Bridging the gap between CLIL and interculturality: An analysis of novice teachers' reflective narratives

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Abstract: This article presents a phenomenological study that explores the intercultural profile of 24 novice pre-primary and primary teachers enrolled in a teacher education course on intercultural education (ICE) for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). The study examines how these future educators conceptualise the integration of ICE in CLIL classrooms, their understanding of diversity, and their evolving identities as intercultural individuals based on the analysis of a corpus of reflective portfolios. Following a qualitative methodology, the data were analysed through inductive thematic coding to identify emerging patterns of meaning in participants' narratives. Findings show that participants reflect critically on pedagogical practices related to ICE and CLIL, expressing both enthusiasm and concern regarding aspects such as materials, assessment, and language use. Diversity is framed as an asset – particularly in its linguistic and cultural dimensions – though challenges are acknowledged, especially in relation to special educational needs. Participants also demonstrate a growing awareness of their intercultural identity and a strong commitment to promoting global citizenship. These findings suggest that reflective practice within teacher education can foster meaningful intercultural growth and professional positioning, while highlighting the need to further address assessment and inclusion in intercultural CLIL pedagogy.

Keyword: Interculturality

Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an educational approach whereby a foreign language (FL) has a distinctive role in the process of learning disciplinary content because it is used for the instruction of subject matter. In the last decades, education authorities all over Europe have firmly sanctioned CLIL so that, at present, CLIL programmes are in place in virtually all European countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023) and CLIL has been eagerly embraced by European education academics and professionals to the extent that it is seen as a flagship initiative for European bilingualism (Lorenzo *et al.*, 2010: 435). Supported by a solid body of research (e.g., Admiraal *et al.*, 2006; Banegas & Zappa-Hollman, 2023; Coyle, 2011; Dafouz & Guerrini, 2009; Dalton-Puffer *et al.*, 2010; Escobar Urmeneta & Nussbaum, 2011; Ruiz de Zarobe & Jiménez Catalán, 2009, to name just a few), CLIL is associated with the promotion of multilingualism to increase employability and overcome economic recession (European Commission, n.d.) and has been described as a change agent that enables "a more equitable distribution of linguistic and social capital" (Coyle, 2013: 245).

CLIL is tightly linked to culture and intercultural understanding. CLIL pedagogy is typically described as revolving around "the 4Cs framework" (Coyle *et al.*, 2010), a tool for mapping out CLIL activities by addressing four components or building blocks that begin with a C, culture being one of them – the others are content, communication and cognition. As we will see, CLIL teachers are in a privileged position to help their students become intercultural "global citizens" (Block, 2011; Byram & Wagner, 2018) who can face today's world challenges and ably resist extremism and intolerance, because CLIL provides abundant learning opportunities for intercultural development (Romanovski, 2018). Yet, research shows that teachers are ill-prepared to accomplish this target

successfully. Culture remains the most underexplored component within CLIL research (Coyle, 2007: 550) and the literature consistently shows that the affordances of CLIL for intercultural education are uncharted, partly because CLIL programmes fail to prioritize the development of intercultural competence (Gómez-Parra, 2018, 2020, 2021; Méndez García, 2013; Ortega Martín *et al.*, 2018; Sudhoff, 2010; among others).

This article portrays the results of a phenomenological study aimed at gauging the preparation of a group of novice pre-primary and primary teachers[1] for delivering intercultural education at the beginning of their career after pursuing a course on interculturality in CLIL taught at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) and tailored for CLIL's diverse education settings in the Region of Madrid (described in Alonso-Belmonte, 2025).

CLIL for intercultural citizenship

In stark contrast with some parents' and caretakers' viewpoint on bilingualism (Pérez Cañado, 2020), CLIL is not meant to educate individuals who can pass by a native speaker of the target language. Rather it is geared to educate the so-called "new bilinguals" (Palacios Hidalgo, 2020), that is, plurilingual users of at least two languages and two cultural systems who can identify, understand, respect and participate in culturally diverse environments and eventually become interculturally-competent critical citizens who are able to mediate or become "a bridge" across cultures (Byram, 2006: 12).

The concept of intercultural competence (IC) is well documented in the literature. This construct can be defined as a complex set of abilities "needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006: 12) and is based on three interrelated dimensions or *savoirs*, viz. behaviour, cognition and affection – or skills, knowledge and attitudes – which are articulated through internal and external outcomes (Deardorff, 2006). In other words, interculturally competent individuals must be able to act appropriately and effectively in the intercultural encounter, to know about their own and their interlocutor's cultural conventions, and to show positive feelings towards cultural difference. One of the most renowned models of IC is Michael Byram's (Byram, 1997a, 2021), especially among FL teaching practitioners because of its focus on communication. In this model, IC dimensions are subdivided into: (1) skills of interpreting and relating; (2) skills of discovering and interacting; (3) intercultural attitude; (4) intercultural knowledge; and (5) critical cultural awareness or political education.

During the past decade, Byram's understanding of critical cultural awareness has been further developed in the frame of intercultural citizenship education (ICE; Byram *et al.*, 2016). ICE focuses on developing values such as democratic culture and human rights to oppose racism, intolerance and radicalism. Hence, ICE highlights the political facet of interculturality, so that IC burgeons into civic action. This transformative conception of intercultural education in the 21st century stems from the need to face unprecedented challenges such as climate change, war and conflict, gender and social inequality, poverty and unemployment, migration and displacement. Finding solutions to these global threats to well-being demands new skills, knowledge and attitudes such as creativity; communication, negotiation and collaboration abilities; critical thinking; respect for diversity; and commitment to social justice, to be applied in new communicative

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[1] Primary refers to ISCED level 01 (UNESCO, 2012) and caters for children between 6 and 12 years old. Pre-primary corresponds to ISCED level 020 (*op. cit.*), that is, to early childhood education for children from age 3 to 6.

settings, i.e. among multicultural members of society or through digital means (Hoff, 2020).

Concomitantly with this interest on intercultural citizenship, some have placed the onus on the global dimension of social responsibility (i.e. Gaudelli, 2016; Lourenço, 2021; Lourenço & Simões, 2021). The purpose for them is "to empower students as critical beings to see the relevance of global issues in their own lives and to understand their 'glocal' responsibilities […], something which is often captured in the phrase 'think globally, act locally'" (Lourenço & Simões, 2021: 87). In that vein, they propose the notion of global citizenship education, a type of education concerned "with the relevance of knowledge, skills and values for the participation of citizens in, and their contribution to, dimensions of societal development which are linked at local and global levels" (UNESCO, 2014: 15). Global citizenship is part of the UN's A2030 in relation to the sustainable development goals, and in Europe it has been the object of different publications and guides since the Maastricht Global Education Declaration in 2002 (Council of Europe, 2002).

The FL classroom is often portrayed as an optimal space for developing intercultural global citizenship competences because it allows students to explore diverse cultures and identities in a cross-cultural scenario. There is mounting evidence on the role of language education in contributing to ICE (Byram & Wagner, 2018), global citizenship education (British Council, 2008) and global understanding (Tochon, 2009). Furthermore, within the FL realm, CLIL is particularly suitable for working on global intercultural issues, for two main reasons. First, CLIL's C for "culture" (Coyle *et al.*, 2010), also linked to "citizenship", "community" and even "connection", is about developing awareness of self and other, cultural identity, citizenship, and progressing towards intercultural understanding. It permeates all actions in the CLIL classroom: culture has an overarching position in the 4Cs framework (*op. cit.*). Secondly, CLIL is interdisciplinary in nature, based on collaboration among teachers and the active involvement of students in the co-creation process of learning. These features foster a hunger to learn about the world that is highly compatible with ICE approaches to language learning. For those reasons, many teacher educators recommend including cross-linguistic and cross-cultural objectives in CLIL lessons (Genesee & Hamayan, 2016).

In order to successfully implement an ICE-informed approach in CLIL, teachers must be interculturally competent themselves and know how to interweave intercultural contents in their practice. Indeed, interculturality is often considered among the necessary teacher competences in CLIL (Pérez Cañado, 2016). For example, Bertaux *et al.* (2010: 6) propose that interculturally competent CLIL teachers should be able to: select and adapt authentic material from different parts of the world; articulate key cultural parameters associated with the language being taught; guide their students in developing cultural awareness and in acting in the "right way" depending on the context; raise their curiosity about the culture(s) and people(s) related to the target language; help students overcome superficial cultural stereotypes; and initiate or sustain virtual or physical exchanges with students from other parts of the world.

However, it appears that many CLIL teachers are unable to tackle these matters and, in general, to address intercultural issues in the classroom, especially at the onset of their careers. The literature is rife with documented cases of teachers who are unprepared to deal with interculturality (Sercu, 2006), who lack awareness of their own cultural identities and who fail to recognize racial, ethnic, and cultural differences between themselves and their students (e.g. Finney & Orr, 1995; Mahon, 2006; McGowan & Kern, 2014, for FL teachers), showcasing the standards of a dominant, white, western view of interculturality, which often contrasts with other more pluralistic perspectives. Research

also highlights that many pre-service teachers feel unprepared to engage effectively with culturally diverse learners (Barquín, 2015; Mujawamariya & Mahrouse, 2004), describing emotions such as confusion, anxiety, and a sense of being overwhelmed during their training (Guo *et al.*, 2009), and an increased likelihood of intercultural stress among FL teachers (Hooker, 2003). This runs parallel with a shortage of suitable CLIL training (Gómez-Parra, 2020; Méndez García, 2013; Ortega Martín *et al.*, 2018; Sudhoff, 2010).

The situation calls for careful planning of teacher education on interculturality for CLIL settings, so that CLIL teachers receive adequate preparation to endorse ICE and help their students become responsible global citizens. In this vein, for the design of effective courses on IC within CLIL, the following challenges have been identified (Alonso-Belmonte, 2025):

- The interplay between CLIL and ICE: merging IC and CLIL remains challenging due to the complexity of both concepts (Gómez-Parra, 2021), particularly in relation to assessment because the fact that CLIL combines language and content learning complicates the choice of appropriate tools. For instance, despite recommendations, assessment practices in Madrid's CLIL tend to consist in applying traditional summative procedures based on written tests (Otto & Estrada, 2019), which runs counter to efficient IC assessment (Scarino, 2010).
- Diversity in CLIL: while ICE promotes inclusion and equity, in practice, cultural diversity is often viewed as a challenge (Jordán-Sierra, 2004). As Dietz (2009: 49) notes, "otherness becomes a problem" when structural inequalities are reframed as cultural differences. This has been detected across Spanish classrooms, which are more and more culturally diverse (Garreta-Bochaca, 2022), and the Region of Madrid is no exception (Mayoral Peñas *et al.*, 2020).
- CLIL teachers' intercultural identity[2]: the degree of interculturality among CLIL teachers is underexplored. Nonetheless, it stands to reason that CLIL teachers' level of IC and understanding of their ideological stand concerning intercultural issues is relevant for ICE. Our research in the context of FL teaching in the Region of Madrid shows that prospective FL primary teachers who will eventually become CLIL teachers tend to portray an intermediate IC and an intercultural identity characterized by a non-agentive attitude shaped by stereotypes (Fernández-Agüero & Garrote-Salazar, 2019; Garrote-Salazar & Fernández-Agüero, 2016).

These foci were taken as important building blocks of the course under scrutiny in this study.

Objectives and research questions

This article digs into the intercultural profile of a group of novice teachers as expressed in a corpus of written portfolios collected in the context of a course on IC for CLIL in the Region of Madrid. By the author's definition, "intercultural profile" is the description of a blend of IC observable behaviour-driven traits – skills, knowledge and attitudes – intervening when operating in cross-cultural contact. The complete characterisation of an individual's intercultural profile is a complex endeavour and falls out of the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, this piece of research aims at outlining a preliminary profile of the participants based on a number of features. As a starting point, the research questions that guide this analysis are based on the challenges identified for the design

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[2] Intercultural identity is the 'intellectual template for a constructive and creative way of seeing and relating to oneself and others' (Kim, 2015: 10) when communication occurs outside an individuals' cultural group.

of IC courses in CLIL that were presented in the previous section, namely the interplay between CLIL and ICE, diversity in CLIL, and CLIL teachers' intercultural identity:

(1) How do these teachers articulate the link between CLIL and ICE? What are the reported features of effective CLIL methodology for ICE?
(2) How do these teachers voice their views on diversity? What pedagogical constructs do they reflect about in relation to diversity in CLIL?
(3) How do these teachers depict themselves as intercultural individuals? What is their degree of intercultural political engagement and awareness?

The objective of this research is twofold: gauging these teachers' preparation for ICE in the context of CLIL training and, in doing so, initiating the evaluation of the affordances of this training.

Method

Data

Data is drawn from a corpus of 24 written reflective portfolios compiled between January 2023 and May 2025, when data collection was completed. These portfolios are a subset of the wider corpus UAM-ETNA (English Teachers' Narratives), which is mainly integrated by written reflective documents produced by students at UAM's Faculty of Teacher Education along with other texts such as recording of mentor-trainees' interviews and post-observation meetings. Reflective practice is widely recognised as a framework for teachers' professional growth (Mann & Walsh, 2017; Newby *et al.*, 2007) and a distinctive characteristic of numerous FL teacher education programmes across the world (Farrell, 2013; 2018). Concerning interculturality, it is believed that engaging in self-reflection enables teachers to make intercultural progress. In particular, the development of intercultural meta-cognitive awareness – the ability to monitor and reflect on one's own cognitive processes – has been identified as important to enhancing IC (Byram, 1997b, 2008). As Dai (2009: 4) suggests, "critical integration", which involves a reflective examination of the strengths and weaknesses of both one's own and others' cultures, "paves the way for mutual growth". Consequently, reflective self-examination through narratives is a valuable method for intercultural enquiry and for deepening awareness of intercultural positioning and membership within teacher education contexts.

Participants wrote this portfolio in English as part of their assignments for a teacher education course on IC for the context of CLIL (described in Alonso Belmonte, 2025) with the aim of summarising the key concepts seen and main activities carried out during the course sessions, and reflecting on how this content had influenced their views of interculturality. The course is part of a master's degree for in-service teachers working in CLIL contexts that draws from Alonso-Belmonte & Fernández-Agüero (2016), an online open-access teacher training module on IC whose design and rationale are based on the analysis of 400 surveys distributed among practising European teachers within the framework of a European K2 project (Calabrese & Russo, 2016).

The master's course for CLIL teachers merges theoretical instruction with guided school observations in diverse contexts and reflective practice to develop IC. Emphasis is placed on embedding intercultural objectives – knowledge, attitudes and skills – into classroom practice using differentiated instruction and formative assessment. Trainees are encouraged to reflect on their own intercultural identity, given its influence on classroom practices (Gong *et al.*, 2022), and to participate in telecollaborative exchanges with peers from other countries, which have proven effective in enhancing IC (Üzüm *et*

al., 2020). This approach aligns with Byram's (1997a, 2021) model of IC, particularly the development of critical cultural awareness as a core pedagogical aim, because this model remains pedagogically oriented and applicable to FL teaching (see Alonso-Belmonte, 2025 for more information on the course).

The 24 portfolios are compiled into a corpus consisting of 97,011 words, divided into three subcorpora: a primary education subcorpus (59,107 words), a pre-primary education subcorpus (19,400 words) and a subcorpus for the portfolios of teachers with a double degree in primary and pre-primary education (18,504 words). Table 1 summarises these data, as well as the number of words tagged as relevant for this research.

Table 1.
Corpus data.

	Files	Words	Tagged words
Subcorpus			
1. Primary education (PRI)	14	59,107	8,792
2. Pre-primary education (PPR)	7	19,400	2,624
3. Double degree (DD)	3	18,504	1,884
Total	**24**	**97,011**	**13,300**

Participants

The portfolios were written by 24 Spanish novice primary and pre-primary teachers (in their early- or mid-twenties, graduated less than three years before data gathering) grouped through a non-probabilistic sampling technique as participants of the course described above who consented to contributing to UAM-ETNA, in compliance with the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki on human experimentation (World Medical Association, 2013).

The study sample consisted of 4 male and 20 female teachers (16.67% and 83.33% respectively), with a mean age of 22.75 (22.7 for female and 23 for male) and a standard deviation of 1.05 (1.10 for female and 0.71 for male). They were all Spanish citizens raised in different parts of the country (19 of them in central, monolingual Spain) who had a degree in primary education, in pre-primary education or both (that is, a doble degree). Their level of English is at least B2 according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001) and in the development of their language competence, 8 of them stated that they had sojourning experience (33%, for a mean time of 4.8 months). None had prior specialised training on IC. As regards work experience, they had little to no formal teaching practice but some of them (*n*=4) reported being hired as English or general support teachers in language schools or after-school clubs. Table 2 portrays the sample as per these and other attributive variables selected in this study.

Table 2.
Sample description.

	Occurrence (N)	Frequency (%)
Gender		
Male	4	16.67
Female	20	83.33
Age		
22	13	54.17
23	7	29.17
24	2	8.33
25	1	4.17

26	1	4.17
Level of education degree		
Primary education	14	58.33
Pre-primary education	7	29.17
Double degree in primary and pre-primary education	3	12.50
Specialisation of education degree		
English as a FL	18	75.00
Special needs	1	4.17
Physical education	1	4.17
No specialisation	4	16.67
Certified level of English		
B2	12	50.00
C1	10	41.67
C2	2	8.33
Previous teaching experience		
None	20	83.33
Up to 2 years	2	8.33
Between 2 and 4 years	2	8.33
Sojourning experience		
None	16	66.67
Up to 4 months	6	25.00
Between 4 and 9 months	2	8.33
Total	**24**	**100.00**

Procedure

This study adopts an interpretative phenomenological non-interventional qualitative approach (Smith *et al.,* 2009) to explore the nuances of the intercultural profile of a group of novice teachers, as revealed through their self-reflective narratives during an IC training programme for CLIL. The corpus was analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software (CAQDAS) applying a bottom-up coding strategy based on the constant comparison method of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and employing descriptive coding techniques (Miles *et al.*, 2014). This methodology was selected for its capacity to unveil the complexity and richness of familiar situations from a renewed analytical perspective.

The procedure involved examining the participants' self-reflective narratives for speech fragments which reflected their gaze on interculturality as per three main analytical constructs: the interplay between CLIL and ICE, diversity in CLIL, and their perception of their own intercultural identity. That is, attention was paid to excerpts in which the portfolio writers referred to the foci identified as relevant for IC training in CLIL and put forward in the research questions.

The tagging process was conducted in four stages, with the collaboration of a second researcher to mitigate potential bias:

(1) Familiarisation: the author first engaged in a close reading of the raw text to gain a holistic understanding of the data, identifying all relevant passages linked to the analytical constructs and compiling them into a working table.
(2) Initial coding: in collaboration with the second researcher, descriptive labels were assigned to each excerpt. These labels summarised the core theme of the passage using language as close as possible to that of the corpus. This iterative process involved cross-coding and conversational validation. The initial codes were organised under the preliminary constructs, which served as overarching categories.

(3) Code refinement: linguistic nuances were re-examined, and similarities between codes and excerpts were re-evaluated. Consensus with second researcher was reached on a definitive set of tags, comprising five categories – the preliminary constructs plus two new categories.

(4) Theoretical synthesis: finally, hypotheses were formulated to interpret the codes, leading to the point of theoretical saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The analysis was supported by ATLAS.ti Version 9, which facilitated the organisation and interpretation of the textual data by enabling the connection of discursive elements to broader thematic patterns. The final set comprises 19 codes under 5 categories. Table 3 shows the final list of codes and categories in alphabetical order (the categories are further explained in the results section and examples of codes will be shown in the discussion).

Table 3.
Taxonomy of codes.

Categories	Codes
Diversity in CLIL	Diversity as a challenge
	Diversity as an asset
	ICE/CLIL as support for inclusion
IC assessment	Assessing IC as a challenge
	Evaluation of IC assessment procedures
Intercultural identity	Awareness of change
	Awareness of strengths or limitations
	Commitment
	Critical analysis of intercultural encounters
	Perception of professional self
Interplay between CLIL and ICE	Evaluation of ICE methodology for CLIL
	ICE/CLIL principles
	ICE/CLIL teacher profile/role
	The role of language in ICE
Social responsibility	ICE as a challenge
	ICE as a collective endeavour
	ICE as transformation
	ICE for global citizenship
	Threats to global citizenship

Results

The analysis of the portfolios' discourse disclosed interesting findings regarding these novice teachers' discernment of their intercultural profile as per the three constructs identified as relevant for the design of IC courses for CLIL and the two new categories that emerged from the analysis. Briefly explained, the set of categories is the following:

(1) Interplay between CLIL and ICE: this category encompasses the excerpts where the participants' voice how they conceive the education of the "new bilinguals" (Palacios Hidalgo, 2020), thus conflating ICE and CLIL – methodological principles, the role of the teacher, appropriate materials, etc.

(2) IC assessment: in their narratives, participants clearly and repeatedly articulate their concern for assessment in ICE. As a result, *IC assessment* has emerged as a category on its own, revealing participants' reflections on the complexity of evaluation.

(3) Diversity in CLIL: this title covers the coded fragments on whether CLIL works across different levels of attainment not to leave the underachievers behind, and how it can be implemented to cater for every student.

(4) Intercultural identity: this category comprises instances of intercultural meta-cognitive awareness where participants describe themselves as intercultural individuals, i.e. their analysis of their past cross-cultural experiences and how they envision themselves in the future as ICE teachers.

(5) Social responsibility: this new category gathers the participants' frequent references to their role as change agents for civic action and duty to engage in political education to face the challenges of today's world.

Concerning the coding within the categories, Table 4 displays the occurrence of the tagged codes in the corpus, itemised by subcorpora (primary, pre-primary and double degree teachers), where the absolute figures from Table 1 are presented in relative terms. In Table 4 it can be observed that most of the codes belonging to the categories *Intercultural identity* and *Interplay between CLIL and ICE* (in bold) are counted among the most frequent as a whole, with the sole exception of *Commitment* (for subcorpora 1, 3 and 4) and *ICE/CLIL teacher profile/role* (for all subcorpora) respectively. That is, participants express more interest on describing themselves as intercultural individuals and reflecting on their teaching than on the topic of diversity.

Table 4.
Tagged codes for each subcorpus.

Codes	1. PRI	2. PPR	3. DD	Total
		Frequency (%)		
Assessing IC as a challenge	1.32	3.28	7.89	2.79
Awareness of change	5.92	8.20	10.53	7.17
Awareness of strengths or limitations	5.92	9.84	7.89	7.17
Critical analysis of intercultural encounters	9.21	3.28	2.63	6.77
Commitment	2.63	8.20	0.00	3.59
Diversity as a challenge	0.66	1.64	7.89	1.99
Diversity as an asset	1.97	3.28	13.16	3.98
Evaluation of IC assessment procedures	4.61	3.28	5.26	4.38
Evaluation of ICE methodology for CLIL	11.84	14.75	5.26	11.55
ICE as a challenge	1.97	3.28	0.00	1.99
ICE as a collective endeavour	1.97	3.28	0.00	1.99
ICE as transformation	1.97	1.64	0.00	1.59
ICE for global citizenship	8.55	8.20	7.89	8.37
ICE/CLIL as support for inclusion	4.61	1.64	2.63	3.59
ICE/CLIL principles	8.55	16.39	13.16	11.16
ICE/CLIL teacher profile/role	3.29	0.00	2.63	2.39
Perception of professional self	13.16	4.92	5.26	9.96
The role of language in ICE	6.58	3.28	5.26	5.58
Threats to global citizenship	5.26	1.64	2.63	3.98
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Getting into more detail, codes ordered by frequency (Figure 1) show that, in the total corpus, the two most common codes are *Evaluation of ICE methodology in CLIL* and *ICE/CLIL principles* – part of the participants' opinion on the effective combination of ICE and CLIL –, followed by *Perception of professional self* – pertaining to the participants' self-depiction of their intercultural identity in the work environment – and *ICE for global citizenship* – which shows their concern for the political facet of interculturality. These will be thoroughly discussed below. The occurrence of the next three most frequent codes – *Awareness of change*, *Awareness of strengths or weaknesses* and *Critical analysis of intercultural encounters* – is associated with these teachers' ability to critically evaluate their own perspectives, practices and products on the basis of explicit criteria (Byram, 2001). The likewise high ratio of these codes could be the result of the self-reflective nature of the portfolio. Also, to a lesser extent participants ponder over *The role of language in ICE*, *Evaluation of IC assessment procedures* and *Diversity as an asset*. The

rest of the categories display a low percentage of occurrence in the corpus. Nevertheless, examples of them will be presented in the discussion too.

Figure 1.

Tagged codes by frequency.
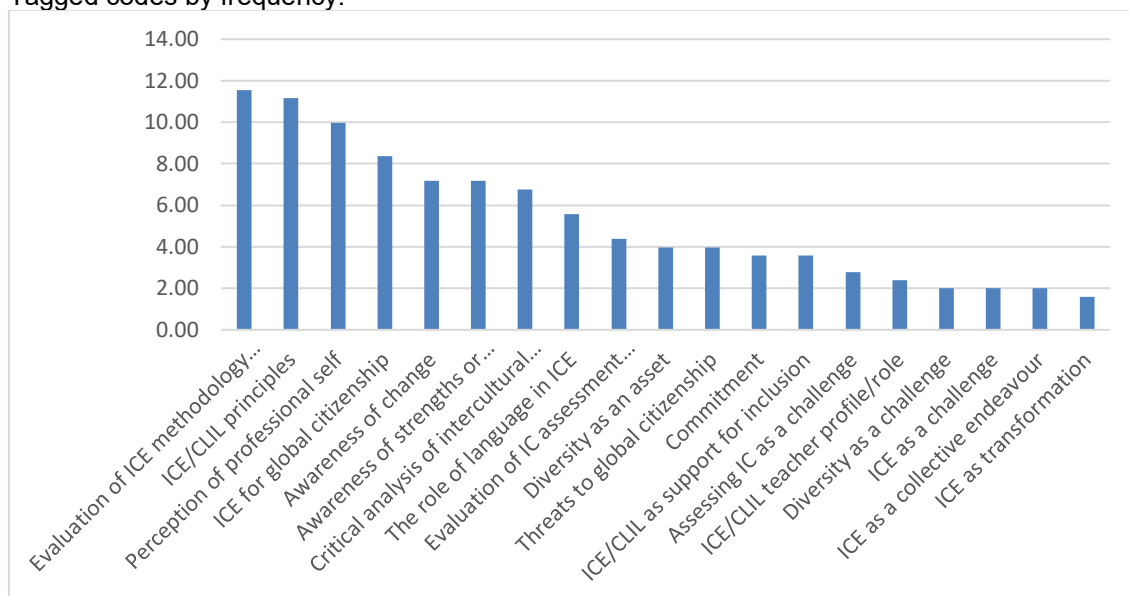
When looking at the three subcorpora separately it can be seen that some intercultural matters are unevenly treated by the different groups of teachers. For example, the double degree ones are especially interested in topics such as *Diversity as a challenge* but do not delve that much into explaining how they see themselves as professionals (*Perception of professional self*). On the other hand, reflecting on their intercultural professional persona and revisiting past intercultural experiences in light of the lessons learned during the course are frequent concerns for the primary group (*Perception of professional self* and *Critical analysis of intercultural encounters* respectively). This can be seen in Figure 2, which depicts the 10 most frequent codes and their occurrence in the subcorpora.

Figure 2.

Occurrence of the most frequent codes in the subcorpora.
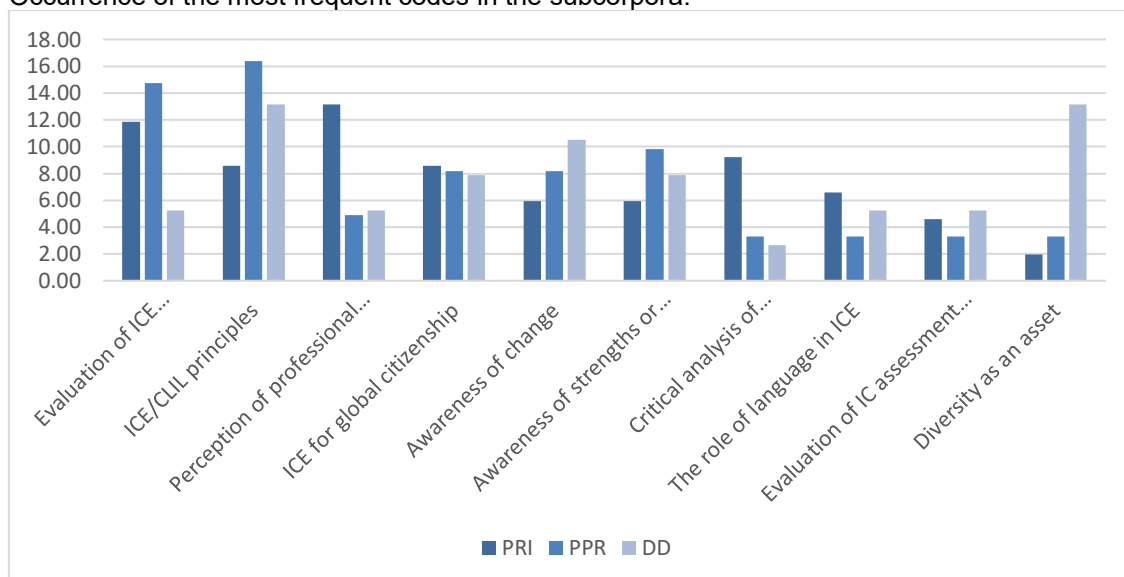
Nevertheless, some themes appear to be common sources of interest. In the discussion, the results presented here will be examined in greater depth in relation to the characterisation of these novice teachers' profile, illustrated by examples of the tagged codes.

Discussion

The following paragraphs present a description of the participants' intercultural profile emerging from the data organised into three subsections which tally with the research questions put forward in the Introduction. More specifically, the codes belonging to the categories *Interplay between ICE and CLIL* and *IC assessment* will be dealt with first, in relation to the participants' views on implementing ICE in the CLIL classroom; secondly, the codes from the category *Diversity in CLIL* will be addressed in order to elucidate how these teachers voice their understanding of diversity; and finally, these teachers self-depiction as intercultural individuals will be treated through the codes under *Intercultural identity* and *Social responsibility*.

How do these teachers articulate the link between CLIL and ICE? What are the reported features of effective CLIL methodology for ICE?

From the data, it can be said that these novice teachers are deeply engaged in evaluating the features of effective ICE implementation in their teaching contexts, and in pinpointing the principles that define this effective implementation. This is a reasonable outcome of framing their narratives against the backdrop of a teacher education course on IC; in fact, it could be taken as a proof of the usefulness of the course. In any case, these teachers visibly articulate their thoughts on the relationship between ICE and CLIL, and connect them with their role as ICE/CLIL teachers, as can be seen in excerpt 1:

1. 'I believe that it will be easier for CLIL teachers to adapt to working with IC than for other professionals who are not so used to bringing different skills together' (PRI4:129; ICE/CLIL teacher)

Besides, they frequently express their opinion on the appropriateness of IC materials, activities and techniques, as can be seen in excerpts 2 to 4. In particular, textbooks tend to come up in the data in association with negative connotations (excerpt 4):

2. 'I believe any intercultural lesson should begin with the teacher giving the students a sense of perspective and making them question whether their view on something is the only one that exists.' (PRI12:219; ICE/CLIL princ)
3. 'I find the idea of sharing cultural artifacts […] particularly interesting. I had previously considered this approach in the context of social studies, where objects, typically Western, are used to explore historical content. However, I had not reflected on its potential for promoting intercultural competence.' (DD2:26; Eval of ICE method)
4. 'I think that something important is to stop using textbooks. Perhaps it may seem a bit radical, but in general these continue to promote certain cultural stereotypes [of certain cultures], making the rest invisible.' (PRI1:100; Eval of ICE method)

The corpus also contains acute reflections on the role of language as a tool for communication, on the interrelation between language and culture and on the implications of this liaison for CLIL and for cross-cultural understanding. Through these reflections it can be seen that the participants acknowledge the key position of culture in the CLIL framework and its impact on communication (Coyle *et al.*, 2010). A case in point is the following quotation:

5. 'Now I see that much of what we communicate is beyond words. Understanding the implicit rules of conversation, what to say, how to say it, when to speak, and when to remain silent is essential to avoiding cultural friction.' (PRI13:231; Role of lang)

With respect to assessment, these teachers envision the difficulty of measuring an individual's IC – in line with the scholarly opinion that assessment is "one of the hot-button issues" within intercultural education (Borghetti, 2017: 1; Sercu, 2010) – and appraise the soundness of different assessment procedures such as the *CEFR Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) based on their experience or the contents seen in the course. As mentioned in the Results section, these profound reflections are more often found among the double degree professionals, whose dual qualification in both primary and pre-primary education entails a longer initial training period and, arguably, more sustained engagement with reflective practice. See for instance excerpts 6 and 7:

6. 'From my perspective, one of the main challenges in assessing IC lies in the educational system's tendency to prioritize quantitative assessment methods.' (DD2:29; Asses IC as a ch)

7. 'When thinking about assessing intercultural awareness, I realized how tricky it is to evaluate something that's constantly evolving.' (PPR5:80; Asses IC as a ch)

However, in spite of their training, participants do not put the complexities of IC assessment in relation with CLIL, some exceptions notwithstanding (i.e. excerpt 8):

8. As a future teacher in a bilingual primary school, I consider it essential to understand that IC assessment is a never-ending process.' (PRI11:213; Eval of IC asses)

In short, the novice teachers studied are actively involved in evaluating effective ICE implementation within CLIL contexts. By way of illustration, they critically reflect on the role of culture and language, express their concerns about inadequate materials, and highlight the challenges of assessing IC recognised by the academia. These insights reveal a strong commitment to adapting their teaching practices based on their IC training although it appears that, in this training, more emphasis could be placed on assessment for CLIL.

How do these teachers voice their views on diversity? What pedagogical constructs do they reflect about in relation to diversity in CLIL?

The most salient feature of these teachers' profile with respect to their representation of diversity is that they conceive it both as a challenge and as an asset. Diversity collocates with linguistic units such as "strength", "educational resource", "valuable and enriching factor" and "opportunity", but also with "barrier", "limitation" and the word "challenge" itself. Oftentimes these two somewhat contradictory characteristics are contrasted in the same sentence with the aim of emphasising the positive aspects of diversity, as in:

9. 'As a future teacher, I would like to be part of a school that, like this one, sees diversity not as a challenge to overcome, but as an asset to cultivate.' (PRI10:195; Div as an asset)
10. 'Looking back as a teacher, I realize how much I learned from that experience: diversity in the classroom is not a barrier, but a powerful opportunity for mutual growth and learning.' (DD3:32; Div as an asset)

The coded instances that unequivocally present diversity as an asset tend to be about linguistic or cultural diversity. This reflects these professionals' interest in languages and perception of plurilingualism as an advantage (the majority are FL experts). Moreover,

the words "linguistic", "cultural" and "diversity" are a regular association, which is understandable in the context of a self-reflective task for a course *on interculturality*. See for instance excerpt 11 below:

> 11. 'Reflecting on the lessons, classroom experiences, and real-life examples, I have come to appreciate the complexity and richness that cultural diversity brings to education.' (PPR3:38; Div as asset)

On the other hand, other types of diversity can be gazed as a challenge. This worry resonates with prior research on other stakeholders' perspectives about CLIL for pupils with learning disabilities (i.e. Anghel *et al.*, 2012) and puts at stake the inherent aim of CLIL to have a levelling effect that makes linguistic capital accessible to all types of learners (Coyle *et al.*, 2010). As excerpt 12 shows, participants verbalise their preoccupation showing personal engagement and a grasp of their teaching reality:

> 12. 'I think differences between CLIL and monolingual methodologies can create difficulties, particularly for students with Special Educational Needs. Throughout my practicum in bilingual schools, I have noticed that these challenges are not unique to teaching History, but they also arise with different subjects and types of content.' (DD3:31; Div as a ch)

Nonetheless, these novice teachers also see the potential of their teaching milieu for reaching all students. In this sense, the code *ICE/CLIL as support for inclusion* refers to the fragments where the participants explore the possibilities of ICE or CLIL for effective inclusive education. The ideas put forward in these fragments are somewhat vague and open though, that is, they are not a repertoire of solutions and examples of good practices, but general reflections that turn around the belief that ICE helps ensuring that every student feels seen and valued (see excerpt 13):

> 13. 'Recognising the importance of culture in the classroom and integrating interculturality into the objectives of the CLIL curriculum can contribute to creating a more inclusive and enriching learning environment.' (PPR2:50; ICE/CLIL as support for inc)

All in all, the data reveals that diversity is conceived both positively and negatively. While it is often seen as a strength or opportunity in relation to multiculturality and plurilingualism, it is also sometimes framed as a barrier, especially regarding students with special educational needs. However, participants also recognise the potential of CLIL and intercultural approaches to foster more inclusive classrooms, as reflected in their belief that integrating cultural diversity into the curriculum can enhance educational experiences. Yet, the scant manifestation of the category *Diversity in CLIL* in the corpus indicates that this potential should be further explored in intercultural in-service education.

How do these teachers depict themselves as intercultural individuals? What is their degree of intercultural political engagement and awareness?

First of all, these teachers' self-depiction as interculturally aware individuals is noticeably marked by the recognition that IC is a tangible and evolving construct: they repeatedly express that their IC is evolving, that they are undertaking a change, and that this change will continue, because intercultural identity "is not a box to tick, but a river that flows" (PPR6:90). In the corpus there are plentiful examples of instances or realisation and even awakening to a new way of perceiving interculturality within CLIL and within FL teaching in general, as shown through expressions such as "I have opened my eyes", "This has completely changed my vision" or "This was revealing for me". Moreover,

participants distinctly refer to their improvement in the different dimensions of IC, namely knowledge, attitudes and skills. Some examples of this awareness of their own change are quotations 14 to 16, addressing knowledge, attitudes and skills respectively (in bold):

14. 'Initially, I thought of culture as something tied to broad social groups or nationalities, but **now I know it is** a dynamic system of values, behaviors, and ways of interacting that exists in all spaces, including the classroom.' (DD2:23; Aware of ch; emphasis added)
15. 'Learning about polychronic and monochronic cultures […] helped me understand past misunderstandings and reminded me to be **more flexible and open-minded**.' (PPR5:79; Aware of ch; emphasis added)
16. 'I have learned that IC is not something you can gain right away. **It is a skill** that develops over time, and it is important to start nurturing it early.' (DD2:27; Aware of ch; emphasis added)

This expression of portfolio writers' awareness of their own ongoing change could be taken as an indicator of the effectiveness of the IC course which frames this study, one of whose core pedagogical aims is, as we saw, to encourage reflection on intercultural identity. It can also suggest that reflective written self-examination is a good option for deepening meta-cognitive awareness of intercultural positioning and membership (Byram, 2008; Dai, 2009). Indeed, this realisation often prompts these teachers to revisit earlier cross-cultural experiences and reassess them through the lens of their evolving competence, both in the professional and personal spheres. This can be seen in the following quotes:

17. 'I had never thought about the cultural implications of [using the Union Jack as the symbol for Madrid's bilingual programme], and how it may unintentionally present a limited view of what English represents, favouring one culture over the many that speak the language.' (PRI14:245; Critical analysis of int enc)
18. 'As someone who has studied and worked in international environments, [after this session] I was able to relate to the "hidden" parts of the cultural iceberg and recall moments where I had misunderstood or been misunderstood due to implicit cultural norms.' (PRI13:229; Critical analysis of int enc)

Another sign of successful self-examination is the code *Awareness of strengths or limitations*, which makes reference to the participants' recognition of their characteristics as intercultural individuals, i.e. their level of agency and involvement when faced with cross-cultural events. As can be seen in excerpts 19 and 20, they can be very open and personal about these characteristics:

19. 'What stayed with me most was the idea that being an intercultural speaker isn't just about knowing other cultures […]. That felt very real to me, because I've caught myself making quick judgments or feeling uncomfortable in unfamiliar situations.' (PPR5:78; Aware of lim)
20. 'What does it mean to smile in different cultures? As a Spanish I know we smile more than in other countries and it is a gift that we have received for free.' (PRI5:131; Aware of st)

Regarding the professional realm, these novice teachers could be said to portray a nascent professional persona in relation to interculturality. The analysis of the code *Perception of professional self*, one of the most frequently tagged, indicates that with time and experience, they could be eventually counted among the non-native FL "interculturally savvy" educators (Sparrow, 2000: 750), whose double profile as learners and teachers of their subject matter helps them incorporate their own intercultural journeys into their job (Bayyrurt, 2007). In particular, tagged fragments display a deep level of reflection and commitment with the profession:

21. 'This task also helped me reflect on my strengths and areas for growth as a future teacher. I realised that I am capable of designing activities that are both educational and transformative, but that I must always be attentive to the cultural diversity of my students.' (PRI13:237; Percep of prof self)
22. 'I hope to develop the tools to become more interculturally competent myself, so I can one day bring this perspective into my future primary classrooms.' (PRI8:160; Commit)

Both heightened awareness and commitment can be perceived in relation to these teachers' involvement in intercultural political education and civic action. Their discourse is fraught with references to global citizenship, harmonious, tolerant societies, and in general, with the world beyond the classroom. That is, through their self-reflections, these teachers demonstrate that they see the relevance of global issues in their own lives and openly assume their 'glocal' responsibility (Lourenço & Simões, 2021) to educate children as critical intercultural beings. Classrooms are sometimes seen as "small spaces that hold enormous transformative power" (PRI8:179) and IC is seen as a "school-wide commitment" (PRI10:194), consistent with CLIL's interdisciplinary nature. Excerpts 23 and 24 are instances of this involvement:

23. 'I now see IC not as an optional topic but as a fundamental aspect of language education and an essential part of preparing students to become thoughtful, responsible global citizens.' (PPR5:84; ICE for global cit)
24. 'Integrating IC and bilingualism in our primary school classrooms not only enriches students' learning but also prepares them to be global citizens in the interconnected world we live in.' (PRI1:106; ICE for global cit)

The data also renders insightful comments on the difficulties to undertake this task, related to the challenges of applying ICE in CLIL and the complexities of today's society such as racism, ethnocentrism and prejudice, as in 25 and 26 respectively:

25. 'Some questions that came to my mind […] were, how could we as teachers teach IC in a FL when students do not understand the language? Is it possible to teach IC in all subjects?' (PRI6:147; ICE as a ch)
26. 'It's evident we are living in times where vulnerable communities and cultural identities are increasingly under threat rather than protected. // Honestly, these types of news stories make me increasingly aware of the critical role we, as teachers, play today.' (PRI8:173; Threat to global cit // 174; ICE/CLIL teacher profile/role)

The broader takeaway of this section is that these novice teachers articulate a growing, reflective intercultural identity marked by awareness of change, of personal strengths and weaknesses, and professional aspirations. Their narratives reveal not only a developing sense of self as intercultural educators, but also a commitment to global citizenship and a recognition of both the transformative potential and the real-world challenges of implementing ICE within CLIL contexts.

Conclusion

The analysis of participants' reflective portfolios suggests that these novice CLIL teachers are developing a nuanced intercultural awareness that informs both their personal identities and their emerging professional roles. Their ability to articulate the complex relationship between ICE and CLIL pedagogy, as well as their engagement with issues of global responsibility, reveals a promising orientation towards inclusive and socially committed teaching practices. While this growth is likely supported by their participation in the intercultural training programme, the findings could also reflect broader trends in initial teacher identity formation in plurilingual and multicultural educational contexts, which would be interesting to explore further.

Interestingly, these teachers' intercultural identities appear to depart from patterns observed in previous studies (cf. Fernández-Agüero & Garrote-Salazar, 2019; Garrote-Salazar & Fernández-Agüero, 2016), where prospective teachers from the same institution often exhibited a non-agentive stance shaped by cultural stereotypes. In contrast, the present data reveal a more dynamic and reflective self-positioning, with stronger indications of agency and critical engagement in intercultural matters, as well as clearer alignment with the principles of intercultural citizenship. This shift might, at least in part, be attributed to the structure and pedagogical approach of the training course itself – a possibility that underscores the relevance of well-designed IC programmes in teacher education.

Nevertheless, several caveats must be acknowledged. Firstly, the study did not include a pre-intervention measure of participants' initial levels of IC, which limits the ability to track developmental change over time. Secondly, the subset of participants holding a double degree in primary and pre-primary education was notably small, which restricts the generalisability of findings for this group. Thirdly, despite the richness of the qualitative data in the portfolios, only a relatively small portion of the corpus (13.7%) was tagged as relevant for this study, likely due to the inclusion in the portfolios of descriptive content such as session summaries alongside reflective passages. These caveats will be addressed in future research.

Beyond these limitations, the study highlights the role of reflective writing as a catalyst for IC and professional self-awareness among novice teachers. To maximise its potential impact, future intercultural training programmes – whether the one explored here or others – should place greater emphasis on practical strategies for assessing intercultural competence and fostering inclusive pedagogies tailored to CLIL environments. These enhancements will help prepare future educators to respond to the demands of increasingly diverse classrooms and to advance the goals of equity and global citizenship through their teaching practice.

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