

## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING BOOKS: AN INSTRUMENT FOR ITS ASSESSMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** This article introduces a new instrument designed to assess the extent to which foreign language teaching books used in formal educational contexts promote the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Grounded in established theoretical models of ICC (e.g., Byram; Fantini) and content validation by experts, this tool helps users critically analyze intercultural content and activities within these materials. Through validation by experts and a pilot application carried out with 12 foreign language teachers working in different formal educational contexts (including schools, language institutes, and higher education), the instrument made it possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks analyzed. Among the strengths are the inclusion of content that promotes cultural curiosity and the integration of language skills. Among the weaknesses, aspects such as emotional management, non-verbal communication, and the valuation of ethnic and racial diversity were highlighted. The participating teachers positively valued the clarity and usefulness of the instrument, highlighting its transformative potential in educational practice. The possible implications and new applications derived from the adoption and improvement of the instrument are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** intercultural communicative competence, language learning books, assessment, foreign languages, interculturality

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*LA COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA INTERCULTURAL EN LOS LIBROS DE APRENDIZAJE  
DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS: UN INSTRUMENTO PARA SU EVALUACIÓN*

*Resumen: Este artículo presenta un nuevo instrumento diseñado para evaluar en qué medida los libros de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras utilizados en contextos educativos formales promueven el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural (CCI). Basada en modelos teóricos consolidados de la CII (por ejemplo, Byram; Fantini) y en la validación de contenidos por parte de expertos, esta herramienta ayuda a los usuarios a analizar críticamente los contenidos y actividades interculturales de estos materiales. Mediante la validación por parte de expertos y una aplicación piloto realizada con 12 profesores de lenguas extranjeras que trabajan en diferentes contextos educativos formales (incluidas escuelas, institutos de idiomas y educación superior), el instrumento permitió identificar los puntos fuertes y débiles de los libros de texto analizados. Entre los puntos fuertes se encuentra la inclusión de contenidos que promueven la curiosidad cultural y la integración de las habilidades lingüísticas. Entre los puntos débiles, se destacaron aspectos como la gestión emocional, la comunicación no verbal y la valoración de la diversidad étnica y racial. Los profesores participantes valoraron positivamente la claridad y la utilidad del instrumento, destacando su potencial transformador en la práctica educativa. Se discuten las posibles implicaciones y nuevas aplicaciones derivadas de la adopción y mejora del instrumento.*

*Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa intercultural, libros de aprendizaje de idiomas, evaluación, lenguas extranjeras, interculturalidad*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the field of intercultural communication is relatively young (Fantini, 2020), its impact on language education is significant to the extent that fewer courses do not directly include the intercultural component or the development of intercultural (communicative) competence in their goals and descriptions. This also becomes important due to the relationship with other recurring concepts that have impacted language teaching in recent years, such as globalization, inclusive education, peace education, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the promotion of critical citizenship (Calle Díaz, 2017; UNESCO, 2019; United Nations, 2015). All these factors together lead to the learning of languages to interact with people of diverse backgrounds, customs, and cultural characteristics, while valuing one's own culture and appreciating those of others. In many national and institutional educational systems, particularly those where foreign language teaching is strongly mediated by textbooks, this emphasis renders teaching materials a valuable resource for the implementation of intercultural objectives.

Although the intentions of the academic community regarding the intercultural component are clear and useful for current times, there is a lack of synchronization in its application. This may partly be due to the lack of integration between the theories and practices of intercultural practitioners and language educators (Fantini, 2020; Qin, 2024). Additionally, previous studies have revealed a dissonance between the

expectations, views, and opinions of educators and those involved in design and implementation (Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero, 2021). Another difficulty is the simplified or essentialist view of what the intercultural component implies for those who plan the courses or materials (Qin, 2024; Torres Escobar, 2022, 2023). Additionally, many teachers are unfamiliar with teaching culture (Cuartas Álvarez, 2020) or, as expected, with the development of intercultural communicative competence (hereon ICC).

Although these difficulties can be directly addressed in the training of future teachers, it is also important for teachers to have tools that allow them, on the one hand, to become familiar with the elements and strategies of ICC and, on the other hand, to evaluate the materials, contents, and activities that, in theory, have been proposed for the development of this competence (Byram, 2021; Deardorff, 2009). Following this line, the main objective of this article is to present and pilot an evaluation instrument designed to assess the extent to which the contents and activities of foreign language teaching books promote the development of ICC. Some questions to consider are:

1. What criteria should the instrument contain to identify whether the contents and activities of language learning books focus on developing ICC?
2. In what ways can the instrument help a teacher identify components and aspects of ICC that are not promoted in the teaching material?
3. What preliminary conclusions can be drawn about the creation and implementation of this tool?

The order to be followed in this article is as follows: After this introduction (1), we present the conceptual framework (2), which contains a brief review of the theoretical concepts, such as intercultural communication, intercultural competence, and ICC. Next, in (3), we detail the components included in the instrument, its application, structure, and scope. In session (4), we analyze data derived from a pilot implementation of this tool by some foreign language teachers. In (5), we discuss the application of the instrument and its possible effectiveness and scope, together with other aspects that should be considered for its application. Finally, in (6), we reach conclusions about this experience and consider future avenues for the application and improvement of the instrument.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. *Intercultural Communication*

This term refers to what emerges from the engagement to communicate between people who possess different experiences, assumptions, meaning-making, and behaviors (Bennett, 2015, p. 451). Its importance is perceived in the dynamic, potent, and ever-present nature of the forces that lead people from different cultures to communicate (Lustig & Koester, 2010, p. 2). In this sense, intercultural communication

is unavoidable, as individuals are shaped by multiple cultural influences and communication necessarily entails the exchange and interpretation of meanings.

Since its emergence, the field of intercultural communication has emphasized an attitude of self-reflection, intercultural modesty or humility, and an appreciation for the importance of empathy or changing one's perspective to see things from other people's point of view (Bennett, 2015, p. 451). This is why intercultural communication is often related to openness to new ideas, customs, and practices in contrast to those of our own culture.

Some of the possible difficulties that hinder intercultural communication are the uncertainty and anxiety generated by new interactions (Gudykunst & Yun Kim, 2003). Other difficulties may be the attitudes that some people have towards members of other cultures due to stereotypes and prejudices, or simply due to a Eurocentric view that may, in many cases, remain unconsciously in everyone.

The actions recommended by Liddicoat & Scarino (2013, p. 25-37) to promote intercultural understanding are decentralizing one's own culture in language learning, recognizing and promoting the interrelation of language and culture, and obtaining knowledge of the world through communication. In addition, the authors (2013, p. 28-32) emphasize other actions such as understanding how some statements can be interpreted in specific cultural contexts, promoting transformative learning that reshapes one's own identity and practices, developing symbolic competence to recognize subjective, historical, and creative language associations, and learning from cultural experiences and reflections by focusing on norms related to bilingualism and interculturality in teaching and not based on the native speaker model.

Most, if not all, of the actions for the development of intercultural communication are applicable in the educational field. It is precisely in this field that intercultural communication has been mostly promoted to train citizens who, once they leave their formal education, can join a labor market that is becoming increasingly diverse and global. This need has driven the development of intercultural competence.

## *2.2. Intercultural Competence*

The importance of intercultural communication has led to the formulation and promotion of intercultural competence. This refers to the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with others in diverse cultural contexts (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997). Its application involves not only knowledge of other cultures but also respect and openness to diversity (Deardorff, 2006a, 2006b). Given the intercultural relations in today's world, intercultural competence should be of importance in all fields of knowledge and for many professions.

Due to its transcending local character, this competence has been promoted in a wide variety of academic programs (see *e.g.*, Byram & Feng, 2006; Deardorff, 2006a, 2006b, 2011; Fantini, 2009; Salisbury *et al.*, 2013, etc.). Its potential has allowed it to be part of exchange programs (Deardorff, 2006b) and training courses in international business (Gertsen, 1990), tourism (Reisinger & Turner, 2003), and the medical field (Betancourt *et al.*, 2003; Schouten & Meeuwesen, 2006). The growing demand for community services that are valued and attentive to cultural differences between users

and staff members (see, *e.g.*, Ang & Van Dyne, 2008, for a review in the medical field) justifies the promotion and development of this competence in the academic training of future professionals.

In essence, intercultural competence has both direct and indirect educational implications, as it enhances students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral capacities through their interactions with people from other cultures and diverse perspectives. Several studies have linked this competence to the development of critical thinking, empathy, and a reduction in ethnocentrism (Fantini, 2009; Salisbury *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, educators and academic institutions have progressively recognized the influence of intercultural competence in the formation of responsible global citizens to face today's challenges. Its impact on the educational field confirms the importance of continuing its incorporation in more disciplines and a greater diversity of educational contexts.

Lustig and Koester (2010) identify some imperatives that demand the development of this competence. Among them, the authors identify (2010, p. 2-11):

- The technological imperative: Advances in this field, seen in tools such as the internet and mobile devices, have driven more frequent and instantaneous cross-cultural communication.
- The demographic imperative: Demographic changes leveraged by migratory processes and increasing diversity have created more multicultural communities where cross-cultural communication is necessary.
- The economic imperative: The need to communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds is necessary for economic collaboration and business success, which extends to a global scale.
- The peace imperative: Because misunderstandings and cultural clashes can lead to conflict, cross-cultural communication can be a tool for peace and conflict resolution.

While it is true that more motives can be added to this list, these imperatives are among the main reasons for promoting the development of this competence. This variety of reasons shows that this competence is very relevant in today's world, where intercultural relations, business, and interactions have become the norm. Each of us participates in numerous intercultural interactions or encounters every day, whether physically or virtually. The development of intercultural competence is closely related to ICC, which will be addressed in the next section.

### *2.3. Intercultural Communicative Competence*

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate and interact effectively across linguistic or cultural constraints (Byram, 2021). Its origin draws on the foundations of communicative competence, as there is an interaction between the competence to communicate in our native language and that of our second language (Fantini, 2020). This interaction is complex since, as Byram (2021, p. 3-12)

points out, it involves linguistic competence and intercultural understanding, as well as attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to interact meaningfully with people from different cultures. Its development is very relevant for students being able to engage with diverse cultures (Lázár *et al.*, 2007).

Byram (2021) proposed a model of the dimensions of intercultural communicative competence. In this, the author (44) includes *education* (political education, critical cultural awareness) as a central dimension and four others that complement it. These are the *skills to interpret and relate*, *knowledge* (of the being of others; of interaction; individual and social), *skills to discover or interact*, and *attitudes* (relativization of the being and valuing towards others).

Based on his research experience, Fantini (2019) goes further and signals components and aspects that belong to ICC. His model includes *characteristics/attributes* (e.g., open-mindedness, patience, motivation, interest, empathy, among others), *proficiency in the target language*, *a longitudinal developmental process*, *dimensions* (knowledge, attitudes/affect, and skills), and *abilities* (to establish relationships, communicate well, and collaborate). This account is valuable as it underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of ICC in line with personal growth and interaction across cultures.

After analyzing various proposals and models, Deardorff (2009, p. 265-269) highlights elements such as *the importance of relationships with people from other cultures* (relational competence), *the role of identity in transcending narrow identity limitations*, and *the contextual factors* (e.g., political, social, historical, etc.) that influence interactions. These factors emphasize the complexity and multidimensionality of ICC, which also highlights the need for flexible and inclusive frameworks.

With the contributions of the previously mentioned authors and the expanding volume of literature on the subject, it is evident that ICC is complex in that it involves many factors and elements. Considering that this is also a dynamic and fluid concept by nature (see Dervin, 2023) allows us to keep an open attitude toward what this competence may involve according to the context. Therefore, an instrument that seeks to assess this competence in textbooks should not be rigid but flexible, while recognizing that textbooks may not always value intercultural perspectives.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTRUMENT AND PILOT

#### 3.1. *Description of the instrument*

The creation of the instrument draws primarily on the dimensions of Byram's intercultural communicative competences (2021) and the components and aspects of Fantini's (2019; 2020) work on the same topic. After an exhaustive literature review taking as main references the mentioned sources but also considering other recent works (e.g., Bennett, 2015; Cuartas Álvarez, 2020; Deardorff, 2006a, 2006b; Lázár *et al.*, 2007), we identified a list of traits that materials seeking to promote cultural learning in foreign language teaching should possess. 28 features were initially identified. To validate the content, 3 experts from three different areas of expertise

(one in literature, one in language teaching, and one in intercultural education) were consulted to assess the instrument from a broad perspective. Their review was helpful as it provided feedback and recommendations, which led to the extension to 32 items. Those 32 items were finally reduced to 29 due to the redundancy of some of them. Each one is composed of two questions that guide the presence of those elements in the material. All those items are grouped into 8 major categories, listed and briefly described below<sup>1</sup>:

### Section 1: Cultural attitudes and awareness

1. Attitudes toward one's own and external cultures: It focuses on the attitudes that the material awakens in users towards cultural curiosity and the reduction of prejudices.
2. Critical cultural awareness: It aims to analyze whether the material induces critical reflection on social practices, norms, and behaviors.
3. Ethnocentrism and stereotypes: This leads to determining if the material helps to challenge ethnocentric views and stereotypes.
4. Evaluation of cultural values: This allows us to find out if the material stimulates the evaluation and contrast of the cultural values of one's own and other cultures.

### Section 2: Cultural knowledge

5. Knowledge of one's own and new culture(s): This seeks to examine the knowledge provided by the material about one's own and the target culture, the processes of interaction, and cultural transmission.
6. Cultural products and practices: This item points to identifying cultural products and artifacts and how they are used by people from the meta culture.
7. National and regional identities: This leads to analyzing the approach to national and regional identities and how they contribute to intercultural communication. This includes regional and national dialects.

### Section 3: Intercultural skills

8. Interpretation and relational skills: It allows establishing whether the material helps the user to relate documents, behaviors, norms, and values of other cultures with his/her own.
9. Discovery and interaction skills: It allows us to find out if the material promotes discovery skills and the search for new intercultural experiences.

<sup>1</sup> Linguistic competence is addressed throughout the instrument by means of items that focus on the integration of language skills, sociolinguistic and discursive competence, and the use of language in intercultural contexts, rather than as an isolated category, in line with established models of intercultural communicative competence.

10. Real-time interaction: This involves identifying whether the practice of intercultural communication is promoted in real time, either through simulations, role-playing, or authentic interactions.
11. Ethnographic skills: This item involves an analysis of the material to determine if it promotes ethnographic attitudes in the student for the exploration of new cultures.
12. Integration of knowledge and skills: This leads to questioning whether the material promotes the use of knowledge and skills in an integrated way in intercultural communication.

#### Section 4: Communication and linguistic competence

13. Nonverbal communication: This leads to assessing whether the material includes information on nonverbal practices and behaviors in cross-cultural interactions.
14. Sociolinguistic and discourse competence: It concentrates on sociolinguistic aspects seen in the relationships between speakers and the production of culturally appropriate discourse in interaction.
15. Use of the linguistic competence: It aims to establish whether the material integrates linguistic competencies (phonological, pragmatic, lexical, syntactic, etc.) in intercultural contexts.
16. Influence of context on communication: This focuses attention on the influence of contexts and adaptation to them for interaction.

#### Section 5: Adaptability and empathy

17. Adaptability and empathy: It seeks to identify whether the material promotes the student's empathy and adaptability toward people from other cultures.

#### Section 6: Critical reflection and analysis

18. Capacity for reflection and analysis: This focuses on the analysis of one's own cultural norms and practices in a critical manner.
19. Intercultural mediation: It puts into perspective the usefulness of the material to promote the roles of mediators between cultures and cultural exchanges.
20. Political education: This aims to reveal whether the material integrates political education and historical and current relations between cultures.

#### Section 7: Social dynamics and diversity

21. Social interaction processes: This allows us to determine whether the material explains social interaction processes or interaction styles and to adapt to them.

22. Social structures and dynamics: This item focuses on identifying whether the material provides information on the dynamics of social groups and how they are structured.
23. Conceptions about the family: This item focuses on how the family is structured in each culture and the expected roles of each member.
24. Perceptions of genres and roles: This allows students to compare how genders are perceived in each culture and the expected roles for each gender in society.
25. Racial and ethnic identities: This point helps students recognize and reflect on the ethnic diversity of each culture.

#### Section 8: The role of the educational environment

26. The intercultural speaker model: This focuses on whether the material presents the learner as an intercultural speaker, as opposed to a non-native speaker, and how cultural meanings and norms are negotiated.
27. Assessment of the intercultural competence: It seeks to determine whether the material itself assesses ICC and provides information to the user on the development of ICC.
28. Encouraging lifelong learning: This directs attention to lifelong learning about other cultures and to the continued development of the ICC.
29. The role of teachers and educational institutions: This item promotes an analysis of whether the material addresses the role of the teacher and the institution and offers indications on the development of the ICC.

For the assessment of any didactic material, such as a textbook in a foreign language, it is suggested that each question has a value of one point if the criterion is met. As a result, the material is evaluated out of 58 possible points, which can be classified as shown in Table 1.

Category	Range	Description
<b>Very low</b>	0-11	The material has a very limited impact on the development of intercultural communicative competence.
<b>Low</b>	12-23	The material addresses some cross-cultural aspects, but its influence is low.
<b>Moderate</b>	24-34	The material includes a moderate focus on intercultural competence, showing some promotion of skills.
<b>High</b>	35-46	The material significantly promotes the development of intercultural communicative competence.
<b>Very high</b>	47-58	The material promotes the development of intercultural competence in an excellent and consistent manner.

Table 1. *Classification of materials based on the number of points*

### *3.2. Pilot implementation of the instrument and participants*

Once the tool was polished, we proceeded with a pilot to test whether other teachers could effectively apply it. This piloting was also intended to find out details such as user feedback, difficulties and limitations, strengths, application time, and suggestions for improvement.

One of the criteria for each participant's choice of language teaching book is that it must be classified (or self-classified) within communicative language teaching. This excludes vocabulary-focused books, workbooks, and translation materials. In addition, it was recommended that these be published in the last 15 years (2010-2025). This is because most of the books published earlier gave little or no importance to the development of the intercultural component.

Most of the teachers were taking a graduate seminar on interculturality and language (except 4 of them), which was offered to students of two different master's degrees related to education and language teaching at a Colombian university. The textbooks analyzed corresponded to the languages taught by the participating teachers. Since English is the most widely taught foreign language at the institutional level, most of the materials selected were English textbooks, while a smaller proportion corresponded to other foreign languages, as shown later in Figure 1.

After using the instrument to evaluate how the selected book promoted the development of intercultural competence, each participant filled out a brief questionnaire focused on this experience<sup>2</sup>. This questionnaire was administered in Microsoft Forms. Each participant completed it from his or her preferred place and time.

The average time spent completing the questionnaire was 4.5 minutes. The data was extracted into an Excel document and processed later. In total, 4 reports from 4 teachers were discarded because they used a type of book that was not appropriate for this study (e.g., grammar books, workbooks). In the end, we included data from 12 teachers who participated in the instrument's pilot and excluded the report provided by 4 instructors due to the reasons already mentioned.

According to the report provided by participants, the majority worked as instructors of English (75%, 9 out of 12), as seen in Figure 1. Only three teachers taught other languages (French, Portuguese, and Italian, one each).

<sup>2</sup> The questions are mentioned in the results section. Those and the names of selected books are also available on: [https://osf.io/b8ayp/?view\\_only=3cd8d30568fb4c798b2123296eeb741c](https://osf.io/b8ayp/?view_only=3cd8d30568fb4c798b2123296eeb741c)

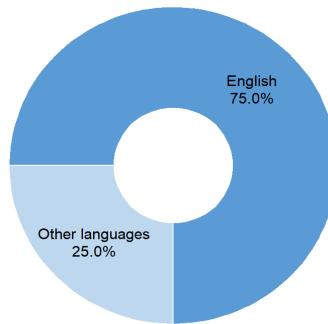


Figure 1. *Percentages of taught languages*

A close inspection of their report, as seen in Table 2, reveals that teachers work with students from different levels. Five teachers work with students at levels A1–B2, two teach across all proficiency levels, one works with learners at A1–A2, and one teaches B2-level courses.

Language and Level	Taught levels
English, A1-B2	5
English, all levels	2
English, A1-A2	1
English, B2	1
French, A1	1
Portuguese, B1	1
Italian, B1-C1	1

Table 2. *Distribution of languages and levels*

As seen in the table, English is more represented in this study (taught by 75% of the instructors) in comparison to other languages such as Portuguese, Italian, and French (25%). This reflects the Colombian pattern, in which this language is more widely offered than others as a requisite to graduate from schools and universities. Other languages are less offered and optional for most students in the country.

Regarding place of work, most teachers work in colleges (5 out of 12, 41.7%). Others currently teach in language institutes (2 out of 12, 16.7%), primary schools (2 out of 12, 16.7%), secondary schools (2 out of 12, 16.7%), and one of them works teaching private English lessons (1 out of 12, 8.3%).

Their teaching experience is also diverse. Five of them have one year of experience (41.7%), three have between 2 and 5 (25%), one has between 5 and 10 (8.3%), and three have between 11 and 20 years of experience (25%). Their level of education is also diverse. Six of them hold a bachelor's degree and were enrolled in their first seminar

of a Master's in Education or TESOL (50%), five had already completed a master's degree (41.7%), and one participant reported holding a doctoral degree (8.3%).

## 4. RESULTS

In what follows, we report and analyze the information provided by participants on the use of the instrument and some preliminary patterns derived from this activity.

### 4.1. *Experience using the instrument*

In the question about whether the instructions and the example given at the beginning of the instrument were clear, participants had to choose between "Completely disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", and "Completely agree". Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses.

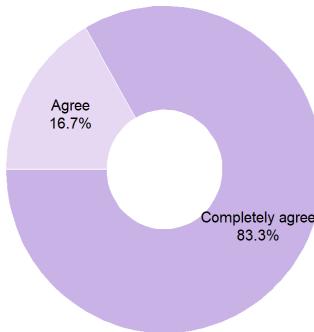


Figure 2. *Percentages of agreement with the clarity of instructions and examples*

In the figure above, we can see that 10 teachers expressed complete agreement that the instructions and the initial example were clear. The other two also agreed with the clarity of both.

The next question aimed to know about the perception of the participants in terms of the clarity and confusion of other sections and questions in the instrument. To the question, "Was there any section or question that you found confusing or difficult to apply? Please indicate which one and explain why", participants could write their opinion. Eleven of them explicitly stated "none" to confirm that no section or question generated doubts. The remaining participant said that, in general, the questions requiring critical thinking had taken more time from her.

On the question "Do you think the instrument adequately covers the important aspects of intercultural communicative competence?", participants again had to choose between the options: "Completely disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", and "Completely agree". Figure 3 shows the results.

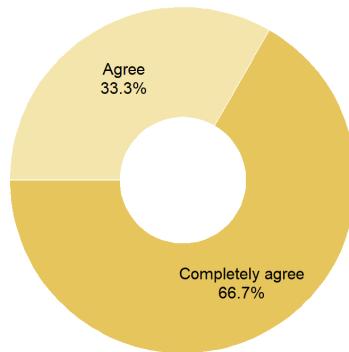


Figure 3. *Percentages of agreement on the adequacy of the instrument to cover aspects of ICC*

As seen in Figure 3, eight teachers (66.7%) reported complete agreement that the instrument adequately covered the most essential aspects of the ICC. The other four reported agreement as well (33.3%).

To learn more about how comprehensive the instrument was in addressing aspects of ICC, participants had to answer the question: “Would there be anything related to intercultural communicative competence that you would add to it? What is it?”

Ten participants mentioned that they would not add anything else. On the other hand, two teachers said that they would suggest something. Their suggestion is reported below:

P9: Based on what I observed, I would like to add something regarding intercultural awareness from an early age.

P12: To add the different levels of intercultural competences.

Both contributions are significant and can be considered. In fact, there is currently a junior researcher working on an adaptation of the instrument for children’s books. The ICC approach at the levels should be addressed in future studies, if appropriate.

In addition, the following question was asked to obtain an overview of user satisfaction with the instrument: “Overall, how would you describe your experience using this instrument?”

The following word map highlights the appreciation given by participants for the instrument:



Figure 4. Word map based on the participants' description of their experience using the instrument

As seen in Figure 4, participants used words to show satisfaction and appreciation, such as pleasant, clear, accessible, reflective, and easy, to describe their experience using the instrument for the first time. All the responses showed the user's satisfaction. This is evident in the following comments:

- P1: It was nice and easy to use. The sections are quite clear and easy to understand.
- Q3: Reflective, as it made me think about aspects I had not considered, the material that supports student learning.
- P5: It was good, you can analyze a book in depth to know if it is a good option to teach.
- P6: I found shortcomings in a text that I thought was complete in different intercultural areas.
- P7: Very good and enriching. I was able to evaluate aspects that I had not taken into account.
- P8: Very good, it dealt with aspects that I had not taken into account some time ago.
- P9: It was very good because it led me to reflect on whether interculturality is really being shown in our classes
- P12: A good experience. Questions were well formulated.

It is also evident from the above responses that the instrument impacted the way users now view ICC. Several participants stated that they can now take into account elements that they did not previously consider, which can now impact their own perception of materials' usefulness to promote ICC. Furthermore, the responses suggest that the instrument impacted the way users now view ICC. Additionally, some participants state that they can now consider elements that they did not previously take into consideration.

The last question focused on recommendations for improving the instrument. The question asked, “Do you have any suggestions for improving the instrument?” Six participants stated that they did not have any recommendations. The other six made the following recommendations:

P3: I would suggest including at the beginning of the document some key terms with their definition; for example, intercultural communication and cultural norms.

P4: Perhaps provide examples for all the criteria. I think they make it easier to apply the instrument.

P5: Make the table in Excel so that the sum of the total points made by the evaluator is automatic.

P6: It would be better to use a platform to fill it out in a more comfortable way, because being a table in Word, sometimes reading it can be complicated or distorted.

P9: I think it is an excellent instrument; it seems to me that we can obtain a lot of information to be able to apply to our daily activities as teachers.

P11: Soon, we can add the themes or topics of those cultural components that apply to the competence, but that are not explicitly working on the intercultural competence.

As can be seen, several observations focus on the fact that the summation of the points in the instrument can be performed in a place that facilitates this operation, which can be an Excel document or a platform. To this end, we have created an Excel document to facilitate counting, although the long-term goal is to use it on a digital platform or website.

Another observation is the inclusion of more examples. We believe that including more of these in the instrument can make it confusing, but we think that the elaboration of another complementary document that provides more examples can be useful. This is also one of the next steps to be taken.

#### *4.2. Preliminary conclusion about the representation of ICC in language textbooks*

As mentioned above, 12 teachers evaluated their language teaching books concerning the development of ICC. Although this analysis needs to be replicated with a larger number of participants and with specific books for greater reliability, it allows us to know some preliminary details. The results reported in the appendix allow us to identify some trends based on absolute frequencies (hereon  $r$ ; how many of the 12 books meet each criterion), relative frequencies (hereon  $rf$ ; proportion of books meeting the criterion to the total, expressed as a percentage), the relative usage index (a measure that compares the frequency of a criterion for the total observed frequencies, to see how frequent it is compared to others) and the usage category (qualitative classification as “very low”, “low”, “moderate”, ‘high’ or “very high”, based on ranges of the relative usage index).

Some of the questions with the highest affirmative answers and that can be considered as highly frequent in this analysis were in order:

- 2.1.a Does the material provide knowledge about the distinctive elements of one's own and the new culture? (f= 10; rf= 71.4%)
- 3.2.a Does the material promote skills and activities to discover new cultural information and interact with people from different cultures? (f= 9; rf= 64.2%)
- 4.3.a Are language skills – phonological, pragmatic, lexical, syntactic, etc. – integrated into the activities and recommendations for the development of intercultural communicative competence? (f= 9; rf= 64.2%)
- 1.1.a Does the material encourage students to approach other cultures with curiosity and openness? (f= 9; rf= 64.2%)
- 3.3.a Are learners given the opportunity to apply their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in real-time cross-cultural interactions? (f=8; rf=57.1 %)
- 3.3.b Does the material include simulations, role-plays, or authentic interactions to practice intercultural communication? (f=8; rf=57.1 %).

The affirmative responses to the above questions show that the materials evaluated present strengths concerning the provision of information about characteristic elements of each culture, the fostering of curiosity and openness towards other cultures, the integration of linguistic skills, the application of knowledge and skills in cultural interactions, and the engagement in real or simulated interactions. Overall, the frequency of affirmative responses to these questions highlights the attitudinal components of curiosity and openness, the relevance of linguistic elements, and the experiential exposure to the target culture.

On the contrary, those with low frequency were:

- 5.1.b Does the material include activities that help students manage anxiety and adapt to new cultural environments? (f= 0.0; rf= 0.0)
- 1.1.b Does the material help reduce negative prejudices towards other cultures? (f=2; rf=14.2%),
- 4.1.a Does the material include information on nonverbal communication practices in different cultures? (f=2; rf=14.2%)
- 4.1.b Are students encouraged to observe and analyze nonverbal behaviors in cross-cultural interactions? (f=2; rf=14. 2%),
- 7.5.a Does it provide opportunities for students to recognize ethnic and racial diversity in each culture? (f=2; rf=14.2%)
- 7.5.b Does it include activities for reflection on racial, ethnic, or migrant identities in one's own and the new culture? (f=2; rf=14. 2%)
- 8.4.a Does the material address the role of teachers and educational institutions in fostering intercultural communicative competence? (f=2; rf=14.2%)

- 8.4.b. Are there guidelines for educators on how to teach intercultural communication effectively? (f=2; rf=14.2%)

First, we can see that none of the materials contributes to the management of anxiety in adapting to cross-cultural interactions. The other questions with the highest number of negative responses reflect the poor approach to cultural bias, nonverbal communication practices, analysis of nonverbal behaviors, recognition of ethnic and racial diversity, and the role of the teacher in teaching the ICC. Taken together, these elements point to the deficiency in materials to address emotions, appreciation for diversity, nonverbal language, and how the teacher can contribute to the development of ICC. In the next section, we will address the implications of these findings.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The main objective of the present research was to design and pilot an instrument to assess the extent to which the contents and activities included in foreign language textbooks promote the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This objective responds to the current need to promote education that addresses interculturality, globalization, and critical citizenship (Fantini, 2020), all of which are relevant to the challenges of this century. In general, the findings suggest that the instrument created and piloted is useful for detecting strengths and weaknesses in foreign language teaching books, which may constitute a contribution to helping close the gap between theory and practice in intercultural education (Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero, 2021; Qin, 2024).

The first question focused on identifying the key criteria that such an instrument should have to assess whether language teaching books promote ICC development. Drawing from the literature (e.g., the theoretical basis of the Byram, 2021, and Fantini, 2019 models), core aspects such as cultural attitudes, culturally specific knowledge, intercultural skills, language competencies, and critical reflections on culture and identity were identified. These, in turn, include questions that focus on breaking down each aspect.

Together, all these elements allow for a broad perspective on the type of activities and content that foreign language teaching books should have. It is to be expected that as research on the development of ICC progresses, other elements will be included. This also makes sense because of the dynamic and longitudinal nature of the development of this competence (Fantini, 2019).

Concerning the second research question about how the instrument would help teachers identify components and aspects of ICC that are not promoted in the teaching materials, the instrument proved to be effective in helping the piloted teachers identify them. For example, the foreign language teaching books demonstrated weaknesses in key aspects such as emotional management in intercultural contexts, nonverbal communication, reflection on social prejudice, and the role of the teacher in the development of ICC. These findings coincide with criticisms made in previous research on the simplification and essentialist view of intercultural language teaching (Qin, 2024; Torres Escobar, 2022).

In general, the assessment of foreign language teaching books shows that there is a shortage of specific guides for teachers to teach students to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultures. Along the same lines, the pilot study reveals that the materials show little attention to racial and ethnic diversity. All of the above suggest that, although progress continues to be made in theoretical conceptualization, gaps continue to exist in daily practice, confirming the disconnect previously identified between theory and practice (Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero, 2021).

The third question focuses on the preliminary conclusions that could be drawn about the creation and implementation of the instrument. In this regard, participating teachers rated its use positively. Some of the most outstanding aspects were its clarity, usefulness, and capacity to generate reflection. Most participants expressed their satisfaction with the structure and clarity of the instrument, describing it as easy to use, accessible, and enriching.

This suggests that the tool is not only useful and practical, but that it also has a positive impact on teachers' awareness of interculturality, its approach in the educational context, and its application in real situations. Given its usefulness, we suggest that this tool could be part of continuing education, since it can help many teachers to consciously and systematically incorporate intercultural components in their educational practices (Deardorff, 2009).

The results revealed that certain elements of ICC are consistently addressed by foreign language teaching books. Some of them are the promotion of cultural curiosity, the integration of language skills, and the encouragement of authentic and simulated interactions. This inclusion highlights the awareness that these elements are key in the development of this proficiency and constitute a basis for continuing to incorporate other elements not usually considered in books.

On the other hand, the identification of elements that are scarcely addressed in the books evaluated constitutes an area for improvement. One of these critical aspects is the absence of activities aimed at emotional management and adaptation to the anxiety generated by intercultural interaction, elements that have already been catalogued as frequent barriers to intercultural communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). In addition, the scant attention to nonverbal communication and the recognition of ethnic and racial diversity indicate that material developers still hold a limited conception of intercultural communicative competence.

The implications of this study are relevant for creators of materials, teachers, and teacher trainers concerning the development of ICC. On the one hand, the results highlight the need to incorporate explicit strategies in materials for teaching the management of emotions and attitudes, ethnic and racial identities, nonverbal communication, and reflection on social prejudices, to mention only the most critical elements. On the other hand, there is also a need to reinforce the active role of the teacher as a critical facilitator and cultural mediator (Deardorff, 2009). In this regard, it is indispensable that teacher training directly addresses the development of ICC. This implies the inclusion of clearer and more specific guidelines on how to address these aspects of foreign language teaching.

Finally, although this tool is promising, it is necessary to continue adapting it to other contexts of use, such as early childhood education, specific international

relations courses, and autonomous learning materials, among others. The expanded use in various situations will allow this tool to continue to be strengthened for the benefit of foreign language learners.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study reports on the design and pilot of an instrument to assess how foreign language teaching books promote ICC development. The results are promising in demonstrating that the tool is useful in identifying both strengths and weaknesses concerning ICC development in books. The generation of tools of this type constitutes a significant contribution to reducing the gap between theory and practice in intercultural education (Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero, 2021).

The criteria included in the instrument were mainly based on the most recognized theoretical models on ICC (Byram, 2021; Fantini, 2019), as well as on other contributions to the literature on the subject (Bennett, 2015; Cuartas Álvarez, 2020; Deardorff, 2006a, 2006b; Lázár *et al.*, 2007; among others). These criteria made it possible to subject fundamental aspects such as attitudes toward culture, culturally specific knowledge, skills to interact with people from other cultures, linguistic competence, and critical reflection on culture and identity in textbooks. This comprehensive approach facilitates a concrete and reflective assessment of interculturality. Similarly, the implementation of the instrument highlighted critical areas that have not yet been sufficiently addressed in the materials reviewed, such as emotional management in intercultural interactions, nonverbal communication, and critical reflection on cultural bias and ethnic diversity. These shortcomings are consistent with previous observations on the simplification and essentialist view of intercultural language teaching (Qin, 2024; Torres Escobar, 2022).

Although the instrument was piloted by 12 teachers, its evaluation needs to be extended to a larger number of teachers, representing other languages to a greater extent. This should be extended to other languages that are rarely taught in formal contexts, such as minority languages or others undergoing a revitalization process. Similarly, it will also be important to explore the adaptation of the instrument to language teaching books in early childhood education and for autonomous learning.

Another relevant future direction would be to perform an inter-rater validation of the instrument with a larger group, for example, 20 teachers evaluating the same materials of a specific language. This approach, complemented with statistical methods (such as Cohen's Kappa coefficient, Krippendorff's alpha, or the intraclass correlation coefficient), would make it possible to evaluate the interobserver reliability of the instrument, which would contribute to making the results obtained consistent and replicable regardless of the evaluator.

Other future possibilities for evaluating the instrument may include methodological triangulation through in-depth interviews and focus groups with intercultural experts, material designers, and experienced teachers. This qualitative approach can contribute complementary perspectives that will contribute to the refinement, continuous updating, and theoretical and practical soundness of the instrument.

Finally, it is expected that the emergence of this type of tool will also contribute to strengthening teacher training in intercultural competencies in the pre-service teaching stages and as part of continuing education. This implies the development of programs and more tools to train teachers to effectively integrate intercultural elements into their educational practices (Deardorff, 2009).

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## APPENDIX 1.

*Table 1. Implementation results*

Item	Frequency of use	Relative (%)	Relative usage rate	Category of use
1.1. a. Does the material encourage students to approach other cultures with curiosity and openness?	9	64.29	1.98	High
1.1. b. Does the material help reduce negative prejudices towards other cultures?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
1.2. a. Does the material encourage students to analyze and critically evaluate their own and others' cultural practices and norms?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
1.2. b. Does it promote critical reflection on social and cultural influences on behavior and communication?	4	28.57	0.88	Moderate
1.3. a. Does the material help students identify and question their own preconceived ideas and cultural stereotypes?	4	28.57	0.88	Moderate
1.3. b. Are there activities that promote awareness of the existence and impact of stereotypes?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
1.4. a. Does the material induce students to reflect on cultural values explicitly (e.g., through conversations with native speakers, collaborative projects, or simulations)?	3	21.43	0.66	Low

1.4.b. Are there activities that require students to compare and contrast cultural values critically?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
2.1. a. Does the material provide knowledge about the distinctive elements of one's own and the new culture?	10	71.43	2.21	High
2.1.b. Are the processes of cultural interaction and transmission explained at both the individual and social level?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
2.2.a Does the material include specific knowledge about cultural products and practices of various social groups?	6	42.86	1.32	High
2.2.b. Are students exposed to a variety of cultural artifacts (e.g., musical instruments, ritual masks, paintings, textiles, etc.) and encouraged to understand their significance?	7	50.0	1.54	High
2.3. a. Does the material address the concepts of national and regional identity and their influence on communication?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
2.3. b. Are dialectal or regional differences within the same language described?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
3.1.a. Does the material help students connect cultural documents or behaviors from other cultures to their own experiences?	7	50.0	1.54	High
3.1.b. Does it include activities that help students understand and relate different cultural norms and values?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
3.2.a. Does the material promote skills and activities to discover new cultural information and interact with people from different cultures?	9	64.29	1.98	High
3.2.b. Are students encouraged to actively seek out new cultural experiences and knowledge?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
3.3. a. Are learners given the opportunity to apply their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in real-time cross-cultural interactions?	8	57.14	1.76	High

3.3. b. Does the material include simulations, role-plays, or authentic interactions to practice intercultural communication?	8	57.14	1.76	High
3.4.a. Are students encouraged to make observations in different cultural settings?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
3.4. b. Does the material include activities that induce students to explore diverse cultural practices?	4	28.57	0.88	Moderate
3.5. a. Are the knowledge and skills taught in the material integrated in a way that promotes effective cross-cultural communication?	8	57.14	1.76	High
3.5. b. Does the material provide a framework (i.e., an organized and coherent structure) through its units for the development of intercultural communicative competence?	7	50.0	1.54	High
4.1. a. Does the material include information on nonverbal communication practices in different cultures?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
4.1. b. Are students encouraged to observe and analyze nonverbal behaviors in cross-cultural interactions?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
4.2.a. Does the material take into account the sociolinguistic aspects of communication, such as the context and the relationship between speakers?	9	64.29	1.98	High
4.2. b. Are activities included that help the student understand and participate in discourse appropriate to the culture(s) of study?	8	57.14	1.76	High
4.3. a. Are language skills (phonological, pragmatic, lexical, syntactic, etc.) integrated into the activities and recommendations for the development of intercultural communicative competence?	9	64.29	1.98	High
4.3. b. Does the material include activities that require the use of language skills in intercultural contexts?	8	57.14	1.76	High
4.4. a. Does the material provide information on how different contexts influence intercultural communication?	3	21.43	0.66	Low

4.4. b. Are students taught to adapt their communication strategies according to the context of the interaction?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
5.1. a. Are students helped to develop empathy for people from other cultures?	6	42.86	1.32	High
5.1. b. Does the material include activities that help students manage anxiety and adapt to new cultural environments?	0	0.0	0.0	N/A
6.1.a Are students encouraged to reflect on and analyze their own cultural norms and practices?	7	50.0	1.54	High
6.1.b Does the material include exercises that encourage critical thinking about cultural norms?	4	28.57	0.88	Moderate
6.2. a. Are students taught the skills necessary to mediate between cultures in cross-cultural exchanges?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
6.2. b. Does the material include activities in which the student acts as a cross-cultural mediator?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
6.3.a. Does the material incorporate political education topics to help students develop a critical awareness of the culture?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
6.3. b. Are students encouraged to understand the historical and current relationships between different cultures?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
7.1. a. Does the material explain the processes of social interaction (communication and ways of relating) in different cultures?	6	42.86	1.32	High
7.1. b. Are students taught to recognize and adapt to different styles of interaction (e.g., verbal, nonverbal communication, time management, behavioral expectations, etc.)?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
7.2. a. Does the material provide information on the characteristics and identities of different social groups or classes and their impact on communication?	3	21.43	0.66	Low

7.2. b. Does the material help to understand the expectations and lifestyles of the target culture's social groups or classes?	4	28.57	0.88	Moderate
7.3. a. Is the information provided on family types typical of your own and the new culture?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
7.3. b. Does the material encourage reflection on the roles of family members in the study culture?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
7.4. a. Does it help to understand the differences in how genders are perceived in different cultures?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
7.4. b. Does the material contribute to the recognition of the expected social roles of each gender?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
7.5. a. Does it provide opportunities for students to recognize ethnic and racial diversity in each culture?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
7.5. b. Does it include activities for reflection on racial, ethnic or migrant identities in one's own and the new culture?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
8.1. a. Does the material emphasize the role of the learner as a cross-cultural speaker rather than as a native or non-native speaker?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
8.1. b. Are there tasks that require students to negotiate meaning and cultural norms in cross-cultural interactions?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
8.2. a. Do the materials include criteria (i.e., principles or benchmarks) for assessing intercultural communicative competence?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
8.2. b. Are students provided with information on what is expected in their development of intercultural skills and knowledge?	3	21.43	0.66	Low
8.3. a. Does the material promote the idea of lifelong learning in the context of intercultural communicative competence?	5	35.71	1.1	Moderate
8.3. b. Are students encouraged to further develop their intercultural competencies beyond the classroom?	4	28.57	0.88	Moderate

8.4. a. Does the material address the role of teachers and educational institutions in fostering intercultural competence?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low
8.4. b. Are there guidelines for educators on how to teach intercultural communication effectively?	2	14.29	0.44	Very low