Exploring EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Experience with Cultural Content and Intercultural Communicative Competence at Three Colombian Universities

Indagación sobre la experiencia con el contenido cultural y la competencia comunicativa intercultural de docentes de inglés en formación, en tres universidades colombianas

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This article reports the findings of a qualitative research project that explored pre-service English teachers' perceptions of and attitudes toward the aspects of culture and intercultural competence addressed in their English classes in the undergraduate programs at three Colombian universities. Findings reveal that pre-service teachers are mainly taught elements of surface culture and lack full understanding of intercultural competence. They also see culture as a separate aspect of their future teaching career. We provide alternatives so that pre-service teachers might overcome limitations of the teaching of culture as preparation for their future teaching career in the foreign language classroom.

Key words: Cultural content, deep culture, intercultural communicative competence, pre-service teachers, surface culture.

Este artículo reporta los hallazgos de una investigación cualitativa que indagó sobre las percepciones y las actitudes de los profesores en formación en el área de inglés respecto a los contenidos culturales y la competencia cultural que se abordan en las clases de inglés, en tres universidades colombianas. Los hallazgos revelan que los docentes en formación primordialmente tratan aspectos de la cultura superficial y no tienen total claridad de qué es la competencia comunicativa intercultural. También conciben la cultura como un aspecto desligado de su futura profesión docente. Se sugieren algunas alternativas para que los profesores en formación puedan superar las limitaciones de la enseñanza de la cultura y se preparen para su futura carrera docente en el salón de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa intercultural, contenido cultural, cultura profunda, cultura superficial, docentes en formación.

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Introduction

The development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context has become a necessity rather than an option in our contemporary society. The ongoing process of globalization and the amalgamation of diverse communities worldwide demand second language learners and teachers to develop cultural awareness. Hinojosa (2000), Kramsch (2001), Hernández and Samacá (2006), and Barletta (2009) argue that one of the main missions of foreign language teaching is not only to prepare students and teacher educators to learn linguistic structures and to speak another language fluently, but to instruct them to become aware of cultural boundaries, misunderstandings, and the way of life of a foreign culture. Genc and Bada (2005) state that language teaching has begun to recognize that there is an intricate relationship between culture and language, because teaching language structures without considering the aspects of the target culture is inadequate. Despite these salient ideas about the inclusion of culture in the EFL classroom, the teaching of culture and the development of ICC still require more attention and research, more concretely, in Colombian EFL education. Therefore, this article explores how EFL pre-service teachers deal with the fusion of language and culture.

Statement of the Problem

Authors such as Byram (1997), Lázár (2003), and Chlopek (2008) assert that one of the main problems in EFL classrooms is that language teachers often restrict the inclusion of cultural content in the language classroom. The study of grammar forms and communicative functions has dominated language syllabi and restricted learners' ability to become culturally competent. Taking into account that the study of the target culture remains an unripe topic in the educational setting, including Colombia, we, as

teacher-researchers, wanted to conduct a diagnostic research by exploring and identifying what actual perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes EFL pre-service teachers at three universities in Bogotá had in regard to the insertion of culture in the English class and, in this way, detect the level of understanding of ICC they had. Furthermore, we wanted to inquire about the teaching practices they were given to develop ICC at the language programs they belonged to. We think that this diagnostic study, which focuses on EFL pre-service teachers' actual voices and opinions, will allow us to determine to what extent culture and ICC are part of their preparation in the classroom and what methodological alternatives they should embrace to foster intercultural awareness in a more conscientious way.

Theoretical Framework

Culture and intercultural communicative competence are the main theoretical constructs that guided this exploratory study.

Culture

Sihui (1996) and Prieto (1998) claim that the development of culture is facilitated through the process of social communication because any set of behaviors, beliefs, and ideologies are necessarily embraced by the members of a particular community through language. The inseparable bond between language and culture leads to observe that English learners must essentially learn meanings of the target culture, rather than simply studying grammar forms and communicative functions. The Common European Framework of Reference to Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) indicates that learners do not simply communicate, but develop *interculturality,* and that linguistic and cultural contents in the classroom contribute to enhance ICC and create positive attitudes to new cultural experiences.

Robinson (as cited in Castro, 2007) indicates that many teachers highlight the importance of "practicing

culture" in the classroom rather than trying to define it. Robinson claims that culture should be viewed from four definitions: the *behavioral definition* (set of patterns that are shared and that may be observed in terms of actions and events), the *functionalist definition* (social rules governing and explaining events), the *cognitive definition* (the knowledge shared by a cultural actor and other actors, and that helps them to interpret the world), and the *symbolic definition* (system of symbols used by the individual to assign meanings to different elements and events).

Despite EFL teachers' attempts to incorporate cultural content in their teaching practices, culture continues being seen from the behavioral definition. Therefore, it is conceived as a static, accumulated, and classifiable concept that can be taught and learned with no effort (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2003). Aspects of culture such as celebrations, food, tourist places, and important people, which are classified as elements of surface or observable culture (Hinkel, 1999), seem to be the most common contents discussed in the EFL context. In this sense, there is a need to address significant aspects of deep culture from the functionalist, cognitivist, and symbolic levels (as proposed by Robinson, 1988) that are very often omitted, including, for instance, attitudes to life, personal and collective ideologies, beliefs, and customs that constantly change through generations. In fact, Trujillo (2002) suggests that culture changes through time and this endless transformation must be the main object of interest in the language classroom.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

ICC is defined as the "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and [the] ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 10). Byram (1997) proposes a model of ICC composed of three main factors or *savoirs*: The first factor is *knowledge* of "social groups and their products and practices . . . and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (p. 51). The second factor consists of *skills*: the skill of interpreting, the skill of relating, and the skill of discovering, which all together help individuals to learn, explain, and compare the meaning of a given situation or documents from another culture. The third factor of ICC involves having positive *attitudes* such as openness, empathy, readiness, and curiosity about cultural expressions that may be similar or quite different from one's own.

With knowledge, skills, and attitudes, learners can develop, as proposed by Byram (1997), another *savoir* that he calls critical cultural awareness which is the ability to analyze critically that our own and the target cultures are different and dynamic because all human beings do not behave and think homogeneously, but act and see life in varied ways. Byram (1997) claims that *critical cultural awareness* is "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 53). In this sense, the intercultural speaker becomes critical when he/she "brings to the experiences of their own and other cultures a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate" (p. 54).

Similarly, Banks (2004) argues that the citizens of this globalized society need to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to coexist with other cultural communities and cultural borders. Banks also affirms that critical cultural awareness means to support human rights and equality, as well as to accept the inclusion of minority groups into the mainstream society. This competence reduces the proliferation of stereotypes, prejudices, and misrepresentations of others, and allows learners to see the deeper aspects of culture. These views of ICC become a relevant epistemological notion for those EFL learners who are preparing to become EFL teachers.

Research Methodology

Research Questions:

Supported by the previous theoretical framework, our research was led by the following questions:

What perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes do EFL pre-service teachers have in regard to the incorporation of the cultural component in the EFL class?

How might EFL pre-service teachers foster ICC through the cultural contents studied in their English class?

Context of the Study

This research was carried out at three universities in Bogota. Two are state founded universities while the other one is private. The three universities offer an undergraduate teaching program—in English or Languages—which provides teaching and training for those who want to teach English in the EFL context. Their programs consist of ten semesters and are completed by credit hours. The programs are composed of different areas of knowledge of which the field of foreign languages is the most important one in terms of time distribution, credit hours, and number of subjects. Advanced levels, with which our study was conducted, took English lessons 6 to 10 hours a week.

Participants

In order to select the students to participate, we asked the directors of the Language Departments of each institution to let us develop this study with a group of fifth semester learners. A total of 51 upper-intermediate EFL students, aged 18 to 22, from the three institutions participated, including both females and males: 16 students from U1,[1] 15 students from U2, and 20 students from U3. The reason for choosing upper-intermediate students was that, at this point

of their career, they already had enough background knowledge and experience to give account for the cultural experiences in their English classes. One of the main features of the participants is that they are EFL pre-service teachers. Therefore, they are given professional training to become English teachers. As part of their preparation, they not only need to have a good English level to teach future generations, but be knowledgeable about teaching methods and theories related to culture and ICC, since they need to be qualified to teach in the on-going era of globalization.

Instruments

For the study, we selected three data collection instruments: (a) Questionnaires focused on three core aspects: knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes toward culture (see Appendix A). Participants answered the questionnaires individually when we visited each institution. (b) During our visits, we also used an individual semi-structured interview, which was recorded on tape, transcribed later and saved in a file. The interview was conducted in English because we were aware that we were interviewing teacher-educators and we wanted to expose them to speaking in the target language about their preparation in terms of the cultural aspects they had been instructed in. The interviews consisted mainly of four questions: The cultural topics approached in the English class, students' preferences for any cultures, opinions about the importance of culture, and the cultures existing in the classroom. The questionnaire and the interviews contained open-ended questions because we wanted to observe participants' broad range of feelings, thoughts, and opinions about their experiences with contents of culture; in other words, to have data from their varied perspectives. (c) We also made a documentary analysis of the study plans of the programs in which participants were enrolled. The purpose was to observe whether or not study plans included any explicit cultural contents in English courses.

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[1] U1, U2, and U3 stand for the three universities where the study was conducted.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, we followed the grounded approach principles because, instead of basing our study on a prior hypothesis, we interpreted and found similar patterns and themes that emerged from the data collected. We did an in-depth exploration of the data in order to find EFL pre-service teachers' knowledge, perceptions of, and attitudes toward culture through a color coding system. Color coding allowed us to establish the frequency and to identify the similar opinions students had given. After that, we decided to, as Freeman (1998) suggests, name, group, find relationships, and display data contained in the questionnaires. Data were displayed in the order participants had answered each question so that we could identify patterns and relationships (see Appendix B). We also did the same process separately with the other two instruments (interviews and study plans).

Later, through a process of triangulation which consists of analyzing multiple sources of information or points of view on the phenomenon that is being investigated (Freeman, 1998), we established relationships with the data collected in the questionnaires, interviews, and study plans in order to see if salient patterns appeared among all of them. This triangulation made possible verification that the data were reliable and consistent since we realized that the same opinions and patterns were present in the other instruments. We recognize, obviously, that the study plans did not show evidence of students' voices, but were useful to establish relationships as to what extent they incorporated cultural content and if students knew the information described in them. In the findings section, we will use the following codes to analyze and interpret data: questionnaires (Q), interviews (I), participants (P), and University (U). It is important to say that the units of analysis taken from students' answers are verbatim. That is why some of them have grammar mistakes or are in Spanish.

Findings and Discussion

In this section we will describe and discuss the findings of our research. First, we will refer to pre-service teachers' knowledge and perceptions about culture and ICC. Then, we will explain their perceptions towards cultural contents, methodologies, and resources used in their classes. Finally, we will report about their attitude as to what extent they consider culture and ICC important for their professional teaching career.

Perceptions of Theories on Culture and ICC

Since participants were pre-service teachers, we wanted to inquire about their knowledge of culture in the EFL context, involving theories and definitions of culture and ICC, and the dynamic nature of culture as useful information for their teaching careers. Data showed that most of them gave a general definition of culture based on traditional views. They defined it as a set of customs, habits, identity, beliefs, traditions, and values of a particular community, as can be seen in the following examples.

> Culture...are the several characteristics that set or define a society. (P4, Q, U3)

> Culture is the main characteristics of, of a town, of a country, of a city [*sic*]. (P1, I, U1)

> A set of beliefs, behaviors, thoughts, customs, that are learned and transmitted in a group of people. (P1, Q, U2)

Participants' answers demonstrated that they seemed to have a static view of culture. Words like "main characteristics" and "learned and transmitted" suggest that they think that culture is unquestionably transmitted without suffering any possible alteration or transformation. None of the pre-service teachers recognized culture as relative and changeable. This finding supports Trujillo's view (2002) that EFL learners and, in particular, EFL pre-service teachers need to become aware that elements of surface culture should not be the only contents to study in the classroom.

When students were asked about what ICC was, most of them gave partial definitions. This supports the fact that students lack knowledge of this competence. For instance, at U1 only four pre-service teachers defined ICC as ability, others had a partial or vague view of it, and some others did not provide any answer. At U2, six participants, out of fifteen, answered that ICC was an ability or skill, while the other seven did not define the term. Similarly, a few students from U3 defined ICC better when compared with U1 and U2 students, but most of them gave an incomplete definition:

> Is the ability to interact with other cultures. (P3, Q, U2)
>
> Competence to talk with people from other places and with other culture. (P15, Q, U3)

Moreover, students seemed to confuse communicative competence with ICC since they believe that being able to communicate appropriately with speakers from the target language is the main priority, as shown in these data samples:
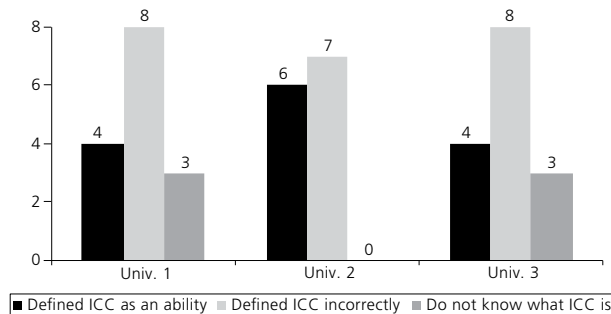
> Learning a [*sic*] foreign communication. (P3, Q, U1)
>
> Yes, I think is important because is the language which I want to learn. (P1, I, U3)
>
> I can learn English more, I can learn English easier. (P4, I, U2)

Thus, they need to be guided to acknowledge the significant role culture and intercultural awareness play in the process of communication and as part of their training to become teachers in the future. This finding strongly relates to Byram's (1997) claim that individuals must attain certain levels of intercultural understanding in order to develop critical intercultural awareness with respect to their own country and others since, according to the participants' answers; they are more concerned about how to communicate with speakers of the target culture than to deal appropriately with their cultural differences.

Figure 1 shows participants' level of understanding of ICC at the three universities. Perceptions of ICC show that only a limited number of pre-service teachers had some general idea about the concept, but none of them referred concretely to knowledge, skills, or attitudes as essential components of ICC.

Figure 1. EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Definitions of ICC

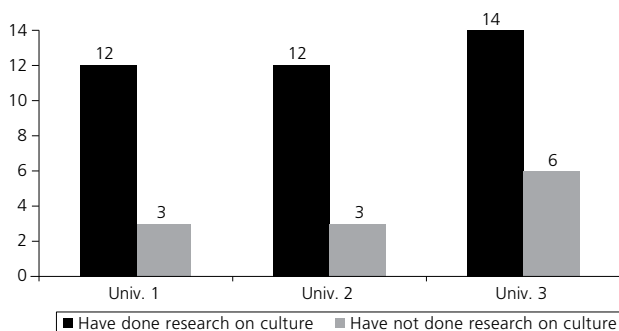Defined ICC as an ability   Defined ICC incorrectly   Do not know what ICC is

Cultural Contents Reviewed in and Outside of the English Classroom

Another aspect we wanted to explore referred to cultural topics they discussed in their English classroom. All of them mentioned aspects of surface culture, including history, tourism, arts, entertainment, and food; being history and tourism the most salient aspects. It is important to note that only 8 participants out of 51 answered that they had discussed "social and historical aspects." However, they did not report which social and historical facts they had studied, and this may imply that they had not internalized or critically learned those particular facts. Surprisingly, these pre-service teachers never referred to aspects of deep culture such as relationships, culture shock, cultural misunderstanding, relations of power, social class, politeness, discrimination, otherness, attitudes to life, and identity. Data showed that they are often trained to teach observable and surface elements of culture. This finding indicates that they still need their teachers' help to become aware of the dynamism and transformation of deep elements of culture because, as data suggest, they learn culture at an informative and superficial level, rather than from

a critical and reflective perspective. As pre-service teachers they need to be more critically prepared on concepts of culture so that they do not replicate a superficial approach to culture when assuming a teaching position in an EFL classroom in the future. As Hernández and Samacá (2006) highlight, learning about culture goes beyond studying a list of facts about history, music, arts, or geography. Similarly, it is our understanding that pre-service teachers should address issues of deep culture as identity, social clash, attitudes, and conflicting values and beliefs that might differ from their own, but that will empower them to deal with otherness and complex interaction among individuals from the target culture. A way to promote this discussion of the foreign culture is suggested by Álvarez and Bonilla (2009), who state that learners should be engaged in interactions through a collaborative and a dialogical process because students should take a critical position about the target culture, departing from the understanding and analysis of their culture.

Besides these topics of surface culture studied in class, pre-service teachers admitted that they had done research on cultural contents outside the classroom. As they were asked if they did research on culture, 38 students reported that they had researched on their own initiative while 12 had not. Figure 2 shows this aspect more specifically at each university.

Figure 2. EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Autonomous Research on Culture

Additionally, most students recognized that they had done more research on the Anglophone cultures than on their own culture, while just a few students had done more research on their own culture than the target culture. Sixteen participants from the three universities acknowledged that they had investigated other cultures different from the Anglophone and their own. Over all, data revealed that more learners had initiative to do research on the Anglophone cultures without their teachers' request. However, most of the topics students acknowledged having researched included history, beliefs, music, science, art, literature, and food. These topics confirm the finding that pre-service teachers mainly focus on aspects of surface culture, since they seem to be probably influenced by the topics addressed in their language classes. This fact was clearly evidenced in the data as only few students reported having researched deep aspects of culture such as impolite behaviors and slang. In short, the positive finding is that they acknowledged being autonomous when learning elements of the Anglophone cultures outside the classroom. The limitation that we identified as analysts of the data is that students need to be encouraged to research cultures different from the Anglophone ones in order to create more diverse and inclusive intercultural awareness, since interculturality implies the discussion of different nations around the world that do not necessarily have to belong to the Anglo-Saxon civilization. This will allow EFL pre-service teachers in their future teaching positions to promote an open environment of inclusion and diversity, since they will surely teach learners from different cultural backgrounds within Colombia.

From the data, only one pre-service teacher acknowledged that he had researched some elements of deep culture, such as behaviors, expressions, and accents. On the other hand, those participants who answered they had never done research on their own initiative argued that they were not interested

in culture, had no time to investigate, and were not motivated to study that topic. Others did not answer why they lacked interest. They only said they had never done any type of research. Some comments related to the question are:

> I think I have too many homeworks [*sic*] to do and I don't have time. (P3, Q, U1)
>
> Because I am not interested on that. (P2, Q, U2)
>
> I think that it's a lack of self-work and initiative, a lack of motivation. (P4, Q, U3)

The fact that several EFL pre-service teachers are not concerned about learning cultural content on their own indicates that they are not totally aware of the real need of becoming intercultural in our current society and that they need more guidance to understand that ICC is not an innate ability, but one that is acquired and taught through conscious instruction. In this sense, those teachers who instruct pre-service teachers need to address the study of cultural content more purposely in their classes so that pre-service teachers do more research and discuss this topic more often in order to become better intercultural English speakers and more qualified EFL teachers.

One interesting perception articulated by one pre-service teacher regarding the reasons for doing research on his own is:

> I think is important to know how the others had acted and why they had done know and understand the other can help us growing like people and as teachers we would need it [*sic*]. (P8, Q, U1)

This participant and another from U2 recognized that their interest in learning cultural content is because they think it is an important aspect for their future teaching career. The other 49 participants at the three universities said that they had initiative to learn about culture because they were planning to travel abroad and because they were just interested in learning this kind of information. Some of their opinions are:

> I think it's important because maybe we will travel. (P2, I, U2)
>
> Because if I want to travel to some other place, I have to know about that culture. (P12, Q, U1)
>
> Because I like to learn more about countries I'm studying. (P4, Q, U3)
>
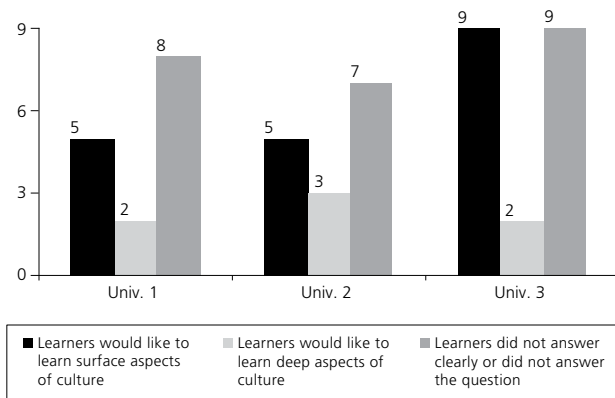> What people do there and what we do here and maybe the places where we can go. (P6, I, U2)

Participants' answers indicate that they still need to be instructed by their teachers to see culture not only as a tool to meet their traveling and tourists' interests, but to be prepared to become English teachers in the future, since the language programs in which they are enrolled aim at preparing qualified teachers in the Colombian context. At this point we were able to establish a significant correlation: since most participants see culture as informative and at a surface level, which will allow them to travel as tourists and to communicate when traveling, they still need to become more aware of culture at a deeper level.

As a conclusion, participants seem not to be familiar with the distinction of surface and deep levels of culture because they have not been trained to recognize those levels. As a consequence, with their teachers' assistance, pre-service teachers are called upon to become more aware of ICC and consider more mindful reasons to see the study of culture in the EFL classroom, not only for traveling plans, but also for their role as future English teachers and citizens of a multicultural world. This finding leads us to reflect on what Quintero (2006) points out: that an intercultural person is one rooted in his/her own culture but, at the same time, open to the world; a person who observes the unknown from the known, and who interacts with otherness from his/her own affirmation and self-assessment, that is to say, one who becomes critical of the globalized world around him/her.

Additionally, data gave us interesting insights as to which topics participants would like to study regarding culture. Some of them said that they would like to study

features of deep culture (without being aware that those aspects belonged to deep culture), including behaviors, accents, the culture of u.s. Native-American Indians, body language, educational systems, and politeness. However, the majority stated that they would like to study aspects such as historical facts, food, landmarks, "special days," the arts, important people, and traditions in general. These responses support once more the fact that pre-service teachers' perceptions about culture rely on the surface level of culture, and that they have not become aware of deeper aspects. History seems to be the most required aspect they would like to study, but they see history as an opportunity to learn factual information from the past, but do not reflect how historical events have caused cultural conflicts, resistance, and social differences. Figure 3 presents the level of surface and deep culture that students would like to learn in the English classroom.

Figure 3. Level of Cultural Content EFL Pre-Service Teachers Would Like to Learn

Consequently, data revealed that students need to apply different manifestations and expressions of deep culture (attitudes to life, gender, race, social classes, prejudices, how people act in certain circumstances, ideologies, individuality, etc.) so that they will be able to foster ICC more appropriately. This can be connected to Nieto's (2002) concern that these deep cultural aspects are manifestations of economic, political, and social

power that should be discussed to promote critical intercultural awareness in the classroom.

Importance of Incorporating Culture in the EFL Classroom

According to the participants, it is important to incorporate culture in the English classroom because it is related to language. Twenty students, out of 51, established a relationship between culture and language:

> Because the English Language is part of the culture and it is important to know cultural aspects! (P3, Q, U2)
>
> It is important, every language [is part of a] culture, so if we study about [culture] we can understand the language much better. (P7, Q, U1)
>
> Because learning a foreign language implies learning the culture, too. (P10, I, U3)

These opinions reveal that almost half of the participants from the three universities think that language is a medium through which to acquire culture. They perceived culture as an essential element to negotiate meaning in real social situations of life. This finding contrasts with the notion of surface culture that most of them have. At least half of the participants identified the link between language and culture as dynamic in actual cross-cultural interaction, but it does not mean that they are aware of this cultural feature as dynamic. Also, because only less than half made this connection, the other half needs to see culture as a powerful agent when speakers from diverse backgrounds engage in the process of communication. Some of their answers indicate that including culture in the ELF classroom is just for the sake of learning language and gaining general knowledge of a culture, but they do not see it as determinant component in authentic communicative practices, as these samples suggest:

> Is very important because of this why I can know about other cultures and other aspect from other countries in the world [*sic*]. (P2, Q, U1)

I think it is quite important because, because the cultural component improves the process of learning languages. (p7, i, u2)

Because it is a good way to improve our knowledge. (p4, q, u3)

These views emphasize that English teachers should become foreign culture teachers, having the ability to teach learners to experience and analyze the home and target cultures through communicative language practices in the classroom, rather than in informative terms.

Another important finding in the data was that only five out of 51 participants thought culture would help them to become more qualified English teachers in the future:

Because it is important knowing other cultures for our self-development like teachers. (p5, q, u3)

Because first, I'm going to be a teacher, I'm going to teach this. (p6, q, u1)

As a teacher we have to know different cultures to teach the other, to teach to the kids. (p3, i, u2)

We might observe, then, that teacher educators need to instruct pre-service teachers to consider cautiously to what extent the aspect of culture is a crucial element to qualify their teaching career, since they have not thought about this point yet.

Pre-Service Teachers' Preferences About Cultures to Be Studied

When students were asked if they were more inclined to learn about a specific English culture over another, most of them said they were. Twenty-four participants tend to study one Anglophone culture over the other:

Yes, I studied the cultures and the food. The United States and British. (p7, i, u2)

I would like to know more about British culture than American culture. (p12, q, u3)

Inglaterra ya que es un idioma, más limpio que el norteamericano [I prefer British English because it is a cleaner language than the American one]. (p2, q, u3)

Opinions show that EFL pre-service teachers are sometimes biased about cultural groups as they did not explain why they preferred one culture over another. Learners' predisposed and simplified views seem to be the result of their lack of solid ICC. In this sense, English teachers are called upon to help students to become more critical in regard to preconceptions of certain cultural groups. Pre-service teachers need more guidelines to understand that, for instance, there is not a "better" and "cleaner" English accent. On the contrary, all cultures and languages are different and unique, and English variations, from the perspective of *lingua franca*,[2] can never be categorized as "cleaner" or "better," because English is a universal language that not only functions as a means for individuals to communicate worldwide, but has different variations and accents. English is one of the most popular languages that has facilitated intercultural encounters regardless of notions of language purity and appropriate use. Over all, this finding from data suggests that pre-service teachers still need to create more positive attitudes to respect and value differences, rather than excluding them just because they have stereotypes and reductionist labels on them.
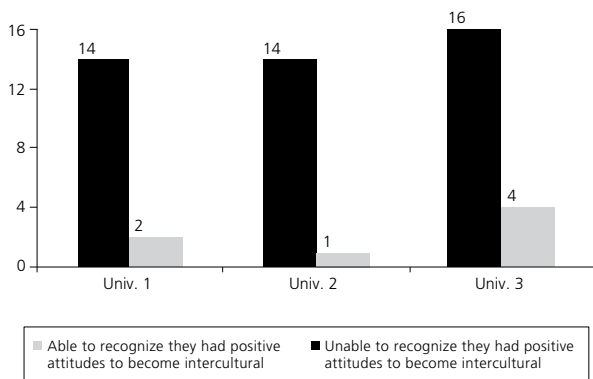
Another relevant finding from data is that pre-service teachers do not have clear opinions about the people and lifestyles of other cultures. Most of them only made generalizations and stated ambiguous opinions of foreign people. Views such as: "American people are more businessmen than Colombian people" (p4, q, u1) and "I know that they have a lot of different aspects of us but I do not know any specific point" (p7, i, u2) demonstrate that their opinions are hedged on general stereotypes or that they simply do not know about deep attitudes, particular characteristics, or cultural behavior of the foreign culture. This information is significant in

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2   A language used to make communication possible among speakers who do not share a mother tongue, in particular when it is a foreign language, distinct from speakers' mother tongues.

this study because it shows again that students have mostly focused on the study of language forms and on the surface level of cultural aspects and have not completely envisioned, with their teachers' help, deep aspects in regard to complex social relationships. Stereotypes and unawareness of the people of the target culture lead us to conclude that EFL pre-service teachers still require developing more conscientious ICC. They must become critical thinkers who are able to interpret, compare, and discover—skills proposed by Byram (1997)—intricate meanings of the target and their own culture.

When pre-service teachers were asked which characteristics a person should have in order to become aware of cultural aspects, they recognized that an intercultural person requires having tolerance, openness, respect, patience, and curiosity. Nonetheless, 16 participants from the three universities did not answer this question. Similarly, when being asked if they thought they had the characteristics they had mentioned in the previous question, 44 students were unable to answer this question (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Recognition of Their Own Attitudes to Become Intercultural

Able to recognize they had positive attitudes to become intercultural

Unable to recognize they had positive attitudes to become intercultural

Data showed that although participants listed positive attitudes, they found it difficult to recognize they held them. It seems to be that pre-service teachers need to build those positive attitudes, as suggested by Byram (1997), in order to develop ICC and to be more convinced that they can be capable of adopting them

as part of their qualification to become EFL teachers. In fact, Byram has stated that any person can become intercultural, but it requires effort, preparation, and awareness.

Methodologies and Resources Used to Teach and Learn Culture

The most common methodology used at both U1 and U3 when discussing culture is students' presentations, while at U2 teachers' presentations are a salient method. This might indicate that U2 follows a more teacher-centered approach than U1 and U3, where teachers' presentations are less frequent. In this direction, U1 implements teachers' presentations in a lesser degree, while U3 students reported that teachers' presentations are sporadic, since pre-service teacher education students have to do research on cultural issues and give their own presentations as part of their preparation to become English teachers.

In regard to home videos, U3 participants acknowledged that they often used this kind of methodology. U1 students sometimes use home videos, while U2 students rarely use them to learn culture. Role-plays are more used at U2 than in the other two universities, but the students at the three universities said that they have sometimes role-played situations related to cultural content. In conclusion, the most common instructional activity to study culture is through students' oral presentations.

Students at the three universities (33 participants out of 51) reported that videos and movies are the most used resources to study culture in class. However, they did not give concrete examples of those visual materials. Listening activities rank the second place. Contrary to what many might think, the Internet was not recognized as a significant resource in the language classroom. Only seven EFL education students, out of the 51 mentioned, said they used the Internet as an effective way to learn culture. Nonetheless, they did not say if they often used the Internet as an extra class resource to research content for their presentations. It

seems to be that they use the Internet to prepare their presentations outside the classroom, but it is not often used as a class activity to learn cultural content.

A third resource that participants valued is reading materials, including books, articles, and magazines. Data showed that U2 students have more access to reading material than U1 and U3 students. This information may be consistent with the methodologies used at U1 and U3 where teaching culture is mainly based on students' presentations. Results indicate that U1 and U3 teachers still need to encourage learners to read books, documents, and stories as ideal resources to acquire cultural content in order to complement the oral presentations they already have as a methodology.

Moreover, EFL students of pre-service education were very critical about how culture should be taught in the English class. Essentially, they would like to have more involvement and more experiential learning. Their answers mostly depended on the methodology used at each university. U2 students would like to have more presentations and discussions through which they can compare and contrast cultural groups. Since U2 students reported that teachers mostly give presentations, they would like to participate more in class discussions. U1 students asserted that they would like to have a "more reflective," "deeper," and "critical" analysis of cultural content. They would also like to do research and read books, and if possible, to talk to and meet native speakers. Some U3 students recognized that the current ways through which they learn culture are good. However, they would like to have options different from oral presentations. They suggested the use of real life situations, reading short stories, and chatting with native people online.

In brief, participants' answers from the three universities still demand more significant methodologies which could involve them in a more critical and experiential way focused on more meaningful student-centered approaches. Interestingly enough,

students also mentioned that classes should reduce the great emphasis on grammar and include more cultural content.

Students' opinions seem to relate to what we observed in the study plans from the three universities. At U1, the study plan includes six semesters of English courses in which the cultural component is not evident. It is the teacher's decision whether he/she includes any cultural issues to be discussed. However, there are three courses that address "society" of the foreign language. Similarly, at U2, all the English courses from first to ninth semesters focus on the development of language proficiency, but there are four courses that include cultural components: Language and Communication (fourth sem.); Language, Society, and Culture (sixth sem.); and Literature in English 1 and 2 (eighth and ninth sem.). By contrast, U3 devotes six courses named "Anglophone Languages and Cultures." However, the courses focus on elements of the surface culture, and this superficiality supports the fact that the teaching of culture in the EFL context, as claimed by Byram (1997) and Hinkel (1999), lacks a deeper perspective. In addition, there are two courses oriented towards one aspect of culture: English literature in seventh and eighth semesters in which the study of literary works and authors is addressed. There are four more courses called Emphasis and Competences Development which in some cases may be oriented towards the study of culture, but it also depends on the teacher's decision when he/she is assigned the course. The description of the study plans may indicate, when relating them to students' answers, that teacher and students are making a great effort to include culture, but, in general, it is mainly oriented to language study because the study plans neither describe nor contain cultural aspects to be studied. They only stress the importance of developing communicative competence through language forms and communicative functions.

The findings summarized in this section invite us to reflect upon the importance of including this core

component in the teaching of English. In order to reach this aim, there is a need to re-shape the fundamentals of the EFL context: the institution's study plans, the teacher's conceptions of culture and ICC, the syllabus, the methodologies, the resources and activities. For instance, institutions can make the ICC component more visible in their study plans and programs so that its inclusion does not depend on a teacher's decision. Similarly, teachers can replicate effective ICC experiences from their colleagues such as the one presented by Agudelo (2007) where he encouraged his students to explore and analyze the relationship between language and culture and its role in the field of language teaching through the use of critical pedagogy, and by addressing issues of cultural and linguistic diversity and intercultural communication.

In addition, teachers can implement strategies as the ones mentioned by Fleet (2006) in order to teach culture: Saying in our own words what we have read or heard, doing research on cultural issues, sharing different culture views, personalizing cultural contents, discussing cultural misunderstandings, and giving presentations on lifestyles and different ideologies, among others. We can use authentic materials as the ones described by Peterson and Bronwyn (2003): films, news broadcasts, and television shows; websites; photographs, magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, travel brochures, and other printed materials. An example of deep cultural contexts is proposed by Álvarez and Bonilla (2009), who engaged students in ethnographic work about subcultures (vegetarians, body builders, and gays) in order to examine and understand diverse groups that deviate from traditional representations of homogeneous culture.

We personally suggest discussing literary works, studying history critically rather than informatively, and addressing conflicting and debatable topics about discrimination, xenophobia, homophobia, race, gender roles, hatred, human rights, relations of power, politeness, social differences, consumer societies, the

working class conditions, the world economy, and the growth of globalization, among others. These topics are not only realistic, but provide learners with the capacity to become reflective and critical about how people from other cultures as well as their own see these topics, and how those issues might favor or affect the relationships among the diverse cultural groups around the world and within learners' own cultural backgrounds.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the three research questions, findings lead us to address the following conclusions:

1. The development of this study helped us envision mainly two assets of English-language programs so far: (a) Raising students' awareness on the importance of cultural topics and their relationship to language. (b) Helping students become autonomous and interested in learning about cultural topics.

2. Although cultural content has become part of the language classroom, there must be a significant change by including both elements of surface and deep culture, since the latter is poorly studied in the classroom. For the particular professional necessities of students involved in pre-service teacher education, they need more instruction on how to teach elements of surface and deep culture in the EFL context.

3. Pre-service teachers need further preparation to compare and interpret cultural content. Rather than just being understanding, they should become more critical about issues of otherness, power relationships, ideologies, and identity. Since this kind of learners already possesses an appropriate language level, critical and interpretative processes might possibly be achieved if teachers incorporate aspects of deep culture. This change will allow pre-service teachers to become more critical intercultural learners.

4. Students involved in teacher education are still influenced by stereotypes and misconceptions of other cultural groups. This might be caused because the teaching practices are primarily oriented to the study of superficial culture. Teachers are called upon to find alternatives so that they help prospective EFL teachers to reduce false misrepresentations of other people through more pertinent materials in which cultural conflicts, behaviors, and ideologies can be discussed.

5. Although prospective teachers of English in Colombia seem to have a positive attitude towards culture, there is a great necessity to help them to create stronger personal attitudes to become intercultural as regards tolerance, curiosity, read-iness, and openness, since they are not totally convinced of having those attitudes and, in most cases, do not recognize they have them.

6. It is the responsibility of teacher education programs at the three universities where the study was conducted to get prospective English teachers aware that studying culture implies more than just gaining information in a received way or from a tourist's perspective. As future educators, they must see culture as part of their teaching career so that they are able to instruct their students on ICC and, if possible, contribute to the process of helping others to face the current process of globalization. Therefore, in regard to the first research question, pre-service teachers' perceptions of and attitude toward cultural content need to be strengthened along their teaching training so that they might become more prepared EFL teachers.

7. With respect to the second research question, University teachers should start to train pre-service teachers in Colombia to become more aware of ICC theories. ICC can be fostered among pre-service teachers not only through the study of contents and the development of class activities about culture, but with theories of what ICC is as they are involved in epistemological discussions about English teaching methods and theories in order to become better qualified teachers in the Colombian context and competent intercultural beings in this globalized world.

It is important to say that the teaching of culture is best approached by creating an open and tolerant atmosphere within the school and classroom community itself (Fleet, 2006), where members surely come from diverse backgrounds of their own country. Pre-service teachers in particular must value and appreciate their own national differences to later appreciate foreign groups. Not only celebrating cultures of all types, but establishing critical views can empower pre-service teachers to develop critical ICC so that they will be able to accept all students in the EFL classroom regardless of race, color, social class, age, sexual orientation, educational level, and ideology. Language should be a means to learn about all the cultures and subcultures of the world. As found in this research, pre-service teachers and learners belonging to Language Programs at several universities in the EFL context still need more preparation, methodologies, themes, and positive attitudes to become better intercultural interpreters of diversity and stronger advocators for inclusion and difference.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Answer the following questions about the incorporation of cultural content in the English classroom. Feel free to answer in English or Spanish. Be honest with your answers. They will only be used for academic or research purposes. Your identity will be confidential.

Section I

1. Do you consider that the cultural component has been incorporated to the syllabus of your English class?
   Yes: _____   No: _____

2. Give a short definition of the following terms:
   Culture: _____
   Intercultural communicative competence:_____

3. If your answer to Question 1 is Yes, tick the cultures that have been discussed in your English class.
   a. your own culture   ☐
   b. Anglophone cultures   ☐
   c. other cultures   ☐

4. If your answer to Question 1 is Yes, which cultural aspects have been discussed in your English class? (e.g., historical aspects, social aspects, tourism, etc.).
   _____
   _____

5. Have you done research about cultural aspects of other countries by your own initiative?
   Yes: _____   No: _____
   Why _____
   Why not? _____

6. Which aspects have you taken into account?
   _____
   _____

7. What kind of cultural knowledge would you like to study in your English class?
   _____
   _____

Section II

1. Do you think it is important to incorporate the cultural component in your English class? Why? Why not? _____

2. Do you feel more inclined to learn about a specific English-speaking culture over another?
   Why? _____
   Why not? _____
   Which ones? _____

3. What ideas/opinions do you have about the people and lifestyles of other cultures?

   _____
   _____

4. Do you think you have changed your opinion/ attitude about the cultures based on something you learned in your English class?

   _____
   _____

5. What qualities should a person have in order to become aware of cultural aspects? Do you have any of them?

   _____
   _____

Section III

1. Which methodology has been implemented in order to get to know the English-speaking/ Anglophone cultures? Tick the one(s) that apply.
   a. Presentations given by students ☐
   b. Presentations given by the teacher ☐
   c. Home-videos made by students ☐
   d. Role-plays ☐
   e. Simulated TV/radio programs/interviews ☐
      Other _____.   Please, specify:_____

2. What kind of resources/materials has been used in your English class to study cultural content?

   _____
   _____

3. How do you think the cultural component should be approached in your English classes?

   _____
   _____

Appendix B: Sample of Displayed Data from Questionnaires

Students' Answers from University 2
Section 1: Question 2

	Students' Views of ICC
P1:	Is the ability to communicate with people that haven't the same culture that I have.
P2:	No answer given.
P3:	Learning of foreign communication.
P4:	It's the ability to get a good relationship with people from other countries.
P5:	No answer given.
P6:	It's a way to demonstrate what you know about another culture, you can speak and have to own new point about it.
P7:	To learn more about other cultures.
P8:	Ser capaz de comprender, analizar y construir un juicio crítico sobre cómo puede y ha podido ser entendido el mundo [Being able to understand, analyze, and construct a critical judgment about how the world can be possibly understood].
P9:	Learn about different cultures and practicing them.
P10:	For development mores speaking and learn with our partners.
P11:	Relations between people of different countries.
P12:	No answer given.
P13:	The class there is communication between the teachers and the students.