



Strengthening Global Competencies and Cross-Cultural Understanding: A Comparative Analysis of the Indonesian Education System from a Global Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The tide of globalization demands that educational systems worldwide cultivate global competence and cross-cultural understanding in a structured and sustained manner. This study aims to comparatively analyze the integration of global competence in Indonesia's education system relative to globally recognized reference countries, evaluate the effectiveness of Indonesian education policy in developing cross-cultural understanding, and formulate evidence-based strategic recommendations for its enhancement. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the PRISMA protocol was employed, synthesizing ten indexed scientific articles as primary sources. The findings reveal that Indonesia faces structural barriers, including system centralization, the dominance of standardized testing, and unequal resource distribution, which collectively hinder the holistic development of global competence. Unlike Finland, Japan, and Singapore, which embed global perspectives as cornerstones of their curricula, Indonesia's approach remains largely reactive and externally driven through the adoption of foreign policies. Strategic factors demonstrably significant include digital literacy, teacher pedagogical autonomy, international collaboration, and the transformation of assessment systems toward authentic competency-based evaluation. This study affirms that deep contextualization is essential in any adoption of global educational practices to ensure alignment with Indonesia's socio-cultural realities.

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly massive wave of globalization has driven fundamental transformations in the orientation of education systems across the globe. The ability of the younger generation to interact, collaborate, and contribute effectively in cross-cultural contexts is no longer merely an added value but has become an essential requirement in the 21st century. The construct of *global competence*—encompassing knowledge of global issues, the ability to think from multiple perspectives, an open attitude toward differences, and the capacity to act responsibly within diverse communities—serves as the primary framework for designing education that is relevant and highly competitive. A decade-long systematic review indicates that most scholarly publications define *global competence* through the dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, and skills as complementary components, and an increasing number of universities across various countries are striving to integrate these dimensions into their curricula in a structured manner (Musnadah, Dwiyanti, Manihtada, & Zulfahmi, 2024). The relevance of *global competence* is also inseparable from the urgency of *intercultural communicative competence* (ICC), which is believed to be one of the primary requirements for human life in an increasingly interconnected world, particularly within the realm of modern education and the global professional context.

Indonesia, as a nation with extraordinarily rich cultural diversity, possesses a strong foundation for fostering *cross-cultural understanding* within its educational system. However, the reality of national curriculum policies often reveals a tension between global pressures and local interests that are not always successfully integrated. A critical analysis of the 2013 Curriculum reveals that the adoption of various assessment innovations and competency-based approaches in Indonesia is driven more by external pressures and *policy borrowing* than by organic needs arising from educational practices on the ground, leading to significant inconsistencies in implementation at the teacher and school levels (Hendrastomo & Januarti, 2025). This situation is exacerbated by the low level of explicit integration of global competence dimensions into instructional materials. A review of English textbooks for senior high school levels in Indonesia indicates that the representation of *global competence* in learning materials remains uneven and tends to focus on only one or two dimensions, failing to address the four dimensions of *global competence* formulated by the OECD PISA in a holistic manner. This finding suggests a significant gap between policy intent and actual implementation in the classroom.

From a comparative research perspective, a literature review on intercultural competence in higher education shows that foreign language instruction, international experiences, and collaborative learning are the most frequently studied areas, while studies specifically linking a developing country's national education system policies to the development of *cross-cultural understanding* remain very limited. Similar findings also confirm that integrating ICC into the curriculum has a positive impact on students' learning motivation, cross-cultural communication competencies, and language proficiency simultaneously (Hakim, 2023). This literature gap serves as both *the research gap*

and the basis *for the novelty* of this study: no comprehensive study has yet conducted a comparative analysis of how Indonesia's education system—in terms of its policies, curriculum, and teaching practices—develops *global competence* and *cross-cultural understanding* compared to the education systems of countries recognized as successful at the international level, such as Finland, Singapore, and Japan.

Based on this background and the identification of the literature gap, this study formulates three main research questions: (1) How does the integration of *global competence* in the Indonesian education curriculum compare with that of globally benchmarked education systems? (2) To what extent can Indonesian education policies systematically and sustainably accommodate the development of *cross-cultural understanding*? (3) What strategic factors need to be strengthened in the Indonesian education system to holistically enhance students' *global competence*?

In line with these research questions, this study aims to: (1) conduct a comparative analysis of the implementation of *global competence* in the education systems of Indonesia and reference countries; (2) evaluate the effectiveness of Indonesia's education policies in fostering cross-cultural understanding among students; and (3) formulate evidence-based strategic recommendations for strengthening students' *global competence* within Indonesia's education system. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the discourse on comparative education, particularly in the fields of *intercultural education* and *global citizenship*. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for policymakers and education practitioners in designing curricula that are more responsive to global demands, while remaining rooted in the uniqueness and richness of Indonesia's cultural values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concepts of Global Competence and Global Citizenship Education

Global competence in the context of education cannot be separated from the construct of Global Citizenship Education (GCE), which is a pedagogical approach aimed at fostering values of empathy, intercultural understanding, and social responsibility in students to address increasingly complex global challenges. A study on the implementation of GCE through the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia indicates that while elements of global citizenship have been integrated through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), the concept of GCE remains poorly understood and not systematically implemented by educators in the field, resulting in a significant gap between policy objectives and actual classroom practices. In developed countries such as Japan, the GCE approach in higher education still tends to be oriented toward the formation of neoliberal-style global human resources—that is, it emphasizes English proficiency and competitiveness in the global job market more than it does fostering critical and ethically responsible global citizens. These findings indicate that the orientation of GCE differs substantially across countries, depending on their respective socio-political contexts and national curriculum priorities.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as a Key Dimension

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is one of the essential elements in the development of students' global competencies. The development and validation of ICC measurement instruments show that this construct encompasses four interrelated dimensions: knowledge, awareness, attitude, and skills, which together form an individual's ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in multicultural environments. In the context of online learning in Japan, the implementation of technology-based GCE has proven capable of fostering empathetic identification, developing critical agency, and strengthening students' self-confidence in cross-cultural interactions—all of which are crucial pillars in building comprehensive ICC (Andriya, 2025).

The Indonesian Education System: Multiculturalism and Curriculum Policy

Indonesia is known as one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse countries in the world, with more than 1,300 ethnic groups living side by side. Nevertheless, the implementation of multicultural education within a centralized system still faces structural tensions: on one hand, policies promote the recognition of local diversity, while on the other, pressure for national standardization often limits teachers' pedagogical adaptability at the school level (Asmara, Astuti, Ambarita, Thoha, & Maryanti, 2025). In the context of citizenship, a systematic review of civic engagement programs reveals that project-based learning, as implemented in P5, is the most effective method for fostering students' active engagement as critical and globally competent citizens, although its evaluation model still requires further development (Rhomadoni, Erma, Sugirad, Dahliah, & Asmara, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) approach as its primary methodological framework, which is a scientific review procedure designed to systematically, transparently, and replicably identify, screen, evaluate, and synthesize findings from various relevant studies. The implementation protocol follows the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure accountability at every stage of literature selection and minimize potential bias (Aulia, Ramadhan, Rahmawati, Kholifah, & Karawang, 2025). The literature search was conducted through four reputable academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ERIC, using a combination of keywords: "global competence," "cross-cultural understanding," "comparative education system," "Indonesia education," and "intercultural education." The established inclusion criteria included indexed scientific articles published between 2019 and 2024, written in Indonesian or English, discussing global competence or intercultural education, and available in full text. Conversely, editorials, non-peer-reviewed conference proceedings, duplicate articles, and studies without verified methodologies were excluded. From a total of 309 initially identified articles, a four-stage screening process based on PRISMA yielded 10 final articles that met all inclusion criteria.

These articles were analyzed using narrative synthesis to map key themes, patterns of findings, and knowledge gaps across studies (Page et al., 2021).

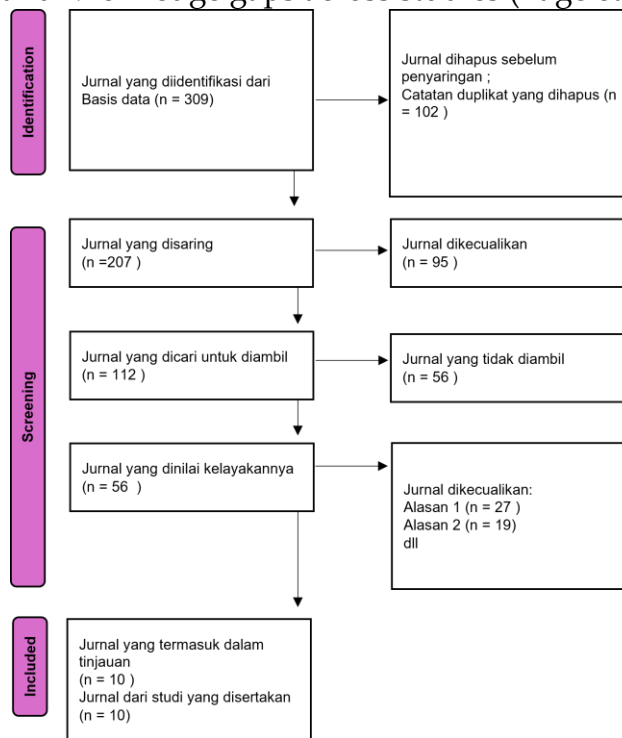


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A systematic review of the ten articles meeting the inclusion criteria in this study yielded a fairly comprehensive overview of the research landscape on global competencies and cross-cultural understanding within the context of comparative education. These ten studies reflect a diversity of methodological approaches, ranging from literature reviews to large-scale quantitative surveys, which collectively contribute a multidimensional perspective on the issue of integrating global competence into education systems. Table 1 below presents a comprehensive synthesis of each of the selected studies.

Table 1. Literature Synthesis

N o	Name & Year	Title	Method	Subject/Conte xt	Findings	Relevance
1	(Rajagukguk, 2024)	Analysis of Education Systems: A Comparison of Education Systems in Indonesia	Compara tive literature study	The education systems of Indonesia and Malaysia	Both countries are committed to improving the quality of education, but differ in their curricular	Provides a basis for structural compariso n of the Indonesian education system with those of other Southeast

		and Malaysia			approaches; Indonesia's is dynamic and reform-oriented, while Malaysia's is more centralized and stable	Asian countries
2	(Saputra & Yolanda, 2025)	Cross-Curricular Perspectives on English Language Education : A Qualitative Comparative Study between Indonesia and Australia	A qualitative comparative analysis of policy documents and teachers' perspectives	English language education systems in Indonesia and Australia	Indonesia's centralized system limits teacher autonomy and cross-curricular integration; Australia's decentralized system encourages technology-based pedagogical innovation	Relevant for analyzing structural barriers to the development of cross-cultural understanding in Indonesia
3	(Huang, Cheung, Xu, & Jiang, 2025)	Intercultural Learning and Adolescents' Global Competence: The Mediating Effect of	Multilevel quantitative survey	211,554 students from 26 economies/countries	Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between intercultural learning and students' global competenc	Provides empirical evidence of the psychological mechanisms underlying the development of global

		Self-Efficacy			e at both the individual and school levels; a discriminatory school climate moderates this effect	competence across countries
4	(Saputra & Yolanda, 2025)	Cross-Curricular Perspectives on English Language Education	Comparative qualitative analysis	Language education curricula and policies in Indonesia and Australia	Recent reforms in Indonesia have not yet been able to overcome resource constraints and the dominance of standardized testing that limits modern pedagogy	Strengthening the argument regarding the gap between policy and implementation in Indonesia
5	(Prayitno, Pati, Kanzunudin, Kudus, Mohammed, Saif, Dwianto, & Maret, 2025)	Adaptive Curriculum, Digital Literacy, and Global Collaboration for Enhancing Multicultural Competence in Higher Education	Quantitative; multiple regression	700 Indonesian college students	Adaptive curriculum ($\beta=0.342$), digital literacy ($\beta=0.416$), and global collaboration ($\beta=0.289$) significantly contribute to multicultural competence; digital literacy is the	Empirically demonstrates strategic variables that can strengthen the global competence of Indonesian students

					strongest predictor	
6	(Triwiyanto, 2024)	Literature Review: Global Competencies and World-Class University Outcomes in Indonesia	Literature Review (Publish or Perish)	World-class universities in Indonesia	Achieving world-class university status is strongly correlated with the development of global competencies; globalization demands the renewal of skills among students, faculty, and educational staff	Provides a perspective on the urgency of global competencies in the context of Indonesian higher education
7	(Directions, Asia, & Analysis, 2025)	Reading the Direction of Southeast Asian Education : A Comparative Analysis of the “ ” in Indonesian and Malaysian Education	Descriptive-comparative; document analysis	Indonesian-Malaysian education regulations and policies	Malaysia demonstrates greater consistency in funding and equitable access to education; Indonesia faces geographical disparities and uneven teacher quality	Deepening comparative understanding of education policies in the regional
8	(Sumampouw, 2026)	Comparative Analysis of Cross-	Literature review	The education management systems of Finland, Japan,	Successful countries (Finland, Japan,	Direct benchmarks for comparing

		National Education Management to Improve the Quality of Education in Indonesia		South Korea, and Indonesia	South Korea) excel in equitable access, continuous teacher training, and accountable evaluation ; Indonesia needs to strengthen data-driven planning	Indonesia with successful countries at the global level
9	(Hamida, Latifah, & Aroma, 2026)	Global Education Policy Case Studies	Comparative; policy analysis	ASEAN countries and the global context	Globalization drives the adoption of international standards; countries adapt global policies to their respective local contexts; 21st-century skills are a primary focus	Relevant as a framework for understanding policy borrowing and local adaptation within the Indonesian education system
10	(Adiyas & Aini, 2026)	Global Education Models and Implications for Learning Innovation in Indonesia	Qualitative descriptive; literature review	Finnish, Japanese, and Singaporean education models vs. Indonesia	The global education models of Finland, Japan, and Singapore contribute to digital literacy, teacher	Key references for comparing global education models relevant to the

					competence, and the integration of global perspectives; Indonesia needs to adapt these principles without neglecting the local context	research title
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The patterns of findings across studies in the synthesis table above indicate a consistent argument that the Indonesian education system faces structural challenges in integrating global competence holistically, while also highlighting several strategic variables proven effective across various national contexts. Table 2 below presents a comparative analysis focused on key dimensions of global competence development.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Global Competence Development in Education Systems

Dimensions of Comparison	Indonesia	Finland/Japan/Singapore	Source
Curriculum orientation	Dynamic-reformative, but tends to be driven by external policy borrowing; inconsistencies in implementation in the field	A stable and consistent competency-based holistic curriculum; rooted in internal pedagogical needs	Sumampouw et al. (2026); Adiyas et al. (2026)
Teacher autonomy	Limited due to a centralized system and the dominance of national standardized tests	High; teachers possess strong pedagogical flexibility and professionalism	Saputra & Yolanda (2025); Saputra et al. (2025)
Integration of intercultural learning	Partial; not yet systematic in the national curriculum or teaching materials	Explicitly integrated into the curriculum; supported by an inclusive school culture	Huang et al. (2025); Adiyas et al. (2026)
Digital literacy as a pillar of	Developing, but not yet widespread; the strongest predictor of multicultural	Strong digital infrastructure integrated into learning	Prayitno et al. (2025); Adiyas et al. (2026)

global competencies	competence in higher education		
Equitable access and quality	Hindered by geographical disparities and unequal distribution of resources	A robust equity system; minimal quality gaps between regions	Muhtaromah & Novi Sopira (2025); Sumampouw et al. (2026)
International collaboration	Beginning to be developed in higher education; not yet widespread in primary and secondary education	Widespread and structured as part of national education policy	Triwiyanto et al. (2024); Prayitno et al. (2025)
Assessment mechanisms	Still dominated by standardized tests; does not yet comprehensively reflect the measurement of global competence	Authentic and formative assessments that measure competencies in a multidimensional way	Sumampouw et al. (2026); Hamida et al. (2026)

Together, the two tables above show that the gap between Indonesia and the reference countries is not merely a matter of resources, but is more fundamental at the level of system design, pedagogical autonomy, and the depth of integration of intercultural dimensions within the curriculum structure. These findings form the foundation of the analysis in the following discussion subsection.

Comparison of Global Competence Integration in the Curricula of Indonesia and Global Benchmark Countries

A comparative study between Indonesia and benchmark countries such as Finland, Japan, and Singapore reveal substantial disparities regarding the depth of integration of *global competence* into the national curriculum architecture. These three countries have positioned holistic learning, character development, and a global perspective as core, integrative elements of their curricula, rather than as supplements. The opposite is true in Indonesia, where the cycle of curriculum reform tends to be reactive to external pressures rather than emerging from pedagogical needs that grow organically from within the system. (reinforces these findings by identifying three characteristics consistently possessed by high-performing countries: equitable access to education, continuous teacher competency development, and the implementation of accountable evaluation—three aspects that remain unresolved challenges for Indonesia. At the regional level, a comparison with Malaysia also shows that the consistency of Malaysia's funding policies and resource distribution results in more robust equity compared

to Indonesia, which is burdened by geographical complexity and inter-regional disparities.

The Effectiveness of Indonesia's Education Policies in Developing Cross-Cultural Understanding

An evaluation of Indonesia's education policies indicates that the centralization of the system is the most dominant structural barrier to the development of *cross-cultural understanding*. (Huang, Cheung, Xu, & Jiang, 2025) simultaneously demonstrates that reliance on national standardized tests narrows teachers' pedagogical space to adopt cross-cultural learning approaches. This contrasts with Australia, which promotes teacher autonomy and cross-curricular integration through a decentralized system. From a cross-national perspective, (Saputra & Yolanda, 2025) demonstrates, using data from 211,554 students across 26 economies, that intercultural learning significantly enhances students' *global competence*; however, its effectiveness depends on the mediation of *self-efficacy* and the moderation of school climate. These findings have direct implications for Indonesia: the creation of an inclusive school environment free from discriminatory dynamics is a prerequisite for *intercultural learning* programs to function optimally. Furthermore, " " emphasizes that the adoption of global education standards cannot be implemented mechanically but must undergo contextualization that considers local social, cultural, and political realities—a fundamental correction to the tendency of "*policy borrowing*" that has long characterized Indonesia's curriculum reform.

Strategic Factors for Strengthening Global Competence in the Indonesian Education System

A cross-study synthesis identifies four strategic factors that need to be accelerated. *First*, strengthening digital literacy: (Arah, Asia, & Analisis, 2025) demonstrates that digital literacy is the strongest predictor of *multicultural competence* among Indonesian students ($\beta=0.416$, $p<0.001$), making it an investment priority that cannot be ignored. *Second*, structured pedagogical decentralization: teacher autonomy has proven to be a catalyst for cross-cultural learning innovation, as demonstrated in the contexts of Australia and Finland. *Third*, the expansion of international collaboration vertically from universities to the elementary education level; this correlates with the achievement of *world-class universities* grounded in the maturity of *global competencies*. *Fourth*, transforming the evaluation system toward authentic, multidimensional competency-based assessment, because (Hamida, Latifah, & Aroma, 2026) indicates that the dominance of standardized tests hinders the meaningful measurement and development of *global competence* in learning practices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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FURTHER STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be considered for future research. First, this research was conducted using a Systematic Literature Review approach; therefore, the findings depend on the availability, scope, and methodological quality of the selected articles. Although the reviewed studies provide strong conceptual and empirical insights, this study does not involve direct field data from teachers, students, policymakers, or school institutions in Indonesia. Future studies are recommended to employ mixed-methods research by combining large-scale quantitative surveys with interviews, classroom observations, or case studies to obtain a deeper understanding of how global competence and cross-cultural understanding are implemented in real educational settings.

Second, the comparative analysis in this study focuses mainly on Indonesia and several benchmark education systems, such as Finland, Japan, and Singapore. Further research may expand the comparison by including more diverse countries from Southeast Asia, Europe, and other developing contexts to identify policy patterns that are more relevant and adaptable to Indonesia's socio-cultural conditions. Third, future studies should examine specific educational levels, such as primary education, secondary education, vocational education, and higher education, because each level may require different strategies for integrating global competence into the curriculum.

Finally, further investigation is needed to develop valid and contextualized assessment instruments for measuring students' global competence and intercultural communicative competence in Indonesia. Such instruments should not only assess cognitive knowledge, but also attitudes, skills, self-efficacy, empathy, and students' ability to participate responsibly in multicultural and global contexts. Future research may also explore the role of digital learning platforms, teacher professional development, international collaboration programs, and authentic assessment models in strengthening students' global competence in a sustainable manner.

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