

# **Special Issue on Re-envisioning Intercultural Competence: From Static Frameworks to Fluid Practice**

## ***Introduction to the Special Issue***

In an era defined by rapid digital transformation and unprecedented global mobility, the conceptualisation of Intercultural Competence (IC) is undergoing a significant paradigm shift. This special issue brings together a diverse collection of research comprising five insightful articles that move beyond traditional, linear models toward more dynamic, co-constructed, and reciprocal understandings of intercultural engagement.

## ***Structure of the Special Issue***

The contributions in this issue are organised to lead the reader from conceptual reimagining to practical application, culminating in a critical evaluation of assessment. We begin with Theoretical Re-envisioning, where the foundational definitions of IC are interrogated and updated for the digital, social-constructionist era. This is followed by Applied Contexts and Diverse Populations, which provides empirical case studies ranging from the integration of refugee students to longitudinal educator-student trajectories. The issue concludes with Innovative Assessment Methodologies, a section dedicated to the ‘measurement gap’, moving from implicit association experiments to a broad-scale critical review of quantitative instruments used over the last four decades.

## ***Part I: Theoretical Re-envisioning***

The volume opens with a theoretical provocation by Amy B McHugh, who examines the limitations of established process models within the context of Virtual Exchange (VE). By advocating for a social constructionist lens, she argues that IC is not an individual achievement to be acquired, but a relational and situated achievement emerging through explicit negotiation and collaborative meaning-making. Drawing on recent empirical research, the article highlights how peer feedback and collaborative meaning-

making challenge existing IC models and extend their relevance.

### ***Part II: Applied Contexts and Diverse Populations***

This theme of fluidity is further expanded in the second article by Didem Ekici, who applies a reciprocal approach to the integration of refugees and immigrants in higher education. Ekici's work serves as a vital reminder that IC frameworks are only effective when they are shaped by the experiences and worldviews of the students themselves, accounting for power dynamics and the unique 'funds of knowledge' brought by marginalised populations.

Transitioning to longitudinal practice, Mahboubeh Rakhshandehroo in the third article explores the 'symbiotic' nature of IC development. Through a study of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) in Japan from 2021 to 2025, the research demonstrates that intercultural growth is a bidirectional journey, transforming not only the students but also the educators who facilitate these digital spaces. The findings highlight how the asynchronous digital format uniquely supports development in perspective-taking and global citizenship awareness by reducing communication anxiety.

### ***Part III: Innovative Assessment Methodologies***

The final section addresses the persistent challenge of measurement. In the penultimate article, Curtis Chu and Mariko Takahashi introduce a pioneering implicit assessment method using 'free association' to explore changes in cultural knowledge and awareness. Their approach seeks to bypass the conscious mind of respondents, mitigating the social desirability bias and cognitive loading often found in traditional explicit assessments. By providing single-word prompts aligned with VE content, they successfully observed an increase in cultural associations, implying expanded awareness.

The special issue concludes with a comprehensive meta-analysis by Peyman G.P. Sabet, Elaine Chapman, and Jian Zhao. Their paper provides a critical review of 57 quantitative intercultural assessment instruments published between 1980 and 2025. The findings reveal a striking over-reliance on self-report Likert-type surveys, which constitute 98% of the

analysed tools. The authors identify significant flaws in these traditional measures, including social desirability bias, cognitive biases, and a limited ability to assess actual behavioural and cognitive skills. By examining alternative formats like Situational Judgement Tests, they issue a powerful call to action for more innovative, behaviour-based tools that can accurately capture the complexity of the global citizen.

Together, these articles provide a holistic view of the state of the field, challenging how we teach, how we learn, and, crucially, how we measure the intercultural encounters that define our modern world.

**Dr. Peyman G. P. Sabet**



Dr. Peyman G.P. Sabet is a Doctor of Education candidate at the University of Western Australia with a focus on educational psychology and the internationalisation of Australian tertiary education. He also holds a PhD in language and intercultural education from Curtin University where he works as a lecturer in TESOL. Peyman has been involved in language pedagogy and linguistics for more

than twenty-five years, with a wealth of teaching experience and publications in a number of peer-reviewed journals. Peyman's research expertise lies in the areas of Interlanguage Pragmatics, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Competence, Assessment, Vague Language and Second Language Acquisition.

**Dr. Jian Zhao**



Dr. Jian Zhao is an early-career researcher at the Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, where she completed her PhD in December 2022. Specialising in mental health measurement, assessment design, and mixed- methods research, she has contributed to projects on the mental health of Chinese international students in Australia and the prediction of self-harm, suicidal behaviours among young people in Western Australia. Dr. Zhao developed instruments for assessing coping strategies and monitoring mental health

changes, which have been used by other researchers. Her work is published in peer-reviewed journals such as *Frontiers in Psychology*, *Frontiers in Education*, *Behavioural Science*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, and *Social Behaviour and Personality: An International Journal*. Her key research interests include mental health measurement, assessment design, international student mental health, coping strategies, resilience, and the prediction of suicide and self-harm.