

# ORGANISING AND HOSTING AN ERASMUS+ BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME (BIP) AT UNIVERSIDAD ISABEL I

## LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND SOCIETY



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This book reflects the careful work and dedication of all contributors. Nonetheless, responsibility for the content of each chapter rests with its respective author.

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# FOREWORD

## THE VALUE OF ERASMUS+ AND BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES (BIPs)

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Alfonso Gentil Álvarez-Ossorio

SEPIE director (the Erasmus+ National Agency for education and training in Spain)

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As Spain's National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU in the fields of education and training, SEPIE recognises the crucial role that Erasmus+ plays in fostering European integration, innovation, and solidarity through education. At its core, Erasmus+ is not only a mobility programme, but a strategic tool to build a more inclusive, digital, and sustainable Europe.

Among its most dynamic and forward-looking components are the Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), which combine physical mobility with innovative virtual collaboration. These short, intensive programmes bring together students and staff from multiple countries to work on shared challenges, exchange perspectives, and develop key transversal skills. BIPs respond directly to the needs of today's higher education landscape by promoting flexible and inclusive learning environments, making mobility more accessible and adaptable to a wider variety of learners and staff, taking into account

different life situations, study paths, and the evolving digital context of higher education.

From SEPIE's viewpoint, BIPs contribute significantly to the main objectives of Erasmus+, particularly the reinforcement of the European Education Area and the advancement of the European Strategy for Universities. They facilitate deeper cooperation between institutions, empower students through international experiences, and help reduce barriers to mobility by offering shorter and more accessible formats.

In the broader context of the European project, BIPs embody the values of cooperation, mutual understanding, and shared European identity. They are also a clear expression of Europe's commitment to digitalisation, sustainability, and educational innovation. By supporting these initiatives, SEPIE fosters the development of high-quality partnerships and encourages institutions to think creatively about how they engage in internationalisation.

Ultimately, BIPs are a microcosm of what Erasmus+ strives to achieve: a Europe where learners, educators, and institutions collaborate beyond borders, find common solutions, and grow together. They enrich both individuals and systems, and they reflect the vision of a united Europe built through education.

## INTRODUCTION

*"In one word: fantastic. I think it was one of the best experiences in the last years. I was nervous before coming, because I know you cannot see, but I am so shy. I have not many social skills. In Burgos, I understood another part of me in this field. I made friends from other countries, so it was great."*

*— Italian student participant, BIP "Language, Education and Society"*

This heartfelt reflection encapsulates the transformative potential of an Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP). With just a few weeks of shared learning (online and face-to-face), students from across Europe may not only assimilate new academic content, but also discover new versions of themselves. This book documents, analyses and celebrates such experiences through the lens of the BIP *Language, Education and Society*, hosted by Universidad Isabel I in the city of Burgos (Spain) from the 27th to the 31st of May, 2024 and developed through the collaboration of institutions and educators committed to inclusive, intercultural, and innovative education.

When we embarked on the ambitious task of organising our first BIP, we were filled with enthusiasm, but also a sense of responsibility. As Ovtšarenko et al. (2024) remind us, designing an effective BIP entails facing essential questions: How do we structure engaging online and in-person activities?

How do we assess students meaningfully and give feedback that supports growth? How can we ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion? And, perhaps most importantly, how can we foster collaboration and community in such a compressed timeframe? We approached these challenges guided by our academic expertise, and with a hope that the programme would not only succeed but become an unforgettable experience for all involved.

Organising the BIP was not merely about logistics or curriculum design. It was about creating a dynamic learning ecology in which students and teachers from our university and Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi (Poland), Università Telematica Giustino Fortunato (Italy), SSML Internazionale (Italy) and IST-Hochschule für Management (Germany) could grow academically, interculturally, and personally. Teachers played a central role in creating this ecology by promoting a culture of active participation. Incorporating collaborative methods and digital tools was vital to maintaining student engagement, enabling critical thinking, and preparing learners for the demands of the 21st century. At the same time, the benefits of the BIP extended beyond students. For organisers and university institutions, the programme represented a catalyst for pedagogical innovation, international networking, and institutional transformation.

The main thesis of this book is simple but powerful: well-designed BIPs can offer inclusive, intercultural, and interdisciplinary learning opportunities that benefit not only students, but also educators and institutions. Documenting

the design and implementation of these programmes, especially in their early stages, is essential for informing future practice and research. As the literature suggests, the careful integration of virtual and physical mobility, combined with social presence and structured interaction, is what ultimately determines the success of blended mobility programmes (Carthy, 2022; Helm & O'Dowd, 2020; Frampton et al., 2025).

In our case, we observed how BIP participants developed not only intercultural awareness and disciplinary insights, but also transversal skills such as leadership, collaboration, and empathy—echoing findings from Raikou-Karalis (2020) and Frampton et al. (2025). That a shy student could come out of their shell and build international friendships in less than ten days is more than anecdotal: it speaks to the socio-emotional and cognitive power of these blended experiences.

And yet, challenges remain. Recruitment of participants, meaningful assessment, and sustainable institutional support are issues that still need to be addressed (Ovtšarenko et al., 2024). Research must continue to explore how to maximise student engagement in compressed formats and how to ensure learning continuity between the online and in-person phases. As Carthy (2022) argues, ensuring social presence in the virtual environment and building a learning community that carries into the physical space are crucial to the long-term success and scalability of BIPs.

This book is our contribution to an ongoing conversation. It brings together diverse voices (students, teachers, researchers) and offers practical reflections, theoretical insights, and proposals for innovation. We hope that these pages serve as both a resource and an inspiration for those planning, researching, or simply considering their participation in a blended learning experience.

## **Outline of chapters**

*Behind the scenes* explains in detail the workings of a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), a new initiative of Erasmus+ for short-term mobility and international cooperation. The chapter serves as a guide for Higher Education Institutions interested in implementing their own BIP. It contextualizes BIP in the Erasmus+ framework, explains the application process and fund allocation, goes over the division of roles and tasks and provides a step-by-step guide on how to implement a BIP.

*“Language, Education and Society”: Benefits, impacts and challenges* presents the results obtained from the research project carried out during the in-person component of the “Language, Education and Society” BIP programme hosted by the Universidad Isabel I in the city of Burgos (Spain) from the 27th to the 31st of May, 2024. Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered on the last day of the programme through a satisfaction survey of the students and semi-structured interviews with coordinators, students, and teacher participants. Key findings indicate that the BIP program offered students a

meaningful and enriching learning experience while providing a gratifying endeavour for both organizers and teachers. The experience impacted the participants both academically and personally and presented challenges in terms of communicating in English as a second language, as well as logistical constraints related to planning and time management. Drawing on these findings, this chapter proposes practical and concrete recommendations to improve the design, implementation, and management of the Erasmus BIP. These recommendations are intended to optimize the student experience and maximize the benefits for all stakeholders in the international higher education landscape.

*Questioning texts* is a teaching module designed to improve reading comprehension and critical thinking skills among higher education students. The module is divided into three components, each working on a different aspect of the text: content, absence and format, with the goal of providing students with the theoretical framework and practical tools required to apply a critical mindset to the act of reading; to develop key transferable skills that will benefit their academic and professional careers. Designed to be taught both in an online and physical setting, the module is a flexible and engaging teaching tool that combines lectures with task-based teaching. The chapter explains the objectives, contents, methodology followed and areas subject to adaptation or improvement.

*Design for all: Accessible digital resources design* presents an academic reflection on the experience "Design for all: accessible digital resources design" targeting international students. The key objective was to underscore that accessibility benefits all individuals and should be prioritised across disciplines creating awareness and promoting digital competence. The initiative was designed to enhance understanding accessibility and inclusion, emphasising their universal benefits and necessity in fostering equitable societies. Developed in two sessions, the experience began with an online theoretical webinar introducing core concepts of inclusive design and accessibility, followed by an in-person workshop focused on the practical application of these principles in online documents. This binomial experience provided a stage of basic guidelines and online tools for creating accessible digital documents, empowering participants to implement inclusive practices in their academic and professional activities. This allowed learning about errors in design that cause exclusion due to limitations that are in the design and not in the person. This initiative reinforced the role of education in addressing societal challenges, fostering intercultural dialogue and promoting the ethos of "Design for all."

*Learning Stations as an educational resource* shows how the active methodology of learning stations was used with the group of international students in the BIP programme. The main objective was to make the students aware of all the benefits and possibilities of this methodology, both on a

theoretical and practical level. To this end, two sessions were held, the first of which was of a theoretical nature and taught online, and the second of which was practical and face-to-face. In the second session, which took advantage of the students' visit to the Isabel I University in Burgos (Spain), different facets of Spanish culture were explored using the Learning Stations methodology. In this way, the aim was not only for the students to internalise the way in which this methodology works, but also to introduce them to Spanish culture and to get to know aspects such as different emblematic places in the country, its gastronomy and different traditional dances and games. The choice of Spanish culture as a guiding thread proved to be a success. Moreover, the implementation of the Learning Stations proved to be an effective motivational methodology, fostering a dynamic and collaborative learning environment. Students not only gained knowledge about Spanish culture, but also developed skills such as problem solving and critical thinking.

*We are what we eat: Food, culture, and the building of intercultural competence* describes the experience in the BIP program in which we worked on intercultural skills through food studies and a cooking workshop. We encouraged students to examine the intersections of food studies and Spanish culinary traditions. The event aimed to bridge academic discussions on food history, identity, and cultural heritage. The practical cooking included a session where students prepared the iconic dish of tortilla española. Key outcomes included a deeper understanding of the role of Spanish cuisine in

shaping national and local identities, as well as the development of practical cooking skills. This workshop underscored the importance of food as a lens for interdisciplinary research and public engagement, suggesting that culinary practices can serve as a powerful tool for understanding broader social, historical, and cultural phenomena.

*Intercultural communication in tertiary education* aims to understand the BIP students' perspective regarding the importance of intercultural communicative competence in classrooms where different cultures and diverse backgrounds coexist. This chapter is based on the assumptions that teachers must know in order to understand the importance of the main emerging factors when two or more cultures come into contact in a transcultural university classroom, such as transculturality, communicative competence or the evolution of the communicative approach, among others. Under an observational research paradigm, two sessions have been designed, the first of which has been an online theoretical session, while the second session has consisted of a practical face-to-face class with Italian and Polish students who have enjoyed an Erasmus scholarship at the Isabel 1 University of Burgos. The results demonstrate that students are aware of the importance that the cultural component has gained in language teaching in recent decades. These outcomes highlight the importance of making teachers aware of the need to reflect on the implementation of teaching strategies aimed at developing intercultural communicative competence, which includes both

communicative competence and intercultural competence, which addresses aspects of recognition, appreciation and respect within cultural determinants.

*Intercultural citizens: Engaging across sociocultural differences* examines how intercultural citizenship was addressed through two workshops delivered as part of the teaching content in the “Language, Education, and Society” BIP Erasmus programme. The first workshop, titled “Intercultural Citizens: Engaging Across Sociocultural Differences,” explored foundational concepts such as identity, intersectionality, diversity, prejudice, and stereotypes. These topics were designed to guide students in adopting a proactive and reflective attitude toward intercultural citizenship by emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and empathy in navigating sociocultural differences. The second workshop, “Intercultural Citizens: Sharing Our Personal Experiences,” encouraged participants to analyze their own intercultural encounters. Through this reflective practice, students identified common barriers in intercultural communication and developed strategies for overcoming them, focusing on enhancing communicative awareness and fostering successful intercultural interactions. This chapter concludes by discussing the workshops’ impact on participants’ understanding of intercultural citizenship and proposing recommendations for incorporating similar approaches into international education programs to better prepare global citizens.

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# CHAPTER 1: BEHIND THE SCENES

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## 1. Introduction

Established in 1987, the Erasmus program is an initiative of the European Union to improve the quality of education across the continent through the development of student and teacher mobility and cooperation. The program is organized in seven-year cycles with specific funding, goals and rules for each cycle. Traditionally, student mobility involved at least a half-term, although most frequently it extended to the whole academic year. This, while very enriching, can be a deterrent for some students either for financial or academic reasons, as it entails a residence of several months.

Additionally, recent events like the 2020 lockdown, the expansion of on-line education and the development of digital communication tools highlight a changing scenario in which traditional mobility is not the only answer to promote cooperation and the transnational experience. The Erasmus + program has adapted to these challenges and incorporated the use of digital tools to the higher education experience by introducing in this current cycle

(2021-2027) the possibility of short-term mobilities through the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP). BIPs are the natural evolution of previous initiatives for intensive cooperation and blended learning, combining face-to-face and virtual learning, like the Intensive Programmes of the Erasmus programme prior to 2014. However, BIPs are a new feature of the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027, designed with several key objectives in mind such as promoting inclusive and accessible mobility, which should enable more students to participate in international experiences; leveraging digital learning and virtual tools, which became even more important after the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthening cooperation between higher education institutions in innovative, interdisciplinary and multicultural projects.

The purpose of a BIP is to offer both physical and virtual mobility for students at Higher Education Institutions (HEI). In this way, students will get the advantages of mobility and international experience when full-term mobility is not possible due to other commitments. Thus, the BIP combines online teaching with a short period, usually a week, of physical mobility. The online part is compulsory and should provide a learning space where student participants can work together and simultaneously on specific assignments related to the main topic of the program. Usually, the program requires students to work together in groups from different countries and explore current challenges associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and other social challenges. Each BIP focuses on a specific topic, such as "Critical thinking

in the age of generative artificial intelligence” or “Language and translations tools” to cite some recent examples (ErasmusBIP.org, n.d.).

Because the intention of the programme is to broaden the possibilities to experience international work and cooperation, the only requirement for students is to be currently enrolled in any course offered by a HEI, regardless of field and graduate level. The program, however, must bring added value to the courses offered by participating HEIs. This is easily achievable when the programme design is aligned with the SDGs.

BIPs bring multiple advantages to higher education. They enable more accessible and flexible international mobility, promote the co-creation of knowledge between different European universities, drive the digitization of education and innovative teaching methods and, furthermore, are aligned with the objectives of the European Education Area and the European Universities. This chapter will explain step by step how to apply to get funding and how to successfully implement a BIP.

## **2. How to apply**

In order to participate, whether as organizer or mere contributor, HEIs must be part of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) which involves its own application process. Other than that, HEIs can be involved in a BIP in three different roles: as an organizing institution, as a host institution or as a partner

institution. The organizing institution applies for funding and designs the BIP. The hosting institution provides the place for hosting the physical mobility and the partner, or partners, institution provides the students and, if so desired, any professors needed to complete the course. Usually, the organizing institution takes on the role of hosting, but it is not compulsory. What is mandatory, however, is that at least three higher education institutions from at least three different EU Member States or third countries associated with the Erasmus+ program participate. Thus if, as it was our case, a Spanish institution takes on the role of organizing and hosting, there must be partners from two other countries. In our case, Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi (Poland), Università Telematica Giustino Fortunato (Italy), SSML Internazionale (Italy) and IST-Hochschule für Management (Germany).

As previously explained, the funding and regulations are updated on each Erasmus+ cycle. Thus, it must be kept in mind that the call conditions for the next 2025-2035 cycle may differ from the current 2021-2027. This chapter will attempt, nevertheless, to provide an inclusive and illuminating view of the process regardless of changes. Specific documentation can be found on each country's National Agency website.

There isn't a specific call for a BIP project. Instead, inside every Erasmus+ KA131 call there is an option to request a BIP project. HEIs can choose the minimum number of students, between 10 and 15, and also how many BIPs they want to organize. Evidently, funding will vary according to the number

of students selected. At this point, no more information is needed in the application process.

The application is submitted through the National Agency of International Education platform. Usually, the application window is from November to February, but this may vary depending on the national agency in each country, so it is advised to contrast this information with the specific National Agency ruling over a HEI.

### **3. From grant award to implementation**

Grants are usually awarded in September-October, but this will depend on the national agency. Communication of the awards is made through the National Agency portal. The grant for the BIP is included in the total funding awarded by the national agency for the Erasmus+ KA131 project. Depending on the type of project the HEI has applied for (10 or 15 students), between 4,000 and 6,000 euros will be awarded to spend entirely on the BIP. These funds must be used in the following 24 months.

Each HEI must have an account in the Beneficiary Module platform. This platform includes all information related to the Erasmus+ project awarded: funding, mobilities, participating organisations and BIPs. Once the HEI receives the funds and the Erasmus+ project is available in the Beneficiary Module, the HEI must introduce in the system the details of the BIP. There

is a specific section entitled 'Blended Intensive Programme(s)', where all the information must be entered: name, target group (students, staff or both), objectives, description, methodology, educational area, level of studies, dates of the virtual and physical components, host country, number of credits to be awarded to participants, number of students, teachers and participating organisations. Each participating HEI must add the ID of the BIP project in each mobility so it can be linked to the correct BIP project in the system. This aspect is of particular importance in order to receive a correct evaluation from the National Agency.

Successfully implementing a BIP requires both administrative and academic organization and coordination. The following pages will describe the duties of each area in detail.

### **3.1 Administrative Organization**

The administrative organization is performed by the International Relations Office personnel and teaching staff from a specific faculty of the organizing HEI. Organization involves building partnerships, managing funds, monitoring that all BIP requirements are satisfied and reporting the conclusion of the BIP. The following checklist should provide a clarifying view of the tasks involved:

- Partnerships. A BIP must include at least three institutions, the organizing one and two others from different countries. In total, three countries must be represented.

- Hosting: One of the institutions will be the host for the physical component. While usually the organizing institutions take on this role, it is not compulsory and one of the partners may take on this task.
- Students: When applying for the Erasmus+ project, the HEI can establish the minimum, 10 or 15 students, which will influence the funding. Those students must hail from three different countries. Each HEI is in charge of the selection of the students, teachers and staff that they want to send to the project. All of them shall receive funds for their mobilities, provided by the sending institution.
- Duration: the programme must take a minimum of 45 hours and award at least 3 ECTS. There are no specifications about how many hours must be spent for each part of the programme, although they are usually divided in equal halves. However, it is recommended to allocate more hours for the physical component in order to be able schedule some cultural activities related to the topic of the project. The duration of the physical component can be from 5 to 30 days. This is up to each institution and the availability of the funds to spend.
- Funding: the funds can be used to support the personnel of the organizing HEI, provide food and accommodation to the participants, cultural activities, purchase of merchandising to give as a present for the

participants or purchase of any material needed for the development of the project.

- Support: the organizing HEI should provide travel information to all participants, accommodation, food, cultural visits, etc. Additionally, they will support students and their HEIs with any administrative issues, like the signing of the learning and inter-institutional agreements.

### **3.2 Academic Organization**

The academic organization, or Scientific Committee, is undertaken by one or more HEI professors, and it involves the planning and design of the academic contents of the programme, as well as writing a coherent and informative proposal to be shared in order to invite professors and students to participate. Thus, in this phase, the academic organizer must answer the following points.

- Topic. All BIP have a special topic that should be aligned with one or more of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The abridged titles of the goals is as follows: No poverty (SDG 1), Zero hunger (SDG 2), Good health and well-being (SDG 3), Quality education (SDG 4), Gender equality (SDG 5), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), Reduced inequalities (SDG 10), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), Climate action (SDG 13), Life

below water (SDG 14), Life on land (SDG 15), Peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16), and Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17).

- Group project. Students will develop and present a final group project, the topic of which is chosen from all the themes explored during the program.
- Contents. To ensure the alignment of the modules with the BIP topic, the organizer must establish clear learning objectives and outcomes. Additionally, they should reflect on the preferred teaching methodology and the division between online and physical components, so the BIP will be balanced and effective.
- Teaching staff. The organizing HEI imparts the lectures and workshops that make up the programme. However, it is more common to share this task between all partners, inviting other HEIs to participate with at least two professors. External agents, that is, people not employed by the HEIs, can also be invited to teach a module. All of them receive a certificate of participation.

## 4. Step-by-step guide

The amount of information and tasks involved can be overwhelming. For this reason, the chapter concludes with a step-by-step guide that should help implement a BIP from the moment funds are received to students completing the programme.

1. Start by working on the BIP description brochure or flyer. The academic and administrative staff should collaborate with the design/communications department of the institution to create a unique and meaningful image for the BIP (See Appendix 1). Institutions without this kind of department can do this work with simple programs, like Canva. What matters is that the project is given a visual and identifying face.
2. Design and distribute an academic call for partners. Make the information short, precise and eye-catching. It should include all basic information so institutions, individual professors and students can decide whether they are interested in participating. This includes: short description of the program, dates of the virtual and physical components and location. Send the information to all HEIs of your interest that may have courses related to the main topic of your program. Recruiting participants may be the biggest obstacle in the organization process (Ovtšarenko et al., 2024).
3. The scientific and organization committees must agree on which HEIs will participate.

4. Decide which HEI will host the program during the physical component.
5. Once the partnership and the obligations of each HEI are clearly established (agreeing on hosting and number of students and professor participants) it is time to open the application period so each HEIs can select the students and teachers that will participate. Each institution can decide on the dates and extension of this period.
6. Schedule the classes for the on-line and physical components. Make sure that students can have a short break between classes and do not assign more than five lectures or activities for a day, as students will still have to complete their usual coursework. Additionally, this helps students to be more focused and engaged in lessons. Classes do not have to be as strict and constrained as is usual at the university level, allowing for more experimentation. It is also important to remember that students will come from different educational backgrounds (graduate or undergraduate levels) and fields, so the classes should be accessible to a general profile. For the online component, using any LMS platform (Learning Management System), like Blackboard or Moodle can work effectively.
7. Select students for the programme. Each sending institution will hold their own selection process and send the candidates profiles to the organizing institution. The organising institution must decide how many students it can accept. Although the minimum is 10 or 15 (depending

on what was requested), up to 20-25 students may participate. It all depends on fund distribution.

8. *Manage the learning* agreements of the invited students. Note that while the Erasmus + programme implemented the “Erasmus Without Papers” (EWP) initiative so all partnership documentation could be done online through the EWP Dashboard, not all HEI have adopted this system at this point, meaning that some learning agreements are still signed by hand and mailed. In any case, it is very important that all mobility and learning agreements be signed by all parties at least one month before the project. All participants' mobilities are funded by their own universities Erasmus+ funds. The funding works the same way as with a traditional Erasmus+ mobility, the only difference is the amount of the grants, as short mobilities receive a smaller financial support.
9. Each participant is responsible for finding their own room and board, to be paid with the funds as discussed in the previous point. However, the hosting HEI usually provides support in this end, making recommendations, negotiating group fees and sending a travel guide with information on the location, transport, accommodations, food and must-see and do activities. If the organizing HEI desires, and they have not used the funds fully, they can allocate a part to providing room or, more usually, meals.
10. Plan cultural activities. Given that one of the goals of the BIP is to promote the transnational experience and establish cooperation, it is

very advisable to plan cultural activities for the participants so they will have more opportunities to spend time together, share experiences, and learn about the local culture and history. These activities should take place after classes and they can include visits to the city's most emblematic places or simple sightseeing. These activities can be paid with project funds.

11. Supervise and review the group projects. Part of the BIP requirements is that students work in small groups and develop a presentation related to the topic of the BIP. It is highly recommended that groups be formed by the organizing institution, in order to ensure a varied composition and representation on each group. This will also encourage interaction and provide students with different points of view. Reserve at least 2 hours of the physical component calendar for the presentations of their projects, which should take place at the end of the BIP when all lessons and workshops have taken place. The scientific committee will evaluate the project presentations. Final certificates may include a mark or simply indicate the completion of the BIP.
12. Keep an attendance list where students must sign in every day they attend classes. Both the group project and attendance are requisites in order to get a certificate of completion.
13. Provide certificates of completion for students and teachers. These certificates can be in paper or digital format. However, it is recommended to issue students with paper certificates as it increases the sense of

achievement and completion. The certificates must include the logos of the participating universities as well as the logos of the European Union and Erasmus+ programme. The certificates should also include the name of the BIP, name of the participant, dates of both online and physical components and the signature of the responsible persons of the organizing institution. It is not necessary to include the contents of the programme (both online and physical components) on the reverse of the certificate, but it can be an enriching addition.

14. At the end of each Erasmus+ project, HEIs have to submit a final report to their National Agency. If a BIP has been requested, the platform will make available specific sections in the report to provide details of the project. Most of the information, like student information, is already automatically filled in on the system; HEIs will only need to add a few comments and confirm the data.
15. Keep all invoices and documentation related to the project in case the European Commission wants to audit the HEI at some point.

Success! By following these steps, the HEI should be happily implemented. Especially when taking into account the division of tasks discussed in the third section of this chapter. The following chapters will provide a more in depth look at the academic work of the BIP, detailing the specific teaching actions taken in the BIP *Language, Education and Society* implemented in the spring of 2024 at the Universidad Isabel I of Spain.

## References

EramusBIP.org. (n.d.). *List of BIPS*. Retrieved June 13, 2025, from <https://erasmusbip.org/list-of-bips/>

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# APPENDIX CHAPTER 1

# Blended Intensive Programme

Participants  
will receive  
**3ECTS**

Language, Education and Society

Virtual Component: 8th-12th of April 2024  
Physical Component: 27th - 31th of May 2024  
Universidad Isabel I, Burgos (Spain)

Meals and  
cultural  
activities  
included

**REGISTER HERE**  
UNTIL THE 12th OF MARCH

Register here



# BIP



Akademia  
Humanistyczna  
w Łodzi





# BIP

## Programme description

Language, education and society are three interrelated concepts. Language influences thought and behavior but, at the same time, it is through formal education as well as the environment (society) that we develop language and communication skills. Additionally, the European Commission sees multilingualism as one of the defining features of the European project, understanding language competences as key factors in building identities and developing projects and cooperation across borders.

The BIP program at Universidad Isabel I seeks to explore the multiple branches derived from languages as they apply and affect education and society. Seminars and workshops may verse around: translation process and tools, communication competence, language skills, language in specific fields, communication for specific target groups, verbal and non-verbal communication, etc.

## About Burgos

Welcome to Burgos, a stately city with an exceptional artistic heritage that is full of history, stories and legends, yet is also welcoming, inviting and ideal for a leisurely stroll. Founded by Count Diego Porcelos in 884, Burgos has throughout history been the capital of Castilla, place of residence and pantheon of kings, centre of international trade and a fundamental milestone on the Camino de Santiago, which undoubtedly has contributed to it being such a particularly hospitable city. Today, tradition and the avant garde seamlessly merge in the city, and its many tourist attractions, headed by its Gothic Cathedral, include sites that have already become a global point of reference, such as the Museum of Human Evolution.

Whatever the traveller interests, Burgos has a lot to see and many stories to tell. Here we only suggest a handful of unmissable visits, to whet your appetite.

+ INFO: [international.relations@uil.es](mailto:international.relations@uil.es)

# CHAPTER 2 “LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND SOCIETY”: BENEFITS, IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results obtained from the research project carried out during the in-person component of the “Language, Education and Society” Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) programme hosted by Universidad Isabel I in the city of Burgos (Spain) from the 27th to the 31st of May, 2024. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered on the last day of the programme through a student satisfaction survey and semi-structured interviews with coordinators, students, and teacher participants. Thus, this chapter provides an overview of the benefits, impacts, and challenges of the BIP for both students and participating educational institutions. Further, the motivation for this study stems from the growing significance of international mobility in higher education and the pressing need to critically assess the operation and effectiveness of programmes like Erasmus+ BIP in shaping future professionals within the European higher education landscape.

The empirical study described in this chapter addresses several key areas of analysis and discussion. First, it evaluates the organisation and methodology employed by Universidad Isabel I in hosting the programme, focusing on both its virtual and face-to-face components. Next, the research examines the relevance of the content provided within the BIP's thematic focus, assessing how the lectures and workshops align with students' interests, academic pursuits, and future career goals. Additionally, it analyses participants' preferences regarding online and in-person learning experiences based on the educational training offered throughout the programme. The study further explores the effectiveness of the collaborative project, a crucial element of the programme's formative process, assessing the methodology, virtual meetings with tutors, in-person group meetings, and the project's connection with the presentations and workshops. It also investigates the impact of the Erasmus+ BIP on students' cultural and interpersonal skills, focusing on their shared experiences in Burgos, exposure to Spanish culture, and interactions with classmates from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as the development of their intercultural competence. Moreover, the study collects and analyses feedback from students, faculty, and coordinators involved in the Erasmus+ BIP to evaluate overall satisfaction. This data is used to identify both successful aspects of the programme and areas for potential improvement in future editions.

Based on the research findings, this chapter concludes with practical and concrete recommendations aimed at improving the design, implementation, and management of the Erasmus+ BIP. These recommendations aim to enhance the student experience and maximise the benefits of the programme for both participants and the educational institutions involved.

## **2. Previous BIP experiences**

The design and structure of BIPs, which combine synchronous and asynchronous activities along with short-term mobility, are considered particularly effective in promoting active, collaborative, and contextualised learning (Ovtšarenko et al., 2024) since the combination of internationalisation at home and short-term mobility allows BIPs to uniquely maximise the benefits of both approaches (European Commission, 2022). As comparative studies such as the one by Kucsera & Zimmaro (2010) have stressed, programmes with an intensive format, when well-organised, foster high levels of interactivity and learner engagement. Such a format is not only suitable but often more successful than traditional course models. However, the literature also underscores the importance of careful instructional design, particularly when integrating virtual platforms, ensuring social presence and interaction to build a cohesive learning community (Frampton et al., 2025; Ovtšarenko et al., 2024).

BIPs have also been described to enhance a wide range of academic and transversal competencies. Their focused format supports the efficient acquisition of specialised content while also allowing for horizontal skill development, such as digital literacy, teamwork, and problem-solving across disciplines (Grindei et al., 2024; Ovtšarenko et al., 2024). Evidence from both qualitative and quantitative studies suggests that students perceive these programmes as instrumental to their “skills, professional development,[and] personal growth” (Frampton et al., 2025, p. 8). Moreover, learning in multicultural teams and completing collaborative tasks—as in the case study on global citizenship by Carthy (2022)—provides a scaffold for developing communication and critical thinking skills in an internationalised setting.

Perhaps one of the most distinctive impacts of BIPs is their potential to cultivate intercultural competence. As highlighted by Beelen & Jones (2015) and Rauer et al. (2021), the internationalisation at home element facilitates access to intercultural learning for students who might otherwise be excluded from mobility programmes. This inclusive approach contributes to equity in international education. Furthermore, the immersive, cross-cultural experiences made possible through short-term mobility help students develop interpersonal and intercultural awareness, trust, and communication skills, which are vital in today’s diverse professional contexts (Teichler, 2017). Authors often describe these experiences as “transformative” since they

lead to greater cultural sensitivity, personal insight, and emotional learning (Frampton et al., 2025).

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences in the BIP. Data collection methods included a student satisfaction survey and semi-structured interviews with students, faculty, and programme coordinators. This section details the study's participants, the instruments used for data collection, and the processes applied for data analysis.

#### **3.1. Participants**

The recruitment of participants was carried out during the physical component through direct outreach, where they were asked to volunteer. During the last workshop of the final day, one of the researchers requested that students fill out a paper-based, anonymous satisfaction survey to assess the BIP programme content. Following the Certificate Ceremony, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with students and some teachers, asking them to spare a few minutes of their time to answer five questions about their overall BIP experience, which would be recorded for future analysis. Thus, the inclusion criterion was voluntary participation, following the explicit consent

of all participants. The remaining teacher participants and the two organisers were interviewed throughout the week following the programme.

Therefore, a total of 20 participants took part in the survey, and 23 participants participated in the interviews (Table 1).

**Table 1:**

*Participants and research tools*

Institution	Research tool	Participants		
		Students	Teachers	Organizers
IST-Hochschule für Management (Germany):	Survey	2	0	0
	Interview	2	0	0
Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi (Poland):	Survey	9	0	0
	Interview	3	1	0
Scuola Superiore per Mediatori Linguistici Internazionale (SMML) (Italy)	Survey	2	0	0
	Interview	2	0	0
Università degli Studi Giustino Fortunato - Telematica (Italy) 4	Survey	4	0	0
	Interview	2	0	0
Universidad Isabel I (3)	Survey	3	0	0
	Interview	3	8	2

## 3.2. Data collection

The data collection phase for the project took place from the 31st of May to the 7th of June, 2024. The study began with the recruitment of participants to complete an anonymous satisfaction survey and participate in individual interviews. Written consent was obtained through a consent statement appearing at the top of the satisfaction survey, which informed participants about voluntary participation, confidentiality, data use, accuracy and honesty, contact information, and legal rights (see Appendix 1). Additionally, oral consent was requested at the beginning of each interview recording (see Appendix 2). This section describes the two tools used for data collection.

### 3.2.1. Survey

The “Ui1 BIP Erasmus Satisfaction Survey” (see Appendix 1) collected participants' feedback on various aspects of their learning experience. Open and closed-ended questions were developed to prompt students to reflect on the learning activities, the programme's organisation, and its cultural impact. In particular, the questions were categorised under the following five thematic headings: *Learning Experience*, *Organisation & Methodology*, *Learning Outcomes*, *Final Collaborative Project*, and *Cultural and Interpersonal Skills*.

1. In the first section, participants were asked to select their favourite online and in-person workshops, rating them based on personal preferences. They also chose the extracurricular activities they enjoyed most among

tours of Burgos' historical sites, cultural experiences like "chocolate con churros", and a pub crawl.

2. In the second section, respondents rated statements related to the overall organisation and methodology, such as whether they received enough information and whether both the virtual and face-to-face components were functional.
3. The third section surveyed the relevance of the programme for the students' personal interests, studies, and future careers.
4. The fourth section examined the effectiveness of the final collaborative project, including the support provided through virtual and in-person meetings, as well as the value of the workshops in facilitating project completion.
5. Additionally, in the fifth section, participants reflected on the programme's influence on their cultural and interpersonal skills. They shared whether the experience enhanced their communication skills in English, deepened their understanding of Spanish and other cultures, and improved their intercultural competence.

All sections, except the first one, encouraged participants to elaborate on their responses to provide deeper insights via a "Tell us more" element. Accordingly, all these insights helped gauge the overall educational and

personal development achieved through the Erasmus+ BIP. Specifically, 20 out of the 21 student participants completed the survey.

### 3.2.2. Interviews

The second instrument used was an oral interview recorded on the last day of the physical component after the Certificate Ceremony. The study was conducted voluntarily and confidentially, and participants were informed about the use of their data and their legal rights. They also provided their explicit consent to participate. Particularly, the interview consisted of five questions aimed at measuring overall satisfaction with the programme and improving future editions.

*How would you describe your Erasmus+ BIP experience?*

*What could have enhanced or improved your overall experience?*

*Would you repeat this experience if given the chance to? Why or why not?*

*Would you recommend the Erasmus+ BIP to your fellow students/fellow professors? Why or why not?*

*Would you like to add anything else?*

The semi-structured interview questions were tailored ad hoc to each participant's role and experience, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their individual experiences and unique perceptions, as participants included

not only students but also teachers and coordinators. Specifically, two coordinators, nine teachers and 12 students were interviewed.

### **3.3. Data analysis**

From July to October 2024, the focus shifted to in-depth data analysis, which was conducted iteratively. The process began with the transcription and coding of survey and interview responses using Google Sheets to facilitate detailed examination of the data. To maintain participants' confidentiality, all personal information was anonymised. Specifically, individual responses were assigned alphanumeric codes to ensure they were not identifiable in any published results or reports.

Once both data sources had been transcribed and coded, the data were thoroughly examined. Common themes and patterns were identified through a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Quantitative data from the satisfaction surveys were analysed descriptively, using measures such as mean, median, and mode to summarise and present the survey responses. Qualitative data from surveys and interviews were coded inductively, allowing themes and categories to emerge organically from participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Additionally, data triangulation was conducted across the three sources to validate the findings and ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

Comparisons were made between participants' experiences, and potential relationships among them were explored to gain deeper insights.

Data analysis was completed in November 2024. In December 2024, the results were interpreted, and key implications and conclusions were identified. The interpretation was conducted within the context of the research objectives and existing literature, aiming to highlight both the practical and theoretical implications of the findings. The findings were used to generate meaningful conclusions and provide relevant recommendations for improving the implementation and design of the BIP.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Survey results**

The first section of the survey, titled "Learning Experience," included four questions asking participants to select their most enjoyed presentations and workshops.

The first question asked the participants to rate the online presentations/workshops from one to three (with one being the highest value) that they liked the best. The most-voted were "Intercultural citizens: Engaging across sociocultural differences" (13 votes), "We are what we eat. Food, culture, and the

building of intercultural competence" (12 votes), and "Modern communication in business" (5 votes).

The second question asked to rank the in-person presentations/ workshops from one to three (with one being the highest value) that they liked the best. Regarding the physical aspect, the three presentations that students liked the most were "Teaching languages and cultures through cooking using learning stations" (13 votes), "Learning stations in a practical way" (11 votes), and "Intercultural citizens: Sharing our personal experiences" (10 votes).

The third question asked to rate their overall favourite presentations/ workshops from one to three (with one being the highest value). The results showed that "Learning Stations in a Practical Way" (12 votes), "Teaching Languages and Cultures Through Cooking Using Learning Stations" (11 votes), and "Intercultural Citizens: Engaging across sociocultural differences" (10 votes) were the most liked in that order.

The fourth question queried about the three extracurricular activities enjoyed the most overall. In the first place, 75% of the students voted for the guided visit to the Old Town; 60% of the participants chose the Pub Crawl activity; the gastronomic experience: trying *churros* with chocolate obtained 55% of the votes, and the Cathedral and the Museum of Human Evolution of Burgos visits were the less voted with a 50% and 45% of the votes.

The second section presented four subsections: "Organisation and Methodology", "Learning Outcomes", "Final Collaborative Project", and "Cultural and Intercultural Skills" with different Likert scale affirmations to be rated from 1 to 10, being 1 the lowest score and 10 the highest, and an open-ended space titled "Tell us more" for participants to share any more possible comments.

"Organisation and Methodology" queried about the BIP development and its components and received an average score of 8.4 points.

For the first item, "I received enough information about the BIP development", the data generated an average of 8.55 points; the second point, "The virtual component was useful and educational for me", obtained an average of 7.45; the third, "The face-to-face component was useful and educational for me", an average of 9.2., making the face-to-face component the best rated.

Moreover, in the "Tell us more" space, students shared the following comments:

- "I wished for more information before about activities and it should have been mentioned that we had two other online classes (like date 2nd of May) for a project, too. The virtual component was good, but the teachers should have seen before if the technic works. Lot of delays occurred." (GS2<sup>1</sup>)

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1 GS: German Student; IS: Italian Student; PS: Polish Student; SS: Spanish Student.

- "I wish we had information about extracurricular activities sooner" (PS2)
- "Teacher X did a great job. Their enthusiasm has motivated me to participate more actively. They are well organized and attentive to all needs. The program was clearly explained. Face-to-face was way better." (PS3)
- "Learning Outcomes" surveyed how the BIP contents could relate to participants' experiences and obtained an average score of 8.16.

The first question, "The presentations/ workshops were relevant to my personal interests" received 8 points; the second, "The presentations/ workshops were relevant to my studies", obtained 7.5 points; the third question, "The presentations/ workshops were relevant to my future career", had 7.45; the last question, "Overall, the BIP was a useful learning experience", 9.7 points.

In this section, students expressed the following:

- "BIP was an amazing experience but I would like to learn more practical information. Some subjects such as business communication I find adds value to my work, but some such design thinking could be explained more. Some information was very basic." (PS3)
- "I really liked the course about making the presentations accessible for all, never thought about this before, now I try to make texts/ websites accessible also for blind people e.g." (GS2)

In the “Final collaborative project” section, participants evaluated various aspects of the final collaborative project and gave it an average score of 8.32 points.

The first question asked participants to rate the effectiveness of the project’s methodology—including onboarding meetings, group meetings, and the final presentation—on a scale of 1 to 10. Participants rated this aspect with an average score of 8.45, reflecting a strong overall effectiveness. The second question assessed the usefulness of virtual meetings with tutors for project development, with an average rating of 8.05. The third question addressed in-person group meetings, which were highly valued, received an average score of 8.5. In the fourth question, participants evaluated the utility of presentations and workshops provided during the project, resulting in an average score of 8.05. Finally, participants rated the overall usefulness and interest of the final collaborative project, awarding it a high score of 8.55, suggesting a positive and engaging experience.

In the “Tell us more” space, the following comments were found:

- “It was very hard in the beginning for our group to get started because we didn’t know each other personally.” (GS1)
- “Working with people who we don’t know was hard, because we can’t communicate in online component.” (PS5)

The first question in the "Cultural and Interpersonal Skills" section asked participants to rate the impact of sharing experiences with international classmates, which received a high score of 9.35. The second question focused on improvements in English communication skills through the BIP experience, achieving an average rating of 9.5. In the third question, participants evaluated their learning about Spanish culture and the city of Burgos, which scored 8.9. The fourth question asked about insights gained into the diverse cultures and languages of their classmates, also scoring 9.35. Lastly, participants rated the programme's influence on their intercultural competence, awarding it a top score of 9.6. The average score of the subsection is 9.34.

Participants expressed the following in the "Tell us more" section:

- "Highest output." (GS1)
- "I would not say it improved my English, but it was definitely nice using it again. I loved the workshops about Spanish culture, it was the best part. But I would have loved more interaction with Spanish students, as I was here in Spain and would have loved to improve my Spanish actually. Maybe next time also a workshop to the Spanish language :) Thank you for this amazing project!"(GS2)
- "We were talking a lot about our culture in each countries we lived, were sharing the experience, and were learning from each other a lot. The programme was the best adventure in my life and I'm glad I achived my

goals like ex. improved my communication skills and social skills and learnt sth about cultures that interest me." (PS1)

- "I had multiple chats with my classmates about "how is this/ how does this work in your country". I found it very interesting. Also we taught each other a little of our languages." (PS2)

## **4.2. Interviews results**

At the end of the programme, a voluntary, anonymous interview was conducted to gauge participant satisfaction and gather suggestions for improvement. With five tailored questions, it explored the experiences of two coordinators, nine teachers, and 12 students. This part presents the results objectively.

### **4.2.1. Question 1: How would you describe your Erasmus+ BIP experience?**

Coordinator 1 (C1) expressed great satisfaction with the programme, highlighting "the enriching experience" of working with colleagues and professors from partner universities. They emphasised the strong bonds formed among students, and suggested that many of these relationships "could become lifelong friendships". Additionally, they praised the programme for promoting collaboration between institutions, enhancing the university's visibility, and contributing to the internationalisation of both the university and the city of Burgos. Overall, C1 was pleased with the outcome and expressed

a desire to repeat the experience. In turn, C2 also reported a successful experience, especially given that it was their first time organising such a programme. They noted that the planning went smoothly and was well-received, particularly the online component, which professors from the guest universities praised. The coordinator stressed that the virtual sessions played “a key role in preparing both students and faculty for the in-person activities”. Rather than seeing the online portion as a mere prerequisite, they underlined its value as an integral part of the programme that contributed to its overall success.

Teacher 1 (T1) valued the programme as an accessible Erasmus alternative for students with work or family commitments. T2, T3, T4 and T8 praised the strong support from university colleagues and students’ engagement. T3 described the programme as “awesome,” and T4, who participated for the first time, found teaching in English to students from other countries enriching. Likewise, T5 emphasised the programme’s excellent organisation and the depth of personal connections, and T6 and T7 appreciated the structure that combined online theory with hands-on sessions, noting that the practical phase was especially engaging. They enjoyed the collaboratively tailored content to students’ interests and the avoidance of cultural stereotypes. Lastly, T9 described the experience as transformative, both professionally and personally, as it reinforced their commitment to education as a means of bridging cultural divides.

Italian students described the experience as “wonderful” (IS1), “fantastic” (IS2), and “amazing” (IS3) and highlighted the pleasure of meeting new people, cultural connections, personal discovery, exploration of new realities and “enjoying the city of Burgos” (IS1). They also declared that it was one of the best experiences in recent years, helping overcome social shyness and making friends from other countries.

On the other hand, Polish students found the experience enjoyable and well-organised: “I really enjoyed fully this experience. Everything was well organised, nicely structured, and it gave a lot of interesting opportunities to open our minds and ideas about different cultures” (PS1). And also “intensive and very educational” (PS3). They conveyed their appreciation of the cultural exchange, new knowledge, and landmarks visited and highly recommended the experience to others.

Both German students expressed that they enjoyed the experience and found the cultural exchange enlightening. More specifically, they stated: “In a very short time, we had a lot of fun, nice conversations, we talked about cultural differences...It was very cool and I’m really thankful for this” (GS2).

Finally, Spanish students described the experience as highly enjoyable, particularly appreciating the opportunity to “interact with other students and professors from other European countries, with whom I had to communicate in English, and this has made me feel free in a language which is not mine”

(SS1). One of them in particular highlighted the physical component, as it allowed them “to be in contact with the teachers and the interactions were closer” (SS2).

#### **4.2.2. Question 2: What could have enhanced or improved your overall experience?**

C1 declared that, despite the time constraints, the programme was successful. For future editions, they suggested organising earlier and potentially extending the duration of the BIP by including a weekend, which would allow for more activities and interactions between students and professors. They also mentioned that several students had expressed a desire for the programme to last longer, which could be addressed by organising BIPs of up to 15 days, allowing for excursions and more time for students to bond. In turn, C2 focused on the importance of both the online and in-person components of the programme. They praised the professors’ collaborative efforts, which contributed to the programme’s success, particularly the dynamic and participatory classes. For future improvements, they suggested minor adjustments, such as catering more to students’ preferences during breakfast to create a more personalised experience. They also expressed a desire for greater diversity in faculty participation, ideally incorporating more international professors and joint sessions. Overall, both coordinators felt that the programme was well-structured but acknowledged the potential for adjustments, depending on the topic and audience in future editions.

When they answered the second question, the teachers largely praised the BIP programme's structure, particularly the balance between online and in-person components. T1 found the blended format to be "highly effective" because of the break of three weeks between phases and the relationship-building that occurred during the in-person phase. T3, T4, T5, and 8 presented several recommendations, such as focusing on a shared faculty topic for a cohesive experience, allocating more online time to refine topics before the in-person sessions, using individual or paired computers for students during practical sessions to enhance learning, and slight schedule adjustments for better preparation, though overall, they found the resources accessible. T6 and T7 appreciated the seamless transition from online to in-person sessions and highlighted the strong coordination and teamwork. Finally, T9 underscored the value of understanding the host country's cultural and educational context and suggested the importance of ongoing feedback from students and peers to enhance teaching practices. Collectively, the teachers recognised the programme's thoughtful design and offered constructive suggestions for further improvement.

In addition, students established that they would not have changed anything because their experience was "amazing" (PS1). Nevertheless, some of them suggested possible improvements.

None of the Italian students had suggestions for improvement as they considered them unnecessary. IS1 even feared that "if you change something,

maybe you can ruin it". More specifically, IS3 enjoyed the learning stations and suggested applying this methodology to more topics for greater usefulness. IS4 loved the experience, especially the cooking class, because it was very practical.

Although PS2 felt the project was perfect and had no suggestions for improvement, their peers wished for deeper coverage of the topics as they found them interesting and would like more detail and would have appreciated "to know about the extracurricular activities earlier" (PS1).

German students were also satisfied overall, as they found everything well-organised. They suggested having "a little bit more information about this week beforehand" (GS1) and "more time to development of the Collaborative Final Project" (GS2).

Spanish students suggested several improvements. SS1 proposed making the in-person classes more practical, reducing the length of lectures, and scheduling the gala dinner later in the programme. SS2 wished their English skills had been better so that they could communicate with the rest of the students and fully enjoy the programme without work obligations. Finally, SS3 recommended increasing the participation of Spanish students from Universidad Isabel I, as it was low.

### **4.2.3. Question 3: Would you repeat this experience if given the chance to? Why or why not?**

C1 expressed strong enthusiasm for organising another BIP and explained that the International Relations department was already planning a future one, probably focused on the topic of Security. However, they aimed to maintain a broad, interdisciplinary approach. They emphasised the advantages of this year's theme, "Language, Education, and Society," which allowed students from various fields to participate easily. This coordinator also highlighted the benefits of collaborating with or hosting other BIPs. C2 also expressed a clear interest in organising another BIP and confirmed that preparations for the following programme were already underway.

All the teachers agreed that they would "definitely" repeat the experience of participating in such a programme. T1, T2 and T5 underlined the opportunity that the BIP programme provided them to meet students from other countries and practice their intercultural and language skills. Other aspects highlighted by teachers included the engagement and motivation of students, the excellent organisation and the flexibility in preparing lessons and materials. Finally, T9 called attention to the importance of international teaching, as they considered it "extremely enriching and necessary".

Students also agreed that the experience was worth repeating. Moreover, IS1 declared that he would repeat it "one hundred times". This student, along with

others such as GS1, PS1, and SS1, expressed their enthusiasm about meeting new people and forming relationships thanks to the programme. Other important aspects highlighted by students included the relevance of the chosen topics (culture, diversity, languages...) and the advantages of meeting new cultures and an international context with students and teachers from different countries.

#### **4.2.4. Question 4: Would you recommend the Erasmus+ BIP to your fellow students/ fellow professors? Why or why not?**

All participants would recommend the programme to someone else without exception.

C1 specifically pointed out that these short-term programmes are ideal for older university students who may have personal or professional commitments (e.g., work or family) that prevent them from engaging in long-term international exchanges. Additionally, they emphasised the value of these programmes in raising the university's profile and fostering new partnerships with other institutions. C2 noted that this Programme facilitates immersion and internationalisation more effectively than traditional, long-term Erasmus programmes. They observed that while some Erasmus spots remain unfilled due to the long duration, short-term programmes like BIPs are highly popular, particularly among working students.

Overall, teachers recommended the BIP programme to both students and fellow educators since they believed the programme's interdisciplinary and transversal content is of great interest to any student, regardless of their degree or master's programme (T6 and T7).

Before the end of their stay, some of the students were already actively recommending the programme: "in this day I told my friends "for the next BIP you need to come!" (IS2). IS3 underlined the importance of knowing other countries, cultures and traditions: "I think this is very important in the society nowadays". PS1 considered it a "must experience for all people. It helps open our minds and our hearts to other cultures and see there are no differences between us, but we are so alike. It breaks stereotypes and racism, which still exist in many places, and this is the way we can make friendships with everyone and connect." GS2 would "recommend it to everybody because I think this is an experience you will always remember and you don't always have the chance to do something like this, so if the opportunity shows up you should take it." Similarly, SS2 strongly recommended it for the valuable cultural exchanges and shared experiences among students and professors.

#### **4.2.5. Question 5: Would you like to add anything else?**

C1 expressed a deep personal connection to the project, emphasising its special nature. They highlighted the beauty of participants from different countries sharing experiences and perspectives and finding common

ground despite cultural differences. The positive atmosphere and enjoyment throughout the programme were key elements for this coordinator, and they believed they should be promoted and organised more frequently. C2 acknowledged that while there is always room for improvement—such as organising more activities or including a weekend trip outside Burgos—the programme was very valuable. They expressed a desire to continue organising similar programmes, sure that they would generate significant interest among participants.

All teachers were very grateful for their experience and to the organising team. They expressed satisfaction with the programme, highlighted the success of its cultural diversity (T2), suggested that it should be organised more frequently “to provide students with more opportunities to enhance their intercultural experiences and form lasting relationships” (T1) and looked forward to the next programme (T3 and T5). Furthermore, T6 and T7 highlighted the value of intercultural experiences, particularly for an online university, where such activities help foster closer connections with students.

Similarly, all students expressed heartfelt gratitude; several of them thanked the teachers for their dedication and acknowledged the personal and academic efforts that went into the project. Some of the students referred to future opportunities: IS2 suggested extending the stay for future programmes, and PS2, GS2, and SS3 hoped to participate again in the future. PS3 found the programme extremely useful, highlighting the workshops, especially the

cooking session, and expressed surprise at the amount of practical work involved: "I was surprised, to be honest because I didn't think that there was going to be so much practice. I'm just very grateful".

The results presented here provide a detailed understanding of the participants' experiences in the Erasmus+ BIP, as well as the challenges and benefits associated with it from the perspectives of learning, teaching, and organisational aspects. The following section discusses these results within the broader context of Erasmus programmes to situate them within best practices for programme organisation and implementation. Additionally, it highlights areas for future improvement to optimise the experience for students and educators as well as the host and home institutions.

## **5. Discussion**

The results of this study confirm the relevance and transformative potential of Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), particularly when designed with strong organisational coordination, interdisciplinary content, and an emphasis on intercultural learning. Overall, participants viewed the "Language, Education and Society" BIP as a valuable and multifaceted experience, which aligns with previous literature emphasising the educational and personal benefits of short-term international mobility combined with virtual components (Ovtšarenko et al., 2024; Frampton et al., 2025).

A key finding was the overwhelmingly positive reception of the face-to-face component, which students rated more highly than the virtual one. This echoes concerns in the literature about ensuring meaningful social presence and interaction in virtual learning environments (Frampton et al., 2025). While the online segment served a functional preparatory role, several participants suggested improvements in communication and technical readiness. These insights underscore the need for improved integration between online and physical modalities, ensuring that both contribute meaningfully to the learning experience.

From an organisational perspective, high scores in the “Organisation and Methodology” and “Final Collaborative Project” sections indicate that the programme successfully created a coherent and well-supported learning environment. The workshops with a practical component were particularly well received. These results reinforce the effectiveness of active, experiential learning methods in short-term intensive programmes (Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010). Still, both students and faculty underlined the need for more in-depth, focused coverage of content and improved alignment between sessions and collaborative project goals. Teachers also proposed more unified themes across workshops, which could potentially enhance curricular cohesion.

One of the most salient themes to emerge from both the survey and interviews was the development of intercultural competence. Participants

consistently rated their engagement with international peers and cultural experiences in Burgos highly, underscoring the unique affordances of short-term mobility for fostering intercultural dialogue and personal growth. These findings support claims by Beelen & Jones (2015) and Rauer et al. (2021) that BIPs offer a more inclusive form of internationalisation, especially for students who may be excluded from long-term mobility. Interestingly, several students expressed a desire for more interaction with local students and opportunities to practice Spanish. This observation suggests that even programmes with a strong intercultural focus can benefit from better integration with the host community, supporting deeper cultural immersion and reciprocal language learning.

Feedback from the teaching staff also highlighted the reciprocal benefits of the programme, both professionally and personally. Teaching in English, navigating cross-cultural classroom dynamics, and engaging in collaborative planning contributed to their professional development. This aspect of faculty internationalisation, though less emphasised in existing literature, emerges here as a key strength of the BIP model.

Despite the overall satisfaction, some limitations emerged. These include time constraints, insufficient prior communication about activities, and limited opportunities for informal social interaction during the virtual component. These challenges echo previous studies that underline the need for strong

instructional design and continuous feedback mechanisms in BIPs (Grindei et al., 2024; Ovtšarenko et al., 2024).

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to shed light on the significant educational, cultural, and interpersonal value of the “Language, Education and Society” Erasmus+ BIP organised by Universidad Isabel I. Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis, we have demonstrated that BIPs are not only viable but exceptionally enriching experiences when carefully designed and implemented.

The programme effectively fostered active learning, intercultural communication, and collaboration among students and faculty across multiple countries. While the hybrid model offered flexibility and broadened access, the in-person component was found to be particularly impactful, underscoring the importance of physical mobility in achieving deeper cultural exchange.

At the same time, the study identified areas for improvement, including enhancing the interactivity of the virtual component, providing more advanced communication about activities, expanding content coverage, and increasing integration with the host university’s local student population.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations can guide future BIPs:

## 6.1. Recommendations for practice

### 1. Plan as thoroughly as possible before the BIP starts

A detailed and comprehensive planning phase is essential to ensure the smooth execution of the BIP. This includes setting clear objectives, coordinating schedules among participating institutions, and aligning academic content with the programme's interdisciplinary focus.

*Example:* Develop a shared project timeline with all partner universities, specifying deadlines for course material submissions and coordination meetings to ensure effective collaboration.

### 2. Provide as much information as possible in advance

Timely dissemination of relevant information helps students prepare effectively. This includes logistical details, academic expectations, and cultural insights. Providing comprehensive pre-programme materials reduces uncertainty and enhances readiness.

*Example:* Send out a welcome pack that includes a detailed schedule, the description of the collaborative project, and the organized extracurricular activities.

### 3. Promote interaction with students before, during, and after the BIP

Fostering continuous communication among students encourages relationship building and collaboration. Pre-programme introductions, interactive online sessions, and post-programme networking opportunities contribute to a cohesive and supportive learning environment.

*Example:* Create an online forum or social media group where students can introduce themselves and discuss project ideas before the programme begins.

### 4. Go for deep learning and understanding

Designing activities that promote critical thinking and in-depth exploration of topics enhances the academic value of the BIP. Encouraging students to engage with complex issues and apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts fosters meaningful learning experiences.

*Example:* Include case study analyses and problem-solving workshops that require students to apply interdisciplinary approaches.

### 5. Be flexible in the group project

Flexibility in group projects allows students to explore diverse perspectives and adapt to varying team dynamics. Providing guidelines while permitting creative freedom helps accommodate different learning styles and encourages innovative solutions.

*Example:* Allow groups to choose their preferred format for presenting their projects, such as videos, presentations, or written reports.

### 6. Provide current topics and areas of knowledge

Incorporating contemporary themes and emerging fields ensures the programme remains relevant and engaging. Selecting topics that resonate with current global challenges enhances the programme's appeal and applicability to students' future careers.

*Example:* Design a module on "Effective global communication in the Artificial Intelligence era" to address current educational concerns.

### 7. Encourage students to share about their cultures and languages

Promoting cultural exchange enriches the learning experience and fosters mutual respect among participants. Activities that highlight students' cultural backgrounds create a dynamic and inclusive environment.

*Example:* Organise a "Cultural Night" where students can present traditional foods, music, and customs from their home countries.

#### **8. Teach students about local culture and language**

Integrating local cultural and linguistic elements into the programme deepens students' connection to the host country. Guided tours, language workshops, and cultural immersion activities provide valuable insights and enhance intercultural competence.

*Example:* Arrange an introductory language class and a city tour guided by local students to introduce participants to the host country's heritage.

#### **9. Have students reflect on interculturality in the European context**

Encouraging reflection on intercultural experiences within the broader European framework helps students appreciate the region's diversity and unity. Structured reflection activities, such as journals or group discussions, facilitate critical thinking about cultural interactions.

*Example:* Include a reflective essay assignment where students analyse their intercultural experiences and how these relate to European integration.

## 10. Show enthusiasm and empathy

Instructors and coordinators should demonstrate genuine enthusiasm and empathy throughout the programme. Positive engagement and emotional support contribute to a motivating and welcoming atmosphere, enhancing the overall student experience.

*Example:* Regularly check in with students during the programme to address concerns, celebrate achievements, and provide encouragement.

In conclusion, BIPs hold immense promise for higher education institutions that seek to internationalise their curricula, promote inclusive mobility, and prepare students for a globalised professional world. This study contributes to the growing body of research affirming that short-term, blended, and interdisciplinary programmes can create transformative learning experiences for all stakeholders involved.

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## APPENDIX 1 CHAPTER 2

### SATISFACTION SURVEY INVITATION

Dear student,

You are invited to take part in a research study about your Erasmus + BIP experience. We would like you to complete an anonymous satisfaction survey to share your opinion on the BIP programme's organization, methodology, and contents, as well as on your collaborative project. Your answers will help us understand your overall satisfaction with the programme and improve future editions. It will take you less than 10 minutes to complete.

This form contains information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Please, read it carefully to make an informed decision.

1. **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to complete the survey, and you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason.
2. **Confidentiality:** All information provided in this survey will be kept confidential. Your responses will be aggregated with those of other participants and analyzed collectively. Individual responses will be coded through an alphanumeric code and so, they will not be identifiable in any published results or reports.

3. **Data Use:** The research team will process personal data to carry out a scientific study, as well as proceed with its publication and dissemination, based on your explicit consent and the fulfillment of a mission carried out in the public interest attributed by the Organic Law of the University System. The data will only be communicated only in cases where there is a legal obligation or it is strictly necessary to fulfill its purpose and will be kept for the time necessary to fulfill this purpose and to determine the possible responsibilities that may arise from the treatment, or until you withdraw consent.
4. **Accuracy and Honesty:** Please provide accurate and honest responses to the best of your ability. Your input is valuable and will contribute to the integrity and reliability of the research findings.
5. **Contact Information:** If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Sergio Ruiz Pérez at [sergio.ruiz.perez@ui1.es](mailto:sergio.ruiz.perez@ui1.es)
6. **Legal rights:** You can exercise your rights to file a claim with a supervisory authority, to withdraw consent, access, rectification, deletion and portability of data, limitation, and opposition to processing, as well as not to be subject to decisions based solely on the automated processing of data, when appropriate, before Universidad Isabel I, c/ Fernán González, 76, C.P. 09003, Burgos; or via [dpo@ui1.es](mailto:dpo@ui1.es). Find more information in our privacy policy (<https://www.ui1.es/politica-de-privacidad>).

By checking the following box, I acknowledge that I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate based on the terms outlined.

Thank you for your cooperation and valuable input.

# UI1 BIP ERASMUS+ SATISFACTION SURVEY

Please, write your sending institution: \_\_\_\_\_

## Learning experience

1. From the following list, choose the three **online presentations/ workshops** that you liked best. Mark your preference from 1 to 3 with 1 as the highest value:

<u>online presentations/ workshops</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
Amalia Herencia "The SDGs in university arts education"			
Alicia Herraiz "Deep Reading I -Questioning texts"			
María Eugenia Álava "Spanish 20th century poetry - a practical overview (Part I: introduction to XXth century art in Spain)"			
Elsa Liras, Carmen Chacón y Ana Padillo "Learning stations as an educational resource"			
Javier Buenadicha "We are what we eat. Food, culture, and the building of intercultural competence"			
Belén Ozarín "Intercultural Communication"			
Elena Barredo "Accessible digital resources design training"			
Manuel Macías y María del Carmen Gómez "Teaching literature in the EFL classroom"			

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**online presentations/ workshops**

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**1 2 3**

Roberto Masone

"Translation Strategies"

Ida D'ambrosio

"The communicative power of advertising and the needs of consumer protection"

Sergio Ruiz y Valentina Yordanova "Intercultural citizens: engaging across sociocultural differences"

Federico de Andreis

"The Interplay between Culture and Organizational Behavior: Implications and Strategies in Global Management"

Muddasar Naeem

"The Future of Learning: AI-driven Education"

Marcin Jazwiec

"Modern Communication in Business"

- 
2. From the following list, choose the three **in-person presentations/workshops** that you liked best. Mark your preference from 1 to 3 with 1 as the highest value:

---

**in-person presentations/ workshops**

---

**1 2 3**

Alicia Herraiz

"Deep Reading II - Theory and Practice"

María Eugenia Álava

"Spanish 20th century poetry - a practical overview (Part II: Poets and their works in Spain in the second half of the XXth century)"

Teresa Lourdes Morán

"Design thinking: Elevate your career"

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**in-person presentations/ workshops**

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**1 2 3**

Elena Barredo

"Design for All: Creating accessible digital resources workshop"

Belén Ozarín

"Interculturality in the University Classroom"

Sergio Ruiz y Valentina Yordanova

"Intercultural citizens: Sharing our personal experiences"

Marcin Jazwiec

"Writing business emails in multinational teams"

Elsa Liras, Carmen Chacón y Ana Padillo

"Learning stations in a practical way"

Javier Buenadicha "Teaching Languages and Cultures Through Cooking Using Learning Stations"

Marcin Jazwiec

"Basic types of commercial correspondence"

- 
3. Now, choose the three presentations/ workshops and activities that you enjoyed most overall.

---

**online presentations/ workshops**

---

**1 2 3**

Amalia Herencia

"The SDGs in university arts education"

Alicia Herraiz

"Deep Reading I -Questioning texts"

María Eugenia Álava

"Spanish 20th century poetry - a practical overview (Part I: introduction to XXth century art in Spain)"

Elsa Liras, Carmen Chacón y Ana Padillo

"Learning stations as an educational resource"

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**online presentations/ workshops**

---

**1 2 3**

Javier Buenadicha

"We are what we eat. Food, culture, and the building of intercultural competence"

Belén Ozarín

"Intercultural Communication"

Elena Barredo

"Accessible digital resources design training"

Manuel Macías y María del Carmen Gómez

"Teaching literature in the EFL classroom"

Roberto Masone

"Translation Strategies"

Ida D'ambrosio

"The communicative power of advertising and the needs of consumer protection"

Sergio Ruiz y Valentina Yordanova "Intercultural citizens: engaging across sociocultural differences"

Federico de Andreis

"The Interplay between Culture and Organizational Behavior: Implications and Strategies in Global Management"

Muddasar Naeem

"The Future of Learning: AI-driven Education"

Marcin Jazwiec

"Modern Communication in Business"

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**in-person presentations/ workshops**

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**1 2 3**

Alicia Herraiz

"Deep Reading II - Theory and Practice"

María Eugenia Álava

"Spanish 20th century poetry - a practical overview (Part II: Poets and their works in Spain in the second half of the XXth century)"

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**in-person presentations/ workshops**

---

**1 2 3**

Teresa Lourdes Morán

"Design thinking: Elevate your career"

Elena Barredo

"Design for All: Creating accessible digital resources workshop"

Belén Ozarín

"Interculturality in the University Classroom"

Sergio Ruiz y Valentina Yordanova

"Intercultural citizens: Sharing our personal experiences"

Marcin Jazwiec

"Writing business emails in multinational teams"

Elsa Liras, Carmen Chacón y Ana Padillo

"Learning stations in a practical way"

Javier Buenadicha "Teaching Languages and Cultures Through Cooking Using Learning Stations"

Marcin Jazwiec

"Basic types of commercial correspondence"

- 
5. Now, choose the three **extracurricular activities** that you enjoyed most overall.

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**Extracurricular activities**

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**1 2 3**

Old town Burgos guided tour

Chocolate con churros

Pub Crawl

Museo de la Evolución

Cathedral guided tour

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Mark your agreement with the following statements with **1 as the lowest** value (disagree) and **10 as the highest** (completely agree):

### **Organization & Methodology**

- received enough information about the BIP development.
- The virtual component was useful and educational for me.
- The face-to-face component was useful and educational for me.

Tell us more:

### **Learning Outcomes**

- The presentations/ workshops were relevant to my personal interests.
- The presentations/ workshops were relevant to my studies.
- The presentations/ workshops were relevant to my future career.
- Overall, the BIP was a useful learning experience.

Tell us more:

### **Final collaborative project**

- The methodology (onboarding meeting, group meetings, final presentation, etc.) of the final collaborative project was effective.

- The virtual meetings with the tutors were useful for the development of the final project.
- The in-person meetings with my group were useful for the development of the final project.
- The presentation/ workshops received were useful for the final collaborative project.
- The final collaborative project was useful or interesting.

Tell us more:

### **CULTURAL AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

- Sharing my experience with international classmates was a transformative experience.
- The BIP experience improved my communication skills in English.
- I learnt about Spanish culture and the city of Burgos.
- I learnt about the different cultures and languages of my classmates.
- The BIP programme improved my intercultural competence.

Tell us more:

# APPENDIX 2 CHAPTER 2

## U11 BIP ERASMUS SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Dear participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study about your Erasmus + BIP experience. We would like you to answer some questions to share your opinion on the BIP programme's organization, methodology, and contents. Your answers will help us understand your overall satisfaction with the programme and improve future editions. It will take around 10 minutes to complete.

This form contains information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Please, read it carefully to make an informed decision.

1. **Voluntary** Participation: Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to complete the interview, and you may withdraw at any time without providing a reason.
2. **Confidentiality**: All information provided in this interview will be kept confidential. Your responses will be aggregated with those of other participants and analyzed collectively. Individual responses will be coded through an alphanumeric code and so, they will not be identifiable in any published results or reports.

3. **Data Use:** The research team will process personal data to carry out a scientific study, as well as proceed with its publication and dissemination, based on your explicit consent and the fulfillment of a mission carried out in the public interest attributed by the Organic Law of the University System. The data will only be communicated only in cases where there is a legal obligation or it is strictly necessary to fulfill its purpose and will be kept for the time necessary to fulfill this purpose and to determine the possible responsibilities that may arise from the treatment, or until you withdraw consent.
4. **Accuracy and Honesty:** Please provide accurate and honest responses to the best of your ability. Your input is valuable and will contribute to the integrity and reliability of the research findings.
5. **Contact Information:** If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Sergio Ruiz Pérez at [sergio.ruiz.perez@ui1.es](mailto:sergio.ruiz.perez@ui1.es)
6. **Legal rights:** You can exercise your rights to file a claim with a supervisory authority, to withdraw consent, access, rectification, deletion and portability of data, limitation, and opposition to processing, as well as not to be subject to decisions based solely on the automated processing of data, when appropriate, before Universidad Isabel I, c/ Fernán González, 76, C.P. 09003, Burgos; or via [dpo@ui1.es](mailto:dpo@ui1.es). Find more information in our privacy policy (<https://www.ui1.es/politica-de-privacidad>).

Please read the following at the beginning of your interview to express your consent: "I acknowledge that I have read and understood the information about this research project and agree to participate based on the terms outlined."

Thank you for your cooperation and valuable input.

The research team.

Interview questions:

- a. How would you describe your Erasmus BIP Experience?
- b. What could have enhanced or improved your overall experience?
- c. Would you repeat this experience if given the chance to? Why or why not?
- d. Would you recommend the Erasmus Bip Programme to your fellow students/ fellow professors? Why or why not?
- e. Would you like to add anything else?

# CHAPTER 3: QUESTIONING TEXTS: A CRITICAL THINKING MODULE

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Alicia Herraiz Gutiérrez

Universidad Isabel I

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## 1. Questioning texts

*Questioning Texts* is a two-part teaching module designed to improve reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. By exploring the main literary criticism theories in conjunction with distant-reading strategies, students develop the ability to identify patterns, recognize biases and, ultimately, consider multiple meanings in a text. In this context, the notion of “text” is used in a broad sense, equating it with “message”. Thus, the module uses both written and audiovisual materials, as well as fiction and non-fiction, as examples to be analyzed. Students will be presented with critical analyses of movies and TV shows, novels, scientific papers, data sets, and maps, underlining the idea that critical theory does not have to be applied exclusively to literature and, therefore, that critical thinking is a skill that should be engaged in all contexts.

Indeed, the module’s aim is to provide students with the theoretical framework and practical tools required to apply a critical mindset to the act of reading, understanding this as consuming information (Abu Shihab, 2011; Aloqaili,

2012; Baker & Brown, 1980; Beyer, 1984; Hosseini et al., 2012; Mendelman, 2007). To achieve this, the module's contents cover literary theory, graphic expression and medium contextualization and analysis. As a result, after the module, students should more easily be able to question a text's intentions, identify implicit and explicit biases and understand the influence that format has over message. The expectation is that students will then be able to transfer these newly developed skills to any kind of text, including teaching materials, research papers and copy edits (Ana et al., 2020; Bridges, 1993; Carter, 1993; Wall, 2015).

The critical analysis of a text entails key aspects such as becoming aware of the structures employed in building a message, noticing bias construction through omission of information and, of special importance, awareness of the influence format has over the message and the necessity to adapt a message to the medium (Capella & Li, 2023; Chae, 2020; Lewis & Atad, 2023). To cover all these aspects, the module is divided into three components that bring attention to the different approaches one can adopt towards a text. *What does the text say?* brings the focus to textual content through the lenses of literary theory and criticism. *What does the text not say?* expands the scope and teaches to detect gaps and fallacies over which biases are built. Finally, *How does the text say it?* explores the influence and limitations that format has over a message, showing how changing the medium changes in turn the visible facets of a text.

When implemented in the BIP *Society, Language and Education*, the module was divided into two parts and took place in an online and physical environment. However, it can be easily adapted to fully face-to-face or fully online teaching. The second case, fully online, requires digital tools that allow working in small groups synchronously. Common videoconference applications such as Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate Ultra have this feature available, so working fully online should not become an impediment although it would require more planning on the instructor's part to ensure the exercise runs smoothly.

The following pages explain the contents covered in the module, the methodology used to impart it, and proposals for improvement and adaptation.

### **1.1. What does the text say?**

The aim of this component is to present different perspectives as valid vantage points from which to approach a text. To this end, students are introduced to literary theory and criticism. Considering there are many different critical perspectives and that the field thrives in intersectionality, rather than attempting to be comprehensive, the module opts for providing general context on literary criticism in the first place, followed by definitions of the main theories. It is understood that rather than reviewing each and every possible critical perspective, in an introductory course it will be more useful to engage with a selected few and see them in action.

Thus, the component begins by explaining literary theory as a series of specialized perspectives that provide a framework from which to question a text on specific aspects (Bronner, 2017; Shuster, 2024; Tyson, 2023; Williams et al., 2025). With this base established, the component goes on to talk about Structuralism, Marxism, Feminism, Postcolonialism and Psychoanalyses. The five theories were chosen because they provide an ample and comprehensive panorama of the possibilities of criticism. Additionally, knowledge of these five theories allows for some effective intersectionality. For example, by combining Feminism with Marxism, which explores the often-forgotten female labor, or Feminism with Postcolonialism to talk about People of Colour (POC) Feminism.

For each theory, the instructor explains the core concepts, provides a brief list of questions to apply to the text and illustrates with examples from modern films and TV shows. While any kind of media can be subjected to this kind of criticism, modern films prove more advantageous because it is more likely that students will be familiar with them, which helps to make the examples more clarifying and effective. Without transcribing the whole component, below are the main points shared:

Structuralism: Stories are built of basic components and the opposing relations between them.

Questions: What are the pairs of opposites? How do they relate to each other?

Find examples in: The composition of villains in Disney and Marvel movies and how they contrast with the hero in shape, color and tone. For example, in *The Lion King* (1994) the heroes Simba and Mufasa have a red palette against the villainous green Scar. This same color opposition is repeated in *Thor* (2011).

Marxism: Cultural works explore work and class relations, challenging or promoting the status quo. Additionally, cultural works can become disenfranchised from their creators, becoming line products of consumption.

Who provides the labor in the story? Is this work meant to express something or to be consumed?

Find examples of labor relations in: The erasure of the lower-class labor that supports the high-class status and comfort in period pieces with romantic plots such as *The Bridgerton* (2020-2025).

Find examples of disenfranchised work: The similarities and paint-by-numbers plots of Marvel films, in which the hero path is followed by rote and there is little individuality to differentiate them as seen in: *Iron Man* (2008), *Thor* (2011), *Ant Man* (2015), *Doctor Strange* (2016).

Feminism: Reflect on women's presence, representation and voices.

Where are the women in this story? Does the text pass the Bechdel test? And the Sexy Lamp test?

Find examples in: Almost any movie, but especially any caper movie like *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) or *The Italian Job* (2003) any action movie like the *Bourne* series (2002-2016), *Fast and Furious* (2001-2023), *Mission: Impossible* (1996-2025) and the like.

Postcolonialism: Reflect on the presence, representation and voices of people of color.

Where are the people of color? How much depth do they have? Is their only purpose to support the main character's arch?

Find examples in: Most period pieces, self-discovery pieces like *Eat Pray Love* (2010) any movie relying on the sassy black best-friend trope. Additionally, explore the depiction of non-western locations and the use of the Mexican Filter as seen in *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) and *Poor Things* (2023).

Psychoanalysis: The human psyche is divided in three aspects, id, ego and superego, each in a different point in the basic instincts – society's norms axis. Some elements can take on symbolic aspects and deliver additional meaning.

Is there a Freudian trio? Are there any remarkable symbols?

Find examples of the Freudian trio in: The movie adaptations of *Harry Potter* (2001-2011) and *Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) , the *Star Trek show* (1966-1969) and films depicting Captain Kirk, Spock and Bones.

Find examples of symbols in: Roses in Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* (1999) or, more recently, music in Ryan Coogler's *Sinners* (2025).

After going over the contents, students are given the opportunity to put these principles into practice. Thus, they are randomly assorted into five groups, each one representing a movie genre. In case they are unsure what a genre referred to; examples can be provided as follows:

1. Action: Sagas like *James Bond*, *Jason Bourne*, *Die Hard* or *Mission Impossible*.
2. Superheroes: Any movie using Marvel or DC characters like *Iron-Man*, *Avengers*, *X-men*, *Batman*, *Superman*.
3. Children: Any family-oriented movie from Disney, Dreamworks or Pixar studios such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frozen*, *Sherk*, *How to tame your dragon*, etc.

4. Rom-com: Any romantic comedy, usually featuring Sandra Bullock or Matthew McConaughey as well as *Pretty Woman*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Love Actually*, etc.
5. Fantasy or Sci-Fi: Stories taking place in imaginary locations such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* or *Dune*.

Once the groups are formed, students are given the following tasks:

- a. Choose a movie to represent the genre.
- b. Choose any two of the five critical theories presented today.
- c. Apply those two theories to the chosen movie.

After allocating fifteen minutes for group discussion, the groups are asked to present their analyses to the rest of the class. This structure maximizes their exposition to examples of critical theory applications. First, inside the group, students will see how the same text can contain multiple meanings depending on the perspective adopted to analyze it. Then, by hearing the examples from other genres, they will see how the same theory can be applied to different works and how that can unearth different meanings or identify surprisingly similar patterns across genres.

Working in groups to complete a task has multiple benefits: students are more engaged and take an active role in their learning process (Finelli et al., 2011);

working on a task enhances reading skills (Aguilar Cuenca, 2024); group work promotes collaboration and communication (Bennett & Gadlin, 2012) and it helps with content retention (Johnson et al., 2014).

## **1.2. What does the text not say?**

The component should more correctly be called *What doesn't the text say?*, but the parallel structure with the previous section contributes to highlighting the idea that absence can be as meaningful as presence. The purpose of this section is to engage critical thinking by questioning broad assessments and identifying information gaps. To this end, students are presented with two case studies.

The first one presents the popular conclusion to the infamous 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment which asserts that, given power over people, humans will abuse said power (Haney et al., 1973). This assessment is shared often, shrouded by the perceived legitimacy of a renowned academic institution such as Stanford University. By asking "what isn't the text saying?" students are encouraged to demand more information from the assessment (Dolan, 2014). Thus, the component provides some less commonly shared facts such as that all participants belonged to the same group (privileged white men), that they knew beforehand what the researcher expected to find and that said researcher was their professor. The questions reveal a new context that casts doubt at the universality of the Stanford Prison Experiment conclusions.

Humanity may not be so willing to behave cruelly, but privileged white male undergrads will do anything for a good mark.

Similarly, the second case study shares a humorous anonymous quote: “The biggest difference between Americans and Europeans, is that Europeans think that a 100 miles is a long way, and Americans think that a 100 years is a long time.” While there is a certain truth in this saying, it relies on the idea that the United States has a very short history. Here, the instructor may guide discussion with the following questions: Is it true that the United States is a young country? When was it born? Was no one living there before that time? What happened to the previous population? Are there no visible cultural remnants of them? These questions bring to the forefront the long history of that land and its population, which has been often ignored and marginalized.

The exercise provides students with examples of how to request more information to ensure that a statement is valid, and how to validate sources, which are key features of academic work (Detmering & Johnson, 2012; Gardner et al., 1999; Graham & Metaxas, 2003; Purdy, 2012).

### **1.3. How does the text say it?**

The third component shifts the focus toward the influence that format exerts in message reception and interpretation. While the general principle is easy to grasp, the extent of this phenomenon does not become evident until seeing some examples in action. Thus, the section starts with the idea that format

affects and constraints the story told. To illustrate, the instructor draws a comparison between two popular TV Shows, *Supernatural* (2005-2020) and *American Gods* (2017-2021). Both shows have similar topics and motives, employing magical realism in an American setting in which gods and many other supernatural beings interfere in mortal lives. However, they present substantial differences in their length and plot division. While *Supernatural* enjoys 15 seasons with usually 24 42-minutes episodes per season, *American Gods* has merely 3 seasons with varied episodes number (8 to 10) and length (42 to 70 minutes). Evidently, these differences in format must affect storytelling. What is not so evident is that the differences are due to the platform on which the show is first aired. The *Supernatural* show was conceived for TV, and is thus constrained by the daily and yearly schedule, while *American Gods* is designed for platform streaming, which prefers shorter content and allows for varied episode length since there is not a specific time slot to occupy. The shows are chosen for their popularity online, so students may be familiar with one or both. Additionally, their thematic and visual similarity highlights the differences that emerge when the publishing context differs.

Once this idea has been established, the module explains some principles of graphic depiction of quantitative and qualitative information as used by Franco Moretti (2007) and Edward Tufte (1987). Students are shown maps, graphs and trees as examples of how to synthesize information in graphic form and how visual representation helps visualize patterns. Moretti's book

provides some examples, but the module chose to employ other materials that had bigger visual impact like Minard's famous *Carte figurative* (1869) as well Randall Munroe's movie charts (2005-2025).

This component will allow students, on the one hand, to question the shape in which information arrives to them and what that entails for the message; and, on the other, to be more critical of their own choices when creating and producing messages. Given the higher education context in which the module takes place, this will benefit their future academic output.

## **2. Implementation. How to bring the module to class**

As previously explained, when implemented in the BIP Society, *Language and Education*, the module was divided into two parts. The component *What does the text say* was taught in a physical environment, which greatly helped to organize the group work. The second and third components were taught together in an online session. While the module is designed to be taught in the order presented here, in the case of our BIP the online component took place first. However, changing the order does not significantly affect content acquisition and skill development.

Given the constraints of the online medium, rather than working in groups on a task, for the second part of the module that groups components 2

and 3, the contents were divided in smaller units at the end of which the instructor posed brief questions that students could answer via chat or voice, promoting their engagement with the materials (Miller et al. 2014). Students were prompted to attempt to interpret the examples by themselves before listening to the explanations, to draw parallels, to pose their own questions in the *What does the text not say?* case studies, and to think of other examples of format affecting messages in the *How does the text say it?* component.

While it was not implemented on this occasion, if given more time for the online session and more familiarity with the online video tools, the second part of the module could replicate the group task in the first part and have students work online in small groups before presenting their conclusions to the class. Thus, students would be sorted into groups and provided with a set of data, asking them to transform it into a visually effective display. Depending on the desired effect, instructors can choose between two alternatives. On the one hand, instructors can provide the same data set to each group while assigning a different format (graph, map, tree, poster, etc.). In that scenario, when students presented their work they would all be familiar with the source data and they could compare and contrast how different formats highlight different aspects of the same source message. On the other hand, if the desire is to promote critical thinking and decision making, each group would be provided with different data sets and they would be free to choose

the presentation format, which entails more thinking and planning on the students' part, as well as agreeing and collaborating.

*Questioning Texts* provides an early approach to literary criticism and, through it, contributes to student development of their critical thinking, source analyses and text interpretation. Additionally, by going over distant reading tools and graphic representation, students gain awareness of the effect medium has over messages. The contents and illustration materials have been selected with the target public in mind, to increase engagement through familiarity and keep students interested. The methodology employed seeks to activate and engage students, allowing them to put the contents into practice, work in groups and compare their answers, which should help their communication and decision-making skills. Finally, the module is designed to be flexible in its application, which can be entirely face to face or online as well as in any order that best fits the program.

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# CHAPTER 4. DESIGN FOR ALL: ACCESIBLE DIGITAL RESOURCES DESIGN

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## 1. Introduction

This chapter presents an academic reflection on the experience “Design for All: Accessible Digital Resources Design”, a two-part workshop targeting international students. The key objective was to underscore that accessibility benefits all academia and should be prioritised across disciplines creating awareness and promoting digital competence. The module was designed to enhance understanding of terms such as accessibility and inclusion, emphasising their universal benefits and necessity in fostering equitable societies. Developed in two sessions, the experience began with an online theoretical webinar introducing core concepts of inclusive design and accessibility, followed by an in-person workshop focused on the practical application of these principles in online documents. This binomial module provided a stage of basic guidelines and online tools for creating accessible digital documents, empowering participants to implement inclusive practices in their academic and professional activities. Further, allowed them to learn

about errors in design that cause exclusion due to the limitations present in the design and not in the person. This initiative reinforced the role of education in addressing societal challenges, fostering intercultural dialogue and promoting the ethos of Design for All.

The results of previous Erasmus+ BIP projects have highlighted the need to work on future projects on how to improve teaching for students with disabilities. Results revealed that this is a highly relevant topic when preparing teaching materials for students with disabilities (e.g., Ovtšarenko, 2024). The intervention on “Design for All: Designing Accessible Digital Resources” focuses on the creation of inclusive materials in the academic and professional context, laying the conceptual foundations for disability, accessibility, educational inclusion, and the specific techniques to be implemented for the creation of inclusive digital documents. Consequently, it answers the questions raised in the discussion of previous Erasmus+ BIP programs and represents a novelty within the framework of BIP projects. This represents an evolution with respect to previous BIP, systematically incorporating for the first time specific content on the preparation of materials for students with special needs, which is considered a strategic and proactive approach.

Beyond its technical and methodological approach, the experience served as a platform to rethink the role of higher education in the formation of global citizens committed to the principles of equity and social justice. The training not only aimed to equip students with specific digital skills, but also to foster

a shift in perspective regarding the ethical responsibility of design (Carretero et al., 2017). In this context, the module made visible how seemingly neutral decisions in the field of digital design can perpetuate invisible barriers that systematically exclude certain groups. This awareness became a catalyst for critical thinking among the participants, who contributed diverse perspectives on accessibility based on their cultural and educational realities. Consequently, the workshop became a learning space where students not only acquired technical skills but also consolidated a deeper understanding of design as a tool for social transformation (Carretero et al., 2017). Incorporating the Design for All approach into educational contexts reinforces the idea that accessibility should not be treated as a marginal or secondary requirement, but rather as a fundamental criterion of quality and responsibility in any academic or professional project. In this way, this initiative not only fulfilled its educational objective but also fostered a critical and proactive attitude toward inclusion, preparing students to assume leadership roles in building more fair and accessible digital environments for all (European Union, 2023).

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Inclusive education: an internationally promoted goal**

The concept of inclusive education has gained growing interest in recent decades on the international agenda, reflecting a shared concern to guarantee

equitable and quality access to education for all, regardless of their personal, social, or cultural circumstances. Various international organizations have issued declarations and recommendations aimed at strengthening this inclusive vision, recognizing that truly equitable education is key to a just and cohesive society.

In this context, several relevant milestones stand out that have contributed to consolidating this approach. In 2006, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities focused attention on the importance of educational inclusion. A year later, in 2007, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) emphasized that citizens' individual and social circumstances should not become an obstacle to educational success. Subsequently, the Council of the European Union (2009) emphasized that education must promote intercultural skills and values, preventing any kind of exclusion. All these ideas led the European Agency to draft a recommendation to governments in 2011, providing a set of basic principles for inclusive education policies.

Inclusion is not limited to offering services; it involves transforming students' learning expectations, encouraging interaction between them and paying special attention to those who may be at risk of exclusion. In other words, an inclusive environment requires the involvement and commitment of both teachers and educational institutions to ensure equitable learning

opportunities. All of this must be accompanied, as UNESCO (2015) indicates, by an open and flexible view of learning, understanding it as a lifelong process.

From a holistic perspective, inclusive education ensures that anyone associated with the educational institution (student, employee, provider, etc.) can move around its facilities, access services, information, and carry out all activities without difficulty. Therefore, inclusive education addresses physical, technological, and communication accessibility.

## **2.2. Disability according to the WHO: the paradigm shift**

Beginning in 2011, with the publication of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), the World Health Organization (WHO) established a paradigm shift, adopting the social model for understanding disability. This new perspective recognizes that functional limitations should not be understood exclusively from a medical or clinical perspective, but rather as the result of the interaction between individual conditions and the barriers of the physical, social, and attitudinal environment. Consequently, the importance of contextual factors in how disability is perceived and addressed is emphasized.

From this social model and human rights approach, disability does not reside in the individual, but in the society that does not provide the necessary conditions to guarantee their full participation. For this reason, it is preferable to refer to "persons with disabilities" rather than "disabled persons," which emphasizes

that the limitation of opportunities is not inherent to the individual but rather depends largely on the presence or absence of support, accessibility, equity, and recognition. In short, "If the discriminatory effect toward a person with a disability arises at the moment they share their existence with society, it is society itself that is responsible for making a normal life possible for all people." (Guasch et al., 2012, p. 26).

This approach has been fundamental in reorienting public policies, especially in the field of education, where it has helped to promote the development of inclusive models. Inclusive education, aligned with the principles established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), maintains that all students, regardless of their personal characteristics, have the right to a quality education in common and accessible environments. In this sense, promoting inclusive education involves not only adapting the educational system to the diversity of its students, but also transforming pedagogical structures, attitudes, and practices to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

Thus, the new paradigm proposed by the WHO and consolidated in international human rights frameworks has been key to redefining the concept of disability and guiding educational policies toward more equitable, participatory, and fair models. All of this appeals to an ethic of shared responsibility, in which society assumes an active role in creating more just, accessible, and equitable environments for all people.

### **2.3. Accessibility and Universal Design**

Inclusion and equal opportunities are inextricably linked to the concept of accessibility. Accessibility refers to the degree to which products, systems, services, environments, and facilities are capable of being used by a population with the widest range of characteristics and capabilities (physical, cognitive, financial, social, and cultural, etc.) to achieve a specific goal in a specific context (Persson et al., 2015).

In the digital realm, this implies that resources are designed so that they can be perceived, operated, and understood by a wide range of users, including those with visual, hearing, motor, or cognitive disabilities.

In this sense, we can consider everything that does not exclude people based on ability, gender, age, or culture. Accessibility measures are necessary for everyone, and they are essential to ensure inclusion. If digital technologies are combined with the idea and definition of accessibility, it can be determined that the former open a wide range of possibilities for promoting inclusion and universal access to information.

In the European context, as part of the Erasmus+ mobility program, accessibility is approached through the concept of Design for All, which initially emerged in the design field, from the Scandinavian functionalism movement of the fifties as well as from the ergonomic design of the sixties (European Institute for Design and Disability, 2004).

Universal accessibility and Design for All frequently appear in legislation and regulations aimed at the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. In Spain, Law 51/2003, of December 2, on equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and universal accessibility for people with disabilities. Specifically, Design for All is defined as the activity by which environments, processes, goods, products, services, objects, instruments, devices, or tools are conceived or designed, from the outset and whenever possible, in such a way that they can be used by all people to the greatest extent possible.

The concept of Design for All or Universal Design is based on the premise that environments, products, and services should be inherently accessible to all people, without the need for subsequent adaptations. This approach seeks to create inclusive solutions that benefit the entire population, promoting equity and full participation in society. In the educational context, implementing Universal Design principles in digital resources is essential to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, can access and benefit from the learning content.

As the Stockholm Declaration—proposed by the European Institute for Design and Disability in 2004—stated: “Good design enables, bad design disables”. Therefore, designs must meet several criteria to be considered accessible. The Center for Universal Design (CUD) at the University of North Carolina has proposed the following seven principles: (1) equitable use, the design is useful and of commercial value to people with different abilities; (2) flexibility

of use, the design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities; (3) simple and intuitive use, the design is easy to use and understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level; (4) perceptible information, the design communicates the necessary information effectively, regardless of sensory abilities or environmental conditions; (5) fault tolerance, the design minimizes the hazards and negative consequences of possible accidental or unintended actions; (6) low physical effort, the design can be used efficiently and comfortably with minimal fatigue; (7) size, space for approach, and use, appropriate size and space are provided to approach, reach, manipulate, and use the design regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

The implementation of Design for All principles in BIPs can enable the development of inclusive environments, where technology becomes a facilitator of learning and communication, reducing barriers and promoting equity in access to information and knowledge. This requires digital competence, which not only involves the use of technological tools but also the ability to create and adapt accessible content, ensuring that the information can be used by a diverse range of users.

### **2.3.1. Digital competence**

Digital competence, understood as the set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to use information and communication technologies effectively, includes the ability to create and use accessible digital resources (Carretero et al., 2017). Fostering this competence in students and professionals is essential for promoting inclusive and equitable practices in diverse contexts (INTEF, 2022). Training in the design of accessible digital resources not only improves the quality of educational materials but also raises awareness of the importance of inclusion and diversity in society.

The key tool for assessing and developing digital skills is the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, also known as DigComp, published in 2017. This framework has become a reference for the development and strategic planning of digital competence initiatives at European level. Therefore, there is a contextual affinity with the BIP, as both are aimed at EU citizens. Being the BIP program an intensive combined methodology through face-to-face and online learning, it is essential to enhance and reinforce digital competence development.

This framework then provided specific guidance for the students who made up the BIP, as a way to help them improve their personal development to deal with the rise of new (digital) skills and competences needed for employment, personal development and social inclusion (Carretero et al., 2017).

Within the DigComp framework, accessibility and inclusion in digital content are established in Areas 3, "Safety," and 4, "Problem-solving," which are dedicated to being aware of digital technologies for social well-being and social inclusion, respectively. These areas emphasise both the importance of identifying simple digital technologies for social well-being and social inclusion, as well as their effective use and the selection of ways to adjust and customise digital environments to personal needs.

BIP students should not only be able to identify and choose digital resources but also integrate accessibility principles to ensure their use by all users, including those with disabilities or specific learning needs.

Competence in digital content development involves the ability to generate materials that meet accessibility standards, ensuring that the resources can be perceived, understood, and used by the broadest possible range of people. In this sense, the integration and redesign of digital content play a key role, as they allow pre-existing materials to be adapted to make them more inclusive, eliminating barriers and optimizing their accessibility. Furthermore, programming and accessibility in the design of digital resources reinforce the need to apply universal design principles, ensuring that digital environments are inclusive from the outset and promote equity in access to information and learning (INTEF, 2022).

### **2.3.2. WCAG: guidelines for creating accessible digital resources**

In the context of creating accessible digital resources, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is widely recognized internationally as one of the main references in establishing standards for the web.

Its purpose is to promote the evolution and interoperability of the web to foster its universality and accessibility. Within its broad scope of work, it includes the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), which focuses on the ongoing analysis of technical needs and solutions to ensure digital inclusion. The WAI carries out its standardization work through a consensus-based process involving industries, organizations for people with disabilities, governments, and accessibility research organizations, among others.

One of the most relevant works of this initiative is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which offers a set of technical and regulatory recommendations aimed at making digital content—including websites, electronic documents, applications, and educational platforms—perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust for all users. They are presented under the umbrella of "technology neutrality," that is, the guidelines' independence from the technology used to generate web content. These guidelines constitute a global benchmark adopted by institutions, governments and organizations in the development of accessible content.

The WCAG, currently in version 2.2 (recommended) and a future version 3.0 (currently in draft) are organized into principles and success criteria ranked by conformance levels (A, AA, AAA), allowing for progressive implementation according to the desired or required level of accessibility. Its implementation has become especially relevant in the educational and administrative fields, where the digitization of content and services must be accompanied by specific attention to the functional diversity of users. In this sense, the WCAG not only responds to a technical requirement but also to an ethical and legal imperative of equity and digital inclusion, being essential to guaranteeing universal access to information and full participation in the knowledge society.

The accessibility of digital documents has two aspects: the author's own choices and the functionalities offered by the software or format in which they are created (Térmens et al., 2008). The first aspect responds to the creator's or author's decisions (information structure, incorporation of complex elements such as tables and graphs, linguistic register, etc.) that directly affect accessibility. The second aspect responds to the different technical features of the programs used, which can be exploited to varying degrees by users.

In the academic context, accessibility is one important key to ensuring the full participation of all students and building more just and equitable academic communities. We can implement the digitization of content in the most common and standardized daily tasks in any task or assignment, if we speak at the student level, such as the creation of texts, presentations, emails, etc.

As mentioned, accessibility in digital documents goes beyond a technical requirement; it is a commitment to inclusive, quality education.

More specifically, Microsoft® Word was chosen as the tool to display accessibility guidelines for content design in text documents due to its widespread use in educational and professional settings, its compatibility with accessibility standards, and the potential specific features it offers for creating accessible content. Furthermore, its intuitive interface and compatibility with multiple formats facilitate the implementation of accessibility best practices without requiring advanced technological knowledge.

Word includes specific tools to improve the accessibility of documents, such as the "Accessibility Checker," which identifies barriers and offers suggestions for correcting them. It also allows the use of structured styles, semantic tags, alternative descriptions for images, and high-contrast formats, complying with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and other international standards. Another relevant aspect is its integration with assistive technologies, such as screen readers and speech recognition software, which allows for assessing the accessibility of documents from the perspective of users with disabilities. Furthermore, its compatibility with accessible formats such as PDF/UA and EPUB facilitates the distribution of documents in inclusive environments.

Therefore, the choice of Microsoft® Word as a tool for studying accessibility in text documents is justified by its inherent accessibility, ease of use, compatibility with international standards, and its integration with assistive tools, allowing students to develop skills applicable in real-world settings.

### **3. Objectives**

The main objective of the "Design for All: Accessible Digital Resource Design" experience was to emphasize that accessibility benefits everyone and should be prioritized in all disciplines, promoting shared responsibility and digital competence. To achieve this general objective, the following specific objectives were established:

- Raise awareness among participants about the importance of accessibility and inclusion. Students were encouraged to understand that accessibility is not only a necessity for people with disabilities, but also benefits society as a whole by promoting more equitable and usable environments.
- Develop competencies in the design of accessible digital resources. Participants were expected to acquire practical skills to create digital documents and materials that meet accessibility standards, facilitating their use by a diverse audience.
- Foster the spirit of Design for All in professional and academic practices, promoting the adoption of inclusive design principles in students' future

activities, incentivizing the creation of solutions that consider the needs of all people from their conception

- Promote intercultural dialogue and international collaboration.

The initiative aimed to facilitate the exchange of experiences and perspectives on accessibility and inclusive design in different educational contexts.

## **4. Implementation**

The initiative was developed in two complementary sessions that combined theory and practice to offer comprehensive training to participants.

### **4.1. First session**

The first session of the module consisted of a 50-minute online synchronous seminar held on April 10, 2024, at 11:00 a.m. with the title "Accessible digital resources design training".

The seminar's content was theoretical and introduced participants to various basic topics related to inclusive design and accessibility. First, the fundamentals of accessibility were introduced. The author explained what accessibility is, its importance, and how it affects different groups of people. The participants also were led to discuss the principles of universal design, detailing its seven principles and how to apply some of the techniques in the digital context through examples they can find and face in a real context.

Accessibility regulations and standards were introduced, by highlighting international guidelines and regulations governing accessibility in the digital realm, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Finally, the benefits of accessibility for all were analysed, emphasizing how accessible design practices not only benefit people with disabilities but also improve the user experience for all in routine tasks. For example, sometimes we need subtitles when watching a video in a noisy environment, or we are unable to read the text on the ATM screen if the sun is shining on it, etc.

This theoretical session laid the conceptual foundation necessary for participants to understand the importance of accessibility and be prepared to apply this knowledge and leverage the content covered in the practical session.

## **4.2. Second session**

The second session consisted of an in-person workshop at the Isabel I University in Burgos, Spain, held on May 28, 2024, at 9:00 a.m titled "Design for All: Creating accessible digital resources workshop". The 50-minute workshop focused on the practical application of accessibility principles in the creation of digital documents using Microsoft® Word.

The workshop explained the main aspects that make the information contained in a Microsoft® Word document accessible based on the guidelines established by WCAG 2.2, font type and size, list creation, colour selection (Figure 1 and

Figure 2), image inclusion (Figure 3 and Figure 4), and document structure using styles and lists. Various examples were used for the presentation, as well as correct and incorrect practices for the same information.

### Figure 1

*Wrong and right practices in semantic use of colour in tests.*

Meaningful use of colour without alternative	Meaningful use of colour with alternative
<p>El tributo directo de carácter real que grava el valor de los bienes inmuebles es el:</p> <p>a) IRPF  <b>b) IBI</b>                      c) IVA</p>	<p>El tributo directo de carácter real que grava el valor de los bienes inmuebles es el:</p> <p>a) IRPF  <b>b) IBI</b> Right answer                      c) IVA</p>
<p>El tributo directo de carácter real que grava el valor de los bienes inmuebles es el:</p> <p><b>a) IRPF</b>                      b) IBI  <b>c) IVA</b></p>	<p>El tributo directo de carácter real que grava el valor de los bienes inmuebles es el:</p> <p>a) IRPF  <b>b) IBI*</b>                      c) IVA</p> <p>* Right answer</p>

### Figure 2

*Wrong practice in semantic use of colour in forms.*

**DATOS PERSONALES**

Tratamiento  
 Sr.  Sra.  Miss

Nombre \*

Apellido \*

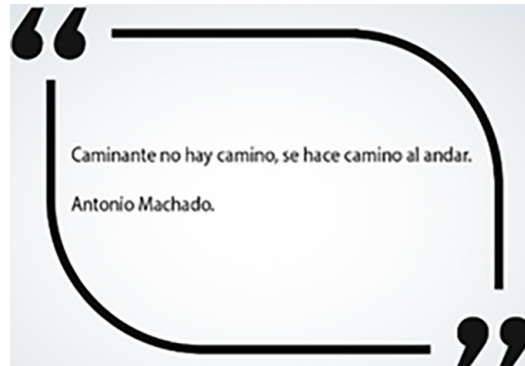
Correo electrónico \*

Contraseña \*  
  
(Mínimo 5 caracteres)

Fecha de nacimiento  
 -  -

### Figure 3

*Example of text as image, as inaccessible information.*



### Figure 4

*Examples of exceptions of images that are not decorative and do not require a text alternative.*



In each of the topics covered, participants had the opportunity to analyse and review case studies that illustrated accessible and inaccessible practices

projected on the screen. After the personal analysis they could share their opinions with the rest, through a classroom discussion guided by the author. Students could identify common design errors that can lead to barriers to accessing information and cause exclusion, understanding that limitations often lie in the design, not the individual. The author provided guidance and corrected any necessary aspects that arose from the discussion.

In addition, the author showed how to use online tools to evaluate and improve the accessibility of colours used in documents. The author explained to participants how to use online tools Adobe Colour and Colour Contrast Checker (Figure 5), as well as Colour Contrast Analyzer, which facilitate the creation of accessible content using colour.

**Figure 5**

Interfaces of Colour Contrast Checker and Adobe Colour programs.



This approach allowed participants to understand firsthand the challenges of choosing accessible colours and their combinations, as well as the type and size of fonts, line spacing, language, and establishing the language of a text or how to include images or links in an inclusive way, among others. Besides, solutions related to accessible design were provided, strengthening their understanding and skills in this area.

Regarding resources, the instructor used a digital presentation to showcase the workshop content, as well as online tools for colour analysis. A printed copy of the presentation was provided to students before the workshop began so they could follow the session more closely and even take notes during it.

Since Microsoft Word is one of the most widely used text processors worldwide, it was already known by students, regardless of nationality. This practice made it easier for the entire group to recognize and locate the different functionalities worked on in the workshop in a simple way in the word processor.

Working together through case studies and examples of accessible and inaccessible practices enhances the comprehensive assimilation of theoretical concepts by seeing their application in real-life situations, as well as stimulating reflection, analysis, and informed decision-making. It allowed students to actively participate in building knowledge together rather than merely

receiving information and establishing relationships between conceptual and procedural aspects.

## **5. Teaching recommendations**

A detailed analysis of the program developed in this BIP identified a series of areas for improvement. The analysis is based on the experience gained during the planning, execution, and evaluation, as well as on the feedback obtained from the various stakeholders involved. Consequently, a series of recommendations are presented aimed at strengthening the quality and pedagogical effectiveness that will allow for the optimization of future editions of the programme.

- Integrate the more theoretical content covered in the workshop into the online session so that the workshop can be dedicated exclusively to practical activities. To achieve this, it could be helpful to have 60 minutes in the first session, the online seminar.
- Develop activities in the practical workshop such as the creation and evaluation of accessible documents, the adaptation of existing inaccessible documents by identifying barriers and proposing solutions to improve their accessibility, the simulation of user experiences for people with disabilities, and the expansion of content to other digital formats such as presentations, web pages, or multimedia content.

- Incorporate additional activities into those already implemented through dynamics in which participants must individually implement some of the suggested approaches, allowing for a deeper understanding of the practical challenges.

## 6. Conclusions

The module developed on the design of accessible digital resources has addressed a cross-cutting issue for the BIP “Language, Education, and Society”.

In the context of language, as a means of communication and an essential element of learning, the accessibility of information is essential; its absence would make it limited and exclusive. Within the educational context of the program, accessible resources ensure inclusion and empower all students—regardless of their abilities or backgrounds—to fully participate in educational programs. All this is based on the use of digital technologies for the development of online training and through the promotion of digital competence in learning.

Ultimately, the multicultural environment created by participants from diverse countries makes it inevitable for us to recognize that we are part of this rich and diverse society. A space is created that, indirectly through the content covered, is conducive and invites us to reflect on the shared responsibility we each have with others, to understand and respect individual differences

through knowledge and techniques to promote inclusive information, or at least not create barriers and be able to recognize them.

Inclusion enables us to recognize the importance and personal responsibility we have as part of society to ensure that the documents we create and the information we share are accessible to all who access them, being aware that digital technologies can both hinder and improve accessibility. Students can understand the challenges faced by people with disabilities and can ensure that their creations are accessible. Students will become future professionals, experts, and researchers in various disciplines, so they will learn about accessibility and influence the world in which we live. This will enhance their empathy and co-responsibility, which are inherent to the content covered in the sessions, thus responding to the social dimension.

The "Design for All: Accessible Digital Resource Design" experience achieved its objectives, by providing international students with a deep understanding of the importance of accessibility and the skills necessary to implement it in their academic and professional practices.

Regarding awareness, participants recognized that accessibility is a fundamental aspect that benefits all of society, not just people with disabilities. Through the acquired tools and knowledge applicable to the creation of accessible documents, students will be able to advocate the importance of inclusive practices and ensure its future creations are accessible. Through the

workshop, they identified common errors in previous designs and learned how to correct them, thus strengthening their understanding of digital inclusion and improving their skills to understand the accessible materials in academic and professional settings.

Inclusive design in digital documents was fostered by reinforcing the need to integrate Design for All principles and encouraging participants' commitment to creating accessible digital content in their future academic and professional practices. In an effort to achieve a more just society, it is considered enriching and necessary to include cross-cutting and social themes in BIPs, with the ultimate goal of promoting ethical values and co-responsibility toward others, not only in the physical or in-person environment but also in the digital context.

Finally, the promotion of intercultural dialogue was achieved through the exchange of experiences and approaches to accessibility in different cultural contexts, enriching the discussion and fostering a global vision of inclusive design, as it was aimed at international students. These proposals would enrich the learning experience, offering a more comprehensive and applied approach to accessible design in digital environments. The experience may inspire some to advocate for accessibility in other settings or projects.

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# CHAPTER 5. LEARNING STATIONS AS AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

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## 1. Introduction

The Erasmus+ BIP (Blended Intensive Programme), within which this chapter is framed, aims to combine short-term physical mobility with collaborative virtual activities, to promote new forms of academic exchange and international learning. These experiences seek to foster pedagogical innovation through the integration of active methodologies, as well as to encourage innovative curriculum design adapted to diverse educational contexts.

Moreover, BIPs are geared towards the development of students' transversal skills, including communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, language proficiency, intercultural competence, and research abilities. They are based on an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach, in which all participants—regardless

of their field of study—can engage with the content from complementary perspectives, thereby fostering shared and meaningful learning experiences.

The use of active methodologies such as Learning Stations in higher education represents an innovative approach that fosters active, collaborative, and student-centered learning. Although this methodology has traditionally been applied in primary and secondary education, recent studies and educational practices have demonstrated its potential in adult and university-level learning contexts (Gigena & Cuesta García, 2022).

Building on the above, the implementation of Learning Stations within the framework of a Blended Intensive Programme represents, to our knowledge, a novel and pioneering practice. This integration not only corresponds to the pedagogical goals of the Erasmus+ BIP, but also enhances its potential by introducing a dynamic, student-centered methodology that promotes autonomy, collaboration, and contextualized learning. By adapting Learning Stations to a higher education setting and embedding them within an international and interdisciplinary programme, this initiative contributes to expanding the methodological repertoire of BIPs and opens new pathways for innovation in transnational teaching and learning environments.

## 2. Justification

This chapter presents an example of the successful implementation of a module designed for students participating in the Erasmus BIP programme “Language, Education and Society”, based on the Learning Stations methodology. This teaching strategy allowed for a flexible approach to content delivery, combining theoretical, practical, and experiential learning. By integrating diverse learning formats and encouraging student interaction, the module fostered a deeper understanding of the interconnections between language, educational practices, and societal contexts.

The module was delivered in a blended format, integrating both online and face-to-face sessions. This format seeks to leverage the flexibility of online learning along with the opportunities for direct interaction and group cohesion offered by in-person teaching (Alammary *et al.*, 2014). During the virtual phase, students accessed theoretical content and participated in interactive self-assessment activities, such as Kahoot quizzes. These ideas were then applied in the face-to-face sessions through practical activities. This approach also offers benefits for instructors, as students arrive in the physical classroom with a solid conceptual foundation, allowing teachers to focus more on practice and applied reflection (Lopes *et al.*, 2024).

Although Learning Stations are more commonly used in primary and secondary education, they can be effectively adapted to adult learning

contexts (Gigena & Cuesta, 2022). This methodology is grounded in several pedagogical principles:

The active and autonomous role of the student, who chooses activities according to their needs and interests, with the teacher acting as a guide and facilitator (Espíñeira Caderno, 2005).

- The diversification of the classroom, transforming the space and content into stations that address different learning styles and skills.
- Student motivation, fostered by the ability to choose, make decisions, and work according to their interests (Zull, 2002).
- The importance of collaborative work, which enables peer learning and reinforces the value of others.

To apply this methodology, it is recommended to conduct an initial assessment of students' interests and prior knowledge, define learning objectives, and structure the content across stations. It is essential to prepare clear materials, plan the number of sessions required, and design appropriate assessment strategies (Dreher, 2013, as cited in Gigena & Cuesta García, 2022).

## **3. Theoretical framework**

### **3.1. Conceptualization**

The Learning Stations methodology is presented as a teaching strategy that facilitates work across multiple thematic areas simultaneously, promoting multidisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered learning (Bauer, 1997; Krebs & Faust-Siehl, 1993). To achieve this, it is essential to shift from a traditional “one-way” teaching approach to one that emphasizes how students utilize their knowledge to apply concepts, practice skills, and develop competencies and attributes necessary for success in their lives (Hoa *et al.*, 2021).

According to Bauer (2009), learning through stations involves organizing the content of a thematic unit into different workstations, where students participate actively. This methodology fosters critical and creative thinking and positions the teacher as a facilitator (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Although it originated in primary education to address students with varying levels of prior knowledge (Espiñeira Caderno, 2005; Fernández-Rufete, 2020), its applicability at other educational levels has been demonstrated. Montessori emphasized the value of this methodology in terms of spatial transformation, sensory activity, and movement, considering it an element that enhances learning (Yaglis, 2005).

From the perspective of neuroeducation, it is considered an effective strategy to improve teaching and learning processes through the intentional use of space. The stations, as physical elements distributed throughout the classroom, form a “learning circuit” where students move from one station to another to complete various activities (Soler Ortiz *et al.*, 2014). These stations may include:

- **Station 0:** Starting point with instructions and roadmap.
- **Work stations:** Activities with varying levels and formats.
- **Rest station:** A space for pause and reflection.
- **Final station:** Assessment and synthesis of learning.

### **3.2. Theoretical and Pedagogical Foundations of the Method**

The theoretical foundations supporting the Learning Stations methodology stem from various pedagogical and psychological approaches. This educational proposal is based on the following theoretical principles (López & Martínez, 2010; Marzuca-Nassr *et al.*, 2021; Navarro-Granados & García-Fuentes, 2022; Sabuco, 2021):

**Constructivism.** Learning is understood as an active process in which students build new knowledge based on what they already know. The activities designed for the stations should promote student autonomy, allowing them to complete tasks with minimal teacher intervention. The teacher’s role

becomes that of a facilitator or guide, providing feedback and support only when necessary.

**Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).** In this approach, assistance can come from both the teacher and peers, which is why forming heterogeneous groups is recommended. The teacher must carefully plan the instructional design, creating conditions that allow students to progress in their learning autonomously.

From another perspective, Learning Stations are also grounded in the principles of **inclusive education**. One of the most valuable aspects of this methodology is that it enables students to access the same content through different learning modalities: auditory, visual, hands-on, or experiential. This facilitates attention to diversity through optional tasks or those adapted to different levels of difficulty (Hoa *et al.*, 2021).

Learning Stations, therefore, create the possibility of designing varied learning environments in which the same concepts are explored through multiple formats (Albarracín-Vivo, 2023). Furthermore, when the teacher deems it appropriate, a specific station can be designated to work with a small group of students, in order to provide more personalized support.

### **3.3. The role of the teacher**

The role of the teacher within the Learning Stations methodology undergoes a significant transformation compared to traditional approaches. As Espiñeira Cadeiro (2005) points out, the teacher shifts from being the central figure who imparts knowledge to becoming a facilitator, guide, supporter, and mediator of the teaching and learning process.

The responsibilities and functions of a teacher when applying this methodology are numerous and varied, ranging from the initial organization before the students begin their work to the evaluation of the intervention itself (Pérez Fernández, 2023).

Before implementing the methodology, the teacher has an important role in planning and design. Learning objectives must be defined, and the content organized into different workstations. Additionally, the teacher is responsible for creating materials and instruction sheets for each station (Antolinos Sánchez, 2022). The planning should take into account the students' interests and prior knowledge and, above all, the diversity in the classroom, adapting tasks to students' individual needs, preferences, and learning paces.

Likewise, the physical (or virtual) classroom space must be organized and transformed to create the different stations where students will work. This breaks with the traditional classroom layout, which allows the teacher to

establish a path so that all students move through each station in an orderly manner (Signes i Monferrer & Moreno, 2021).

During the session, the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator, offering continuous support while students work autonomously or collaboratively. The teacher must be present and attentive, to provide help when necessary. However, it is essential that the instructions and explanations are as clear as possible to enable autonomous student work (Castillo Noriega *et al.*, 2021).

Another key aspect during the session is the evaluation of student learning. The teacher thus becomes an attentive observer of the process. Working with small groups allows the teacher to better understand students' needs and interests (Signes i Monferrer & Moreno, 2021). Monitoring progress is essential and can involve tools such as tracking or observation sheets. According to Antolinos Sánchez (2022), feedback and evaluation are key responsibilities. The teacher can provide personalized and immediate feedback during the session. This author also suggests using questionnaires to gather students' perceptions of their motivation and cooperative work.

Furthermore, this methodology emphasizes student interaction and collaboration. Working in small groups encourages teamwork and mutual support, as stations can include activities specifically designed for group work (Pérez Fernández, 2023).

### **3.4. Learning stations in higher education**

In tertiary education, Learning Stations allow for the integration of theoretical content with practical, reflective, and experiential activities. This not only enhances student engagement but also promotes deeper understanding and the development of key competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills. Moreover, Learning Stations are particularly useful for addressing the diversity of student profiles found in higher education. They offer multiple entry points to the same content, allowing students to learn in ways that align with their personal learning styles—whether visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or experiential. This flexibility supports differentiated instruction and the inclusive design of learning experiences.

In university settings, Learning Stations can be used to:

- Work on interdisciplinary content by connecting different fields of study.
- Facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios.
- Encourage collaborative learning through group-based tasks.
- Promote self-regulated learning by giving students autonomy and choice.

This methodology aligns with current pedagogical models that advocate for active learning and competence-based education, and it can be effectively implemented both in in-person and blended learning formats. It also provides opportunities to design innovative evaluation strategies, such as formative assessments, peer feedback, and reflective journaling.

In sum, Learning Stations in higher education represent a valuable pedagogical resource for transforming traditional teaching practices into dynamic, participatory, and inclusive learning environments.

## **4. Design and implementation of the sessions**

The implementation of Learning Stations corresponds to the innovative approach of the Erasmus+ BIP programme by promoting active, collaborative, and flexible methodologies that integrate face-to-face interaction with the use of digital resources, thereby fostering a dynamic, inclusive, and contextually adaptable learning experience within international setting (European Commission, 2024).

Following the organizational structure of the BIP, this module was divided into two distinct parts: an online component and an in-person component. The first component, conducted during a 60-minute online session, aimed to introduce the BIP participants to each other and to the methodology of Learning Stations as an educational strategy applicable across various fields and educational levels—something they were later able to experience first-hand during the in-person phase. The second part of the module took place on-site at Universidad Isabel I, with the participation of students from Italy, Poland, Germany, and Spain.

The two main components of this module—online and in-person—are explored in more detail below. While the specific materials used in each modality will be described later, the general materials employed throughout the workshop included:

- Theoretical presentation on Learning Stations
- Quiz to assess theoretical content
- Instructions for each station (roadmap)
- Instructions for card games
- Deck of cards
- Templates with QR codes linked to songs and dances
- Map of Spain
- Pushpins, stationery materials, and a stopwatch
- Picture booklet featuring Spanish monuments
- Spanish omelette (tortilla de patatas) recipe

A repository has been created and can be accessed through the following doi: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.29625821.v1>, where all the resources developed for this workshop are available, both for the online and face-to-face formats.

#### **4.1. Online component**

As previously mentioned, the first part of the module was conducted online through a 60-minute theoretical session delivered via the Blackboard

Collaborate platform. The main objective of this session was to introduce students to “Learning Stations” as a didactic resource within the context of formal education. The session was structured in three distinct phases.

First, the instructors introduced themselves to the students and facilitated a brief initial discussion to learn about the degree programs the students were enrolled in and their prior familiarity with the Learning Stations methodology.

Second, a presentation created using the Canva graphic design platform was shared, which introduced the concept of Learning Stations by addressing their origin, historical development, key characteristics, and educational potential. This theoretical overview, which included an explanatory video, provided a conceptual foundation that enabled students to understand the purpose and applicability of this methodology in formal teaching and learning contexts.

Finally, an assessment activity was conducted using the interactive tool Kahoot in order to evaluate the students’ understanding of the content presented and to encourage active participation. Additionally, students were invited to express their personal interests regarding the content to be addressed during the in-person phase of the program. The majority expressed interest in learning about cultural aspects of Spain, which was taken into account in the design of the face-to-face activities for the second phase of the program.

## 4.2. Face-to-face component

The second part of the BIP, as previously mentioned, was conducted in person at Universidad Isabel I, located in the city of Burgos (Spain). A total of 21 students from various European countries participated in this phase: 6 from Italy, 9 from Poland, 2 from Germany, and 4 from Spain.

This stage of the module consisted of a face-to-face workshop lasting approximately 90 minutes, with the primary aim of putting the Learning Stations methodology into practice. The session was designed based on the cultural diversity of the group and the interests expressed by the students during the online session. Connections were also established with other sessions held as part of the BIP, such as the one dedicated to cooking Spanish omelettes (*tortillas de patatas*).

Based on these considerations, the activity was thematically focused on various sociocultural aspects of Spain. Four Learning Stations were designed, each aimed at exploring a specific dimension of the central theme. The topics addressed at these stations included gastronomy, traditional games, folk dances, and iconic monuments of the country.

Prior to the session, the physical organization of the classroom was carefully planned to facilitate its development. The room was strategically arranged, with the four Learning Stations distributed in the corners of the space. Each station was equipped with a large work table, enough chairs for all group

members, and detailed instructions for carrying out the respective activity, which will be described later. In addition to the four main Learning Stations, an initial station (Station 0) and a final station (Station 5) were included to serve as introductory and concluding stages of the session, respectively.

The temporal organization of the session was also carefully planned to ensure effective rotation among the Learning Stations, optimize the available time, and promote the active participation of all students. During the scheduled time, each group was required to rotate through all Learning Stations. The session plan allocated 15 minutes to each of the four main stations (Stations 1 to 4), 20 minutes to the initial station (Station 0), and 10 minutes to the final station (Station 5).

While each station will be described in detail below, it is important to note that the activity began with Station 0, conducted as a whole-group activity, during which the objectives were introduced and general instructions were provided. After this initial phase, students were divided into small groups, with each group starting at a different station. The stations were numbered from 1 to 4, and the rotation followed a sequential order: after the assigned time elapsed, each group moved to the next station. The group at Station 4 proceeded to Station 1, thus completing the rotation cycle.

Once all groups had completed the four thematic stations, the session concluded with Station 5, again conducted as a whole-group activity. This

final station served to share insights and encourage reflection on the overall experience.

The following Table presents a summary of the organization and distribution of the different Learning Stations:

**Table 1**

*Organization and Distribution of the Learning Stations*

Name	Duration	Student Distribution	Content Covered
Station 0: What do I remember?	20 minutes	Large group	Presentation, brainstorming, explanation of the dynamic, group organization
Station 1: Traditional card games	15 minutes	Small groups	Traditional Spanish card games
Station 2: Traditional dances	15 minutes	Small groups	Traditional Spanish dances
Station 3: Spanish monuments	15 minutes	Small groups	Spanish monuments
Station 4: Spanish omelette	15 minutes	Small groups	Instructions for making Spanish omelette (tortilla de patatas)
Station 5: What have I learned?	10 minutes	Large group	Reflection on the session and the Learning Stations methodology

### **4.2.1. Didactic Sequence of the Learning Stations**

#### a) Learning Station 0: What Do I Remember?

This station was designed as an introductory and orientation activity, with the aim of fostering mutual acquaintance among the students participating in the BIP, as well as contextualizing the working dynamics that would be developed throughout the session.

First, a brief review of the Learning Stations methodology was conducted, which had already been addressed theoretically during the initial, online phase of the program. This was followed by a collective brainstorming activity to recall and share the group's prior knowledge of the methodology.

Subsequently, an interactive activity was carried out to encourage participant engagement and introduce them to the teaching team. Each student was given two minutes to interview the peer seated to their right, asking questions about their name, country of origin, academic background, and hobbies. After the allotted time, each student presented their peer to the rest of the group, in order to share the information gathered during the interview.

The next step involved the formation of working groups. To this end, one of the instructors assigned each student a number from 1 to 4,

which they were asked to remember in order to later group themselves according to the assigned number. Thus, students with number 1 moved to Station 1, those with number 2 to Station 2, and so on until all four stations were formed.

In order to promote cultural diversity and collaborative work among students from different backgrounds, an effort was made to ensure that each group was composed, insofar as possible, of one Spanish student, at least two Polish students, and one Italian student. This distribution aimed to enrich the learning experience and encourage intercultural exchange within each team.


#### b) Learning Station 1: Traditional Card Games

At this station, participants found two decks of Spanish playing cards on the table, along with detailed instructions for learning how to play two traditional and widely popular card games in Spain: *El Burro* and *El Cinquillo* (Figure 1).

The main objective of this station was to introduce participants to these traditional expressions of Spanish cultural heritage. To this end, they were asked to carefully read the instructions and then choose one of the games to play as a group. If time permitted, they could play both.

Figure 1

Instructions for the card games in Learning Station 1



## BURRO


**Burro** is a very funny card game played in Spain. The cards are selected from the deck to be played with, so that as many numbers are used as there are players participating. In each hand, 4 cards are dealt to each player, and they begin to continuously repeat the action of simultaneously rotating one of their cards.

**Step 1. Rotation**  
At each rotation, on the call of one, two and three, all players choose one of their 4 cards and pass it face down to the next player. All players simultaneously look at the card received.

**Step 2. Say ¡Burro!**  
When a player completes a foursome of cards of the same number, he can chant Burro! while placing his hand in the centre of the table. The other players must respond immediately by repeating the same action, so that they form a pile with all their hands.

The last player to react, whose hand is at the top of the pile, loses, and a letter of the word B-U-R-R-O is added to the pile, thus ending the hand. The player who mistakenly sings Donkey without having the same four cards is the one who adds a letter. In this case the hand continues.

**End of the game**  
Whoever completes the word B-U-R-R-O first (who loses 5 times) loses the game.




## CINQUILLO

**Cinquillo** is a card game of the Spanish deck (40 cards), that can be played from 2 to 4 players. The **aim of the game** is to score the points established before the opponents. Each time the player wins a round, he/she scores.

The player who has the **5 of coins** always starts the first round. The cards are put into groups by suits (coins, cups, swords and sticks).

**On his/her turn, the player must:**

- Place a card of the same suit following the highest or the lowest run of cards on the table following the next order:



- Place a "5" of another suit.
- Pass the turn if he/she cannot place any cards.

In the following rounds, the player who starts is the one located on the right of the player who started the previous round. It is mandatory to start with a "5" of any suits. If he/she cannot place any cards, he/she will pass the turn.

**Count up points**  
The first player who has no cards is the winner of the round. The player who wins the round scores 5 points and one more point for each card not placed by his/her opponents.

c) Learning Station 2: Traditional Dances

This station required a large open space within the classroom, as it was designed for participants to practice various traditional dances from the Spanish cultural repertoire, such as *sevillanas*, *jota*, and *auresku*.

Upon arriving at the station, students found a sheet with general instructions (Figure 2) for the activity, three QR codes linking to representative audio recordings of each dance, and three images that visually illustrate each one. These images also included their own QR

codes, which redirected to a video demonstration of the corresponding dance.

Figure 2

*Supplementary materials for Learning Station 2*



The first part of the activity consisted of listening to each audio clip and matching it to the image the group believes corresponds to that particular dance. After verifying whether their associations were correct, participants chose the dance they preferred and rehearsed it as a group during the remaining time at the station.

This activity not only promoted the auditory and visual recognition of different cultural expressions, but also encouraged bodily expression and collaborative work

#### d) Learning Station 3: Spanish Monuments

The objective of this station was to introduce some of the most emblematic monuments from various regions of Spain, as a way to foster knowledge of the country's cultural and geographical heritage.

Upon arrival, participants found a sheet with general instructions for the activity, a corkboard with a political map of Spain, pushpins, small labels with the names of several monuments, and an individual sheet for each monument. These sheets include an image of the monument and three guiding questions for inquiry and reflection: What is its name? Where is it located? And a brief description (Figure 3).

During the 15 minutes the group spent at this station, its members were expected to use the internet to identify the monuments listed on the labels, match them with the corresponding sheet (which includes an image), and correctly place each label on the map by pinning it to the appropriate city.

Optionally, participants could complete the information sheets for the monuments they found most interesting, by answering the proposed questions. This activity fostered active learning, independent information seeking, and collaborative work, while also highlighted the monumental richness of Spain.

**Figure 3**

*Students participating in Learning Station 3*



e) Learning Station 4: Spanish Omelette (*Tortilla de Patatas*)

The objective of this station was to introduce one of the most iconic dishes of Spanish cuisine: the *tortilla de patatas* (Spanish omelette). In addition, this activity served as an introduction to the practical cooking workshop that students would later carry out in the university's facilities, where they will prepare their own *tortilla de patatas* (this activity is described in detail in Chapter 6).

Upon arriving at the station, participants found a sheet with the activity instructions and a recipe for *tortilla de patatas*, divided into individual steps written on small slips of paper (Figure 4). Their task was to read all the steps, reflect on their logical sequence, and arrange them in the correct order according to their judgment.

Once the recipe was organized, participants were given the correctly ordered version so they could check whether their sequencing was accurate. This activity, in addition to introducing elements of Spanish culinary culture, fostered comprehension skills, sequential logic, and teamwork.

#### Figure 4

*Students participating in Learning Station 4*



#### f) Learning Station 5: What Have I Learned?

Once all groups had completed the rotation and participated in the activities at each of the four previously described Learning Stations, the final station was reached. This last station was conceived as a moment of closure and collective reflection. Its main objective was to gather

qualitative feedback from the entire group, encouraging the expression of opinions, impressions, and insights gained throughout the activity.

To this end, a whole-group discussion was conducted, guided by the teaching team through a series of open-ended questions. These prompts aimed to explore students' perceptions of the Learning Stations methodology and to assess their level of engagement, satisfaction, and perceived usefulness of the experience.

Overall, students expressed highly positive evaluations of the activity, particularly highlighting the dynamic, participatory, and hands-on nature of the session, as well as the added value of collaborative work in a multicultural environment. Moreover, participants consistently recognized the applicability of the Learning Stations methodology across a range of educational contexts, regardless of level or stage, acknowledging its potential as an innovative and effective teaching strategy.

This final phase not only served to bring the session to a meaningful close but also reinforced student's experiential learning.

### **4.3. Attention to diversity**

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the BIP was its strong commitment to addressing the diversity of the participating student body, both from a

methodological perspective and in the design of the content and activities. The use of Learning Stations made it possible to create a flexible, inclusive, and respectful environment that accommodated the different learning styles, paces, and needs present within the group.

First, the organization of the in-person session into differentiated stations facilitated the diversification of didactic strategies, integrating multiple channels of access to knowledge. The proposed activities encompassed visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading-based dimensions, thus enabling a more personalized approach to cultural content. Through the manipulation of materials, listening to audiovisual clips, reading authentic texts, and interacting with culturally representative objects, the session aimed to respond to the group's diverse cognitive profiles, as recommended by current educational literature.

In addition, each station was carefully designed to include graduated levels of difficulty, allowing all students to participate according to their own abilities and interests, thereby promoting equity in access to learning (Tomlinson, 2014). For example, in Station 3, *Spanish Monuments*, participants were asked to match each monument to its location on the map of Spain, with the optional task of completing an information sheet including basic data and a brief description. This differentiation was informed not only by academic criteria, but also by a broad understanding of diversity that encompasses

cultural, linguistic, emotional, and learning style differences, as well as varying paces and levels of motivation.

Another key aspect was the creation of a positive emotional environment, aimed at fostering students' intrinsic motivation and reducing potential emotional barriers to learning, such as anxiety or lack of confidence. The Learning Stations methodology supports autonomy, small-group collaboration, and multiple forms of engagement with content, which in turn reinforces self-esteem and a sense of competence. Special attention was given to the emotional component of learning, understood as a crucial factor for academic success, especially in international contexts where students may face linguistic or cultural adaptation challenges (Pekrun, 2014).

The active, experiential, and cooperative nature of the activities also contributed to strengthening the sense of belonging within the group and promoting positive intercultural interaction. This is particularly relevant in mobility programs, where students come together with diverse backgrounds, values, and cultural references (Deardorff, 2006). The opportunity to learn from one another in a structured yet open environment was a key factor in promoting inclusion and in valuing diversity as a resource rather than a challenge.

In short, the design and implementation of this program demonstrated a clear intention to address student diversity not only as a pedagogical principle

but as a central organizing axis of the educational experience. This inclusive approach was essential in fostering active participation, meaningful learning, and the co-construction of knowledge in a multicultural and international context.

## 5. Conclusion

Thanks to the success of the sessions and the high levels of student satisfaction reported throughout the course and in the general BIP surveys, the use of the Learning Stations methodology is recommended for Erasmus+ students. This approach serves as a guide to best practices for teachers and educators, which can be implemented not only within the context of a BIP, but also across a wide range of regular university courses throughout the academic trajectory (Lopes *et al.*, 2024). As such, this work constitutes both a replicable model and a potential approach for future educational projects in diverse academic disciplines and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, Learning Stations foster autonomous and collaborative learning, critical thinking, creativity, and student motivation. By engaging learners through multiple channels, the methodology facilitates the construction of knowledge in diverse and personalized ways. As Bermejo *et al.* (2022) point out, this approach aligns with influential educational theories such as Kolb's Learning Styles Theory (1984) and Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1996), contributing to a broader shift toward innovative, inclusive,

and meaningful learning experiences. In this context, the in-person session emerged as the most engaging and enriching component of the workshop. It allowed students to consolidate the knowledge acquired throughout the course, while also activating previously developed competencies. This promoted peer learning and effective team collaboration, reinforcing the value of experiential and participatory formats in international education contexts.

A series of pedagogical implications can be drawn from this experience for lesson planning based on the station-by-station methodology. Key considerations include the selection and design of learning materials, the clear structuring of sessions, the social and collaborative dynamics encouraged among students, and the evolving role of the teacher as a facilitator during the design and implementation of the learning sequences (Farias-Martinez, 2010).

As a flexible, active learning methodology, Learning Stations emphasize the importance of student autonomy and responsibility. Learners are positioned as central agents in their educational process, which is facilitated by clear guidelines and well-defined stations. Each station should present one or more tasks that students can complete independently, without the need for constant teacher supervision.

As we observed in the workshop, this approach is gaining traction in higher education due to the multiple pedagogical benefits it offers. It supports inclusive

practices, provides effective classroom management solutions in contexts with high student-to-teacher ratios, and enhances the implementation of differentiated instruction without requiring additional personnel or splitting of student groups (Bermejo *et al.*, 2022).

### **5.1. Limits of the study**

While the Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) implemented with university students demonstrates notable educational value and pedagogical richness, and the results appear promising, this study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged to ensure a rigorous interpretation of the findings and to inform future research or related interventions.

First, the duration of the activity represents one of the main limitations. While the allocated time allowed for the development of several Learning Stations, it may have been insufficient to explore complex aspects of Spanish culture in depth.

Another significant limitation concerns the cultural approach adopted. Without careful planning, the teaching of culture runs the risk of becoming superficial or folkloric, failing to critically address the internal diversity of Spain or the social, historical, and political factors that shape it. The selection of content, materials, or activities may have favored a partial or stereotyped view of Spanish culture. To mitigate this risk, spaces for reflection and intercultural dialogue were intentionally included.

Regarding logistical and technological aspects, given the blended nature of the program, participation inequalities may have arisen—particularly in the online component—due to disparities in access to technological resources, connectivity issues, or time zone differences. Additionally, the distribution of time among the stations may not have been entirely balanced, which could have affected the depth of engagement with certain activities.

Furthermore, specific challenges related to the implementation of the Learning Stations methodology were identified. For educators, the time required for the design and preparation of the stations proved to be demanding, as it involved selecting appropriate materials, structuring sessions effectively, and coordinating activities to ensure a coherent flow. The management of time during class also presented obstacles, as instructors needed to monitor student progress across multiple stations simultaneously, balancing the pace to avoid rushed or idle periods. As a potential measure to address this challenge, future proposals could consider the integration of a visible timekeeper accessible from all areas of the classroom, enabling students to better manage their time at each Learning Station (Bermejo *et al.*, 2022). These factors represent significant barriers to the seamless application of the methodology and may increase the workload for teaching staff.

From the students' perspective, varying levels of prior knowledge—particularly regarding Spanish culture—posed an additional challenge. Differences in familiarity and cultural background influenced how students engaged with

the Learning Stations, potentially resulting in unequal learning experiences. This disparity necessitated differentiated support to ensure that all students could benefit equally from the activities. To mitigate this obstacle, a Spanish student was intentionally integrated into each group, facilitating cultural understanding, promoting the exchange of perspectives, and supporting effective collaborative dynamics.

Overall, these limitations do not diminish the value of the experience but rather highlight the need to complement such interventions with more comprehensive designs, rigorous evaluation tools, and tailored instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learner backgrounds and optimize teaching conditions.

## **5.2. Implications for practice**

The experience developed within the framework of the “Language, Education and Society” Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), focused on the use of Learning Stations to explore Spanish culture, has demonstrated significant pedagogical potential in the context of university curriculum internationalization. Nevertheless, based on the critical analysis of its limitations, a series of recommendations are proposed below to optimize its implementation and guide future educational and research interventions.

It is recommended to further promote collaborative and interdisciplinary learning by encouraging the formation of international and diverse working

teams. These teams foster the exchange of perspectives, negotiation of meaning, and joint knowledge construction. Learning Stations can be enriched through the integration of inquiry-based tasks, problem-solving activities, or creative projects that connect cultural content with other disciplines studied in students' academic training, such as history, literature, sociology, art, or communication.

Given the blended nature of the program, it is essential to ensure the effective integration of digital tools that support equitable student participation. The use of interactive platforms, collaborative environments, multimedia content, and accessible resources contributes to the creation of more inclusive, engaging, and context-sensitive learning experiences. Similarly, attention must be paid to potential language barriers or connectivity issues that may hinder full participation in the activities.

In terms of assessment, it is suggested to implement formative, participatory, and ongoing evaluation processes that go beyond collecting final feedback and instead accompany students throughout their learning journey. The use of rubrics, portfolios, reflective journals, and self- and peer-assessment activities can foster greater awareness of one's own learning and encourage more active student engagement in the educational process. Furthermore, involving students in the planning and evaluation of activities can lead to a more contextualized and meaningful instructional design.

Finally, it is considered essential to promote the sustainability of the program and foster networking among institutions. The creation of communities of practice, the development of shared materials, and the systematization of experiences can support the continuity of such initiatives and facilitate their transfer to other educational contexts. The internationalization of higher education should not be limited to isolated actions, but rather be articulated as a transversal axis that promotes global, critical, and socially committed citizenship.

In conclusion, the application of Learning Stations within the module described in this chapter has proven to be an effective pedagogical strategy in the multicultural and international context where an Erasmus+ BIP unfolds. This methodology enhances student engagement, fosters the development of key transversal competencies –such as critical thinking, intercultural communication, and autonomous learning– and facilitates meaningful, experiential connections with academic content. As such, Learning Station represents a valuable approach for promoting inclusive, dynamic, and academically enriching experiences in higher education.

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# CHAPTER 6. WE ARE WHAT WE EAT

## FOOD, CULTURE, AND THE BUILDING OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Fco. Javier Buenadicha Gómez

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### 1. Introduction

The teaching of a foreign language is inextricably linked to the teaching of the culture or cultures of the countries in which the language is spoken. Therefore, it is essential that the learners of that language master the most relevant cultural aspects of the target language in order to be able to develop their intercultural competence.

Among the many aspects of a culture that can be taught in language learning is gastronomy. In this sense, more and more authors highlight the important role played by the food of a country, its ingredients and modes of preparation and its prominent role in social relations in the construction of cultural identity, as well as other aspects such as table manners and customs or intergenerational traditions (recipes, family meals, memories, smells, tastes, etc.).

In this sense, and with the aim of making BIP students aware of the importance of food in all cultures, we proposed the organization of a theoretical-practical module that would include these contents, and that would also relate them to

two aspects dealt with in other chapters: intercultural competence (chapter 7) as a theoretical framework and, from a pedagogical point of view, the methodology of Learning Stations (chapter 5).

In the following sections, I will present, first, a theoretical approach to key concepts related with this module, such as, as I said, intercultural competence, language teaching, food studies, and learning stations. Secondly, I will describe both the on-line and in-person workshops, and how they were developed, including different resources used (ingredients, utensils, economic resources, etc.). I will end the chapter with a brief discussion of pros and cons of the intervention, as well as several suggestions for future workshops.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In this section, I will discuss a few aspects that I took in consideration to prepare the workshops, both in the online version and in the cooking class at the end of the BIP.

From a theoretical perspective, key concepts such as intercultural competence (IC), teaching language and culture through food with Task-Based methods (TBLT) and Food Studies as an academic field will be discussed. Also, since the in-person workshop used the Learning Stations methodology, a glimpse of the main aspects seen in chapter 5 will be reviewed.

## **2.1. Intercultural Competence**

IC is discussed in depth in chapter 7 by prof. Ozarín, so readers may go over the chapter for further insights. However, with respect to the purposes of this chapter, a few words must be said.

Teaching language through the lens of food offers rich opportunities to foster intercultural competence, as it encourages learners to engage with cultural practices, values, and social meanings, such as those embedded in culinary traditions. For instance, Byram (1997) highlights that intercultural competence involves not only linguistic skills but also attitudes of curiosity and openness toward other cultures.

## **2.2. Teaching Language and Culture through Food**

The use of food as a medium for language teaching has attracted increasing scholarly attention, particularly within TBLT and Content-Based Instruction frameworks. Food-centered pedagogy engages learners multisensorially—integrating visual, auditory, tactile, and gustatory experiences—which, research shows, significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition, retention, and intercultural competence.

Seedhouse et al. (2020) conducted a pioneering longitudinal study on the impact of cooking tasks on second language vocabulary learning. They found that participants exposed to embodied cooking tasks learned significantly

more food-related vocabulary than those taught through pictures alone and that retention remained high after a delayed post-test, suggesting strong consolidation effects driven by motivation and real-life relevance. Their findings underscore how the physical manipulation of ingredients, combined with contextualized language use, promotes deeper lexical learning than passive study.

Authentic materials such as food packaging, menus, and cooking shows further anchor language learning in real-world contexts. Graziano (2019) reports that students engaging with actual grocery labels or restaurant menus show greater pragmatic competence and motivation, as they perceive the immediate usefulness of the vocabulary. Tasks based on reading and interpreting these texts foster functional language use and critical media literacy.

Fleck et al. (2024) highlight the culturally rich affordances of food in language classrooms. According to the authors, sharing family recipes and discussing the origins of traditional dishes not only enriches vocabulary but also cultivates cultural empathy and critical thinking about food systems and sustainability. They advocate for project-based assignments, such as students creating recipe books or conducting interviews about regional food customs, to enhance language skills alongside cultural literacy.

Writing activities, an important part of language curricula, also benefit from a food-centered approach. Lating (2022) illustrates how recipe writing encourages learners to use procedural discourse, imperative forms, and sequencing vocabulary, thereby integrating grammar and vocabulary in meaningful production.

Finally, interdisciplinary approaches combining language and nutrition education have demonstrated additional benefits. Duncan et al. (2012) describe the “Healthy Eating for Life” program, which integrated L2 instruction with health topics and multimedia, resulting in improved vocabulary acquisition and greater learner engagement. This synergy allows learners to develop linguistic and conceptual understanding simultaneously.

### **2.3. Eating and Culture: Food Studies as an Academic Field**

In recent years, Food Studies has emerged as a dynamic interdisciplinary field that explores the cultural, social, historical, and political dimensions of food. As food increasingly becomes a subject of academic inquiry, educators are finding innovative ways to incorporate it into teaching and public engagement. Food Studies has evolved over the past few decades into a vibrant interdisciplinary field that interrogates the cultural, political, economic, and historical dimensions of food. Originating from disciplines such as anthropology, history, sociology, and literature, Food Studies bridges

the humanities and social sciences, and increasingly incorporates perspectives from environmental studies, public health, and gender studies.

The foundational works of authors like Sidney Mintz (*Sweetness and Power*, 1985) and Mary Douglas (1972) were instrumental in establishing food as a legitimate subject of scholarly inquiry. Mintz's study of sugar and its global commodification highlighted how everyday food items are embedded in systems of power and colonialism, while Douglas's structuralist approach to meals opened pathways for understanding food as a system of meaning. These early contributions laid the groundwork for subsequent research that explores food practices as reflections of identity, community, and memory.

In the 21st century, Food Studies has expanded to include questions of sustainability, globalization, culinary nationalism, and sensory experience. Scholars such as Warren Belasco (2008), Carole Counihan (1999), and Krishnendu Ray (2004) have emphasized the role of food in shaping national identities, migrant experiences, and gender roles. Meanwhile, the material turn and interest in affect theory have led to deeper inquiries into embodiment, taste, and the phenomenology of eating. Recent work also emphasizes embodied experience and the multisensory dimensions of eating, building on affect theory and material culture studies (Probyn, 2000; Sutton, 2010).

Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) and *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (2013) together offer a compelling exploration

of our complex relationship with food from field to fork. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan traces the origins of four different meals, unraveling the hidden ecological, ethical, and economic threads that connect industrial agriculture, organic farming, and foraging. The book's investigative, almost journalistic style invites readers to question how and why we eat what we do. In *Cooked*, Pollan turns his attention to the transformative power of cooking itself, framing it around the four classical elements—fire, water, air, and earth—to explore techniques like grilling, braising, baking, and fermentation. Here, the narrative becomes more personal and reflective, celebrating cooking as both a craft and a cultural act that reconnects us to nature, community, and tradition. Together, these works offer a rich, thoughtful examination of food not just as sustenance, but as a lens for understanding our place in the world.

In parallel with theoretical advancements, there has been growing attention to pedagogy within Food Studies. Trubek and Belliveau (2009) argue for cooking as a form of experiential and embodied learning, proposing that the kitchen can function as a site of critical inquiry. Their work demonstrates how food preparation enables reflection, sensory engagement, and deeper understanding of cultural context, positioning cooking as a pedagogical tool rather than merely a practical skill.

Food Studies also intersects with pedagogy, as educators increasingly turn to food as a means of engaging students in critical thinking and interdisciplinary learning. Cooking classes, experiential workshops, and food-centered syllabi

are now common in universities worldwide, offering new ways to combine theory and practice. In this context, the study of food is not only academic but also deeply personal, political, and performative.

In the Spanish context, scholarship has explored the symbolic role of cuisine in the construction of regional and national identities, the impact of tourism and globalization on traditional foodways, and the role of food in post-Franco cultural reconfigurations. The work of scholars like Ismael Díaz Yubero (2013), and José Carlos Capel (1997) has contributed to a growing body of literature that situates Spanish gastronomy within broader cultural and historical narratives.

The work of Sevilla (2019) offers cultural histories of Spanish cuisine that trace how culinary practices and narratives have shaped collective memory and tourism. Empirical studies, such as those by Alonso-Sobrado and Sanz Marcos (2020), analyze how gastronomic identity is communicated through institutional tourism websites. Complementing this historical and cultural lens is the growing field of food literacy research. Luque et al. (2022) have developed and validated a Self-Perceived Food Literacy Scale for Spanish university students, offering a methodological tool to assess students' abilities to plan, prepare, and reflect critically on food practices. This tool is particularly relevant for evaluating the outcomes of pedagogical interventions that integrate cooking and reflective learning.

This growing field invites constant innovation in research and teaching. The workshop presented in this chapter contributes to this evolving discipline by integrating digital and embodied methods to explore the meanings of Spanish food in academic and practical contexts.

Finally, it is important to note that the in-person workshop took place under the methodology of Learning Stations (see Chapter 5).

### **3. Development**

This section presents a case study of a pedagogical initiative that combined scholarly reflection with experiential learning through a two-part workshop focused on Spanish cuisine.

The workshop was designed as a response to the growing interest among students and researchers in understanding how food can be a gateway to exploring identity, memory, and tradition. With a particular focus on Spain—a country whose culinary landscape reflects complex regional identities, historical encounters, and global exchanges—the workshop aimed to foster critical engagement with food as both material practice and cultural narrative.

Conducted in two phases (an online and an in-person workshop) the initiative sought to engage participants in theoretical reflection and practical exploration. It brought together students and instructors. The goal was not

only to deepen understanding of Spanish food but also to implement ideas on how food is understood from a cultural perspective.

### **3.1. Online Workshop**

The online workshop was held during a one-hour session scheduled during the BIP online week. In this section, I will describe the main objectives designed for this session, the methodology used and results obtained.

#### **3.1.1.Objectives**

Primarily, the objectives for this session were mostly theoretical. In the one-hour session, students would be able to:

1. Understand the importance of food in culture
2. Relate food to language
3. Familiarize with concepts and subject fields such as Intercultural Competence and Food Studies

#### **3.1.2.Methodology**

The online workshop took the form of a webinar or online seminar, with the instructor introducing the theoretical content designed for this purpose (with the help of a slides presentation). In a nutshell, it could be defined as a “lecture with Socratic method” (Suhadi et al., 2015): The instructor showed different

dishes from Spanish cuisine and asked the students to identify as many as they could.

This content led on questions like the following:

- *What is food?*
- *How is food related to culture?*
- *How is food taught when we learn a foreign language and/or about a foreign culture?*

In addition, some quotes were given to the students as food for thought and as a way to allow them to reflect on the topic. Here are some examples:

*"Food and eating are not just something we do or we need, there is something cultural in them"*

*"Food is memories"* (Spanish celebrity chef José Andrés)

*"There is no sincerer love than the love of food"* (George Bernard Shaw)

Interaction was made possible with the online audience through tools such as [Menti](#) , which allowed students to share their knowledge about Spanish food (naming some of the dishes they knew) and, later, to express some suggestions on their local cuisines. Students enthusiastically used Menti to list over 25 different Spanish dishes. Some of them showed an impressive initial awareness of the topic. Food and eating were presented not only

engagement, religion, taboo, etc. In other words, anthropological traits as reviewed by Harris (1998). At the end of the presentation, I introduced the field of Food Studies, encouraging students to further reading and research before the next meeting at the in-person workshop.

### **3.1.3. Results**

The results were fully satisfactory. The students showed their enthusiasm and interest in cooking from the very beginning. However, due to the nature of this workshop, and its short duration, it was difficult to draw definitive conclusions. Despite this time constraint of just one hour, I believe the session succeeded in igniting curiosity and laying the theoretical groundwork for the next session.

## **3.2. In-person Workshop**

When the day of the face-to-face workshop arrived, the students' expectations were at their highest. The BIP organisers decided that it would be the last activity of the programme, so that its recreational nature would accompany the end of the week in Burgos.

The participants were divided into six groups of approximately 5 people, who would be in charge of cooking a typical Spanish dish: *tortilla de patatas* (consisting of an omelette stuffed with fried potato slices).

The recipe for this meal had been given to them in the previous session, dedicated to the work with Learning Stations (see Chapter 5). Therefore, as they were already familiar with the ingredients and the preparation, it was easier for them to start cooking.

### **3.2.1.Objectives**

The main objective of the session was to cook the tortilla de patatas, although this objective was accompanied by a number of specific objectives, namely, to:

1. Become familiar with Spanish cuisine.
2. Become familiar with the ingredients, preparation methods and utensils most commonly used in Spanish cuisine as a whole.
3. Become aware of the interrelationship between food and culture in a general sense, and between Spanish food and its culture in a specific way.
4. Taste tortilla de patatas, not only as a food, but also as a "cultural artifact".

### **3.2.2. Methodology**

Following the learning stations methodology, as indicated above, the students were divided into groups of 5 people. They were given the utensils and ingredients necessary for the preparation of the omelette (see Table 1,

ingredients and utensils are indicated for each group) and they organized themselves.

**Table 1**

*Ingredients for the preparation of the tortilla (per group)*

Ingredient	Quantity (Kg/l/units)
Potatoes	3 kg
Onions	6 units
Eggs	1 dozens
Olive oil	1 l
Parsley	-

We were fortunate to have the human nutrition laboratories at our disposal, which served as a kitchen and a place for food preparation. There, we had 6 cookers, enough space for cutting and preparing the ingredients, storage and all the necessary utensils (see Table 2).

Since the recipe of the *tortilla* (see Table 3) was previously given to the students during a previous workshop that same day, no time for clarification or further details was needed.

Table 2

*Kitchenware used for the preparation of the tortilla (per group)*

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Utensil

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Frying pan

Frying pan lid

Bowl

Peeler

Plates

Chopping board

Chopping knife

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Table 3

*Recipe for the tortilla de patatas*

- ▶ Peel the potatoes and slice them thinly (about 1/8 inch or 3 mm thick).
- ▶ Peel and thinly slice the onion, if using.
- ▶ Heat the olive oil in a large nonstick or cast iron frying pan (around 10-inch / 25 cm) over medium heat.
- ▶ Add the potatoes and onion. Cook gently (don't brown) for about 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are soft but not falling apart. Add salt during this step.

- ▶ Use a slotted spoon to remove the potatoes and onion and place them in a bowl.
- ▶ Let cool slightly, and optionally strain and reserve some of the oil for later use.
- ▶ In a large bowl, beat the eggs and add a pinch of salt.
- ▶ Add the slightly cooled potato-onion mixture and stir gently to combine. Let it sit for 5–10 minutes so flavors meld.
- ▶ Heat 1–2 tablespoons of the reserved oil in the same pan over medium heat.
- ▶ Pour the mixture into the pan and smooth the top.
- ▶ Cook for 5–7 minutes, until the bottom is golden and set but the top is still a bit runny.
- ▶ Place a flat plate or lid over the pan, carefully flip the tortilla onto it, then slide it back into the pan to cook the other side.
- ▶ Cook for another 3–5 minutes, until the tortilla is fully set or to your desired doneness (some people like it a little gooey in the center).
- ▶ Let it cool slightly before slicing. It can be served warm, at room temperature, or cold.

Once cooking began (Figures 1 and 2), the laboratory was filled with the aroma of frying potatoes and onions, immediately sparking memories and discussions among students from different countries. In some groups, students

compared the tortilla to similar dishes from their own cultures, such as the Italian frittata. After tasting the final product, a short reflective conversation invited students to articulate how food embodies cultural narratives and memories. This debriefing linked practice back to theory, reinforcing the workshop's objectives.

### Figure 1

*Students and instructors cut the potatoes and the onions in the in-person workshop*



Credit: Universidad Isabel I

### 3.2.3. Results

It can be said that this in-person workshop was a great success. As presented earlier in this book (see Chapter 2 on analysis of results), the cooking workshop was the most celebrated and loved by the students. The participation of all students was enormous. Perhaps the main problem was organisational and space; despite having a large room, the high number of students forced us to divide the students into large groups, as we only had 6 cooking cookers available.

#### Figure 2

*Frying the potatoes*



Credit: Universidad Isabel I

## **4. Implications and suggestion for future practice**

Some of the changes that could be made to improve this experience further, could be to limit the number of students in the session, perhaps by organising several sessions with fewer students in each session.

Other applications to improve the experience are detailed below. For example, a possible extension of the workshop could incorporate a formal, instructor-driven group discussion immediately after the practical session. This would help students consolidate their learning.

Expanding the diversity of dishes prepared in future workshops could deepen students' understanding of regional variation and cultural hybridity within Spanish cuisine. Including lesser-known regional recipes or inviting guest speakers from different Spanish regions could offer richer cultural insights. Of course, this kind of workshops are not limited to Spanish cuisine, but open to the world-wide range of culinary diversity.

## **5. Conclusions**

This chapter has presented a pedagogical experience that combined the study of Spanish cuisine with the development of intercultural competence through a dual workshop format—one theoretical and online, the other practical and in

person. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Food Studies, Task-Based Language Teaching, and the Learning Stations methodology, the intervention sought to engage students with food not only as sustenance, but as a cultural artefact embedded in memory, identity, and social practice.

The positive reception and active participation of students highlight the motivational and educational value of integrating culinary content into language and cultural studies. The module underscored practical challenges, particularly regarding group size and resources.

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# CHAPTER 7. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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## 1. Introduction

Globalization has ushered in advancements in the emotional, social, and academic realms. Thus, educational programmes, such as Erasmus+, need their consideration when promoting the integration of international students. Scholars such as Brunsting et al. (2024) argue that more research is needed to identify the key variables in this readjustment process for students. The internationalisation of education is expanding, driven by the increasing number of international students. Therefore, it is crucial to address the challenges these students may face, particularly in their first time abroad. These challenges, including culture shock, language barriers, and the experience of being a first-year student in a foreign country, can lead to negative consequences such as anxiety, poor performance, or other issues (Yu et al., 2025).

A cohort of 17 students from Italy, Germany, Spain, and Poland participating in the “Education, Culture, and Society” BIP program presents an interesting opportunity to explore how blended learning can promote cross-cultural

communication and understanding. Participants were pursuing degrees in Primary Education, Language Mediation, and Pedagogy. The cultural mix and diverse educational backgrounds, provided a unique opportunity to observe the development of intercultural competence from multifaceted perspectives.

The Erasmus+ BIP emphasises inclusion and culture as key elements of intercultural dialogue, diversity, and mutual respect in academic settings (European Commission, 2020). By enhancing these values, institutions are better equipped to meet the needs of increasingly diverse and multicultural student populations. This article aims to align recent empirical research with practical tasks that are central to intercultural communication (ICC), with the goal of achieving equitable cohesion in learning environments and promoting student self-esteem. The learning sessions described in this chapter add value to the existing body of literature examining ICC among university students participating in blended programmes.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Defined as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, intercultural competence (IC) plays a central role in the formation of students prepared for the challenges of globalization. As Deardorff (2006) argues, "intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 247). This

competence becomes especially important in academic environments where differing values, communication styles, and cultural expectations can impact group dynamics, academic performance, and overall experience.

Intercultural Communication (ICC) and IC, while closely related, refer to distinct concepts within intercultural studies. ICC focuses on the process of exchanging messages between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, emphasizing verbal and nonverbal behavior, context, and meaning negotiation (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). IC refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures, involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral components such as attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Deardorff, 2020; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2022). While ICC is the observable interaction, IC is the underlying capacity that enables such interactions to be successful. Thus, competence is often seen as a prerequisite for effective communication across cultures.

As universities pursue internationalisation through student mobility programmes, cross-cultural curricula, and digital learning platforms, the development of IC has become a priority in tertiary education (Leask, 2015). Scholars emphasise that fostering IC requires more than exposure to cultural difference; it demands structured pedagogical interventions that encourage critical reflection, dialogical engagement, and empathy (Byram, 1997; Jackson, 2011). In this context, blended learning—combining online and face-to-face instruction—offers a promising avenue for cultivating IC by providing diverse,

flexible, and interactive environments that simulate authentic intercultural encounters (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008)

## **2.1. Intercultural awareness vs. intercultural dialogue**

Intercultural awareness and intercultural dialogue are interconnected but distinct concepts that play complementary roles in fostering effective communication across cultural boundaries. Intercultural awareness refers to the cognitive and affective understanding that individuals develop regarding cultural differences and similarities. It involves recognizing that one's cultural norms are not universal and cultivating the sensitivity to perceive how cultural factors shape behaviors, values, and communication styles. According to Baker (2015), intercultural awareness is a prerequisite for developing intercultural communicative competence, as it enables individuals to reflect critically on their own cultural positioning and to anticipate potential misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions, thereby preparing them for effective communication.

By contrast, intercultural dialogue goes beyond awareness by emphasizing active and reciprocal engagement between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds. It is a dynamic communicative process grounded in mutual respect, open-mindedness, and a willingness to learn from the "other." As defined by the Council of Europe (2008), intercultural dialogue aims to foster deeper understanding and peaceful coexistence by

encouraging individuals to engage with diversity through shared exploration and negotiated meaning. While intercultural awareness focuses on internal reflection and perception, intercultural dialogue prioritizes interaction, co-construction of meaning, and relationship-building.

Intercultural awareness lays the foundation for respectful interaction, while intercultural dialogue operationalizes that awareness into practice through communication that values diversity and strives for inclusion. In higher education, promoting both concepts is critical for creating equitable, inclusive learning environments, particularly in multicultural and internationalized classrooms.

## **2.2. Verbal and nonverbal communication in intercultural contexts**

Effective ICC hinges on both verbal and non-verbal modalities; while words convey explicit content, gestures, facial expressions, posture, and spatial dynamics—collectively known as non-verbal communication—signal unspoken cultural meanings (Li & Han, 2024; Khudoyberdieva, 2024). In settings such as English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, non-verbal cues play a mediating role, facilitating trust, emotional attunement, and conflict resolution—thereby enhancing IC among both instructors and learners (Anderson, 2023). Conversely, misinterpreted or overlooked non-verbal signals can generate significant misunderstanding, particularly in

high-context cultures where meaning is implicit (Trynyak, 2024). Instruction aimed at intercultural learners should therefore integrate explicit teaching of culturally specific nonverbal norms—such as proxemic distances, eye contact protocols, and gesture repertoire—into verbal language training, ensuring a holistic approach that enhances empathy, respect, values and mutual understanding (Li & Han, 2024; Trynyak, 2024).

Studies have demonstrated that individuals from different cultural backgrounds interpret gestures, tone, and facial expressions in distinct ways, often leading to miscommunication if cultural context is not accounted for (Abate Birru, 2024; Birch & Lee, 2024). Moreover, non-verbal sensitivity has been shown to significantly enhance classroom dynamics and interpersonal rapport, particularly in ESL environments where linguistic barriers are prevalent (Anderson, 2023). Longitudinal data also suggest that cultural empathy is a strong predictor of intercultural communication competence and psychosocial adaptation among international students (Le & Nguyen, 2024). These findings underscore the importance of integrating nonverbal communication training and cultural empathy development into both educational and professional settings to support meaningful engagement.

Smith and Johnson (2023) examined how BIPs foster intercultural communication through collaborative projects, finding that diverse teams were more effective at problem-solving but faced challenges in virtual settings, requiring adaptive communication strategies. Lopez and Martinez (2022)

focused on the hybrid nature of BIPs, noting that while online interactions supported content engagement, face-to-face exchanges were crucial for building stronger relationships and deeper cultural understanding. Similarly, Chen and Zhou (2023) investigated cultural sensitivity in team dynamics, concluding that students with prior intercultural experience managed cultural conflicts better and that structured cultural awareness training should be integrated into BIPs to enhance success. Garcia and Kumar (2023) assessed how BIPs contribute to intercultural competence, reporting significant improvements in students' intercultural awareness and communication skills after participating in international virtual exchanges. Finally, Williams and Torres (2022) highlighted the integration of intercultural communication training into BIPs, finding that direct interventions, such as workshops and group reflection, were highly effective in improving communication within multicultural teams. Collectively, these studies underscore the importance of both in-person and online components in enhancing intercultural skills, emphasizing the need for structured interventions and reflective practices to ensure the success of BIPs.

### **2.3. Previous BIP experiences**

The majority of literature reviewed focuses predominantly on long-term study abroad programmes, in contrast to the short-term nature of BIPs. The duration of student mobility programmes can significantly influence the variables being studied, as the length of an exchange may shape students' experiences

and perceptions. For instance, students participating in short-term exchanges may initially exhibit higher levels of motivation due to the novelty and intensity of the experience. Despite extensive research on intercultural competence, few BIPs specifically address this topic.

The study "A Blended Intensive Programme Behind the Scenes: Organisational and Methodological Effectiveness" (de Prada et al., 2025) was closely related to intercultural communication, as one of the key aspects was teamwork among multicultural students. Interaction created an environment where intercultural competence and effective communication were essential for the programme's success.

On the other hand, difficulties encountered in the virtual component were interpreted as intercultural challenges, as differences in communication styles and cultural expectations were often amplified in digital environments. The variable of motivation depended on mobility opportunities reflected how cultural and contextual factors influenced students' perceptions and participation. The study revealed that successful multicultural teamwork in a blended intensive programme (BIP) hinges on overcoming intercultural communication barriers and leveraged diversity to promote effective collaboration. It emphasized the importance of addressing intercultural challenges, particularly in virtual settings, and recognizing the impact of cultural contexts on student motivation and engagement.

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In this regard, Chen and Zhou (2023) investigated cultural sensitivity in team dynamics, concluding that students with prior intercultural experience managed cultural conflicts better and that structured cultural awareness training should be integrated into BIPs to enhance success. Garcia and Kumar (2023) assessed how BIPs contribute to intercultural competence, reporting significant improvements in students' intercultural awareness and communication skills after participating in international virtual exchanges. Williams and Torres (2022) highlighted the integration of intercultural communication training into BIPs, finding that direct interventions, such as workshops and group reflection, were highly effective in improving communication within multicultural teams. All these studies underscore the importance of both in-person and online components in enhancing intercultural skills, emphasizing the need for structured interventions and reflective practices to ensure the success of BIPs.

## **3. Development**

The Blended Intensive Program (BIP) developed was designed to explore students' understanding of ICC and assess whether they perceived it as a relevant skill for their professional future and personal development. The primary objective was to analyze their prior knowledge of ICC in the form of real-world applications, while also evaluating their perspectives on its necessity in an increasingly globalized world. Through a combination of theoretical discussions and reflective exercises, the aim was to gauge students' awareness of cultural diversity, communication strategies, and adaptability in multicultural settings.

### **3.1. Online Workshop**

The following section will address the objectives, methodology, and outcomes of the online session, providing a detailed analysis of its structure and implementation.

#### **3.1.1. Objectives**

The objectives of the online session were as follows:

- (1) Define and explore in depth the concepts of intercultural communication and intercultural competence.

- (2) Distinguish between intercultural dialogue and intercultural awareness.
- (3) Examine key concepts such as stereotypes and verbal and non-verbal communication.
- (4) Review aspects such as adaptability to another culture and approaches to conflict resolution, among others.

### **3.1.2. Methodology**

The online session was carefully designed using selected educational resources by the instructor. It began with the real-time presentation of a video on intercultural communication, lasting approximately five minutes. The video showed an analogy between culture and an iceberg: the visible tip of the iceberg represented external culture, including monuments, traditional clothing, and local cuisine, while the remaining 90% of culture was said to lie beneath the surface, hidden underwater, and corresponds to internal culture—values, beliefs, and thought patterns. This internal culture was claimed to be largely subconscious, as individuals are often unaware of its influence. The video also highlighted that a deep understanding of a culture is impossible without direct contact with it. It was noted that if two individuals from the same cultural background were asked to identify the defining characteristics of their country, their responses might vary significantly.

Then, students were introduced to key concepts of intercultural communication through a structured presentation aimed at enhancing their cultural awareness and communicative competence. The presentation began with an exploration of *greetings and farewells*, emphasizing how these basic social rituals differ widely across cultures and highlighting the importance of using culturally appropriate expressions. It was discussed how a greeting can be different in Japan and Italy, taking into account that the former is formal and establishes hierarchies, while in Italy, greetings tend to be more informal and are treated as equals. Culture plays a fundamental role in this sense

Students then examined *gift-giving practices*, learning that while exchanging gifts is a valued custom in some societies, it may be perceived differently—or even as inappropriate—in others. For instance, in Japan, gift-giving is a formalized and ritualized activity deeply embedded in social paradigms. The presentation, wrapping, and timing of gifts are carefully considered to convey respect and maintain harmonious relationships (Lebra, 2018). In contrast, in Italy, gift-giving tends to be more casual and spontaneous, frequently centered around personal occasions such as birthdays and holidays. The value of the gift often reflects individual preferences and the personal nature of the relationship rather than strict social protocols (Miller, 2017). The conclusion reached is that students who take international BIPs do not usually travel to very diverse cultures, so the misunderstandings discussed here are extreme

cases. However, these aspects can be reviewed before traveling to the host country.

The concept of *high-context versus low-context cultures* was also introduced, illustrating how meaning could be conveyed implicitly through shared context in some cultures, while others rely more on direct and explicit verbal communication. High-context cultures, such as Japan and many Arab countries, rely heavily on implicit communication, nonverbal cues, and shared cultural knowledge to convey meaning. In these cultures, much of the communication is indirect, and understanding depends on the context, relationships, and unspoken social rules (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). These issues triggered an interesting debate among students who agreed on the importance of non-verbal communication, for example, smiling, in order to create a warm atmosphere.

On the other hand, low-context cultures, exemplified by countries like Germany, prioritize explicit, direct, and clear verbal communication. In these cultures, meaning is primarily transmitted through words, and less is left to inference or situational context (Hall, 1976). Low-context communication values clarity, precision, and individualism, making interactions straightforward but sometimes perceived as blunt or impersonal by high-context communicators. Students agreed that this kind of communication is more common in business contexts.

The term of *flexibility* was also discussed, and students were urged to remain adaptable and sensitive when interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The presentation also addressed *approaches to conflict*, underscoring how cultural norms influence both the expression of disagreement and strategies for resolution. Finally, the importance of *cultural competence training* was emphasised as a proactive measure to deepen intercultural understanding and improve students' ability to navigate globalized communication settings effectively.

In the subsequent part of the session, a structured debate was facilitated among students, centered around a series of critical questions designed to deepen their understanding of intercultural communication in today's globalized context. The discussion addressed a range of topics, including the importance of intercultural competence in a globalized world, the role of language and strategies for overcoming linguistic barriers, and the variations in nonverbal communication across cultures that often lead to misinterpretation. Participants also reflected on how cultural differences manifest in virtual communication environments, and considered how educational systems might integrate intercultural communication skills into their curricula to better prepare students for international engagement.

The debate explored the influence of stereotypes and cultural biases on intercultural interactions, prompting analysis of strategies to reduce their impact. Finally, students examined real-world examples of successful

intercultural communication in diplomacy and international relations, thereby linking theoretical concepts with practical applications. For example, the Italian students generally felt more comfortable talking about their past experiences, while the Polish students, although the low level of English of two of them had to be taken into account, were more reluctant to speak in public; their intercultural communication couldn't be assessed.

The session continued with the screening of a video that distinguished between *intercultural awareness* and *intercultural dialogue*, offering a nuanced understanding of both concepts. While intercultural awareness involves recognizing and respecting cultural differences, intercultural dialogue emphasizes active engagement, mutual exchange, and collaborative meaning-making between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This distinction was particularly relevant to the session's objectives, as it highlighted the progression from passive understanding to active participation in intercultural interactions—an essential shift for fostering inclusive communication in global contexts. The video served as a reflective tool, encouraging students to critically evaluate their own communicative practices and consider the importance of moving beyond awareness toward meaningful intercultural engagement.

### **3.1.3. Results**

The online session yielded several positive outcomes across all students. Firstly, a high level of active participation was observed throughout the various activities, particularly during the structured debate, where students demonstrated a growing understanding of key intercultural communication concepts. The initial presentation and audiovisual resources effectively facilitated the internalization of complex ideas, such as the cultural iceberg metaphor enabling students to broaden their perspectives beyond superficial cultural aspects.

The Italian students displayed remarkable engagement with academic English throughout the session, participating confidently and accurately in discussions. This level of involvement contributed to fostering a collaborative and rigorous learning environment, enriching the cultural exchange among participants. The final video's distinction between intercultural awareness and intercultural dialogue encouraged students to critically reflect on their own communicative practices, promoting a proactive attitude to progress from passive understanding toward active and constructive participation in intercultural contexts.

The session successfully met its objectives, enabling students not only to acquire theoretical knowledge but also to strengthen practical skills for

respectful and adaptable interaction with individuals from diverse cultures, thereby better preparing them for future international engagements.

## **3.2. In-person Workshop**

The face-to-face session lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in person at Universidad Isabel I. This session provided an opportunity for direct interaction and engagement, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the topics discussed.

### **3.2.1. Objectives**

The main objectives of this session were as follows:

- (1) Discuss the concept of intercultural awareness.
- (2) Explore strategies for integrating intercultural competence through the four language skills.
- (3) Analyze the significance of language in intercultural communication.
- (4) Check various types of exercises that can enhance students' intercultural competence.
- (5) Read a text on cultural behaviors in the business sector, enabling students to reflect on the importance of addressing others with

cultural awareness, the role of smiling, and the significance of maintaining eye contact.

- (6) Facilitate debate through thought-provoking questions.

### **3.2.2. Methodology**

The session began with a video on intercultural awareness emphasizing the necessity of understanding the target culture to prevent misunderstandings. It underscored that fostering intercultural awareness requires the exchange of diverse perspectives, recognizing ourselves as part of a global community, and maintaining an open and curious mindset. Additionally, it stressed the value of being eager to learn, demonstrating patience and kindness, and actively sharing one's own cultural traditions with others. The students were asked to share their perspectives on the significance of enhancing intercultural awareness and the conclusion was that people are now interconnected as part of this globalised world.

During the session, a PowerPoint presentation was used to introduce and explain various activities (see Figures 1 and 2) designed to promote intercultural communication within university classrooms. The presentation outlined practical strategies aimed at fostering inclusivity, mutual understanding, and cultural sensitivity among students from diverse backgrounds. These activities explained included guided discussions, role-plays, collaborative projects, and reflective exercises, all structured to encourage students to engage

meaningfully with cultural differences. By highlighting the pedagogical value of experiential learning and dialogue-based approaches, the presentation has provided participants with concrete tools to enhance intercultural competence in academic settings.

Image 1.

*Listening and Speaking Skills Sample Activities*

**Listening and Speaking Skills: sample activities**

- Video-taped cultural dialogues:** The learners view a video sketch where two people of different cultures are discussing an area of a cultural topic that the project focuses on. One of them is from the learners' own culture whereas the other is from the target culture.
- Taped-recorded interviews with native speakers:** Here learners get into groups and are assigned the responsibility of tape-recording an informal interview with a native speaker they know. Learners should choose a cultural topic the project is based on, and prepare questions on that topic for the interview.
- Songs, jokes and anecdotes:** Songs, jokes or anecdotes from typical films from the target culture could be an excellent source of listening material to transport learners to the target culture and prepare them to communicate naturally.
- Face-to-face tandem learning:** Collaborative oral learning between speakers of different languages is a type of activity particularly suitable for fostering learners' intercultural communicative competence.
- Making up questions to a native speaker:** A native speaker in the target language (for example, a foreign exchange student) could visit the class and learners could be assigned the task of preparing questions in small groups in order to interview the visitor.
- Role-playing:** This activity has been claimed to be suitable for practicing the cultural variations in speech acts such as apologizing, suggesting, complaining, among others (Larsen, 2001).

Cultural Competence

Image 2.

*Reading and Writing Skills Sample Activities*

**Reading and writing skills: sample activities**

- Critical Reading:** That is, reading to make judgments about how a text is argued, is a beneficial reflective activity type for promoting learners' intercultural competence while practicing the reading ability.
- Cultural bump:** That is, a situation that cause people to become uncomfortable or change given particular cultural beliefs and attitudes.
- Analyzing texts:** Learners could also be required to analyze two written texts which have a similar genre as for example, reading advice columns in daily newspapers but which are from different cultures.
- Tandem e-mail learning:** Tandem e-mail learning has been regarded as an effective activity to promote crosscultural dialogue while it is also a means of engaging learners in extended writing in a motivating way (Dodd, 2001).
- Designing stories:** Here the teacher collects some magazines and first selects a variety of pictures that depict people in strange situations in the target culture, and then divides the class into small groups making each group responsible for describing what is happening in a particular picture.
- Cultural misunderstanding:** Learners' cultural imagination can be promoted through writing by selecting passages with cultural misunderstandings. Ideally passages should be narrative texts with different paragraphs each leading toward the intercultural misunderstanding.

Cultural Communication

Due to limited time during the session, students were asked to work in pairs and select one of the sample activities from the slides. Each pair then discussed how the chosen activity could be effectively implemented in a university classroom setting, including the selection of a culturally relevant theme to enhance student engagement. Out of the seven pairs, two chose to draft a set of questions to ask native Polish students about the most typical foods in their country and what is usually done on birthdays. Another group focused on discussing a stereotype-based joke involving Italians and Poles—for instance, “An Italian is late because he enjoys life; a Pole is early because he fears something will go wrong.”

The remaining four groups opted to design short stories based on cultural misunderstandings. Among the situations they created were: a Spanish student bringing a bottle of wine to a Polish dorm party, unaware that alcohol is not allowed in student housing; a Polish student misinterpreting a Spanish classmate’s frequent use of physical touch as overly familiar; a Spanish student feeling confused when a Polish host did not immediately invite them to sit or eat, interpreting it as a lack of hospitality; and a Polish student taking offense when their Spanish partner arrived twenty minutes late, not realizing that such delays are more culturally accepted in Spain. The students greatly enjoyed discussing these topics and engaging in lively conversations with each other.

To address not only the academic but also the professional dimension of intercultural communication, a text in English entitled *Cultural Behaviour* in

Business (British Council, 2023) was subsequently presented, emphasizing the role of culture in the business environment. The text narrated described how effective communication across cultures is essential, as cultural norms significantly influence business etiquette despite the widespread use of English. Misunderstandings may arise when cultural expectations are not recognized, potentially leading to poor judgments or communication breakdowns. The article highlighted three key areas of cultural variation: addressing others, smiling, and eye contact.

In terms of addressing someone, attitudes toward formality differ greatly; for example, German professionals may expect academic titles to be used, while British and American professionals often prefer informal first-name terms. Smiling was another culturally charged behavior—seen as respectful and friendly in countries like the U.S. and U.K., but viewed with suspicion or as a sign of low intelligence or dishonesty in countries such as Russia, Japan, and India. Eye contact also was said to vary: while Western norms may see it as a sign of attentiveness, in East Asia, parts of Africa, and the Middle East, it can be perceived as disrespectful or inappropriate, especially across genders. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity while cautioning against relying on stereotypes, noting that individual identity is shaped by multiple factors beyond nationality, including regional background, corporate culture, and personal experiences.

The classroom debate emerged from the prompt: *“What practices have you encountered that seemed strange or even inappropriate to you?”* This question encouraged students to reflect on personal experiences and cultural perceptions that might lead to misunderstandings in intercultural communication. Several potential misunderstandings mentioned in the source text could resonate with learners. For example, the differing views on the use of academic titles might be perceived by some as arrogance, while for others, it is a sign of respect for achievement. Similarly, variations in smiling—considered polite in some cultures and insincere or foolish in others—could easily lead to misinterpretation of intent. Differences in eye contact norms could also result in discomfort or perceived disrespect. To address these challenges, it was said it is essential to foster open discussions where learners are encouraged to share cultural assumptions and reflect critically on them.

### **3.2.3. Results**

Firstly, these structured, mixed-group activities—such as those involving reading or debates—are effective in fostering intercultural competence as students proved to be engaged with the activities. This aligns with Hungchun Wang’s (2023) researcher in Taiwan, which reported significant gains in students’ intercultural awareness and culturally embedded activities. Similarly, Liang and Schartner (2022) found that culturally mixed group work in higher education enhances empathy, patience, and global perspectives, despite initial

challenges with language in group dynamics—a phenomenon also observed among our participants.

Secondly, the observation that Italian students engaged fluidly with little prior acquaintance echoes findings on the importance of individual communication styles and group trust. De Hei et al. (2020) highlight that collaborative intercultural environments foster willingness to engage and support student autonomy in multilingual contexts, reinforcing the importance of trust-building dialogue.

Finally, integrating both academic and professional cultural content is validated by research on intercultural competence in business English settings. A quasi-experimental study in China demonstrated that embedding reflections on intercultural norms—such as non-verbal cues—significantly enhances students' intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Song et al., 2023). This aligns with our session's use of English texts on business culture, which promoted critical awareness in workplace contexts.

The students emphasized that understanding culturally specific patterns—such as greetings—in intercultural workplace settings is vital, as first impressions are, in their view, fundamental to building trust and establishing professional relationships. They noted that practices like how one addresses a colleague, the appropriateness of a handshake or smile, and the use of eye contact can all significantly shape the tone of an initial encounter. Misinterpreting or

ignoring these subtle cues can lead to discomfort or even offense, potentially undermining future collaboration. As such, they concluded that developing intercultural awareness is not simply a matter of etiquette, but a strategic skill essential for effective communication in globalized work environments.

They concluded that avoiding misunderstandings significantly improves interpersonal dynamics, particularly in professional settings, which are generally more formal and less forgiving than interactions among friends. They emphasized the importance of respecting cultural differences and highlighted the value of demonstrating genuine interest and attentiveness toward others' feelings. In essence, they underscored empathy as a fundamental competence for navigating intercultural communication effectively, especially in workplace environments where clarity, respect, and sensitivity can directly influence collaboration and success.

## **4. Suggestions for Improvement**

In future sessions, it may be beneficial to allocate more time to practical activities rather than focusing primarily on theoretical content. Emphasizing hands-on exercises and interactive discussions could enhance student engagement and facilitate a deeper understanding of the concepts explored. It is essential to promote further debate and address cultural aspects, as these have been identified as crucial elements in fostering students' interest in their peers and enhancing empathy. Engaging in discussions about cultural

diversity, traditions, and perspectives allows students to develop a deeper understanding of one another, breaking down barriers and encouraging meaningful interactions.

Such dialogues not only broaden their global awareness but also contribute to the development of key interpersonal skills, such as active listening, open-mindedness, and mutual respect. By integrating cultural discourse into academic settings, educators can create more inclusive learning environments where students feel encouraged to explore different viewpoints, appreciate diverse backgrounds, and cultivate a sense of shared humanity. A recent peer-reviewed study by Elias and Mansouri (2023) explicitly links intercultural education to inclusive and respectful learning environments. They note that “systematic and transformative intercultural approaches in schools can create more inclusive pedagogic practices and respectful intercultural relations” (p. 21). This suggests that integrating cultural discourse in academic settings fosters empathy, and a sense of global understanding among students—aligning with the claim about developing global awareness and interpersonal skills through culturally inclusive pedagogy.

## **5. Conclusions**

The online and in-person experiences lived in the “Intercultural Communication in the Tertiary Education” workshop lead to the conclusion that a comprehensive approach to research is essential to gaining a deeper

understanding of the parameters that contribute to the enhancement of intercultural competence. The dynamic nature of cultural interactions, shaped by technological advancements, migration patterns, and evolving social structures, necessitates continuous analysis to identify key factors influencing intercultural understanding. By integrating diverse methodological perspectives, future studies can provide more nuanced insights into how individuals develop and apply intercultural competence in various contexts. This will ultimately contribute to the refinement of educational strategies, policy development, and professional training programs aimed at fostering more effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration (Feng & Aziz, 2023).

The observed results show that the specific group of students in the "Language, Education and Society" BIP from Southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, demonstrate a greater propensity to share their cultural background and actively engage in collaborative activities compared to their Northern European counterparts, such as Polish and German students. This tendency may be attributed to cultural differences in social interaction styles, levels of expressiveness, and approaches to group participation. Southern European students often exhibit a more extroverted and participatory attitude, fostering open discussions and a willingness to exchange cultural perspectives. In contrast, students from Northern Europe tend to adopt a more reserved

approach, which may influence their level of involvement in intercultural activities. The different performances

These findings highlight the importance of considering regional cultural dynamics when designing initiatives aimed at enhancing intercultural competence, ensuring that engagement strategies accommodate different interaction styles to foster meaningful and inclusive participation among all students.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were employed to support the enhancement of academic writing throughout this article. These tools were used exclusively for language refinement, clarity, and structural coherence, without altering the original content or compromising the integrity of the research. The assistance aimed to ensure a more precise and formal academic style in accordance with scholarly standards (OpenAI, 2023).

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# CHAPTER 8. INTERCULTURAL CITIZENS: ENGAGING ACROSS SOCIOCULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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## 1. Background

The concept of interculturalism goes beyond merely accepting different cultures; it emphasises the active celebration of both similarities and differences in order to build stronger, more cohesive communities. It encourages individuals to honour their own cultural traditions while also fostering an appreciation for diverse aspects of identity, such as language, nationality, gender identity, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation. Interculturalism promotes mutual respect and dialogue, laying the groundwork for inclusive and democratic societies.

Building on this, and as stated by the *Intercultural Cities Programme - Council of Europe*:

In today's diverse societies, citizenship is about how we engage across cultural differences in our communities and public spaces. (...)

Most importantly, it is about how we actively change or maintain our communities, taking into account the different points of view we have (n.d., p. 2).

These ideas encapsulate the essence of intercultural citizenship: a dynamic, participatory form of citizenship that not only values cultural diversity but also empowers individuals to contribute to social change through dialogue, empathy, and critical reflection. This understanding is central to the [Intercultural Citizenship Test](#), which assesses “citizens’ knowledge and awareness of human rights, their intercultural competences, their perception of diversity as an advantage, as well as their willingness to act in an intercultural way” (n.d., p. 4). The test, conceived as both an educational and political tool, can be used to raise “awareness among citizens, professionals, and policymakers of the importance of redefining (urban) citizenship in a pluralistic and inclusive way” (n.d., p. 4). By encouraging reflection and action, the test supports the development of more inclusive, democratic, and resilient communities, aligned with the principles of intercultural citizenship.

In this context, intercultural encounters—defined as meaningful interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds—play a crucial role in shaping inclusive, democratic, and pluralistic societies. These encounters can occur face-to-face or through mediated forms, such as films, books, or digital media (Council of Europe, 2009). In today’s multilingual and multicultural Europe, intercultural encounters are increasingly common and

especially relevant in higher education settings, where mobility programmes like Erasmus+ provide fertile ground for such experiences.

To support reflection on these interactions, the [Council of Europe's Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters](#) is offered as a valuable educational tool. This resource invites individuals to explore and reflect on their intercultural experiences (whether direct or mediated) by considering how these encounters affect their perceptions, emotions, and values. It encourages users to become more aware of their own identities and biases, while also fostering understanding and empathy toward others. By promoting critical reflection, the *Autobiography* aligns with contemporary approaches to intercultural education, which emphasise the importance of lived experience, emotional intelligence, and participatory learning as key to developing intercultural competence.

In the context of Erasmus+, these tools and approaches take on particular relevance. The programme offers students and staff the opportunity to engage with diversity on multiple levels—linguistic, cultural, academic, and social. This nurturing environment fosters the development of intercultural competencies by helping to facilitate relationships and interactions between individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures, as well as within heterogeneous groups. As a matter of fact, the intercultural dimension is often cited in the literature as one of the most valuable outcomes of International Student Mobility (ISM) (e.g., Castro et al. 2016; Gill, 2016). Intercultural experiences provide students with

opportunities to exchange ideas, values, and worldviews, to reflect on their own assumptions, and to engage meaningfully with others' "foreignness" (Gill, 2016). As such, many higher education institutions in Europe are increasingly described as transcultural universities, which acknowledges the complexity and diversity of languages, communities, and cultures that coexist within them (Baker, 2016).

However, the mere presence of cultural diversity does not automatically lead to the development of intercultural competence (Castro et al., 2016). Cultural norms and expectations can significantly influence how students participate and engage in these settings (Lomer & Anthony-Okeke, 2019). This underscores the need for intentional pedagogical strategies and institutional policies that foreground ethics, inclusion, and critical engagement. As Raikou & Karalis (2020) argue, the integration of social and cultural dimensions into internationalisation practices is essential if we are to move beyond superficial exchanges and towards transformative, interculturally aware learning.

Therefore, intercultural citizenship, intercultural encounters, and international mobility are deeply intertwined. Tools like the *Intercultural Citizenship Test* and the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, when used within thoughtfully designed educational frameworks, can play a critical role in helping students not only navigate diversity but also embrace and shape it as active, responsible citizens of a plural Europe.

## 2. Development

This section describes the two-part practical module facilitated by the authors during the “Language, Education and Society” Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) organised and hosted by Universidad Isabel I in partnership with Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi (Poland), Università Telematica Giustino Fortunato (Italy), SSML Internazionale (Italy) and IST-Hochschule für Management (Germany) in April and May 2024. Specifically, the online workshop “Intercultural citizens: Engaging across sociocultural differences” took place on the 11th of April, 2024 via Blackboard Collaborate and its follow-up in-person counterpart “Intercultural citizens: Sharing our personal experiences” was celebrated at the facilities of Universidad Isabel I in Burgos (Spain), on the 28th of May, 2024.

### 2.1. Online workshop

#### 2.1.1. Pedagogical objectives

The online workshop “Intercultural citizens: Engaging across sociocultural differences” was designed to foster intercultural competences among European university students. Its pedagogical approach was grounded in the principles of intercultural citizenship education, with the Council of Europe’s *Intercultural Citizenship Test* serving as the main conceptual and practical reference point.

The workshop had the following interrelated pedagogical objectives:

- Reflect on the sources and complexity of personal identity
- Consider how multiple dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, religion, food preferences, and lifestyle intersect to form unique individual identities
- Illustrate the notion of intersectionality as a key analytical tool for understanding diversity in contemporary societies
- Encourage the critical examination of prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices within the participants' own contexts and perceptions
- Foster empathy and a sense of individual responsibility in addressing inequalities
- Cultivate cross-cultural skills necessary for effective and ethical engagement in diverse societies

### **2.1.2. Methodology**

The online session took place on the 11th of April, 2024, via Blackboard Collaborate. It followed a participatory and dialogic methodology, centred around inclusive communication, interactive questioning, and critical reflection. It was co-facilitated by the authors, who acted as both content guides and facilitators of discussion, modelling openness and authenticity throughout the session.

Before the workshop began and while participants joined the room, a slide (Figure 1) with a multilingual welcome was projected. This gesture symbolically and practically introduced the session's inclusive tone, explicitly recognising plurilingual communication and establishing English as the lingua franca, while encouraging respectful use of each participant's linguistic repertoire. The facilitators also highlighted that the session was a safe space for expressing individual identities and experiences without fear of discrimination.

## Figure 1

### *Opening slide*



The workshop began with the introduction of its title, as well as goals and competencies:

- Understand possible sources of identity
- Reflect on individual responsibility
- Discuss how we feel about diversity in our proximity
- Create empathy and understanding regarding discriminatory practices
- Develop cross-cultural skills (keen perception, changing perspective, suspending judgment) to manage the cross-cultural collaboration in teamwork
- Increase cultural awareness (knowledge of one's own culture, foreign culture and of cultural differences)

Following a brief self-introduction by both facilitators—who shared personal anecdotes about their cultural backgrounds, mobility experiences, and passions—the concept of identity was explored. A slide featuring various identity markers (ethnicity/ beliefs/ nationality/ birth; food/ sports team/ clothing style; body type/ sexual orientation/ ideology/ gender; language/ age/ place of residence/ mode of transport) prompted participants to reflect on what constitutes their own identity. The facilitators emphasised that identity is multifaceted and fluid, and encouraged participants to contribute via the chat or by speaking up. Some of the participants shared their thoughts about their personal identities as young European citizens and students with specific preferences in terms of food, music, sports or place of residence.

From this initial activity, the concept of **intersectionality** was introduced. The presenters explained how identity markers intersect, how unlikely it is that an individual will think of themselves as defined entirely as one aspect of their make-up, and how they may experience different forms of privilege or discrimination depending on the combination of these aspects. Through the concrete example of how a celebrity like Beyoncé could identify herself with one of her young fans from a minority background, participants were guided to see how social categories can overlap in both empowering and marginalising ways.

This led to a shift in focus toward recognising **diversity** and developing **empathy**. A scenario-based activity (Figure 2) asked participants to imagine their reactions to hypothetical neighbours: people with different religions, “ultras” (extreme football fans), refugees, Spaniards or a same-sex couple. This activity was intentionally provocative, designed to elicit immediate emotional responses and stimulate reflection on the roots of prejudice. Participants were encouraged to notice their internal reactions and then share their thoughts, either verbally or in the chat. Their responses revolved around the possible discomfort of having “ultras” soccer team supporters due to the potential violence they could be involved in. The presenters agreed that that would also be the most worrying scenario for them and expressed that we should be aware that even seemingly “tolerant” individuals can harbour

unconscious prejudices. Furthermore, one of the participants shared that the term originated in Italy and was initially not a pejorative concept.

## Figure 2

### *Scenario-based activity*



The graphic consists of a large pink rectangle on the left containing the text "I WOULD BE DISTURBED IF THE MEMBERS OF A NEW FAMILY MOVING IN NEXT DOOR...". To the right of this rectangle are five horizontal bars of varying colors (purple, blue, and light blue), each containing a lettered option (a) through (e) describing a group of people.

I WOULD BE DISTURBED IF THE MEMBERS OF A NEW FAMILY MOVING IN NEXT DOOR...

- a) have a different religion than me.
- b) are “ultras” supporting a soccer team.
- c) are refugees.
- d) are Spaniards.
- e) are a same-sex couple.

Building on this discussion, the facilitators introduced definitions of **prejudice**, **stereotypes**, and **discrimination**. They explained how these cognitive and emotional patterns can lead to unjust social outcomes and how they can manifest across a wide spectrum, from racism and homophobia to ageism and classism. One participant reflected on how such dynamics play out in European communities and daily lives when she described that even though we live in a multicultural society, there are still many barriers for migrants and minorities to access equal opportunities.

Next, a short video ([That little voice](#)) was screened in order to address the importance of empathy and the ethical imperative to “find your voice” in the face of injustice. This resource was used as a springboard for discussion about moral agency and responsibility. Participants were invited to share their thoughts on the video and respond to the following question: “Would you react when facing one of these situations of discrimination? And if yes, how?” (Figure 3). Several participants agreed that they would react actively in these situations, and some of them had reacted in similar scenarios. One student expressed that he defended a bullied peer in secondary school, and another concurred that we should express our discomfort whenever someone criticises our accent when we speak a second language.

### Figure 3

*Questions based on the video “That little voice”*



The closing part of the workshop focused on the practical implications of intercultural citizenship. The facilitators discussed different forms of proactive engagement: from volunteering and advocating for legislative change to modelling inclusive behaviour in daily interactions. They emphasised that “reaction” need not always be public or confrontational—leading by example, using inclusive language, and staying informed were also presented as powerful forms of resistance to discrimination.

To conclude, the presenters reminded participants that interculturalism is not simply about coexisting peacefully but about building meaningful connections across differences (Figure 4). They reiterated that diversity, when well managed, can be a source of social strength and cohesion. Participants were then invited to continue their reflection by taking the full [Intercultural Citizenship Test](#) provided by the Council of Europe and to bring their insights to the future face-to-face meeting planned for April in Burgos, Spain.

## Figure 4

### *Reminder for participants*



### **2.1.3. Implications**

The online workshop described proved to be both a pedagogical and emotional experience for participants. It offered a space in which intercultural understanding could be explored in depth and with sincerity. Several key implications emerged from the implementation of the session.

Firstly, the dialogic and interactive structure of the workshop fostered active engagement and co-construction of meaning. Rather than receiving information passively, participants were positioned as reflective agents capable of articulating their views, sharing experiences, and questioning assumptions. This approach aligned with contemporary theories of intercultural education, which stress the importance of lived experience, emotional intelligence, and participatory learning (e.g., Byram, 2008; Porto & Zembylas, 2022).

Secondly, the workshop demonstrated the value of storytelling and personal disclosure in building trust and authenticity in online learning spaces. The facilitators' willingness to share personal anecdotes about topics such as food, lifestyle, and cultural migration invited participants to reflect on their own identities in a non-threatening way (Gill, 2016). This personal touch created emotional resonance, making abstract concepts like intersectionality and empathy more tangible and relatable.

Thirdly, the use of thought-provoking questions and real-life scenarios encouraged critical self-examination and highlighted the power of implicit

bias. By acknowledging that even seemingly “tolerant” individuals can harbour unconscious prejudices, the workshop created opportunities for deeper self-awareness. The example of discomfort toward football “ultras” made it easier for participants to recognise the subtle ways in which prejudice can operate, even in the absence of overt hostility.

The session also emphasised the ethical dimensions of citizenship in multicultural societies and transcultural universities (Baker, 2016). By moving from empathy to action, the workshop encouraged participants to take responsibility for fostering inclusion, both institutionally and individually. This shift from awareness to agency is a crucial step in cultivating intercultural citizenship. One particularly meaningful outcome was the recognition of the importance of small, everyday actions in combating discrimination. Participants were reminded that standing up for others does not always require grand gestures; it can mean listening actively, challenging a stereotype in a conversation, or amplifying marginalised voices. In an age where digital environments often intensify polarisation, such micro-acts of solidarity take on added significance.

Additionally, the workshop reaffirmed the importance of creating safe spaces in online education. By explicitly establishing a respectful and open environment at the outset, the facilitators laid the groundwork for honest and vulnerable dialogue. This is especially vital when addressing sensitive topics

such as race, gender, and inequality, where participants may hold divergent views or carry different emotional burdens.

Finally, the workshop's alignment with the *Intercultural Citizenship Test* gave it added pedagogical depth. Framing the session within an existing framework provided a structured foundation for exploration while allowing for flexibility in delivery. By encouraging participants to take the test and revisit the topic for the upcoming physical workshop, the facilitators also ensured that the workshop was not an isolated event, but part of a continuous learning journey.

## **2.2. In-person workshop**

### **2.2.1. Pedagogical objectives**

"Intercultural citizens: Sharing our personal experiences" was based on the Council of Europe's Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters. The main goal of this in-person workshop was to provide a more nuanced practice of the theoretical framework presented during the online workshop regarding the topic of interculturality. In particular, it aimed to explore in detail the concepts "intercultural encounter", "interculturality", "intercultural competence", and "intercultural communication".

The workshop had the following pedagogical objectives:

- Promote the development of intercultural competence and communication through a practical role-play and subsequent collaborative analysis
- Foster empathy, tolerance and respect for other cultures
- Experience some possible conflicts that may arise from different beliefs, values, and behaviours in different cultures
- Encourage critical thinking and self-analysis through group analysis after the role-play
- Prompt students to think about other intercultural encounters experienced by them in real-life situations

### **2.2.2. Methodology**

This workshop was developed during the physical part of the BIP. It was celebrated specifically at the facilities of Universidad Isabel I in Burgos (Spain), on the 28th of May, 2024. To contextualise the dynamic, several tools were used. For the creation of the fictional environment, an “intercultural dinner” (Figure 5) in which participants should interact with as many people as possible, the authors set in advance a table with plates, snacks, festive decorations, and cutlery.

Figure 5

*An intercultural encounter*

First, when the workshop began, as all the participants already knew each other, the facilitators directly proceeded to introduce the topic and present the objectives of the workshop.

The second step involved dividing students into diverse, mixed groups to encourage cross-cultural communication. Students often gravitate towards peers from their own university or country, limiting their interaction with others. To counter this tendency, facilitators intentionally grouped participants with peers from different backgrounds in order to foster collaboration beyond their usual social circles. Later, each student was given a card with a role (Table 1). The roles were the following:

**Table 1***Roles in the intercultural encounter*


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<p>You come from Greenland. You like to meet foreigners, but you really dislike being touched by strangers. In your country, you rarely look into each other's eyes, and you always avoid eye contact when you first meet someone. You eat with a spoon.</p>	<p>You are from Blueland. In your country, people gently, but consistently, touch each other's arms when they talk. You eat with your hands. You like to meet foreigners, but you avoid people from Whiteland.</p>
<p>You are from Whiteland. You love to meet people and express your enthusiasm with a lot of gestures. When you meet someone, you touch your earlobes and bow a little to say "hello" politely. You eat with chopsticks.</p>	<p>You are an Observer. You do not interact with the group and stay away to observe the group dynamics. Look for their actions and details that catch your attention.</p>

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For the performance of the assigned roles, students received the following instructions, projected on a slide:

Imagine that you have been invited to an informal social gathering for international students.

There are students from three different countries.

Your goal is to get to know one another by talking briefly to as many people as possible.

Stand up, walk around and get to know one another based on the role on your card.

In order to foster a friendly atmosphere, some soft background music was played during the encounter. After spending 10 minutes performing their

assigned roles, students regrouped with their “landmates” to engage in the next phase of the workshop: reflection.

They were prompted to consider two central questions: *What is an intercultural encounter?* , and *What barriers can we come across?* Additionally, students were asked to compile the key characteristics they observed in the other groups and attempt to describe the three fictional countries they had interacted with. The reflection was guided by the following specific questions:

1. What is the role of physical contact?
2. What caused (or could have caused) conflicts?
3. How did participants avoid/ solve conflicts?
4. Which culture did you find the strangest of all?
5. How did you feel while you were participating in the game?

In their groups, students engaged meaningfully with the discussion and generated insights that deepened their understanding of intercultural competence, as well as their own experiences and abilities in this area.

In response to the first question about physical contact, students observed that each fictional culture displayed different norms. For instance, participants representing Greenland were uncomfortable with physical touch, whereas those from Blueland embraced tactile interactions, such as touching others’

arms. These deliberately exaggerated behaviours served to highlight the variability of cultural conventions and encouraged reflection on how such differences can give rise to misunderstandings or conflict. In this regard, a particularly highlighted point raised was the tension caused by Blueland's avoidance of individuals from Whiteland. Students role-playing as Greenland also expressed discomfort when others acted overly enthusiastic or engaged in excessive physical contact. These experiences prompted a deeper exploration of cultural boundaries and personal space.

Regarding conflict resolution, those in the roles of Observers, as well as the facilitators, noted that although students reacted with surprise or amusement to one another's behaviours, they consistently maintained an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. However, students from Whiteland reported feeling discriminated against by Blueland and expressed confusion about the underlying reasons, which exacerbated their sense of exclusion. Overall, students shared feelings such as "strange," "discriminated," and "avoided." Nonetheless, the overarching conclusion drawn from the activity emphasised the importance of adapting to and accepting cultural differences. Students recognised that intercultural competence involves respecting and tolerating diverse values, beliefs, and behaviours, all of which are deeply rooted in individuals' cultural contexts and lived realities.

Once students had shared their vision and conclusions about the activity, facilitators explained the meaning of an intercultural encounter and presented

the main barriers that can be found in this kind of situation. They explained that people can have a different set of beliefs, that is, what they assume is true. For example, about what is classed as edible and inedible or what is thought to be polite behaviour. They can also have a different set of values, i.e. what they assume is important in their lives. For example, they value honesty more than politeness, or they consider that older people's views are more valuable than those of the young. Finally, they can differ in their set of behaviours, that is, the routine, often unconscious, ways of acting. For example, they always avoid looking older people directly in the eyes, or they always keep a fast during a given period of the year.

Next, the facilitators provided students with some tips for managing an intercultural encounter successfully and showing respect, empathy, and tolerance for others: first, being able to "decentre" from your own culture and reality, that is, become aware of what is usually unconscious, is fundamental, and, moreover, be able to take the other person's perspective and accept that their ways also seem "natural" to them.

Another crucial dimension of intercultural encounters is intercultural communication: the capacity to communicate and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This encompasses not only language proficiency, but also customs, ways of thinking, social norms, and habits. Developing this competence requires perseverance, openness, and sensitivity to difference (Kramsch, 1993). In this respect, the facilitators

introduced some of the problems that can arise due to a lack of intercultural competence during a communicative process in an intercultural context:

- Associate different meanings with specific terms
- Express their intentions in different linguistic forms
- Follow different cultural conventions in a conversation (content and structure)
- Different meanings of gestures, mime, volume, pauses, etc.

Navigating these complexities requires communicative awareness, defined as the ability to recognise both verbal and nonverbal conventions in intercultural contexts, understand their impact on discourse, and negotiate shared communication norms (Byram, 2020). Interculturally competent individuals remain alert to differences in meaning, discourse patterns, and interactional expectations, and actively work to establish clear, respectful channels of communication.

Finally, the facilitators shared with the students some of the competencies collected in the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) in order to engage appropriately, effectively, and respectfully in intercultural encounters (Figure 6):

In any collaborative and respectful environment, it is essential to truly listen to others, grasping their perspectives, valuing their arguments, and recognising the person behind the opinion. This means being open to criticism, willing

to step into someone else’s shoes, and responding with empathy and understanding. At the same time, expressing one’s own thoughts clearly is vital: articulating needs, interests, emotions, and values with coherence and honesty, always providing transparent reasons behind one’s views. Furthermore, working with others requires shared responsibility, organising tasks together, cooperating fairly, accepting roles, and approaching group goals with reliability, dedication, and care. It also involves embracing diversity of thought, recognising conflicts, and managing them respectfully, accepting that mistakes and differences are part of the process. Also, compromise and consensus are key—finding common ground, respecting majority decisions, and valuing minority voices. It takes trust, courage, and a careful balance between rights and responsibilities to foster a supportive and inclusive community. Ultimately, the goal is to promote shared responsibility, build fair agreements, and work together toward collective aims with mutual respect and understanding.

## Figure 6

*“How to take action?” slide*

### HOW CAN WE TAKE ACTION?

Grasp and take seriously the opinions and arguments of others, accord **personal recognition** to people of other opinions, put oneself in the situation of others, accept criticism, listen.

Make **one’s own opinions** (needs, interests, feelings, values) **clear**, speak coherently, give clear and transparent reasons.

Organise **group work**, co-operate in the distribution of work, accept tasks, demonstrate trustworthiness, tenacity, care and conscientiousness.

**Tolerate** variety, divergence, difference, recognise conflicts, find harmony where possible, regulate issues in socially acceptable fashion, accept mistakes and differences.

Find compromises, seek **consensus**, accept majority decisions, **tolerate** minorities, promote encouragement, weigh rights and responsibilities, and show trust and courage.

Emphasise **group responsibility**, develop fair norms and common interests and needs, promote common approaches to tasks.



To conclude the workshop, the facilitators shared a QR (Figure 7) code so students could scan it and access the *Autobiography of Cultural Encounters* and find further information.

Figure 7

*QR code to the Autobiography of Cultural Encounters*



### 2.2.3. Implications

The methodology used in the preparation and development of this workshop followed an active and collaborative teaching approach centred on the student (communicative approach). Following this approach (García-Santa Cecilia, 2022), and as the word “facilitators” can suggest, the authors had a secondary role as guides while students were responsible for their learning process. Additionally, the workshop aimed to prioritise a practical and experimental approach and develop critical thinking through the role-play activity and the

subsequent reflection work in groups. This experiential dimension allowed students not only to observe cultural differences, but to feel their impact first-hand, making the learning process more memorable and transformative (Kolb, 1984).

The positive reception of this workshop, as indicated in the BIP's student satisfaction survey, further highlights the pedagogical value of practical, experiential activities in short-term intensive programmes. This type of activity proved to be highly accepted by students, as it was one of the three in-person presentations/ workshops best valued in the survey, which results can be found in Chapter 2 "Language, Education and Society": Benefits, impacts and challenges. In this chapter, the authors conclude that the workshops with a practical component were particularly well received and find that these results reinforce the effectiveness of active, experiential learning methods in short-term intensive programmes (Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010). One example to prove this point is the comment by one of the students, who found the programme extremely useful, highlighting the workshops, and expressed surprise at the amount of practical work involved: "I was surprised, to be honest because I didn't think that there was going to be so much practice. I'm just very grateful".

By combining experiential learning, collaborative discussion, and intercultural role-play, the workshop enabled students to meaningfully engage with complex cultural issues in a safe, supportive environment. The success of the activity,

as evidenced by student feedback, demonstrates that such methodologies not only enhance intercultural understanding but also contribute to the development of essential transversal competences outlined in the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC), such as empathy, cooperation, openness to cultural otherness, and tolerance of ambiguity. This approach may represent a powerful and effective model for intercultural education within short-term, intensive programmes, since it is a way to offer Erasmus+ participants tools to navigate and value diversity in increasingly interconnected societies.

### **3. Suggestions for practice**

Building on the experiences and reflections gathered during this Erasmus+ BIP module, we offer the following suggestions for designing future workshops—both online and in-person—that aim to nurture both intercultural citizenship and meaningful intercultural encounters. These proposals are rooted in the theoretical foundations outlined in the Background section and the pedagogical experiences described in the Development section. They are adaptable to various learning contexts, proficiency levels, and institutional formats.

**Structure workshops around personal reflection and participatory dialogue:**

One of the most impactful elements of our workshop was the consistent integration of reflective questioning and opportunities for dialogue. Future sessions should prioritise spaces where participants can explore and articulate their identities, values, and emotions in response to culturally sensitive prompts. Activities like identity mapping, scenario analysis, or response-to-media tasks (e.g., videos, testimonials, or literary texts) encourage participants to make personal connections to abstract concepts such as intersectionality, empathy, and citizenship. Both asynchronous (e.g., pre-workshop reflection journals) and synchronous (live discussion) modalities can support this engagement.

**Emphasise intersectionality and emotional engagement as key learning dimensions:**

Concepts like intersectionality are more effectively understood when connected to personal experience. We recommend that facilitators introduce this idea through storytelling (either their own or that of participants) and use accessible, real-world examples that resonate with students' lives. Emotions are not peripheral but central to intercultural learning. Designing learning activities that elicit emotional responses, such as moral dilemmas or case studies involving injustice, can deepen understanding and enhance participants' sense of ethical responsibility.

**Foster inclusive facilitation practices and model vulnerability:**

Facilitators play a critical role in setting the tone for intercultural dialogue. Explicitly naming the session as a safe space and modelling openness through personal sharing can invite authenticity from participants. Inclusive language, plurilingual awareness, and flexibility in interaction formats (chat, voice, small group) are essential for equitable participation, especially in multilingual, multicultural groups.

**Introduce and scaffold intercultural tools like the *Intercultural Citizenship Test* and the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*:**

These Council of Europe resources offer powerful frameworks for both self-assessment and reflection. We recommend presenting them not as evaluative instruments, but as learning tools that support awareness and growth. For example, the *Autobiography* can be incorporated as a guided journaling task across a series of workshops, while selected sections of the *Citizenship Test* can serve as conversation starters or formative assessment tools.

**Provide continuity between online and in-person encounters:**

Blended formats are especially well-suited to intercultural education, as they allow participants to build rapport and develop reflective habits over time. Designing workshops as multi-phase experiences—beginning online and culminating in a face-to-face session—can strengthen learning outcomes.

The online phase can focus on foundational concepts and personal identity, while the in-person encounter can prioritise collaborative tasks, intercultural storytelling, and peer exchange.

### **Encourage action-oriented outcomes**

Intercultural citizenship implies agency. Conclude workshops with discussions about everyday actions participants can take to promote inclusion in their academic, social, or digital communities. Encourage them to view ethical engagement not only as grand activism but also as small acts of solidarity, such as challenging stereotypes, using inclusive language, or amplifying marginalised voices.

## **4. Conclusion**

In today's diverse and interconnected world, developing intercultural competence is a social responsibility for every citizen, especially within aligned communities such as the European Union. In this context, intercultural encounters occur constantly and in multiple forms, making it essential to foster tolerant, respectful and empathic individuals who are capable of managing these encounters successfully. Erasmus+ programmes, and more specifically the Blended Intensive Programme described in this volume, provide invaluable opportunities to acquire intercultural knowledge and competence through first-hand, practical experience.

During the virtual and physical component of the BIP organised by Universidad Isabel I, facilitators aimed to leverage the intercultural experience that this kind of programme entails and reinforce it with the workshops developed around this topic in order to help students develop intercultural competence consciously. Some of the tools followed for the preparation and implementation of the workshops were the *Intercultural Citizenship Test* and the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* of the Council of Europe, which, embedded into thoughtfully designed learning experiences, can provide structured yet adaptable means of supporting empathy, critical reflection, and active engagement across cultural differences.

Feedback gathered from students highlighted the pedagogical impact of participatory and experiential learning. Activities such as storytelling, personal reflection, and intercultural role-play allowed participants to confront their assumptions, recognise unconscious bias, share diverse perspectives, and engage meaningfully with complex concepts such as identity, diversity, prejudice, stereotypes, and interculturality. Rather than being passive recipients of information, students became active co-constructors of intercultural understanding.

The experiences and outcomes of the Erasmus+ BIP module described here also offer valuable guidance for future educational practice. Reflective dialogue, emotional engagement, and ethical action must be at the heart of intercultural workshops. Strategies such as identity mapping, media-

based prompts, and real-world case studies help to make abstract principles personally resonant and ethically urgent. As such, facilitators play a central role in shaping these learning environments: modelling vulnerability, promoting plurilingual awareness, and maintaining inclusive, safe spaces are essential for equitable participation.

Furthermore, the recommendations emerging from the BIP highlight the need for continuity and blended learning in intercultural education. By designing workshops as multi-phase experiences—starting online and culminating in face-to-face interaction—educators can deepen engagement and extend the impact of intercultural learning over time. Equally crucial is the emphasis on action-oriented outcomes. Intercultural citizenship is not only about awareness but also about agency: empowering participants to take everyday actions that promote inclusion, challenge stereotypes, and support equity in both academic and social spaces.

In conclusion, the success of the BIP workshops reinforces the idea that intercultural competence is not innate, but cultivated through deliberate, reflective, and emotionally resonant learning experiences. Through practical pedagogies rooted in empathy, participation, and real-life connection, learners can be empowered to become responsible and resilient citizens, capable of navigating, shaping, and enriching the diverse societies in which they live.

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