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Literature Review on “Cross-Cultural Communication in Tourism: How Travel Experiences Shape Intercultural Perspectives through Tourism Discourse”

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Abstract

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Abstract: The study aims to analyze selected academic literature on tourism and intercultural communication to understand the role of tourism experiences in shaping intercultural views. The study does not focus on tourists' or hosts' lived reality; rather, it examines the empirical content of academic literature to understand how the concept of tourism is represented as a context for intercultural learning, self-reflection, communication, mediation and competence development, as well as for misunderstanding, stereotyping, inequality and power relations. The study uses a qualitative research design based on a literature review (Integrative) and qualitative document-based analysis (Thematic analysis). A systematic search and selection process was used to select a corpus of 16 substantive scholarly publications, and the literature was analyzed theoretically using Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model and critical intercultural communication.

The findings reveal four interconnected ways in which travel experiences are conceptualized in literature: tourism as a venue for intercultural learning and reflection; encounters in tourism as processes of negotiation and mediation; tourism as a complex space marked by stereotypes, inequalities, and symbolic violence; and travel experiences as opportunities to build intercultural competence. Overall, this suggests that tourism does not automatically lead to positive intercultural exchange. Instead, its ability to promote intercultural understanding relies on factors like interaction, reflection, interpretation, mediation, and ethical engagement. Structural inequalities and power imbalances can limit this potential. The study provides an important analysis of the discursive construction of tourism as a place of intercultural learning and of tension, inequality, and contestation.

Keywords: tourism; intercultural communication; travel experiences; intercultural communicative competence; intercultural learning; tourism discourse; cultural mediation; power and inequality

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1. Introduction

This study explores the conceptualization of intercultural approaches to tourism in the academic literature, with a particular focus on interculturalism and the role of travel experiences. Rather than examining tourists' and hosts' lived experiences, the study uses selected academic literature as empirical data to explore how tourism is presented as a space for intercultural learning, perspective-taking, communication, and cultural encounter. It also considers the issues and conflicts found in the literature and how these have been discussed in relation to tourism, such as misunderstanding, stereotyping, inequality, and power relations. In this manner, the study views tourism not only as a form of travel or leisure but also as a space where ideas and conceptions about culture, communication, and intercultural relations are shaped and negotiated.

Tourism is a social phenomenon in the modern world, driven by people's desire to escape their daily lives and enjoy leisure activities, services, and experiences planned for their entertainment. As stated by Albu (2015), tourism has always been associated with the growth of the "spatial and temporal horizon of knowledge" (p. 8), highlighting that traveling involves movement and encounter, the knowing of the beauties of nature. The definition of tourism by Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) is also very similar: "Tourism is primarily a social activity including a temporary migration of people to places outside their everyday surroundings and including pleasure deriving from the participation in various leisure activities, facilities and services provided to cater to tourists' needs " (p. 77). Beyond its economic significance, tourism has been defined as a particular type of society-to-society encounter. Based on previous research in the field of sociology of tourism, Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) state that tourism "may be defined as a special form of indirect contact between two societies which may be comprehended according to the following scheme: communicator message–receiver" (p. 78), so that the primary focus of tourism is the communication between tourists and the host destination. In this perspective, tourism rests on the encounter and communication between people from emissive countries and those from receptive countries. It provides new opportunities to meet people from other countries and to share values and experiences with them. Tourism has, therefore, been lauded for bringing people together, increasing tolerance, and exposing people to other cultures, and even for promoting global development and peace (Dujmović & Vitasović, 2022).

Given the importance of interaction in this context, intercultural communication has been a critical lens for analyzing tourism. Albu (2015) states that "communication is involved in all social life acts, being the constituent factor of creation and of cultural processes", and she believes that in tourism "quality of communication is related to the level of the culture involved and to the degree of improvement of the means by which it is done". Importantly, "good knowledge of other cultures is a necessary step to get to recognize the nature of these differences and to relate to others through attitudes of understanding and tolerance which are premises for genuine intercultural dialogue, especially in the tourism industry". Intercultural communication experiences in tourism "help tourists to know and to appreciate other cultures, but also help them

to a better understanding of their own culture", indicating that travelling may also have a reflexive effect on the tourists' understanding of themselves and their own culture (Albu, 2015, p. 7).

However, tourism cannot be seen solely as a positive, harmonious cultural meeting. Other factors that can influence tourism experiences include inequalities, commercialism, stereotyping, and power dynamics. While in policy and promotional language, tourism is frequently seen as a way of intercultural dialogue, Ferraz and Serpa (2021) claim that there is an "inescapably complex, sometimes paradoxical and contradictory" relationship between tourism and culture (p. 39). They show how idealistic views of tourism as a bridge between cultures coexist with the patterns of symbolic violence, stereotyping, and the reproduction of global inequalities. Thus, tourism serves not only as a site of intercultural understanding but also of miscommunication, commercialization, and discord.

Therefore, this study explores the academic research representation of tourism as a context for intercultural communication. It does not presuppose that travel will inevitably lead to cross-cultural understanding; rather, it explores how scholarly texts define the potential for learning, reflection, communication, and competence-building through travel, as well as the potential for stereotyping, inequality, and misunderstanding. The study examines the emphasis, questioning, and/or unstated notions of culture, intercultural encounters, and tourism found in the academic literature as discourse.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The study conducts a critical, literature-based analysis of the representation of tourism and travel experiences in academic research on intercultural communication and competence. The study builds on a literature review as a research method (Snyder, 2019). It treats the literature as a set of scholarly texts, as empirical data, examining how it conceptualizes tourism as a place for cross-cultural learning, intercultural perspective-shifting, and communicative challenge.

There are two purposes. The first goal of the study is to map and synthesize the predominant approaches to framing tourism-related experiences in the peer-reviewed and professional literature, with a focus on tourism's relationship to intercultural communication, intercultural competence, or cross-cultural learning. This includes conceptual and theoretical papers, empirical studies of tourist-host encounters, and applied research on training and education in tourism contexts. Second, the study is critical in questioning the assumptions underlying such representations: What kinds of intercultural relations, learning processes, and communicative competence(s) can become imaginable, normal, or problematic in this body of research?

Ferraz and Serpa (2021) have used document analysis to explore tourism-related discourses as "regimes of truth" (p. 41) that shape specific conceptions of interaction and coexisting cultures,

from which we draw inspiration for our analysis. By analyzing academic articles, book chapters, and reviews as discourse, this study explores the potential and constraints they impose on tourism as a site of intercultural development, and the conflicting issues they introduce between (ideally) speaking with others and structural inequality. So the interest is not in particular destinations or policies, but in discussing the role of academic discourse in framing interculturality in tourism.

1.2 Research Question and Scope

To meet these goals, the thesis has focused on a single question:

1. How does selected scholarly literature on tourism and intercultural communication conceptualize the role of travel experiences in shaping intercultural perspectives?

This question focuses on how travelers and hosts conceptualize travel experiences, not on their actual travel experiences. Academic articles are used to examine how they describe, theorize, and consider the nature of tourism encounters as opportunities for intercultural learning, perspective-taking, and/or conflict, and how they connect with constructs such as intercultural communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity, and cultural intelligence. The thesis does not present tourism as a self-evident 'bridge' between cultures, but rather examines the types of bridges, boundaries, and asymmetries envisioned in the research literature.

The scope of the study is delimited in several ways. The corpus comprises empirical studies that, represented in peer-reviewed journals and scholarly book chapters, address a topic that is central to the study of tourism or travel, explicitly focus on intercultural communication or intercultural competence, and are freely available in full text in the English language via open-access journals, institutional repositories, or other freely accessible sources. The time frame used is primarily 2000 to 2026. The period 2000-2026 was selected as a practical and theoretically relevant boundary rather than as an absolute exclusion rule. Publications before 2000 were included when they provide basic conceptualizations of the links between tourism and intercultural communication. The study focuses substantively on those contexts where the relationship between host and guest, the cultural dimension of tourism, study abroad, and language-mediated encounters are prominent. Research on different areas (cultural, heritage, religious, and student mobility) and types of tourism is welcome in the corpus, as are texts that explicitly focus on developing intercultural perspectives through travel experiences. Intercultural communication and language education contributions not directly related to tourism are included if they are used to frame or interpret tourism-related encounters.

1.3 Research Method and Rationale

In terms of research design, the study employs an integrative literature review. The overall research design of the study is an integrative literature review and a qualitative approach.

Integrative reviews are not intended to provide an exhaustive review of a phenomenon, as in medical systematic reviews, but to synthesize and critique a range of conceptual, theoretical, and empirical research to produce a more complete understanding of it. The integrative literature review, as described by Torraco (2005), examines, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic to produce new frameworks and perspectives. Likewise, Snyder (2019) suggests that literature reviews can serve as a separate research method when they incorporate existing literature as data sources and apply a systematic process that is explicit in the literature search, selection, and analysis.

In line with these guidelines, the present study uses a three-step procedure to construct its corpus. Academic databases (such as Scopus and Web of Science), open-access platforms, and journal websites are searched with different keyword combinations (such as 'tourism AND intercultural communication', 'tourism AND intercultural competence', and 'travel experiences AND intercultural') to identify potentially relevant publications. Second, titles and abstracts are reviewed against the inclusion criteria (scholarly publication, tourism as a central theme, intercultural focus, full text in English), and those that meet them are downloaded and read in full. Third, the corpus is further expanded through backward and forward citation tracking, citation lists of key texts, and more recent works cited by influential publications such as Ferraz and Serpa (2021) and Albu (2015).

Selected texts are then analyzed using a mixture of document analysis and latent thematic analysis, based on a discourse-analytical, constructionist theory. Building on Bowen (2009), document analysis is a "systematic procedure for the review or evaluation of documents," and data are "examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (p. 27). To identify and interpret patterns (themes) in qualitative data, Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a six-phase framework that offers a flexible approach to familiarisation, coding, theme development, and theme refinement. The analysis of this thesis is based on a latent approach that goes beyond explicit statements to examine the concepts and assumptions of culture, competence, and learning that underpin the conceptualization of tourism experiences.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and critical intercultural communication are the theories adopted for thematic coding during the analysis. As summarised by Hoff (2020), Byram's model of ICC focuses on knowledge of self and others; attitudes of curiosity and openness; and skills of interpreting/relating, discovery/interaction, and critical cultural awareness as dimensions of competence. This recent criticism of the ICC emphasizes the need to be cautious about a static understanding of national culture and a too-harmonious understanding of intercultural contact, focusing instead on conflict, power, and plural identities. The coding of themes reflects these theoretical tensions. It focuses on what is imagined in the texts about the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical awareness that one would be expected to acquire as a

tourist, as well as on the problematization or naturalization of inequalities and cultural essentialism.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study represents an attempt to systematically synthesize three streams of studies, which are usually approached individually:

1. The study of tourist–host encounter and socio-cultural impacts of tourism
2. The study of intercultural communication and intercultural education on communicative competence and intercultural learning
3. Critical studies on power, inequality, and symbolic violence in intercultural relations.

Although several studies have explored intercultural communication in tourism, some have been limited to particular destinations, training requirements, or single case studies, and numerous researchers note that the subject is “not extensively studied” and needs further conceptualization.

One aim of this study is to address that gap by reading academic texts as discourse. It provides a theoretically informed and critically reflective overview of the construction of tourism as a field of intercultural communication in academic texts, uncovering the imagined potential of tourism as intercultural education, as well as the structural constraints and tensions surrounding that imagination and embedded in the academic discourse on the subject. By doing so, it emphasizes academic discourse as a tool for setting expectations regarding tourism's contribution to intercultural understanding, without assuming that such expectations exist. Methodologically, the study also demonstrates how an integrative, qualitative, literature-based approach can be applied in the field of language and intercultural communication to generate new insights from existing research, especially when fieldwork is difficult due to practical and/or ethical concerns. The study should provide a clear and credible narrative of the major themes and assumptions in the literature by documenting search strategies, inclusion criteria, and analytic procedures.

Finally, the findings are intended to inform future empirical research, educational practice, and professional reflection. The synthesis pinpoints the intercultural potential of tourism as idealized, challenged, or overlooked, and suggests potential areas for further qualitative or quantitative research. An evaluation of scholarly representations can also assist practitioners and educators in language teaching and tourism in developing training and curricular programs that better acknowledge the opportunities and challenges of tourism as an intercultural competence and global citizenship program.

2. Literature Review

This chapter examines the scholarly literature on tourism and intercultural communication and how it conceptualizes the role of tourism experiences from an intercultural perspective, contextualizing the present study's focus on empirical evidence from scholarly literature on interculturalism and tourism.

The first part introduces basic concepts of intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and clarifies how these concepts have been adapted to the tourism field. The second part explores the theoretical aspects of travel, study abroad, and tourism as possible enablers of intercultural learning and perspective change, as well as the barriers identified in empirical studies. The third section focuses on cultural sensitivity, ethical relations, and social interaction in tourism, especially highlighting recognition, respect, and reciprocity in tourism encounters. The chapter also outlines the conceptual lacuna this study addresses. Although some research has addressed tourism as an intercultural space, it has not always examined how scholarly discourse conceptualizes it. The methodological procedures for collecting and analyzing the corpus are explained in the following chapter.

2.1 Intercultural Communication and ICC in Tourism Studies

Core concepts from intercultural education

Byram's (1997) influential research on ICC offers a tripartite model of ICC attitudes, knowledge and skills, and critical cultural awareness for helping individuals bridge their own and others' meanings in intercultural communication. Attitudes are characterized as curiosity or openness and a “readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and a belief about one's own.” At the same time, knowledge is related to social groups and processes of interaction (Byram, 1997, p. 34). The skills are divided into the skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction, and ICC is a critical cultural awareness defined as the capacity to “evaluate, critically and according to explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures”(Byram, 1997, p. 63). Hoff (2020) discusses the development of ICC conceptualizations and points out that although Byram's model of ICC has been widely influential, subsequent research has emphasized multilingualism, power, and criticality, arguing for a dynamic, context-sensitive nature of ICC rather than a fixed trait.

Student and staff experiences with foreigners have also become a source of interest in ICC development in other industries, including tourism and hospitality (Gonçalves, 2014; Naqeeb, 2023). Gonçalves (2014) states that to shift the focus from teaching about culture to engaging with culture, tasks must be designed to enable students to negotiate and interpret meaning with actual or simulated visitors and to critically rethink their own preconceptions. Similarly, Naqeeb (2023) demonstrates that language learners can become aware of cultural differences by using intercultural tourism brochures to "dispel stereotypes" and to practice meaning mediation in the process of ICC development (p. 1).

Intercultural communication in tourism enterprises

In tourism research, intercultural communication is usually defined as the interaction between actors who consider themselves culturally different and whose communication is influenced by those differences (Albu, 2015; Jack et al., 2020). Tourism contexts are especially prone to intercultural communication problems because the service encounter is both standardized and personal: service providers must adhere to service protocols while meeting the cultural expectations of diverse visitors. Albu says that misunderstandings may be caused by the lack of ability to communicate in the partner's language, by the norms of politeness, and by differences in host-guest role expectations (Albu, 2015, p. 9-12).

Empirical studies of tourism workplaces support this picture. Drozdova et al. (2023), conducted in small tourism enterprises in Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden, identified intercultural challenges in internal and external communication faced by staff, such as "language barriers, differences in communication styles, cultural and gender issues, and differing perceptions of rules and regulations"(p. 73). They find no explicit approach to intercultural communication in addressing these problems within the consciousness of managers and employees in tourism companies, indicating the need for additional explicit ICC-oriented training and reflection among staff in tourism companies (Drozdova et al., 2023). Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020), in the field of hospitality education, found that Thai undergraduate hotel interns experienced difficulties with intercultural communication at an in-house training hotel, especially when communicating with guests whose language and expectations differed greatly from their own. Using Byram's ICC framework, they report that students/interns ranked five ICC components from highest to lowest as follows:

Table 1: Five ICC competencies perceived by Thai interns

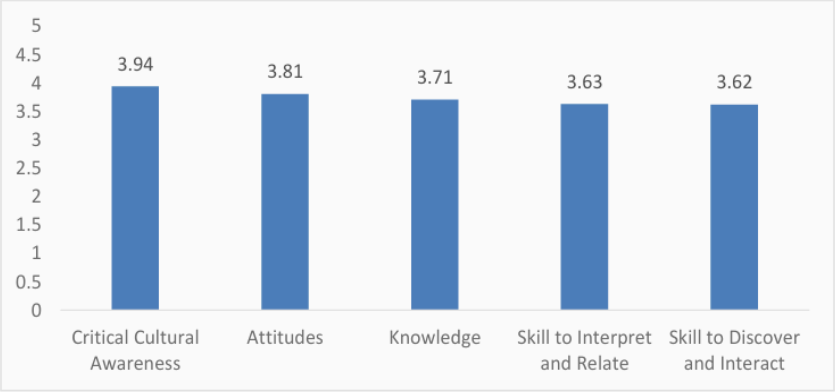

Table 1 summarizes the five ICC competencies as perceived by Thai interns, reported by Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020). According to this, the competencies most needed by hotel interns to meet ICC challenges were encountered the most were:
(i) critical cultural awareness ($\bar{x}$ = 3.94), (ii) attitudes ($\bar{x}$ = 3.81), (iii) knowledge ($\bar{x}$ = 3.71), (iv) skills to interpret and relate ($\bar{x}$ = 3.63), and (v) skills to discover and interact ($\bar{x}$ = 3.62), respectively. To address the cultural awareness challenge, they had to invest time into gaining

knowledge and understanding of visitors' cultural diversity, accept cultural differences, and be ready to adapt to diversity. Second, the strategy for the attitude challenge was to help them adopt an open-minded attitude toward cultural differences so they could operate without bias. Third, the approach to the knowledge challenge was to seek assistance from fellow participants who could communicate in Chinese and to use body language. Fourth, they understood and solved problems and planned how to solve them. Lastly, their approach to identifying and resolving problems was to observe how successful peers solved problems and to model their approach for future problems. The authors suggest that ICC needs to be incorporated in hospitality education not as a theoretical concept, but as tasks that reflect actual service encounters in the industry and require reflection on language use, non-verbal communication, and cultural expectations (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020).

2.2 Travel Experiences as Sites of Intercultural Learning

Study abroad and educational tourism.

A significant body of research treats study abroad and other forms of educational travel as privileged contexts for ICC development (Sobkowiak, 2019; Tarchi & Surian, 2021; Stivriņa & Dzerviniks, 2026). According to Sobkowiak's (2019) interview study with Polish students, the impact of time abroad on the development of intercultural competence is not automatic. However, gains occur when students engage with local communities and reflect on their experiences (p. 681-682). He points out that, for some participants, it was a transformative experience that challenged their stereotypes and fostered empathy. In contrast, others were relatively isolated in national peer groups, where intercultural learning was limited (Sobkowiak, 2019).

Likewise, Tarchi and Surian (2021) report that the development of ICC among study abroad students is influenced by structured reflection and assistance. While being in another country may indeed be a necessary but not sufficient condition, there is a need to scaffold critical incidents and offer guided reflection to develop more complex intercultural understandings and perceptions through travel experiences (Tarchi & Surian, 2021). Additionally, educational tourism research indicates that such learning-related travel can promote transformative learning when participants critically reflect on their cultural frames of reference and self-concept in the context of new cultural experiences (Stivriņa & Dzerviniks, 2026). For example, within the field of adult education, educational tourism is defined by Stivriņa & Dzerviniks (2026) as a tool for “transformative learning” (p. 7), as travel may inspire adults to reconsider their beliefs when it is facilitated and discussed with them.

Tourism work and everyday encounters

Beyond formal education, there is a developing strand of scholarship that examines the potential of the everyday nature of tourism work and of tourist–host encounters as sites of intercultural learning and relationship-building. This literature is a reminder that tourism is a “social

phenomenon" in which societies are connected and communicate more than they trade. Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) emphasize that tourism "may be defined as a special form of indirect contact between two societies," which can be understood through the communicative schema "communicator–message–receiver" (p. 77). They note that "the primary focus of tourism is the communication between tourists and the host destination" (p.77) and that establishing contact with people from other countries and cultures is a very important motivation for traveling. At the same time, they caution that tourism encounters "represent a potential minefield full of difficulties, which occur mainly due to cultural differences in communication and rules of social behavior" (Dujmović & Vitasović, 2022, p. 78). Their analysis highlights how day-to-day social interaction among people in tourism (visitors, employees, and locals) can facilitate both the development of shared appreciation and miscommunication when communicative norms differ.

Szabó's (2025) study of foreign tourism professionals in Japan shows how tourism work itself constitutes a form of intercultural mediation that shapes visitors' experiences and local–global relationships. These individuals are referred to as "key agents of bridging social capital within the tourism industry" who "serve as cultural mediators, interpreters of Japanese traditions, social norms and practices for international visitors, and cultural brokers between the local community and international visitors" (Szabó, 2025, p. 101). These organizations are largely non-institutionalized, but still play a vital role in promoting intercultural understanding and developing more sustainable tourism in Japan. According to Szabó (2025), everyday work, in the form of guiding, interpreting, and narrating, can inspire professionals to develop more complex intercultural perspectives and establish new networks in relationships beyond a transactional service.

Studies on tourism development in developing countries also view the phenomenon as more than just a source of income. In these contexts, tourism is not merely an economic sector but a tool for the empowerment and cultural exchange of local communities and for environmental conservation (Oyedele & Akwen, 2025). Drawing on studies of community-based tourism, Oyedele and Akwen (2025) report that community participation in tourism planning and management can promote intercultural understanding and safeguard culture. Meanwhile, they emphasize the importance of ethical and professional tourism practices and community involvement to ensure that intercultural interactions are not rooted in hierarchy and exclusion, but are inclusive and equitable.

The sum of these studies suggests that everyday tourism practices and experiences, such as guiding, hosting, or community tourism, are significant settings in which intercultural communication is performed, managed, and acquired. Tourism professionals and residents are not merely background elements in the tourist's experience; they help create the meanings

attributed to places and people, and they are also affected by repeated, place-based interactions with culturally diverse others.

2.3 Cultural Sensitivity, Ethics and Power in Tourism Encounters

Tourism scholarship has come a long way from "cultural awareness" to other relational and ethical concepts, such as cultural sensitivity. In their conceptual paper on Arctic tourism, Viken et al. (2021) explicitly draw on the “phenomenologically informed model of intercultural sensitivity” proposed by Bennett (1986), which defines cultural sensitivity as a means of engaging with cultural diversity (p. 3). Bennett (1986) suggests that developing cultural sensitivity requires not only knowledge and skills, but also self-reflection that results in new attitudes, understanding, and awareness. The more people can identify and assign non-evaluative meanings to various cultural nuances and viewpoints, the more culturally sensitive they are, says Bennett. Improving intercultural sensitivity thus means acquiring new competence as well as developing consciousness (Bennett, 1986).

Drawing on Bennett’s distinction between ethnocentric and ethnorelative orientations to difference, Viken et al. (2021) argue that tourism has historically been marked by ethnocentric practices such as “assimilation, stereotyping and appropriation” of Indigenous cultures (p. 4). They highlight, for instance, the fact that ‘romantic and essentializing conceptions of the Arctic, its people and their livelihoods are detrimental on many fronts, not least because they mask the effects of colonialism and the Anthropocene in the Arctic’ (p. 2). To move beyond these dynamics, they propose an ethnorelative framework centered on “recognition, respect and reciprocity,” suggesting “that recognition should be seen as a baseline for ethnorelative, culturally sensitive ways of encountering cultural difference” (p. 6). Cultural sensitivity is not something that can be completed or finalized in tourism, but rather something that is negotiated and continuously exercised across different processes and becoming (Viken et al., 2021).

A more general discussion of the ethical dimensions of tourism and intercultural communication further emphasizes the ambivalences of tourism encounters. Ferraz and Serpa (2021) describe the connection between tourism and cultural interaction as paradoxical, arguing that, on the one hand, tourism can contribute to cross-cultural exchange, understanding, and empathy; on the other, it can lead to superficial contacts, stereotyping, and the commercialization of culture. They recommend sustainable tourism in which practices promote respect for cultural diversity and space for true dialogue between host and guest, without reinforcing unequal power relations (Ferraz & Serpa, 2021).

The same ethical issues are promoted in tourism in developing contexts. Oyedele and Akwen (2025) argue that ethical and professional tourism practices, including community involvement, transparency and respect for local customs, are crucial for promoting intercultural understanding and ensuring that tourism benefits host communities. Their analysis highlights that intercultural

communication in tourism is invariably associated with issues of justice, representation and voice: whose voice or voices do the stories play, who decides, who benefits.

Taken together, these papers argue that the term “intercultural communication” or “competence” now often carries overtones of colonial history and power relations in today's tourism scholarship. Recognizing cultural sensitivity as a skill set is merely a starting point; the approach is an ethical attitude toward otherness that involves awareness of past injustices and a willingness to engage in a "reciprocity" in tourism interactions.

2.4. Literature-Based Perspective

The literature reviewed in this chapter is relevant not only for its descriptions of tourism and intercultural communication but also for the ways academic research shapes the meaning of travel experiences. The chosen scholarship focuses on the potential for intercultural learning and self-reflection, mediation, competence-building, and ethical engagement through tourism, as well as how it can be dangerous when it involves stereotyping, commodification, inequality, and superficial contact. The present study is interested in these representations as it does not directly investigate the experiences of tourists or hosts. Rather, it examines the description, explanation, and evaluation of intercultural potential in tourism within scholarly texts.

Therefore, the literature is the main body of content around which various understandings of tourism and intercultural approaches can be discussed. The selection of relevant publications and the analysis of their representations are described in the following chapter on methodology. In this separation, the Literature Review enables one to focus on the content and debates within existing scholarship. At the same time, the Methodology chapter explains how the corpus was constructed and analyzed.

2.5 Synthesis and Identified Gap

Based on the substantive and methodological literature reviewed, several points stand out. First, the field of tourism and related travel experiences is generally considered as a context for intercultural communication and for the development of intercultural competence. Still, empirical work consistently shows that such development is contingent rather than automatic. For instance, Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020) found that Thai hotel interns considered critical cultural awareness and attitudes more important than knowledge and skills, meaning that being part of an intercultural workplace in a hotel does not ensure successful intercultural communication without explicit training and reflection. As in Sobkowiak's (2019) study, the lack of opportunities to engage with the local community and make full use of intercultural contact will not be addressed by studying abroad unless the student actively seeks these opportunities.

Second, the conceptual literature on cultural sensitivity and ethics in tourism highlights the need for recognition, respect and reciprocity, while emphasizing that tourism experiences are part of

colonial history and unequal power dynamics (Viken et al., 2021; Ferraz & Serpa, 2021; Oyedele & Akwen, 2025). This suggests that analyses of "intercultural perspectives" in tourism must attend not only to individual attitudes, but also to how scholarly texts position different actors, narrate histories and imagine futures.

Thirdly, integrative literature review and document analysis are considered suitable methods for making sense of the disjointed literature in an interdisciplinary field, especially when the purpose is not to collate effect sizes but to create new conceptual lenses (Snyder, 2019; Bowen, 2009). From an analytical perspective, Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as a "skimming, reading and interpretation process (which) combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis" (p. 32). He also proposes that researchers provide a detailed description of how the study was designed and conducted, as it is important to share this with others so they can "evaluate the quality of the research" (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). However, Moreno et al. (2024) state in their bibliometric review that studies on communication and tourism rarely consider the role of academic texts in constructing key phenomena, and that tourism communication research needs more theoretically informed studies that explicitly examine issues of power, identity, and ethics.

This study responds to this call by focusing not on the self-reports of tourists or workers, but on how selected tourism and intercultural communication articles define the role of travel experiences in the development of intercultural perspectives. The empirical reading of these texts and their thematic analysis propose to make visible the dominant and alternative narratives that attempt to imagine tourism as a space of intercultural learning, ethical encounter, and social change.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a literature-based research design and is qualitative in nature, using published academic texts as the primary empirical material. The study does not generate new interview or survey data in tourism contexts. Still, it systematically identifies, selects, and analyzes scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles, and book chapters that explicitly discuss one or more of the following concepts: tourism, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, or cross-cultural learning. It does so in accordance with Snyder (2019), who argues that a literature review can be considered "a research method" that employs existing literature as a data source (p. 333–334).

In particular, the design is an integrative literature review. The integrative review is a unique kind of research that analyzes and critiques existing research and "creates new understandings about the topic through one or more forms of synthesis" (Torraco, 2005, p. 357). An integrative review should be more than a summary of previous research; it should "critically analyze existing literature on the topic" and "identify aspects of a phenomenon that are missing, incomplete, or poorly represented in the literature" (Torraco, 2005, p. 361). In a methodological guide, Broom's note, cited by Whittemore and Knafl (2005), provides the widely used definition of an integrative review as a review that "summarizes prior empirical or theoretical literature" to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a specific phenomenon (p. 546).

This is especially relevant to the present study, which aims to analyze and interpret the conceptualization of tourism's intercultural potential in the academic literature rather than measure it empirically. Integrative or narrative reviews are appropriate when the purpose is to review, critique, and synthesize representative literature to produce new conceptual perspectives, but not to provide an exhaustive list of all literature, as stated by Grant and Booth (2009). The study aims to generate a theoretically grounded and critical synthesis of dominant themes and assumptions by systematically analyzing academic texts on tourism and intercultural communication as data.

3.2 Empirical Material and Corpus Selection

Table 1: Selection Criteria

Selection Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Topic relevance	Studies related to tourism and travel, study abroad, tourist–host interaction, or other forms of travel	Studies unrelated to tourism, travel, or intercultural interaction
Conceptual Focus	Studies explicitly addressing	Studies without a clear focus

	intercultural communication, intercultural competence, cross-cultural learning, cultural interaction, cultural intelligence, or closely related concepts	on intercultural communication or related concepts
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles and, where available in full text, scholarly book chapters	Conference papers, editorials, commentaries, book reviews, theses/dissertations, and non-scholarly publications
Publication Timeline	Primarily published between 2000 and 2026, with older foundational works included where conceptually significant	Publications outside this period that were not conceptually relevant or foundational
Language	English (full-text available)	Non-English publications or studies without full-text access
Content suitability	Studies providing sufficient conceptual, analytical, or empirical discussion for close reading, analysis, and quotation.	Studies lacking sufficient depth, analysis, or relevance to the research objectives

The empirical material includes scholarly publications, primarily from 2000 to 2026 to prioritize contemporary research on tourism and intercultural communication, including recent work on study abroad, intercultural competence, cultural sensitivity, ethics, and tourism discourse; it does not exclude older literature automatically: foundational works are retained when they are necessary for the theoretical framework. The corpus includes some peer-reviewed journal articles and, if available in full-text, scholarly chapters. A text was required to have four major characteristics to be included. It needed to be related to tourism and travel, study abroad, tourist-host interaction, or any other form of travel. Second, it was required to explicitly mention intercultural communication, intercultural competence, cross-cultural learning, cultural interaction, cultural intelligence, or a conceptually related concept. Third, it needed to be fully accessible in English. Fourth, it required sufficient conceptual, analytical, or empirical discussion to be read and discussed closely—and to be quoted on the pages. Open access is a key tenet of the corpus. All published works included in the study must be readily accessible, as the research must be grounded in close textual analysis. Sources cannot be used as empirical material without an abstract, snippet, or partial preview. Open or free access allows checking of quotations and helps create transparency in the use of evidence. The corpus was deliberately designed to include conceptual, empirical, and critical views. Conceptual and review articles are significant for their ability to state general statements concerning tourism as intercultural contact.

Albu (2015), for example, claims that "intercultural communication experiences have the function of making the tourists know and appreciate the other cultures, but also of making them better known of their culture" (p. 7). Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) also highlight the possibilities for "mutual appreciation, understanding, respect, tolerance" and opportunities for "a potential minefield full of difficulties" (p. 77). Ferraz and Serpa (2021) amplify this key statement by claiming that tourism–cultural interaction is "inescapably complex and sometimes paradoxical and contradictory" (p. 39). In addition to these texts, the corpus consists of more recent open-access texts that link tourism to intercultural competence or cultural mediation in more specific contexts. For instance, in the study of foreign tourism professionals in Japan, Szabó (2025) sees them as bridging social capital in tourism and interprets them as cultural mediators. A study on intercultural communication in tourism workplaces is also appropriate. According to Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian (2020), intercultural communication is related to cultural awareness, sensitivity, and an understanding of cultural differences. It declares that the most desired skill in a hotel internship environment is critical cultural awareness. Naqeeb (2023), in his research paper, employs tourism discourse as a pedagogical instrument for intercultural learning to explore the potential of tourism representation to advance ICC.

Some new resources expand the scope of concepts within the corpus. Drozdova et al. (2023) discuss communication barriers in tourism work environments and the practical problems of intercultural communication in service settings. Oyedele & Akwen (2025) directly connect intercultural understanding to tourism and discuss the importance of intercultural communication training in tourism. The focus of the present thesis has been placed within the field of interdisciplinary research, important for the context of the research presented, by means of the systematic review of the research field *"Research trends in communication and tourism"* by Moreno et al. (2024), which confirmed that tourism–communication research is a quite extensive area of academic research itself. More recent studies by Cuhlova et al. (2026) view international travel as a context for informal intercultural learning and competence development, a focus closely related to this thesis.

These different kinds of texts are thus integrated into the corpus to illustrate both continuity and change in the conceptualization of tourism. Some texts take a more strongly developmental perspective on travel, presenting tourism as a journey towards openness, empathy, and/or personal development. Others foreground conflict and commodification, power, and symbolic violence. Others, however, are interested in the perspectives of people involved in tourism or the hospitality industry, study-abroad students, or destination discourse, as specific sites in which intercultural perspectives are negotiated. These strands are brought together to give the thesis a more thorough, critical examination of the literature than could be achieved with a smaller body of texts.

3.3 Search Strategy and Data Collection

The data collection process was organized systematically and transparently. Both Scopus and Web of Science were the primary databases used for the first search because they cover tourism, communication, and language journals, as well as interdisciplinary social science journals. In addition, Google Scholar, open-access journals' websites, and institutional repositories were used to find freely accessible versions of relevant publications. This search was not intended to be comprehensive of all publications on tourism and intercultural communication. Rather, the goal was to build a well-defined and analytically tractable set of full-text sources that directly addressed the research question. The search terms covered two main conceptual areas: tourism and travel, and intercultural communication and intercultural learning. The principal search combinations were as follows:

Table 2. Search combinations used in the literature search

No	Search Combination
1	tourism AND "intercultural communication"
2	tourism AND "intercultural competence"
3	tourism AND "cross-cultural communication"
4	tourism AND "cultural interaction"
5	"travel experiences" AND "intercultural"
6	tourist-host interaction AND "intercultural"
7	"study abroad" AND "intercultural competence"

These combinations were modified as needed to accommodate the database's syntax and the usefulness of the results. A set of essential texts was identified, and a backward citation search was conducted to locate earlier foundational studies cited in these texts' reference lists. Forward citation tracking, on the other hand, identified additional, more recent publications on the same debates. This process was particularly useful for locating foundational publications and more recent open-access studies that were not identified by the initial keyword searches.

There were three stages in the selection process. First, titles were reviewed to exclude publications that were clearly not relevant to the research focus, such as destination marketing, tourism infrastructure, revenue management, or technical studies in tourism administration. Second, the abstracts of potentially relevant publications were reviewed to determine whether they contained a reference to tourism or travel and explicitly referenced intercultural

communication, intercultural competence, cultural interaction, cross-cultural learning, or a concept closely related to these. Third, the remaining publications were downloaded and read in great detail to get the full texts. Publications were kept only when they contained conceptually, analytically, or empirically rich content for close reading, thematic coding, and quotation that could be verified on the pages.

Final Search Outcome

The final corpus was 16 substantive scholarly publications. Document-based thematic analysis was used to analyze these publications as the empirical material. Conceptual articles, empirical studies, review research, educational studies, and research on tourism professionals were included in the corpus. As a whole, they were the various aspects of tourism as intercultural communication: tourist–host encounter; study abroad; tourism education; hospitality work; cultural mediation; tourism discourse; cultural sensitivity; intercultural understanding.

The 16 substantive publications included the following:

1. Albu (2015), on intercultural communication in tourism.
2. Cuhlova et al. (2026), on intercultural competence development through tourism among Czech visitors to France.
3. Drozdova et al. (2023), on intercultural communication in tourism enterprises.
4. Dujmović and Vitasović (2022), on social interaction and intercultural communication in tourism.
5. Ferraz and Serpa (2021), on the paradoxical relationship between tourism and cultural interaction.
6. Gonçalves (2014), on intercultural awareness and communication skills in tourism education.
7. Jack et al. (2020), on language and intercultural communication in tourism.
8. Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian (2020), on intercultural communication challenges among Thai hotel interns.
9. Moreno et al. (2024), on research trends in communication and tourism.
10. Naqeeb (2023), on intercultural tourism brochures and intercultural communicative competence.
11. Oyedele and Akwen (2025), on tourism and intercultural understanding in developing nations.
12. Sobkowiak (2019), on the impact of studying abroad on students' intercultural competence.
13. Stivriņa and Dzerviniks (2026), on educational tourism and transformative education.
14. Szabó (2025), on foreign tourism professionals and bridging social capital in Japan.
15. Tarchi and Surian (2021), on intercultural competence among study-abroad students.
16. Viken et al. (2021), on cultural sensitivity and difference in tourism.

These 16 publications must not be interpreted as a representative sample of the entire body of tourism and intercultural communication research, but rather as the core of the analysis. They were chosen because they clearly answered the research question and provided sufficient full-text content to analyze the nature of travel experiences as opportunities for intercultural learning, mediation, competence development, ethical engagement, or conflict. The full reference list includes other works, such as theoretical and methodological sources. These include foundational models of intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communicative competence (Bennett, 1986; Byram, 1997), research design (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005), document analysis, thematic analysis, methodology of literature review, and evaluation of trustworthiness (Snyder, 2019; Elo et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They were used as the basis for the theoretical and methodological framework; however, they are not included as additional tourism studies in the final empirical corpus.

For the study, 16 substantive publications on tourism and intercultural communication have been selected and supplemented with other theoretical and methodological sources. The end product of the data collection process was found adequate for a qualitative integrative review, as it included a variety of viewpoints without being too large to read, compare, code, and analyze in detail. The intent was not to generalize in the number sense, but to deepen the analysis and/or to vary the ideas. The final phase of the search confirmed that all identified publications were in English and available in full text online via open-access journals, institutional repositories, publishers' websites, or other freely accessible academic platforms. The publications would be treated as empirical documents, and close reading, contextual interpretation, and verification of quotations and page numbers would require full-text accessibility. The selection process consequently ended when the 16-source corpus had been assembled, and each publication had been checked for relevance, accessibility, and suitability for detailed thematic analysis.

3.4 Analytical Approach

The selected corpus is analyzed using a combination of document and thematic analyses. Document analysis is suitable because the material presented consists entirely of written academic texts. Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as a systematic process of reviewing or analyzing a document, and documents must be reviewed and interpreted to extract meaning, gain understanding, and build empirical knowledge. This method does not regard scholarly articles as neutral sources of information but as places where concepts, values, and assumptions are expressed in words. The study is thus limited to a few formulations, definitions, evaluative statements, and argumentation patterns for tourism, travel, and interculturality.

The outputs of document analysis are “excerpts, quotations, or entire passages” that can be organized into themes and categories (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). The following quotations in this study address intercultural dialogue, learning through travel, tourists as learners of culture, hosts as mediators, communication barriers, stereotypes, conflict, and asymmetry in tourism. For

instance, Albu (2015) views tourism as an area in which understanding, tolerance, and meaningful intercultural dialogue depend on a good knowledge of other cultures. Dujmović and Vitasović (2022), on the other hand, maintain that while tourism can enhance social interaction, it can also create communication problems and can lead to prejudice and misunderstanding. In this sense, Ferraz and Serpa (2021) explicitly mention power, pointing out that tourism experiences are driven by "symbolic violence, power and asymmetries, tension and conflict" (p. 40).

The study uses thematic analysis to transition from individual quotations to broader interpretation, as per Braun and Clarke (2006). Their method is described as "a way of identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) in data" (p. 79), which can provide a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data. Thematic analysis was used because the corpus consisted of a variety of text types, including conceptual, empirical, critical, and applied professional research. It is flexible enough to accommodate this diversity while still enabling systematic identification of recurring patterns.

This involved multiple readings of all selected texts, taking notes, initial coding of common ideas and formulations, summarising codes into broader candidate themes, and further developing and narrowing these themes in relation to the research question. The coding process is not mechanical. Some codes are derived directly from repeated expressions in the literature, such as "understanding," "tolerance," "cultural awareness," "bridging," "conflict," and "stereotype." Others arose through comparison across texts; for example, what constitutes transformative intercultural learning in literature is compared with what constitutes superficial contact in literature influenced by structural inequality.

The analysis is not done at the level of explicit content but at a latent level. Braun and Clarke's (2006) latent approach transcends the semantic content of the data, focusing on "underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations" (p. 84). In the context of the present study, this is particularly relevant as many texts do not merely make claims about the positive or negative impact of tourism; they also make several assumptions about the nature of culture, how learning takes place, the nature of intercultural competence, and whether contact across difference is always a positive thing. When an analysis of the latent is possible, these assumptions can be investigated rather than accepted at face value.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks, closely related to the others, are used to interpret the corpus: intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and critical intercultural communication. These are not treated as separate chapters, as they directly affect the analysis process. These offer lenses for reading and coding the tourism literature. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence is highly applicable, given that many books on tourism implicitly

assume that traveling can lead to knowledge, openness, understanding, and mediation, which are closely aligned with the ICC. Hoff (2020) summarises Byram's five interconnected "savoirs" as the concept of competence: "knowledge of self and other" (savoir), "attitudes of curiosity and openness" (savoir être), "skills of interpreting and relating" (savoir comprendre), "skills of discovery and interaction" (savoir apprendre/faire), and "critical cultural awareness"(savoir s'engager) (p. 56–57).

In this paper, these components serve as the analytical lenses. When developing the code and themes, special consideration is given to the structure of tourism texts:

- The knowledge tourists and/or hosts are expected to acquire concerning "other cultures" and their "own culture" (savoir).
- The openness, tolerance, or curiosity values idealized in the field of "genuine intercultural dialogue" in tourism (savoir être);
- The skills that are considered to be the tourists', hosts', or professionals' skills of interpreting, mediating, and interacting across cultures (savoir comprendre, savoir apprendre/faire);
- And the level of critical cultural sensitivity in power, inequality, and structural constraints in tourism encounters (savoir s‟engager).

The study is also critical of the "simplified" or "idealized" uses of ICC. As mentioned above, Hoff (2020) remarks that some models of intercultural competence might suggest that "a nation's culture is homogeneous and coherent, and a reflection of fixed values and beliefs" (p. 58). Liu (2019) is also quoted as having found fault with such models for being "pragmatically simplistic" and for their tendency to "downplay intracultural variance and cultural complexity" (p. 54). These critiques are significant because it is easy to see how tourism discourse can be perilous, reducing culture to a packaged, enduring difference that can be encountered, valued, or consumed. The study thus turns more towards ICC as an interpretive tool and, at the same time, asks whether the tourism literature essentializes culture or takes it at its own level and its power-driven diversity.

In addition to the focus on inequality, discourse, and power, Critical intercultural perspectives complement ICC. Ferraz and Serpa (2021) are particularly relevant here, as they indicate that the tourist-to-tourism-industry-to-culture connection is problematic in relation to the image of "ideal intercultural communication" (p. 39) prevailing in the tourism sector. Similarly, Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) demonstrate that tourism can foster mutual appreciation. Still, it can also be a source of "prejudice, stereotype, misunderstanding, hostility, tension and conflict of values" (p. 81), as well as communication problems. In the following, however, more recent studies, such as Szabó (2025), show that in certain contexts, the tourism professional can become a cultural bridge, meaning that intercultural mediation in tourism is not just an individual competence but

also a social and institutional function. These two lenses can complement each other in examining the hopes and conflicts in academic depictions of travel.

3.6 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

This study does not require any human participants and thus does not address the same ethical concerns as do interview-based and ethnographic studies. No personal data is collected, and no consent procedures are necessary. However, ethical issues are still relevant. First, the study is obliged to accurately and fairly represent others' work. Direct quotations, when used, are used with caution, with page numbers wherever possible and always in the context and sense of the original quotation. Second, the differences among quotation, paraphrase, and interpretation are always made explicit to the reader, allowing them to distinguish the author's statements from the researcher's interpretation. Third, it facilitates transparency and verifiability as the cited material is available and can be verified directly.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have proposed four alternatives for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The present study ensures trustworthiness by implementing a search strategy, explicitly stating inclusion and exclusion criteria, reading the full texts of all retrieved texts, and using a coding process closely linked to the evidence provided on a page-by-page basis. It is also reinforced by the balanced corpus used, which includes both affirmative and critical accounts of tourism as an instance of interculturalism. The goal is not to prove a preconceived notion but to provide a careful, textually informed account of how the literature represents travel experiences from intercultural perspectives.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview of Findings

The chapter discusses the qualitative document-based thematic analysis of the literature on tourism and intercultural communication. The analysis began with the central research question: "How does selected scholarly literature on tourism and intercultural communication conceptualize the role of travel experiences in shaping intercultural perspectives?" To answer this question, the chapter is organized into four interrelated themes that emerged repeatedly across the corpus:

1. Tourism as intercultural learning and self-reflection,
2. Tourism encounters as negotiation and mediation,
3. Tourism as contradiction, including stereotypes, asymmetry, and symbolic violence,
4. Travel experiences as a discourse of competence development.

These themes were not picked at random. They were produced through multiple readings, codings, and comparisons with the selected texts and interpreted using the theoretical frameworks outlined in the methodology chapter. In this regard, the findings chapter is not simply a summary of the literature, but a demonstration of how the literature presents a field of intercultural possibility, mediation, and tension. One of the major recurring themes throughout the corpus is the absence of a single, unifying concept of tourism. Rather, the literature shows more oscillating positions between affirmation and criticism. In some studies, travel is characterized as an arena of openness, perspective-taking, and intercultural awareness; in others, as a space of misunderstanding, superficial contact, commercialization, and inequality. The literature depicts tourism in varied and sometimes opposing ways: as a chance for learning and development, yet also as a setting marked by inequality and misunderstanding.

4.2 Tourism as Intercultural Learning and Self-Reflection

The first major point is that the literature included in the selection is sometimes perceived as a space for intercultural learning and self-reflection through tourism. Travel experiences are described as opportunities to encounter new cultural practices, to rethink difference, and to reconsider assumptions about self and others.

Several studies indicate that tourism can help deepen knowledge of other cultures and increase cultural awareness. For instance, according to Albu (2015), intercultural communication in tourism is an opportunity for tourists to learn about and understand other cultures as well as their own. Similarly, Viken et al. (2021) conceptualize cultural sensitivity as emerging in encounters, narration, and social processes. These studies capture tourism as both a form of cultural consumption and a form of reflection and perspective transformation. Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) also define tourism as a social activity that entails contact and communication between the tourist and the destination. They indicate that travel involves more than just moving from one

place to another; it can be an engagement with communication, interpretation, and social interaction across cultures. The potential, however, depends on the quality of communication and engagement in the encounter.

This is confirmed by studies of study abroad and educational travel. International travel can serve as a setting that facilitates informal intercultural learning, as described by Cuhlova et al. (2026), and it does not necessarily lead to intercultural learning, as demonstrated by Sobkowiak (2019) and Tarchi and Surian (2021). Their research shows that those who interact with the local community, consider what happens to them, and engage in intercultural interaction are more likely to develop intercultural competence. When students do not interact with other nations or language groups beyond what they are familiar with, learning opportunities can be limited. In addition, Naqeeb (2023) demonstrates that there are opportunities to foster intercultural orientations through tourism representations, for example, tourism brochures. This implies that learning and cultural expectations can begin before actual encounters occur, as tourism texts shape knowledge of cultures, places, and people.

In general, the literature provides for a positive outlook on tourism as a tool for intercultural learning and self-reflection. However, this potential is not automatic; it requires interaction, reflection, interpretation, and meaningful engagement with cultural difference.

4.3 Tourism Encounters as Negotiation, Mediation, and Meaning-Making

The second important finding is that, in the selected literature, tourism encounters are discussed not just as interactions between two people from different cultures, but as something much more complex. Interpretation, explanation, translation, and mediation are important factors in shaping travel experiences. It is thought that intercultural views in tourism arise not only from personal contact but also from the mode of communication, personal interpretation, and the attribution of meaning to that contact.

Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) define tourism as a communicative process that encompasses a communicator, a message, and a receiver. This indicates that tourism encounters include not only people but also messages, expectations, and interpretations. It is important, then, not just that people from different backgrounds interact, but also that they understand each other and the meanings they place on the interaction. Albu's (2015) discussion of "genuine intercultural dialogue" (p. 7) supports this view. The nature of the dialogue suggests reciprocity, interpretation, and engagement rather than passive observation. Tourism can then be defined as a communicative space where meanings are negotiated. Language, behavior, symbols, and interpretation are all involved in cultural encounters.

In tourism-related research, the mediating role is particularly evident in studies of tourism professionals. According to Szabó (2025), foreign tourism professionals in Japan serve as

cultural mediators, facilitating cross-cultural communication between international tourists and the local community. Such experts can provide visitors with information about local customs, norms, and practices. This demonstrates that tourism experiences are mediated and that these mediators shape tourists' experiences and perceptions of local culture. In addition, this is observed in studies conducted in the tourism and hospitality sector. Successful intercultural communication is not only about providing information but also "maintenance and establishment of human relationships" (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020, p. 209). They emphasize the need for cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding of cultural differences during hotel internships. Tourism workers are therefore not just service providers, but also play a part in managing, explaining, and interpreting intercultural encounters. Likewise, Drozdova et al. (2023) note internal and external communication problems in tourism businesses, including language barriers, variations in communication style, and differences in understanding of rules or expectations. Jack et al. (2020) also portray tourism as an important context for language and intercultural communication in multilingual and mobile environments.

Overall, the literature shows that tourism is not only an individual tourist's encounter with cultural difference. It is a broader communicative landscape shaped by guides, workers, institutions, languages, and texts in tourism. These actors and practices can support intercultural understanding by helping visitors and hosts interpret and negotiate cultural meanings.

4.4 Tourism as Contradiction: Stereotypes, Inequality, and Symbolic Violence

The third important finding is that the literature examined is critical of idealized notions of what tourism offers as a way forward towards intercultural understanding. Several studies refer to tourism as a contradictory and complex space which can be associated with power imbalance, stereotypes, inequality and symbolic violence.

Ferraz and Serpa (2021) describe the relationship between tourism and culture as "inescapably complex, sometimes paradoxical and contradictory" (p. 39). They believe that tourism can foster intercultural exchange and understanding, but can also create symbolic violence, power imbalances, tension, and conflict. Their research demonstrates the possibility of positive images of tourism existing within the context of unequal relationships and simplified understandings of cultural difference. The same positive and negative aspects apply to tourism, as Dujmović and Vitasović (2022) suggest. They understand that tourism can help develop mutual love, understanding, respect and tolerance. Meanwhile, they caution that interaction with tourism may be fraught with challenges and mass tourism can lead to "prejudice, stereotype, misunderstanding, hostility, tension and conflict of values" (p. 81). Their research indicates that although contact with other cultures is not necessarily an automatic means to understanding, superficial contact or contact for commercial purposes is insufficient to ensure understanding. Albu (2015) also identifies communication barriers, misunderstandings, and negative stereotypes

as challenges in tourism encounters. These problems demonstrate that the multicultural nature of tourism can be both a dialogue and a conversation, leading to misunderstandings.

Other studies expand the moral aspect of this topic. Oyedele and Akwen (2025) link tourism to intercultural understanding and emphasize the need for training, community engagement, and ethical tourism. In a similar vein, Viken et al. (2021) speak of recognition, respect, and reciprocity in encounters with cultural difference. These studies collectively indicate that tourists' learning is not the only aspect of tourism. It also entails questions of representation, participation, power, and wellbeing of host communities.

4.5 Travel Experiences as Competence Development

The fourth finding is that tourism and travel are mentioned as potential contexts for developing intercultural competence, awareness, and sensitivity in the selected literature. Travel is seen as a way to encounter cultural difference, but also as a means to build and extend knowledge, openness, communication skills, and reflection and critical awareness.

For Albu (2015), tourism is connected with respect for other cultures and the enrichment of one's own culture. This interest is more clearly expressed in research related to tourism education, to work in the hospitality industry, and tourism studies abroad. For instance, Jhaiyanuntana and Nomnian (2020) place great emphasis on critical cultural awareness among Thai hotel interns. Their study indicates that language skills and polite behavior are not enough to achieve intercultural communication in tourism. It also entails an understanding of cultural differences and attitudes, as well as the capacity to respond in an intercultural manner. In addition, Gonçalves (2014) highlights the need to promote intercultural awareness and communication in tourism education. Similarly, Naqeeb (2023) demonstrates that tourism brochures can serve as learning tools for achieving intercultural communicative competence. The studies introduce tourism-related learning environments and tourism texts as potential sources of tourism competency.

This is supported by research on study abroad. Sobkowiak (2019) and Tarchi and Surian (2021) demonstrate how international mobility can be used as a tool for reflection, awareness, and intercultural communication. However, both studies indicate that competence development is not a natural process. It requires active participation, community engagement, reflection, and opportunities for intercultural exchange. Cuhlova et al. (2026) also state that international travel can be a context for informal intercultural learning. The literature also demonstrates that intercultural competence can take both professional and relational forms. According to Szabó (2025), tourism professionals act as cultural bridges, facilitating understanding of local practices and communication between people of different cultures and languages. This implies that competence is not only a concern for the individual traveler but also for tourism workers and professionals who support intercultural encounters.

The literature reviewed in this study suggests that travel can build intercultural competence in general. However, the studies do not indicate that tourism brings competence per se. Reflection, interaction, communication, and meaningful engagement with cultural difference are fundamental to development.

5. Discussion

The present study aims to answer the following research question: How does selected scholarly literature on tourism and intercultural communication conceptualize the role of traveling experiences in intercultural perspectives? The results indicate that travel is not always a positive and uniform intercultural experience as presented in the selected literature. Instead, it conceptualizes travel experiences in four interconnected ways: as a site of intercultural learning and self-reflection; as a process of negotiation, mediation, and meaning-making; as a contradictory space shaped by stereotypes, inequality, and symbolic violence; and as a context for developing intercultural competence. Overall, the results indicate that travel can offer intercultural perspectives through interaction, reflection, interpretation, and ethical engagement. However, this effect can be constrained by superficial contact, unequal power relations, and stereotypical representations.

First, the findings show that travel experiences are often conceptualized as possible intercultural learning events. As found in the reviewed literature, tourism has been linked to openness, cultural awareness, tolerance, reflection, and understanding. Albu (2015) describes intercultural communication in tourism as reflexive, as contact with another culture can prompt tourists to reflect on their own cultural beliefs. Likewise, the study abroad and educational tourism literature indicates that traveling can promote intercultural development if travelers engage with local communities, reflect on their experiences, and critically interpret cultural differences. However, the literature also reveals that physical mobility is not enough for intercultural learning. Sobkowiak (2019) and Tarchi and Surian (2021) suggest that students might still be a part of their national and/or language group, even when residing outside the country. Thus, travel does not guarantee intercultural learning, but can help to facilitate it. It is more likely that intercultural perspectives will emerge when one travels with a desire for interaction, reflection, communication, and questioning of previously held assumptions. The importance of this discovery lies in its casting doubt on the popular notion that contact with other cultures is always learning-based. Travel is seen as a possible learning process whose results depend on the quality and depth of engagement.

The second is related to mediation. The literature promotes a conception of tourism experiences not only as direct encounters between tourists and hosts, but also as experiences shaped by guides, tourism professionals, institutions, educational programs, languages, and tourism texts. According to Dujmović and Vitasović (2022), tourism is organized through communication and interpretation, with the communicator, message, and receiver. The perspective presented above is further developed by Szabó's 2025 study, which introduces the concept of cultural mediators, the tourism professionals who link international tourists with local communities. This indicates that tourism experiences are not as neutral as they present themselves to be, as encounters with an objectively existing culture. They are mediated experiences in which some meanings are selected, explained, translated, and made available to visitors. Guides, hospitality, brochures,

websites, and educational activities can shape tourists' experiences of local people and places. So intercultural views can be formed before first contact. The finding is significant for the present thesis as it validates that academic discourse, as well as tourism discourse, is part of the construction of meanings of intercultural experience.

The third finding is the conflict between ideal and critical discourse on tourism. The literature contains several references to tourism as a bridge between cultures and to its role in fostering mutual appreciation, understanding, and tolerance. Other texts contest this positive view, emphasizing stereotypes, commercialization, symbolic violence, non-participation, and the commercialization of cultural difference. According to Ferraz and Serpa (2021), it is necessary to emphasize the complexity and contradictions inherent in the relationship between tourism and culture. Similarly, Viken et al. (2021) show how tourism encounters can reinforce ethnocentric representations and romanticize and essentialize Indigenous cultures. This tension provides one of the central contributions of the study. The literature is not limited to questions about whether tourism fosters intercultural understanding. It also questions the conditions for producing understanding, who can stand in for culture, and whether tourism relationships are reciprocal or unequal and consumption-based. In this way, the ability to communicate interculturally cannot be analyzed simply from the viewpoints of politeness, language skills, or cultural awareness. It should also be examined in terms of power, history, representation, and decision-making.

This is the fourth finding about intercultural competence. There is a substantial body of literature that presents travel and tourism as settings in which knowledge, openness, interpretive competence, communication competence, and critical cultural awareness can be cultivated. This corresponds to Byram's (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence and aligns with studies in tourism education, hospitality internships, study abroad, and educational tourism. The findings also revealed, however, that competence is manifested in various ways. In some studies, it appears to be a distinct skill that tourists or employees can learn through training and practice. In other studies, it is defined as relational, socially situated, and evolving through interaction and mediation. This difference is important because it can lead to a lack of awareness of the structures that influence intercultural interactions. A tourism worker may have cultural knowledge and communication skills and feel comfortable in their own culture, but be unable to communicate effectively within an institution due to language barriers, unequal working conditions, or commercial considerations. Likewise, a tourist can exhibit an attitude of cultural difference in an encounter with a tourist system that commercializes and/or stereotypes communities. The results therefore contribute to a broader competence concept, characterized by a confluence of personal attitudes and skills, and ethical awareness and critical awareness of social structures.

In general, the results confirm the research question, as the literature reviewed in this study conceptualizes travel experiences as ambiguous and contested processes. The potential of travel

as a means of intercultural learning is presented, but it requires interaction, interpretation, reflection, mediation, and ethical engagement. Simultaneously, travel can reinforce stereotypes and inequalities when encounters are superficial, controlled by the commercial sector, and/or shaped by unequal power dynamics. The study, thus, extends the existing literature by combining the aspects of intercultural learning, tourism communication, professional mediation, cultural sensitivity, and critical power analysis, which are discussed separately. The literature speaks about tourism as an intercultural space yet an inherently harmonious one. It is at the same time a place of teaching and misreading, a place of dialogue and control, of recognition and appropriation. This complexity must be the focus of future research in tourism and intercultural communication.

5.1 Synthesis of the Main Findings

The analysis reveals four main conceptions of travel experience in the selected literature: as a space for intercultural learning and self-reflection; as a negotiated and mediated experience; as a space of contradiction and stereotypical and asymmetrical elements; as a space for competence development. The theoretical framework helped elucidate these patterns by revealing how tourism texts imagine knowledge, openness, interpretation, interaction, and critical awareness, and where the literature essentializes or challenges essential culture and idealizes dialogue. The result is not one tourism, but a multi-layered academic conversation in which travel is simultaneously learning, mediation, inequality, and contest.

6. Conclusion

This study examines how selected scholarly literature on tourism and intercultural communication conceptualizes the role of travel experiences in shaping intercultural perspectives. The study demonstrated that, through an integrative literature review and qualitative document-based thematic analysis, tourism is presented in academic discourse as a complex, not simple, and not automatically positive intercultural arena between cultures. Four major patterns are identified in the literature: tourism as a place of intercultural learning and self-reflection; tourism as a space of negotiation, mediation, and meaning-making; tourism as a contradictory space of stereotypes, asymmetries, and symbolic violence; and tourism as a space of competence development.

Focusing on these findings, it can be concluded that travel experiences are understood in the literature not only as the physical crossing of borders but also as socially and discursively mediated experiences in which cultural difference is negotiated, interpreted, and potentially reframed. The study also illustrates that there is not a single voice in tourism literature. Some view travel as a route to openness, tolerance, and critical insight; others as a potential for superficial contact, commodification, hierarchy, and exclusion. In this respect, the study argues that both aspirational and critical narratives shape tourism discourse. The study, thus, contributes to the field by describing not only intercultural tourism but also what is considered intercultural learning, the types of competences that are valued, and which tensions or inequalities are highlighted and which remain under-researched. The thesis draws on scholarly texts as empirical data and thus emphasizes the role of discourse in shaping expectations about tourism's achievements in intercultural contexts.

6.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it draws on only published academic literature and does not claim to capture the lived experiences of the tourist, the host, or the tourism worker in particular contexts. Second, the corpus was limited to English-language, open-access texts, which may have excluded papers in other languages or those behind paywalls. Third, as an integrative and qualitative review, the study prioritizes depth of interpretation over comprehensiveness, meaning that the selected corpus cannot represent the full range of global tourism scholarship. Lastly, the thematic analysis is inherently interpretive, and the results are shaped by the study's theoretical frameworks, such as intercultural communicative competence and critical intercultural communication.

6.2 Practical implications and future research

The results have implications for education in tourism, professional training, and future research. The study proposes that, for educators, tourism should be taught not only as an industry or a mode of mobility but also as a communicative and ethical space where cultural differences are negotiated. Intercultural awareness, awareness of stereotypes, and sensitivity to unequal power

relations should not be confined to the practical aspects of service. However, it should be integrated into the educational context of tourism and hospitality. In the context of tourism, the study highlights the significance of dialogue, mediation, and ethical interaction in fostering positive intercultural experiences.

In terms of future research, it is recommended that further empirical research is conducted to compare tourism representations in the academic field with tourists', hosts', guides', and hospitality workers' lived experiences. Comparative research between destinations, tourism types, and linguistic contexts would also enhance knowledge of different intercultural visions. Furthermore, digital tourism discourse, social media, and promotional texts could be investigated in greater detail in future studies, as they increasingly shape the imagination of intercultural contact even before travel begins. The study would help more comprehensively link discourse and practice to power in the study of tourism and intercultural communication.

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