# Intercultural sensitivity of teachers towards the immigrant community: A mixed research with three public schools

## *Sensibilidad intercultural del profesorado hacia el colectivo inmigrante: una investigación mixta con tres escuelas públicas*

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**Abstract:**

The inclusion of immigrant students in public schools set out important challenges for education professionals in contexts of intercultural emergency. In this sense, sensitivity to diversity becomes a key competence to promote respectful and harmonious coexistence in educational communities. Thus, this study analyses the degree of intercultural sensitivity of teachers working in culturally diverse classrooms in three public schools in the Valparaíso Region, Chile. For this purpose, a cross-sectional-mixed research design was adopted, specifically, through the application of a scale and narrative talks developed with a sample of 102 teachers. The findings show that the participating teachers have a moderate-high degree of intercultural sensitivity, with the most highly valued dimensions being commitment and enjoyment in interaction. They also express high expectations regarding the academic and professional integration of immigrant students. These inputs could strengthen the design of public policies and the implementation of intercultural educational practices.

**Keywords:** cultural diversity, immigration, intercultural education, immigrant education, teachers, social inclusion.

**Resumen:**

La inclusión de estudiantes inmigrantes en la escuela pública plantea importantes desafíos para los profesionales de la educación en contextos de emergencia intercultural. En este

sentido, la sensibilidad hacia la diversidad se convierte en una competencia clave para promover una convivencia respetuosa y armoniosa en las comunidades educativas. Así, en este estudio, se analiza el grado de sensibilidad intercultural del profesorado que trabaja en aulas con diversidad cultural en tres escuelas públicas de la Región de Valparaíso, Chile. Para ello, se adoptó un diseño de investigación transeccional-mixto, en concreto mediante la aplicación de una escala y conversatorios narrativos desarrollados con una muestra de 102 docentes. Los hallazgos dan cuenta de que el profesorado participante posee un grado de sensibilidad intercultural moderado-alto; las dimensiones mejor valoradas son el compromiso y el disfrute en la interacción. Asimismo, manifiestan expectativas elevadas en torno a la inserción académico-profesional del estudiantado inmigrante. Estos insumos pudieran fortalecer el diseño de políticas públicas y la implementación de prácticas educativas interculturales.

**Palabras clave:** diversidad cultural, inmigración, educación intercultural, educación de los inmigrantes, profesorado, inclusión social.

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# 1. Introduction

Recently, Chile has positioned as an important receiving nation of immigrants, mainly from Latin American countries (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). In that regard, the National Center for Migration Studies of Universidad de Talca (CENEM, 2023) indicates that there are 1 482 390 foreigners with habitual residence in Chile; they come mainly from countries like Venezuela (30%), Perú (16.6%), Haiti (12.2%), Colombia (11.7%) and Bolivia (8.9%). On its part, Valparaíso Region has the third highest number of immigrant children and adolescents (hereinafter NNA), which corresponds to 6.6% of the total among regions according to the data from the National Migration Service and from the National Institute Statistics (INE & SERMIG, 2023). In line with the above, the current emergence of this intense and accelerated south-south intraregional migratory flow coincides with a considerable increase of the enrollment of NNA in public schools in the area, bring it with it an important expansion in the diversification of Chilean student body in the classrooms (Flanagan-Bórquez et al., 2021; Jiménez-Vargas, 2022; Stefoni & Corvalán, 2019). In this sense, the arrival of immigrant students set out new challenges for education professionals (Baeza, 2023; Barriga et al., 2024).

Particularly, in Valparaíso Region, there are about 11 912 foreigners between the ages of 0 and 19 years. The 10 to 14 years age group concentres the largest number of immigrants NNA with a 34.7%, while the 15 to 19 years age group has 29.1% (INE & UNICEF, 2023). According to these sources, the Venezuelan group is the main group in the region with the 43.3% of the population of minors. In second place is the Colombian group with a 9.1%. In third and fourth place are the Argentinian and Haitian groups, with a 7.5% and 6.5%, respectively. Thus, we can see how different socio-cultural groups have been integrating to the region's educational system, resulting in a notable more diverse student population in social, economic, gender and ethnic terms. As a consequence, new student groups with diverse characteristics and need, among them, the immigrant nucleus.

According to several researches developed in Chile (Barriga et al., 2024; Venegas, 2020; Verdejo, 2019), the social inclusion of this groups of non-traditional students in the Chilean school system demands a deep understanding of the social representations and expectations of teachers toward this group of students. These studies postulate that these factors linked to the development of successful educational transitions. Thus, the perception of teachers can have a significant influence on learning, academic performance, and student well-being. Thus, teachers are responsible for implementing in the classroom innovations and pedagogical strategies aimed at promoting healthy coexistence and cultural respect through critical reflection (Contreras-Bravo, 2021; Pavez-Soto et al., 2023). For that purpose, teaching staff should integrate the philosophical and social beliefs that an intercultural-educational perspective entails.

In the view of the above, it is relevant to know what the intercultural representations of teachers regarding the emergency of immigrant students in the Chilean educational system are; what their academic-professional expectations regarding the core group of students coming from international contexts are. To answer these questions, this mixed research design analyzes the degree of the intercultural sensitivity of teachers to the migratory emergency in the Chilean school context, particularly, the degree of affection toward diversity expressed to the immigrant school group.

## 2. Theorical framework

### 2.1. Approaching concept of intercultural sensitivity

As an affective dimension of the communicative competence (Aksin, 2023), the intercultural sensibility is a construct that provides the possibility of assessing and distinguishing how people differ in terms of behavior, perceptions or feelings in the process of intercultural communication. In other words, interculturally sensitive people are aware of their behavior and the language they use in social interactions, being able to appreciate and respect the exchange of ideas (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022), no matter how idiosyncratic they may be.

Thereon, several studies that examine intercultural communication competence (CCI) in South America (Ramírez-Pavelic & Contreras-Salinas, 2022) and North American contexts (Kim & Connelly, 2019), reveal that teachers with a higher degree of intercultural sensitivity have greater teaching competence in the management of diversity within the classroom and, along with is, more positive beliefs and attitudes towards the intercultural education. Other studies (Huang, 2023; Leal, 2020; Tovar-Correal et al., 2024) reveal that CCI has traditionally been approached from the perspective of bilingualism and second language acquisition. This implies the need to broaden the perspectives of study to investigate in a deeper way the cultural diversity in education.

In particular, Chen and Starosta (1997) conceptualize intercultural sensitivity as "the person's ability to develop a positive emotion toward understanding and appreciation of cultural differences that fosters an appropriate and effective behavior in the intercultural communication" (p. 5). The authors specify five dimensions involving the degree of intercultural sensitivity: engagement in interaction, respect for cultural differences, trust, enjoyment and attention in the interaction (Chen & Starosta, 2000). They are developed below.

- Commitment to interaction: reflects a person's willingness to actively participate in exchanges with individuals from different cultures and backgrounds. This commitment implies an open and proactive attitude, fundamental to build bridges of mutual understanding in intercultural environment.

- Respect for cultural differences: highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing the cultural diversities without negative or pejorative judgements. This translates into a genuine appreciation for different perspectives, traditions and values, fostering and inclusive environment where all people feel valued.

- Confidence with the interaction: refers to the security with which a person handles and manages situations of intercultural communication. The confidence reduces the anxiety and increases the effectiveness of social interactions, allowing people to feel comfortable facing misunderstandings or cultural differences. This is relevant to maintaining open and constructive communications at school.

- Enjoyment in the interaction: reflects the pleasure and satisfaction a person experiences when interacting with individuals from other cultures. This implies a positive attitude to the intercultural experiences, being these interactions an opportunity for understanding the other, learning and personal growth.

- Attention to the interaction: refers to a person's ability to be fully present and focused during communicative interaction. These factors demand a careful attention to the

verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication, ensuring an appropriate and culturally sensitive response. Attention in interaction is crucial to grasps the implicit meanings and ensure effective and respectful communication in different contexts. This perspective seeks to facilitate a more positive interaction and harmonious coexistence between people of different nationalities (Ramírez-Pavelic & Contreras-Salinas, 2022; Kim & Connelly, 2019), being key to deepen the representations and expectations through the work developed together with the faculty in this research.

## 2.2. Teachers' representations in intercultural terms

In the context of the growing cultural diversity that emerging in Chilean classrooms, the teachers' representation plays a significant role in the setting of inclusive school environment (Campos-Bustos, 2022). As a concept, it refers to the set of teachers' perceptions built around cultural diversity in the classrooms. This type of subjectivity includes how students' cultural differences are interpreted and valued, as well as the expectations elaborated regarding their academic success. Such representations influence directly in pedagogical practices and in the creation of inclusive educational environments.

This type of perception is influenced by a variety of factors, including one's own personal and professional experiences, as well as the socioeconomical and cultural contexts of schools. Indeed, Segovia and Rendón (2020) postulate that perception about cultural diversity can range from acceptance to resistance and rejection. In this sense, understanding teachers' representations allows access "not only to the way in which community systematizes and interprets reality, but also to observe whether these forms are positive or negative, and whether they promote a fair social coexistence or not" (Campos-Bustos, 2022, p. 6).

In this regard, studies conducted both in different regions of Chile (Contreras-Bravo, 2021; Flanagan-Bórquez et al., 2021; Gaete, 2019) and in international contexts (Etxeberria et al., 2018; Ünsal & Atanur-Baskan, 2021) report a set of obstacles and difficulties related to teachers in the insertion of immigrant students in schools. Between them, language barrier is mentioned (Toledo-Vega et al., 2024), as it makes teaching complex as well as the educational integration of immigrant who does not speak the local language. In addition, there are great challenges related to initial training and its lack of intercultural education, which later limits the way to effectively address the educational needs of NNA (Segovia & Rendón, 2020). These difficulties can generate stress and frustration among the teachers, negatively affecting the quality of teaching and the well-being of their students.

On the other hand, research that addressed the barriers of migrant students in the Chilean school context (Díaz-Pacheco et al., 2024; Jiménez-Vargas, 2022) show that teacher play a key protective role in school inclusion and in the optimal development of student's educational, highlighting the possibility of enriching the teaching-learning process through the integration of multiple cultural perspectives. Other factors of inclusion consist of the existence of intercultural educational policies, institutional reception mechanisms, educational support programs and the commitment of the school community as a whole. (Jiménez-Vargas, 2022). In this sense, collaboration between education professionals, students and their families enhance the creation of more inclusive educational environments (Etxeberria et al., 2018).

In terms of opportunities, the presence of immigrant students could strengthen the develop of citizenship competencies in schools, promoting values such as tolerance, respect and empathy. The migratory impact is valued as an opportunity to innovate in pedagogical practices, adopting strategies that benefit the teaching-learning process, healthy coexistence and inclusion in educational communities (Manghi et al., 2022).

## 2.3. The role of teaching expectations in educational transitions

The admission of immigrant students into Chilean public schools has increased considerably in the last years, challenging teachers to adapt and respond appropriately to their needs and demands. In this sense, teachers' expectations play a crucial role in educational success of immigrant students. Precisely, "in Chile there are few studies focused

on determining which variables affect the formation of such expectations, especially those that consider the students' previous performance and teacher's work experience as explanatory factors" (Barriga et al., 2024, p. 359). In relation to the above, Ayala (2022) explains in one of her studies that immigrant students whose teachers had high expectations showed better academic performance and greater motivation to learn. This relationship is crucial since high expectations can influence the overcoming of academic, cultural and linguistic barriers that many immigrant students face when integrating into a reception educational system. In this regard, research conducted in the Ecuadorian context by Cabrera-León et al. (2019) shows that students immersed in environment where teaching staff manifests high expectations tend to show greater self-efficacy and resilience, a factor that has a positive impact on school success.

Thus, high teacher expectations would ask as protective factors that would facilitate the educational success of immigrant students. Seen this way, when a teacher configures high expectations about his/her student's learning, they will tend to show better academic performance. On the contrary, when low expectations are built on the achievement of their students, they will tend to achieve lower performance and learning (Flanagan-Bórquez, 2021).

In view of the above, it is postulated that teachers' expectations are determinant for migrant NNA to develop successful educational transitions. This type of social representations would not only promote better academic performance, but would also function as facilitator of inclusion of the optimal development of the educational cycle (Venegas, 2020; Verdejo, 2019), strengthening students to face future academic and professional challenges (Rodríguez-Esteban & González-Mayorga, 2023) such as entry into higher education and the world of work. It is essential, then, that the educational system strengthens the development of high expectations and inclusive intercultural practices, recognizing the value of diversity in educational communities.

In context of cultural diversity such as the one investigated, great challenges are faced at work with immigrant students, between them the lack of teacher training in intercultural education (Kim & Connelly, 2019). In this sense, based on studies conducted in Valparaíso and Santiago by Flanagan-Bórquez et al. (2021) and Pavez-Soto et al. (2023), it is recognized that many educational communities in Chile do not have methodologies, didactic resources or technical-pedagogical guidelines that enhance the effective inclusion of the migrant population, beyond the personal will of managements or teaching teams. In response to this, the implementation of training and continuous professional development programs could contribute to the achievement of the intercultural education that enhances the formation of high educational expectations, as much as the acquisition of intercultural pedagogical strategies that promote the inclusion and management of diversity in the school.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants

The sample of participants is made up of 102 teachers (w = 67, m = 35) who reports an average of 11.5 years of professional experience and work in 3 public high schools with immigrant students (2 technical-professional and 1 scientific- humanist) in Valparaíso Region, Chile. Together, 40 teachers indicated that they teach at the primary level and 62 at the secondary level. In addition, they reported working or having work (in decreasing order) with students from countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador and Bolivia. For its realization, this investigation was approved by the respective bioethics commission and the corresponding informed consents were signed for participation.

### 3.2. Design and approach

This study uses a cross-sectional mixed research design (Bagur-Pons et al., 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2023) through which intercultural representation and expectation of teachers regarding the inclusion of immigrant students in Chilean public schools are analyzed. The

combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches responds to the need to identify statistical patterns as well as to explore the experiences and subjectivities of teachers regarding the intercultural emergence in educational spaces. Through the application of intercultural sensitivity scale, the degree of affection of teachers towards diversity was characterized, in this particular case, about immigrant student group. In addition, narrative discussions were held which offered a deeper and more contextual vision of the educational phenomenon, in which barriers, opportunities and expectations related to cultural diversity in schools were explored (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). Through a convergent design (Bagur-Pons et al., 2021), the procedures are integrated from both approaches to offer an enriching interpretation of investigated problematic, connecting statistical with subjectivities and social perceptions.

### 3.3. Data collection

### 3.3.1. Intercultural sensitivity scale

The quantitative work consisted of the application of the intercultural sensitivity scale developed by Chen and Starosta (2000). The Spanish translation of the instrument was validated by 3 English-speaking researchers and 3 translators. The instrument was then adapted to the context of migration. Thus, in paper format, the instrument was applied to teachers in 3 Chilean public schools. This scale is composed of 24 statements distributed in 5 dimensions (Table 1). Of the total, 15 statements have a positive meaning and 9 have a negative meaning. For the statements formulated in a positive sense, the highest score was given to the favorable option and the lowest to the least favorable. For those formulated in a negative sense, the most favorable option was assigned the lowest score and the least favorable option the highest. Regarding reliability, it should be noted that the internal consistency of the 24 items of the scale is high, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ($\alpha$) of .719. In this regard, Romo-Sabugal et al. (2021) establish a high acceptance range between .61. and.88.

TABLE 1. Instrument dimensions and assessments.

| Dimension | Positive assessment | Negative assessment |
|---|---|---|
| Commitment to interaction | 1, 11, 13, 21, 23 and 24 | 22 |
| Respect for cultural differences | 8 and 16 | 2, 7, 18 and 20 |
| Confidence in interaction | 3, 5, 6 and 10 | 4 |
| Enjoyment in interaction | | 9, 12 and 15 |
| Attention in interaction | 14, 17 and 19 | |

As the assessment given to the statements, an odd scale (Liker type) of 5 grades was included, which were scored from lowest to highest for the purpose of analyzing the results. Once the survey was completed, discussions were held with the teachers.

### 3.3.2. Discussions

Three discussions were held with de teachers of the 3 participating schools, with the objective of deepening the educational narratives and broadening the understanding of their perceptions on the inclusion of immigrant students (Bravo-Villa et al., 2022; Navarrete-Mora et

al., 2024). These spaces for dialogue were designed as reflective and participatory instances, where they could share their experiences in an atmosphere of trust, thus favoring a more detailed explorations of their representations and pedagogical practices in contexts of cultural diversity. For that purpose, a script of questions was prepared to guide the exchange of ideas, covering key aspects as the barriers perceived in the teaching of immigrant students, the opportunities that diversity brings to the school environment and academical-professional expectations they project to their students.

Throughout the sessions, the emerged stories highlighted both everyday challenges, such as language difficulties, differences in learning levels and the need to adapt pedagogical strategies, as well as the positive assessments of migration and its potential to enrich the educational practices. These sessions were audio recorded, which made it possible to record the richness of the stories in a rigorous manner. This process not only facilitates the data transcription, but also codified and identified discursive patterns in the way teachers conceptualized the inclusion of immigrant students in the Chilean educational system.

## 4. Data analysis

First, the result of the scale was coded according to their real value based on the responses obtained. Then, a reverse coding was applied to the negative item (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Data processing was carried out using the SPSS statistical program (version 30.0.0) and the analysis techniques were mainly descriptive statistics of central tendency (mean) dispersion (standard deviation) and calculation of the frequencies and percentages. For sample distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was applied. It shows that *intercultural sensitivity* variable follows a normal distribution, since the *p*-value is greater than alpha ($p = .161 > .05$) based on the use of parametric tests. The student's *t*-test for independent samples indicated that there are no statistically significant gender differences in the sample, nor in the type of educational institution in which the participants work (technical-professional or scientific-humanist).

Second, for the analysis of the textual data of the discussions, the recordings were transcribed into a textual corpus which was coded using Atlas Ti software (version 8.4.5). thus, data were analyzed according to the central themes addressed: the barriers and opportunities posed by immigration in the school environment and the academic-professional expectations of teachers about immigrant students. After the thematic content analysis (Contreras-Bravo, 2021), the information was triangulated with the results obtained both in the scale applied and, in the discussions, allowing the quantitative data to be contrasted with the qualitative data. Thus, the speech registered were selected, which allowed to deepen the dimension of the applied scale and provided an enriched approach on the perceptions and expectations of teachers regarding migration in the Chilean school context.

## 5. Results

The following section presents the results of the analysis of the five dimensions that make up intercultural sensitivity. Each dimension is presented with tables illustrating the percentages of responses obtained for the specific items of each factor, which allows visualizing trends and variations in the degrees of sensitivity.

Besides of the quantitative results, qualitative results are included, expressed in the speech record produced in the discussions, which provide research inputs that enrich, deepen and contextualize the findings obtained, thus revealing nuances and subjective experiences complementary to the statistical data.

### 5.1. Commitment to interaction

Regarding the commitment to interaction (Table 2), 94.1% of the faculty expressed "enjoyment in interacting with students from different countries".

TABLE 2. Descriptives "commitment to interaction".

| ITEM | M | SD | TD | D | I | A | TA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I enjoy interacting with students from different countries. | 4.7 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 5.9 | **19.6** | **74.5** |
| 11. I tend to wait before forming an impression of students from other countries. | 4.4 | 1.0 | 3.9 | 2.0 | 3.9 | 28.4 | 61.8 |
| 13. I am open-minded with students coming from other countries. | 4.7 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.0 | **30.4** | **67.6** |
| 21. I tend to give positive feedback to my students from other countries during our interaction. | 4.3 | 0.9 | 2.0 | 1,0 | 11.8 | 33.3 | 52.0 |
| 22. I avoid situations where I have to deal with students from other countries. | 4.8 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 1.0 | **11.8** | **86.3** |
| 23. I often express my understanding to my students from other countries through verbal and non-verbal cues. | 3.8 | 1.2 | 6.9 | 5.9 | 16.7 | 38.2 | 32.4 |
| 24. I have feelings of enjoyment and appreciation for the cultural differences of my students from other countries. | 4.4 | 0.9 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 13.7 | 21.6 | 60.8 |

Note: TD: totally disagree; D: disagree; I: indecisive; A: agree; TA: totally agree.

Likewise, 98% of the sample declared themselves to be "open-minded" when interacting with foreign students and 98.1% objected to the "statement I avoid situations in which I have to deal with students from other countries". In line with these findings, we were told in the discussions about the opportunities that the arrival of immigrant students in Chilean schools implies for the future:

> I see the future as a great opportunity for Chilean children to learn from other cultures by making friends with children and adolescents of the same age with cultures rich in meaning. Likewise, we and the institutions should take responsibility for the guidelines and practices we develop to achieve an education that integrates immigrants. (Tech.History.20)[i]

## 5.2. Respect for cultural differences

According to the frequency distribution (Table 3), most of the participants state that they respect both the values and the different ways of behaving of the foreign students.

TABLE 3. Descriptives "respect for cultural differences".

| ITEM | M | SD | TD | D | I | A | TA |
|------|---|----|----|---|---|---|----|
| 2. I believe that students from other countries are closed minded. | 4.2 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 8.8 | 14.7 | 26.5 | 50.0 |
| 7. I don't like being in the classroom with students from other countries. | 4.9 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | **6.9** | **92.2** |
| 8. I respect the values of students from other countries. | 4.8 | 0.6 | 2.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 15.7 | 82.4 |
| 16. I respect the diverse ways of behaving of students from other countries. | 4.4 | 0.9 | 2.0 | 1.0 | 10.8 | 31.4 | 54.9 |
| 18. I would not accept the different opinions of students from other countries. | 4.7 | 0.9 | 3.9 | 0.0 | 2.0 | **14.7** | **79.4** |
| 20. I think my culture is better than other cultures. | 4.5 | 1.0 | 4.9 | 2.0 | 3.9 | **14.7** | **74.5** |

Note: TD: totally disagree; D: disagree; I: indecisive; A: agree; TA: totally agree.

As can be seen, a large percentage of the sample (99.1%) disagrees with the statement "I do not like being in the classroom with students from other countries". Similar are the values of disagreement with statements such as "I would not accept the opinions of students from other countries" (94.1%) and "I think my culture is better than other cultures" (89.2%). In line with these results, one of the participating teachers commented:

> I see migration as a great opportunity for Chilean students and for us as well. With time we will be forced to learn to respect and understand the other, what their cultural characteristics are, to understand that many things that for us are very normal and every day, for others are completely different. (Philo.ScientHum.5)

## 5.3. Confidence in interaction

The results in this dimension reveal a high degree of confidence in interacting with immigrant students (Table 4). The vast majority of the teachers surveyed feel confident and capable of handling intercultural interactions in their educational context. For example, on the item "I can be very sociable when interacting with students coming from other countries", 94.2% report high sensitivity, with a mean of 4.6 and a standard deviation of.6. This reflects a positive tendency towards sociability in culturally diverse environments, demonstrating security and comfort of the faculty when interacting with students of different nationalities.

T<sub>ABLE</sub> 4. Descriptives "confidence in interaction".

| ITEM | M | SD | TD | D | I | A | TA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. I feel confident when interacting with students from different countries. | 4.7 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.9 | 18.6 | 77.5 |
| 4. I feel it is very difficult for me to speak in front of students from other countries. | 4.6 | 0.8 | 2.9 | 0.0 | 2.9 | 25.5 | 68.6 |
| 5. I always know what to say when interacting with students from other countries. | 4.0 | **1.0** | 2.9 | 6.9 | **9.8** | **46.1** | 34.3 |
| 6. I can be very sociable when interacting with students coming from other countries. | **4.6** | **0.6** | 0.0 | 1.0 | 4.9 | **27.5** | **66.7** |
| 10. I feel confident when interacting with students from other countries. | 4.7 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 3.9 | 22.5 | 72.5 |

Note: TD: totally disagree; D: disagree; I: indecisive; A: agree; TA: totally agree.

However, in the item "I always know what to say when interacting with students from other countries", it is observed that 46.1% agree with the statement, with a standard deviation of 1.0, and 9.8% of the sample is undecided. This suggests that, although in general they show confidence in intercultural interaction, there are those who also face difficulties when interacting with students with these characteristics (Campos-Bustos, 2022).

The above is related to various investigations (Ayala, 2022; Toledo-Vega et al., 2024) that report certain obstacles that teachers identify in their work with foreign students, among them, the difficulty in handling the local language of non-Spanish-speaking students and the low level of learning in mathematics. In line with the above, one of the participants reflects on these difficulties:

> The learning issue is a problem, and in some cases also the language. The low level of learning that some bring from their countries of origin has an impact and, in addition, arriving at an educational establishment in a discontinuous manner, uff. Because it is not that they arrive and have continued studying in a sustained way, some have been one or two years without attending school. So, of course, that's when discouragement sets in. (Biol.Tech.12)

### 5.4. Enjoyment in interaction

In this case, a predominantly positive attitude of teachers towards interaction with immigrant students is reflected (Table 5). The item "I get uncomfortable easily when interacting with students from other countries" indicates that 95.1% of the sample rejects this statement, suggesting that most do not experience discomfort in such interactions. In other cases, they express similar opinions, showing disagreement with certain statements. Precisely, in the item "I often get discouraged when I am with students from other countries", 96.1% express disagreement, with a mean of 4.8. This shows that the majority not only do not get discouraged, but find these interactions satisfying and motivating. The low dispersion of responses (standard deviation of .7) reinforces the consistency of this trend.

TABLE 5. Descriptives "enjoyment in interaction".

| ITEM | M | SD | TD | D | I | A | TA |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| 9. I get uncomfortable easily when interacting with students coming from other countries. | 4.7 | 0.9 | 4.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 | **11.8** | **83.3** |
| 12. I often get discouraged when I am with students from other countries. | **4.8** | **0.7** | 2.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | **9.8** | 86.3 |
| 15. I often feel incompetent when interacting with students coming from other countries. | 4.6 | 0.9 | 2.0 | 3.9 | 3.9 | **14.7** | **75.5** |

Note: TD: totally disagree; D: disagree; I: indecisive; A: agree; TA: totally agree.

Similarly, about the statement, "I often feel incompetent when interacting with students from other countries", 75.5% do not feel incompetent in these situations. Although a small percentage (14.7%) showed lower responses, the data show that enjoyment and feeling competent are dominant characteristics when interacting with students from different cultures (Tovar-Correal et al., 2024). In this regard, we are told in the group activity:

> I like Chilean students can interact with foreigners in the classroom, that they can get to know other cultures, other customs, other cuisine. I also like that they can share their different way of being and thinking with each other. (Art.Scient-Hum.12)

## 5.5. Attention in interaction

In this case, a moderate to high level of attention is observed when interacting with immigrant students (Table 6), highlighting that a large percentage makes an effort to better understand their immigrant students, which suggests an active and empathetic disposition to improve intercultural communication. On the item "I am very observant when interacting with students from other countries", 33.3% of the sample was in the highest agreement category, and 38.2% in agreement, with a mean of 3.9.

However, the standard deviation of 1.0 suggests that there is some dispersion in the responses, indicating that not all faculty share the same level of observation. This implies that, although a large majority express positive levels of attention, there is also some variability, with some being farther from the mean in terms of observation and others reporting lower levels of attention in the interaction.

TABLE 7. Descriptives "attention in interaction".

| ITEM | M | SD | TD | D | I | A | TA |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| 14. I am very observant when interacting with students from other countries. | **3.9** | **1.0** | 2.0 | 7.8 | 18.6 | **38.2** | **33.3** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. I try to obtain as much information as possible when I have to interact with students from other countries. | 4.1 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 5.9 | 14.7 | 42.2 | 36.3 |
| 19. I am sensitive to the culture and meanings of students from other countries. | **4.1** | 1.1 | 4.9 | 3.9 | 10.8 | 36.3 | **44.1** |

Note: TD: totally disagree; D: disagree; I: indecisive; A: agree; TA: totally agree.

In relation to the statement "I am sensitive to the culture and meanings of students from other countries", 44.1% placed themselves in the highest category of agreement, with an average of 4.1. This reflects that almost half perceive themselves as highly sensitive to the cultural aspects of students from other nationalities, which is linked to various studies (Ayala, 2022; Flanagan-Bórquez et al., 2021) that report on teachers' commitment to fostering respect for cultural diversity. This is evident in the teachers' reflections:

> My expectations for immigrants are the same as for all my students. I don't differentiate between them. Some want to go to university and will probably achieve that. Others want to enter the workforce directly. As a technical school, we will help them enter the workforce. And yes, I have high expectations for everyone. (Math.Tech. 4)

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The intercultural representations of teachers in this study reflect a predominantly inclusive orientation and a positive attitude toward cultural diversity in the classroom. The presence of immigrant students is valued as an opportunity to enrich the school environment, strengthen intercultural sensitivity, and foster mutual respect (Chen & Starosta, 1997, 2000). However, challenges also emerge related to confidence in interaction, especially in areas such as language barriers and differences in student learning, which could end up generating uncertainty among teachers (Toledo-Vega et al., 2024; Ünsal & Atanur-Baskan, 2021). Despite these difficulties, teachers express a proactive attitude and a high sense of self-efficacy in their ability to manage diversity in the classroom. In terms of academic and professional expectations, high aspirations are identified regarding the educational continuity of immigrant students, linked to an equitable conception of opportunities for access to higher education and the world of work. This finding is relevant, given that the literature suggests that high teacher expectations directly influence students' educational trajectories, impacting their academic performance and academic and professional projections (Cabrera-León et al., 2019; Barriga et al., 2024; Verdejo, 2019). However, questions remain about how these expectations translate into concrete practices of accompaniment in the vocational guidance processes and support in the educational transitions of this group of non-traditional students.

In line with the research objectives and questions, the findings identify both obstacles and protective factors in the inclusion of immigrant students in Chilean schools (Díaz-Pacheco et al., 2024). Studies conducted in Valparaíso, Santiago, and other regions of Chile (Baeza, 2023; Contreras-Bravo, 2021; Flanagan-Bórquez et al., 2021; Pavez-Soto et al., 2023) warn that, although teachers generally have a receptive attitude toward diversity, challenges remain related to pedagogical adaptation, intercultural training, and the need to develop teaching strategies that promote equity in learning processes. This is key to ensuring effective inclusion, in which cultural differences are considered an educational resource rather than a barrier. In view of this, it is important to strengthen ongoing training in Intercultural sensitivity in order to provide teachers with the tools they need to manage diversity in the classroom effectively.

At the methodological level, the mixed approach adopted has allowed for a comprehensive approach to teachers' intercultural representations and expectations, combining the

interpretive richness of qualitative analysis with the robustness of quantitative analysis (Bagur-Pons et al., 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Its potential for international transfer lies in the possibility of replicating this design in other contexts of intercultural emergency, adapting it to different territorial and educational realities. In this sense, the study not only provides knowledge about the Chilean reality, but also offers methodological tools that can be applied in other countries with similar migratory dynamics.

Among the limitations, it is recognized that the sample, which is intentional and restricted to a specific region, limits the generalization of the results. Likewise, the research does not address variables such as socioeconomic status, gender, curriculum, or teacher training in intercultural competencies, aspects that could influence their representations and expectations. For future research, it is recommended to include these variables, expand the study to other regions of the country, and incorporate a comparative study to contrast these findings with other geographical areas. It would also be relevant to evaluate the impact of continuing education programs on intercultural sensitivity and teaching practices in order to strengthen inclusion in schools (Manghi et al., 2022).

Finally, the results of this study could contribute as a relevant input for the design of more inclusive public policies and culturally sensitive educational practices. The growing emergence of immigrant students in Chilean classrooms requires rethinking reception mechanisms and teaching strategies, ensuring that diversity is promoted as a core value. In this sense, it is essential that educational centers adopt intercultural approaches that not only meet the needs of immigrant students but also foster the development of intercultural communication skills (Aksin, 2023; Tovar-Correal et al., 2024) among all students, teachers, and education workers. In this way, the promotion of intercultural, anti-racist, and more humanized education (Aldayuz-Henríquez, 2023) could actively contribute to the construction of more cohesive societies that are respectful of diversity.

## Notes

[i] Teacher's discipline - type of educational institution - years of professional experience.

## Authors' contributions

**César Díaz-Pacheco:** Conceptualization; Data curation; Fund acquisition; Methodology; Project management; Research; Resources; Software; Supervision; Visualization; Writing (original draft); Writing (review and editing).

**Claudio Vergara-Reyes:** Data curation; Methodology; Software; Validation; Visualization; Writing (original draft); Writing (review and editing).

**María Leonor Conejeros-Solar:** Fund acquisition; Resources; Supervision; Writing (review and editing).

## Artificial intelligence (AI) policy

We declare that artificial intelligence (AI) was used for the purposes of editing and final correction of the manuscript.

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