

Received: 25 May 2025
Revised: 27 October 2025
Accepted: 3 December 2025
Published: 7 December 2025

Interculture-Based Language Learning in Academic English Writing: A Systematic Literature Review in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) examining the effects of Interculture-Based Language Learning (IBLL) on academic English writing in higher education. Guided by PRISMA 2020, 312 records were retrieved from Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ, resulting in 22 peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2015 and 2025 included in the final analysis. Data were systematically extracted and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. The synthesis identifies three main themes: the influence of IBLL on academic writing development, its pedagogical and affective benefits, and challenges in implementation. The findings indicate that IBLL enhances academic writing quality, including text organization, argumentation, grammatical accuracy, and intercultural awareness, while also promoting student engagement, motivation, confidence, and critical thinking through reflective and collaborative practices. Nevertheless, persistent challenges related to teacher readiness, institutional support, and balancing intercultural integration with formal academic writing standards remain. Overall, this review positions IBLL as a multidimensional pedagogical framework that integrates linguistic, intercultural, and pedagogical dimensions of academic writing in higher education.

Keywords: English Academic Writing, Intercultural-Based Language Learning, Higher Education, Systematic Literature Review, Thematic Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Interculture-Based Language Learning (IBLL) is an instructional approach that emphasizes the integration of intercultural awareness and communication skills within language learning (Haerazi et al., 2023). Rather than focusing solely on linguistic accuracy, IBLL encourages learners to understand how language operates within social, cultural, and global contexts, enabling them to communicate meaningfully across cultures (Aprianoto et al., 2018).

In higher education, IBLL is particularly relevant as students are increasingly required to engage in academic communication within multicultural and international contexts (Ilham, 2024). Academic English learning is no longer limited to mastering grammatical structures and vocabulary but also involves understanding how academic discourse is shaped by cultural norms, rhetorical conventions, and global communication practices (Ilham, 2023). Therefore, integrating intercultural perspectives into academic language learning becomes essential for preparing students to participate effectively in international academic environments (Sutrisno, Abbas, & Muhammad, 2024).

Aprianoto et al. (2018) report that intercultural-oriented language learning significantly enhances students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and communicative adaptability. Yao (2021) further emphasizes that intercultural competence enables language learners to negotiate

meaning more effectively across cultural boundaries, particularly in academic settings. Similarly, Esseili (2025) highlight that IBLL supports students' ability to interact appropriately with diverse academic audiences, making intercultural competence a core component of successful language learning in higher education.

Chen (2018) explains that academic English writing in higher education requires students to demonstrate critical and analytical thinking through coherent argumentation and adherence to formal academic conventions. Clouet (2017) and Ilham (2022) identify grammar accuracy, vocabulary use, and paragraph organization as central elements in academic writing instruction. Furthermore, Rahnuma notes that many academic writing studies continue to prioritize linguistic and structural aspects, often treating writing as a technical skill rather than a culturally situated practice.

Haerazi & Irawan (2020) demonstrate that integrating authentic cultural materials into writing instruction can improve students' ability to adapt their academic texts to diverse audiences. (Garska & Brien, 2019) show that intercultural-oriented writing instruction enhances students' awareness of power, identity, and cultural positioning in academic discourse. In addition, Al Herz (2025) and Whitaker (2024) argue that culturally informed writing pedagogy fosters creativity, critical thinking, and sensitivity to global academic conventions, although its implementation is often limited to specific classroom contexts.

However, despite the growing number of studies on IBLL and academic writing, existing studies remain fragmented and lack a systematic synthesis that specifically focuses on academic English writing in higher education. Most previous research has examined language skills separately or local teaching practices, resulting in limited understanding of how IBLL affects writing structure, coherence, grammar usage, and reader awareness in various academic contexts and over time (Song et al., 2025). As a result, the pedagogical potential and implementation challenges of IBLL in academic writing instruction have not been comprehensively mapped.

To address these gaps, this study aims to systematically review and synthesize existing research on the implementation of Interculture-Based Language Learning in the development of academic English writing skills in higher education. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of studies published between 2015 and 2025, this article contributes by mapping the longitudinal development of research variables, identifying thematic patterns across linguistic, pedagogical, and affective dimensions, and clarifying how intercultural competence functions within academic writing instruction rather than general language learning. The findings are expected to provide theoretical insights for researchers and practical guidance for educators seeking to integrate intercultural approaches into academic writing curricula in higher education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to synthesize empirical evidence on the implementation of Interculture-Based Language Learning (IBLL) in enhancing academic English writing skills in higher education. The SLR approach was selected to ensure a structured, transparent, and replicable review process, which is particularly recommended for mapping research trends and identifying gaps in educational research (Keele, 2007).

The review procedure followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) as proposed by (Page et al., 2021). The use of PRISMA has been widely recognized for improving methodological rigor, enhancing validity, and minimizing bias in systematic review studies (Moher et al., 2009).

Literature Search Strategy

Literature sources were systematically collected from major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ. These databases were selected to ensure comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed research in language education and applied linguistics, in line with best practices in systematic reviews (Papaioannou et al., 2016).

The search focused on studies published between 2015 and 2025, capturing recent developments in intercultural language pedagogy and academic writing instruction in EFL contexts. The search employed combinations of the following keywords:

“Interculture-Based Language Learning,” “intercultural language learning,” “academic English writing,” “EFL writing,” and “higher education”, combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) as recommended by Higgins and Green (2011) to refine search accuracy and relevance.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria comprised:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles written in English.
2. Empirical studies examining IBLL or intercultural approaches in language learning.
3. Research conducted in higher education contexts.
4. Studies addressing academic English writing or writing-related skills.

The exclusion criteria included:

1. Conceptual papers, editorials, opinion pieces, or letters to the editor.
2. Studies focusing solely on speaking or listening skills without a writing component.
3. Research conducted in primary or secondary education contexts.

These criteria were applied to maintain the credibility and relevance of the analyzed data, following established recommendations in systematic review methodology (Pope et al., 2007).

Study Selection Process

The article selection process adhered to the PRISMA framework and was conducted in several stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). The initial database search yielded 312 records. After removing 67 duplicate articles, 245 studies remained for title and abstract screening. During this stage, 177 articles were excluded due to irrelevance to the research focus. Subsequently, 68 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, resulting in 22 empirical studies included in the final.

The detailed selection process is presented in the PRISMA Flow Diagram below.

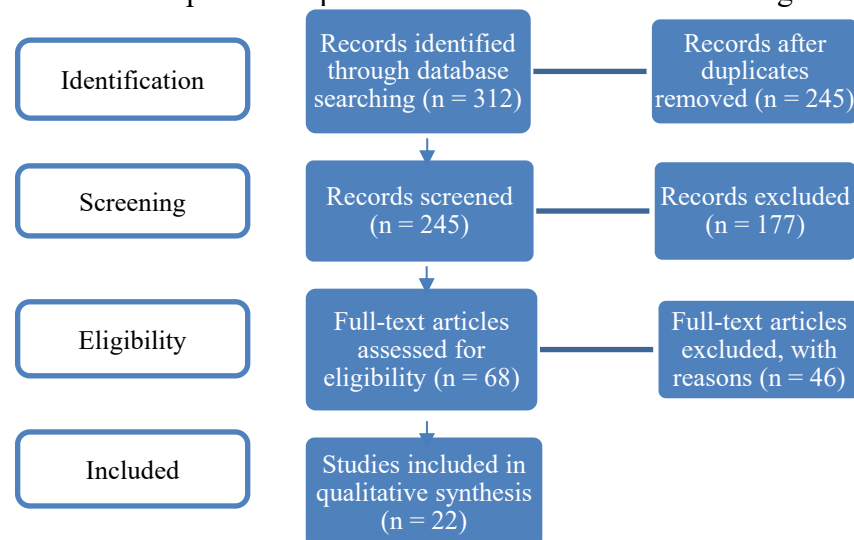


Figure 1. Diagram of the Study Selection Process

Data Extraction

Data extraction was conducted systematically using a structured framework adapted from (Tranfield et al., 2003). Key information recorded from each study included:

1. Author(s) and year of publication
2. Research context and participants
3. Research design and methodological approach
4. Focus of IBLL implementation
5. Key findings related to academic writing outcomes and intercultural competence

This procedure ensured consistency and comparability across the reviewed studies.

Thematic Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the impact of IBLL on academic English writing development. The analysis followed the six-phase framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First, all selected articles were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying recurring concepts related to intercultural integration, writing structure, coherence, grammar development, and pedagogical strategies. Third, these codes were grouped into broader themes based on conceptual similarities. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined by comparing findings across studies to ensure internal consistency. Fifth, themes were clearly defined and labeled to reflect dominant trends. Finally, the themes were synthesized to explain how IBLL contributes to academic writing development in higher education contexts.

Summary of Reviewed Studies

To enhance transparency and facilitate cross-study comparison, a summary table was developed to present key characteristics of the reviewed articles. The table includes information on authors, research context, methodology, focus, and main findings, enabling readers to identify research trends, methodological patterns, and existing gaps within the literature.

Methodological Rigor

To ensure reliability and validity, the review process strictly followed predefined inclusion criteria, systematic coding procedures, and PRISMA reporting standards. The combination of transparent article selection, structured data extraction, and rigorous thematic analysis strengthens the credibility and replicability of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of Interculture-Based Language Learning (IBLL) on the development of academic English writing skills in higher education, as well as to identify its pedagogical and affective benefits and implementation challenges. The results of the studies reviewed show that IBLL contributes significantly to improving the quality of students' academic writing, particularly in terms of text structure, clarity of argumentation, accuracy of language use, and awareness of cross-cultural academic norms. In addition, IBLL has also been shown to strengthen the pedagogical and affective dimensions of learning, including student engagement, motivation, self-confidence, and critical thinking skills. On the other hand, a number of studies reveal structural, pedagogical, and institutional obstacles that affect the effectiveness of IBLL implementation in higher education. Based on the thematic analysis procedure described in the Method section, the findings are organized into three major

themes: (1) the influence of IBLL on academic writing development, (2) the pedagogical and affective benefits of IBLL, and (3) the challenges and limitations in its implementation. The following table presents a grouping of key findings based on the focus of the study, relevant researchers, and identified insights or research variables, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the contributions and limitations of IBLL in academic writing learning.

Table 1. Research Results Related to the Effect of IBLL on Academic Writing Skills

No	Focus	Authors	Research Variables
1	Development of Academic Writing Skills and Linguistic Competence	(Chen, 2018; Du & Liu, 2024; Fitriana, 2023; Haerazi et al., 2018; Haerazi & Irawan, 2020; Liu & Hwang, 2025; Okumura, 2025; Sutrisno, Abbas, & Annury, 2024)	Improvement in text structure, argumentative clarity, academic grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing quality through the integration of intercultural perspectives
2	Intercultural Communicative Competence and Global Academic Identity	(Aulia, 2021; Chen, 2018; Du & Liu, 2024; Fitriana, 2023; McIntosh et al., 2017)	Enhanced awareness of World Englishes, academic norms across cultures, multilingual academic identity, and readiness to participate in global academic discourse
3	Pedagogical Benefits: Engagement and Active Participation	(Ekstam, 2015; Mekonnen et al., 2023; Morganna et al., 2020)	Increased student engagement, collaborative learning practices, active knowledge construction, and cognitive involvement in academic writing classes
4	Affective Benefits: Motivation and Academic Confidence	(Yamauchi et al., 2016)(Aulia, 2021; McIntosh et al., 2017)	Higher learning motivation, increased academic confidence, and improved clarity in expressing academic ideas in writing
5	Development of Critical Thinking and Metacognitive Awareness	(Hendriyani et al., 2019; Mekonnen et al., 2023; Sutrisno, Abbas, & Annury, 2024)	Strengthening of critical thinking skills, metacognitive awareness, and reflective writing practices through intercultural and project-based learning
6	Balancing Intercultural Content and Academic English Standards	(Broido & Rubin, 2020; Haerazi et al., 2023)	The need to balance intercultural integration with formal academic English conventions to ensure compliance with global academic standards
7	Pedagogical and Instructor-Related Challenges	(Aulia, 2021; Laborda et al., 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021)	Limited intercultural pedagogical competence, insufficient digital literacy, and difficulties in adapting IBLL to online learning environments
8	Institutional and Socio-Cultural Constraints	(Del Rocío et al., 2018; Rostianingsih & Ubaidillah, 2024; Souza & Coutinho, 2025)	Institutional resistance, lecturers' readiness, diverse student sociocultural backgrounds, and the risk of symbolic rather than transformative IBLL implementation

Research on Intercultural Language Learning (IBLL) in English academic writing in higher education shows significant development over time. This approach has proven effective not only in improving the linguistic quality of students' writing, such as grammar, coherence, and text organization, but also in developing intercultural communicative competence relevant

to the global academic context. As it has developed, the focus of IBLL research has expanded from strengthening rhetorical and academic aspects to pedagogical and affective dimensions, including student engagement, motivation, confidence, and critical thinking skills. In addition, recent research also highlights the challenges of implementing IBLL related to teacher readiness, institutional support, and the diversity of students' socio-cultural backgrounds. The following mind map illustrates the main developments in research variables related to the application of IBLL in academic writing instruction during the period 2015–2025.

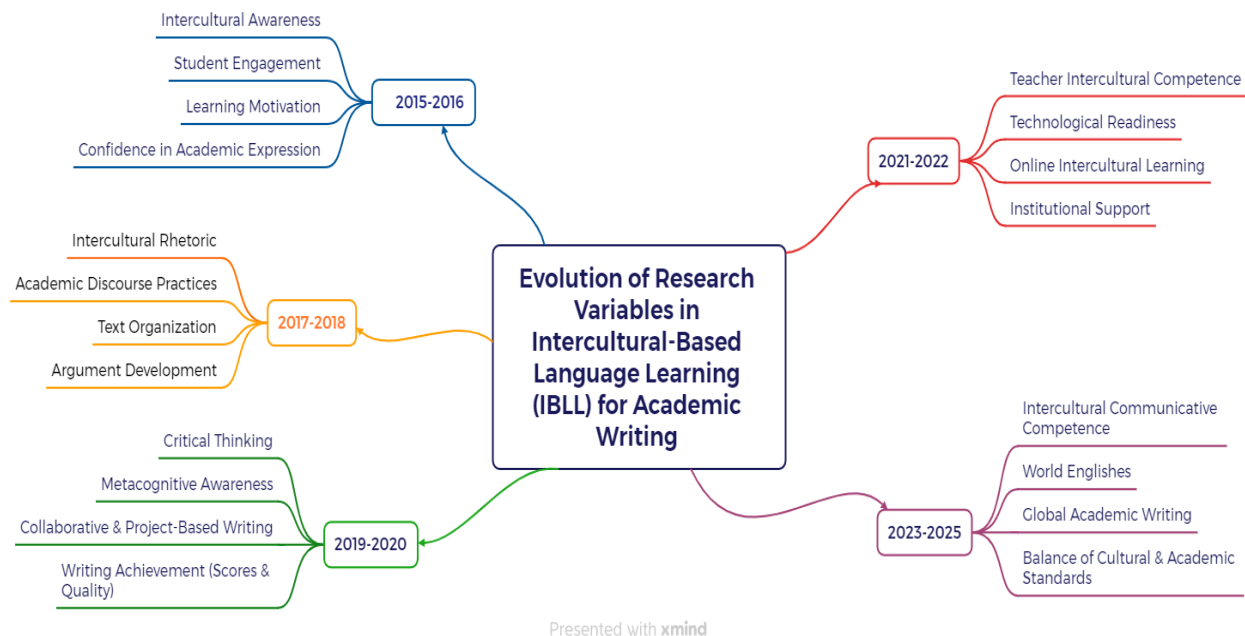


Figure 1. Evolution of Research Variables in Intercultural-Based Language Learning (IBLL) for Academic Writing

Discussion

Building on the synthesized findings, this discussion interprets how IBLL influences academic English writing beyond isolated linguistic outcomes. Unlike previous studies that examined intercultural competence, affective factors, or writing performance separately, this review demonstrates that IBLL operates as an integrated pedagogical framework shaping linguistic quality, intercultural awareness, and learner engagement simultaneously.

The synthesis of findings summarized in Table 1 suggests that Intercultural-Based Language Learning (IBLL) consistently contributes to the development of academic English writing skills in higher education across linguistic, cognitive, and affective dimensions. Across the reviewed studies, IBLL is associated with improvements in text organization, clarity of argumentation, grammatical accuracy, and academic vocabulary, alongside increased awareness of intercultural academic norms. Beyond linguistic outcomes, the findings also indicate that IBLL enhances students' engagement, motivation, confidence, and critical thinking through collaborative, reflective, and intercultural writing practices. At the same time, the synthesis reveals recurring challenges related to pedagogical readiness, institutional support, and the need to balance intercultural exploration with formal academic writing conventions. These findings are organized into three overarching themes: the influence of IBLL on academic writing development, its pedagogical and affective benefits, and the challenges and limitations of its implementation in higher education contexts.

The developmental patterns summarized in Figure 1 reflect a broader theoretical shift in how academic writing is conceptualized within Intercultural-Based Language Learning (IBLL)

research. Rather than treating academic writing as a purely linguistic skill, the reviewed studies increasingly position writing as a socially situated, intercultural, and cognitively mediated practice. The progression from early emphases on intercultural exposure and rhetorical awareness toward the integration of critical thinking, metacognitive reflection, and affective engagement indicates an expansion of IBLL from language-oriented instruction to holistic academic literacy development. Furthermore, the recent attention to institutional readiness, teacher competence, and policy support suggests that IBLL has entered a more mature phase of inquiry, where sustainability and contextual feasibility become central concerns. This evolution highlights IBLL's potential not only as an instructional approach, but as an integrative pedagogical framework that connects linguistic, intercultural, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions of academic writing in higher education.

The influence of Interculture-Based Language Learning (IBLL) on the development of academic English writing skills in higher education significantly influences the development of academic English writing skills in higher education by fostering intercultural communicative competence while improving students' linguistic abilities. Du & Liu (2025) emphasize that the integration of intercultural elements enables students to navigate the plurality of English usage in global academic contexts and strengthens the position of multilingual students as users of Englishes worldwide. Chen, (2018) and Fitriana (2023) show that understanding variations in academic norms, rhetorical styles, and cross-cultural discursive practices directly contributes to improvements in text structure, clarity of argumentation, and accuracy of language use in academic writing.

Furthermore, several studies such as Sutrisno et al. (2024), Okumura (2025) and Liu & Hwang (2025) found that the application of IBLL not only enriches the rhetorical dimensions of writing but also improves core linguistic competencies, including academic grammar, vocabulary, and critical thinking integrated into writing practice. Haerazi & Irawan (2020) and Haerazi et al. (2018) provide empirical evidence that students taught using the IBLL model achieve higher writing quality and scores compared to conventional learning. Broido & Rubin (2020) and Haerazi et al. (2023) emphasize that the effectiveness of IBLL will be optimal if the strengthening of intercultural dimensions is balanced with mastery of formal academic English standards, so that students are able to produce academic texts that meet the demands of the global academic context.

Based on these research results, the influence of IBLL on the development of academic English writing skills in higher education is substantive and multidimensional. IBLL not only improves technical aspects of writing, such as language accuracy and text organization, but also transforms the way students understand, construct, and produce academic discourse in a global context. The integration of cultural perspectives enables students to write with a broader audience awareness, manage rhetorical style variations, and strategically utilize linguistic and cultural resources in academic writing. Thus, IBLL can be understood as a pedagogical approach that holistically develops students' academic writing skills, covering linguistic, cognitive, and discursive dimensions, thereby preparing them to meet the demands of academic writing in an increasingly multicultural and international higher education environment.

1. The advantages found in the application of IBLL in learning academic writing in tertiary institutions

The application of Intercultural-Based Language Learning (IBLL) in academic writing has long been recognized as contributing to the strengthening of students' pedagogical and affective dimensions in higher education. Ekstam (2015) shows that cultural and academic meetings in writing classes encourage active student engagement and reflection on cross-cultural academic practices. In line with this, McIntosh et al. (2017) emphasize that the intercultural rhetoric approach helps students build awareness of cultural relations and academic

identity, which has an impact on increasing confidence and readiness to participate in multilingual academic discourse (Aulia, 2021).

In addition to engagement and self-confidence, IBLL also has a positive effect on student motivation and cognitive development. Yamauchi et al. (2016) reported that cross-cultural interactions in writing instruction enhance learning motivation and students' clarity in expressing academic ideas. Hendriyani et al. (2019) added that IBLL promotes critical thinking skills and metacognitive awareness through project-based learning and cross-cultural reflection. The findings of Morganna et al. (2020) show positive affective, cognitive, and behavioral attitudes towards IBLL in collaborative practices, while Mekonnen et al. (2023) emphasize the strengthening of students' cognitive engagement and reflective readiness in culture-based academic writing learning.

In summary, these findings indicate that IBLL functions not only as a pedagogical approach, but also as an affective framework that supports the quality of academic writing experiences in higher education. Through cross-cultural interaction, critical reflection, and collaborative practice, IBLL consistently improves student engagement, motivation, confidence, and critical thinking. These dimensions are interrelated in shaping a participatory and reflective learning environment, which ultimately strengthens students' readiness to engage actively and confidently in English academic writing discourse.

2. Challenges and Limitations of Implementing Intercultural-Based Language Learning (IBLL) in Academic Writing in Higher Education

The application of Intercultural-Based Language Learning (IBLL) in academic writing faces various structural and pedagogical obstacles in higher education settings. A study by Laborda et al. (2020) shows that globalization and cultural differences require teachers to master complex cross-cultural strategies, but many teachers still find it difficult to adapt their methods to their students' backgrounds. This challenge is exacerbated by limited pedagogical competence and technological literacy among language teachers, as found by Aulia (2021), which emphasizes the need for teacher training in effectively integrating cultural approaches. Furthermore, research Nugroho et al. (2021) reveals that the adaptation of online learning during the pandemic has created new obstacles to the implementation of IBLL, particularly in maintaining engagement and intercultural feedback. These obstacles indicate that the implementation of IBLL requires institutional support, including teacher professional development and a sustainable culture-based curriculum.

In addition to technical constraints and teacher competence, limitations in the implementation of IBLL also arise from institutional resistance and the diversity of students' social contexts. Rostianingsih & Ubaidillah (2024) highlight the existence of resistance from the academic community towards cross-cultural critical approaches because they are considered to challenge established academic norms. On the other hand, a study by Del Rocío et al. (2018) found that students' perceptions of meaningful learning are highly dependent on teaching strategies and lecturers' readiness to link local and global cultures. Furthermore, an article by Souza & Coutinho (2025) emphasizes the importance of critical and reflective research on cross-cultural teaching practices so that the implementation of IBLL is not only symbolic but also transformative. Thus, the success of IBLL greatly depends on the active involvement of teachers, institutional policy support, and the ability to adapt to the socio-cultural dynamics of students in the era of global education.

Based on the results of the aforementioned research, the main challenges in implementing Intercultural Language Learning (IBLL) in academic writing in higher education include limitations in the pedagogical competence and technological literacy of teachers in managing complex cross-cultural learning, especially in an online context. In addition, institutional resistance and the lack of systematic integration of IBLL into the curriculum have resulted in

its implementation tending to be partial. Obstacles also arise from the diversity of students' socio-cultural backgrounds, which requires an adaptive approach, while lecturers' readiness to link local and global cultures is still limited. Therefore, the success of IBLL requires institutional policy support, strengthening of teacher capacity, and contextual and reflective learning design.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesizes 25 empirical studies published between 2015 and 2025 and demonstrates that Intercultural-Based Language Learning (IBLL) functions as a multidimensional pedagogical approach that enhances academic English writing in higher education. The key findings reveal that IBLL improves linguistic quality, including text organization, argumentation, and language accuracy, while simultaneously strengthening intercultural competence, student engagement, motivation, confidence, and critical thinking. This review contributes to the literature by integrating linguistic, pedagogical, affective, and institutional dimensions of IBLL and by mapping the evolution of research trends over a decade, thereby positioning IBLL as a comprehensive academic literacy framework rather than a solely language-focused intervention.

Practically, the findings suggest that effective IBLL implementation requires systematic instructional design, continuous teacher professional development, curriculum alignment, and institutional policy support to balance intercultural exploration with formal academic writing standards. Finally, future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches, explore IBLL across diverse disciplines and learning modalities, and examine teacher readiness, assessment practices, and institutional frameworks to ensure the sustainable integration of IBLL in higher education academic writing instruction.

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