DECOLONIZING THE EFL MATERIALS: A STRATEGY TO TEACH ENGLISH TO CHILDREN AND FOSTER THEIR ICC

DESCOLONIZAR MATERIALES DE INGLÉS: UNA ESTRATEGIA PARA ENSEÑAR INGLÉS A LOS NIÑOS Y FOMENTAR SU COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA INTERCULTURAL

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of foreign languages emphasizes communicative and intercultural skills; however, Colombian education often neglects local cultures, leading to cultural alienation. This research aims to investigate the role that a digital booklet, designed from a decolonized perspective, plays in the EFL learning process and the development of intercultural communication competence of a group of young learners. This research follows a qualitative action research design and the participants are four children from Puerto Gaitan, Colombia, who took EFL lessons online, and whose parents are active members of a social foundation located in the same municipality, which is interested in fostering their communicative skills in the target language to help them become cultural ambassadors of their region. The instruments used to collect data were transcripts from the video recordings of the lessons, field notes and the students' productions. Findings show that the booklet played the role of a motivational source, a facilitator of context and language and a provider of interaction among cultures by means of its features and activities. Likewise, the use of the booklet fostered the children's development of intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills, which represent the basis of their intercultural communication competence.

Keywords: *language teaching, intercultural competence, cultural significance, decolonized digital resource*

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Descolonizar Materiales de Inglés: Una Estrategia para Enseñar Inglés a los Niños y Fomentar su Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural

RESUMEN

La enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras enfatiza las habilidades comunicativas e interculturales; sin embargo, la educación colombiana a menudo descuida las culturas locales, lo que lleva a una alienación cultural. Este estudio busca investigar el papel que juega un librillo digital, diseñado desde una perspectiva descolonizada, en el proceso de aprendizaje de inglés y el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural de un grupo de jóvenes estudiantes. Esta investigación sigue un diseño de investigación acción cualitativa y los participantes son cuatro niños de Puerto Gaitán, Colombia, que tomaron clases de inglés en línea, y cuyos padres son miembros de una fundación social ubicada en el mismo municipio, la cual desea fomentar sus habilidades comunicativas en el idioma para ayudarlos a convertirse en embajadores culturales de su región. Los instrumentos para recolectar datos fueron transcripciones de grabaciones de video, notas de campo y producciones de los estudiantes. Los resultados muestran que el librillo desempeñó el papel de fuente de motivación, facilitador del contexto y del lenguaje y proveedor de interacción entre culturas a través de sus características y actividades. Asimismo, el librillo fomentó el desarrollo de actitudes, conocimientos y habilidades interculturales de los niños, representando la base de su competencia comunicativa intercultural.

Palabras clave: *enseñanza de idiomas, competencia intercultural, significado cultural, recurso digital descolonizado*

INTRODUCCIÓN

In recent years, the field of teaching foreign languages has emphasized the relationship that is established between the development of communicative and intercultural skills that allow students to interact effectively and share information about L1 and L2 cultures into the classrooms. However, in Colombia, English as a foreign Language (EFL) has focused mainly on the foreign language culture, relegating "local needs, interests, and life experiences of the learners in their own context" (Núñez and Téllez, 2020, p. 23). Hence, learning EFL in our territory implies a power relationship between a dominant group, mainly the American or British culture, and a subordinate group, which is the Colombian one; therefore, the dominant culture tends to superimpose its practices and knowledge on the local one.

Moreover, deculturation is a growing concern in Colombia. In recent years, the spread of EFL has led to a cultural alienation, which makes people tend to abandon their own traditions and heritage (Mann, 2001). This situation is worsened inside the EFL classrooms since the majority of materials and textbooks to teach this language tend to constrain the students' intercultural communication competence. The production of EFL educational resources in Colombia is scarce; the majority of these materials are designed by international publishing houses that do not understand the complexity of local contexts and communities, nor do they truly promote awareness and sensitivity towards sociocultural diversity (Núñez and Téllez, 2020). What is more, school curricula address very few topics related to our own culture, which does not foster its recognition and value.

Following the aforementioned, a change of paradigm to embrace our own southern epistemologies and decolonize the EFL learning and teaching practices is paramount. It implies understanding that there is an imposed worldview that should be negotiated and mixed with the local one. In this regard, developing materials which reflect a more diverse and inclusive range of cultures and perspectives, recovering pedagogies which have been marginalized by the dominant approaches from the northern epistemologies, and exploring local contexts by incorporating our own cultural and social backgrounds are key strategies to decolonize the Colombian EFL classrooms.

Consequently, this research arises, first, from our observations and reflections as EFL pre-service teachers. We have realized the emergent need of creating EFL materials that do not prevent learners

from valuing and learning about their own culture along with the foreign one as these resources tend to emphasize heavily on foreign cultural traits as if they were superior to our own, instead of valuing standard English varieties which have their own richness (Pennycook, 1994). Furthermore, this research emerged from the challenge we had to face when having a social practice to teach synchronous online EFL lessons to a group of young children whose parents belonged to a social foundation in Puerto Gaitan, Meta in Colombia. These learners had little to no knowledge of English, nor did they have sophisticated electronic devices, just their parents' cell phones; however, the foundation's interest was to support the children's EFL learning as a way to empower them to become the cultural ambassadors of their region, which is a tourist destination, so that they could bring prosperity to their community in the future. Therefore, the design of a digital decolonized booklet that could support their learning and foster their intercultural communication competence (ICC) emerged as our main strategy.

Thus, the following research questions guided our research: What is the role that an EFL digital booklet, designed from a decolonizing perspective, has on the learning process of a group of young children, from the rural and the urban area of Puerto Gaitan, Colombia, who are taking lessons in a synchronous virtual environment? and second, to what extent can the use of these material foster this group of students' ICC?

Accordingly, this research may promote EFL classrooms where the L1 culture is valued and considered as a source of knowledge and topic of interest just as much as the English one. This could boost the learners' effective communication, and serve as an example for teachers who seek to satisfy their students' L2 learning needs without forgetting their cultural wealth, which may result in a more meaningful and engaging language learning experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Decolonization

The term decolonization can be defined as the process of removing dominance and power from a colonizing group. It implies a cultural, economic, psychological, and political liberation that allows the right to exercise self-determination over one's own land, culture, politics and economy. In fact, it aims to create new symbolisms and realities based on the local context of subordinate groups to challenge hegemonic and discriminatory hierarchies (Gómez et al., 2017).

In the educational context, decolonizing means rebuilding a system that is already predetermined, examining its limitations and biases. It questions patterns of knowledge and power instituted by colonialism (Fandiño, 2021). Thus, decolonized education breaks the traditional ways in which things are conceived and done for the mere fact that they have always been that way, and proposes a decoupling of forcibly imposed cultural and linguistic concepts and terms, to give way to the creation of context-specific instructional strategies based on local sociocultural, historical-political, and educational needs (Fandiño, 2021).

Different authors have focused on the decolonization of EFL classrooms from different perspectives. Among them, Nuñez (2020) explains that the content of EFL textbooks, from the ways of being, knowing and exercising power, misrepresent and hide the realities of the local context. Also, Kumaravadivelu (2016) emphasizes the potential benefits of incorporating decolonial perspectives in ELT, such as promoting social justice, empowering subaltern learners, and enriching the overall learning experience.

Intercultural Communication Competence

The intercultural communication competence (ICC) has had a positive influence on the field of languages education. In the current globalized, interconnected and interdependent world (Munezane, 2021), full of opportunities for people to interact with others from different contexts, fostering intercultural communication becomes a must to succeed in creating citizens of the world. Hymes (1972) defines the ICC as the ability of an individual to express him/herself effectively and appropriately in diverse cultural contexts, taking into account their native communicative structures and relating them to foreign ones. Also, Byram (1997) proposes a five dimensions model of the ICC that characterizes a competent intercultural speaker. These five dimensions are solidly interconnected, hence, not developing one implies not achieving the others.

Table 1 Five dimensions of ICC

Savoir	knowledge about the communication participants -oneself and the other-, the interaction happening and the individual-society relationship.
Savoir être	attitudes towards the self-strengthening and valuing others
Savoir comprendre	skills to interpret and relate information
Savoir apprendre/faire	discovery and interaction skills
Savoir s'engager	cultural awareness from a critical perspective

Note. Adapted from Byram, 1997. p. 34)

However, authors like Hymes (1972), Byram (1997), Byram et al. (2002) and others are focused on the study of ICC on the adult population. It opens the door to creating a new field of research to understand the functioning of the ICC in the younger population. One pioneering investigation in the study of Children's ICC was developed by Gerlich et al. (2010); they identified skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to ICC in a preschool group of children aged three to six.

This study allows to raise the conceptualization of children's ICC in a bilingual education environment. It was was based on the observation of children during 4 school days where cultural exchange activities were carried out in order to analyze their behavior towards the ICC. It demonstrated the importance of meaningful developmental environments that promote students' exposure to language and culture in bilingual institutions at early ages and the key teacher's role as a linguistic and behavioral model. Therefore, fostering children's ICC contributes to their adaptation to the uncertainty when interacting with other cultures by developing behavior strategies of exploration and negotiation with proper confidence.

MATERIALS DESIGN

The process of developing or selecting suitable and effective resources for language teaching and learning is known as ELT material design (Tomlinson, 2011). This practice objective is to create resources that are in line with the needs, interests, and skills of the learners as well as with the objectives of the educational programs. Tomlinson (2011) asserts that there are three key steps to material design: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Teachers or material developers identify goals and students needs during the analysis stage. Later they must aim at developing relevant, authentic, and meaningful materials. They should provide opportunities for learners to practice all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and to interact by using the language in meaningful contexts. Hence, designing materials with a clear purpose in mind is key, as well as setting opportunities for their regular evaluation; it allows to measure their effectiveness and fosters improvement (Richards, 2013).

There have been different studies focused on the design of materials in EFL classrooms. Howard & Major (2004) emphasize language levels proficiency and cultural appropriateness considerations as guidelines for creating effective English language teaching materials. The authors stress the significance of aligning materials with learning goals and objectives, as well as providing a variety of activities and assessments that allow students to practice and apply new language skills. Rico (2012) also reflects upon the role of designed teaching materials for ICC development; he explains that traditionally designed materials prevent learners from developing their communicative skills and successfully participate in an intercultural encounter due to the stereotypes and colonizing perspectives they promote. Therefore, materials design and decolonizing education may serve as drivers of change towards effective and culturally enriched communication that opens doors to a more inclusive and assertive world.

METHODOLOGY

This study follows the principles of qualitative research, which aims to comprehend complex social phenomena with an emphasis on the viewpoints and experiences of individuals and groups (Bryman, 2012). Likewise, it is framed in the action research design, which is commonly used in the educational field as an improvement-oriented strategy. It involves cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting upon practice as a strategy for professional development (Burns, 2019).

Accordingly, this research involved four cycles, each one with five main steps. First, the planning of lessons and materials embedded in a digital booklet took place. It was developed according to the syllabus provided, the children's needs, their context and the institution's requirements, which mainly emphasized on the foundations needed for students to be able to interact in EFL about their region and in the future, become their territory ambassadors. Second, activities and lessons of the digital booklet

were developed; this step was a critical one since several different modifications were required due to the children and their parents' lack of knowledge about the use of platforms and ICT tools, which made us focus on the basics. Third, the lessons were developed online; the children's processes and the use they made of the material were observed, recorded and reviewed for further analysis. Fourth, there was a reflection and assessment stage based on the data collected, considering the kids' EFL learning process and ICC development, and the weaknesses and challenges of the material. Finally, decisions regarding the way to present the language contents, the narrative used and design elements were made to improve the quality of the material and so, the learners process.

Our participants were a group of four students aged between five and eight years old. Their parents were active members of a Colombian social foundation located in Puerto Gaitán, Meta, whose main purpose is to promote the formation of skills in order to contribute to the prevention of drug consumption among the indigenous population living in the Wacoyo reserve, although they also work with the non-indigenous community from the municipality. They focus on making the most of leisure time and seek to develop autonomy and social cohesion among the members.

These children had almost no knowledge of EFL. Their parents attended a campaign made by the foundation to teach their kids English online during two hours a week for ten weeks. Then some informed their interest and joined the foundation's objective of starting training their children in this language so that in the future they could share their traditions, customs and values as a strategy for their community to make their culture known and learn from others around the world. These kids were in elementary school; some of them were becoming literate and others were perfecting their reading and writing skills, so their written productions involved words as well as drawings. Moreover, due to their ages, some of their oral production was difficult to understand, so Spanish was used as a tool to confirm understanding and sometimes to deliver instruction.

Due to their location and economic situation, they did not have high-tech devices, but their parents' cell phones. Furthermore, the poor Internet quality and continuous power outages were issues that affected the class delivery; hence, lessons tended to be paused, some restarted more than once, and it was not possible to develop interactive online activities.

We implemented three instruments to collect data. First, according to Creswell (2016), recordings can

be a rich source of data, especially in qualitative research, where varied and detailed data are often needed to understand complex phenomena; therefore, every online lesson was video recorded and later transcribed to get detail of what had happened. Second, we took field notes, which allowed us to record our class observations; as Emerson et al. (2011) explain, field notes help capture detailed descriptions of the activities, the class environment, the methodologies implemented, the people involved. Third, we collected the students' productions. We took pictures of their written samples and drawings as evidence of their outcomes based on the activities proposed in the digital booklet. These instruments allowed us to analyze the learners' EFL learning progress, the development of their ICC, and the strengths and opportunities for improvement of the material.

Likewise, in order to analyze the data, first, we carried out a process of triangulation. It is a method that involves the utilization of multiple data sources, methods, theories, or researchers to study a phenomenon, with the aim of enhancing the credibility and validity of the information through cross-verification (Creswell & Plano, 2017). This approach helped us to avoid biases and get a more comprehensive understanding of the findings. Second, we developed a thematic analysis, a powerful method for uncovering meaning. It is a strategy used to carry out complex interpretations of qualitative data by identifying and analyzing data thematic patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Besides, it is important to mention that we carefully emphasized the ethical principles that must be taken into account when conducting research. We acquired the consent to carry out this research directly with the foundation by presenting a letter where we requested authorization to proceed with the study, explaining important information and main objectives. to ensure full understanding of the study objectives, procedures, and benefits. In addition, absolute confidentiality of their personal information was guaranteed by codifying the data and ensuring that no individual could be identified. Also, methodological rigor was applied at all stages of the process to guarantees transparency in the presentation of the methods used and honesty in the interpretation of the results.

Table 2 Codification of the data collected

Instruments	Codes
Transcripts from video recordings	T (number)
Field Notes	FN (number)
Students documents	SD (number)
Students	S (number)

Note. Own Elaboration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims at analyzing the role an EFL digital booklet, designed from the decolonized perspective, played in the EFL learning progress of a group of Children from Puerto Gaitan, Colombia, and to what extent it fostered their ICC. For that purpose, two categories and subcategories emerged as it is shown in table 2.

Table 3 Research questions, categories and subcategories

- What is the role that an EFL digital booklet, designed from a decolonizing perspective, has on the learning process of a group of young children, from the rural and the urban area of Puerto Gaitan, Colombia, who are taking lessons in a synchronous virtual environment?
- To what extent can the use of these material foster this group of children's ICC?

Categories	Subcategories
The roles of a decolonized digital Booklet on the children's EFL learning process.	The booklet as a source of motivation
	The booklet as a facilitator of a context and language items to understand how language works
	The booklet as a space of interaction among cultures
Young learners' ICC development through the use of a decolonized EFL digital Booklet.	Attitudes
	Knowledge
	Skills

Note. Own elaboration.

The roles of a decolonized digital Booklet on the children's EFL learning process.

According to the data analysis, there are three main roles the digital booklet played along the process. They are explained as follows.

The booklet as a source of motivation

According to Sedarmayanti (2017), motivation is a mental condition that encourages activity and provides energy that leads to the achievement of goals or reduction of imbalances. After collecting and systematizing the data, the analysis we carried out about the role of the booklet we designed showed three ways in which this material constituted a source of motivation for the participants.

First, we identified the motivational power of the digital booklet on the participants by integrating the idea of a trip around the world for learning EFL. The booklet presents the idea of a trip to visit three different English speaking countries, Colombia, The USA and Australia, whose cultures were portraited throughout different environments and situations. This feature followed Mirza's idea regarding the importance of giving learners enough opportunities to receive language input used in meaningful situations, thereby enabling them to exploit such situations (2021). Then the students' motivation was marked by their positive response towards the places they were going to see while using the booklet; the idea of visiting unknown countries and using English in situations proper for a trip fostered their wish to keep working in class and participating while focusing their attention. What is more, the presentation of different scenarios and situations embedded in the contexts of every country not only aroused the children's interest, but also arouse their curiosity and anticipation to the class contents.

> Then, we introduced the material from the book (whose name is not mentioned), which drew a lot of attention because it sparked curiosity about a journey. The children began asking questions like: "Where are we going to travel?" and "How are we going to travel?" (FN 1).

Secondly, the use of meaningful characters along the journey was a factor that highly motivated the learners. There were three colorful digital animals who were presented as their traveling companions. Paco, the main character, shared the children's nationality and social context. The children were very excited when they recognized him as a typical animal of their geographical region. Also, John, an eagle, and Luke, a kangaroo, were two characters typical from the United States and Australia. They called the students' attention since they did not have much knowledge of these animals' origins. Thus, it also had not raised their curiosity and engaged them in multiple activities that fostered interaction. Students had different reactions, such as shouting, moving towards their screens and asking about them. It

boosted the learning atmosphere and made them feel eager to continue learning about them and their context by using the target language.

> Students showed excitement to answer by showing a smile and jumping in their seats. They showed that they remembered that they had talked about greetings. In the same way, the students remember Paco's friends, their names, nationalities and which animal they were. FN2

Finally, the use of cultural items and situations proper of the explored countries was another source of motivation. It seemed that topics such as typical food, traditions, celebrations, curious facts, tourist places, among others, created a novel environment since the students did not have previous knowledge regarding the foreign cultures. In response to this, they generated attitudes of curiosity and discovery toward a cultural exchange. As Kashdan & Silvia (2009) explain, these attitudes potentialized the learners wish to explore new scenarios, no matter how novel and challenging the experiences could be, which in turn, promoted their active learning while sharing ideas about their own contexts and enhanced their understanding about their own culture and the foreign ones.

> (After discussing the vocabulary in the booklet) The teacher asked the student what the perfect accompaniment could be for a hamburger in Colombia. The student thought a lot and the teacher decided to suggest French fries as an example. The student smiled and mentioned *Creole potatoes*. The teacher congratulated him … the teacher explained that the activity would continue, but now Paco, the Colombian capybara, would help them (FN4).

The booklet as a facilitator of a context and linguistic items to understand how language works
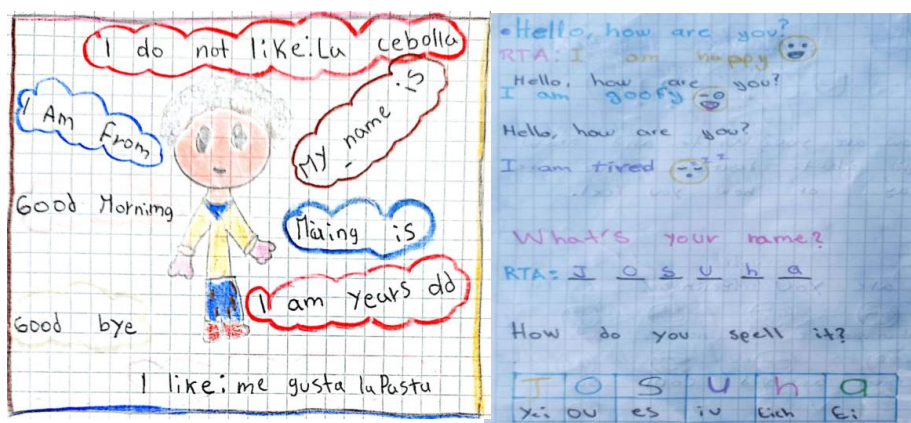
When using the digital booklet, the students received instruction and developed different activities immersed in specific contexts, such as dialogues, stories or informative blocks that were written or presented through audios and images. The teacher acted as a facilitator while reading, explaining, and playing the audios of the material. Then instead of memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary, students seemed to understand the language's meaning and function to achieve specific communicative goals and connect it to real life situations. This was evident during the lessons as students' participation focused on their understanding of circumstances in which the characters were involved, such as filling a passport with their personal information in English to be able to travel, comparing their tastes regarding food, finding equivalents from the other cultures and learning about the types of animals they

could find in Australia, among others, even though they had not seen them in their region. Although they tended to move from English to Spanish ánd vice versa, it was clear how the use of the new and revisited EFL items in different context and situations made them aware of the communicative nature of language to receive information, to formulate questions about the unknown information and clarify the doubts that emerged through the lessons, to explain what they had understood and to share what they knew from their culture without focusing on strict grammatical rules and lists of words.

> ¡Listo profe! Blue whale, blue whale. Green, parrot. En mi casa también hay peces ¿Se los muestro? ¡Ahí está el acuario! son green, blue y red… green. Three! ¡Parrot, parrot! El color de la parrot (T5, S3).

Also, images serve as visual anchors making the abstract easier to understand and to remember. They engaged students with the colors and shapes and captured the implications of meaning beyond isolated words; they helped to create associations to clarify definitions, contextualize meanings and avoid the ambiguity, which boosted their vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. Besides, formulaic language seemed to be very useful for the learners' communication and language understanding. The use of ready-to-use phrases allowed children to pick grammar patterns as they interacted with the teacher and the characters of the booklet, for example, while greeting, sharing personal information and expressing their likes and dislikes. Therefore, these phrases helped the learners enhance their oral and written skills and facilitated their comprehension while reading and listening.

(Activity to introduce themselves to the characters using formulaic language) SD1 S1, SD1 S2)

The booklet as a space of interaction and sharing among cultures

The use of the digital booklet also provided the students with multiple opportunities to interact by using the target language. The learners frequently exchanged ideas and information in written and oral ways

while interacting with the characters, which also generated a positive and dynamic learning environment. A key feature of the booklet was the characters' speech, which appears in dialogue bubbles and audio recordings; it made learners engage in conversations while rehearsing the language. Regarding the aforementioned, Cook (2008) states that exposure to authentic cultural and language interactions supports the language learning process.

What is more, the interactions with the characters and the language samples in the booklet allowed students to recognize and appreciate various cultures while fostering a sense of belonging to their own, which is important when developing the ICC. Images, written texts and audios with the characters' words provided the learners with details about the cultures that the learners used to compare and appreciate while experiencing a cultural exchange.

> In the next activity, through a dialogue with Luke the kangaroo, the learners reviewed the colors and proposed examples, teacher showed the screen and then she showed them the colors, she said that Luke chose "corn" as an example for the color "yellow" and that ¨Maíz" is called "corn" in English. Then the students gave an example according to the color. FN 4

> In this way, the booklet not only fostered the students' communicative skills in EFL, but provided them with a meaningful learning environment in which they could interact with different characters, learn from their cultures and share information about their own context, which aligned with the intention of the social foundation the learners' families belonged to.

Young learners' ICC development through the use of a decolonized EFL digital Booklet

The second category emerged from the analysis of data we systematized throughout the adapted version of the children's ICC development matrix by Gerlich (2010), which involved attitudes, knowledge and skills young learners could demonstrate. This allowed us to identify how our participants were building the foundations of their ICC.

Attitudes

Attitudes represent one of the pillars of the ICC (Gerlich et al., 2010; Byram et al., 2002; Byram 1997); they represent values, opinions, and willingness to accept, understand, and realize not only the own culture but also features, views and experiences of others as well. After analyzing the data, we could find that the learners were able to exhibit their attitudes towards their language and culture and the

foreign ones in different moments of the class. First, by sharing judgmental statements, they demonstrated their rejection towards some foreign culture features, in this case some typical food. Their lack of experience with the new tastes and their previous knowledge made them judge negatively a dish presented in the booklet. However, students demonstrated tolerance to the unknown, for instance, when learning about wild animals from their own and foreign countries; no matter the fear those animals may produced, their interest towards the unknown allowed them to accept and value them; some of them even wanted to see them in real life and pet them no matter their previous feelings. Besides, there were some hesitating moments in which students doubted about what to respond as they did not know whether their ideas were appropriate to the topic or not, so they took their time but finally answered.

Likewise, they exhibited their interest toward the languages and cultures when being introduced to new topics that appealed to their likes; their curiosity towards the novelty made them even anticipate what was going to be taught. Also, their body language showed their excitement towards certain topics and activities related to the trip to other cultures. These situations allowed them to demonstrate their admiration for the other cultures and their willingness to interact and participate actively. There were very few moments in which the learners seemed to be not interested in the class and the material; mainly at the beginning of the process, some students were distracted and tended to focus on personal topics unrelated to the class; it happened when they did not understand the new language or when they did not have any previous knowledge about the topic, which showed certain frustration that disappeared with the time as they became knowable of the foreign cultural topics and language and related them to their own.

Finally, they demonstrated their motivation towards the intercultural contact and the use of the foreign language. There was a continuous excitement when interacting with the booklet characters and the teacher along the class. What is more, their wish for traveling, their interest towards most of the novel features of the foreign cultures, and their enthusiasm when participating in conversations with the characters motivated them to understand and reproduce the target language using the phrases and vocabulary they had been taught, although their need for translating and incorporating words and ideas from their own culture was a constant as well.

Knowledge

Based on Gerlich's (2010) categories of ICC knowledge, which relate to the model of Byram et al. (2002) and Byram (1997), the analysis of the data allowed us to identify certain types of knowledge our students developed, which helped them start building their ICC. Thus, the participants were able to exhibit factual knowledge regarding their own and the foreign cultures as well as their knowledge of the foreign languages and the lack of it. To begin with, something that call our attention was the fact that they tended to compare the information from the foreign cultures to what they had experienced in their own context; they found similarities and differences regarding the characters of the booklet, food, animals and traditions, among others, and seemed to be proud of their previous knowledge and experiences while showing interests towards the novelty. Additionally, by watching TV and using streaming service platforms, they had already built certain knowledge about the foreign cultures that they shared with no hesitation. It was shown through their active participation in various discussions while introducing vocabulary, and reading and listening.

Likewise, students seemed to be proud of the knowledge they had gotten from the lessons; they were enthusiastic when recalling previous lesson contents, reviewing vocabulary, and showing understanding when listening and reading. Nevertheless, sometimes they had trouble remembering or finding new words and structures or using the proper pronunciation to communicate; as they were EFL true beginners, there were different moments in which they had to pause and ask for support from the teacher.

Skills

The ICC skills encompass diverse abilities for facilitating successful intercultural communication. Based on Gerlich's (2010) model, our learners were able to develop skills to communicate by implementing various strategies. First, they used verbal communication strategies which included the use of new vocabulary, formulaic language and even the use of Spanish to participate in oral activities and conversations. The teacher's support was paramount to equip the learners with enough linguistic resources to interact. Also, the use of non-verbal communication, like facial expressions and body movements, allowed students express their interest towards communicating; they jumped out of their seats when something new called their attention or moved their hands and head when remembering

language and trying to express themselves. Besides, when they were not able to express their ideas easily, they used their mother tongue or asked the teacher to translate as strategies in order to keep the communication.

Moreover, they developed strategies of deduction and transferring. First, by using images, linguistic resources and previous knowledge, they generated ideas and tried to understand certain concepts and situations they had not thought about before. Also, they were able to transfer basic structures, sounds and vocabulary from their mother tongue to the target one; Although semantics, grammar and pronunciation were not always successfully used, their communicative intention allowed them to discover certain rules that helped them to improve their linguistic skills as well.

Table 4 Matrix of ICC attitudes, knowledge and skills

ICC Attitudes	Instrument code	Context	Participant(s)	Oral and behavioral samples	Languages	Comments
Judgemental statement	T4	The characters present some of the most typical foods and students have to choose a favorite one and explain why. "In my country we eat a vegemite that is a brown dip that we use for sandwiches, the flavor is salt and bitter but in my country we love it."	S3, S4	Ay! No guacala, suena asqueroso - Yo jamas lo probaria profe - Creo que ese no es mi favorito.	Listening in English, Speaking in Spanish	In this case the kids are judging culture features of the foreign language. The teacher explains it is a new flavor, not bad at all, in order to guide them and let them value the other culture
Tolerance/acceptance	FN7	The teacher shows the list of animals arranged in alphabetical order for each animal.	All students	During the course of the class. Students share their feelings and experiences with animals, some feel fear or surprise when talking about wild animals, However they show their interst and others say they want to pet them if possible.	English and Spanish	Even though feelings of fear and surprised emerged, their interest towards the unknown allowed them to accept and value the unknown animals. some of them even wanted to see them in real life and pet them no matter their previous feelings.
Hesitation	FN4	The teacher asked the student what the perfect accompaniment could be for a hamburger in Colombia. The student thought a lot and the teacher decided to suggest French fries as an example.	S3	The teacher asked the student what the perfect accompaniment could be for a hamburger in Colombia. The student thought a lot and the teacher decided to suggest French fries as an example. The student smiled and mentioned *Creole potatoes* . The teacher congratulated him.	Listening in English, Speaking in English and Spanish	The student hesitated while thinking about what type of food would be convenient and finding the world.
Interest	FN 1	The teacher presented the principal characters in the booklet, Paco, Luke and John, and this lead to some inquiries about the countries of origin for Luke and John (America and Australia). For instance, they inquired about the distance from Luke and John, the language they speak, and whether they can comprehend us.	All students	"How far away are we from Luke and John?", "What language do they speak?" and "Can they understand us?".	As this was their first class, them express their ideas in L1.	The students show a significant interest in characters originating from other cultures (America and Australia). They were curious about their way of speaking, their physical distance from where they live, among other aspects. They demonstrated respect and admiration for a different culture.
	FN 2	The teacher begins by recalling Paco and his friends. Students become enthusiastic, jumping and engaging in the conversation about them. The teacher encourages them to recall the animals and participate by remembering their names and nationalities.	S1, S2	Students express excitement by sharing a smile, jumping in their seats and starting talking about the characters.	The teacher asks in English and the students answer in Spanish.	Even though the students didn't know how to express their interest in the topic correctly, they used L1 and L2 to express their ideas, as well as their body language to demonstrate their engagement.
	FN 3	Teacher was talking about all the themes and topics that they seen the last class, and also was asking about what the students remember.	S1, S2	The teacher starts the class by making a recap of the last class. A student actively participates by remembering greetings, passports, and tickets that were used last class.	The teacher asks in English and the students answer in Spanish.	The interest about the themes that they had already seen in classes supported their actively participation and engagement.
No interest	FN 2	The teacher begins by elucidating the story and background of Paco to the students, using the booklet. Nonetheless, a student becomes distracted and disrupts the class by talking about other things.	S2	The student, with excitement, decides to interrupt the class by discussing her personal matters, even though the teacher was speaking.	Listening in English, Speaking in Spanish	The student, by not being captivated or showing interest in what the teacher was discussing, decides to shift the topic to something that truly interested her, even if it was entirely unrelated to the ongoing class discussion. This maybe indicate a desire to connect with the teacher by expressing herself and sharing personal thoughts. However, it also demonstrates a lack of interest and respect towards the class, the teacher, and the classmates.
Motivation for contact	FN 1	The teacher in the lesson, proceeded with the crafting of airplane tickets to initiate they journey.	All students	Students participated making the airplane tickets and the drawings of the characters in their notebooks.	Spanish when speaking and English when writing.	Their wish for travelling and meeting the characters made them design their own plane tickets and use English to register their personal information. However, they needed to ask the teacher to translate to get the proper words.
	FN 3	The teacher was presenting how introduce themselves using one of the characters that was Luke the kangaroo, the idea of the activity was to use the structure of introductions to talk with luke the kangaroo.	All students	"Hello luke my name is S1" "Hello luke mi name is S2" My favorite food is papitas fritas Luke	English and Spanish	The motivation of the students to talk with Luke the kangaroo was evident. The did not hesitate to use the langauge learned, although they used Spanish to fill the unknown.
Motivation for language	T 05	There are some expressions from the students which demosntrate enthusiasm for learning a foreing language.	S1, S3	Sii! Bueno, ¡ Me aprendí casi todos! menos el 49 ¡Colors! ¡Me los sé de memoria! ¡Yellow! ¡Yellow!	English and spanish	The motivation is key for language acquisition and the students demonstrated an intrinsic interest in learning and mastering the foreing language.
	T03	Listening activity that requires all the attention for the students to identify the phrases that they had already learned.	S1	Yo reconoci un (I am from monteria) que significa yo soy de. Profe puedes ponerlo otra vez, es que hay una palabra que quiero reconocer, ya casi la tengo.	Listening in English, Speaking in Spanish and English	Student create an engagement with the activity and was really motivated to understand the ideas from the audio, S1 made an effort to understand and reproduce the same phrases that he recognized and try to explain them to the teacher.
	T5	Notably, the student who initially displayed apprehension about speaking English now greets the teacher and responds to basic English questions with ease.	S1	How are you teacher? Student 1: Yes, yes ! (T5)	English	It is clear the motivation for the language use. He is trying to keep the conversation with the language he knows.

ICC knowledge	Instrument code	Context	Participant(s)	Oral and behavioral samples	Languages	Comments
Factual knowledge	T1, FN 1	The teacher presented the primary character, Paco the capybara, and engaged the, in an activity where the children had to speculate about the type of animal Paco was.	All students	Yo he visto muchos de esos animales aqui donde vivo. Son animales tipicos de mi ciudad. They find out that Paco was a capybara and recalled that there are many of these small animals in their city, and in some way, they are characteristic of the region where they live.	Listening in English, Speaking in Spanish	The students recognized the animal that is very typical of the area where they live (Meta). Therefore, when discussing a familiar animal, they felt the need to talk about that animal and its culture. They seemed proud to have such a small creature in their surroundings.
	F6	They moved on to the presentation of the class topic, which was the alphabet and vocabulary of different animals. This class was guided by Luke the kangaroo, so everything was centered around Australia.	All students	The teacher asked the students what information they knew about that country, and all the children participated and were excited to share what they knew about Australia. There were comments like, "I watch documentaries about Australia with my family all the time and see the dangerous animals," and "In the Disney movies I watch with my dad, I saw a kangaroo similar to Luke."… While she asks the students if they know or have seen these animals that are there, the students tell their experiences and they tell the teacher that they have seen them in movies, videos or even where they live, so with each animal some of them say that they know them and have seen them like others have not.	Spanish and English	Children had information about the animals from other cultures due to their access to the TV and streaming platforms. This knowledge made them feel motivated and eager to participate. They also were enthusiastic when they noticed there were several animals they had seen in their territory. It was very motivating.
Language knowledge	FN 5, T5	The students had to answer basic questions and that involved colors associated vocabulary (e.g., objects and animals).	All students	The students state colors and numbers in English, with correct pronunciation and using English for basic communication was evident. Bueno, el azul es blue, el amarillo es yellow, el verde es green, el rojo es … ¡Se me está olvidando! ¡Ay no! Bueno el negro es black, el rosado es pik, pink ¿Cuál más? El naranja es orange ¿Cuál más? ehh tengo el morado en la mente pero es que no me acuerdo.	English primarily, with occasional references to the students' native language for clarification.	The interactive exercices encourage the students to reproduce or recall words in the foreing language. They feel eager to express what they know.
Lack of knowledge	FN 1	When the teacher presented the primary character, Paco the capybara. The teacher made an activity where the children had to guess the type of animal Paco was. They provided a variety of opinions in response.	All students	The students, despite being familiar with the animal, encountered difficulty in recalling the name of the species. They demonstrated this by mentioning incorrect names for the animal.	Spanish	The students were already familiar with the animal, as it is a very typical one in the area where they live. However, when the teacher asked them for the name of the animal, they encountered difficulties as they couldn't remember the name of it. However, it did not discourage them.

ICC Skills	Instrument code	Context	Participant(s)	Oral and behavioral samples	Languages	Comments
Verbal communication strategy	T03	The students had to introduce themselves using the language structures that they have seen on class, they have to make a portrait and talk about theirselves using only English phrases they could recall.	All students	Mi nombre es S1 - my name is S1- yo tengo 8 años - I am 8 years old - mi comida favorita es la pasta - my favorite food is pasta- yo soy de Puerto Gaitan - I am from Puerto Gaitan.	The using of L1 and translating to the L2.	The students knew that luke the kangaroo could not understand Spanish for that reason they decided to use their L1 to think of what to say and then translate itusign the formulaic language given to be understood.
Non-verbal communication strategy	FN 2	The teacher begins by recalling Paco and his friends. Students become enthusiastic, jumping and engaging in the conversation about them. The teacher encourages them to recall the animals and participate by remembering their names and nationalities.	S1, S2	Students express excitement by sharing a smile, jumping in their seats and starting talking about the characters.	The teacher asks in English and the students answer in Spanish.	Students used their non-verbalcommunication and body langauge to express their interest.
Lack of communication strategy	T7	Students have to answer the question about the favorite things of the characters and the characters' countries.	S3, S4	What was your favorite thing about my country? No entendi), my favorita thing of your country is mmmm….. tu naríz….. no, tu bandera.	They express the major part of the ideas in L1 and translate to the L2	Students had to answer the questions using short phrases in L2 however they could not first understand the question completely and did not find the words to express themselves. So they started guessing and providing any answer to keep working on the activity. They even used humor to avoid frustration.
	FN 2	While the teacher was providing to the students some examples about the activity of the class, a student brought up the topic of how to say "papitas fritas" and how to express it in English.	S2	The student expressed interest in participating in class. However, as she does not know how to say what she wanted to say in English, she wasn't afraid to ask to the teacher about how the translation is.	Students use L1 to ask how to say a word in L2.	The student clearly did not know how to express her liking for French fries. So, showing confidence in front of the teacher, she decided to ask for the correct translation for the specific food. The student used her native language to acquire knowledge in a second language.
Deduction/transfer	FN 1	The teacher presented the key characters of the booklet, Paco, Luke and John. Students start to ask some questions about the countries of Luke and John's. For instance, students made questions that they were unaware about such as: "How distant are we from Luke and John?", "What language do they speak?" and "Can they comprehend us?".	All students	Students were unaware about their relation with the other cultures, so they asked question such as: "How distant are we from Luke and John?", "What language do they speak?" and "Can they comprehend us?".	As this was their first class, them express their ideas in L1.	The students, upon being interested in subjects from another culture, asked about things they didn't know but found intriguing they tried to guess based on whatthey had in their own culture and deduced some things from the images. The teacher responded happily to their participation.
Mediation/translation	FN7, SD7	Activity to express in short phrases about the favorite animals of their country and the australian zoo making a comparison.	S3 and S4.	They named the animals and also draw them to understand bettter the vocabulary, and also they write name of the animals in spanish to understand better the idea.	L1 and L2.	The use of draws to make more easy to understand and express their ideas due they don't know how to write correctly the name of the animals, also the use of translation to make a clearment their ideas.

Note. Adapted from Gerlich (2010).

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the use of decolonized materials, in this case a digital booklet, played a significant role in the students' EFL learning process and allowed students build their ICC foundations. The motivation it produced as well as the linguistic and visual resources it provided along with the opportunities it fostered to interact withing meaningful contexts related to the own culture and the foreign ones, helped students get in contact with English speaking cultures while learning the basics of the target language and exhibiting understanding of it works.

The decolonized perspective which the booklet was designed with, as well as the linguistic and semantic resources, including images, formulaic language, reading and listening text, its narrative and characters allowed the students to identify how the language works in real communication and use basic vocabulary and expressions to interact in everyday basic situations. Nevertheless, the use of their first language and translation, among others, were strategies they implemented to successfully express themselves in the communicative contexts the booklet proposed. Besides, it encouraged students' engagement and immersion in cultural contexts beyond their own, fostering curiosity, empathy, and understanding of different perspectives while generating different attitudes, types of knowledge and skills that constituted their ICC foundations.

Finally, although designing decolonized materials may be a demanding task, we encourage further efforts to produce them. They positively support and encourage the learning of languages along with their cultures, which may result in successful foreign language learning processes.

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APPENDIX A. BOOKLET

The digital booklet contains activities and materials designed to facilitate children's early learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). This resource includes a variety of activities and materials adapted to the needs of students, designed to be used online, making them accessible to all. Additionally, it focuses on the development of Intercultural Competence (ICC), promoting student interaction and the development of their linguistic and communication skills.