requires an understanding of how IC development can be applied in education settings. Previous systematic reviews and meta-analyses have contributed to bridging this policy-practice gap by synthesising research on various educational practices for IC development (Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya 2023; Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar 2020; Luo and Chan 2022; Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar 2022; Zhang and Zhou 2019).

Upon reviewing these studies, we identified an important limitation. To date, systematic reviews on IC research either focus solely (e.g. Goldstein 2022) or partially (e.g. Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar 2020; Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar 2022) on studies of practices conducted outside the confines of the classroom setting, such as studying abroad and participating in extracurricular activities. Relying on practices for developing IC outside of the classroom risks being applied unsystematically across educational contexts, making access to this competence dependent on conditions such as economic resources. We propose that classroom settings serve as the foundation for the systematic implementation of IC in education for all. Therefore, in this review, we focus on classroom-based practices as those surveyed in previous research to further our understanding of IC approaches to teaching and learning.

In this systematic examination of peer-reviewed studies related to the field of intercultural education, we intend to contribute with a critical synthesis of the current state of knowledge regarding (a) the range of applicable *classroom teaching and learning practices* (CTALP) in the existing research literature designed to develop students' IC within the classroom and (b) the educational contexts in which these CTALP have been studied. This review refers to educational contexts as the settings where a particular educational intervention has been implemented, including school subject, grade level, national context, student group, and class size. The review encompasses classroom-based secondary and upper-secondary (ages 13 to 19) education research explicitly studying IC development. Our overarching objective for this review is to gain deeper insights into how IC development has been studied in empirical research. This understanding can inform future inquiries in the field regarding the use of classrooms to support IC learning and help teachers broaden accessibility to IC development among global youth.

Aim and review questions

This review aims to advance our understanding of students' IC development in classrooms by systematically reviewing the empirical literature on intercultural education. Specifically, we identify researched CTALP for IC development, examine which educational contexts they were conducted in, and synthesise our current knowledge of the classroom as a space to support IC learning. Gathering information on existing classroom-based research about the contents and contexts of IC development will highlight knowledge gaps and guide recommendations for further research. We address the following review questions: RQ1 – In what educational contexts has CTALP research been conducted to develop students' IC? RQ2 – What are the key categories of CTALP that stimulate students' IC development in educational contexts?

The following section contextualises and defines the central concept of this review to justify our search scope and choice of search terms.

The complexity of defining IC

Research on IC has grown significantly in recent decades (Peng, Zhu, and Wu 2020). Considerable attention has been paid to developing theoretical conceptualisations of how IC can be understood, including definitions, models, and assessment frameworks (Leung, Ang, and Tan 2014). With a rapidly increasing interest in the construct of IC, theoretical divergences have surfaced in the research field, creating tensions in the theoretical and empirical understanding of IC. Due to these tensions, a cohesive definition of IC has yet to be established (Wolff and Borzikowsky 2018).

One tension concerns the labelling of this theoretical construct. Neighbouring constructs of IC share a similar conceptual foundation, including transcultural competence, cross-cultural competence, global competence, intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, cultural expertise or effectiveness, and multicultural awareness or competence (e.g. Azzopardi and McNeill 2016; Casinader 2018; Sousa et al. 2019). Although some of these terms emphasise distinct aspects, they are often used interchangeably and are highly interrelated. In this review, we recognise that these terms all share a conceptual foundation and broadly unite under the connotations of IC. Therefore, the target construct will be called IC, elucidated below.

Another tension regards the operationalisation of IC. An extensive body of literature has intended to further the theoretical understanding of what characterises IC (e.g. Bennett, 2015; Bennett and Bennett 2004; M. J. Bennett 1986; Croucher, Sommier, and Rahmani 2015; Cushner 2011; Ganesh and Holmes 2011; Gorski 2008; Holmes 2014). These theoretical contributions to the conceptual understanding of IC are valuable but also lead to a scattered picture of what IC can be in educational practice. As a result, the porous conceptualisation of the IC construct makes it challenging to teach and creates a fragmented understanding of IC among researchers. Luo and Chan's (2022) systematic review of qualitative methods to assess IC in higher education underscored this conceptual confusion. They found that IC operationalisations varied extensively in the 34 reviewed studies and that individual studies examined various terminologies, the number of IC aspects, and learning outcomes (Luo and Chan 2022). Additionally, conceptual confusion is apparent in systematic reviews researching IC, which characterise it differently (e.g. Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya 2023, Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar 2020, Luo and Chan 2022, Müller et al. 2020, Nielsen et al. 2019, Zhang and Zhou 2019).

An interim definition of IC

While we recognise the need for a precise definition, attempting to define IC conclusively would risk anchoring a potentially misleading definition for the review. To stay in dialogue with the research field, we adopt a systematically inclusive approach in the screening process to find IC-relevant studies. This allows the review coverage to reflect the field's terminological and conceptual breadth. Thus, we explore how this construct has been defined empirically, refraining from prematurely delaminating the exact competencies

that IC encompasses. For more exhaustive definitions of the IC construct, view Perry and Southwell (2011) or Spitzberg and Changnon (2009).

For this systematic review, *intercultural competence* is defined as a multidimensional construct encompassing a range of competencies whose contents vary depending on the research context (Deardorff 2006, 2009, Malazonia et al. 2017). Commonly attributed aspects include diverse cultural groups' norms, beliefs, customs, traditions, and social practices, social dynamics within diverse cultural environments, power structures in social systems, global issues, implications of global events, and cultural interactions (Byram 1997; Gorski 2008; Huber 2014; Lustig and Koester 2012; Ubani 2013). IC has also been suggested to comprise communication, critical thinking, perspective-taking, empathy, self-awareness, and reflexivity (Blasco 2012; Borghetti 2017; Deardorff 2006; Esen 2021; D. W. Johnson and Johnson 2015). Additionally, IC has been suggested to include attitudes, such as openness, respect, and curiosity (Deardorff 2006; Perry and Southwell 2011). Collectively, developing IC has been posited as a way to orient oneself and interact effectively and appropriately across cultural environments (Fantini 2009).

Previous research

This section provides an overview of relevant research in the field. We elaborate on the need for classroom-based studies by considering the field's central foci and limitations.

Educational practices for IC development

Previous systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses have examined educational practices for developing students' IC in contexts such as studying abroad and participating in extracurricular activities (Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya 2023; Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar 2020; Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar 2022; Zhang and Zhou 2019).

Findings in previous reviews present some contrasting outcomes. Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar (2022) synthesised 56 articles on home and study-abroad research to develop IC and reviewed experiential learning through cultural immersion. They concluded that learner variables such as 'age, gender, L1 background, the context of education, language proficiency, previous contact or knowledge, and attitudinal and behavioural variables' impacted the effectiveness of the interventions (280). In contrast to this conclusion, Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar's (2020) systematic review of the development of IC found no conclusive evidence on the impact of age, gender, education, geographical location of the participant, religion, and ethnicity (351–52). Instead, Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) highlighted that the duration of intercultural experiences and denominational affiliation are important variables influencing the effectiveness of students' IC development.

Moreover, according to Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar's (2022) systematic review, studying abroad generally leads to positive outcomes, concluding that 'intergroup contact during the study abroad experience helps reduce cultural prejudice, improves IC skills, and facilitates intercultural understanding and relations despite cultural, ethnic, and national differences' (280). Zhang and Zhou's (2019) meta-analysis of overseas immersion through study-abroad programmes echoes Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar's (2022) findings. In addition, several individual studies also support these conclusions (e.g.

Cushner and Chang 2015; J. Jackson 2009; Pedersen 2010; Porto 2019; Wolff and Borzikowsky 2018). Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar's (2020) systematic review on the effectiveness of study abroad programmes for IC adds depth to these conclusions. Based on results from Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige (2009) and Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, and Ardichvili (2016), Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) extrapolated that 'living or studying abroad, if unaccompanied by any support of mentorship, cultural meaning-making, or interventions, could cause participants to regress on the intercultural sensitivity continuum' (353). This conclusion was supported by Y. Wang and Kulich (2015). Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar's (2020) results suggest that the teacher's role is prominent in IC learning even while studying abroad.

Apart from the results of systematic reviews, several individual studies have investigated educational interventions to develop IC among students. These include intercultural training programmes (e.g. DeJaeghere and Zhang 2008; Fabregas Janeiro, Lopez Fabre, and Nuno de la Parra 2013), intercultural exposure through cross-cultural contact (e.g. Barrett 2018; Cui 2016; Deardorff 2011; Tarique and Takeuchi 2008), or internet-based cross-cultural contact (e.g. Barrett 2018), teaching strategies (e.g. Cannon 2008; Gowindasamy 2017), intercultural simulation games (e.g. Fowler and Pusch 2010), school-community projects (e.g. Barrett 2018), cooperative learning (e.g. Barrett 2018), project-based learning (e.g. Barrett 2018), subjectivity exercises (e.g. Weigl 2009), and reflective development practices for improving IC (e.g. Feng 2016).

In sum, we see that a rich array of research on IC offers valuable information on IC development, but certain limitations regarding the teaching and learning of IC remain to be addressed.

Limitations of the existing knowledge

Reviews and individual studies of IC often incorporate practices that require more than teachers can provide in the classroom setting. We will now turn to critical limitations in current research on students' development of IC and unexplored contextual factors that may influence students' development. For this review, the limitations of interest are educational contexts and cultural exposure.

Limited knowledge of IC and Educational contexts

No systematic review has surveyed researched practices for increasing student IC across school subjects (cf. Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar 2020; Luo and Chan 2022; Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar 2022; Zhang and Zhou 2019), but some have highlighted leniencies within the field. Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya (2023) concluded in their review of which IC aspects may promote professional collaboration that intercultural communication was the most recurring research object, especially in language education. Specifically, their results, including 325 studies, show that IC development has primarily been researched in the context of English as a foreign language. Luo and Chan's (2022) systematic review reached similar conclusions about disciplinary restrictions. These results frame IC development as centred on language learning such as foreign languages, modern languages, and English as a second language (e.g. Blell and Doff 2014; Porto and Byram 2022; Toyoda 2016; Y. A. Wang 2012). However, IC research has also been conducted in

history education (e.g. Virta 2009), religious education (e.g. R. Jackson 2004; R. Jackson and O'Grady 2019; Johannessen and Skeie 2019), and civic education as well as social science (e.g. Deardorff 2009; Perry and Southwell 2011; Nestian Sandu 2015).

Limitations of previous research methodologies have impeded the comprehension of grade-related factors and IC development. For example, in their systematic review of assessment instruments of IC, Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya (2023), Huang and Zhang (2023), and Luo and Chan (2022) delimited their review scope to only research conducted in higher education. Similarly, individual studies conducted in a classroom setting have shown promising results for improving students' IC (e.g. Feng 2016), but the results' generalisability is restricted to a higher education context.

Furthermore, in their meta-analysis, Zhang and Zhou (2019) used the grade level as a moderator variable. However, they coded the variable as dichotomous, with K-12 as variable category one and university as variable category two. Consequently, their analysis overlooked the variability of IC development measures at specific elementary, primary, secondary, and upper-secondary grade levels, where pedagogical adaptations may be necessary to accommodate the target age group. Dividing K-12 into reduced grade level spans, such as K-3, 4–6, 7–9, and 10–12, would allow for a more in-depth analysis of the implications for teaching and learning IC. By expanding the variable categorisation and considering grade level spans, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the validity of these practices as predictors of IC development in different age groups.

Restrictions related to cultural exposure

As the prior research section indicates, many researched practices have focused on cultural exposure, which involves immersing participants in cultural differences. These practices include studying abroad, cross-cultural contact, internet-based cross-cultural contact, extracurricular activities, and other activities requiring participation from students from different cultural backgrounds. The prospects of developing students' IC through cultural exposure may be linked to intergroup contact theory, which proposes that contact between members of different social groups can improve intergroup relations (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

The rationale for implementing cultural exposure approaches to develop students' IC are reasonable, but several problems are associated with these approaches. There are inconsistencies in the observed effects of cultural exposure on IC development. For instance, separate reviews by Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar (2020), Tajeddin, Khanlarzadeh, and Ghanbar (2022), and Zhang and Zhou (2019) demonstrate that previous research results regarding the effectiveness of study abroad programmes are incoherent. The learning outcomes from these interventions depend on other influencing factors, such as on-site interventions. Moreover, research indicates that studying abroad and the physical proximity to contrasting cultural beliefs, norms, values, and traditions is not a guarantee for IC development (Kohli Bagwe and Haskollar 2020, Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, and Ardichvili 2016, Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige 2009). According to Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, and Ardichvili (2016), one must also be guided to reflect critically on one's cultural identity and awareness to develop IC. Thus, even with diversity present, creating the necessary conditions for IC development through cultural exposure requires

teachers to offer students reflecting opportunities to change perceptions and understand positionality.

In addition to these observed inconsistencies in students' learning outcomes from living, studying, and travelling abroad, Affinito et al. (2023) address the risks of strengthening intergroup bias when abroad. Their five studies consistently show that negative multicultural experiences negatively affect participants' outgroup prejudice and stereotyping, highlighting the consequences travelling experiences can inflict (Affinito et al. 2023).

Furthermore, the reviewed research seldom considers the practical implications of applying the approaches they have studied for cultural immersion. Cultural exposure, such as through study abroad programmes, international experiences, extracurricular activities, and student body diversity, remains unattainable for many students to experience. Despite potential effectiveness, cultural exposure-based practices retain severe constraints, such as being costly, time-consuming, and sporadic. The limited access for students means that a fraction of students can benefit from it, and such IC practices may be highly susceptible to selection effects. Consequently, relying on extracurricular practices to enhance students' IC will inevitably result in unsystematic appliances across educational contexts.

Although researchers have theorised that cultural exposure through a diverse student body can potentially develop students' IC (Hayden and Wong 1997, Perry and Southwell 2011), more is needed to develop IC for all students. Cultural exposure through student body profiles is an unreliable approach to acquiring IC due to student body diversity and cultural composition differences. Despite culturally heterogeneous classrooms, many schools in segregated school systems still exhibit culturally homogeneous teacher and student bodies (European Commission 2015). According to studies by Halualani et al. (2004) and Volet and Ang (1998), students tend to restrict their contact with peers from the same cultural background in culturally diverse schools. Consequently, a comprehensive application of IC-inducing measures through cultural exposure is unlikely to be realised systematically on a large scale.

Summary of key limitations

Research on IC and education indicates that extracurricular activities and cultural exposure can generate desired outcomes, but their inherent limitations constrain their utility. Conflicting results regarding students' IC learning from these practices exist, and when shown to be effective, the teacher is highlighted as important for IC learning.

To overcome the limitations associated with extracurricular activities and cultural exposure, we position IC development within the classroom as a viable prospect for systematically implementing IC in education. We will provide in-depth coverage of CTALP in intercultural education research by delimiting our scope to classroom-based IC development practices. The findings of our current review will contribute to understanding students' IC development in classrooms.

Additionally, scant research has examined the implementation of IC education across school subjects and grade levels. Despite the importance of these educational contexts for designing effective and appropriate education, they have received little consideration in review studies. By analysing the subjects in which research has been conducted, we can identify areas that require more exploration and better understand how to adapt CTALP

to align with diverse subjects' learning objectives. Therefore, this review examines the distribution of researched IC practices across school subjects. Likewise, analysing the allocation of IC practices studied across different grade levels is important for understanding whether these practices are specific to certain grades or applicable to all ages. For instance, some practices, such as study abroad programmes, may only be suitable for some age groups. These programmes are often promoted as fostering IC; however, participation is generally limited to older students, indicating that IC learning is age-restricted. Thus, this review also considers the distribution of researched IC practices across grade levels to determine whether implementing CTALP to develop students' IC is more suitable for the secondary (ages 13–15) or upper-secondary (ages 16–19) school level. Together, the analysis of subjects and grades extends our knowledge of associations between CTALP to develop IC and educational contexts.

Methods

In line with Torgerson, Hall, and Lewis-Light (2017), conducting a systematic review enables us to actively gather and analyse a substantial corpus of relevant and high-quality research evidence within a confined research domain. This process is key in pinpointing a specific phenomenon's known and unknown aspects (Zawacki-Richter et al. 2020). We analyse and categorise the studies' implemented practices and results in different educational contexts to estimate the overall empirical support for CTALP that develops IC. In turn, we use the synthesis of empirical data to estimate the outcomes of these practices. Synthesising findings from individual studies reduces the risks of generalising misleading results from individual studies (Hammersley 2020).

Drawing from previous systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses (Abrami et al. 2008; Abrami et al. 2015; Alizadeh and Chavan 2016; Fleischer 2012; Müller et al. 2020; Newman and Gough 2020; Nielsen et al. 2019), the operational procedure for this systematic literature review followed 10 steps: (1) Define review questions. (2) Define relevant search terms. (3) Identify electronic databases that are relevant to the present purposes. (4) Set delimitations for literature searches. (5) Develop a review strategy. (6) Perform a literature search. (7) Apply screening criteria to the article's title, abstract, and content in various review cycles. (8) Extract data from identified literature. (9) Abstract and categorise data. (10) Answer the review questions by synthesising the results of each study.

Search strategy

The systematic search strategy, developed in collaboration with university librarians, was formulated using a building block approach, progressively adding new search term blocks. As shown in Table 1, the strategy surveyed three main components: intercultural competence, educational practice, and upper-/secondary school (for key terms in all databases, see Tables S1–S4).

As the literature review underscores, the concept of IC is multifaceted and has various associated terms. Understanding the CTALP that promotes the development of students' IC requires using a wide range of interconnected key terms. This inclusive approach enabled us to capture the nuances of how this target construct has been researched.

Table 1. Database, keywords, and search hits for the search string in web of science.

Database	Search number	Search term	Search hits
Web of Science		Intercultural competence	
	1	TS=("communicative competenc*" OR "cross-cultural adaptation" OR "cross cultural adaptation" OR "cross-cultural communication" OR "cross cultural communication" OR" cross cultural competenc*" OR "cross-cultural competenc*" OR "cross cultural skill*" OR "cross-cultural skill*" OR "cultural awareness" OR "cultural competenc*" OR "cultural effectiveness" OR "cultural expertise" OR "cultural intelligence" OR "cultural learning" OR "cultural self-awareness" OR "cultural sensitivit*" OR DMIS OR "effective intergroup communication" OR "ethnorelativity" OR "global citizenship" OR "global competenc*" OR "global competitive intelligence" OR "global mindset" OR IC OR IDI OR "intercultural adroitness" OR "intercultural communication*" OR "intercultural competenc*" OR "intercultural cooperation" OR "intercultural education" OR "intercultural interaction" OR "intercultural knowledge" OR "intercultural learning" OR "intercultural mindset" OR "intercultural sensitivit*" OR "intercultural understanding" OR "international communication" OR "international competenc*" OR "multi cultural awareness" OR "multicultural awareness" OR "multicultural communication" OR "multi cultural communication" OR "multi cultural competenc*" OR "multicultural competenc*" OR "multicultural education" OR "multi cultural knowledge" OR "multicultural knowledge" OR "multicultural learning" OR "multicultural mindset" OR "multi cultural mindset" OR "multicultural understanding" OR "multi cultural understanding" OR "transcultural competence*" OR "transnational competenc*")	137 104
		Educational practice	
	2	TS=("best practice*" OR classroom OR didactic* OR "educational intervention*" OR "educational practice*" OR instruction OR intervention OR "pedagogical intervention*" OR practice* OR procedure* OR teaching)	5 376 452
		Secondary school	
	3	TS=("Grade 10" OR "Grade 11" OR "Grade 12" OR "Grade 6" OR "Grade 7" OR "Grade 8" OR "Grade 9" OR "Secondary Education" OR "College Preparation" OR "Secondary School*" OR "High School*" OR "Junior High School*")	159 979
	4	1 AND 2 AND 3	529

Note. Multiple variations of the focal research object, intercultural competence, were included to make the search as exhaustive as possible. This included sub-categories of IC identified in previous research.

The key terms were formulated using the PICO framework (Population, Intervention, Context, Outcome) (Tai et al. 2020). To streamline the data review process, this research's defined population is secondary and upper-secondary students aged 13 to 19. The intervention, or 'initiative', as Higgins (2017) labels interventions for educational research, comprises CTALP which seeks to develop students' IC. The context is a teacher-led secondary and upper-secondary education classroom setting. The outcome is students' IC.

To thoroughly search for all available and relevant literature, the international scientific databases included were Web of Science, ERIC, Scopus, and Education Resource. ERIC and Education Resources exclusively publish educational research, and Scopus and Web of Science are interdisciplinary databases. Hence, the former two databases ensured educational relevancy and search accuracy, and the latter two broadened the scope of the literature search, increasing search exhaustiveness. The respective database searches were performed on March 6th, 13th, 16th, and 21st of 2023 (see Tables S1–S4 for which database was searched on which date), and we imported results into the systematic review reference program Rayyan. Full texts were imported into the reference manager program Zotero.

Selection criteria and review procedure

The study selection process includes prespecified eligibility criteria formulated *a priori* conducting exhaustive literature searches to enhance the probability of retrieving relevant, high-quality articles (Hammersley 2020). Relevance was determined by comparing the study's content with the eligibility criteria and, in turn, their suitability to answer research questions. The subsequent selection process of the retrieved studies followed a pre-established review procedure protocol. In the forthcoming section, we will first discuss inclusion and exclusion criteria to establish the scope of the review and then examine the review procedure.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

As previous systematic reviews have included extracurricular practices for IC development, this systematic literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of current research on the inventory of CTALP that develops student IC. The review perimeters are limited to studies explicitly aiming to study practices to develop student IC in classroom settings. The review will not include studies investigating exchange programmes, study abroad programmes, extracurricular activities, and other educational procedures conducted outside the classroom setting. As such, this review also excludes telecollaboration projects and student online exchanges requiring participation from students outside of the studied classroom. Additionally, as the relevant population for this review is students and not teachers, studies that focus on teacher training programmes, teacher recommendations, and teacher interviews were also excluded to narrow the review's scope. Since previous systematic reviews have investigated IC development in a higher education context (Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya 2023; Huang and Zhang 2023; Luo and Chan 2022), to avoid redundancy, this review is limited to studies researching CTALP in secondary and upper secondary classrooms (grades 7–12, ages 13 to 19). We exclude studies conducted solely at primary levels (below the age of 13), higher education, and adult education (above the age of 19). Studies that include students in grades 7–12 (ages 13 to 19) and other grade levels (primary levels, higher education, or adult education) are included in the review. However, only results from the relevant grade groups (7–12) are reported in the results section. Furthermore, the national context or year of publication is not subject to limitation, but the review is limited to studies published in English. As a benchmark for quality appraisal, an eligibility criterion is that the empirical study must be peer-reviewed and published in a scientific journal. Consequently, conference papers, dissertations (monographic), reports, policy documents, editorials, commentaries, and international large-scale assessment frameworks were omitted. This review focuses exclusively on empirical studies published within the field of education, excluding studies published in scientific journals of other academic disciplines where IC research is prevalent, such as business management, healthcare, psychology, and social work.

Review process

The review followed pre-established coding instructions to enhance interrater reliability and lessen confirmation bias in screening and selecting articles (Tai et al. 2020). All four reviewers participated in the screening procedure, and two reviewers per

article assessed the study's eligibility. The reviewers' decision to include or exclude an article – and the reasons for this decision – remained unknown to the other reviewers until every article had been assessed in each round of double-screening revision. Reviewers agreed on whether to include or exclude an article in the near-totality of cases. Reviewers' disagreements were resolved through engaging in dialogue about the grounds for inclusion or exclusion. We did not use a third-party tiebreaker but instead communicated with the disagreeing party about why the article met or did not meet the selection criteria until a consensus decision was reached. No instances occurred where reviewers could not reach a consensus. These joint assessments provided valuable insights into how the same article could be interpreted somewhat differently based on our screening criteria. See supplementary materials for more information about the reviewers' coding protocol and review process.

The point of article collection started in March 2023, and the review procedure ended in October 2023. The search criteria elicited a total of 4904 original articles. Duplicate articles were eliminated. Ultimately, after applying the screening criteria to the 4904 articles in three rounds of revision, outlined in Figure 1, 28 unique articles were established as the material for the present inquiry.

Data analysis and synthesis

The analysis involved coding the information collected to systematically record the extracted data used to answer the review questions (Newman and Gough 2020). To answer the review questions, we extracted the following categories from the retrieved articles: school subject, grade level, national context, target student group, sample size, and CTALP. These categories were divided into contextual variables and content variables. The context variables were used solely to evaluate RQ1, and the content variable *CTALP* was used in conjunction with the context variables to answer RQ2.

Context variables

- *School subject*: The coding of school subjects was reported according to the school subject's name in the study.
- *Grade level*: Participants' school grade level was coded 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 or 12. If the study did not include grade level but participants' age, the age groups are translated to grade levels accordingly: 13-year-olds – grade 7, 14-year-olds – grade 8, 15-year-olds – grade 9, 16-year-olds – grade 10, 17-year-olds – grade 11, 18-year-olds and older – grade 12. Grades 7, 8, and 9 were combined into a sum category called secondary school, and grades 10, 11 and 12 were combined into upper-secondary school.
- *Country*: This variable denotes the country where the study was conducted. Hence, it is coded by the country name.
- *Target student group*: If the study explicitly states that a CTALP practice is aimed at a specific target group concerning ethnicity or race, these participants' characteristics are reported.
- *Sample size*: The reported number of student participants in the study is included to report variation in sample size. As a benchmark value, studies with $n > 100$ participants will be distinguished from studies with $n < 100$.

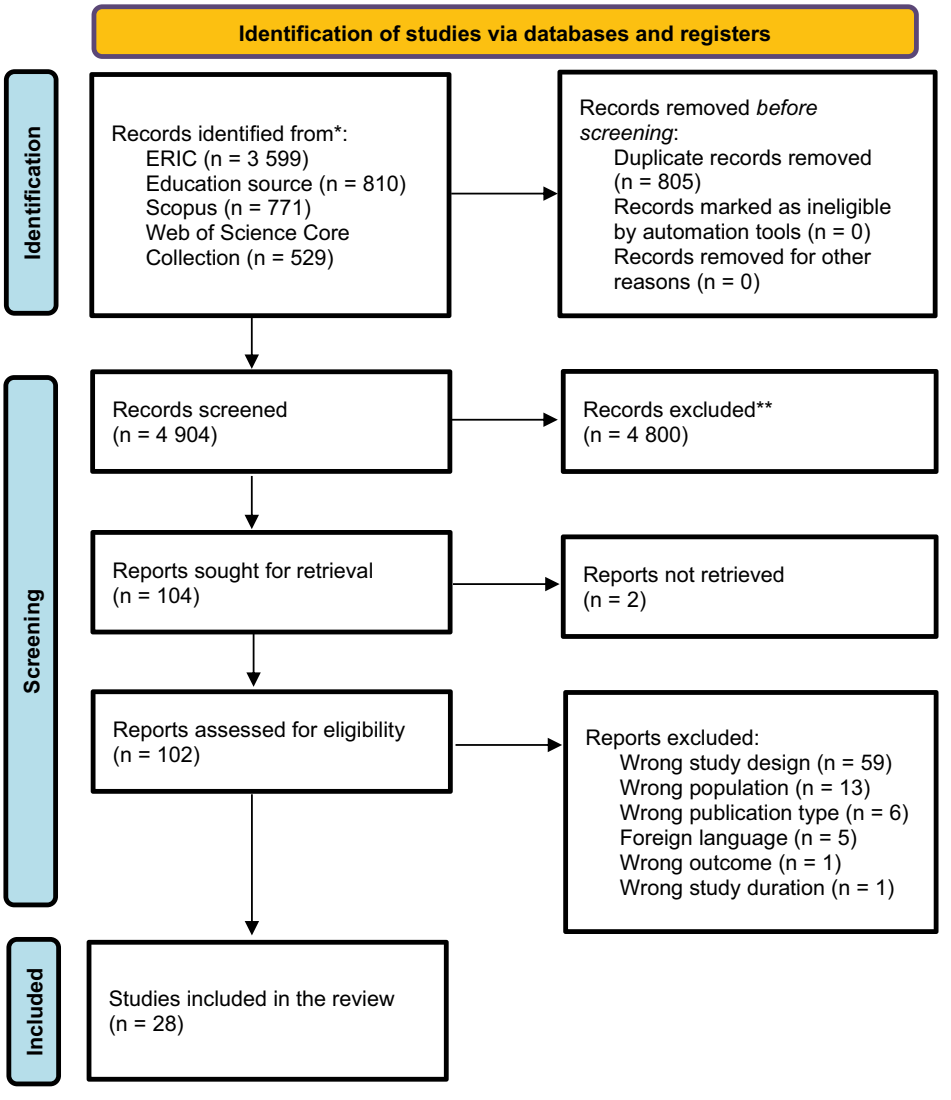

Figure 1. Flow diagram of the systematic review selection process of the reviewed literature. Note. The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram is based on Page et al. (2021) guidelines and Petticrew and Roberts' (2006, 291) flow diagram template for systematic reviews.

Content variables

- *CTALP*: The CTALP variable was operationalised as the specific activities or materials to facilitate IC development. This was recorded by a concise description of what the CTALP entailed. The reported CTALP are abductively synthesised into a teaching practice category. These categories are a generalised description of the implemented classroom practice, used to enhance comparability and understand fundamental principles of similarity and differences in the reviewed CTALP.

Furthermore, Microsoft Excel was used to configure the data analysis process to optimise automated support and streamline the process between reviewers.

Following the content analysis of the extracted data, the abstracted information from the individual studies is synthesised to describe thematic convergence and divergence in the corpus literature.

Results

This section describes and summarises the extracted data from the studies included in this review. Table 2 provides an overview of the reviewed studies. The results are organised according to the sequence of review questions.

RQ1: In what Educational Contexts has CTALP Research been Conducted to Develop Students' IC?

The descriptive results of the context variables reported in this subsection provide the basis for the subsequent review question's comparative analysis. The variables *school subjects* and *grade levels* are of particular comparative interest when answering the next review question, as they are the most educationally relevant context variables.

School subjects

The included studies have researched CTALP to develop students' IC in various subjects. These can be categorised into language (foreign – and native-language education), social sciences (history, religion, civics, and social studies), biology, and physical education.

The language category consisted of 16 studies in foreign- and native language education, specifically including Modern Greek as a native language (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou 2011), English as a native language (Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007), English as a foreign language (Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Hanley 2021; Hoff 2017; Khanukaeva 2020; Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023; Manjet et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2017; Ulisses and Hurst 2016; Zorba and Çakır 2019), Spanish as a foreign language (Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff 2023; Ulisses and Hurst 2016), French as a foreign language (Koro 2018), Chinese as a foreign language (Kennedy 2020), and Russian as a foreign language (Hanley 2021).

The social sciences category consisted of 10 studies, including history education (Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Hanley 2021; Johansson 2021; Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021), religious education (Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021), civic education (Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021), and social studies (Elley 1964; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Scott 1999).

Finally, one study was conducted in biology (Bibon 2021), and another (Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020) was conducted in physical education.

Grade levels

While a broader grade span than the target grade levels (i.e. 7–12) is reported in Table 2, the following review will only account for the target grade levels.

CTALP for developing students' IC have been researched in all target grade levels (7–12). The secondary school grades consisted of 16 studies conducted in grade 7 (Feeney

Table 2. Results from the systematic review of the focal 28 studies.

Author(s)	School subject(s)	Grade level(s)	National context	Target student group(s)	Sample size	Key categories of CTALP
Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael (2012)	Civic education	High school	U.S.	–	301	Experiencing (immersion)
Bibon (2021)	Biology	Grade 9	The Philippines	–	45	Learning
Busse and Krause (2016)	Foreign language education and other humanities subjects	Grade 9–12, adult education	Germany	–	209	Reflecting, experiencing (immersion)
Castañeda Usaquén (2012)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 8	Colombia	–	51	Learning, reflecting
Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou (2011)	Modern Greek Language	Grade 9 (Third-grade classroom of a secondary school)	Greece	Greek, Albanian, and Georgian origin	21	Reflecting
Elley (1964)	Social studies	Grade 8	New Zealand	–	Three classes	Learning
Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson (2011)	History	Grade 11	U.S.	African American and Latino students	21	Learning, reflecting
Feeney and Gajaseni (2020)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 7	Thailand	Native Thai	10	Reflecting, experiencing (immersion)
Hanley (2021)	History, world history, and English and Russian languages	Grade 5–10	Kazakhstan	–	70	Learning, reflecting
Hoff (2017)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 10–11 (VG1)	Norway	–	Four classes	Reflecting, experiencing (immersion)
Johansson (2021)	History	Grade 8 and 9	Sweden	–	Two classes	Learning, reflecting
P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown (2011)	Social studies	Grade 6–8	U.S.	–	260	Learning, reflecting, experiencing (immersion)
Kennedy (2020)	Chinese as a foreign language	Grade 9	New Zealand	–	2	Learning, reflecting
Khanukaeva (2020)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 9	Norway	–	56	Reflecting
Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan (2021)	Religious Education/ islamic studies	Grade 11	Indonesia	–	1030	Learning, reflecting

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (Continued).

Author(s)	School subject(s)	Grade level(s)	National context	Target student group(s)	Sample size	Key categories of CTALP
Koro (2018)	French as a foreign language	Grade 6–7	England	–	94	Learning
Lee, Ho, and Chen (2023)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 8	Thailand	–	59	Learning, reflecting
Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. (2021)	Civic education	Grade 10–12	Georgia	–	254	Learning, reflecting
Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. (2021)	History/National History	Grade 9	Georgia	Ethnically Georgian students	53	Learning, reflecting
Manjet et al. (2017)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 10 (4th form secondary school student)	Malaysia	Malays, Chinese and Indians	292	Learning, reflecting, experiencing
Murray and Puchner (2012)	Language Arts	Grade 7	U.S.	African American, multi-racial, Asian/ Pacific Islander, and white students	21	Reflecting
Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda (2020)	Physical education, sports education	Grade 7	Spain	–	133	Reflecting. experiencing (creation)
Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff (2023)	Spanish as a Foreign Language	Upper-secondary school	The Netherlands	–	25	Learning, reflecting
Scott (1999)	Social studies	High school	U.S.	–	–	Reflecting
Singh et al. (2017)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 10 (4th form secondary school student)	Malaysia	–	292	Learning, reflecting, experiencing
Thein, Beach, and Parks (2007)	English as a native language	Grade 11–12	U.S.	White students	–	Reflecting
Ulisses and Hurst (2016)	English and Spanish as a Foreign Language	Grade 11	Portugal	–	50	Learning, reflecting, and experiencing (immersion)
Zorba and Çakır (2019)	English as a Foreign Language	Grade 7	Turkey	Mediterranean Region, Aegean Region, other Regions	32	Learning, reflecting

Note. The CTALP is shortened to Learning, Reflecting, and Experiencing. These key categories are listed in this order, with no particular intention of emphasising their significance in the study. The experiencing category is followed by the immersion or creation subcategory in parenthesis.

and Gajaseni 2020; Hanley 2021; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Koro 2018; Murray and Puchner 2012; Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020; Zorba and Çakır 2019), grade 8 (Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Elley 1964; Hanley 2021; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023), and grade 9 (Bibon 2021; Busse and Krause 2016; Hanley 2021; Johansson 2021; Kennedy 2020; Khanukaeva 2020; Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021). Furthermore, the upper-secondary school grades consisted of 12 studies conducted in grade 10 (Busse and Krause 2016; Hanley 2021; Hoff 2017; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021; Manjet et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2017), grade 11 (Busse and Krause 2016; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Hoff 2017; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007; Ulisses and Hurst 2016), and grade 12 (Busse and Krause 2016; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007).

While some studies focus specifically on one grade level (e.g. Bibon 2021; Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Feeney and Gajaseni 2020), other studies include two or more grade levels (e.g. Busse and Krause 2016; Hoff 2017; Johansson 2021; Koro 2018; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021).

Several studies only included the student participants' ages, which were translated into grade levels (e.g. Elley 1964; Kennedy 2020; Koro 2018). Three studies (Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012; Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff 2023; Scott 1999) stated that it was conducted in an upper-secondary or high-school setting.

Countries

The development of students' IC in classroom settings at the secondary and upper-secondary level have been studied in 18 national contexts: Colombia (Castañeda Usaquén 2012), England (Koro 2018), Georgia (Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021; Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021), Germany (Busse and Krause 2016), Greece (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou 2011), Indonesia (Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021), Kazakhstan (Hanley 2021), Malaysia (Manjet et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2017), the Netherlands (Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff 2023), New Zealand (Elley 1964; Kennedy 2020), Norway (Hoff 2017; Khanukaeva 2020), the Philippines (Bibon 2021), Portugal (Ulisses and Hurst 2016), Spain (Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020), Sweden (Johansson 2021), Thailand (Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023), Turkey (Zorba and Çakır 2019), and the U.S (Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Murray and Puchner 2012; Scott 1999; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007).

Target student groups

In a number of studies, CTALP for developing students' IC have been researched with ethnic/race-specific target student groups in mind. The target scope of student characteristics was of different breadth, where some studies reported on targeting multiple ethnicities (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou 2011; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021; Manjet et al. 2017; Murray and Puchner 2012) and others only one ethnic group (Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007). Instead of ethnicity or race, one study reported the students' regional birthplace, distinguishing them from students

born in the Mediterranean, Aegean, and other regions (Zorba and Çakır 2019). One study explicitly stated that participant schools were selected based on racial composition (Manjet et al. 2017).

Sample size

The sample sizes of the participants included in the reviewed studies varied from two (Kennedy 2020) to 1030 (Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021). Eighteen studies had less than 100 participants (including Elley 1964 and Johansson 2021; who reported three and two school classes, respectively), eight studies had over 100 participants (including Hoff 2017 who reported four school classes), and two studies did not give any indication of sample size (Scott 1999; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007).

RQ2: What are the Key Categories of CTALP that Stimulate Students' IC Development?

As apparent in Table 2, the reviewed literature on CTALP to stimulate students' IC development revealed three key categories. The analysis shows that research on developing students' IC in classroom contexts can be implemented through *learning about culture, reflecting on culture*, and *experiencing culture*. This trinity of underlying mechanisms for IC development has been operationalised to various CTALP, which cluster differently around learning about-, reflecting on-, and experiencing culture. We suggest that these categories should be considered complementary elements that co-create an integrative intercultural understanding rather than mutually exclusive. Accordingly, one CTALP can include several elements sequentially or concurringly, some of primary and others of secondary importance. The studies exemplified in the following sections may not be restricted to one category of CTALP but are centred on one or two.

Learning about culture

Studies that have researched students' IC development through learning about culture entail acquiring knowledge about one or several target cultures' values, norms, beliefs, customs, traditions, history, or social practices. Participants acquire a more profound understanding of other cultures through receiving or searching for information on the target culture(s). From this perspective, participants are framed as recipients of IC where cultural knowledge can be transmitted through teacher-led instructions (Bibon 2021; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Koro 2018; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021; 2021), watching documentaries (Elley 1964; Kennedy 2020), and reading facts about cultures in textbooks (Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Hoff 2017; Kennedy 2020; Zorba and Çakır 2019). Thus, from a learning-about-culture perspective, various cultures exist worldwide, and teachers, through different modes of action, inform students about foreign cultural characteristics to stimulate IC development.

Learning about culture in different school subjects

In the research on language subjects, learning about culture entailed three key CTALP: reading textbook literature about foreign cultures in the target language (Castañeda

Usaquén, 2012; Kennedy 2020; Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023; Zorba and Çakır 2019), watching videos about foreign cultures in the target language (Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Kennedy 2020; Koro 2018; Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023), and reading fictional literature that comprises foreign cultures in the target language (Koro 2018; Manjet et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2017; Zorba and Çakır 2019). Other research on practices included listening to songs and reading poems in foreign languages (Koro 2018). Accordingly, several CTALP studied in the language subjects used content and language-integrated learning to stimulate students' IC development, comprising content related to IC while learning a foreign language.

Furthermore, in the social science subjects, studying culture included teaching about the history of diverse ethnic groups (Johansson 2021), historical and contemporary injustices (Elley 1964; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Hanley 2021; Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021; Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021), social change and societal challenges (Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012; Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021), and acquiring knowledge about different cultural groups (Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021).

Learning about culture in biology subject research meant constructing the lesson content on indigenous medicinal treatments (Bibon 2021). Foreign illnesses were used as an entry point for developing culture-based lessons that bridged biology to IC content.

Learning about culture in different grade levels

In the secondary school contexts, learning about cultures was a prevalent part of CTALP research (Bibon 2021; Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Elley 1964; Hanley 2021; Hoff 2017; Johansson 2021; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Kennedy 2020; Koro 2018; Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023; Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021; Murray and Puchner 2012; Zorba and Çakır 2019). Likewise, in the upper-secondary school grades, learning about cultures was also a significant part of the reviewed CTALP research (Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Hanley 2021; Hoff 2017 (Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021; Manjet et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2017; Ulisses and Hurst 2016).

No discrepancies between the employment of CTALP were observed in the reviewed research on secondary and upper-secondary school classes. Hence, the learning about culture practices did not indicate particular appropriateness in different grade levels. On the contrary, similar CTALP, such as teacher-led instructions (Bibon 2021; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Koro 2018; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, Maglakelidze, et al. 2021; Malazonia, Macharashvili, Maglakelidze, et al. 2021), watching documentaries (Elley 1964; Kennedy 2020), and reading facts about cultures in textbooks (Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Hoff 2017; Kennedy 2020; Zorba and Çakır 2019) were employed across multiple of the target grades, not indicating any particular affiliation to any educational level. This result holds even when studies conducted in both secondary and upper-secondary school classes (e.g. Hanley 2021) employed the same CTALP in both groups sorted after educational level were excluded from the analysis.

Reflecting on culture

CTALP research for developing students' IC through reflecting on culture involves analysing and problematising aspects of foreign and home cultures. Instead of

being positioned as a recipient of external information on specific cultures, students must reflect on culture actively. This reflection was structured differently in the reviewed CTALP. For instance, reflecting on culture includes comparing and contrasting cultural similarities and differences between two or more foreign cultures (Castañeda Usaquén 2012) or introspective thinking about one's relationship with one's cultural identity (Hanley 2021). From this perspective, developing IC is less considered to be about acquiring knowledge about foreign cultures and more about understanding cultural identity, positionality, and intersubjectivity through the lenses of diverse cultures.

Reflecting on culture in different school subjects

Several researched CTALP in the language subjects have focused on developing students' IC through reflecting on culture. In fiction-based CTALP (Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Hoff 2017; Manjet et al. 2017; Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff 2023; Singh et al. 2017; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007), teachers utilised the contrasting cultural perspectives of the characters in fictional narratives to stimulate students' reflection about topics such as societal issues and norms, conflicts, contradicting experiences, cultural nuances and identities, and human behaviour. Moreover, instead of using fictional literature as a prompt for reflection, Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou (2011) studied how posters for refugees can be used for students to reflect upon racism and xenophobia. Similarly, Ulisses and Hurst's (2016) study of intercultural CTALP also featured critical discussions of multicultural images.

In comparison, the CTALP studied in the social sciences used other educational designs to develop students' IC through reflecting on culture. These practices included reflecting upon diverse historical narratives (Johansson 2021), accounts of racism in history and contemporary society (Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011), political movements (Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011), existing stereotypes (Hanley 2021), ethnic minorities (Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021), social change and intersectional oppressions related to gender, class, race, and religion (Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021), societal challenges (Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012), and daily lives of people in different countries (Scott 1999). Like Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou (2011) and Ulisses and Hurst (2016) studied visual analysis of images and posters, CTALP in history education (Johansson 2021) and social studies (Scott 1999) were also based on students' analysis of visual illustrations of historical injustices and contemporary living conditions in foreign countries.

In the physical education context (Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020), playing sports games from around the world was used as prompts to make students reflect on other cultural realities.

Reflecting on culture in different grade levels

In the secondary school contexts, several of the studied CTALP centred on reflecting on culture (Busse and Krause 2016; Castañeda Usaquén 2012; Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou 2011; Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Hanley 2021; Johansson 2021; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Kennedy 2020; Khanukaeva 2020; Lee,

Ho, and Chen 2023; Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021; Murray and Puchner 2012; Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020; Zorba and Çakır 2019). Similarly, in the reviewed studies conducted in upper-secondary school settings, several studies researched reflecting on culture CTALP (Busse and Krause 2016; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011; Hanley 2021; Hoff 2017; Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021; Malazonia, Lobzhanidze, et al. 2021; Manjet et al. 2017; Scott 1999; Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff 2023; Singh et al. 2017; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007; Ulisses and Hurst 2016).

One apparent pattern between the different types of reflecting practices at the educational levels was that while the studies at secondary school primarily focused on reflecting on foreign cultures (e.g. Castañeda Usaquén 2012), practices researched at the upper-secondary school level also included an emphasis on reflecting on one's home culture (e.g. Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021). Hence, reflecting on culture practices indicated progression in the reflection objective in different grade levels. In contrast, the CTALP implemented in classes with older age groups incorporated reflection on foreign and home cultures.

Experiencing culture

This CTALP category entails direct engagement with cultural phenomena through active participation in diverse cultural environments. Participants temporarily 'feel' the foreign culture through CTALP such as simulations (Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011), role-playing (Busse and Krause 2016; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020; Ulisses and Hurst 2016), and reading fictional literature (Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Hoff 2017; Manjet et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2017). Simulations, role-playing, and reading fictional literature can be considered CTALP for experiencing culture through the subcategory *immersion*, which is characterised by deep involvement in cultural activities. A common motivation described in the reviewed studies for immersing participants in cultural experiences was to evoke emotional responses from participants, such as empathy (Busse and Krause 2016; Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Hanley 2021; Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012). The second identified subcategory of experiencing culture in the reviewed research is *creation*, where participants experience culture through creating cultural phenomena, such as cooking traditional dishes, making traditional music, or playing traditional games. Thus, the intention is that for a brief moment, participants experience certain aspects of a foreign culture by immersing or creating a particular cultural phenomenon. Once the CTALP has ended, the participants resume their cultural worldview, hopefully with new cultural experiences.

Experiencing culture in different school subjects

In a civic education context, Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael (2012) used an online simulation tool that allowed students to immerse themselves in the lives of people from different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown (2011) used a web-based simulation to investigate the potential effects on students' knowledge of human

rights, the global environment, conflict and cooperation, international economics, and world health.

Instead of using web-based simulations, researchers in language, social science, and physical education subjects also used role-playing to develop students' IC (Busse and Krause 2016; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020; Ulisses and Hurst 2016). These roles included acting on individual, group, and state levels.

Using a fiction-based CTALP in language subject research, students were immersed in the lives of diverse characters, offering a first-person perspective on these characters' cultural experiences (Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; Hoff 2017; Manjet et al. 2017; Schat, van der Knaap, and de Graaff 2023; Singh et al. 2017; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007).

The reviewed studies present one robust account of experiencing culture as creation. Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda (2020) experience culture through creation by recreating traditional sports games from around the world in physical education classes, targeting students' understanding of their cultural realities. Two studies that potentially could have fitted the creation subcategory (Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023; Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021) both included CTALP that centred around traditional dishes, but since students did not cook traditional dishes themselves, this was not recognised by us as experiencing culture through creation.

Experiencing culture in different grade levels

The results from the review indicated variation in the applied experiencing culture CTALP in the secondary and upper-secondary settings. In secondary school contexts (Busse and Krause 2016; Feeney and Gajaseni 2020; P. Johnson, Boyer, and Brown 2011; Puente-Maxera, Mendez-Gimenez, and de Ojeda 2020), experiencing culture through immersion practices (simulations, role-playing, reading fictional literature) and creation practices (recreating traditional sports games from around the world) were researched. In contrast, the research carried out in upper-secondary school settings (Bachen, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael 2012; Busse and Krause 2016; Hoff 2017; Manjet et al. 2017; Singh et al. 2017; Ulisses and Hurst 2016) only researched experiencing culture through immersion. Although this variation subsists, the reliability of this finding is weak, as only one study of all the reviewed studies researched cultural creation practices. Accordingly, based on this slight variation, there is no reason to believe that CTALP through experiencing culture is only appropriate for secondary school grade levels. However, this variation indicates a potential need to implement and evaluate cultural creation practices at upper-secondary school levels.

Discussion

The results of the reviewed studies provide insight into the development of students' IC in classroom settings. These insights elucidate convergences and divergences of how IC has been researched and taught to stimulate students' IC in different educational contexts, discerning underlying patterns which, to some extent, go beyond the conclusions drawn by the researchers in the individual studies.

Context variables

The first review question in this study sought to determine in what educational contexts CTALP has been researched for developing students' IC. The analysis primarily focused on school subject(s) and grade level(s) but also included country, target student group, and sample size. Regarding grade levels, all target grade levels (7–12) have been researched to a similar extent. Accordingly, the reviewed empirical research does not indicate whether implementing CTALP to develop students' IC is more appropriate for the secondary or upper-secondary school level.

Regarding countries, there was a glaring gap in international representation in research from African countries, with no country from the African continent being included in the articles. Similarly, only one included study was conducted in South America (Colombia). Results from Luo and Chan's (2022) systematic review and Peng, Zhu, and Wu (2020) bibliometric analysis reiterate a similar regional absence. These observations are somewhat surprising considering the seeming significance of IC in the context of the rich cultural diversity across the African and South American continents and their colonial pasts (Ogom Nwosu (2009)). In light of these results from both the present and previous reviews, the absence of research in certain regions might indicate that IC is not a prioritised educational objective on a global scale but instead primarily of regional interest. The factors causing regional disparities in IC research should be a future avenue for investigation.

Regarding the researched school subjects, most of the reviewed studies focused on language and social science subjects. Foreign language subjects are the dominant humanities subjects researched regarding developing students' IC within the classroom. In one of the reviewed studies, the researchers expressed foreign language subjects' special relevance to IC stating that 'foreign language classes are the most important venues for learners to access opportunities to develop their intercultural learning experiences and competence' (Lee, Ho, and Chen 2023, 5). Reviews in higher education contexts also find that IC assessments predominantly have been developed for language-related university majors (Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya 2023, Luo and Chan 2022). Moreover, as indicated in Table 2, most of the reviewed foreign language studies were conducted in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context. The presence of studies undertaken in EFL contexts can be explained by (a) this review only included studies published in English and (b) English's hegemonic stance as a global foreign language subject. However, foreign language prioritisation as a school subject to promote and research intercultural development does not necessarily imply that foreign language subjects are the most relevant subjects to stimulate all aspects of students' IC development. Non-language related school subjects might be equally or more relevant for IC development, although yet to be extensively researched. Accordingly, the current distribution of research signifies a need for further exploration in the social and natural sciences subjects on how IC can be developed.

Various studies centred on students who exhibit particular ethnic/racial characteristics. The results reveal contrasts between the people for whom this competence is supposed to be developed. The variations in target groups imply that there are significant differences in research for those who are thought to require IC. Some studies conceptualised IC to be important for students with a majority background (Feeney and Gajaseni 2020;

Malazonia, Macharashvili, et al. 2021; Thein, Beach, and Parks 2007), others for students with a minority background (Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson 2011), and others for groups with a mix of students with majority and minority backgrounds (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou 2011; Murray and Puchner 2012; Singh et al. 2017). Emphasis on specific attributes was motivated in the studies to reduce intergroup conflict or stigmatisation and minimise ethnocentrism among ethnic/racial majorities. Thus, these findings suggest that developing IC is motivated for different purposes determined at a local level, such as resolving issues relating to race and ethnicity. Conceptualising IC as only relevant for particular student groups based on race or ethnicity raises concerns about contributing to oversimplification and misrepresentation of intra-group differences.

As can be viewed in Table 2, the number of participants included in the studies varied extensively. At the lower end of the spectrum, the number of participants reported was two (Kennedy 2020), and at the highest end, 1030 (Khojir, Aini, and Setiawan 2021). While all study results have been treated equally in this review, there is an evident disparity in external validity between the reviewed studies. Most of the reviewed articles' sample sizes contain students from a couple of school classes, which is insufficient to confidently conclude that a particular instructional intervention positively influences students' IC development at the population level. This restriction is reflected in Guillén-Yparrea and Ramírez-Montoya's (2023) systematic review of intercultural education studies in higher education, which concluded that sample size is the most common limitation.

Classroom teaching and learning practices

The second review inquiry defined key CTALP categories stimulating students' IC development based on the reviewed research in different educational contexts. This review revealed a range of researched CTALP and abductively synthesised these practices into learning about-, reflecting on-, and experiencing culture. Our findings demonstrate that recurrent CTALP to develop IC included role-playing, reading multicultural literature, and analysing multicultural images. Some studied CTALP were quite rudimentary, such as reading about a target culture or watching documentaries, but were still identified as helpful to gain a foundational understanding of certain aspects of cultures' values, norms, beliefs, customs, traditions, history, or social practices. Therefore, it is important to note that even though IC is often characterised in research as something complex, the results show that the entry bar to IC learning is relatively low, particularly within the learning about culture category.

A CTALP that was not extensively researched but showed promising potential for developing students' IC was intercultural simulations. Particularly, Bachen's, Hernez-Ramos, and Raphael (2012) study of the REAL LIVES game in a U.S. context demonstrated how simulation games circumvent most critical issues outlined with cultural exposure in the present review's limitations section. If students have access to computers or phones, the potential for implementing intercultural simulations may bypass problems such as being costly, time-consuming, sporadic, offering limited access to students, and being susceptible to selection effects. Fowler and Pusch (2010) state that CTALP based on simulations allows students to gain immersive experiences of what their lives could have been like under different circumstances. Such simulations can circumvent the risks of multicultural experiences negatively affecting participants' outgroup prejudice and

stereotyping, as indicated by Affinito et al. (2023). Despite simulations being one of the more resource-intensive reviewed CTALP, they are still more accessible to students than exchange programmes, study abroad programmes, extracurricular activities, and other educational procedures conducted outside the classroom setting.

Another noteworthy result is that this review found no CTALP research intended for students to assimilate into the majority culture, such as behavioural and value system adaptations to integrate students into a new culture. The absence of these aspects conveys IC as empirically unrelated to cultural assimilation. Instead, acquiring IC is framed as centring on becoming more aware of cultures outside and inside the cultural self through developing specific competencies, such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.

Though studies centred on mostly one CTALP category, it was common to use a multi-practice-oriented approach, combining learning about culture, reflecting on culture, and/or experiencing culture practices. The most prevalent combinations were learning about culture and reflecting on culture, as well as reflecting on culture combined with experiencing culture. A combination not observed in the reviewed studies was learning about culture and experiencing culture without including reflection on culture. CTALP for developing students' IC through reflecting on culture is thus prevalent in all researched CTALP combinations, possibly indicating that CTALP aimed to stimulate reflecting on culture is fundamental for developing IC. These findings can have important implications for designing CTALP for developing students' IC, especially at the secondary and upper-secondary school levels, as empirical research consistently indicates that reflecting on cultural practices is a significant IC development mechanism.

Remaining challenges in classroom-based research for IC development

We identified some issues which should be considered when conducting intercultural CTALP research in the future. Several reviewed studies did not investigate the long-term effects of their implemented practices on students' learning (e.g. Bibon 2021, Manjet et al. 2017). Ideally, CTALP produces increased IC over an extended period. To make robust evidence-informed best practice recommendations, further research would need to determine whether the observed positive correlation or causation has produced a long – or short-term impact on students' IC.

Various reviewed articles did not include explicit operational definitions of their target constructs (e.g. Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, and Tsakou 2011, Murray and Puchner 2012), severely impacting the research transparency and replicability. We did not attempt to disentangle the myriad of IC dimensions in the reviewed studies, bypassing the latent issue of conceptual confusion in the field. To respond to the conceptual confusion surrounding IC described in Zhang and Zhou's (2019) systematic review, we recommend future research to accurately define what is meant when claiming to study IC or an interrelated term to reduce the theoretical fragmentations in the field.

The reviewed studies indicated overwhelmingly positive results from their researched CTALP. Noting the lack of valid and reliable test items for measuring IC and the lack of RCT, it is evident that conclusions about effective CTALP for IC development are still very limited. The positive results might indicate publication bias as all reviewed studies concluded they, to varying extents, were successful in

their endeavours to develop students' IC or an interrelated competence. In addition, there is a risk of overestimating the positive effects of the implemented CTALP and, in turn, inferring false-positive results in the present analysis (Newman and Gough 2020; Torgerson, Hall, and Lewis-Light 2017).

Some caveats are attached to this finding. For instance, Johansson (2021) reported that some students struggled with historical contextualisation, and Lee, Ho, and Chen (2023) reported that students with less English proficiency found it challenging to participate in intercultural conversations. In the context of English as a foreign language, Lee, Ho, and Chen (2023) argued that introducing intercultural elements into EFL teaching practices might negatively impact students' subject learning if they already have difficulty with the teaching content. These results indicate that implementing IC teaching content better serves student groups with more advanced subject knowledge. Conversely, Busse and Krause (2016) reported that introducing IC did not hinder content acquisition or obstruct learning on intercultural tasks, regardless of whether the instructional language in lessons was in a native or foreign language. These results are not necessarily conflicting, as the relative subject knowledge between the studied student groups in Lee, Ho, and Chen (2023) and Busse and Krause (2016) is unknown. Nevertheless, these results open up a discussion of potential drawbacks of IC instruction, reinforcing the mindfulness of context dependency of CTALP's effect on students' IC learning.

Limitations of the review and further agenda

This review has evaluated the existing knowledge body and identified research gaps in using the classroom space to facilitate IC development in different educational contexts. While the purpose of the review was to advance our understanding of the classroom as a space to support IC learning, both to strengthen the foundation for the systematic implementation of IC in education and broaden accessibility to IC development among global youth, it is important to acknowledge that the classroom may not be a suitable learning environment for *all* IC development. For instance, unlike out-of-classroom learning experiences, classroom-based practices have significant limitations in providing opportunities for authentic intercultural interactions, which may be vital for students' IC learning. This prompts us to consider the possibilities and limits associated with the affordances of the classroom as an IC learning space. Therefore, an important avenue for further investigation is exploring which IC aspects are more suitable for development outside the classroom than inside it.

Moreover, the search strategy inferred some methodological restrictions that impacted the review's results that future work should address. First, the review was limited to studies published in English, which skewed the sample selection in favour of English-speaking researchers, possibly contributing to the observed geographical bias. It is thus important to note that other CTALP for developing students' IC might have been researched but published in other languages. Nevertheless, this language restriction was necessary to make the review feasible.

Another search strategy limitation was that the review was limited to studies conducted in secondary and upper secondary school settings (grades 7–12, ages

13–19), excluding studies conducted at primary levels (grades K-6), higher education, and adult education. This restriction implies a lack of generalisability of results to grade levels beyond the studied scope. Therefore, we underscore the need for additional systematic reviews addressing these omitted grade spans. Specifically, we recommend future research to investigate how IC could be more effectively integrated into primary education since no prior systematic review has solely focused on this grade level, including the present review.

A last methodological constraint concerns excluding grey literature such as book chapters, reports, manuscripts, and dissertations, which also fell outside the review's coverage. Our findings' restrictions call for further investigation into other forms of scientific literature.

Considering these limitations, we propose that future research review studies on CTALP for developing students' IC in various languages, grade levels, and forms of publications. We also encourage systematic reviews that investigate the effectiveness of particular CTALP in increasing students' IC to support evidence-based best practices. As indicated by the number of retained studies in this review, IC research in the classroom remains rather underexplored, and we believe more studies using CTALP are required to understand how to leverage the classroom context as a space to support IC learning.

Conclusion

By synthesising the existing literature on classroom-based practices promoting IC, we have systematically investigated and presented empirical evidence on CTALP to develop secondary and upper-secondary students' IC. The review's results revealed commonalities, contradictions, and tensions in the scientific literature, indicating a certain level of coherency, critical landmarks, and areas of interest for future research. The analysis also highlighted potential gaps and shortcomings in the contemporary scientific literature on the reviewed topic, intending to inform directions for future empirical studies and systematic reviews.

In conclusion, this systematic literature review's findings underscore the complexity and simplicity of developing students' IC in the classroom. Nuances in our results highlight the importance of considering educational contexts when designing and implementing CTALP. The synthesised empirical evidence elucidates three core mechanisms interlinking different CTALP for developing students' IC with particular educational contexts. The practical applications of these mechanisms can inform and improve educational practice. Moving forward, these observed patterns offer a foundation for future research endeavours to consider when designing CTALP for IC in the classroom.

Note

1. Council of Europe. 2014. *Developing intercultural competence through education*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe. UNESCO. 2007. UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education, Paris Transcend Borders.

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The first author improved their writing style, grammar, and spelling using Grammarly. During the preparation of this work, the first author used chatGPT to improve the readability of some passages. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the manuscript as needed and took full responsibility for the publication's content.

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