

# The Intercultural Competence in Colombian University Teachers - Analysis of a Questionnaire

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## Abstract

The promotion of Intercultural Competence (IC) in English Teaching has been an area of extensive study and advocacy at a global level; however, in the Colombian context, this initiative is in its first stages. This article reports results from a first phase of a mixed research study carried out within the framework of the Doctorate in Education at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, which aims to explore and identify the intercultural profile of a group of English professors working at eight public universities in Colombia.

In the first stage, a quantitative survey study was developed, based on the results of a questionnaire that was answered anonymously and voluntarily by 70 English teachers. After examining the questionnaire, one of the most interesting results was the significant difference between the beliefs of professors with and without postgraduate studies. This mirrors the fact that a high number of these educators understand promotion of intercultural competence merely as content transmission, ignoring the development of skills and attitudes. Whatsmore, it is evident that a large percentage of these professors filter cultural topics for the class and approach them in a personal and anecdotal way. On the other hand, there is a marked concern amongst the population about the need for promoting cultural relativism in students, both in order to recognize their own identity and accept otherness.

**Keywords:** intercultural competence, teachers' beliefs and conceptions, intercultural practices, cultural relativism, public university.

## 1. Introduction

In Colombia, higher education institutions are subjected to an organization and surveillance system which ensures certain quality conditions. This system is called 'accreditation'. The accreditation is a testimony that declares the status of the quality of a program or institution based on an evaluation process in which the institution, the academic communities and the National Accreditation Council (CNA) participate (Note 1) (National Accreditation System, 2015). Therefore, it is expected that both universities and their academic programs have achieved, or are in the process of achieving, an accreditation which allows the program to continue being offered.

One of the aspects evaluated in these accreditation processes is the area of internationalization, which includes among other factors, the insertion of the institution in international academic contexts. This is achieved through cooperation networks and student and teacher mobility. In order to achieve successful mobility experiences, it is imperative that the academic community develops competencies that allow them to function satisfactorily in different contexts and situations of intercultural interaction, that is to say, that they develop a high degree of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2004; Quiroz, 2013). As Deardorff, 2004; p. 2) states "One meaningful outcome of internationalization efforts is the development of interculturally competent students. Yet, few universities address the development of interculturally competent students as an anticipated outcome of internationalization in which the concept of "intercultural competence" is specifically defined".

Intercultural competence (hereinafter CI) is understood as the ability to act and communicate appropriately when facing complex worlds, and individual beings with different expectations, practices and attitudes (Mike Byram, 1997; Michael Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Sercu, 2005; Bennett, 2008; Deardorff, 2009; Hernández & Valdez, 2010; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Alonso & Fernández, 2013; Paricio, 2014; Alonso & Fernández, 2015; Witte & Harden, 2015; Demircioğlu & Çakır, 2015). However, this does not develop by itself, on the contrary, it should begin with being promoted in the classroom, equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes

required to achieve this goal in an appropriate manner.

Specifically regarding the area of language teaching, one of the reasons why language teachers should seek to promote IC in their classes is the fact that the study of the language cannot be separated from the sociocultural context in which it occurs. Jokikokko (2010) states that when it comes to intercultural learning and intercultural competence, teachers play a primordial role, because they can affect the thinking and actions of future generations. Thus, it is not only important for teachers to be culturally competent, but they must promote intercultural competence in their students. However, many different investigations (Meyer, 1999; Sercu, 2005; Zhou, 2011; Alonso Belmonte & Fernández Agüero, 2013) have shown that teachers do not have enough clarity around the concept, nor ideas about how to approach it and evaluate it; or even to put it simply, they do not give it the time or weight it deserves. If teachers do not have this intercultural awareness, how can they promote it in the classroom? Intercultural competence is very unlikely to be included in the curriculum of foreign language classes for many reasons, but especially because educators prioritize the development of linguistic competences. This is also due to the fact that “many teachers are aware of their lack of training or inadequate training for the development of IC in the classroom” (Alonso & Fernández, 2013, p. 185).

In Colombia, there are a few research studies that have been developed in the area of interculturality in the teaching of foreign languages. Álvarez (2014) reviewed six major referenced journals in the country (from the seventies to 2011); with the aim of establishing the types of articles published on the subject of culture in ELT (English Language Teaching), the predominant approaches of research and the levels of education where these investigations were developed. The results of Álvarez’s study show that the influence of sociocultural perspective has propelled language teachers to move from a linguistic approach towards a more intercultural approach. However, this demonstrates “the challenges that teachers and researchers face suggest that the intercultural dimension is still in its infancy in the Colombian scholarship” (p. 1).

In order to know the situation after 2011, I made another revision to the same six journals (and two more), this time from 2011 onwards. Thus, 21 articles were obtained, of these, 14 relate qualitative research and five address theoretical aspects or reflections. Nevertheless, only two articles out of the 14 research projects took teachers as their research population. The first one explored the tense relations between the beliefs and practices of teachers of English as a foreign language on the teaching of Culture (Baleghzadeh & Moghadam, 2013). The second, titled “Attitudes and beliefs of the IC in virtual professors” (Barreto & Medina, 2013) is closely related to our project. The only drawback of Barreto and Medina’s study was that they were not examining foreign language teachers.

In accordance with all of the above, this study sought to delve into the intercultural profile of a group of professors, in order to identify their conceptions and beliefs in relation to intercultural competence, as well as their intercultural practices in the English classroom. To this end, a questionnaire was designed for the first phase of the study and an interview for the second phase- which is still in progress. Therefore, this paper will focus on the first phase of the research and will report the findings gathered from the analysis of the questionnaire.

All these previous considerations lead me to pose the following research question:

### *1.1 Research Question*

What are Colombian university professors’ conceptions, beliefs and practices regarding the development of intercultural competence in the English classroom?

## **2. Literature Review**

Thanks to the different cultures that cohabit in our society and to phenomena such as globalization and the unbridled technological progress, interest in the concept of interculturality and its derivatives - intercultural education and intercultural competence - has permeated different fields of knowledge, and among them the area of language teaching. This section presents a brief review of the concepts of interculturality and intercultural competence, focused on the teaching of languages, which is the main area of interest in this study.

The term interculturality has often been confused with multiculturalism and pluriculturalism. Academics such as Walsh (2005); Jokikokko (2010); Walsh (2010); Witte and Harden (2011); Tejerina (2011); Bernabé (2012) and Ramos (2013) have aimed to differentiate these terms, where one differs from others according to the way in which intercultural exchanges often take place. Multiculturalism is a phenomenon that can occur in any society due to aspects such as migration or displacement. Witte and Harden (2011) affirm that the concept of interculturality can be contrasted with the concept of multiculturalism, while the latter visualizes the diversity of cultures in an additive way, the concept of interculturality dissolves cultures and establishes a new genuine field in the midst of the dominant categories of the norms, values, beliefs and discourses of the cultures involved: this is interculturality. In the same line, Tejerina (2011, p. 71) understands multiculturalism as the “presence of

heterogeneous cultures in common spaces of coexistence”, in which the two cultures coexist (but do not interact). Therefore, with the purpose of having a space of coexistence that overcomes cultural conflicts, interaction would be sought instead, and by its mere presence, it would change from multiculturalism to interculturality. Thus, interculturality requires not only the relationship, but also a peaceful coexistence, based on a multidirectional dialogue among cultures.

For the pluriculturalism, Bernabé (2012, p. 69) refers to it as “the simultaneous presence of two or more cultures in a territory and their possible interrelation”. For Alonso and Fernández (2013, p. 190) pluriculturalism and, therefore, plurilingualism “are achieved through the development of a neutral, intermediate, dynamic space that arises from the contact between different cultures (the C1, C2, C3, etc.)”. In this sense, the term pluriculturalism can be confused with multiculturalism, although, multiculturalism differs as it can be defined as the presence of different cultures in a territory, which restrict themselves to coexisting, they are conjoined spatially but not socially (Bernabé, 2012).

In the same way, Walsh (2005) makes a distinction between these terms, coming from Latin American lens. For the author, pluriculturalism is a widespread phenomenon in Latin America, a reflection of a historical coexistence between indigenous and afro people with mixed-race *mestizos*. It is based on the recognition of existing diversity but from a centric perspective of the dominant and national culture. That is to say, subordinate cultures enrich the dominant culture and add cultural diversity, without this necessarily implying a re-thought or reconstruction of the dominant structure. Interculturality, on the other hand, designates multiple-way relationships, negotiations and cultural exchanges; “it aims an equitable interrelation between culturally different people and practices, an interaction that starts from the inherent conflict of social, economic, political and power asymmetries” (p. 45). For the author, interculturality is not simply about recognizing, discovering or tolerating the other and their differences; nor about considering some identities as essential or immovable, in fact, it is a space for exchange, where encounters between individuals, knowledge, meanings and different practices are built together.

Regarding the concept of intercultural competence, despite the interest and acceptance that intercultural competence has had in the context of language teaching, in the construction of the concept of IC, approaches have been made from different perspectives, with no agreement having been reached among the theorists to give it a unique definition. (Deardorff, 2006; Dervin, 2010; Zhou, 2011); This is not a problem, as Dervin and Gross (2016) put it, “the way IC has been discussed, conceptualized and manoeuvred deserves full deconstruction again and again. One should never be satisfied with the concept”. Taking this into account, we will present some of the efforts to conceptualize it.

As a result of the ELT evolution different terms have been used to refer to the intercultural dimension in the teaching of languages; such as Intercultural Competence (Fantini, 2000; Fantini, 2009; Sercu et al., 2005; Deardorff, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2016; Dervin, 2010; Dervin & Hahl, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, etc); Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997; Byram, 2009; Sanhueza et al., 2012, etc) and Intercultural Communication Competence (Wiseman, 2003; Yang, 2018). This evolution entailed “a shift in emphasis from linguistic competence (LC) over communicative competence (CC), to intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC)” (Larzén-Östermark, 2008, p. 527). Thus, the terms IC and ICC will be used in this paper interchangeably.

Hernández and Valdez (2010) establish that IC is the ability of a person to act adequately and flexibly when faced with actions, attitudes and expectations of people from other cultures. Adequacy and flexibility imply a knowledge of the cultural differences between the foreign language and one’s own, as well as having the ability to solve intercultural problems as a consequence of said differences. In the same way, IC is the ability to recognize, accept and value one’s own culture, the ability to “establish self-identity while mediating between cultures” (p. 94). In other words, it is to know, understand and value other cultures, without neglecting their own. The extent to which individuals manifest aspects influenced by their cultural affiliations and characteristics is what makes interaction an intercultural phenomenon.

One of the most well-recognized academics in the IC field is Byram (1997), the author of an IC model applied to education, particularly languages teaching. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002, p. 10) refer to intercultural competence as the “[speaker’s]... ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality”. The intercultural speaker is aware that his interlocutor does not have a single identity with beliefs, values and behaviors and that there are more hidden identities to discover.

Byram (1997) presents an IC model (Figure 1), which according to Alonso and Fernández (2013) is the most widely lauded and accepted in the teaching of languages and in the training of teachers in Europe. Being so widely

cited and accepted, it has escaped much critical evaluation (Byram, 2009). Byram's model establishes that, in situations of intercultural exchange, it is necessary to possess skills to interact, interpret, relate and discover aspects from culture 1 (C1) and culture 2 (C2), where both cultures are nurtured and benefited from this interaction. Likewise, critical cultural awareness skills are needed, which lead to a critical reflection on a basis of reasoning, practices and products of cultures. It also requires attitudes of curiosity and receptivity to overcome mistrust, ethnocentrism and judgments about meanings, beliefs and behaviors, as well as being open to compare one's own beliefs and meanings, and analyze them from the point of view of those involved in the interaction. Similarly, it is essential to have a basic knowledge of the social groups and identities of both C1 and C2; In other words, it requires Knowledge "of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12).

	<b>Skills</b> To interpret and relate <i>(savoir comprendre)</i>	
<b>Knowledge</b> Of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal <i>(savoirs)</i>	<b>Education</b> Critical cultural awareness <i>(savoir s'engager)</i>	<b>Attitudes</b> Of curiosity and openness Relativizing self Valuing others <i>(savoir être)</i>
	<b>Skills</b> To discover and/or interact <i>(savoir apprendre/faire)</i>	

Figure 1. Factors in intercultural communication (Byram, 1997, p. 34)

Later, Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) added the values and beliefs a person has because they belong to a number of social groups; since, no matter how open, curious and tolerant you are with other cultures, these values, beliefs and behaviors are deeply rooted and can create reaction and rejection. This is why intercultural speakers need a critical awareness of themselves and their values, as well as those of other people.

Finally, one cannot forget the role and relevance of nonverbal communication, although it has been slightly mentioned by authors such as (Byram, 1997; Wiseman, 2003; Sercu, 2005; and others) it has not been given a significant role in the concept of the IC. This is the reason why Yang (2018) redefines the concept of intercultural communication competence considering both its verbal and nonverbal features: "a second- or foreign-language-speaking individual's verbal (linguistic, socio-cultural- pragmatic, and discourse competence) and nonverbal exchange capabilities (paralinguistic, kinesic, and proxemic competence) appropriately applied to a setting in which one interacts with people coming from different language and cultural backgrounds" (p. 539).

### 3. Method

With the aim of having solid data that answered the research question in depth, the mixed research method was chosen: combining the collection, analysis and linking of quantitative (closed) and qualitative (open) data in the same study, in such a way that we can see more clearly what is happening in the study area (Castro & Godino, 2009; Bisquerra, 2014; Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014; Sánchez, 2015; Creswell, 2015). In that sense, this document discloses the quantitative phase; in which, a survey study was carried out. The instrument of this first phase is a questionnaire of 24 closed questions and three open questions.

#### 3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed and piloted during the first semester of 2016. Once the authorization of the head of departments was obtained through an informed consent, the questionnaire was sent via *Google Drive* to all the English professors of eight public universities during the second semester of 2016. The completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous and 70 professors out of 250 responded. The data obtained through the questionnaire was subjected to a descriptive statistical analysis through the SPSS software and the Excel program, with the aim of establishing correlations and differences among the teachers' answers. The data was correlated with the following variables: (a) Job position (b) Experience abroad and (c) Academic level.

The questionnaire is divided into four sections and consists of 24 closed questions. Three open questions were asked as well, which were separated from the matrix for the analysis with SPSS, and therefore they were not numbered. These three open questions were subjected to a qualitative analysis, using the Atlas.TI software.

These are the four sections (Note 2):

- 1). Basic information: eight items (questions 1 to 8).
- 2). Teachers' conceptions and beliefs about intercultural competence: composed of four items (questions 9 to 12).
- 3). Intercultural practices in the classroom: 9 items (questions 13 to 21).
- 4). Professors' beliefs regarding the intercultural profile of their students.

### 3.1.1 Piloting and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was determined by means of a pilot test to 35 teachers. As a result, a first Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.587 was obtained for a number of 90 items, which did not reach the minimum reliability acceptance values- 0.70 (DeVellis, 2003; Kline, 2000). In the absence of a high correlation between the elements or items, we proceeded to a second and third stage until we got a Cronbach's alpha of 0.829, for 86 elements (Table 1), which is interpreted as a good range of reliability, according to George and Mallery, general criteria (2003, p. 231), because the closer you are to alpha 1, the greater will be the internal consistency of the items. Consequently we had to consider the internal consistency of the questionnaire and the reliability of the pilot test, so we proceeded to apply it to the total sample  $n =$  object of study.

Table 1. Final reliability statistics

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized elements	N of elements
,829	,860	86

## 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the most relevant results of the questionnaire analysis are presented. They will be exposed in two ways: at a general level for the entire sample and at a differentiated (particular) level when they are considered significant. "At a differentiated level" is used to refer to the results of the correlations with each of the variables of analysis: job position, experience abroad and academic level.

### 4.1 Teachers' Characterization

As stated above, section 1 inquired about basic information of the participants in order to achieve a characterization (description) of said population. This portrait would contribute to the analysis of their answers.

As stated before, the questionnaire was sent to all the English professors of 8 public universities, and was answered by 70 teachers in total. The majority of responses were concentrated in three universities:

University A: 20 professors (28.57% of the population)

University B: 18 professors (25.71%)

University C: 15 professors (21.43%)

The other professors (24.29%), as figure 1 below shows, are distributed among the other five universities, with four or three teachers who answered the questionnaire in each university.

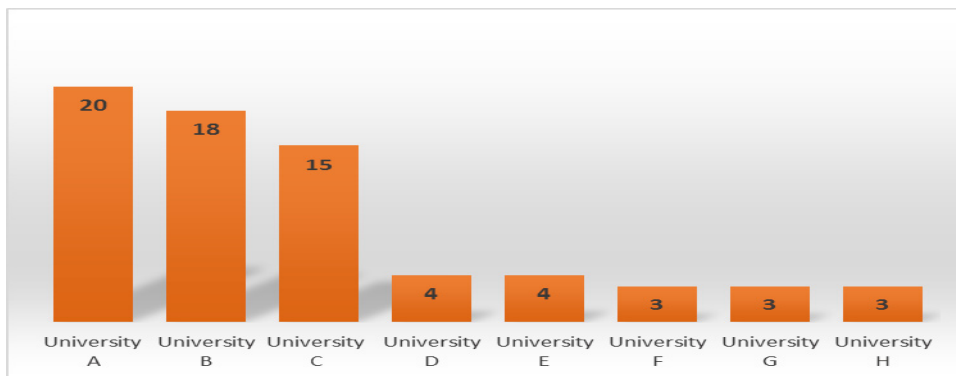


Figure 2. Participating Universities

All the participants work as English teachers in different careers offered by universities or in programs that train future English teachers, called “Licenciaturas” in Colombia- bachelor degrees be it in English, in languages, or in foreign languages. All of them are Colombian professors teaching EFL. 24 out of the 70 are hourly-paid professors (their salary depends on the number of classes taught, once delivered the class, they leave the university); 22 adjunct professors (full time educators with temporary contracts) and 24 tenured professors (that is, full-time professors with permanent contracts). The only differences between the adjunct and the tenured professors is the type of contract and that tenured professors receive more benefits than the other types of contracts. In terms of gender, the population analyzed is relatively even, with 54.29% women and 45.71% men.

Professors in general are highly trained: 81% of the group had a specialization, a masters or doctoral studies. and it must be noted that there is a significant number of teachers with a master’s degree (57% of the population). This high academic level is more noticeable in tenured professors, since 92% of these educators hold a master’s degree or a PhD, only one teacher holds a specialization and one an undergraduate degree. Therefore, talking about tenured professors is equivalent to talking about teachers with a masters or doctoral studies (Figure 2).

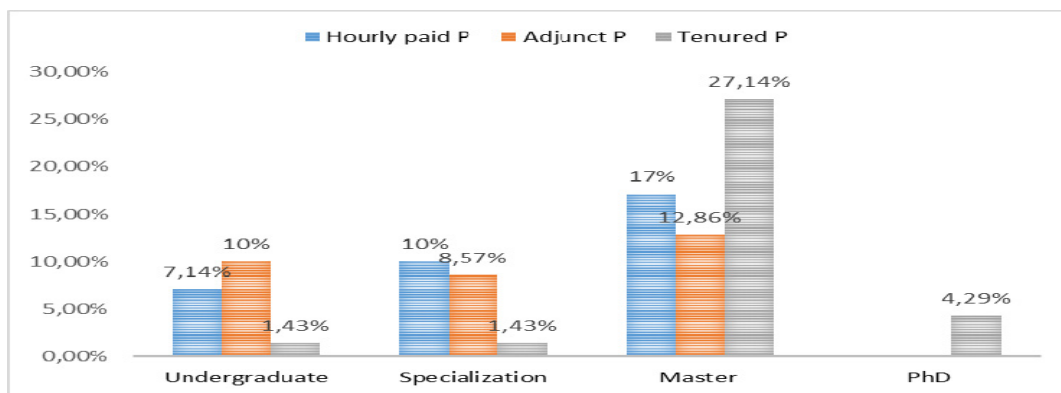


Figure 3. Correlation: Job position- academic level

75% of the professors have not studied abroad. Among the 25% who have studied abroad, a large majority (65%) are tenured teachers. However, 60% of the population has traveled abroad for other purposes (tourism or English short courses), especially in the group of tenured teachers.

It was also shown that, the higher the academic level the more experience the teacher had had abroad. Since 30% of the teachers with an undergraduate degree, 50% of those with a specialization, 70% with a masters and 100% of those with a PhD have had experience abroad. The latter have been in those countries for more than 5 years, see Figure 3.

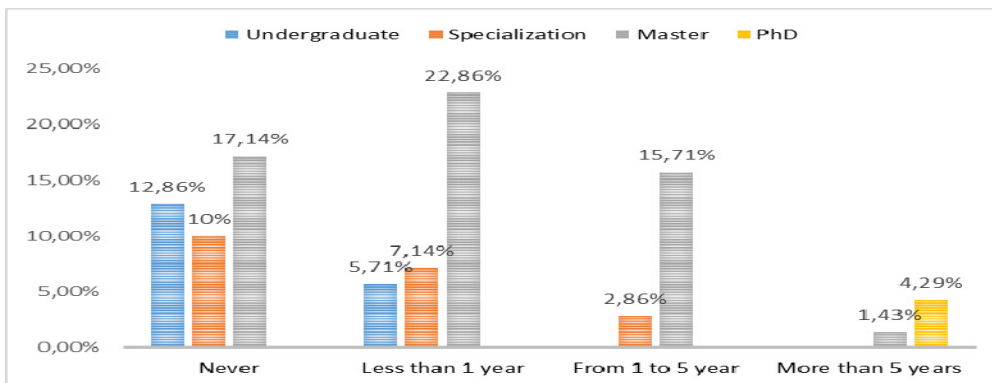


Figure 4. Correlation: Experience abroad-academic level

In general, the group were highly experienced teachers, with 80% of the participants having more than 6 years teaching English. From these, 39% had more than 16 years of pedagogical experience. It is also observed that the tenured professors and those with the highest level of education have the most experience-see Figure 4.

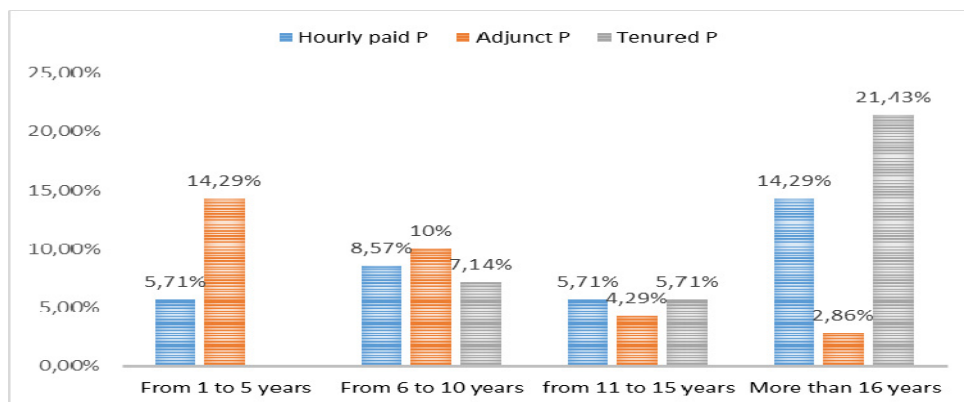


Figure 5. Correlation: Position- teaching experience

Finally, a finding which can be understood due to Colombia’s geographical location and the influence of the media, is that 81.43% of the population is more familiar with American culture, followed by British culture, at 15.72%.

4.1.1 A minimal Training Regarding Interculturality and IC During Their Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies

Most of the teachers are not satisfied with the training they had during their undergraduate courses, in terms of IC development. Specifically, 67.15% of the population perceives that training was very poor, poor or fair. This is especially evident in the groups of tenured professors, in those with the best academic level and those with the longest experience abroad, who appear more critical of their undergraduate training- (Figure 5). Their analysis of their postgraduate studies sees improvement in satisfaction, so 47.16% of the population is satisfied with the training received in their postgraduate course in the area of interculturality, followed by 32% who evaluated it as only “fair” (Figure 5).

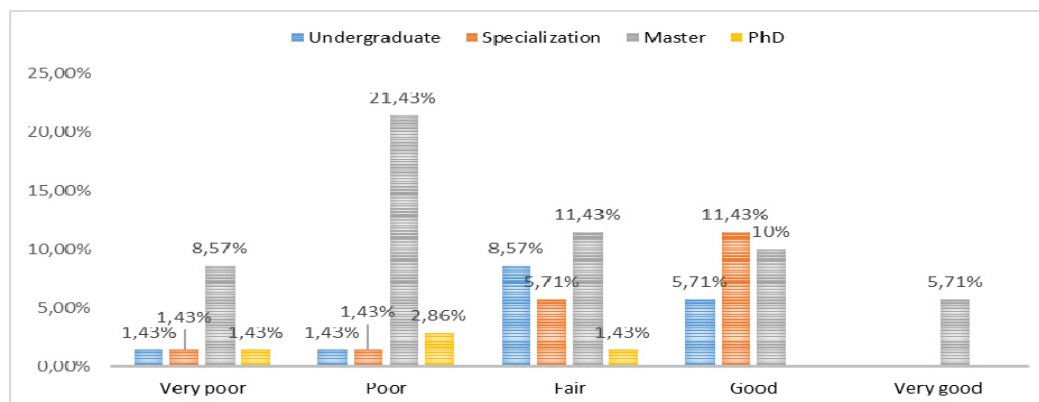


Figure 6. Correlation: Training in the area and academic level

## 4.2 Teachers' Conceptions and Beliefs Concerning the IC

### 4.2.1 There Is Apparent Comprehension of the IC Concept

After seeing a general characterization of who these teachers are, we move on to study their conceptions and beliefs about IC. Section 2 started with two open questions, question A asked to write 4 words that they associated with the term intercultural competence and in question B they briefly wrote what they understood by IC. Both questions were analyzed with the Atlas. Ti Software.

According to the analysis of the most recurrent words in both questions A and B, it was observed that the codes with more density and foundation, that is, with more textual citations were: ability, capacity, development in different contexts, interaction with other cultures and understanding. This shows that, in general, the sample understand clearly about the globally accepted concept of what IC is. They perceive it as a capacity or ability to interact / relate / function adequately in other contexts or cultures, which agrees with the IC definitions presented by recognized authors in the area of interculturality (Alonso & Fernandez, 2015; Bennett, 2008, Michael Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001; Byram, 2000).

According to Deardorff (2006), a definition of IC agreed by experts in interculturality references effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations. Some teachers go further and add the terms understanding, knowledge, tolerance, respect to the concept, seeing them as necessary elements for such interaction (Bennett, 2008; Byram et al., 2002; Byram, 2000; Jokikokko, 2010; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Viafara & Ariza, 2015)., Other concepts allude to the influence of a deeper and critical interculturality, since they also include concepts such as the recognition of otherness and diversity; and it is emphasized that there is no superior culture (Jokikoko, 2010; Walsh, 2005; Walsh, 2010).

In short, the basic concept of IC seems to be understood by most of the teachers. However, whether they have a clear idea regarding the relationship of the concept with the way in which this competence should be promoted in the English classroom is what will be determined throughout the article.

### 4.2.2 Familiarity and Preference for the Cultural Topics of the Textbook

As can be seen in Table 2, the topics related to the most familiar foreign culture for the professors (mostly the American culture) are those which are more included in English textbooks, and those which they have more access to thanks to the media; such as *daily routine (living conditions, food and drinks); education and other cultural expressions such as music, drama and art*. The less popular topics are history, geography, literature, international relations (political, economic), ethnic and social groups. These are more in-depth issues that are part of the identity of a foreign and local culture. These themes should raise more interest and should be included to a greater extent in English classes. We cannot forget that the strength of intercultural competence in the native and foreign culture dimension is that students are not only learning from the new culture, but also reflecting and reinforcing knowledge about their own country and their own identity.



Table 2. More familiar topics

Ranking	Topics
1	Daily routine, living conditions, food
2	Education, professional life
3	Other cultural expressions (music, drama and art)
4	Values and beliefs
5	Youth culture
6	Traditions, folklore, tourist attractions
7	History, geography, political system
8	International relations (political, economic, cultural)
9	Literature
10	Different ethnic and social groups

At a different level, one finding which was easy to understand is the fact that educators who have more experience abroad are the ones who feel more familiar with different topics related to the foreign culture.

Later, in section three, question 21, when professors were asked to choose the degree of profundity in which they worked on these topics, it was corroborated that they tackle these issues in the classroom depending on how familiar they are with them. This is a finding that coincides with other studies (Sercu, 2005; Alonso & Fernández, 2015). These authors assert that many teachers limit themselves to transmitting or exposing students to the cultural contents found in course textbooks, and leave aside relevant aspects such as norms, attitudes and values, or they do not provide students with sufficient opportunities for the development of the intercultural competence.

#### 4.3 Intercultural Practices in the Classroom

##### 4.3.1 Intercultural Teaching Is Equated With the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge, Rather Than the Development of Skills and Attitudes

In question number 18, professors were given a list of definitions of intercultural teaching, some more accurate than others. They were asked to classify the definitions from the most to the least accurate. The definition that occupied first place at a general level was: *18.5-providing experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theater, cinema)*- Table 3 below. From this, it can be inferred that for a good number of educators, the intercultural education is linked to the cognitive aspect, that is, for them, interculturality has to do with the mere transmission of knowledge, through experiences of a cultural nature.

Table 3. Ranking of definitions of intercultural education

Ranking	Definitions
1	18.5. Provide experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theater, cinema)
2	18.6. Promote the ability to handle situations of intercultural contact
3	18.4. Promote the overcoming of stereotypes, the appreciation for others and their differences
4	18.3. Promote an interest and understanding of students' culture
5	18.2. Promote reflection on cultural differences
6	18.7. Provide information about shared beliefs and values
7	18.8. Provide information about daily life and routines
8	18.1. Provide information about the history, geography, and political conditions of the foreign culture

Now, when doing the differentiated analyzes, it was found that three groups; tenured teachers, those with better

academic level, and those who have more experience abroad were the ones who have assimilated the concept of intercultural teaching more clearly. Since they ranked definitions 18.6 and 18.4 as the most accurate (example Figure 6 below). This is evidence that both the level of education and the stay abroad are linked to a better understanding of the concept in question. Nevertheless, this does not mean that if the teacher has not been abroad, he / she would not be able to develop IC, but that those who have had that opportunity might have a more solid foundation of knowledge, based on their experience outside the country.

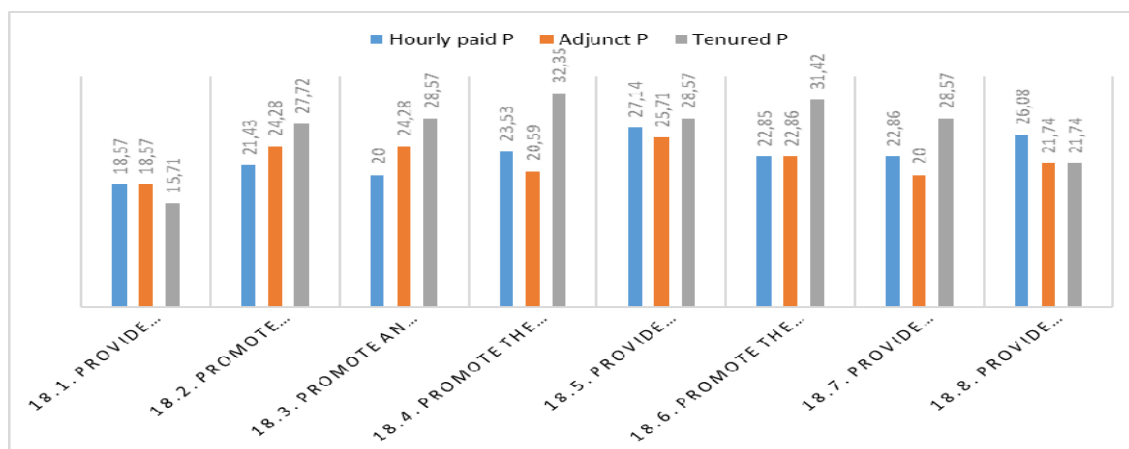


Figure 7. Ranking of definitions- according to job positions

Other studies have also detected the emphasis in the transmission of content, such as Carlsson, (2017); Larzén-Östermark (2008) and Sercu (2005). For example, Sercu developed an investigation where the objective was to investigate how professional Flemish professors of English, French and German see themselves, in relation to the expected profile of the intercultural foreign language teacher, and to what extent their teaching can be characterized as directed towards the achievement of the intercultural communicative competence (instead of just communicative competence). The results reported that teachers of English, French and German define intercultural teaching mainly in terms of providing information, which is why “it can be assumed that their teaching practice will not be geared primarily towards promoting their pupils’ acquisition of intercultural skills, such as empathize with people living in the foreign culture, reflect on cultural differences and on one’s own culture and identity and know how to handle intercultural contact situations.” (Sercu, 2005, p. 93).

When talking about the development of skills and attitudes, reference is made to experiential learning, supported by authors such as Byram (1997); Byram et al. (2002); Aguado (2009); Alonso and Fernández (2013); Alonso and Fernández (2015), see this type of learning as educating the person in order they can critically interpret the cultural context in which they live and learn. Alonso and Fernandez (2013) state that it is relevant to promote the experiential learning of other forms of life, beliefs and customs, through the analysis of situations, problems and daily activities, while reflecting on their own L1 and C1. Experiential learning is centered on the “development of anti-racist behaviors based on the analysis of social and personal reality, through the solution of moral conflicts in which supposed or real situations in relation to discrimination, marginalization or racism are analyzed” (Aguado, 2004, p. 23).

In other words, experiential learning requires promoting approaches that favor self-discovery, reflection and analysis. For example task-based approaches, or projects, simulations and other similar activities, where students simulate situations that lead them to reflect upon and compare cultures. This is superior to limiting themselves to a rote learning of cultural contents, which do not lead to adequate intercultural understanding. Likewise, the importance of using authentic material of different types is highlighted, and if possible, chosen by the student.

#### 4.3.2 The Most Used Activities for Promoting IC Are Those Which Focused on the Professors

The teachers were given a series of activities to choose from. Some of the activities promote the development of IC (in bold in Table 4) and others refer more to the transmission of knowledge, or the transmission of anecdotal information (underlined activities). This was for the author to determine to what extent the teachers were aware of the activities most likely to promote the development of IC in the English classroom. The other activities also contribute to the development of IC in students, provided it is a student-centered class, and it is approached in such

a way that it promotes the development of attitudes and skills necessary for that purpose.

This is the list of activities in order of frequency of development in the classroom, according to the teachers in general.

Table 4. Ranking of activities according their frequency order

Order of frequency	Activities
1	<u>(20.1) I tell my students when I find something strange or fascinating about the foreign culture.</u>
2	
3	<u>(20.2) I tell my students what I hear and read about the country or the foreign culture.</u>
4	(20.6) I use videos, CDs or the internet to illustrate an aspect of the foreign culture. (20.7) I ask my students to compare an aspect of their own culture with that same aspect in the foreign culture.
5	<u>(20.8) I comment on the way in which the foreign culture is represented in the materials I use in my class (guide book, workbook, etc).</u>
6	(20.5) I ask my students to describe an aspect of their own culture in the foreign language.
7	(20.4) I talk with my students about stereotypes regarding particular cultures or countries, or the inhabitants of certain countries.
8	(20.15) I ask my students to talk about their intercultural experiences.
9	<b>(20.13) I ask my students to participate in role-playing games in which people from different cultures meet.</b>
10	<u>(20.3) I speak with my students about my own experience in the foreign country.</u>
11	(20.9) I ask my students to reflect on the image promoted by the media of the foreign country about that same country.
12	<b>(20.11) I ask my students to explore what it would be like to live in a foreign culture.</b>
13	(20.14) I invite an English speaking native to my class.
14	(20.10) I ask my students to independently explore one aspect of the foreign culture.
15	<u>(20.12) I briefly deal with one aspect of the foreign culture in which I feel negatively inclined.</u>

It was found that, at a general level, the activities that should be used more frequently if one wants to promote IC through interaction and discovery are the following: *(20.11) I ask my students to explore what it would be like to live in a foreign culture and (20.13) I ask my students to participate in role plays in which people from different cultures meet*, these rarely take place in the English classroom, since they are in positions 9 and 12 out of 15 activities. In general, the population used teacher-centered activities more regularly, and apparently filter the cultural contents to be discussed in class treating them in a personal and anecdotal way (their vision of the foreign culture and their experiences or knowledge of that C2). However, these personal experiences do not necessarily reflect a cultural condition, since these may be vitiated by the teachers' subjectivity. Nevertheless, it is the tenured teachers and those with a highest academic level who develop activities 20.11 and 20.13 with more frequency (see figures 6 and 7).

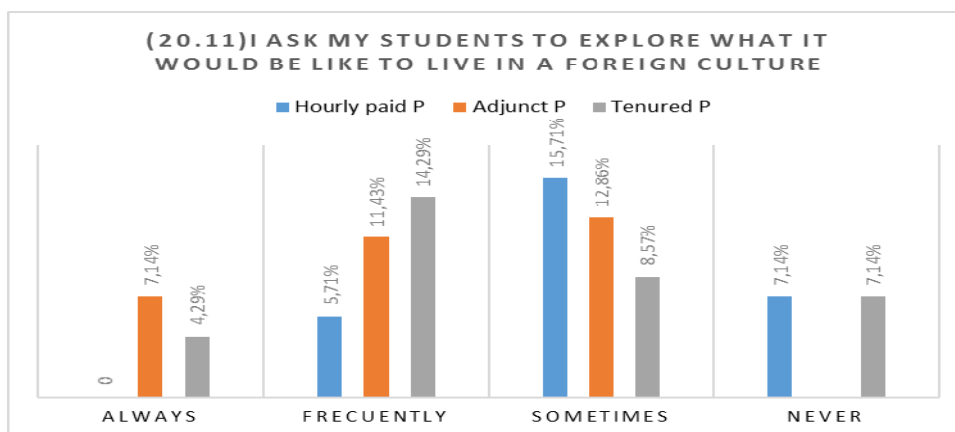


Figure 8. Correlation: activity 20,11 and job position

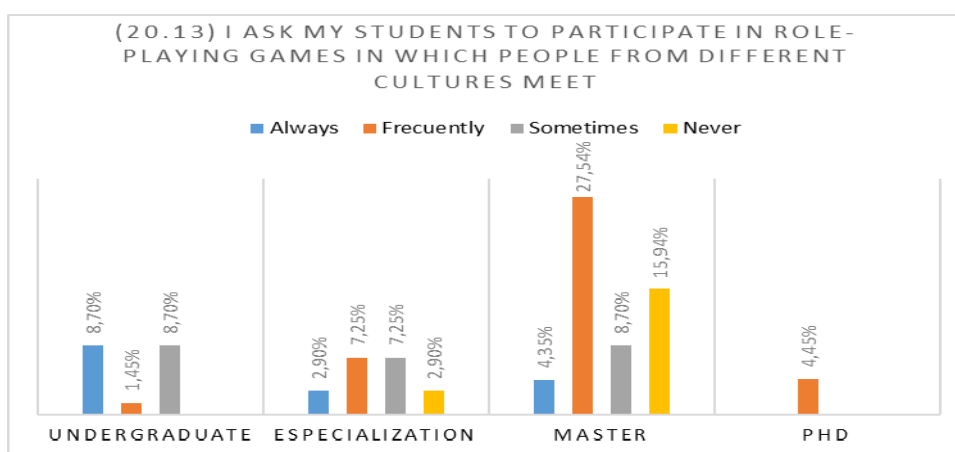


Figure 9. Correlation activity 20.13 and academic level

Alonso and Fernández (2015) present a compendium or taxonomy of useful activities to promote IC development: “Within this general taxonomy, group work, debate, discussion and active thoughtful participation in class are effective dynamics to foster critical attitudes and help students become aware of their ethnocentrism: learners are given the chance to contrast their positions and search for a common ground in conflicting situations” (p. 169). Thus, if you want to promote intercultural learning activities you should seek to promote development of attitudes and skills of interaction and discovery, reflection, an awareness development of their own culture and the target culture (experiential learning), skills of comparison and contrast, constructive criticism and more All these through activities such as debates, discussions, simulations, role-playing games and others which contribute to overcome ethnocentrism, as well as to value their own identity.

#### 4.3.3 The Promotion of IC in English Classrooms Has Begun to be Featured Among the Objectives of the English Class

The teachers were given a list of eight objectives for the English class, among these objectives there are three related to the promotion of interculturality (and therefore of IC) in the classroom. These are objectives 16.2, 16.4 and 16.8 in italics. Professors had to rank these objectives from the most to least important for them. The following table is the resulting ranking:

Table 5. Ranking of objectives for the English class

Ranking	Objectives
1	16.1. Motivate my students to learn a foreign language.
2	16.2. Promote familiarity with the culture and the civilization of the countries in which the target language is spoken.
3	16.3 Help my students acquire skills that are useful in other areas of their life, as well as to learn other languages
4	16.6. Promote the acquisition of a proficiency level in the foreign language that allows the student to use the language for practical purposes.
5	<i>16.4. Promote a positive disposition and open mind towards unknown cultures.</i>
6	<i>16.8. Help my students to have a better understanding of their own identity and culture.</i>
7	16.7. Promote the acquisition of the four linguistic skills that allow them to use the language adequately.
8	16.5. Promote the development of grammatical and lexical skills that allow them to use the language with accuracy.

At a general level, the objectives related to interculturality are in intermediate positions. From this, it can be inferred that for these teachers, although the area of interculturality is not the most important objective for the English class, it is not neither the least relevant. This is a sign that interculturality is beginning to gain importance in the classrooms of the participants, especially for the tenured professors and those with a better academic background, who gave a higher score to the objectives related to interculturality. However, greater involvement is needed in the area, which is still in its infancy in the Colombian context (Álvarez, 2014).

#### 4.3.4 Class-Time Devoted to the Teaching of Linguistic Aspects Over the integration of Language and Culture

44,28% of professors say they dedicate 60% of the class to teach the language and the remaining 40% of the class time to work with culture (which leads to the promotion of IC), followed by 30% who say they dedicate 80% of their class to focus on linguistics rather than work on culture. These results exceeded the option of 100% of integration in which the teaching of language and culture go hand in hand; since when the language is taught, the culture related to that language is also taught. The concepts language and culture are inseparable, either for the acquisition of a first language as for the learning of a foreign language (Witte & Harden, 2015), see Figure 10.

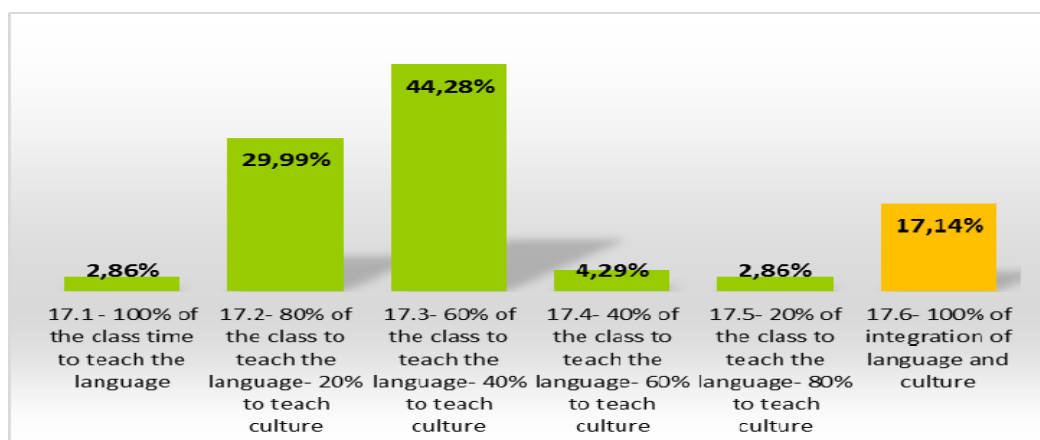


Figure 10. Language teaching vs culture teaching

In the case of foreign languages or second languages, it is unquestionable that culture as an ingrained set of behaviors and modes of perception and therefore plays a major role in learning a foreign language. “A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (Brown, 2007, p. 189). Thus, the

promotion of IC in the foreign language classroom should not be limited to a few moments in class, but should be integrated into the process in a systematic way, reinforcing the link between language and culture (Alonso & Fernández, 2013).

Later in the open question D, where teachers justify the fact that they should devote more time to the promotion of IC and not only to the linguistic component, one of the most reasons alluded to is the lack of time and this hinders the achievement of all the intended goals for the class. Especially for those teachers who do not teach in ELT undergraduate programs, but in other undergraduate programs, where they have four hours a week, maximum, for their class. Therefore, promoting IC takes time and having a reduced amount of lessons forces the teachers to give priority to other competences, and to the content of the course book. This agrees with the findings of authors such as Paricio (2014); Alonso and Fernández (2013), Zhou (2011), and Sercu (2005), who express that, although there has been an interest in the study and the inclusion of the intercultural dimension in English teaching, in reality, this is not reflected yet. On the contrary, there is evidence of a relegation of intercultural skills in favor of linguistic skills.

These arguments are a clear sign that many of these teachers are not aware that the development of linguistic and communicative competences should go hand in hand with the intercultural competence. This is why, we now speak about intercultural communicative competence, which links the communicative competence with the intercultural dimension and consequently aims to offer a model for the integration of language and culture in the teaching of languages. Authors such as Sanhueza et al., (2012); Paricio (2014), and Sercu (2005) refer to the progress that has taken place, evolving from an emphasis on the communicative competence towards an intercultural education, thanks to the advancement of our social context. It should be noted that ICC includes not only language knowledge, but also the development of skills that lead to the transformation of behaviors, practices and the way of interacting with others.

#### *4.4 Teacher Beliefs in Relation to the Intercultural Profile of Their Students*

According to the teachers' beliefs and conceptions regarding their students:

##### *4.4.1 There Is a Perceived Need to Promote Cultural Relativism in Students*

Another striking finding is derived from the answer to the open question C: What specific ideas do you think English students have about English-speaking countries, culture and people?

The professors believe many students see the American and British culture as hegemonic and superior, where they enjoy better job opportunities, better living conditions, where there is more development and more knowledge. This is why many students see the need to travel abroad and learn the English language. This is also marked by stereotypes, which are mostly taken from what media, technologies and textbooks demonstrate. Two key issues emerge: the numerous cultural differences and the possibility of losing their cultural identity, owing to a belief that a foreign culture is superior.

On the other hand, although many students have a positive attitude and interest in the foreign culture, their knowledge is rudimentary and. It is limited to what they acquire through the use of technology and, media and what they learn in the classroom, more often than not it is related to music, entertainment, television series amongst others. This is why they need more exposure to deeper issues of both cultures, "big C" culture, such as history, ethnic groups, politics and "little c" culture as values and beliefs. All these issues are part of the cultural identity of both C1 and C2. Therefore, we can affirm that the promotion of a critical interculturality is fundamental (Álvarez, 2014, Granados, 2016; Walsh, 2005, 2010). Granados (2016) refers to the fact that some teachers focus excessively on achieving proficiency and best teaching practices, which can mislead students (especially future English teachers) to believe that matters of greater educational scope, such as the inequalities of gender, class, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation in the classroom, are outside their spheres of knowledge; or as presented by Álvarez (2014), who says that the intercultural approach unveils questions of identity, ethnicity, gender and the like, issues which have not been established when working on the integration of culture and language in ELT in Colombia.

Considering the above, we see in open question D, (where they mentioned causes for their need to devote more time to the promotion of the CI), that one of the most commonly featured reasons is thus: one must learn not only to value the foreign culture, but one's own. However it can be seen that the opposite case can occur, where we find students with a marked ethnocentrism. This is a phenomenon that must be addressed in order to overcome it.

In this context, according to the participants' beliefs, a high concern to reach an intercultural sensitivity in students is necessary, where ethnocentrism can be overcome and cultural relativism enhanced. That is to say, teachers need to reinforce students' own culture and identity while accepting and empathizing with the difference between their own and others (Altarejos & Moya, 2003; Alonso & Fernández, 2015, Bennett, 2011; Viáfara & Ariza 2015).

Bennett (1993) created the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity -DMIS-, which explains how people or groups tend to think and feel about intercultural differences. This model serves as the basis for effective training and development, that allows people to work in a better way with people from other cultures. This is related to a tradition of social psychology that aimed to explain the evolution of an individual, moving from ethnocentric to ethno-relativistic attitudes in the following six stages: denial, defense and minimization of difference, which symbolize sequential stages of ethnocentrism, and then the following three stages: acceptance, adaptation and integration of the differences – these represent ethnorelativism. In this sense, it is our duty as educators to design strategies and activities that promote the development of a cultural sensitivity in students that allows them to empathize, accept, adapt and integrate smoothly.

## 5. Conclusions

The data provided by the questionnaire shows that in general, for this group of professors, the promotion of intercultural competence is directly related to the transmission of knowledge of a cultural nature, especially in more well-known topics or the most featured in course books. This is reflected in the most frequent activities developed by the participants, and here it is prevalent that the activities are related to the transmission of cultural knowledge, while reflecting and comparing particular aspects of the two cultures. However, the activities that particularly enhance the development of IC (such as activities that prepare students for interaction and discovery, and promote attitudes of acceptance and empathy within the intercultural encounter) have been disregarded.

Although at a general level, the concept of IC (or ICC) is understood by professors, and the development of the ICC is beginning to gain importance among the objectives of the classroom, it is evident that the group of tenured professors with a superior academic level demonstrate a better understanding of these concepts and their implications for the classroom, compared to the answers of professors with a lower level of study, who are among the groups of adjunct and hourly paid professors.

Additionally, the vast majority of educators admit they spend more time teaching language over the integration of language and culture teaching, which would not be expected if the aim is to promote IC in the classroom. Teachers attribute this focus on the linguistic aspects to different factors, such as the lack of training in the promotion of IC, the lack of time to comply with the contents of their syllabus or simply because they are unaware of their relevance and contribution in the search of critical, reflexive, empathetic with otherness and socially committed professionals.

From another perspective, teachers show a marked interest in having their students strengthen their cultural identity and stop seeing English-speaking cultures as hegemonic cultures superior to their own, or cultures in which they will presumably enjoy better opportunities. Or on the contrary, they want those students with ethnocentric attitudes to develop qualities such as tolerance, empathy and acceptance of otherness, not only contributing to the process of learning a second language, but also leading them to become intercultural citizens. In short, for the population of this research, it is necessary to promote cultural relativism in the classroom, which encourages dialogue and intercultural exchange between C1 and C2.

Finally, it is relevant that English teachers of public universities, and the entire academic and administrative community of these institutions become aware of the importance of promoting the development of IC, in order to contribute to the processes of internationalization and to prepare them in view of the demands of the current globalized world.

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## Notes

Note 1. [https://www.cna.gov.co/1741/articles-186359\\_Lin\\_Ins\\_2014.pdf](https://www.cna.gov.co/1741/articles-186359_Lin_Ins_2014.pdf)

Note 2. The questionnaire has 4 sections:

1). Basic information: eight items (questions 1 to 8):

This first part seeks to obtain basic information from the professor, which may be related to their intercultural profile or have an influence on their perspective.

The study variables for this first part were gender, job position, academic level, experience abroad, teaching experience and the number of students in their classes.

2). Teachers' conceptions and beliefs about intercultural competence: composed of four items (questions 9 to 12):

These questions try to establish the degree of familiarity with the subject and the attitudes, beliefs and conceptions of professors towards intercultural competence. This section contains two open questions that were later analyzed with the software Atlas.TI.

The study variables for this section were: training in interculturality, the most familiar English-speaking culture, familiarity with cultural aspects of English-speaking cultures. Open questions: Concept of Intercultural Competence.

3). Intercultural practices in the classroom: It has 9 items (questions 13 to 21).

The third part delves into the pedagogical practices of the professor, and seeks to establish to what extent they take into account the development of intercultural competence in their English classroom.

Study Variables: IC inclusion in their syllabus, class planning and didactic materials; time allocated to the teaching of culture, objectives, activities, themes, conceptions and attitudes towards the development of the IC in the classroom.

4). Professors' beliefs regarding the intercultural profile of their students: composed of four items (questions 22 to 25).

This section aims at identifying professors' beliefs in relation to the development of the IC in their students; the educators' knowledge of their students' intercultural profile as well as their sources of intercultural contact. This section also contains one open question, and the closed questions 24 and 25 ask for justification or complementation (open answers which were analyzed with the Atlas.ti program)

Study variables: students' attitude towards interculturality, sources of contact with the foreign culture. Open questions: beliefs about their students' intercultural profile, beliefs regarding the time devoted to the promotion of IC.

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