Intercultural Communicative Competence in Language Education: A Bibliometric Analysis (1995–2022)

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Abstract—**This study conducted a bibliometric analysis for intercultural communicative competence in language education by using 401 research articles in this field spanning from 1995 to 2022 in Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection—SSCI database. CiteSpace visualized knowledge maps of this field of research. The research findings show that in the field of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in language education, *The Modern Language Journal* is found to be the most highly cited journal within the past twenty-seven years; the top three highly cited authors are Michael Byram, Claire Kramsch, and Robert O'Dowd; *Ethical Issues in Teaching for Intercultural Citizenship in World/Foreign Language Education* is the most highly cited article; transcultural skill, intercultural communicative competence, technology-assisted L2 research, and pragmatics instruction are found to be top four leading research streams. These findings provide considerable insights into the highly cited journals, authors, articles and leading streams concerning ICC in language education from the diachronic perspective. The visualization of ICC in language education literature by formulating a bibliometric approach might be beneficial for researchers and scholars to track the development of this field.**

Index Terms—**Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), language education, language teaching, language learning, bibliometric analysis, CiteSpace**

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, interaction between people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds has never been more significant. The number of students studying outside their home country is also on the rise. Thus, there is a pressing need for better preparation for cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural relationship building, especially in a second language [1]. Intercultural competence is an increasingly desirable life skill in a multicultural and globalized world. It has become commonplace to state that foreign language learning should be viewed from an intercultural perspective. The main objective of foreign language education is no longer defined strictly in terms of the acquisition of communicative competence, for teachers are now required to teach intercultural communicative competence [2]. 'Intercultural communicative competence' incorporates both 'communicative competence' and 'cultural awareness' and, in that sense, builds on commonly accepted goals in foreign-language teaching [3].

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Research Questions

To explore the status quo of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) research in language education, the following questions are to be addressed in the present study:

RQ1. What are the most impactful journals, and who are the most influential authors on ICC in language education?

RQ2. What are the highly cited articles in this field?

RQ3. What are the leading research streams in this field?

B. Methodology

The present study adopts a bibliometric analysis which uses bibliographic data to identify the structures of scientific fields [4]. The term "bibliometrics" was initially used by Alan Pritchard, who defined it as the "application of mathematics and statistical methods to books and other media of communication" [5]. Bibliometrics studies relationships between numbers and patterns in bibliographic data and use, including the number of publications, the expansion of literature, and usage patterns for libraries and databases [6]. Using this method, we can create an objective view of the literature by making the search and review process transparent and reproducible [7].

C. Data Collection

We deployed CiteSpace 6.1.6. to visualize the knowledge map of ICC in language education. Developed by Chen [8], CiteSpace is adopted as a research tool to facilitate the analysis of emerging trends in a knowledge domain. It contains co-citation networks among references and authors which is of pivotal importance given the research questions underpinning the present study. Also, it helps pinpoint leading research streams in the linguistic research on intercultural communicative competence in language education through cluster analysis.

First, we extracted bibliometric data from Web of Science Core Collection—SSCI database. Several keywords were used to cover the researched topic by searching for the following combinations of terms: (a) "intercultural competence*" OR "intercultural communicative competence*" OR "intercultural communication competence*" OR "interculturally competent*"; and (b) "language education*" OR "language teaching*" OR "language learning*" OR "language acquisition*" OR "foreign language classroom*". After refining the search by limiting the data to articles published in English, the extraction process yielded 547 sources.

We refined the extraction again by carefully reading the articles' abstracts to identify those suitable for further analysis. Then, we removed the articles whose abstracts did not contain one or more of the two significant aspects

specified in the keyword search (i.e., intercultural communicative competence and language education). This process finally yielded 401 articles relevant to the topic.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Highly Cited Journals

The highly cited journals of ICC research in language education involve various disciplines like intercultural communication, applied linguistics and education in Fig. 1. Table I lists the top 10 highly cited journals and their centralities. In CiteSpace, a node's centrality is a graph-theoretical attribute that measures how significant its location in a network is. The sum of the minimum distances between that node and all others determines it [9]. Among them, the top five highly cited journals are *The Modern Language Journal* (with 93 citations), *Language and Intercultural Communication* (with 74 citations), *Foreign Language Annals* (with 73 citations), *TESOL Quarterly* (with 68 citations) and *Applied Linguistics* (with 68 citations).
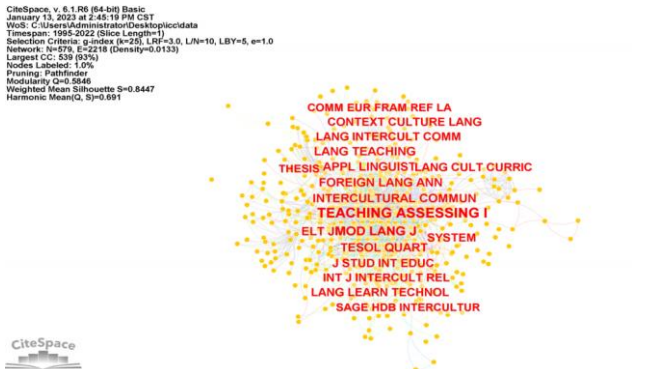

Fig. 1. Cited journals in the field of ICC in language education research.

TABLE I: TOP 10 HIGHLY CITED JOURNALS IN THE FIELD OF ICC IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION RESEARCH

Rank	Number of citations	Centrality	Cited journal
1	93	0.05	*The Modern Language Journal*
2	74	0.03	*Language and Intercultural Communication*
3	73	0.16	*Foreign Language Annals*
4	68	0.17	*TESOL Quarterly*
4	68	0.16	*Applied Linguistics*
6	67	0.02	*Language Teaching*
7	67	0.05	*ELT Journal*
8	63	0.08	*International Journal of Intercultural Relations*
9	63	0.03	*Journal of Studies in International Education*
10	62	0.06	*System*

The most highly cited journal is *The Modern Language Journal* (MLJ), with a centrality of 0.05. As an international journal, MLJ aims to publish studies and research about learning and teaching foreign and second languages and promote scholarly exchange among researchers and teachers of all modern foreign languages and English as a second language. The second highly cited journal is *Language and Intercultural Communication* (LAIC). As a mainstream journal in the intercultural field, articles in LAIC promote an interdisciplinary understanding of the interplay between language and intercultural communication.

The other three Journals are *Foreign Language Annals* (FLA), *TESOL Quarterly* (TQ) and *Applied Linguistics* (AL). Published continuously since 1967, FLA is dedicated to advancing language teaching and learning and serves the professional interests of classroom instructors, researchers, and administrators concerned with learning and teaching languages, particularly languages other than English, at all levels of instruction. TQ is one of the most respected publications in second and foreign language teaching, whose primary focus is to link theory with practice and address the practical concerns of English language teaching. AP is one of the most outstanding journals in linguistics, critically reflecting on current, cutting-edge theory and practice in applied linguistics. Compared with LAIC, FLA, TQ, and AP are the three journals dedicated to topics related to applied linguistics. The latter three journals address interdisciplinary language-related topics, such as ICC topics from foreign language learning and teaching perspectives.

B. Highly Cited Authors

The citation frequency of the author and centrality in a social network can be served as indicators to measure the author's influence in a research field. Fig. 2 is a knowledge map of cited authors. Table II lists the top 10 highly cited authors in ICC research in language education.
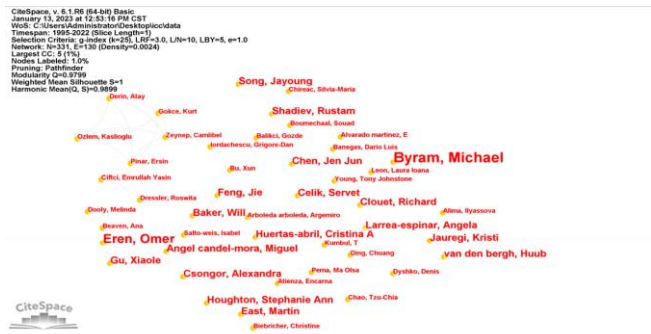

Fig. 2. Cited authors in the field of ICC in the field of language education research.

TABLE II: TOP 10 HIGHLY CITED AUTHORS IN THE FIELD OF ICC IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION RESEARCH

Rank	Number of citations	Centrality	Cited authors
1	168	0.14	Michael Byram
2	95	0.07	Claire Kramsch
3	37	0.09	Robert O'Dowd
3	37	0.18	Milton Bennett
5	36	0.01	Lies Sercu
6	31	0.02	Darla Deardorff
7	28	0.05	Lina Lee
8	27	0.03	Anthony J. Liddicoat
9	23	0.04	Karen Risager
9	23	0.05	Alvino E. Fantini

Among these highly cited authors, Michael Byram (with 168 citations), Claire Kramsch (with 95 citations), and Robert O'Dowd (with 37 citations) are the top 3 highly cited scholars in this field. Byram ranks [10] first with the centrality (0.14) on the highly cited authors' list. He made contributions to exploring relationships between cultural awareness and language awareness which impact language education. His efforts in commenting on the development of the intercultural dimension of foreign language teaching is prevailing, which includes four areas: 'the value of cultural studies', 'pedagogy and didactics', 'methodology' and 'assessment and evaluation' [11]. Byram [12] also shed light

on the relationship between language teaching and intercultural competence, arguing that linguistic competence needs to be enriched with deep intercultural competence to enable language learners to enact their intercultural citizenship.

The second highly cited author is Claire Kramsch. Kramsch's primary research contributions are on exploring the role of proficiency-oriented curriculum in interactional competence [13], the nature of language and communication across cultures through their technology-mediated interactions [14], emphasizing the significant role of foreign language education to nurture communicative competence in a global age [15] and the symbolic self in intercultural communication [16].

Robert O'Dowd ranks third in the number of citations. In ICC and foreign language education, he proposed telecollaboration as using online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work [17]. O'Dowd conducted a large-scale quantitative and qualitative study on telecollaborative activities in European higher education to explore how much telecollaboration could contribute to students' foreign language and intercultural competencies [18]. In addition, he claimed that virtual exchange as an educational practice involving the engagement of groups of learners in extended periods of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with international peers as an integrated part of their educational programs and under the guidance of educators and facilitators [19].

C. Highly Cited Articles

We presented a knowledge map of the influential cited articles in Fig. 3. Table III lists the top 5 highly cited articles according to the citation numbers. These articles provide insights into theoretical knowledge and empirical studies in this field.
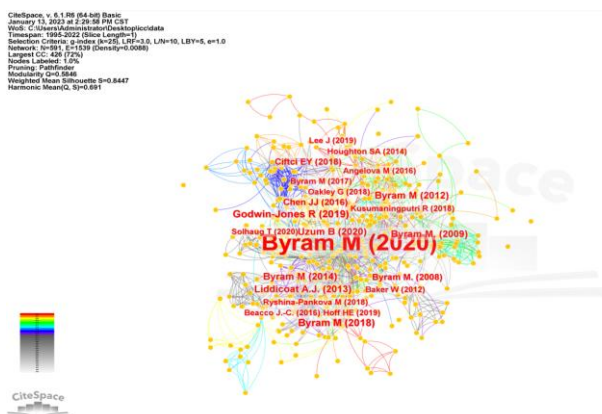

Fig. 3. Cited articles in the field of ICC in the field of language education research.

The first highly cited article is *Ethical Issues in Teaching for Intercultural Citizenship in World/Foreign Language Education* [20], stressing that intercultural citizenship is an "educational philosophy" that aims to make language teaching relevant to students' lives, engaging them both in learning the language and in their development and application of intercultural competence. However,

intercultural citizenship involves more than teaching linguistic and communicative competence; it includes teaching intercultural competence and citizenship responsibilities. As such, it also requires a reconfiguration of teachers' vision of education, with new teacher roles and a new teacher professional identity beyond that of trainer of competencies and transmitter of knowledge.

TABLE III: TOP 5 HIGHLY CITED ARTICLES IN THE FIELD OF ICC IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION RESEARCH

Rank	Number of citations	Cited articles	Authors and years
1	152	Ethical issues in teaching for intercultural citizenship in world/foreign language education	Byram *et al.*, 2020
2	7	Making a difference: Language teaching for intercultural and international dialogue	Byram & Wagner, 2018
2	7	Telecollaboration as an approach to developing intercultural communication competence	Godwin-Jones, 2019
4	6	Language awareness and (critical) cultural awareness - relationships, comparisons and contrasts	Byram, 2012
4	6	Twenty-five years on - from cultural studies to intercultural citizenship	Byram, 2014

The other two articles both ranked second of the highly cited articles, *Making a Difference: Language Teaching for Intercultural and International Dialogue* [12] and *Telecollaboration as an Approach to Developing Intercultural Communication Competence* [21]. The former argues that linguistic competence needs to be enriched with deep intercultural competence. Global language educators help learners develop increasingly sophisticated linguistic and intercultural knowledge and skills. Also, they should improve students' application of these skills in other courses and experiences to enact their intercultural citizenship. The main concepts involved in this view of language teaching are the notion of culture, the language-culture nexus, and intercultural competence. The latter article looks at how telecollaboration can support teachers and learners as they seek to understand language through culture and culture through language, particularly looking at the growing interest in moving beyond traditional representations of culture in the classroom to the concept of intercultural communication competence.

D. Leading Research Streams

Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR) was applied to cluster the keywords. The abstracts of the selected articles were extracted to name the clusters (Table IV) and we obtained 10 most important clusters. According to Chen [22], a network's silhouette score gauges the typical homogeneity of derived clusters. The more significant a group is to a cluster, the higher the average silhouette score is. Among the 10 clusters, their silhouette scores are all above 0.7, which is believed to be persuasive. The top 4 clusters are transcultural skill, intercultural communicative competence, technology-assisted L2 research, and pragmatics instruction in Fig. 4, which reflect the current leading streams of ICC research in language education.

Transcultural skill is the top-ranked hot spot in this field. Studies aiming to analyse and evaluate the extent of transcultural content include an innovative, collaborative learning activity which allowed students to work in small groups and use the Internet to improve their transcultural knowledge [23], and exploration of how transcultural skills and practices are influenced by ideology [24]. In addition, content-based and task-based activities, along with a novel use of a virtual third space as a zone for transcultural learning and collaboration, could foster participants' transcultural competence and their ability to communicate effectively in the international arena through English as an international language [25].

Intercultural communicative competence is also a leading research stream. Based on Byram's [26] definition of ICC and specific types of discourse analysis proposed by Ware and Kramsch [14], Chun [27] explored how online exchanges can play a role in second language learners' development of pragmatic competence and ICC. A model proposed by Woods [28] is that communicative competence is a conceptual tool to shape thinking in developing and researching interdisciplinary teaching and learning in the university classroom. Sercu [29] explored to what extent and how teachers' current professional profiles meet the specifications formulated in the theoretical literature regarding the foreign language and intercultural competent teachers.

Technology-assisted L2 research is another hot spot prevailing along with the development and application of technology in language classrooms. Liu *et al.* [30] investigated how computers were used in the 1990s to support second and foreign language learning and explored the evidence regarding how computer technology can enhance the acquisition of language skills. Building on Kolb's experiential learning model, Hui *et al.* [31] show that technology-assisted learning improves students' acquisition of knowledge that demands abstract conceptualization and reflective observation but adversely affects their ability to obtain knowledge that requires concrete experience. Mishan [32] also focused on second language learning about the history of computer-assisted language learning. Technology such as blogs and wikis have been the most studied Web 2.0 tools [33], while others, such as social networking applications and virtual worlds, have been less frequently explored. Meta-analysis as a research method has been used to study computer-mediated glosses in second language reading comprehension and incidental vocabulary learning [34] and technology-assisted second language vocabulary learning for English as a foreign language [35].

Pragmatics instruction has also become a global research hot spot in this field for over a decade since 2005. For instance, Ohta [36] investigated the applicability of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to interlanguage pragmatics instruction and research. Koike *et al.* [37] looked more specifically at the explicitness of pre-instruction and feedback impact on English-speaking learners of third-semester Spanish classes to explore the effectiveness of teaching pragmatic information to students. A model proposed by Shively [38] for pragmatic instruction on students studying abroad fosters both intercultural competence and language skills informed by research and practice and takes advantage of the affordances that an immersive environment and new technologies offer. Following this, Rueda [39] also presented a theoretical discussion about including explicit pragmatic instruction as a facilitative tool to develop pragmatic competence in a foreign language classroom. There are other studies which investigated the Individual Difference (ID) variables when using L2 pragma linguistic features under an implicit input condition [40], the impact of explicit interventional treatment on developing pragmatic awareness and production of spoken requests in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context [41] and the pragmatic tools that language learners use [42].
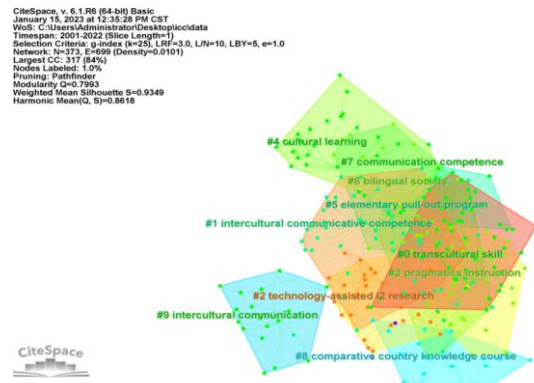

Fig. 4. Important clusters of keywords in the field of ICC in language education research.

TABLE IV: TOP 10 CLUSTERS OF LEADING RESEARCH STREAMS IN THE FIELD OF ICC IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION RESEARCH

Cluster ID	Name of cluster label	Cluster size	Silhouette
0	transcultural skill	35	0.765
1	intercultural communicative competence	32	1
2	technology-assisted L2 research	28	0.981
3	pragmatics instruction	25	0.916
4	cultural learning	24	0.985
5	elementary pull-out program	22	0.938
6	bilingual society	21	0.912
7	communication competence	19	0.953
8	comparative country knowledge course	18	1
9	intercultural communication	17	0.859

IV. CONCLUSION

This study presents the status quo of the literature on ICC in language education by conducting a bibliometric analysis of 401 articles, looking at highly cited journals, cited authors, cited articles and leading research streams in this field from 1995 to 2022. Researchers at the ICC in language education frequently reference Michael Byram's publications among the authors who receive the most citations, which indicates his significant role in the area. Most influential journals are the primary publication venues for articles on applied linguistics, language teaching and learning, and the interplay between language and intercultural communication.

Transcultural skill, intercultural communicative competence, technology-assisted L2 research and pragmatics instruction are identified as four leading research streams that indicate the emphasis and future direction of research for scholars and help us gain a more profound understanding of critical issues related to this field. The interconnection

between these four prominent research topics rests in how transcultural skills necessitate individuals reevaluate their worldview, compelling them to recognize their membership in a significantly broader and intricate community. This involves numerous occasions using a common language, such as English, and reassessing stereotyped knowledge [43]. Pragmatic instruction requires teachers to pass on knowledge and improve the proficiency of second language learners in suitably utilizing their second languages within specific settings [44]. Furthermore, learners' pragmatic ability development can only be fully actualized through interactions with other individuals who use the target language. An interlocutor's capabilities partially depend on other interlocutors' actions within a specific context [45]. Learners engage in the negotiation and development of their pragmatic competence within the framework of the social context. Furthermore, integrating technology in the design of SLA research has positively impacted the Study Abroad (SA) field. It is now widely acknowledged that technological advancements that address the performance and underlying processes of L2 learners can enhance our comprehension of the influence of internal factors such as individual differences and on L2 development when they interact with external factors [46].

It should be noted that the current study solely examined ICC in language education using the abstracts of research articles. In order to provide a fuller picture of the research in the field, future studies may consider the texts of not only research articles but also works from other genres, such as monographs and book chapters. Also, in the process of data collection, the keywords we chose were limited to "intercultural competence", "intercultural communication competence", and "intercultural communicative competence", which could not cover all the other different terms such as cross-cultural competence, global competence and cross-cultural adaptation. For future studies, more consideration might be given to tracking various related terms and exploring their pivotal points in intercultural studies in language education.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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