

DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

DESARROLLO DE LAS COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA, INTERCULTURAL Y
DE CIUDADANÍA GLOBAL A TRAVÉS DE UNA EXPERIENCIA DE
TELECOLABORACIÓN BILINGÜE

DÉVELOPPER LES COMPÉTENCES COMMUNICATIVES, INTERCULTURELLES
ET DE CITOYENNETÉ MONDIALE DES ÉTUDIANTS UNIVERSITAIRES PAR LE
BIAIS DE LA TÉLÉCOLLABORATION BILINGUE

Pilar Mur-Dueñas, Elena Sheldon

Universidad de Zaragoza, University of Technology Sydney

Abstract

This paper examines a bilingual telecollaboration project between undergraduate students at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Australia, and the Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain. The study adds to the growing body of research on virtual linguistic and cultural exchanges by describing and evaluating this bilingual Spanish-English initiative through the analysis of the students' perceptions especially as regards their development of communication skills, Intercultural Communicative Competences (ICC) and global citizenship skills. It further aims to enhance our understanding of intercultural learning through telecollaborations that provide a scalable model for expanding students' linguistic and intercultural exposure through technology (Byram, 1997; Ryshina-Pankova, 2018). The primary objectives of the telecollaboration initiative were to support students' development of (i) ICC by preparing them in their second language (L2)—English for the Spanish students and Spanish for the Australian students—through engagement with cultural differences between Spain and Australia, and (ii) oral skills in their L2, particularly in their use of interactional strategies. Findings from the completion of the exchanges and the students' answers to the questionnaire administered indicate that both English-speaking Australian and Spanish-speaking students engaged in meaningful intercultural communication, demonstrating negotiation and reflection skills despite limited L2 proficiency. The bilingual telecollaborative experience seems to effectively enhance students' oral skills and intercultural awareness, fostering their capacity to participate actively and critically in global communities.

Key words: communicative competence, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), global skills, interactional strategies, virtual interaction, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL).

Resumen

Este artículo examina un proyecto de telecolaboración bilingüe entre alumnado de grado de la University of Technology Sydney (UTS), en Australia, y la Universidad de Zaragoza, en España. El artículo contribuye al creciente número de investigaciones sobre intercambios lingüísticos y culturales virtuales al describir y evaluar esta iniciativa bilingüe español-inglés mediante el análisis de las percepciones del alumnado, especialmente en lo que respecta al desarrollo de sus destrezas comunicativas, su Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural (CCI) y sus habilidades de ciudadanía global. Además, pretende mejorar nuestra comprensión del aprendizaje intercultural a través de telecolaboraciones que proporcionan un modelo escalable para ampliar la exposición lingüística e intercultural de los estudiantes a través de la tecnología (Byram, 1997; Ryshina-Pankova, 2018). Los principales objetivos de la iniciativa de telecolaboración fueron fomentar el desarrollo de (i) la CCI mediante la preparación del estudiantado en su segunda lengua (L2)–inglés para el estudiantado español y español para el estudiantado australiano—a través de la reflexión sobre las diferencias culturales entre España y Australia, y (ii) las destrezas orales en la L2, especialmente en el uso de estrategias interaccionales. Los resultados obtenidos a través de la compleción de los intercambios y de las respuestas de los participantes al cuestionario administrado indican que tanto el alumnado australiano de habla inglesa como el alumnado español de habla hispana participaron en interacciones interculturales significativas, demostrando habilidades de negociación y reflexión a pesar de su limitado dominio de la L2. La experiencia de telecolaboración bilingüe parece mejorar el desarrollo de las destrezas orales y la conciencia intercultural del alumnado, fomentando su capacidad para participar de forma activa y crítica en comunidades globales.

Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa, competencia comunicativa intercultural (CCI), competencias globales, estrategias interaccionales, interacción virtual, Aprendizaje Internacional en Línea en Colaboración.

Résumé

Cet article examine un projet de télé-collaboration bilingue entre des étudiants de premier cycle de l'Université de technologie de Sydney (UTS), en Australie, et de l'Université de Saragosse, en Espagne. Cet article contribue au nombre croissant de recherches sur les échanges linguistiques et culturels virtuels en décrivant et en évaluant cette initiative bilingue espagnol-anglais à travers l'analyse des perceptions des étudiants, notamment en ce qui concerne le développement de leurs compétences communicatives, leur compétence communicative interculturelle (CCI) et leurs compétences en matière de citoyenneté mondiale. En outre, il vise à améliorer notre compréhension de l'apprentissage interculturel grâce à des télé-collaborations qui fournissent un modèle évolutif pour élargir l'exposition linguistique et interculturelle des étudiants grâce à la technologie (Byram, 1997 ; Ryshina-Pankova, 2018). Les principaux objectifs de l'initiative de télé-collaboration étaient de favoriser le développement (i) de la CCI en préparant les étudiants dans leur deuxième langue (L2) – l'anglais pour les étudiants espagnols et l'espagnol pour les étudiants australiens – à travers une réflexion sur les différences culturelles entre l'Espagne et l'Australie, et (ii) des compétences orales en L2, en particulier dans l'utilisation de stratégies interactionnelles. Les résultats obtenus à l'issue des échanges et des réponses des participants au questionnaire administré indiquent que tant les élèves australiens anglophones que les élèves espagnols hispanophones ont participé à des interactions interculturelles significatives, faisant preuve de capacités de négociation et de réflexion malgré leur maîtrise limitée de la L2. L'expérience de la télé-collaboration bilingue semble améliorer le développement des compétences orales et la conscience interculturelle des élèves, en encourageant leur capacité à participer de manière active et critique à des communautés mondiales.

Mots-clés: compétence communicative, compétence communicative interculturelle (CCI), compétences globales, stratégies interactionnelles, interaction virtuelle, apprentissage collaboratif international en ligne.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, language learners need opportunities to communicate and develop their skills beyond the confines of the classroom. Globalization has become an undeniable reality, and foreign language teaching and learning must reflect this transformation. Virtual exchanges offer an effective means to connect language learners across the globe, allowing them to exchange ideas, enhance communicative competence, and foster both intercultural and global citizenship skills (Mercer et al., 2020).

However, research shows that study abroad programs alone are insufficient for cultivating global citizenship. Without the integration of relevant academic content, intercultural language competence, and a pedagogy tailored to international learning, their impact remains limited (Bennett, Volet & Fozdar, 2013). To effectively prepare university students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, educators must, therefore, go beyond delivering subject-specific knowledge. They are now expected to nurture the values, attitudes, skills, and understandings necessary for students to engage ethically and effectively with the wider world (Mairi et al., 2023). In this way, students develop not only language proficiency but also intercultural awareness, negotiation skills, and the mindset required to become global citizens (Byram, 2008; O'Dowd, 2016, 2018; Çiftçi & Savaş, 2018; Marull & Kumar, 2020).

Virtual exchanges can simulate and sustain study abroad experiences, offering a viable solution to expand students' learning opportunities within teacher education programs (O'Dowd, 2018). Not only experiences of virtual study and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) but also one-off telecollaboration experiences have been acknowledged to contribute to enhancing students' development of language and intercultural learning. Against this backdrop, this paper presents the design, implementation and evaluation of a bilingual (Spanish-English) telecollaborative experience between undergraduate students at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) in Australia and the Universidad de Zaragoza in Spain. This paper outlines the project and presents findings from a questionnaire that explored students' views on this transnational virtual interaction.

In setting up this initiative our pedagogical objectives were twofold: (i) to enhance students' development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) by providing knowledge of cultural differences between Spain and Australia in their second language (L2)–English for Spanish students and Spanish for Australian students; and (ii) to improve their communicative skills in the students' L2 (English or

Spanish), especially their oral interaction skills through the deployment of interactional strategies. These interactional strategies include: (1) Taking the floor – turn-taking, initiating, maintaining, and closing conversations, and intervening in discussions; (2) Cooperating – confirming comprehension, giving feedback, relating one's contributions to those of others, summarizing discussions, and inviting participation; (3) Asking for clarification – indicating comprehension or comprehension problems, requesting repetition, and asking follow-up questions for more details (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR, 2020).

Our study draws on Byram's (1997) model of ICC, which identifies the key attitudes and skills expected of an intercultural speaker. Telecollaborations such as the one presented in this paper can help students develop an understanding of others' perspectives with openness, respect, and empathy toward the new culture (Byram, 1997, 2008, 2014; Bennett, Volet & Fozdar, 2013; Sheldon, 2025).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews key theoretical foundations underpinning the Spanish/English online video collaboration, focusing on the potential of telecollaboration to foster foreign language learning, ICC, and global citizenship. Section 3 presents the study's conception and implementation, the research design, the participants, and data collection procedure to explore the students' perceptions of the learning experience. Section 4 evaluates the collaboration from the perspective of the students and presents the main findings from their answers to the questionnaire administered. Section 5 offers some conclusions, discusses limitations, and suggests directions for future iterations of this innovative learning experience.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Telecollaboration, intercultural communication and foreign language learning

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is grounded in the understanding of culture as a dynamic process shaped through dialogic interactions between interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. ICC has been defined as "the ability to experience otherness and cultural diversity, to analyze that experience and to derive benefit from it" (Beacco et al. 2016, p. 10). Interactions such as the ones occurring in telecollaborative exchanges have become a key focus of intercultural communication research (Byram, 1997, 2008, 2020; Ware, 2013; Porto, 2014; Ryshina-Pankova, 2018). By engaging in structured intercultural interactions through

telecollaboration, students can also develop knowledge and skills that can be transferred from one language to another and forge links between their L1s and their L2s (Beacco et al. 2016).

Byram's (1997) theoretical model of ICC, particularly his concept of the communicative goals of intercultural exchanges, frames intercultural competence as a dynamic behavioral process rather than a static body of knowledge. This approach emphasizes the importance of openness and curiosity toward both one's own and others' cultures, while simultaneously fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of (multi)cultural identities (Beacco et al., 2016). According to Byram (1997, 2020), the development of ICC is structured around three key communicative goals: i) the skill of discovery and interaction, ii) the attitude of openness and curiosity, and iii) the ability to decenter and adopt alternative perspectives.

Virtual linguistic and cultural connections such as telecollaboration provide meaningful opportunities to expand students' intercultural experiences beyond traditional classroom settings. Previous studies on telecollaboration have underlined benefits in students' development of not only language skills but also of their ICC (e.g. Eren, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024; Fortanet-Gómez & Drobotun, 2025). In a study conducted by Eren (2023), an eight-week telecollaboration project with 50 pre-service English teachers at a Turkish university was found to enhance the participants' critical cultural awareness. The study by Nguyen et al. (2024) confirmed that the 8-week Virtual Culture Trip program, which utilized English as a Lingua Franca for online intercultural interaction among students from seven countries, resulted in participants' self-perceived significant improvement across their language skills and intercultural competence. Similarly, Fortanet-Gómez & Drobotun (2025) report positive perceptions of Spanish and Ukrainian students regarding a COIL project, confirming that it successfully helped participants improve their English language skills, intercultural competence, motivation, and essential soft skills such as collaboration and problem-solving.

It is the aim of this paper to contribute to this growing body of research looking into a bilingual Spanish-English bilingual initiative with higher education students from two distant cultural settings (Spain and Australia) and analyzing their perceptions especially as regards their development of communication skills, ICC and global citizenship skills. Online video interactions can enhance students' oral skills, and especially interactional skills and strategies in as much as they are required to discuss specific topics in the foreign languages. In doing so, they need to exchange ideas, to take turns to hold and maintain the floor and yield it to their partner, to negotiate meaning by seeking clarification or repetition, checking for

comprehension, and to be cooperative ensuring communication flows. Students' need to resort to these discursive and pragmatic strategies and their reflection on their use can foster their communicative competence (Brown, 2006; Richards, 2014). In relation to ICC, the present study focuses on Byram's first two communicative goals, examining Spanish and Australian students' perceptions on the extent to which they believe to have developed their ICC showing their skills of discovery and interaction and their open and curious attitude. Through this lens, the study contributes to understanding how higher education students construct and negotiate intercultural meaning in bilingual online exchanges.

The motivation to undertake this telecollaboration exchange came from the two teachers. We believe that, as foreign language educators, we need to highlight intercultural communication in our teaching, as doing so will make apparent the dynamic nature of languages and cultures that enact communication and interaction (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Through the implementation of this online video interaction initiative in higher education, we aimed to contribute to offer our students opportunities to develop their communicative skills in the L2 while also making them more interculturally competent, addressing a significant challenge faced by English as a Foreign Language teachers (Barletta Manjarrés, 2009) and teachers of other foreign languages.

2.2. Tellecollaboration and global citizenship

Higher education institutions are pressured "to develop international curriculums that foster a student citizenship with stronger global awareness, as a consequence of their education mission" (Tarrant, Rubin & Stoner 2014: 142). This emphasis on global engagement is often considered a key indicator of an institution's success in achieving globalization and, consequently, in promoting global citizenship (Aktas, Pitts, Richards, & Silova 2017). A sense of duty to those who are viewed as distinct from oneself is evoked by global citizenship (Pais & Costa, 2020). However, research has shown that study abroad programs in themselves will not foster global citizenship unless they are complemented by appropriate academic content, intermediate foreign language skills, and pedagogical strategies to get students ready for their international engagement (Bennett, Volet & Fozdar, 2013).

To equip university students from varied backgrounds and fields, educators are increasingly required to impart more than just subject knowledge. They are increasingly expected to cultivate the values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for students to engage responsibly and effectively with their surroundings (Mairi et al., 2023). In addition to language acquisition, students should develop

intercultural negotiation abilities and attitudes that contribute to their development as 'global citizens' (Byram, 2008). The bilingual virtual interaction described and evaluated in this paper was designed by foreign language educators to partially address the challenge of providing sustainable, authentic, and collaborative transnational intercultural experiences for higher education students to develop their capacity for global citizenship.

3. THE STUDY

For the past 6 years the collaborative initiative has been implemented by joint efforts from a teacher in the Department of Spanish at University of Technology of Sydney (Australia) and a teacher in the Department of English Studies at Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain). To study abroad at partner universities in Spain and other Hispanic nations, Australian students must finish the four semesters of Spanish language instruction required for the Bachelor of International Studies (BIS). These students must demonstrate their linguistic and intercultural communication engagement with a native Spanish speaker. Hence, the interest in setting up this initiative between both institutions. Spanish students in the final years of their Degree in Primary and Infant Education, specializing to become teachers of or in English respectively are offered the opportunity to have an online video interaction with Australian students to develop their communicative, intercultural, and global citizenship skills. It is a voluntary activity for Spanish students, as it is not reflected in their assessment. The teachers' organizational, pedagogical and digital competences, supported by our attitude and beliefs of openness, reflection, and collaboration – following O'Dowd's (2013) *Model of the Telecollaborative Teacher* – enabled us to design and facilitate an online interlinguistic and intercultural exchange which could be effective in our educational higher education contexts.

Each tandem is required to engage in a video interaction lasting between 40 and 60 minutes on a set date and time that they arrange. The first 20-30 minutes of the conversation should be conducted in Spanish, followed by 20-30 minutes in English. Apart from personal details about themselves, especially regarding their university studies and life, students are encouraged to discuss aspects of their culture, customs, regular daily routines, festivities, etc. The idea is to offer students the possibility to interact in a meaningful and relevant way. The specific pedagogical aims that instructors have in offering this opportunity to interact online is the following:

- To develop their oral and productive communicative competence, their interactional skills and their abilities to mediate in communicative encounters.

DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

- To foster their intercultural competence by offering them the opportunity to establish connections and draw comparisons between cultural aspects within their own context and those of their partners in a different cultural setting.
- Especially in the case of Spanish learners, to reflect on the importance of these training actions in their future teaching practice to promote the view of English as a vehicle for international and intercultural communication.
- To encourage self-evaluation in the foreign language learning process, reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses when interacting with native speaking peers.
- To reflect on aspects that are common to foreign language learning, particularly the deployment of communicative strategies such as compensating, monitoring and self-correcting when orally producing their talk in the foreign language, turn-taking, cooperating and asking for clarification when interacting, and inferring and monitoring when receiving the message (CEFR 2020).

After some years running this bilingual telecollaboration exchange, in 2024 we sought to evaluate students' perceptions on their actual interactions and the extent to which they thought they contributed to their development of communication abilities, ICC and global skills. In the following sections, the design of this evaluation based on students' responses to a questionnaire is presented (3.1), followed by information on the students participating in this initiative and respondents to this questionnaire (3.2), and on how data was collected and analyzed through said questionnaire (3.3).

3.1. Research Design

An online questionnaire was administered to the Spanish and Australian students participating in the bilingual telecollaborative initiative in the years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. Such questionnaire was designed by the foreign language instructors to gather feedback on the students' perceptions regarding the intercultural experience, linguistic understanding, and satisfaction with the exchange of opinions. The full questionnaire is presented in the Appendix. The ultimate aim of this questionnaire was to assist the teachers in improving future iterations of the project by incorporating student perspectives. Question 1 asked for institution details, and Question 2 about the common language used in the conversation. Questions 3 to 10 focused on students' preparation before their conversation with a partner student. Questions 7 to 10 explored issues related to comprehension, intelligibility, and misunderstanding during the exchange. Questions 11 and 12 asked

students to describe the nature of their conversation, specifically making them reflect on the use of interactional strategies.

Questions 14 and 15 focused on students' views regarding whether the intercultural conversation helped them to better understand their own culture and traditions and those of the other context, encouraged comparison with Spanish or Australian culture, and prompted them to provide specific examples. Question 13 asked students to justify their response regarding whether the conversation helped them better understand their partner's culture and traditions. Question 16 required students to justify whether the conversation affirmed their knowledge of Spanish or Australian cultural practices or traditions when conversing with their partner.

Question 18 examined students' understanding of cultural differences as a prerequisite for developing genuine global competence, while Question 19 focused on language and cultural competency before the exchange. Students were instructed to tick the statements they considered essential, except for Questions 13 and 17, which were open-ended. For open-ended Questions 13 and 17, Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework was used as a reference, focusing on two key dimensions, as highlighted in section 2.1: (i) skills of discovery and interaction and (ii) attitudes of openness and curiosity. This framework guided the analysis of the students' answers and coding process, providing clear criteria (Mairi et al., 2023).

3.2. Participants

Over the past two years, 35 Spanish-speaking students from the Universidad de Zaragoza have voluntarily taken part in this training experience (Table 1). This represents approximately 30% of the students who were offered the opportunity within the Spanish university context. A larger number of Australian students participated during the same period, with a total of 47 in the last two years. Consequently, on some occasions, one Spanish-speaking student was paired with two Australian students, forming different tandems and completing two separate video interactions.

| | English-speaking (learning Spanish as a FL) | Spanish-speaking (learning English as a FL) |
|--------------|--|--|
| 2023-2024 | 27 | 21 |
| 2024-2025 | 20 | 14 |
| TOTAL | 47 | 35 |

Table 1. *Number of participants taking part in the initiative.*

DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

The questionnaire was administered to all 82 students, but only 44% of them answered it (Table 2). The number of answers was quite low the first year we administered it (2023-2024). However, the number of responses increased the second year (2024-2025), especially on the part of the Spanish students, as all of them taking part in the initiative completed it. Participants in both groups were aged between 19 and 21, with approximately 75% female and 25% male students.

| | N° of Australian students | N° of Spanish students |
|--------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 2023-2024 | 1 | 13 |
| 2024-2025 | 8 | 14 |
| TOTAL | 9 | 27 |

Table 2. *The number of students taking part in the initiative responding the questionnaire.*

Most Australian students from UTS who participated in this intercultural engagement were enrolled in combined degrees such as a Bachelor of Arts in Law, Communication, Business, or Education, all paired with a Bachelor of International Studies (BIS). This five-year program introduces the BIS component in the second year, during which four language subjects are mandatory. After completing three years at UTS, students spend twelve months studying at a Spanish-speaking university abroad and finalize their BIS in their fourth year.

In Spain, all participating students were completing a Bachelor of Education, either in Primary or Infant Education. In the final year, they may specialize in areas such as Musical Education, Physical Education, French Language, Therapeutic Pedagogy, Audition and Language, or English Language (for Primary Education), and Attention to Diversity or Bilingual Education (for Infant Education). Students specializing in English or Bilingual Education are expected to have a B2 or higher level in English proficiency. The initiative was integrated into two optional English-language oral communication courses: Oral Communication (Primary Education) and Language and Communication in the Bilingual Classroom (Infant Education). Participation in the initiative was not part of the course assessment, but was encouraged in order to enhance their communicative competences and achieve the learning outcomes outlined in their degree programs.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Each Australian student was paired with a Spanish student, and the Australian participants were provided with their partner's email address to initiate contact. They introduced themselves via email and arranged a convenient day and time for their conversation. The exchanges focused on topics such as university life, extracurricular

activities, and local customs. Australian students received specific conversation guidelines emphasizing respectful dialogue, particularly when expressing differing views on cultural topics such as festivities, customs, or education. The main objective was to foster critical thinking, empathy, and problem-solving skills through collaborative reflection on social and cultural issues. As highlighted above, each session lasted approximately 40–60 minutes and was conducted online, with students interacting first in Spanish and then in English. Many continued to communicate afterward, strengthening their relationships and enhancing their communicative competence, plurilingualism, and intercultural awareness. Students provided informed consent to participate in the initiative and to use their interactions and answers to the questionnaire anonymously for research and evaluation purposes.

After the bilingual conversation took place, students were asked to complete the questionnaire. As can be seen in section 3.1 and in the Appendix, this questionnaire contains both closed and open-ended questions, which prompted students to justify their responses and provide examples. The questionnaire encouraged reflection on the students' language use, communication challenges, and strategies employed to ensure mutual understanding. This reflective process aimed to raise students' awareness of their communicative skills, ICC and global skills development, helping them to identify their strengths and areas for improvement in oral and intercultural skills.

Once students answered the questionnaire, a spreadsheet was generated to visualise the results and to analyze them quantitatively and qualitatively. Answers were duly anonymized. The responses could be filtered to draw comparisons and establish connections between answers.

In the next section, the students' perceptions on the initiative is offered to try and partially evaluate the effectiveness of the proposal with the hope of inspiring other teachers to set up similar bilingual initiatives across higher education institutions in different countries of the world.

4. EVALUATING THE BILINGUAL VIDEO INTERACTION INITIATIVE: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Even if the initiative has been implemented for the past 6 years, its evaluation focuses only on the past two academic years (2023–2024, 2024–2025), as it was only then that we designed and administered a questionnaire to students. As indicated in Table 2, more Spanish than Australian students completed the questionnaires.

With just a few exceptions, students followed the guidelines and undertook half the conversation in Spanish and half the conversation in English. Also, they reported having understood their partners through bilingual conversation (in one or the other language) and having made themselves understood to a high degree. Only a small number of Spanish students indicated that they comprehended about half of what their Australian partners said in Spanish. Their answers regarding the number of misunderstandings are more varied, ranging from none (n=11) to some (n= 3), a few (n=21), and many (n=1). Most importantly, despite these occasional communication difficulties, most participants reported a high level of mutual understanding. This means that students managed potential challenges effectively by employing a range of interactional strategies, which not only facilitated comprehension but also contributed to the development of their mediation and interactional skills and strategies (CEFR, 2020). More broadly, students' use of these discursive and pragmatic strategies and their reflection on their actual employment can be thought to contribute to the development of their oral communicative competence (Brown, 2006; Richards, 2014). As detailed in Table 3, the most common strategies they report resorting to is rephrasing information, followed by translanguaging (using all their linguistic repertoires at hand), repeating information, and providing an example. Asking direct questions and giving explanations were reported to be the least commonly employed.

| Q10. When there were any misunderstandings or intelligibility problems, how did you solve them? (More than one option can be marked). | |
|--|----|
| Repeating information | 6 |
| Rephrasing information | 10 |
| Asking direct questions | 2 |
| Providing an example | 6 |
| Giving an explanation | 1 |
| Translanguaging - using both languages (English and Spanish) | 6 |
| Other options | 6 |

Table 3. *Students' reported use of interactional strategies to overcome misunderstandings or intelligibility problems.*

Figure 1 shows students' answers to the question on the extent to which virtual video conversation had helped them better understand culture and traditions. Figure 2 presents students' responses to the question regarding the extent to which the video conversation with their partner enabled them to reflect on the concept of their own culture by comparing Australian and Spanish cultural perspectives. In both groups, most Australian and Spanish students (over 60%) indicated that the global learning space had helped them very much to understand their partners' culture and to draw comparisons with their own. The remaining students (less than 40%)

DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

responded that it had helped them a little, and notably, no negative responses were recorded.

Figure 1. *Students' answers to the question "Do you think that the conversation helped you better understand their culture and traditions?"*

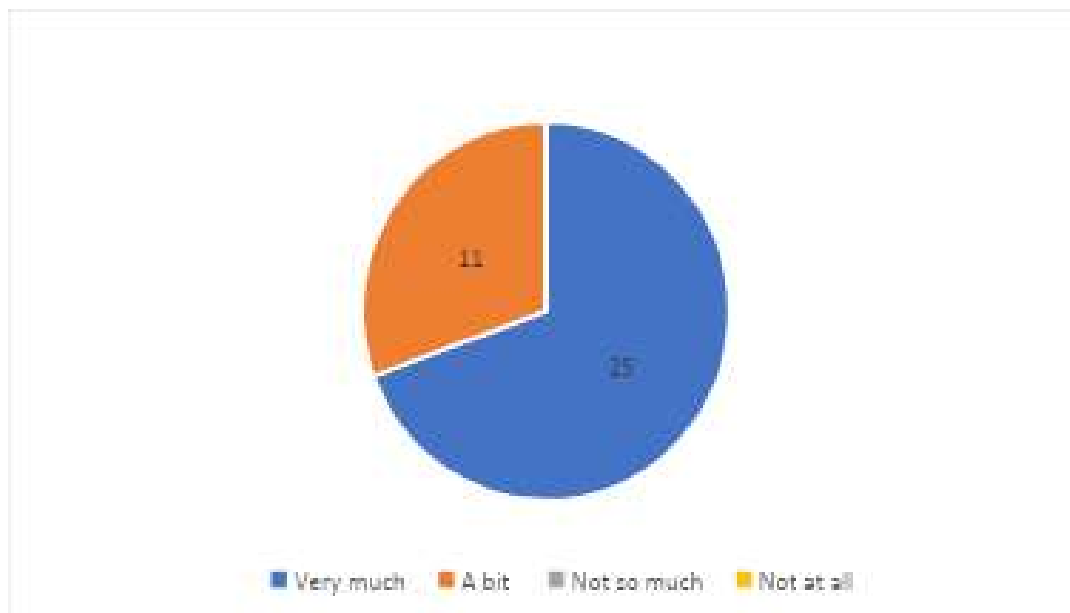
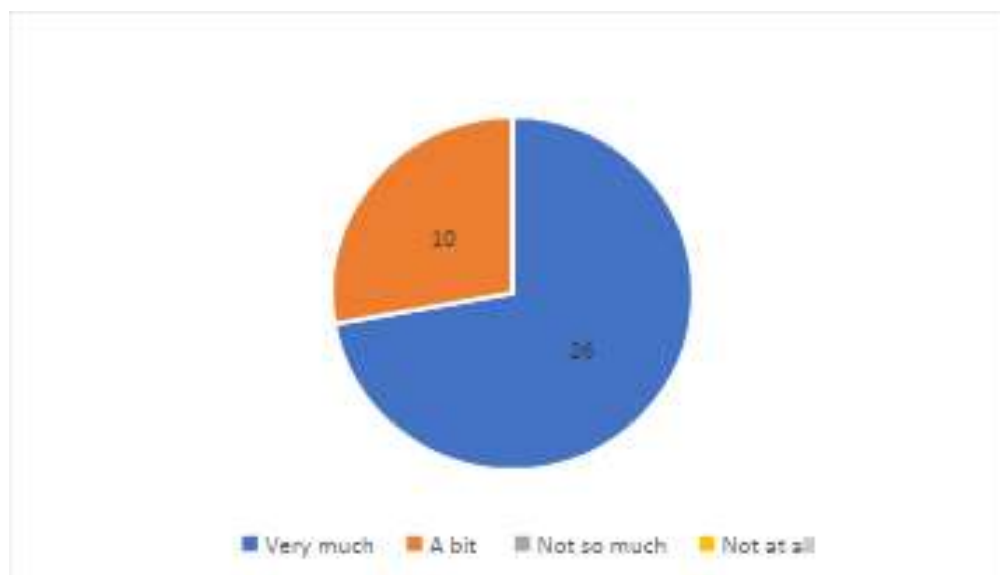


Figure 2. *Students' answers to the question "Did the conversation with the student allow you to reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the Australian and Spanish cultures?"*



DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

The two open-ended questions invited both groups of students to justify their responses, thereby providing qualitative evidence aligned with Byram's (1997) ICC framework: i) the skill of discovery and interaction, and ii) the attitude of openness and curiosity. Some of the examples provided by students illustrating the former are:

- (1) "Cultural differences between Spain and Australia." (Spanish student)
- (2) "The cultural differences and similarities in festivities." (Spanish student)
- (3) "In Australia, there are not as many cultural celebrations." (Spanish student)
- (4) "A clear example is our different schedules (lunch and dinner time)." (Spanish student)
- (5) "Different university life – most students go to university every day, which is very different from university life for students in Australia." (Australian student)
- (6) "Festive holidays and their perspective on personal identity." (Australian student)
- (7) "In Spain, festive holidays are celebrated more in a community setting, whereas in Australia, it is less so." (Australian student)

Their answers show how abstract elements of intercultural competence are made visible through the students' choice of topics and perspectives. Examining these responses reveals how learners built rapport across cultural boundaries and engaged in intercultural meaning-making, developing intercultural awareness and demonstrating' ability to construct and negotiate social relationships. These initial exchanges often functioned as catalysts for deeper interaction, prompting students to share further cultural insights to contextualize their viewpoints and, in turn, strengthen their sense of belonging to a global community and citizenship (Marull & Kumar, 2020; Lenkaitis & Loranc, 2021).

This process paved the way for the emergence of the students' attitude of openness and curiosity, illustrated by some of their answers:

- (8) "The question about bullfighting – curiosity, knowledge, and disbelief." (Spanish student)
- (9) "Multiculturalism in Australia – in Spain, prejudices and racism still exist." (Spanish student)
- (10) "Australians care about animal welfare, something less common in Spain." (Spanish student)
- (11) "There is more in common than we think among young people, with similar problems, experiences, and worldviews." (Australian student)
- (12) "Different cultural norms, and which stereotypes were true." (Australian student)

(13) “The national identity differs between Australia and Spain.” (Australian student)

(14) “University life – balancing study and work as an Australian student.” (Australian student)

Exploring sensitive or controversial topics—such as discrimination, racism, or bullfighting—prompted empathy and critical reflection among participants (Byram & Wagner, 2018; Pais & Costa, 2020). These discussions reveal moments of questioning, intercultural learning, and awareness of social justice issues, where communication flourishes through attitudes of respect, flexibility, and curiosity.

From these responses, it can be inferred that students developed, at least to some extent, an ability to experience otherness and reflect critically on cultural diversity (Beacco et al., 2016; Sheldon, 2025). They demonstrated growing awareness of their partners' cultural practices, openness toward different perspectives, and signs of evolving viewpoints—outcomes consistent with Byram's (1997, 2020) objectives for ICC development. Their ability to compare their own culture with that of their partners also indicates the emergence of plurilingual competence (CEFR, 2020), evidenced through an attitude of curiosity and reflective engagement.

While further development of ICC would require sustained and task-integrated work within the foreign language curriculum, this telecollaborative project has proven to be an effective platform to initiate such progress. Notably, all participants agreed with the statement: “Understanding cultural differences and traditions is necessary to step forward towards real globalization.”

This consensus reinforces the view that online partnerships can promote global citizenship—closely linked to the cultivation of intercultural values such as respect for diversity and the reduction of prejudice and discrimination (Mercer et al., 2020: 13). The students' responses to the final questionnaire item (see Table 4) further reflect the emergence of intercultural and citizenship competence through this telecollaborative experience, supported by Mairi et al. (2023) and Sheldon (2025):

| | |
|--|----|
| Q18. Those students who learn a foreign language must be linguistically and intercultural competent and accept the target culture and traditions before they engage in global exchange. | |
| Tick those statements that you think are essential. | |
| Must have an open mind | 33 |
| Have valid knowledge. | 16 |
| Must have opportunities for intercultural interaction in the target language. | 29 |
| Must act as a global citizen, showing respect for cultural and traditional differences. | 27 |

Table 4. *Students' perceptions of what intercultural competence and citizenship entail.*

They seem to be aware of what it takes to develop ICC and have demonstrated it through their previous reflections and views.

Taking part in the initiative was highly valued by students. However, one of the problems they sometimes mentioned was the difficulty of finding a suitable time for them to meet online due to the time difference. Since students spend long hours at university, some of them also have part-time jobs, and they sometimes must schedule video interactions late at night or very early in the morning, or at weekends. Despite this logistical challenge, students reported that it did not diminish the value of the learning experience or the development of their competencies, and they maintained a highly positive overall assessment of the innovative global learning space.

Overall, students' answers to the questionnaire reveal that they were able to effectively complete the bilingual video interaction, resorting to diverse interactional strategies to cooperate and negotiate meaning during the exchange, which contributed to fostering their communication skills. In addition, they expressed positive views on how the experience helped them better understand their partners' culture and traditions, while also fostering comparisons with their own culture, demonstrating openness and respect. As such, the positive effects of this Spanish-English bilingual initiative between Spanish and Australian undergraduate students on their foreign language and ICC development are in line with previous studies on virtual exchanges and collaborations in which English was used as a lingua franca in different cultural contexts: undergraduate Spanish and Ukrainian students (Fortanet-Gómez & Drobotun, 2025), Turkish pre-service English teachers with faculty members across diverse European countries (Eren, 2021), students from 7 different countries, namely, Vietnam, Poland, Turkey, Belarus, Taiwan, Egypt, and Mongolia (Nguyen et al. (2024), among others.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed to describe a transnational telecollaboration entailing a bilingual video interaction among Spanish and Australian higher education students, describing it in detail, and evaluating it from the point of view of the students, focusing on their perceptions regarding their use of interactional strategies and development of communicative skills, their negotiation of intercultural meanings and development of ICC and global citizenship. This study has provided valuable insights into how learners construct and negotiate intercultural meaning in a bilingual online exchange which seems to have effectively fostered university students' ICC in two distant sociocultural contexts. Both English-speaking Australian and Spanish-

speaking participants demonstrated their ability to engage in intercultural negotiation and meaning-making, even with limited proficiency in their interlocutors' native language.

The findings, based on the students' answers to our questionnaire, illustrate how students' communicative skills can be enhanced, particularly in relation to their interactional and mediation skills. Through the process of drawing on and mobilizing diverse strategies to understand and be understood, students not only developed their ICC but also strengthened their openness and curiosity toward other cultures. Moreover, the project contributed to fostering a sense of global citizenship by raising awareness of different social realities and highlighting the central role of languages as tools for global communication.

We contend that the development of these global skills is particularly pertinent in foreign language learning contexts. As Mercer et al. (2020, p. 27) observe, “[w]hile all teachers can incorporate global skill teaching into their lessons, English language teachers are especially well placed to do so. Not only are they teaching a global language, but their teaching methodologies may already involve aspects of global skills, such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and intercultural competencies.” This observation applies equally to teachers of other foreign languages, such as Spanish, given its prominent role in international communication. Consequently, foreign language educators should actively seek to integrate these skills into their teaching practices, particularly through bilingual virtual exchanges such as the one described in this paper.

From the findings we can conclude that it is a positive learning opportunity for both Spanish-speaking Spanish students learning English and for English-speaking Australian students learning Spanish, which should be sustained. We believe that this bilingual telecollaboration also brings positive outcomes for teachers implementing it and their respective institutions, as it can and has served to establish professional academic connections between both instructors and between UTS and Universidad de Zaragoza.

Looking ahead, we aim to fully embed the telecollaboration initiative into the curriculum for Spanish students, adopting a model like that used for the Australian cohort. At present, the voluntary nature of the program and its exclusion from formal assessment have limited participation. Future iterations will therefore seek curricular integration to ensure broader engagement. Additionally, we plan to undertake a detailed analysis of the recorded video interactions to compare students' reported strategies in their questionnaires with their actual performance. This analysis will allow us to assess the extent to which the interactional and mediation strategies

DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

students identified as most frequently used are indeed reflected in their discourse. Furthermore, we intend to explore how these strategies may vary across different foreign languages, providing a comparative perspective that can inform pedagogical design for future telecollaborative initiatives.

We hope that this study will encourage other foreign language educators to implement similar transnational virtual exchanges in higher education. As indicated here and supported by previous research (Çiftçi & Savaş, 2018; Marull & Kumar, 2020; Eren, 2021; Nguyen, 2024; Fortanet-Gómez & Drobotun, 2025), such initiatives can contribute to enhancing students' communicative, intercultural, and global competences. Bilingual virtual exchanges offer especially rich opportunities for fostering plurilingual competence, as both sets of learners engage in parallel processes of foreign language development and intercultural growth.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Aktas, F., Pitts, K., Richards, C. & Silova, I. (2017). "Institutionalizing global citizenship: A critical analysis of higher education program and Curriculum". *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21 (1), pp. 65-80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315316669815>
- Barletta Manjarrés, N. (2009). "Intercultural competence: Another challenge". *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 11, pp. 143-158.
- Beacco, J.C., Byram, M., Cavalli, M., Coste, D., Egli Cuenat, M., Goullier, F. & Panthier, J. (2016). *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*. Language Policy Unit, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.
- Bennett, J., Volet, S., & Fozdar, F. (2013). "I'd say it's kind of unique in a way": The development of an intercultural student relationship. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17 (3), pp. 533-553.
- Brown, H.D. (2006). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th edition). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Byram, M. (1997), *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847690807>.
- Byram, M. (2014), "Twenty-five years on: From cultural studies to intercultural citizenship". *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 27 (3), pp. 209-225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2014.974329>.
- Byram, M. (2020). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.22730614>.
- Byram, M. & Wagner, M. (2018). "Making a difference: Language teaching for intercultural and international dialogue". *Foreign Language Annals*, 51, pp. 140-151.
- Çiftçi, E. Y. & Savaş, P. (2018). "The role of telecollaboration in language and intercultural learning: A synthesis of studies published between 2010 and 2015". *RECALL*, 30 (3), pp. 278-298. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344017000313>.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors (2020). Council of Europe.

Eren, Ö. (2021). "Raising critical cultural awareness through telecollaboration: insights for pre-service teacher education". *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 36 (3), pp. 288–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1916538>

Fortanet-Gómez, I., & Drobotun, V. (2025). "Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) between Spanish and Ukrainian students: New tasks and new relationships". *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, 71, pp. 91–112. https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.202511126

Lenkaitis, C. & Loranc, B. (2021). The role of intercultural virtual exchanges in global citizenship development. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 15 (2), pp. 222–234.

Mairi, S., Guber, J., Mercer, S., Schartner, A., Ybema, J., Young, T., & van der Meer, C. (2023). "Teacher educators' perspectives on global citizenship education and multilingual competences". *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, pp. 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2170388>

Márquez, R. & Hidalgo, R. (2020). "Intercultural communication in a globalized world: The case of Spanish". In Koike, D. & Cesar, F. (eds.). *The Routledge handbook of Spanish pragmatics. Routledge Spanish Language Handbooks*. London: Routledge, pp. 30–5320.

Marull, C. & Kumar, S. (2020). "Authentic language learning through telecollaboration in online courses". *Tech Trends*, 64, pp. 628–635. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-020-00488-2>.

Mercer, S., Hockly, N., Stobart, G. & Lorenzo Galés, N. (2020). *Global skills: Creating empowered 21st century citizens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nguyen, N. D.N., Leung, A. H.C., Hien H.T. & Thiet, N.T. (2024). "The impact of virtual exchanges using English as a Lingua Franca on students' linguistic and intercultural competence". *TESL-EJ* 28 (3) <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28111a1>

O'Dowd, R. (2013). *Telecollaborative teacher education: Linking teacher trainees through online exchanges*. *ReCALL*, 25 (3), pp. 333–350. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344013000171>

O'Dowd, R. (2016). "Emerging trends and new directions in telecollaborative learning". *Calico Journal*, 33 (3), pp. 291–310. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v33i3.30747>.

DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

- O'Dowd, R. (2018). "From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: State-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward". *Journal of Virtual Exchange* (1), pp. 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.jve.1>.
- Pais, A. & Costa, M. (2020). "An ideology critique of global citizenship education 2. *Critical Studies in Education*, 61 (1), pp. 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2017.1318772>
- Porto, M. (2014). "Intercultural citizenship education in an EFL online project in Argentina". *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 14 (2), pp. 245-261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2014.890625>.
- Richards, J. C. (2014). *Communicative language teaching today*. (3rd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ryshina-Pankova, M. (2018), "Discourse moves and intercultural communicative competence in telecollaborative chats". *Language Learning and Technology*, 22 (1), pp. 218-239.
- Sheldon, E. (2025). Global citizenship: International studies students in the Latin American and Spanish majors at UTS. *Portal, Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 20 (1-2), pp. 5 -10.
- Schenker, T. (2012). "Intercultural competency and cultural learning through telecollaboration, *CALICO Journal*, 29 (3), pp. 449-470.
- Tarrant, A., Rubin, M., & Stoner, L. (2014). "The added value of study abroad: Fostering a global citizenry". *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 18 (2), pp. 141-161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313497589>.
- Ware, P. (2013). "Teaching comments: Intercultural communication skills in the digital age". *Intercultural Education*, 24 (4), pp. 315-326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2013.809249>

APPENDIX

Intercultural Communication Questionnaire UNIZAR & UTS

| |
|--|
| 1. Tick the university |
| UTS |
| Unizar |
| 2. The conversation took place ... |
| fully in Spanish |
| fully in English |
| partly in Spanish |
| partly in English |
| half in Spanish, half in English |
| 3. For UTS students - Perceptions on the training received How well were you prepared to carry out this intercultural oral interaction? |
| Very well |
| Well |
| Fairly well |
| Poorly |
| 4. How effective was the preparation prior to the conversation with a student from Zaragoza? From 1 to 5 |
| 1. Not effective at all |
| 5. Highly effective |
| 5. Why? Why not? Justify your answer. |
| 6. The preparation in class assisted you in gaining critical cultural awareness of the Spanish culture and differences compared to Australia. |
| Strongly agree |
| Agree |
| Disagree |
| Strongly disagree |
| 7. Perceptions on your interaction Did you understand your partner? |
| 100% |
| 75% |
| 50% |
| Not really |
| 8. Did s/he understand you? |
| 100% |
| 75% |
| 50% |
| Not really |
| 9. Were there any misunderstandings/problems in communicating? |
| Many |
| Some |
| A few |
| None |
| 10. When there were any misunderstandings or intelligibility problems, how did you solve them? (More than one option can be marked) |

Repeating information
Rephrasing information
Asking direct questions
Providing an example
Giving an explanation
Translanguaging - using both languages (English and Spanish)
Other options

11. Tick the option that best describes your conversation.

We took turns (i.e. each of us spoke for the same time)
I took longer turns (i.e. explained more things, talked more)
My partner took longer turns (i.e. explained more things, talked more)
We both asked and answered questions.
I only answered questions.
My partner only answered questions

12. Do you think that the conversation helped you better understand your partners' culture and traditions?

Very much
A bit
Not so much
Not at all

13. Why? Why not? Justify your answer.

14. Did the conversation with the student allow you to reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the Australian and Spanish cultures?

Very much
A bit
Not so much
Not at all

15. If you answered very much or a bit, please provide two examples to show how it helped you reflect on cultural differences.

16. Did you affirm your knowledge of the Spanish or Australian culture, practices, or traditions when you conversed with a student?

Very much
A bit
Not so much
Not at all

17. Why? Why not? Justify your answer.

**18. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
Understanding cultural differences and traditions is necessary to step forward towards real globalization.**

Very important
Somehow important
Not so important
No important at all

19. Those students who learn a foreign language must be linguistic and interculturally competent and accept the target culture and traditions before they engage in global exchange. Tick those statements that you think are essential.

Must have an open mind
Have valid knowledge.

DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE, INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCES THROUGH BILINGUAL TELECOLLABORATION

Must have opportunities for intercultural interaction in the target language.

Must act as a global citizen, showing respect for cultural and traditional differences.

Fecha de recepción 3 de marzo de 2025

Fecha de aceptación 7 de noviembre de 2025



Este artículo pertenece a la Universidad de Zaragoza
y se distribuye bajo una Licencia Creative Commons
Atribución-NoComercial-SinDerivar 4.0 Internacional.

Eres libre de compartir copiar y redistribuir el material en cualquier medio o formato
Bajo las condiciones siguientes:

Reconocimiento de la autoría, ya incluida en esta diapositiva.

NoComercial – no se puede utilizar el material para una finalidad comercial.

SinObraDerivada – Sin remezclar, transformar o crear a partir del material