



D-PBICC Model: Digital Project-Based Learning for High School Students' Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has become crucial in the era of globalization, yet English teaching in Indonesia often separates language from its cultural context. This study aims to develop and test the validity, practicality, and effectiveness of the Digital Project-Based Learning for Intercultural Communicative Competence (D-PBICC) model for senior high school students within the context of the Independent Curriculum. The method used is Research and Development (R&D) with the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) model. The limited trial subjects involved one eleventh grade class in an urban high school in Jakarta that independently implemented the Independent Curriculum. Data collection was carried out through a needs analysis questionnaire, expert validation sheets, ICC scales (pre-test and post-test), observation sheets, and a social media content analysis project assessment rubric. Quantitative data were analyzed using a paired-sample t-test in SPSS, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically using directed coding. The results of the study indicate that the developed D-PBICC model meets high validity criteria (88%) based on expert assessments, and is highly practical according to teacher and student responses. Implementation of the model significantly improved all five components of students' ICC (attitudes, knowledge, interpreting skills, finding skills, and critical cultural awareness). The social media content analysis procedure as a core assignment successfully transformed students from passive consumers into critical analysts capable of distinguishing diverse cultural products, practices, and perspectives. The main conclusion indicates that the D-PBICC model is effective as a pedagogical innovation relevant to the needs of the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, Digital Project-Based Learning, Social Media Content Analysis, Independent Curriculum, ADDIE Model.

1. Introduction

Globalization and the massive advancement of communication technology have made intercultural encounters an integral part of everyday life in modern society (Riadini & Cahyono, 2021). In the foreign language education landscape, this global phenomenon has driven a fundamental paradigm shift, where the ultimate goal of language learning is no longer limited to mastering purely linguistic competencies such as grammar and vocabulary, but rather extends to developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Byram, 2021; Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). ICC is defined as the holistic ability to interact effectively and appropriately with speakers from different cultural backgrounds (Fantini, 2006), by integrating cultural knowledge, interpretation skills, openness, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2021; O'Dowd, 2021). Failure to understand and navigate the cultural dimensions of communication often triggers psychological misunderstandings and reinforces negative stereotypes, even when students demonstrate excellent grammatical accuracy (Riadini & Cahyono, 2021). Therefore, integrating cultural elements into foreign language classes is now a theoretical and practical necessity to prepare students to become competent global citizens.

In Indonesia, this urgent need aligns with the policy direction of the Independent Curriculum, which provides flexibility and broad autonomy to educational units to deliver in-depth, relevant, and student-centered learning (Dewi, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2022). One of the main operational pillars of this curriculum is the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as an instructional strategy to develop soft skills, strengthen character, and higher-order thinking skills (Andriyanto et al., 2023; Priyambada, 2023). However, actual implementation in the field still faces significant pedagogical challenges. Many English teachers report feeling inadequately trained to shift from their conventional role as the center of instruction to that of a dynamic project facilitator (Priyambada, 2023; Reza et al., 2023). Furthermore, the scarcity of structured teaching materials and the absence of concrete module examples that align linguistic content with intercultural competencies are further obstacles (Andriyanto et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2022), coupled with the fact that the use of digital technology in the classroom is often superficial without meaningful pedagogical depth (Reza et al., 2023; Dewi, 2021). These conditions create a clear gap between the ideal demands of the curriculum and the reality of classrooms that still lack structured operational models.

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To address this gap, the characteristics of today's digitally native students can be positively optimized. High school-aged adolescents spend a significant portion of their daily time interacting on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X, which are essentially giant repositories of authentic, current, and multimodal cultural content (Zhu, 2025; Islam, 2022). Unfortunately, the potential of social media as a digital cultural laboratory remains largely overlooked and underutilized in a planned manner in formal school instruction (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). This development research aims to bridge this gap by designing and validating a concrete model called the Digital Project-Based Learning Model for Intercultural Communicative Competence (D-PBICC). This model specifically positions structured social media content analysis as a core authentic project assignment to connect formal school learning with students' informal digital ecosystems (Zhu, 2025). Through this model, students are not only invited to communicate, but are trained to critically analyze multimodal cultural texts in order to objectively identify global cultural values, assumptions, and perspectives.

The urgency of developing the D-PBICC model is fundamentally rooted in the reality that cross-border digital interactions have radically altered the sociolinguistic landscape of modern adolescents. When students engage with applications on their smartphones, they are no longer merely consuming traditional print-based texts; instead, they are constantly confronted with a complex, multimodal environment where language, visual semiotics, audio, and cultural values interact simultaneously. Unfortunately, the efficiency of this digital consumption is rarely accompanied by a capacity for critical filtering, leaving students highly vulnerable to absorbing cultural biases without recognizing the underlying value structures. Therefore, this model emerges to transform passive consumption habits into a structured, meaningful process of academic inquiry.

Theoretically, the primary foundation underlying the D-PBICC model is the systematic synthesis of Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework and the instructional tenets of digital Project-Based Learning. Byram emphasizes that genuine intercultural competence necessitates both *savoir-apprendre* (the skills of discovering and interacting) and *savoir-s'engager* (critical cultural awareness). By positioning social media platforms as authentic investigative spaces, the D-PBICC model provides students with concrete opportunities to operationalize both dimensions through structured content analysis projects that connect directly to the digital environments they navigate daily.

A fundamental weakness of traditional cultural instruction in foreign language classrooms has been its over-reliance on static, essentialist, and stereotypical cultural representations typically found in conventional textbooks. Standard educational materials frequently present the target culture superficially, focusing almost exclusively on surface-level elements such as traditional foods, ethnic clothing, or annual festivals. This surface-level approach completely fails to equip students with an understanding of dynamic, shifting sociocultural values that are constantly renegotiated in the global digital public sphere—a critical pedagogical gap that can be effectively bridged through real-time social media content analysis.

Through the authentic project framework of D-PBICC, social media is no longer viewed as a digital distraction that disrupts academic focus; rather, it is purposefully reconstructed into a rich, digital cultural laboratory. Multicultural content such as daily vlogs, global social campaigns, interactive comments, and trending audio-visual materials are systematically analyzed by students through a semiotic lens. This process of deconstructing digital texts compels students to move past literal linguistic translations and delve into implicit layers of meaning that reflect the core worldviews, assumptions, and foundational beliefs of the target native speaker communities. In addition to enhancing intercultural intelligence, the D-PBICC model is strategically engineered to address the persistent challenge of low student engagement in contemporary foreign language education. Conventional instructional methods that maintain a strict boundary between the classroom and the outside social reality often cause students to view foreign language materials as detached from their actual lives. By bringing the very digital platforms that form a core part of their daily social identities into formal instructional spaces, students' intrinsic motivation to explore foreign languages and cultures can be optimally stimulated and sustained.

Nevertheless, transitioning toward an academic utilization of social media demands a significant restructuring of the teacher's traditional classroom role. Within the D-PBICC framework, educators must move away from their absolute authority as the sole source of cultural knowledge and transition into dynamic digital facilitators and critical counselors. Teachers play a pivotal role in designing pedagogical scaffolding, steering the focus of student investigations to align with curricular goals, and moderating group discussions to ensure critical thinking remains objective and free from ethnocentric confrontation.

Another crucial challenge identified in current technology integration under the Independent Curriculum is the phenomenon of superficial digitalization. Many instructional practices claim to be digitally driven simply because they utilize a projector or require students to look up articles online, lacking the pedagogical depth necessary to transform how students process information. The D-PBICC model actively disrupts this superficial pattern by implementing structured, project-based portfolio evaluations where technology is utilized as an active tool for knowledge production and deep intercultural reflection, rather than a mere visual decoration.

From a linguistic development perspective, the D-PBICC model does not neglect foundational language skills such as grammar accuracy or vocabulary acquisition. On the contrary, these linguistic elements are embedded within a highly functional, communicative context. As students analyze source materials and compile their digital project reports in English, they are naturally compelled to employ precise language structures to articulate their critical findings. Consequently, linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence grow simultaneously and reinforce one another within an authentic learning environment.

The model also places a strong emphasis on peer collaboration, which is a core 21st-century skill. The nature of digital PjBL tasks requires intensive group work across multiple stages, including content curation, sociocultural data analysis, and the final presentation of findings. It is during this collaborative process that the negotiation of meaning occurs, not only between the students and the digital cultural texts but also among the students themselves. This peer interaction fosters an environment of natural inclusivity and social tolerance within the classroom.

Furthermore, the theoretical urgency of this development research relates directly to the scarcity of concrete, actionable guidelines accessible to educators in the field. Although the Independent Curriculum policy offers broad autonomy for instructional innovation, many teachers face a form of pedagogical paralysis due to the absence of clear operational syntax and modules on how to practically align digital technology with intercultural outcomes. The introduction of the D-PBICC design and its validation instruments is expected to fill this void by providing a highly replicable blueprint.

Sociologically, cultivating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) through the D-PBICC model at the senior high school level holds vital long-term strategic value. Late adolescents are in a critical phase of forming their personal identities and broader worldviews. Equipping them with a critical analytical lens in the digital realm helps safeguard them from falling into digital echo chambers, radicalism, or xenophobia. Simultaneously, it prevents them from losing appreciation for their own local cultural roots amidst the uncurated waves of global cultural assimilation.

As a piece of educational Research and Development (R&D), the primary focus of this study goes far beyond the creation of a conceptual model. The research advances through rigorous feasibility evaluations, including extensive validation by content experts, media specialists, and pedagogues, followed by practical field testing within pilot classrooms. This comprehensive empirical validation is crucial to ensure that the resulting D-PBICC model components are adaptive, resilient, and fully prepared to meet the complexities of 21st-century digital education.

Based on these overarching rationales, this development research is structured to systematically address modern pedagogical challenges through clearly defined milestones. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) analyze the foundational needs for digital intercultural project models in secondary education; (2) design the operational syntax and core components of the D-PBICC model; (3) evaluate the theoretical validity of the model based on expert consensus; and (4) assess the practical implementation and feasibility of the model within current foreign language classroom ecosystems.

Through the realization of these objectives, this research is expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on intercultural foreign language pedagogy in the digital era. Practically, it aims to provide educators with a proven framework to optimize social media as a constructive, educational tool. Ultimately, by systematically bridging the gap between national curriculum ideals and daily classroom realities, this model strives to foster a new generation of global citizens who are communicatively competent, critically reflective, and ethically grounded.

To address this gap, the characteristics of today's digitally native students can be positively optimized. High school-aged adolescents spend a significant portion of their daily time interacting on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X, which are essentially giant repositories of authentic, current, and multimodal cultural content (Zhu, 2025; Islam, 2022). Unfortunately, the potential of social media as a digital cultural laboratory remains largely overlooked and underutilized in a planned manner in formal school instruction (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). This development research aims to bridge this gap by designing and validating a concrete model called the Digital Project-Based Learning Model for Intercultural Communicative Competence (D-PBICC). This model specifically positions structured social media content analysis as a core authentic project assignment to connect formal school learning with students' informal digital ecosystems (Zhu, 2025). Through this model, students are not only invited to communicate, but are trained to critically analyze multimodal cultural texts in order to objectively identify global cultural values, assumptions, and perspectives.

2. Research methods

This study applies the Research and Development (R&D) method, which aims to produce, test the practicality, and prove the effectiveness of an educational product in the form of an innovative learning model (Sugiyono, 2013). This instructional development design is based on the ADDIE model, which includes five sequential and iterative stages: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (Branch, 2009; Allen, 2006; Kurt, 2021). The ADDIE model was chosen based on its systematic and highly adaptive characteristics in facilitating the development of complex instructional products, where the logical alignment between formative evaluations at each stage ensures that the final outputs in the form of modules and learning guides are fully mature before being widely implemented.

2.1 Design and Development Procedures

The initial steps of the research began with an analysis phase that included distributing needs questionnaires to English teachers and high school students, conducting in-depth interviews, and analyzing the English Learning Outcomes Phase F document in the Independent Curriculum to determine the targeted core competencies. Entering the design phase, the researchers developed a conceptual plan for the D-PBICC model, which included a theoretical foundation, four-phase learning syntax, assessment instrument design, and selection of relevant cultural topics. In the development phase, the first draft of the model guidebook, teacher's manual, and cultural analysis worksheets for students were developed. These were then validated by experts in language pedagogy, educational technology, and intercultural studies through focus group discussions and validation assessment sheets. The revised results, based on expert input, were then taken to the implementation phase, where the model was trialed on a limited basis in a real classroom setting using a weak experimental design in the form of a one-group pre-test–post-test design over a seven-week period. Finally, a summative evaluation phase was conducted to analyze post-trial empirical data to measure the model's validity, practicality, and effectiveness as a whole.

2.2 Research Subjects and Instruments

The subjects involved in this limited trial were a class of eleventh graders consisting of thirty-five students at a public high school in urban Jakarta that had independently implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, taking into account the availability of computer laboratory facilities, adequate internet access, and the willingness of partner teachers to act as classroom instruction implementers. To ensure the feasibility of data collection within the research period, a series of instruments were arranged sequentially and were phase-specific. These instruments included a needs analysis questionnaire, a material and media validation sheet for experts, a student self-report ICC assessment scale adapted from validated scales for pre- and post-tests (Özdemir & Çakır, 2022; Fantini, 2006), a classroom activity observation guide sheet, and a multimodal project assessment rubric adapted from the Intercultural Knowledge VALUE Rubric (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009) to measure the quality of students' cultural content analysis work.

2.3 Social Media Content Analysis Procedure

The social media content analysis project assignment in the D-PBICC model is operationalized through rigorous scientific procedures to transform students' digital exploration activities into a focused academic observation method. In small groups, students are guided using a cultural text analysis worksheet to dissect a digital artifact of their choice taken from Instagram, YouTube, or X with a pre-agreed formal theme such as culinary traditions, regional festivals, or norms of social politeness. The artifact dissection procedure must follow four sequential stages. The first stage is to objectively observe and describe three layers of the artifact: the verbal layer consisting

of word choice and comments, the visual layer consisting of images and composition, and the interactional layer consisting of the dynamics of likes and text replies. The second stage is to interpret and connect these physical findings with the products, practices, and perspectives of the speakers' home cultures (according to Byram's *savoir comprendre* element). The third stage is to compare the results of the interpretation with their own local culture to map common ground and potential communication conflicts. The fourth stage is to critically evaluate the underlying ethical values (according to Byram's *savoir s'engager* element) and synthesize all the conclusions into a new multimodal communication product such as a digital infographic or a short video presentation.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data from the ICC scale in the pre-test and post-test sessions were statistically processed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistical analysis was calculated to map the average student score profile, while hypothesis testing was conducted using a paired-sample t-test after the normality assumption of data distribution using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was met. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from classroom observation sheets, researcher field notes, interview transcripts with teachers and student representatives, and student content analysis worksheets were analyzed using thematic analysis. This analysis process went through stages of data reduction through directed coding based on Byram's five *savoir* framework, code clustering into conceptual themes, data source triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings, and drawing in-depth qualitative conclusions regarding the dynamics of model coercion in the classroom.

3. Results and Discussion

The presentation of research results is described sequentially following the operational stages of the ADDIE model that has been implemented, reinforced by the presentation of quantitative data on student performance and theoretical discussions that contextualize field findings with the latest literature developments.

3.1 Results of the Conceptual Analysis and Design Stage

Initial findings from the needs analysis phase confirmed the existence of a real problem in partner schools. Eighty percent of students stated that their English language learning so far tended to focus on working on written grammar problems and rarely connected reading texts to an understanding of the cultural background of native speakers or global cultural diversity. Meanwhile, teacher interviews revealed instructional anxiety in designing truly active and meaningful project-based learning activities due to the lack of operational step-by-step guidance in the Independent Curriculum. In response to these issues, the design phase successfully formulated a blueprint for the D-PBICC model that divides the learning process into a systematic four-phase syntax: an intercultural theme orientation phase, an instructional language skills practice phase, an implementation phase for group social media analysis projects, and a critical reflection and public dissemination phase for students' culturally diverse products.

3.2 Results of the Development and Expert Validation Stage

The development phase successfully produced the first prototypes of the model's three main documents: the theoretical guidebook for the D-PBICC model, the teacher's learning module for Phase F, and the student cultural text analysis worksheet booklet. These three documents were then assessed by a panel of experts consisting of English language learning experts, instructional technology experts, and cultural studies experts through a focus group discussion forum. The cumulative average score obtained from the validation sheet was 88 percent, indicating that the draft model was highly valid and feasible for implementation in the field without structural revision. Minor input from the experts, such as the need to include a glossary of cultural terms and the addition of examples of social media hashtags that are safe for teenagers, was immediately integrated into the revised prototype before the classroom trial began.

3.3 Limited Trial Results and Model Effectiveness

A limited trial in grade XI demonstrated a very high level of student engagement during the content analysis project. The model's effectiveness in improving intercultural communicative competence was empirically demonstrated through a comparative analysis of ICC scale scores before and after the intervention. Quantitative data comparing the average scores for each subscale of the ICC component are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison Results of Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Intercultural Competence

Intercultural Competence Components (ICC)	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	p-value
Attitude of Openness (Savoir Être)	3.24	4.15	0.91	0.002
Social Knowledge (Savoirs)	2.85	3.92	1.07	0.001
Interpreting Skills (Savoir Comprendre)	2.64	4.21	1.57	0.000
Discovering Skills (Savoir Apprendre)	2.90	3.88	0.98	0.003

Critical Cultural Awareness (Savoir S'engager)	2.52	3.75	1.23	0.000
Total ICC Competency Scale	2.83	3.98	1.15	0.000

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the results of the paired-sample t-test show a significance p-value of zero point zero zero zero, which is far below the error threshold of zero point zero five. This statistical finding proves that the intervention through the application of the D-PBICC model has a significant positive effect on improving the intercultural competence of high school students. When examined per component, the highest score increase was experienced by the subscale of skills in interpreting and connecting cultures with an increase of one point five seven points. This phenomenon confirms that structured content analysis assignments using cultural text worksheet guidelines are very effective in training students' analytical acumen in translating the implicit meanings behind multimodal communication symbols on the internet.

Peningkatan Skor Kompetensi Interkultural (ICC) Siswa via Model D-PBICC

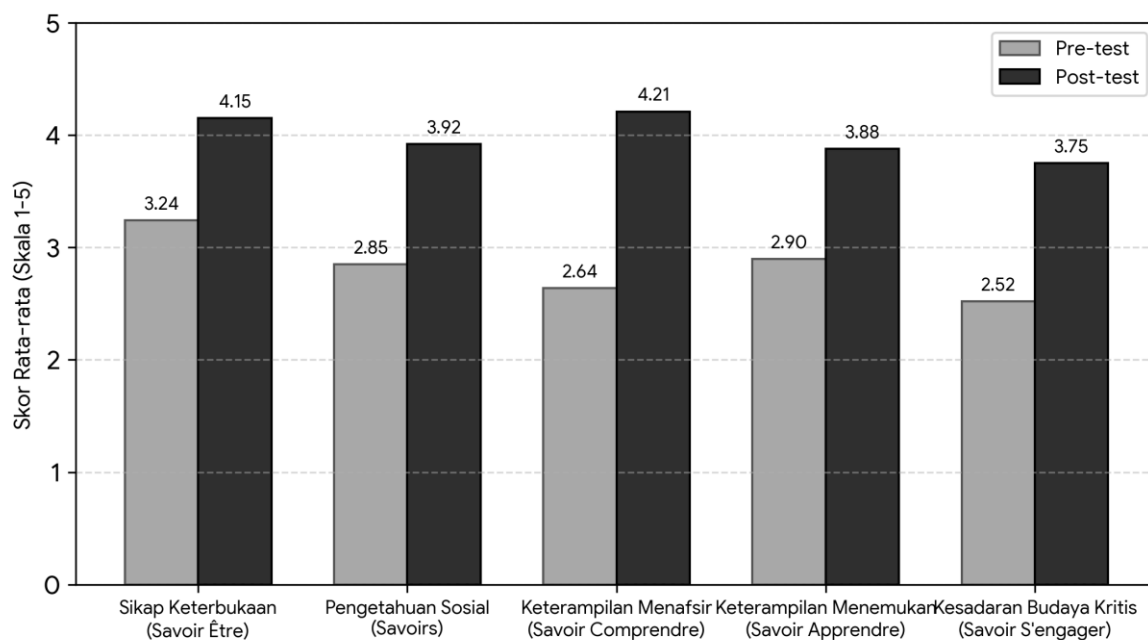


Figure 1. Visual Comparison of Students' Intercultural Competence Achievements

3.4 Discussion of Technology Integration and Intercultural Competence

The operational success of the D-PBICC model in boosting student learning outcomes is inseparable from the appropriate strategy of repositioning social media in the classroom. Until now, social media has often been viewed negatively by educators as a source of learning distraction or simply a means of shallow entertainment. In the D-PBICC model, Instagram posts or short videos on TikTok are reframed as objects of scientific study on a par with classic literary texts. When students are guided to dissect a caption or the dynamics of text interactions in the comments section of a global account, they are actually engaging in in-depth linguistic enculturation. This activity psychologically reduces students' language anxiety because they are working with a medium that is very familiar to their daily lives, thus fostering intrinsic motivation and higher confidence in expressing analytical opinions in English (Zhu, 2025). This confirms contemporary theories regarding the importance of bringing real-world texts into the language classroom to create an authentic learning atmosphere.

The significant role of this blended learning model has also successfully mitigated the issue of limited internet infrastructure, which often hampers the failure of technology integration in Indonesian schools. Through a flexible blended learning approach, students can shift their search and download of digital cultural artifacts into independent assignments outside of school hours using their personal devices (Dooly, 2026). Face-to-face classroom sessions are then fully optimized to facilitate critical group discussions, teacher language guidance, and presentations of their work. This blended instructional governance model not only conserves the school's internet quota but also indirectly trains students' self-regulation and independent collaboration skills, core elements of 21st-century skills. The effectiveness of this structured model's syntax provides a valuable practical contribution to the professional development of English teachers in implementing a culturally responsive digital project-based learning model in the Merdeka Curriculum era.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the entire series of research and development conducted, the main conclusion can be drawn that the D-PBICC learning model has proven to be theoretically valid, practically implemented in the classroom, and significantly effective in improving the Intercultural Communicative Competence of high school students within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The model's high validity is demonstrated by expert assessments that recognize the strength of the model's conceptual and procedural structure, while its level of practicality is reflected in the ease with which teachers can manage the project syntax and the high enthusiasm of students during the learning process. The model's effectiveness is empirically proven by statistical test results that show a significant increase in scores across all five dimensions of intercultural competence, with the highest achievement in the aspect of skills in interpreting digital cultural texts. The applied structured analysis procedure successfully transformed students' roles from mere passive consumers to critical and reflective digital analysts of the diversity of global cultural values. The implications of this research confirm that social media has high pedagogical value when integrated through a systematic project model. As a suggestion for further intervention development, it is recommended to pilot this model on a broader and more heterogeneous school sample scale and explore the potential for integrating advanced immersive technologies to further enrich the quality of students' learning experiences.

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