RESEARCH REPORT
ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Exploring the IMAGE Model to Decenter Stereotypes among Students about Cultural Practices

Explorando el modelo IMAGE para descentrar estereotipos entre los estudiantes sobre las prácticas culturales

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ABSTRACT

Developing students' ability to communicate effectively in a second language requires familiarizing them the target culture. An intercultural speaker can understand the relationships between various cultures, including their cultural practices. However, while learning English requires awareness of cultural perspectives to avoid stereotypes, it is common among language teachers to focus more on language than on culture. In this context, first-semester students from a public university often hold stereotypes about cultural practices and have few opportunities in educational settings to reflect on other cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs. Consequently, this study explored how the IMAGE model helped students challenge their stereotypes while developing their interpreting and relating skills. Results showed changes in students' negative attitudes towards foreign cultures and improvements in their ability to relate to and interpret cultural practices.

Keywords: IMAGE model, intercultural communicative competence, relating and interpreting skills.

RESUMEN

Desarrollar la capacidad de los estudiantes para comunicarse eficazmente en un segundo idioma requiere familiarizarlos con su cultura. Un hablante intercultural es capaz de comprender las relaciones entre diversas culturas, incluidas sus propias prácticas culturales. Aprender inglés requiere ser consciente de las perspectivas culturales para evitar los estereotipos. Es común entre los profesores de idiomas centrarse más en el idioma que en la cultura. Los estudiantes de primer semestre de una universidad pública tienen estereotipos sobre las prácticas culturales y han tenido pocas oportunidades en la escuela para reflexionar sobre los valores, actitudes y creencias de otras culturas. Este estudio exploró cómo el modelo IMAGE ayudó a los estudiantes a desafiar sus estereotipos mientras desarrollaban sus habilidades de interpretación y relación. Los resultados mostraron cambios en las actitudes negativas de los estudiantes hacia las culturas y mejoras en sus habilidades para relacionarse e interpretar prácticas culturales.

Palabras clave: modelo IMAGE, competencia comunicativa intercultural, habilidades de relación e interpretación.
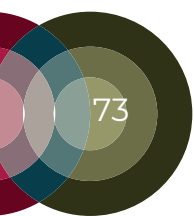
Introducción

Teaching a foreign language goes beyond its linguistic forms; it requires teachers to develop students' ability to communicate ideas within a new cultural context. For instance, when learning English, learners also encounter new cultures, backgrounds, practices, and beliefs. Thus, language does not function in isolation; rather, it requires context and culture (Byram, 1988). The meaning of sentences and expressions that students learn is not determined solely by grammar and linguistic structure; instead, culture influences their interpretation, allowing speakers to contextualize words within different cultural settings. Therefore, culture and language cannot be separated in the teaching process, since language learning cannot exist without a cultural framework (Byram, 1997).

Consequently, teaching English requires familiarizing students with target cultures and developing their ability to relate to and interpret other cultural practices. In this way, learners adopt values that help them navigate actions, attitudes, and practices from other cultures. This process requires respect and tolerance for others' identities, beliefs, and values (Meyer, 1991). When students become aware of their own cultural practices and those of diverse groups, their cultural repertoire expands, helping to mitigate discrimination and stereotypes. Thus, fostering intercultural skills equips students with essential abilities to communicate and function in diverse communities. Students continuously share information, experiences, and perspectives while learning to interact with and appreciate unfamiliar identities. However, many students struggle to identify stereotypes due to a lack of awareness of their own and target cultural practices. For example, they may learn English but know little about their own culture and sometimes hold negative stereotypes about new cultures.

A group of first-semester English learners from a public university demonstrated a lack of interpreting and relating skills when faced with different intercultural products or practices in their communication classes. In general, students showed a negative attitude when interacting with foreign intercultural products or practices, often reacting negatively to topics such as religion, clothing, food, and manners. They had previously little contact with other cultural practices since most of their prior education focused primarily on grammar and vocabulary. In consequence, this group of learners needed to understand that their culture, beliefs, and values are not universal. Thus, they needed to develop their ability to relate to and interpret other cultures while recognizing similarities and differences between their own culture and others.

Moreover, they needed encouragement to observe, analyze, and interpret the behaviors of people from other cultures, comparing and contrasting their cultural norms, conventions, and perceptions with those of others. Developing these skills would help them recognize and appreciate diversity, fostering values such as empathy, mindfulness, respect, and tolerance to succeed in multilingual environments.
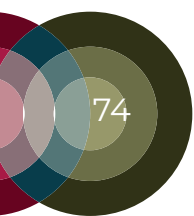
In this regard, studies on intercultural competencies have highlighted the importance of raising EFL students' awareness of cultural practices. Research indicates that students benefit from integrating linguistic competence and intercultural components in the EFL classroom, as they are deeply interconnected (Byram et al., 2001; Irimia, 2012; Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2006; Byram, 1997; Jokikokko, 2005; Gopal, 2011; Laal & Laal, 2012; Lee et al., 2002; Sheets, 2009). Findings also suggest that teachers and students develop intercultural competence more effectively when exploring cultural similarities and differences while fostering open-mindedness and respect for diversity. In contrast, Wiseman & Koester (1993) found that acquiring intercultural competence could cause stress and anxiety for both learners and teachers. Their results suggested that teaching culture requires managing complex situations and information that may be unfamiliar to students.

Lee (2020) found that "intercultural communication competence can be developed when the basic knowledge, skills, motivation, awareness, behaviors, and attitudes towards intercultural competence are emphasized in the EFL curriculum" (p. 316). However, to date, few studies have explored the development of students' relating and interpreting skills through the IMAGE model to promote intercultural communicative competence among EFL learners while exploring cultural practices and products.

For instance, Bush (2007) suggested that using images in the EFL classroom significantly enhances the learning process and strengthens skills such as classification and comparison, facilitating vocabulary acquisition. Research on using images has shown positive results, as students engage with cultures by observing authentic materials. However, explicit teaching strategies and structured instructional cycles are necessary to guide teachers on how to incorporate images effectively in the classroom. The IMAGE model is based on the work of Barnes-Karol and Broner (2010) on using images to explore cultural perspectives and teach culture. It also follows principles outlined by Jonson and English (2003) for developing students' ability to analyze images and texts critically. To this end, this study sought to answer the following question: How does the Image model help first-semester students improve their interpreting and relating skills and address their stereotypes about cultural practices?

Conceptual Framework

Intercultural Dimension

The Intercultural Dimension (ID) encompasses the set of skills that enable students to become not only proficient users of a language but also intercultural speakers capable of engaging in diverse foreign language environments (Byram et al., 2001). In this sense, ID facilitates communication in a
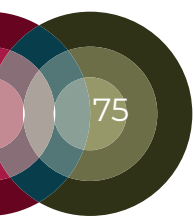
given language while fostering awareness of different identities, beliefs, values, behaviors, and perspectives within cultural exchanges and practices (Irimia, 2012). According to Byram et al. (2002), ID promotes interaction between learners of the target language and native speakers, placing both on equal terms and raising their awareness of each other's identities. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, ID prepares learners for interaction, acceptance, and understanding of other cultures while mitigating stereotypes.

Furthermore, the Intercultural Dimension fosters mutual and reciprocal understanding, ensuring inclusive participation (Larzén et al., 2005). It enhances awareness of cultural pluralism and encourages intercultural encounters. To this end, ID in EFL is guided by four main objectives: (a) it develops both linguistic and intercultural competence; (b) it prepares learners to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds; (c) it enables learners to understand and accept differing perspectives, values, and behaviors; and (d) it helps learners perceive such interactions as enriching experiences (Byram et al., 2002).

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in Language Teaching

Teaching a foreign language extends beyond linguistic instruction; it also involves fostering intercultural sensitivity by equipping learners with the tools to act as cultural mediators who perceive the world from multiple perspectives. In this context, the goal of language teaching transcends the acquisition of linguistic competence to include the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Deardorff (2006) defines this competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, enabling learners to become more critical thinkers and articulate their perspectives" (p. 5). Thus, language learning is not limited to its structural aspects, but requires learners to develop skills that facilitate their integration into cultural groups, such as critical thinking and cultural awareness.

Although ICC has long been a pillar in language teaching theory, its practical application presents challenges, particularly in contexts like Colombia, where the focus has historically been on grammar and vocabulary (Murillo Urrego, 2025). ICC ensures a shared understanding and meaningful interactions among individuals of diverse social identities, each possessing distinct communication styles and cultural perspectives (Byram et al., 2001). Recent studies have explored teachers' perceptions of ICC and the obstacles to its implementation, highlighting the need for more comprehensive training that addresses not only cultural knowledge but also the attitudes and skills required to mediate between cultures (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). Research from the Latin American context also suggests
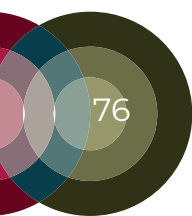
that educational policies and teaching materials often promote a superficial view of interculturality, centered on cultural facts rather than a critical analysis of differences (Murillo Urrego, 2025).

Ultimately, ICC enables learners to become intercultural speakers capable of engaging in complex exchanges across multiple contexts, while avoiding stereotyping and embracing multifaceted identities (Ismail et al., 2017).

Developing ICC requires the acquisition of multiple components, skills, and attitudes that facilitate meaning-making in the teaching-learning process. According to Byram (1997), five key components are essential for ICC development: knowledge, attitude, critical cultural awareness, and skills of interpreting and relating. Knowledge encompasses familiarity with the cultural products and practices of specific social groups, as well as an awareness of one's own culture and that of others (Byram et al., 2002). Attitudes, for their part, involve openness, curiosity, and the ability to challenge stereotypes or preconceived notions about other cultures. Also, critical cultural awareness refers to the ability to analyze and evaluate values, perspectives, practices, and products of both one's own and foreign cultures to foster cross-cultural understanding (Porto, 2003). Finally, the skills of interpreting and relating require learners to adopt a decentered perspective, enabling them to interpret cultural events and relate them to their own cultural practices, considering ethnic and racial diversity (Repečkienė et al., 2011).

The Role of Images in Foreign Language Teaching

Images are powerful tools in the language classroom. Their didactic use has been justified by their ability to facilitate vocabulary memorization and the comprehension of grammatical structures by providing a visual anchor (Lowe, 2021). However, within the framework of ICC, images transcend their merely illustrative function. They are conceived as "visual texts" that, like written texts, are loaded with ideologies, representations, and frequently, cultural stereotypes.

In this regard, a critical approach to images allows students not only to decode what they see but also to analyze how these images construct specific meanings and how they can perpetuate or decenter cultural biases (Huerta, 2021). Such a didactic approach promotes reflection, interpretive ability, and the development of critical thinking—key skills for the development of ICC. Recent studies indicate that the effectiveness of using images depends not only on their quality but also on the relevance of the material to the students, highlighting the teacher's role as a mediator to guide this reflection (Pujiastuti & Sukma, 2024).
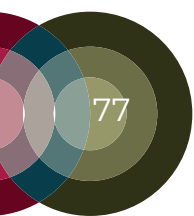
IMAGE Model

The IMAGE model is based on the work of Barnes-Karol and Broner (2010) on utilizing images to explore cultural perspectives. It aligns with the research of Jonson and English (2003) on analyzing French images and texts through critical lenses. In practice, this model presents carefully selected cultural images to students, guiding them to make cultural observations, formulate hypotheses, and drawe conclusions (Glisan & Donato, 2017). The IMAGE model fosters dialogic interaction in the foreign language classroom through scaffolded questioning. For instance, factual questions prompt students to observe images and provide simple descriptions using questions such as: What? Where? Who? and When? Conversely, thought-provoking questions, on the other hand, encourage students to analyze, hypothesize, and express opinions through inquiries such as: What do you think? Or what do you observe? (Glisan & Donato, 2017).

The IMAGE model consists of four steps:

1. Images and Making Observations: In this initial phase, students examine images depicting cultural products or practices. Since observation plays a crucial role in identifying cultural characteristics, the teacher poses factual questions (e.g., What? Where? When? Who?) to elicit explicit responses and promote interaction. Subsequently, students are encouraged to compare and report their observations to the class, ensuring comprehension of the cultural elements portrayed.

2. Analyzing Additional Information: The teacher provides supplementary information about the cultural product or practice through short texts in the target language. This step equips students with new insights, prompting them to incorporate cultural perspectives into their observations. Notably, carefully selected sources, such as brief readings, article excerpts, or relevant data, enhance cultural understanding.

3. Generating Hypotheses about Cultural Perspectives: After finalizing the previous steps, students analyze new images or data to deepen their reflections. Thus, they formulate hypotheses about cultural perspectives, further engaging in deeper analytical discussions. Ultimately, this step sustains student engagement and stimulates critical thinking.

4. Exploring Perspectives and Reflecting Further: Students receive additional materials to explore and reflect on cultural perspectives beyond the classroom. In this stage, they are encouraged to articulate lingering questions or areas of interest. To achieve this, teachers design out-of-class assignments using digital tools such as blogs, websites, YouTube, Google Images, and texts (Glisan & Donato, 2017).
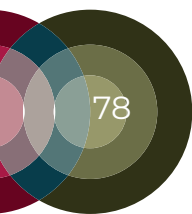
Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which seeks to explore individual experiences and understand events within participants' natural settings (Mackey & Gass, 2015). In particular, the study examines students' stereotypes and the potential of the IMAGE model to enhance their capacity to relate to and interpret cultural practices while addressing negative attitudes toward foreign cultural perspectives. It is worth noting that qualitative research allows for in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation by employing various data collection methods and emphasizing social interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Therefore, action research was chosen to integrate activities mediated by the IMAGE model, fostering students' exploration of cultural perspectives while guiding the English teacher through a structured cycle for developing intercultural competence (Glisan & Donato, 2017). Regarding data collection, the process comprised involved five classroom observations to assess students' engagement with the IMAGE model and their ability to interpret and relate to different cultures. Initially, the first observation served as a diagnostic assessment to identify students' stereotypes and negative attitudes toward other cultures. The following five lessons were designed in accordance with the IMAGE model to challenge and address these stereotypes (Table 1). Additionally, two interviews were conducted during and after the study to understand students' perceptions and evaluate the effectiveness of the IMAGE model. Finally, student-generated materials, such as written reflections in charts and Padlets, were also collected for analysis.

Context and Participants

This study was conducted in an English course at a public university in Córdoba, Colombia. The group comprised 36 undergraduate students, both male and female, registered in a course titled **Communication I** from late January to February 2020. Participants were between 16 and 28 years old and came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Generally, the students had basic English proficiency and were expected to reach the A2 level by the end of the course. However, those who had attended private schools often entered the university with more advanced English skills.

Regarding the instructor, the English teacher leading the course had over six years of experience teaching in both public and private institutions and was pursuing a master's degree at the time of the study. The teacher, who also served as the primary researcher, became interested in developing students' intercultural competence upon noticing their limited knowledge of English-speaking cultures
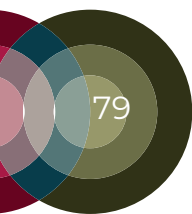
and their focus on grammar and vocabulary. Finally, the second author of this paper served as the researcher's advisor, supervising the process.

Table 1. Sample IMAGE Model Was Used with Students

| Image M. Steps	Lesson 1	Lesson 2
Topic	Greetings in Different Countries	Eating Manners in Different Countries
Step 1	Teacher will show students a set of pictures of greetings used worldwide. Teacher asks some fact questions: What do you see? What are they? Students will observe and will come up with different words related to the images. Students will watch a video of a group of teenagers from different parts of the world explaining the way they greet in their countries. Students should provide comments.	Students see images of Colombian food, specifically from Cordoba, Colombia, and answer factual questions: What do you see? Where is this food from? What food do you typically have for breakfast? Students share information with their partners and highlight the different table manners they see.
Step 2	Students read additional information in a blog: "Showing hello: 15 ways people greet each other around the world." In small groups, they discuss with their partners the perspectives they have about the cultural practices, analyze the data, and relate it to the rest of the class.	Students read a blog about table manners around the world. Then, they highlight and discuss with their partners the different table manners they identify.
Step 3	Students see images of the last president of the USA greeting a person from the New Zealand culture. Students observe and reflect on the pictures through factual questions: Who is in the picture? Where are they from? What is the cultural greeting? Additionally, they answer thought questions: What do you think about the greeting in this picture? Why do you think they greet each other like that?	Students watch a video depicting Indian culture and discuss table manners. What do you think about the situation? Why do you think they ask him to stop doing that? What would you do if this situation happened to you?
Step 4	Students compare the new cultures' greeting with their own and discuss how different cultures compare to them and how representative each cultural practice is of each other´s beliefs and values.	Students write some specific perceptions they changed after learning about the topic on a digital board called "Padlet".

Source: own elaboration..
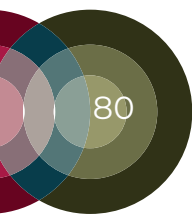
Data analysis

The data gathered from the two interviews and the five observations were transcribed to facilitate the data analysis process. For this purpose, qualitative coding was employed to locate themes in the data concerning students' opinions and evidence of changes in their intercultural competence and progress. Coding is the "process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way" (Creswell, 2015, p. 156). Thus, keywords were identified in the interviews, allowing us to recognize common patterns in students´ opinions regarding their experience with the IMAGE model and their suggestions. Interactions were transcribed and analyzed by developing themes in the data, paying particular attention to students´ progress in their attitudes and skills to interpret and relate to cultural practices from images shown during the five lessons (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Additionally, analysis of the observations involved iterative viewing, allowing the researchers to analyze and discuss the data collaboratively (Creswell et al., 2007).

After analyzing a focus group interview and a lesson aimed at diagnosing students' relating and interpreting skills, we identified students' stereotypes about cultural practices. Students' initial knowledge of cultural practices revealed very little awareness of foreign cultures, leading them to demonstrate radical behavior towards of cultural issues, as shown below:

Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3
S1: "who would even eat that?" S4: "**even more gross**" S2: "no, never" S12: "**es abominable comer eso**"	T: Look at the pictures. Do you know, **what Kakuma is**? S4: "**black people** hahahaha" S1: "**African people big earrings**" S4: "Accessories, many colors"	S10: asqueroso S1: "I would never go to the Philippines" S4: "gross, gross, really gross" S6: I would never eat that dish because rats have a lot of diseases. Philippines are sick.

Source: own elaboration..
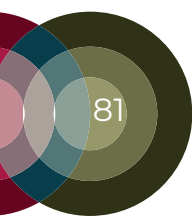
In Episode 1, students were shown cultural images of traditional dishes from unfamiliar cultures. They viewed wild rats served in traditional dishes from different parts of the Philippines and Indonesia, where they are offered to guests upon arrival. However, during this interaction, students were unwilling to negotiate and share meaning. For instance, students S4 and S12 demonstrated a lack of curiosity and openness to understand the reasons behind this cultural practice. Instead, they judged the culture negatively, disregarding the knowledge, products, and practices of the specific social group or community.

In Episode 2, students were presented with a set of pictures featuring an ethnic group called the Maasai in Kakuma, a refugee camp in Kenya, East Africa. The individuals in the images were dressed in traditional clothing and accessories from their community. Notably, while observing, students expressed various stereotypes about the culture. For example, S4 and S1 associated the practice of wearing large rings with skin color. This finding indicates that some students focused more on racial features rather than cultural aspects, evidencing little willingness to negotiate and share meaning.

Similarly, Episode 3 also revealed students' negative perceptions of the highlighted cultural practice. In this case, participants were shown cultural images not only of food from the Philippines but also from Japan, India, and Colombia. Some students, including S4, S6, and S10, responded with highly negative expressions, once again demonstrating a lack of openness to understanding foreign cultural practices. Furthermore, they revealed a tendency to judge these cultural practices harshly without appreciating or attempting to understand the norms, beliefs, and behaviors of the cultures presented.

In the following episode, students were invited to observe images of Muslim families dressed in traditional attire. Below are their comments on the pictures:

Excerpt from Episode 4:

> S4: "A woman that has to cover all her body! I think it is offensive, sorry."

> "I don't have to cover my body because a man told me to do that, sorry but it is ridiculous."

The student used adjectives such as offensive and ridiculous to refer to this culture, focusing on very superficial issues observed in the image. Thus, the student failed to perceive the cultural meaning presented in the picture; instead, he took as a point of departure a Muslim woman wearing a "Hijab", ignoring that it is a very traditional Muslim garment—long dress women and men wear. This evidenced a superficial interpretation of other cultures representing a lack of values and knowledge about cultural practices.
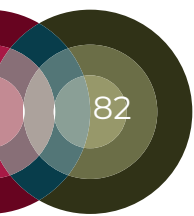
Throughout the analysis of these episodes, we also observed that students showed little capacity to interpret cultures and relate them to their own, as evidenced in the following interactions:

> T: Which cultures do you know?
>
> S11: La musulmana, en Arabia Saudita. No estoy seguro. Que las compañeras hablaron de eso, un hombre puede tener hasta 20 esposas y las tiene que mantener, pero las mujeres tienen que esperarlo a él y no pueden salir sin el hombre.
>
> [S11: The Muslim culture, in Saudi Arabia. I am not very sure. My classmates talked about that, a man can have more than 20 wives and he has to support them financially, but his wives have to wait for him and cannot go out without the man].

These answers showed students' misconceptions about foreign cultures and their practices. As explained above, they knew little about cultural practices and overlooked the reality behind this culture. They discussed the culture focusing only on storytelling or anecdotes. However, upon researching the cited example, it was found that in Muslim culture, men are allowed to marry up to four women only if financial support is provided. Unfortunately, students lacked detailed knowledge about these aspects and passed harsh judgments without having solid arguments, revealing limited knowledge of this cultural practice and a lack of awareness to relate and contrast it with their own. All these stereotypes were carefully discussed with students in their English lesson using the IMAGE model, which evidenced better results in students´ capacity to relate to and interpret foreign cultures.

Changes in students´ stereotypes and their capacity to relate and interpret cultural practices

After analyzing the IMAGE model lessons and semi-structured interviews, we identified changes in students' capacity to relate to and interpret cultural practices. Also, they became able to interpret foreign cultures and relate them to their own. They were able to modify initial judgments and stereotypes of cultural practices when exploring unfamiliar cultures. During 5-image model lessons, which features activities that incorporated authentic materials such as videos, images, blogs, and magazines about foreign cultures, students demonstrated better capacities to interpret other cultures and related them to their own. We also noticed they were more open-minded to accept and respect other cultures, as evidenced the Lesson 1.

Table 2. Lesson 1: Greetings Around the World

|	Nationality	Opinion
1	New Zealander	It's surprising due to the closeness to other people because they have to press their foreheads together and also look into each other's eyes.
2	Japanese	IT´s curious because the duration of the bow depends on the social status of whom they are greeting.
3	Bedouin	It´s weird because they have to press their noses against each other and also rub them.

Source: own elaboration..

In this lesson, students explored images to identify common greetings from around the world. Their responses were collected in a word cloud, created using a Web 2.0 tool and projected onto the board. Students were then asked to analyze additional information about different greetings worldwide. To achieve this, they read online blogs to learn about greetings from various cultures, including Tibet, India, Mexico, and England. Additionally, they explored supplementary information from each website to deepen their understanding of these cultures.

As they read the blogs, students learned about different ways of greeting and their cultural significance. During this process, many students began to imitate some of the greetings that caught their attention. Some reacted by laughing and, at times, mocking the information. At this stage, they were actively exploring and analyzing how people from other cultures behave differently from their own.

The results of this lesson revealed a shift in students' perceptions. For instance, they began using a more varied vocabulary, employing words such as "curious," "surprising," and "weird," indicating a greater openness and curiosity toward expanding their knowledge of different greetings. The following comments reflects a more neutral perspective, signaling an increased understanding after reading about and familiarizing themselves with the cultural meanings behind the greetings studied.

> [Estudiante: pues yo pienso que todos los temas han sido buenos, pero me pareció **más interesante** lo de los Greetings **por qué es importante que sepamos cómo socializarnos de una forma correcta con los demás**].
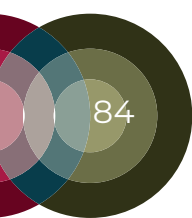
[Student: Well, I consider that all the topics have been good, but I consider that "the Greetings" are **more interesting because it is important that we know how to socialize in a proper way with others**].

[Estudiante: **Es fascinante cómo hacen, darnos cuenta que no somos los únicos en este pedacito de tierra que hay muchas cosas más**...].

[Student: **It is fascinating to see how they do it, to realize that we are not the only ones in this little piece of land and that there are even more things**...].

[Estudiante: Cuando dicen principalmente del respeto y la comprensión o sea **ponerse en el lugar del otro y saber que todos tenemos costumbres distintas y que no todos somos iguales**].

[Student: When they speak mainly about respect and understanding, **it means putting yourself in the other's place and knowing that we all have different customs and that not all of us are the same**].

At this point, evidence indicate that students changed their perspectives and acquired new knowledge when interacting with other cultures. However, they needed more connection with other cultures to see beyond clothing, artifacts,and practices.

The following interaction illustrates some changes in one of the students' views towards greetings around the world:

T: Do you think you would still greet a person like that or you would say no teacher, never?

S11: **Yes, I would, because it is their culture**.

T: I ask you because at the beginning of the class you said something like, "no teacher never"! So, did you change your point of view?

S11: **Yes, because I´m going there, so I would**.

The interaction above exemplifies how the student stopped holding negative attitudes towards the "Hongi greeting" from New Zealand, and changed his perspective. This happened as the student searched for more details on the web about this cultural tribe to expand their knowledge about greeting in this culture. Consequently, students discussed the information found with their partners before sharing ideas with the teacher; these two moments in the lesson allowed students to raise awareness of cultural practices and generate new insights for their understanding and acceptance.

The student understood the new perspective and decentered from his own cultural perpetuation and welcomed the other cultural practice. Each step during the IMAGE lesson was essential, as the process helped students raise awareness about other cultures and led them to become more open and appreciate novel cultural practices or products.

In Lesson 2, students explored table manners from different countries. Notably, they displayed great interest and were highly motivated to learn about other cultures through their culinary traditions.

First, students discussed traditional foods commonly eaten in their region that have been forgotten or replaced by new food trends influenced by other cultural practices. Next, they watched a YouTube video about cultural differences to identify common eating manners across various cultures. Then, they read blog posts about the key principles of each culture's cuisine and dining etiquette. Finally, students expanded their knowledge by researching additional information through websites, books, and videos. This process equipped them with valuable background knowledge, allowing them to participate in class discussions with a prior understanding of cultural practices and differences.

Students demonstrated progress in interpreting cultural practices, showing greater openness when discussing different cultures. They also began to modify negative thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors toward unfamiliar traditions, as evidenced in the following example:
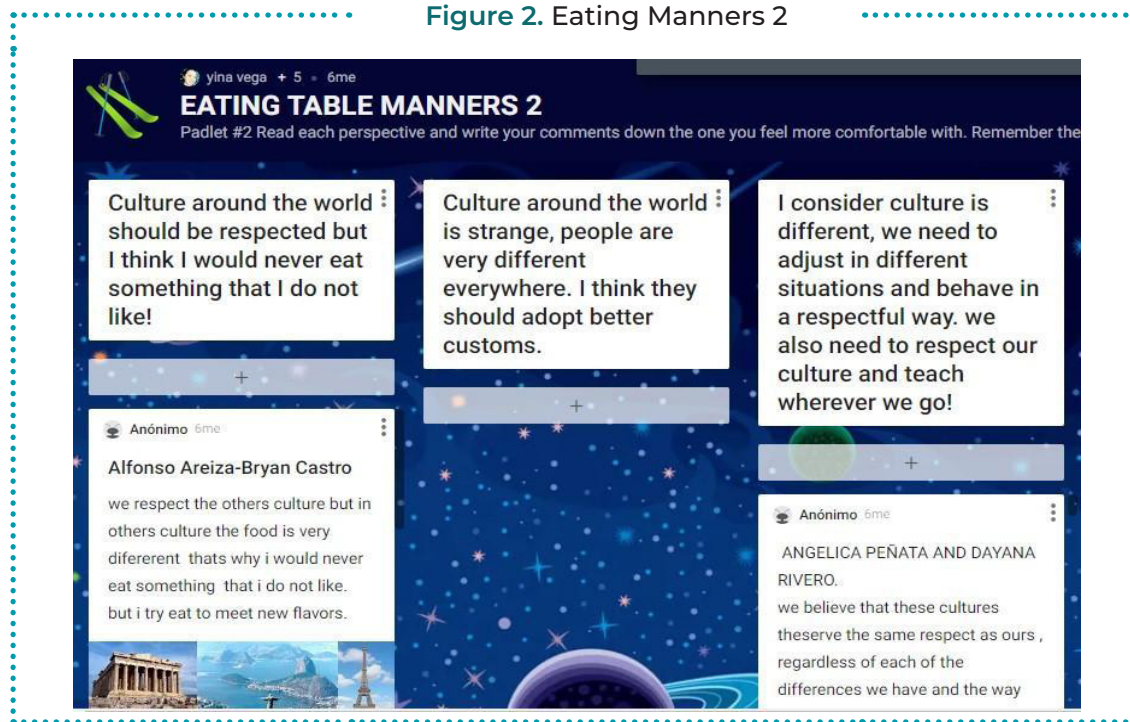
Figure 1. Padlet Activity from Lesson 2A
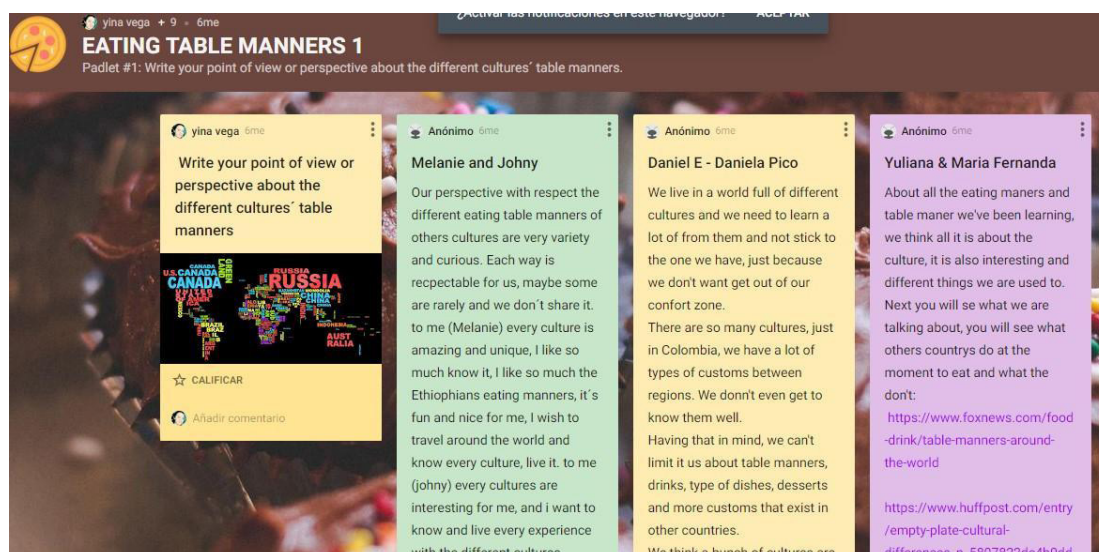
**Source**: own elaboration..

Figure 2. Eating Manners 2

Source: own elaboration..

As illustrated, students reflected on eating manners around the world, including those of their own culture, which led them to analyze cultural practices from a different perspective. When observing authentic videos and images —both those they searched for independently and those proposed in class—students reshaped their initial attitudes and comments towards cultures since they underlying cultural reasons and tenets. Also, in their opinions, students changed their negative comments and negotiated between their stereotypes and new knowledge of the culture to adopt a position. For instance, some students respectfully suggested they would not adopt the cultural norm but would instead show respect towards the foreign cultural practice, since they understood why other cultural groups act in a certain way. These activities enabled students to develop more positive attitudes towards foreign cultures, as stated by one of the students in the Padlet activity: "We will know the eating manners to be respectful, it would be grateful for me to eat the food, as each deserves the same respect".

The students also showed enthusiasm to travel and meet other cultures, as exemplified by (S1), who expressed to travel to encounter other cultures and learn about their specific practices. Similarly, (S2)
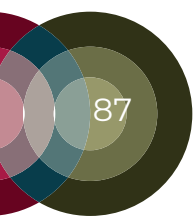
used the expression "get out of the comfort zone" to illustrate his openness to engage with other cultures, their religion, practices, and food, and to try something new. Additionally, (SX) highlighted values such as respect and tolerance towards other cultural practices and pointed out the importance of using one´s own culture to teach and learn in other countries.

Furthermore, (SXX) suggested that other cultural practices deserve the same respect as our own, a comment which allowed us to identify changes in the stereotypes we observed at the beginning of the project. However, we noticed that some students still require more contact with other cultural practices to become more open-minded to avoid always prioritizing their own cultural practices over foreign ones.

Regarding students´ points of view about the lessons and their intercultural competence, we obtained positive insights concerning the changes they have identified in their stereotypes. For instance, some students reflected on the tendency to judge cultures without possessing clear information about specific cultural practices:

> [Student: Yes, teacher, and also, for example, if I start just judging and I do not know the reason—for example the "Eating manners", "the greetings"—all of that has an explanation for **why they do it in that way, so to judge at first, we always have to see it from the respect and understanding**].

> [Student: I think so, it would come to be that about **respect, understanding and kindness, especially because you see a lot about the kindness of the guest. So, yes, I think that helps one. In other words, it makes you be a little more open to your thoughts and helps you see things more differently, in a more caring way**].

These episodes from the focus group interview revealed that acknowledged that there is no single cultural practice or behavior. As observed, they understood the necessity to develop various strategies to engage with other cultural perspectives by knowing, understanding, relating, and interpreting what they see, read, and hear concerning cultures.

Other participants became aware of the relevance to their profession and the need to learn about cultures as EFL learners and future English teachers, as illustrated below:

> [Student: **It is fascinating to see how they do it, realize that we are not the only ones in this little piece of land and that there are even more things…**].

> [Student: Teacher, I have to say that the last topic about the currency has been very interesting, mostly the "Greetings" because **I think that our profession requires to have direct con-**
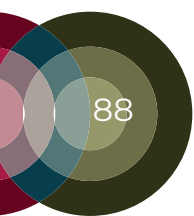
**tact with people from different parts of the world. Knowing a little bit more about cultures
and get to know about their greetings and their meanings is essential; even a national cu-
rrency is part of this globalized world too. Thus, I think that greetings are very important**].

In these episodes, students identified the need to interact with other cultures and diverse forms of
cultural expression, enabling them to understand and accept people's differences, values, behaviors,
and perspectives. In addition, they acknowledged that interacting with other cultures can enrich their
experience as a future English teachers and as learners of a foreign language.

Discussion

This study reports changes in students' ability to interpret and relate cultural images to their own
culture. Simultaneously, it addresses students' stereotypes and negative attitudes toward foreign cul-
tures. As evidenced in the findings, most students improved their interpretative and relational skills,
which led to a shift in their negative attitudes toward foreign cultural practices. The IMAGE model
enabled students to interpret events from other cultures and relate them to their own cultural tenets,
religions, practices, and perspectives.

During the implementation of these activities, students went beyond the image itself to explore and
understand diversity, cultural differences, and cultural practices. In doing so, they analyzed the ima-
ge, described it, and compared it with Colombian culture. These results align with Byram's (2000)
findings on developing students' intercultural competence (IC); his research revealed that students
could relate to, interpret, and further evaluate different cultural practices and behaviors, which led to
positive changes in tolerance and cultural diversity appreciation.

One of the key benefits of this study was increasing students' awareness of cultural practices and
helping them understand the reasons behind each culture they studied in class. As a result, they
became more tolerant and respectful toward other cultural practices, avoiding the tendency to judge
people based solely on an image. This study also provided students with the opportunity to learn both
the English language and its cultural context. As Byram (2000) states, students should not only learn
the language but also develop the ability to interpret and explain cultural documents or events and
relate them to their own. The results of this study emphasize the need for English teaching programs
to explicitly integrate cultural practices into daily teaching.

The findings also resonate with Irma's assertion that "the language practices used in class should
include opportunities for learners to notice cultural and linguistic differences and to view differen-
ces from multiple perspectives, reflecting on their language and culture and not just on that of the
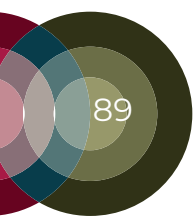
other" (2012, p. 3). However, many English teachers tend to focus primarily on language and content, often overlooking the importance of incorporating intercultural competencies and activities into their lessons. Some teachers introduce cultural perspectives occasionally, following materials provided in textbooks or suggested by instructors, as several scholars have pointed out (Matsumoto, 2009; Ormrod, 2012).

Similarly, the results of this study echoed Atay et al.'s (2009) findings regarding teachers' positive attitudes toward including culturally based activities in class. These activities were found to motivate students to learn English by helping them understand its principles, practices, and the ways in which people think, act, and behave in the target culture. Atay's research highlighted positive attitudes toward culturally based activities, even though teachers were not fully integrating intercultural competence into their EFL classes.

Data analysis showed that the application of the IMAGE model was an effective approach for developing students' intercultural skills and guiding teachers through the step-by-step process of building students' cultural knowledge in EFL learning (Glisan & Donato, 2017). Moreover, this study has demonstrated the feasibility of using the IMAGE model to reduce stereotypes and expand students' knowledge of cultural practices. However, developing successful intercultural learners requires more than the efforts of a single teacher; it must be an ongoing practice (Byram, 2000).

For future research, we strongly recommend that researchers design professional development courses and materials to equip teachers with strategies for supporting and fostering students' intercultural competence inside and outside the classroom. Although cultural topics are occasionally included in textbooks, syllabi, and teaching activities, we emphasize the need to make cultural instruction an explicit and intentional part of the teaching process. The results of this study demonstrate that authentic materials and tasks on cultural topics are essential for developing intercultural competence in EFL classes.

This study aligns with Pinzón's (2020) findings: "After exposing students to authentic material, they managed to understand intercultural scenarios as well as show respect for other cultures" (p. 29). Future research should explore how teachers modify their teaching practices after implementing the IMAGE model and the challenges they face throughout the process.

Conclusions

Results of this research unveiled the need to develop foreign language learners, particularly pre-service teachers' ability to understand foreign language cultures. Furthermore, it demonstrated that
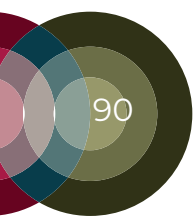
students required explicit pedagogies to deal with stereotypes and negative attitudes they hold about different cultures. With this study, we noticed students needed support to go beyond cultural practices and develop values such as tolerance, respect, and openness to understand and evaluate cultural practices even from their own culture.

Moreover, The IMAGE model resulted in a step-by-step process that helped the teacher develop students' cultural knowledge and competences. Its four steps guided the teacher on using authentic materials such as images allowing students to make cultural observations, analyze images by investigating beyond each cultural representation, construct hypotheses, and hold clear perspectives towards the analyzed pictures. Thus, the teacher used four steps proposed in the IMAGE model to develop students' intercultural competence and improve stereotypes. Hence, we strongly argued that culture could not be studied as separate activities from books or by only discussing proposed ones in textbooks. Culture should be present in students' everyday learning encounters with teachers. Grammar and vocabulary require the context of culture and situation to be learned meaningfully. In consecuence, the results of this study suggested that teaching programs should not focus only on teaching language but should also find strategies to meet students' intercultural abilities within English courses. Accordingly, Byram (2000) explained that culture is a relevant element in teaching a language; thus, it should not be separated from students' social interaction when learning a language since interaction occurs in real cultural contexts.

Additionally, teachers should support students´ intercultural communication competence by using authentic materials apart from the pedagogical and suggested ones that are provided in course books. Results from this study revealed that authentic pictures, blogs, webpages, videos, and Google facilitated students learning and understanding the reasons behind foreign and own cultural practices. These materials allowed students to see real cultural encounters, understand diversity, and become more inclusive and tolerant. As suggested by Atay (2009) "… Language teachers are expected to guide students in the acquisition of various skills, contributing to the development of their knowledge and understanding of a target language and culture(s), and helping them to reflect on their own culture as well" (p.131).
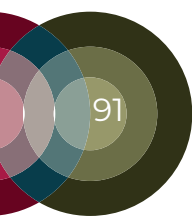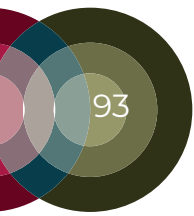
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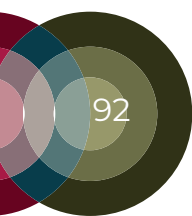
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