



Analysis of intercultural competencies in pre-service teacher education syllabus in Spain

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Intercultural Competence
Pre-service Teachers
Syllabus
Teaching profession
University degrees

ABSTRACT

Background: The proportion of immigrant pupils has been increasing in recent years and will continue to do so owing to the aging of the population and the increase in migration. This poses a challenge for teachers as there is little evidence of teacher training in Intercultural Competence (IC).

Aims: This study determined Spanish pre-service teachers' perceptions about the training they received in IC and their interest in receiving it. It also analyses the presence of IC (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) in the objectives of the syllabi of the courses of the degrees that qualify for the teaching profession in Spain.

Methods: A validated survey was used to obtain teacher profiles and information on IC training. A rubric was designed to collect information on the objectives proposed by the subjects of the degrees that qualify future teachers in Spain. A total of 224 pre-service teachers were surveyed, and 185 university degrees qualified for the teaching profession were analysed. Specifically, 226 participants had syllabi.

Results: Pre-service teachers in Spain acknowledged that they did not feel interculturally competent. However, they were interested in the training. The analysis of the curricula (bachelor's and master's) confirmed areas of improvement in the knowledge, attitudes, and skills dimensions of IC.

Conclusion: This study reveals a gap in university education in Spain, which is unable to respond to the demands of an increasingly diverse society and prepare teachers to meet the challenges of intercultural classrooms.

1. Introduction

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), more than 281 million individuals are considered international migrants, representing approximately 3.6 % of the global population residing in a country other than their country of origin (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). The proportion of migrant pupils in Europe has been increasing in recent years, and this trend is expected to continue owing to the aging of the European population and increased migration (Schachner, 2019). According to Ministerio de Educación, Formación

Profesional y Deportes (2024), this figure amounts to approximately 1.066.875 foreign pupils in the year 2023–2024, representing an increase of 15 % since 2013.

In the field of education, the way systems and institutions respond to the challenges and opportunities presented in this scenario has important consequences for the economic and social well-being of all members of society, including immigrants themselves (Fiske, 1998). For this reason, numerous studies have delved into the challenges faced by migrant pupils in education, which in most cases are related to issues such as having to adapt to new rules and/or routines in schools,

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2025.101524>

language offers that are not adapted to the needs of pupils with a different mother tongue (Hamilton, 2013; Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014), a lack of social and emotional support, and teachers who are not trained to deal with diversity in the classroom (Trasberg & Kond, 2017).

1.1. Intercultural competencies of Spanish trainee teachers

Intercultural education, an educational approach that institutions should adopt to respond to the challenges of society today (migration, cultural diversity, etc.) and cater to the diversity of pupils in the classroom (Toscano-Cruz et al., 2020), focuses on preparing people for a multicultural and multilingual society, particularly in the context of phenomena such as migration (Kambarova, 2024).

Authors such as Ortega Ruiz and Romero Sánchez (2011) point out the need to develop educational proposals that promote a change in the intercultural education model, considering elements such as identity and its transformations experienced in classrooms by pupils from diverse cultures. Pupils' identities not only define their perception of the world but also act as a powerful driver of learning. Through this, learners interpret and understand the social context surrounding them, which in turn influences their attitudes and behaviours towards learning. In line with these studies, Altugan (2015) showed that the lived experiences and sociocultural conditions in which each pupil developed played a crucial role in their motivation to learn. Although diversity in the classroom offers the possibility of enriching the educational process and promoting the exchange of perspectives and intercultural understanding (Dervin et al., 2020), ethnic, racial, linguistic, social, religious, and economic differences among pupils can generate cultural disconnections that, in some cases, negatively affect their motivation to learn (Romijn et al., 2021).

That is why, authors such as Mikulec (2015) and Szczurek-Boruta (2018) argue that interculturalism has to involve all school and educational activities emphasising the role played by professionals working in the educational field, such as teachers and educators, as fundamental to promote "coexistence, dialogue and negotiation" (Szczurek-Boruta, 2018, p. 2) between members of different groups.

Research that has further explored Intercultural Competence (IC) in teachers (Huang et al., 2023; Papadopoulou et al., 2022) defines it as the ability to understand, respect, and communicate with people from different cultures (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2017). The acquisition of IC would enable teachers to create inclusive classrooms in which all learners feel valued and supported in reaching their full potential. However, to ensure the acquisition of these competencies, it is necessary to approach their learning as an ongoing process that requires significant commitment from educational authorities, as well as from training institutions and teachers themselves (Arnesen, 2010).

In this context, teacher training and teachers' willingness to learn and develop IC (Martín-Gutiérrez et al., 2024) are key elements in promoting effective intercultural education. Studies such as Tualaulelei and Halse (2021) have pointed out the need for teacher education programs to incorporate in-depth reflections on educators' values, attitudes, and beliefs, addressing both implicit and explicit biases (Lamb, 2020). Similarly, intercultural agendas, policies, and research must recognise that teachers' professional identities influence not only their practices but also the ways in which they interpret educational policies and construct images of the surrounding context. To this end, aspects such as teachers' emotions, job satisfaction, professional commitment, autonomy, and professional confidence are necessary for interpreting intercultural policies and implementing them in the classroom (Karousiou et al., 2019).

Authors such as Martorana et al. (2021) have emphasised some of the dimensions of IC, such as the affective dimension (the ability to tolerate ambiguity and diversity) or the communicative dimension (the ability to communicate freely), which should be worked on in the classroom to promote appropriate intercultural exchanges between subjects from different historical and geographical contexts. The concept of IC from a

communicative perspective is considered particularly relevant when examining and assessing educational principles and objectives from different contexts, avoiding the reproduction of Westernist logic (Dai & Feng, 2025; Nemouchi & Byram, 2025).

Furthermore, Deardorff (2006) identified several areas in which teachers should work during their initial in-service training to develop IC. These areas include knowledge and understanding of aspects, such as cultural self-awareness, a deep understanding of both one's own and other cultures, and the development of sociolinguistic awareness.

This preparation would enable teachers to adapt various teaching resources to different cultural contexts, thereby promoting interactive learning and discursive lessons. In addition, teachers need to acquire skills such as listening, observing, interpreting, analysing, evaluating, and relating the aspects of cultural diversity to pedagogical issues. This will help them develop the attitudes needed to work in an intercultural classroom and foster values such as respect (valuing other cultures and cultural diversity), openness (towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures, without judgement), and curiosity and discovery (tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty) (Deardorff, 2009). Competencies will contribute to transmitting values of peace, coexistence, and non-violence, as well as raising teachers' awareness of pupils' cultural identities, thus enhancing their educational achievements.

Intercultural competence refers to an individual's ability to interact effectively and appropriately in diverse cultural contexts. This competence is based on the integration of three essential dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Savicki, 2008; Deardorff, 2023). Knowledge of intercultural competence refers to a deep understanding of one's own and others' cultural values, beliefs, norms, and practices. It is not only about accumulating information about other cultures but also about understanding their meanings and how they influence communication and interaction. Likewise, skills involve the ability to interpret and evaluate cultural information, adapt to new environments, and resolve conflicts that may arise in intercultural interactions. A clear example is the ability to reformulate a message to avoid linguistic or cultural misunderstandings and adapt the discourse to the interlocutor's norms of politeness. Finally, attitudes play a crucial role in intercultural competence as they include openness, respect, and willingness to learn from other cultures. Intercultural competence implies not only tolerance but also genuine curiosity to understand different perspectives without imposing one's own values on others. A person with an interculturally competent attitude approaches differences from a learning mindset and critical self-awareness, avoiding falling into cultural superiority (Goldstein, 2022).

Furthermore, there is a need for the syllabus objectives of subjects to reflect IC. It is not simply a matter of knowing facts about other cultures nor of passively coexisting with people of different origins. Its development requires the active integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in daily interaction.

1.2. Intercultural competencies in teacher training in Spain

According to the PISA Report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in the academic year 2021–2022 882,814 international pupils were enrolled in the non-university education system, representing 11 % of the total pupil body (Mahía & Medina, 2022). The majority of international pupils in Spain are in preschool (10.4 %), Primary Education (12.3 %), and Compulsory Secondary Education (9.8 %). However, their presence in the Baccalaureate is lower (6.7 %) despite the fact that the proportion of migrants in the corresponding age group is higher. Of the 988,781 international pupils enrolled in the academic year 2022/23, most were distributed in the Balearic Islands (17.6 %), Catalonia (15.7 %), Valencia (15.5 %), Aragon (15.1 %), Murcia (15.1 %), La Rioja (14.1 %), and Madrid (13.3 %) (Eurydice Spain-REDIE, 2023).

In response, the Spanish government implemented various measures to facilitate the integration of international pupils into the education

system, such as the creation of linguistic and cultural support programs and diverse teacher training (Alpınar, Unaldi, 2014). However, despite the efforts made, migrant pupils in Spain, relative to Spanish pupils, still face many challenges, such as low academic performance in science and mathematics, high dropout rates and difficulty in accessing higher education (Cebrián et al., 2019). It is estimated that by 2021, the dropout rate among migrant secondary school pupils will be 22.5 %, whereas that of Spanish pupils will be 16.8 % (Mahía & Medina, 2022).

Despite this situation, the 2018 edition of the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS, 2018) report found that only 35 % of teachers in Spain felt prepared to address cultural diversity in the classroom. Teachers with more experience and training in intercultural education tended to feel more prepared to address cultural diversity. However, language barriers and lack of educational resources have been identified as some of the main challenges in intercultural teaching (Beutel & Tangen, 2018; Fiani et al., 2022).

From all that has been described thus far, we have seen how the curricula of the degrees that allow access to teaching in compulsory stages in the country (Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Secondary Education Teaching) play a fundamental role in pre-service teachers. For this reason, these plans must be designed to guarantee inclusive education and meet the needs of all pupils, regardless of their origin, culture, or personal characteristics. Today's classrooms are increasingly diverse, with pupils from different cultures and backgrounds, which is why teaching competencies must go beyond mere mastery of skills but integrate theoretical, practical, and experiential knowledge. IC must be understood as a synthesis of intercultural knowledge, practices, attitudes, and values (Pareja de Vicente et al., 2019).

Teacher training in Spain on interculturality has been absent from the general approaches to didactic training within teacher training programs (Pareja de Vicente et al., 2019). Therefore, it is proposed that training in this competence should be integrated into the curriculum of teacher preparation, thus ensuring accessibility for teachers (Fielding et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies such as that of Nolan et al. (2024) argue that it is essential to adopt a comprehensive intercultural approach throughout the education system, avoiding isolated measures or sporadic professional development initiatives, since in many cases, teachers do not have the necessary time for further training (Vaillant, 2024). This perspective is supported by the studies of Aliksiichuk et al. (2024) and Pedraja and Tovar (2024), who highlighted the effectiveness of including IC in the initial teacher training curriculum. Although both initial and in-service training programs have limitations in effectively addressing these needs, in-service training in intercultural competencies tends to be brief, optional, and with a reduced course load.

Both initial and in-service training often lack sufficient practical application, making it difficult to transfer the acquired knowledge to the reality of the classroom. Likewise, aspects such as "the procedural and/or methodological training dimension, that which has to do with the whole set of skills, abilities and capacities of a practical nature to coherently translate the principles of intercultural education into the daily life of intercultural classrooms and schools" (Olivencia, 2012, p. 12) in the field of teacher training, take on special relevance. In fact, although the training strategies used in training programs in Spain, such as active participation or the exchange of experiences, encourage dialogue and individual reflection, there is a lack of collaborative work between teachers and other professionals in developing IC. Furthermore, although training in intercultural techniques and methodologies is relevant, it must be accompanied by a thorough review of teachers' beliefs about their pupils and encouragement to overcome ethnocentrism and sociocentrism (Coelho et al., 2011).

Aguado et al. (2008) indicated that the mere transmission of knowledge and skills, without critical reflection on one's own conceptions, would be insufficient for effective intercultural training. It is necessary to consider the specific educational needs of each educational context and to promote a critical intercultural approach that enables

teachers to deal effectively with the complexities of cultural diversity in the classroom (Berry & Hou, 2021). This would increase teachers' willingness to learn about new cultures and face the challenges this implies in the classroom (Sigindioy, 2024) and avoid feeling insecure and unsupported when dealing with diversity in the classroom (Erlich & Gindi, 2022).

From what has been described so far, although there has been a considerable amount of research on teachers' IC and their preparedness to perform in intercultural settings, very little research has been done on their perceptions of their competence and preparedness. Furthermore, there is a need for the objectives of the syllabus of the subjects of the degrees to reflect IC. It is necessary to train pre-service teachers in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to manage intercultural classrooms (Gay, 2018).

2. Method and analysis

2.1. Objectives and hypothesis

This study proposes the following objectives:

- Objective 1 (O1). To determine the perceptions of Spanish pre-service teachers regarding the training they received in IC and their interest in receiving it.
- Objective 2 (O2). To analyse the presence of IC (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) in the objectives of the syllabus of the subjects of the degrees that qualify the teaching profession in Spain.

The starting hypothesis was that pre-service teachers want to be trained in IC (TALIS, 2018). However, the qualifications that qualify teachers to practice the teaching profession in Spain—both initial qualifications (early childhood and primary education degrees) and specialisation degrees (Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching, MAES)—do not include IC among the purposes of the subjects.

Both the objective and hypotheses of this study are based on the following

- Baiutti et al. (2024), Bennett (2013), Calloway-Thomas et al. (2017), Fantini (2020) and Rommal, Byram (2017), and highlight the importance of intercultural communication and teachers' willingness to choose strategies that enable them to foster empathy in a global environment.
- Arasaratnam-Smith and Deardorff (2022), Deardorff (2023), Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) and Severiens et al. (2014) address the IC model, including knowledge, skills and abilities as essential components of IC.

2.2. Study design and sample

To contextualise this study, it is indicated that this manuscript is part of a research project that aims to analyse attitudes towards acculturation and cultural diversity in teachers at the compulsory education level in Spain". This research complies with the ethical appropriateness evaluation of the research (PI081/2022) by the Research Ethics Committee of the International from the International University of La Rioja (Spain).

To survey pre-service teachers (bachelor's and master's degrees), this study used a descriptive, non-probabilistic design with a convenience sample of 224 pre-service teachers (undergraduate degrees and qualifying master's routes). Given the total sample size $N = 224$, the study attains power = .80 ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed) to detect at least the following effect sizes: mean comparison, correlations between variables and associations in 2×2 tables. Overall, these thresholds indicate the study is adequately powered for small-to-moderate effects.

Invitations were channelled through academic coordinators of initial teacher education programs at several Spanish universities, who disseminated the survey link to their cohorts. Participation was

voluntary, online, and without randomisation; the specific university of each participant was not recorded; therefore, the sample should be considered a multi-university convenience sample that is not representative of Spanish pre-service teachers.

We compiled a register of licensure-qualifying programs in Spain (Early Childhood and Primary Education degrees, and the MAES) and invited their coordinators to circulate the questionnaire among their students (pre-service teachers). Data collection was online and anonymous. This approach mirrors the operational framework of the DiverProf project to achieve state-wide coverage with limited resources. Findings are not generalisable but provide a bounded snapshot of perceptions in similar contexts.

The general profile of the sample was characterised by teachers, mostly women (75 %), with an average age of 25 years. The profiles of the pre-service and in-service teachers are presented in Table 1.

If we want to analyse the presence of IC in the objectives proposed by the subjects of the degrees that qualify future teachers (O2), it is necessary to know the perception that pre-service teachers have of the needs in this area (O1). In our study, we consider future teachers (pre-service teachers) who take a Master's degree (MAES), because in Spain, it is a requirement to be able to teach at the Secondary Education stage. However, after completing the Infant and Primary Education degrees, teachers can work directly in the profession without the need to take a Master's degree. Therefore, the sample shown was considered.

Subsequently, based on the information published by the different Departments of Education and Trade Unions in Spain, via their institutional web pages, we extracted the qualifications for the practice of the non-university teaching profession in the country (degrees in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and qualifying postgraduate or master's degrees-MAES) from these universities. A total of 185 university degrees in the teaching profession (54 private and 131 public) were obtained. There are 60 degrees in Early Childhood Education, 60 degrees in Primary Education, and 65 degrees in postgraduate education or MAES.

For each degree, all subject syllabus were reviewed (average of 40 subjects per degree). Specifically, 226 subject's syllabus included intercultural competencies in their design. A total of 35.62 % were optional subjects, while the rest were compulsory, core, or basic subjects.

2.3. Instruments

Two instruments were used for the data collection. On one hand, a survey to answer O1, and on the other hand, a rubric to answer O2.

The survey consisted of three thematic blocks: a) sociodemographic and training profile; b) attitudes towards acculturation/stereotypes; and c) competencies, attitudes, and self-efficacy in intercultural education. Only the data on the teachers' profiles and the questions concerning

Table 1
The profile of pre-service teachers (survey).

Profile characteristics	Pre-service teachers
Are over 60 years old	2.2 %
You are between 50 and 59 years old	5.6 %
You are between 40 and 49 years old	10.6 %
You are between 30 and 39 years old	18.4 %
You are between 20 and 29 years old	63.1 %
Studying for a master's degree that qualifies him/her to teach	33.7 %
Studying or teaching in pre-school or early childhood education	27.2 %
Studying or teaching in primary school	38.5 %
Studying or teaching in Secondary Education	24.2 %
Studying or teaching in others (Music Ed., Physical Ed., Foreign Languages)	10.1 %
Less than 10 years	100 %

Source. Own elaboration

training in intercultural competencies and their desire to receive it were analysed from the questionnaire. A research survey was administered to 105 people who met the characteristics of the target sample. This pilot test was intended to explore the behaviour of the instrument in the studied sample. For the study presented here, sociodemographic data (Table 1) and a dimension that collected information on the perceptions of Spanish pre-service teacher training regarding the training they had received in IC and their interest in receiving it were considered.

The instrument was piloted and yielded $\alpha \geq .80$ internal consistency. It integrates previously validated scales adapted to the Spanish context. Face and content validity. Item construction/adaptation was grounded in established conceptual frameworks and expert judgement; piloting helped refine wording and comprehension. CFA models (WLSMV) showed good/acceptable fit: Self-efficacy (5 items) CFI= .972, TLI= .958, RMSEA= .046 [90 % CI.028–.063], SRMR= .034; $\lambda = .68-.86$; $R^2 = .46-.74$; $\omega = .91$; AVE= .59. Pro-Diversity (5 items) CFI= .986, TLI= .976, RMSEA= .032 [.014–.049], SRMR= .026; $\lambda = .72-.90$; $R^2 = .52-.81$; $\omega = .93$; AVE= .64. ISI (15 items; ISI_3,4,5,6,10,11,12 reversed) CFI= .934, TLI= .923, RMSEA= .055 [.048–.062], SRMR= .058; $\lambda = .45-.78$; $R^2 = .20-.61$; $\omega = .86$; AVE= .43. Overall, indices support structural validity in this sample.

To collect the curriculum data, a rubric was designed to facilitate the analysis of teaching qualifications. To this end, the categories of analysis previously used by authors such as (Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2022; Deardorff, 2023) were used to classify IC into three dimensions (Table 2): knowledge of other cultures and societies (KNOWLEDGE), attitudes of openness and willingness to relativise one's values and beliefs (ATTITUDES), and skills to interpret and relate events related to other cultures with a critical sense to evaluate one's own and other's cultural practices and products (SKILLS).

During the analysis, we carefully considered how individual objectives reflect the indicators in multiple categories. This nuanced approach allowed us to capture the multifaceted nature of intercultural competencies as they appear in the syllabus objectives for each subject.

Internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's α on 0–3 scores. For the 50-item matrix, overall α was .975. By dimension: Methodology & Assessment (IC), 22 items, $\alpha = .973$ ($n = 132$); Knowledge, 5 items, $\alpha = .940$ ($n = 136$); Objectives and Competences (IC), 30 items, $\alpha = .963$

Table 2
Variables related to IC considered in the study.

Variables	Indicators and operationalisation
KNOWLEDGE	The degree of presence of IC is measured in its knowledge dimensions by evaluating the degree of presence of the objectives on the basis of 4 dimensions, which are: a) recognition/allusion to the dimension of one's own culture or other cultures (traditions, values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, languages, religion and lifestyles); b) reference to educational policies related to attention to cultural diversity; c) reference to key concepts of human rights, identity and/or interculturality d) use and understanding of a second language (either reading or writing) or approach and interest in learning it.
ATTITUDES	The degree of presence of IC is measured in its attitudinal dimensions by assessing the degree of presence of the objectives based on three dimensions: a) critical and reflective awareness of one's values and prejudices; b) cognitive and affective flexibility to interact with culturally different people or groups; c) interest in and commitment to lifelong learning related to attention to diversity.
SKILLS	The degree of presence of IC is measured in its skills dimensions by assessing the degree of presence of the objectives based on four dimensions which are: (a) ability to detect and avoid cultural prejudices and stereotypes, exclusion and discrimination; (b) design, adapt and regulate learning spaces in contexts of diversity that address the unique educational needs of pupils, equity and respect for human rights; (c) cooperative teamwork with other professionals, members of the educational community and social actors; (d) communication skills, openness to dialogue, listening and empathy.

Source. Own elaboration.

($n = 131$). These figures indicate excellent reliability. The item matrix yielded $KMO = .912$ ($MSA = .682-.964$) and Bartlett $\chi^2(1225) = 8233.65$, $p < .001$, indicating sampling adequacy for EFA. Parallel analysis supported a three-factor solution. A maximum-likelihood EFA with oblimin rotation accounted for 60 % of variance. Using a 30 loading cut-off, Factor 1 retained 22 items (loadings.33-.97, $\alpha = .973$), Factor 2 5 items (loadings.62-.997, $\alpha = .940$), and Factor 3 30 items (loadings.31-.80, $\alpha = .963$), with 7 cross-loading items. Overall, findings support the rubric's internal-structure validity and reliability.

2.4. Data analysis

SPSS software was used to analyse the survey and data collected from the syllabus. The processing and analysis of the data is based on descriptive statistics: comparison of means, contingency tables, and findings are described through the detection of patterns of recurring themes and significant differences. For their presentation, graphs and tables are provided to facilitate their understanding.

The data collected from the syllabus of the degree subjects were analysed in the following two areas:

- Identification data: name, ownership, and autonomous community of the university; name of the degree analysed; degree associated with the degree (degree in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, MAES, etc.), year of recognition of the degree by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), number of subjects of the degree analysed, number of subjects identified with IC, name of the subjects analysed, type of subject and course, and term or semester in which it is taught.
- Intercultural competencies in the subjects: Evaluation from 0 to 3 (0: not contemplated, does not appear; 1: does not appear explicitly, but is deduced, although it does not appear as such, it is intuitive; 2: appears, but in an accessory way; 3: appears explicitly and is also substantial) of the dimensions of the IC (knowledge, attitudes, and skills) present in the objectives, contents, competences, methodology, and evaluation of the teaching guides or the syllabus of the subjects. This area also included a qualitative part.

3. Results

3.1. Perceptions of Spanish pre-service teachers training regarding the training they have received in IC and their interest in receiving it

From the analysis carried out in this study, 80.2 % of the total number of respondents (56.7 % of the whole sample) showed interest in training in IC, 14 % of the sample answered "No" directly, and 29.3 % did not answer the question. Of the pre-service teachers enrolled in early childhood and elementary education, 84.6 % were uninterested in intercultural training. Of these teachers, only 21.1 % had training in IC, 51.3 % had no training in this area, and 27.6 % did not answer this question.

Of this training (21.1 %), 8 % was received in undergraduate, 2.6 % postgraduate, 4.8 % other university courses, 4.8 % NGO or association, and 7.9 % "other" formal university training. Other training responses in these subjects were related to Social Networks, catechesis, in the street, in the Scouts, isolated subjects within a course, vocational training for employment, mediation courses, and teachers' centres, among others, in non-formal education. In addition, it can be seen in Table 3 that a higher proportion of women (31.5 %) than men (24.7 %) are trained and that 84.6 % of the sample is not interested in receiving training in IC or in other subjects. Of those interested in IC training, 62.8 % did not receive any training. Similarly, 67.9 % of those who had training in IC and who were not undergoing training at the time of answering the questionnaire expressed an interest in continuing their training.

With regard to the age variable, the results show a clear difference in training between the different age groups. The youngest respondents,

Table 3

General profiles of pre-service teachers with respect to IC.

	Pre-service teachers	
	Yes	% No
Women	31,5	68,5
Men	24,7	75,3
You are not interested in receiving IC training	15,4	84,6
Yes, interested in receiving IC training	37,2	62,8
Have not received IC training	35,2	64,8
Yes, has received IC training	32,1	67,9

Source. Own elaboration

under 30 years of age, are the ones with the highest proportion of training, with 85 % of the sample in this age range. In contrast, older respondents, i.e. those above 30 years of age, show an inverse trend, with a lower proportion in education as age increases. The same trend was observed for interest in IC training. 80.5 % of those under 30 express this interest, indicating a high predisposition in this age group. However, as age increased, interest in IC training decreased, although this was still significant. For the 30–39, 40–49 and 50–60 age groups, interest stands at 64.8 %, 58.2 % and 48.9 % respectively (Fig. 1).

A Student's *t*-test was carried out to compare the correspondence between the means of two variables: the variable that asks about having previously had training in IC and the desire to be trained in this subject, shown in the question "do you want to be trained in IC" (Fig. 2)

The results in Table 4 show that in the case of pre-service teachers, there is a difference in means between those who have had IC training (mean 0.2555) and those who did not (mean 0.1034). Furthermore, there is a difference in the standard deviations, being lower in the group that has not received previous training (0.30631) compared to the group that has received training (0.43773). The significance level was less than 0.005, indicating that the difference between the groups was statistically significant at a confidence level above 95 % (Table 5).

Those who have not received IC training have a lower interest in studying IC than those who have received IC training and whose mean is above (at the 95 % confidence level) (Fig. 2).

3.2. Presence of IC (knowledge, attitudes and skills) in the objectives of the syllabus of the subjects of the degrees that qualify the teaching profession in Spain

Suppose we contrast the interest of teaching staff in IC training with the educational offer that qualifies pre-service teachers to teach in Spanish universities. In this case, we found that out of 226 syllabus (38.9 % private), only 11.31 % included IC in the subjects of the degrees. Seventy percent of the degrees analysed offered the promotion of IC in less than 10 % of their subjects; the other 18 % promoted them in between 10 % and 19.9 % of their subjects; 8 % promoted them in between 20 % and 29 % of their subjects, and only 4 % promoted them in between 30 % and 40 % of their subjects.

The average score assigned to the *knowledge* dimension, present in the objectives of the syllabus analysed, was 2.2 out of 5. The categories used in this dimension result in syllabus proposing, through objectives, the recognition of their own culture and other cultures with a score of 2.5; knowledge of key concepts such as human rights, identity, and interculturality with a score of 2.3, which refers to educational policies related to attention to diversity, with a score of 2.2. The lowest value was assigned to the use and understanding of a second language or interest in learning it, with a score of 1.9 (Table 6).

For the category *attitudes*, the lowest score was obtained is 2.18 for promoting critical and reflective awareness of one's own values and prejudices. This is followed by a score of 2.22 for the other aspects evaluated: interest in and commitment to lifelong learning related to attention to diversity and cognitive and affective flexibility to interact with diverse people or groups (Table 7).

The third category analyses the *abilities* (or skills), where the lowest

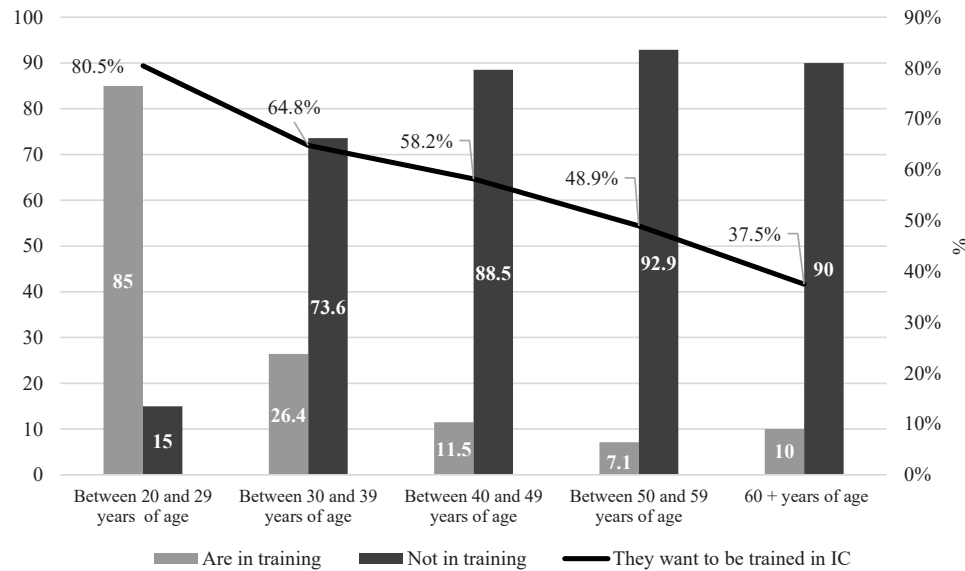


Fig. 1. Pre-service teacher training and interest in IC by age range. Source. Own elaboration.

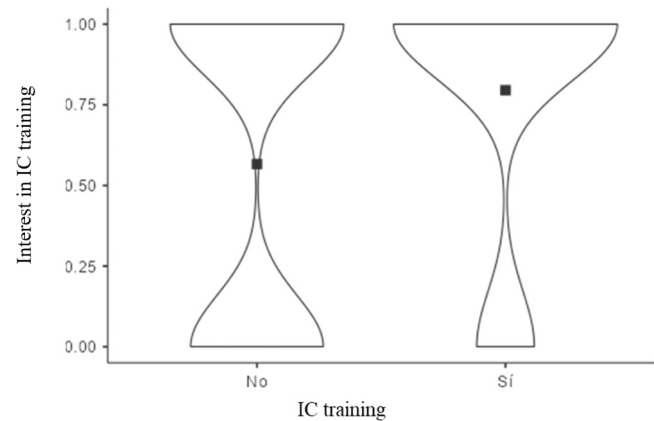


Fig. 2. Relationship between interest in studying and IC training for pre-service teachers. Source. Own elaboration.

Table 4
Statistics on IC training.

Group statistics				
Interested in studying CI?	N	Media	Standard deviation	Standard error of the mean
Has had IC training	No	87	,1034	,03284
	Yes	137	,2555	,03773

Source. Own elaboration

score obtained is 2.00 for the ability to work cooperatively in a team with other members of the educational community and for the ability to identify and prevent prejudiced and stereotyped behaviours in relation to cultural aspects with 2.10. The highest score was for the dimension of developing dialogue, active listening, empathy, and, in general, aspects related to communication (2.25) and the design and adaptation of learning spaces in the context of cultural diversity (2.016) (Table 8).

Comparing public and private universities, differences can be observed in terms of the integration of IC in the curricula of degree programs leading to the teaching profession in Spain. Public universities tended to include knowledge, attitudes, and skills more frequently in the objectives of their subject syllabus in an explicit way (75 %), whereas private universities tended not to include them (66.7 %).

4. Discussion

Responding to Objective 1 (O1), the scenario described is framed in a context in which the majority of those surveyed recognise that they do not have the IC necessary to deal with it. They state that they have not taken and do not wish to take training in intercultural competence (IC). Although we did not collect specific reasons in this study, the literature on professional teacher development and diversity training suggests several typical barriers: lack of time, perceived low usefulness, academic overload, or conceptual confusion (Rokos & Khapova, 2023). Therefore, in line with authors such as Dervin et al. (2020) and Romijn et al. (2021), the need to promote intercultural training actions from the initial (undergraduate) and specialisation (postgraduate) training areas for future education professionals is highlighted. In summary, this study reveals the need to include training in intercultural competencies in initial teacher training since the current offer is limited. Specifically, it has become evident from the analysis of the syllabus of the subjects of the degrees that qualify for the teaching profession in Spain that IC has little influence in the objectives of the subjects.

Despite the increase in international pupils in the Spanish education system (Mahía & Medina, 2022; Schachner, 2019), the low integration of these competencies in the curriculum of qualifications for the profession suggests that educational institutions do not adequately respond to the needs of future teachers in this area. Furthermore, the origin of the training received (formal university, informal and/or non-formal - NGOs, associations, social networks, vocational training, among others) indicates a dispersed and non-centralised approach in formal curricula in Spain. Nevertheless, pre-service teachers in Spain show interest in IC training despite the lack of adequate programs. Moreover, data from this study show that previous training in these competencies, as noted by Trasberg and Kond (2017), positively influences the interest and motivation of future teachers to continue developing them. This would also provide them with the support necessary to foster interculturality (Gindi, Erlich Ron, 2022; Toscano-Cruz et al., 2020; Trasberg & Kond, 2017).

Facilitating access to intercultural training, starting with teacher training, is crucial for fostering a more inclusive society that is prepared to face the challenges of cultural diversity (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021; Schachner, 2019) and overcome the challenges faced by migrant pupils, such as low performance in science and mathematics or the high dropout rates of this pupil profile in Spain (Cebrián et al., 2019). This would allow teachers to acquire emotional baggage, as well as develop

Table 5

T-test for equality of means in intercultural competency training.

Independent samples test		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means					
		F	Sig.	t	Gf	Sig. (bilateral)	Difference in averages	Standard error of the difference	95 % Confidence interval for the difference
Has had IC training	Equal variances have been assumed	39,690	,000	−2828	222	,005	−,15203	,05375	Inferior −,25795 Top −,04610
	Equal variances have not been assumed.			−3055	219,866	,003	−,15203	,04977	−,25011 −,05394

Source. Own elaboration

Table 6

Subjects that promote IC consider knowledge of other cultures and societies within the formulation of objectives.

The objectives consider the knowledge dimension when it promotes:	On a scale of 1–4 The average rating is
Recognition of one's own culture and other cultures, including their traditions, values, attitudes, beliefs, customs, languages, religion and lifestyles.	2.48
The use of key concepts of human rights, identity and/or interculturality.	2.31
Educational policies related to the attention to cultural diversity.	2.20
The use and understanding of a second language (either in reading or writing) or an approach to and interest in learning it.	1.86

Note. 1 (lowest value) =when it is not included in the syllabus objectives, 2 = when it is not explicitly included in the syllabus objectives but is inferred, 3 = when it appears accessory in syllabus objectives, and 4 = (highest value) when it appears implicitly in the syllabus objectives.

Table 7

Subjects that promote IC consider the attitudes of openness and willingness to revitalise their values and beliefs within the formulation of objectives.

The objectives consider the attitudinal dimension when it promotes:	On a scale of 1–4 The average rating is
Critical and reflective awareness of one's values and prejudices.	2.18
Cognitive and affective flexibility to interact with culturally different people or groups.	2.22
Interest in and commitment to lifelong learning related to attention to diversity.	2.22

Note. 1 (lowest value) = When it is not included in the syllabus objectives, 2 =It does not appear explicitly in the syllabus objectives but is inferred, 3 =It appears accessory in the syllabus objectives, and 4 = (highest value) This appears explicitly in the objectives of the syllabus.

the autonomy and professional confidence necessary to address diversity in the classroom (Karousiou et al., 2019). In this sense, IC should be conceived as a synthesis of knowledge, practices, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006; Severiens et al., 2014) that enables both pre-service teachers to apply the principles of intercultural education in everyday classroom practice and educational contexts (Olivencia, 2012). Furthermore, implementing IC in a cross-cutting manner in teacher-qualification programs would ensure the training of different age groups, thus addressing the existing generation gap in terms of training and interest in these competencies (Martín-Gutiérrez et al., 2024).

Data associated with Objective 2 (O2) confirm the absence of IC in undergraduate and postgraduate education programs in Spain (Pareja de Vicente et al., 2019). This lack of pre-service teacher training forces future teachers to seek training in other contexts (non-formal and

Table 8

Subjects who promote IC consider the skills to interpret events from other cultures with a critical sense within the formulation of objectives.

The objectives consider the skills dimension when it promotes:	On a scale of 1–4 The average rating is
The development of communication skills, openness to dialogue, listening and empathy.	2.25
The design, adaptation and regulation of learning spaces in contexts of cultural diversity that address pupils' unique educational needs, equity and respect for human rights.	2.16
Developing the ability to detect and avoid cultural prejudice and stereotypes, exclusion and discrimination.	2.10
Cooperative teamwork with other professionals, members of the educational community and social actors.	2.00

Note. 1 (lowest value) =when it is not included in the syllabus objectives; 2 =It is not explicitly included in the syllabus objectives but is inferred; 3 =It appears in an accessory way in the syllabus objectives; and 4 = (highest value). It appears explicitly in the syllabus objectives.

informal), demonstrating that the initial training received in the degrees that enable the teaching profession does not meet the needs and demands of teachers (TALIS, 2018). This situation not only limits teachers' professional development but also prevents them from effectively addressing the challenges posed by an increasingly culturally diverse school population and the challenges this presents (Fiske, 1998). In fact, a lack of IC among teachers has been shown to hinder the creation of an inclusive and diversity-friendly learning environment, which can have negative consequences for pupil achievement and motivation, as noted by the authors of this study.

Specifically, the data in this study indicate that the programs analysed point to a moderate focus on the knowledge dimension, with opportunities for improvement in key areas such as cultural recognition and knowledge of intercultural concepts, which favour social interaction and the development of second language skills; the latter is considered one of the crucial areas to include in teacher training by authors such as Hamilton (2013) and Sinkkonen and Kytälä (2014). Indeed, while teachers with more experience and training in intercultural education feel more prepared to address cultural diversity, language barriers and a lack of educational resources have been identified as the main challenges to intercultural teaching (Beutel & Tangen, 2018; Fiani et al., 2022).

Likewise, the results of the programs analysed reveal certain weaknesses in the category of attitudes, such as the promotion of a critical and reflective awareness of one's values and prejudices (Deardorff, 2006; 2009). In particular, the need to promote the ability to reflect on the values, attitudes and beliefs of educators is highlighted, as suggested by authors such as Tualaulelei and Halse (2021), in order, on the one hand, to strengthen interest in and commitment to lifelong learning related to attention to diversity. On the other hand, fostering the cognitive and affective flexibility necessary to attend to the identity of international

pupils is a factor that influences their attitudes and behaviours towards learning. Authors such as Altugan (2015) point out that through identity, learners interpret and understand the social context around them, which fosters their motivation to learn. Regarding identity in relation to IC, Kim (2009) highlighted the importance of intercultural communication, as people have a natural tendency to identify with groups, which influences interactions. Collective identity can be a source of conflict in cultural settings, while individual identity is dynamic and can evolve through broad intercultural experiences.

In terms of skills, the need to strengthen cooperative teamwork and the identification and prevention of prejudices and stereotypes is highlighted. As pointed out by the authors of this study, there is a lack of collaborative work between teachers and other professionals in the development of IC. This collaboration would allow training to be enriched, and diversity to be approached from different perspectives. Although training in intercultural techniques and methodologies is relevant, it must be accompanied by a profound revision of teachers' beliefs about their pupils to overcome ethnocentrism and sociocentrism, as proposed by Coelho et al. (2011).

In contrast, the programs analysed pay more attention to the development of communication skills necessary to avoid reproducing the Western-centric knowledge put forward by authors such as Nemouchi and Byram (2025) and the adaptation of learning spaces to cater to cultural diversity. These aspects are important, but they should not replace the work on teachers' attitudes and beliefs. This is why authors such as Martorana et al. (2021) emphasise the need to work in the classroom on both the affective dimension, in order to be able to tolerate ambiguity and diversity, and the communicative dimension, in order to be able to communicate freely within the context of diversity. These dimensions are essential for promoting appropriate intercultural exchanges between pupils in different historical and geographical contexts.

5. Conclusion

The descriptive analysis carried out and the results of the study reveal a worrying gap in university education in terms of preparation for dealing with the cultural diversity of pre-service teachers. Therefore, it is imperative that educational institutions and teacher-training programs adopt a cross-cultural competency-oriented approach (Akpınar, Unaldi, 2014; Arnesen, 2010). This will make it possible to respond to the demands of an increasingly diverse society and prepare teachers to meet the challenges of teaching in a context of diversity.

The results coincide with other studies and with our initial hypothesis regarding the need and desire for training in IC on the part of pre-service teachers, as well as the lack of a sufficient approach to IC in the objectives of the programs of the subjects of the degrees that qualify the teaching profession in Spain. The challenges generated by cultural diversity in the classroom require teachers, who are better prepared in terms of their knowledge, attitudes, and skills, to face the challenges of the intercultural classroom. For this reason, this study contributes to the debate on the need to improve teacher training in IC in Spain, including methodologies that foster dialogue, critical reflection, and peaceful conflict resolution.

Based on the discussion and conclusions previously elaborated, we can consider some implications and research questions as well as methods for future research related to the topic addressed.

First, we recognise the importance of incorporating intercultural competencies in a transversal manner in teacher training, in both undergraduate and master's degree programs (MAES). This implies designing the objectives and contents of the subjects that denote intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

Second, this study leads us to formulate future research questions aimed at determining how the integration of CI into teacher training programs influences professional performance. We also sought to understand the impact of previous CI training on teachers' motivation and

interest in continuing to develop these competencies and whether their perceptions of training needs include them.

Finally, we considered the methodological richness of mixed methods, which would allow us to obtain a deeper understanding of perceptions and training needs, and of longitudinal studies to learn about and evaluate the impact of training on intercultural competencies and their relationship with teacher performance.

The identification of variables associated with the theories and practices of teaching work in the classroom can help both universities and the degrees analysed to reconsider interculturality. Future research is needed to compare the presence of cultural competence in training programs and to improve teachers' willingness to be trained at different education levels. The incorporation of IC in the teaching profession in Spain could be done in "free configuration subjects" or in "optional subjects" that work specifically on the intercultural competencies of future teachers. In addition, the results of this study lay the groundwork for comparative analyses of pre-service and in-service teachers. It also offers the opportunity to explore the situation in other countries with respect to IC training offered by degrees that qualify teachers for the teaching profession.

With regard to the limitations of our study, it should be noted, that our design was based on a convenience sample from several universities without randomisation, recruited online through academic leaders. Therefore, the results are not externally valid for the population of future teachers in Spain and should be understood as a contribution that highlights the shortcomings and demands of training in similar contexts. The tests for differences/associations are interpreted as exploratory. Future replicas should implement probabilistic sampling and collect data on the university of origin to adjust clusters and estimate representativeness. Furthermore, it should be noted that although the construct 'intercultural competence' integrates knowledge, attitudes and skills, in this study the measures are self-reports, not performance tests. Self-reports can be affected by social desirability, memory biases, and discrepancies with practice. Therefore, our findings reflect self-reported perceptions and dispositions, not observed skills. Future triangulation with observation rubrics and portfolio tests is suggested.

Finally, despite the lack of studies in Spain aimed at analysing the presence of IC in the training programs offered, we consider that the data shown helps us to share a common point of conclusion observed in other studies carried out to date.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Nelcy Yoly Valencia-Olivero: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Daria Mottareale-Calvanese:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Ángela Martín-Gutiérrez:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation.

Consent for publication

The authors declare their consent to the publication of this study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The Research Ethics Committee of the International University of La Rioja (Spain) approved this research with the following code: (PI081/2022). Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Funding

This work has been financed by the Research Project "Attitudes towards acculturation and interculturality of teachers of compulsory education in Spain" with reference PP-2022-06 granted in the competitive call for Proyectos Propios de investigación UNIR 2022 of the Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR). You can learn more about the project through the following link: <https://diverprof.es/>

Declaration of Competing interest

The authors confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Data availability

The following website provides access to the data related to the project: <https://diverprof.es/>. However, the authors of the publication may be asked for any information they deem necessary.

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