

**Investigating Intercultural Competence
in Higher Education
by Telecollaboration in Spanish Learning**

Paula Alagarda Durán 1900970
Master's Thesis in Educational Sciences
Supervisors: Charlotta Hilli & Petri Salo
Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies
Åbo Akademi University
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Abstract

Internationalisation has increased the mobility of students and teachers, the establishment of networks, as well as research and academic programmes. Despite the large amount of research within the field of education, more research is still necessary concerning international networking in e-learning environments and cultural exchange online.

Telecollaboration contributes to the cultivation of intercultural competence, which is needed for internationalisation. The development of new technologies has facilitated practices of intercultural communication.

The present study explores the intercultural competence in learning Spanish as a foreign language in Finnish higher education. It focuses on the telecollaboration between students from two European universities: Hanken School of Economics in Vaasa, Finland, and Utrecht University in the Netherlands, in an attempt to communicate in a lingua franca. The participants collaborated by videoconference, in intercultural groups, and in order to accomplish a common task based on different cultures. Their assignment was part of the oral assessment of the Spanish courses in their respective universities. The targets of the telecollaboration were to develop linguistic skills in Spanish as a foreign language, to enhance media literacy, and to promote intercultural communicative competence.

The purpose of this study is to examine the participants' attitudes and behaviour while developing intercultural competence in their virtual exchange. In order to accomplish this, the study is based on a theoretical framework composed by the Intercultural Competence Model of Deardorff (2006). The models of other authors were also regarded as support to the study.

A virtual ethnographical approach was applied so as to obtain answers to the research questions. The data was gathered from video observations, and the videos were recorded during the respondents' online interaction. The results show that the students presented appropriate attitudes and behaviour for developing intercultural competence in their telecollaboration with peer students from other cultures.

Similar studies could be carried out to enhance the use of telecollaboration in higher education in Finland and other European countries. This could, in turn, enhance the possibilities for intercultural exchange and help to expand interculturalism.

Keywords: intercultural competence, telecollaboration, higher education, Spanish, Finland

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1. Introduction

As a powerful phenomenon in the higher education context since the 90s, internationalisation has increased the mobility of students and teachers, the establishment of networks, as well as the research and the academic programmes (Dodou, 2016). However, this remarkable evolution over the past 25 years is questioned by Wit and Knight (2018) who emphasise the need for widening the research in relation to internationalisation.

Technology has contributed to create interactions across cultures around the world to become a common practice and research field in our global 21st century (Durden, Taylor, De Guzmán, Guzmán & Potthoff, 2016) and the development of communication technologies have also facilitated intercultural communication eluding the need of geographic closeness (Arasaratnam, 2016).

Virtual exchange embraces the term telecollaboration, an area of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), research and practice that originated in the 90s. The research field has developed considerably in the past 30 years. Learning outcomes, gains, and difficulties from teachers' and researchers' perspectives have been extensively studied (Helm, 2015). Nevertheless, the students' perspective needs to be further considered. Most research examines the exchange of languages in an eTandem¹ context (O'Rourke, 2007); nonetheless this current study focuses on the telecollaboration between non-native speakers, who are students from two different European universities and attempt to communicate in Spanish, their lingua franca. The trend of online practices in higher education based on the development of students' lingua franca appears to be rising although mainly concerning the English language (O'Dowd, 2016; Godwin-Jones, 2019).

The use of virtual exchanges in language teaching at tertiary education is constantly increasing despite the wide range of students' exchange mobility programmes at offer. The Finnish National Agency for Education promotes these programmes with the argument that they are essential for the internationalisation of higher education. However, the participation of students from Finland in mobility programmes appears to have decreased (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; 2021) over the last years and significantly nowadays due to the coronavirus pandemic. Telecollaboration allows the students to study at home and abroad at the same time, avoiding the physical relocation and the related additional costs. Furthermore, according to O'Dowd (2006), telecollaboration contributes to develop intercultural competence.

This current study investigates university students' intercultural competence when they collaborate online, using electronic technologies to accomplish a common task. Intercultural

¹ students who are native speakers of one language learn the mother tongue of the other and vice versa.

competence is defined as the ability of a person to interact and build important relations with people from varied cultural backgrounds (Arasaratnam, 2016). Intercultural competence is developmental (Arasaratnam, 2016), and collaborative learning facilitates its development (Zhang, 2012).

The use of audiovisual media is suggested by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a teaching method in foreign languages. The CEFR likewise expresses that the emotional-affective aspect is important for the development of attitudes toward the target language and socio-culture. In foreign language teaching the socio-cultural component and the linguistic component converge (2001). Since the relation between language and culture is essential, teachers of foreign languages are expected to find methods to incorporate Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in their language education (Çiftçi & Savaş, 2018).

My profession as a pedagogue of Spanish is endorsed by more than two decades of language teaching experience in Finland. My work has focused mainly on coaching youngsters and adults, at international enterprises and educational institutions, in formal and non-formal education. In my teaching I have created and incorporated varied and innovative methods. I have also participated in different European projects. I hold a master's degree in Audiovisual Communication and as a lifelong learner I continue to consolidate my knowledge in order to progress in my career in the field of education, especially in Digital Didactics.

My own concern about interculturalism and internationalisation, my interest in ICT, and my passion for language teaching and collaboration with other countries and cultures, bring me to consider my personal options in sharing my enthusiasm with the students at Hanken School of Economics in Vaasa, Finland. It is pleasant to give them the opportunity to use new methods, breaking walls and geographical limits with the help of technology. The attempt of broadening the knowledge base for my teaching constitutes an incentive to undertake this study.

1.1 Aim of the study and research questions

The aim of this study is to investigate intercultural competence in telecollaboration in higher education. The research questions are:

1. How do students express attitudes during intercultural telecollaboration?
2. How do students behave when interacting in intercultural telecollaboration?

The questions are related to Deardorff's Model of Intercultural Competence explained in chapter 2. The first question aims to examine the students' expressions of attitude towards the

cultures of others when collaborating online. The attitudes constitute the first step in the process of Intercultural Competence regarding Deardorff's model and are categorized in respect, openness, and curiosity and discovery. The purpose of the second question is to find different perspectives of the students' intercultural communication competence in their virtual interaction. It refers the last step in Deardorff's model and includes appropriate communication and behaviour.

In order to obtain the answer to these questions, a virtual ethnographical approach was applied. A deductive theory-driven analysis was implemented to evaluate the findings. Data were collected by observation of videos recorded during the students' online interplay. The students from the two European universities collaborated by videoconference in intercultural groups and on two tasks as part of the oral assessment of the Spanish courses in their respective universities. Being the respondents' teacher, I stay directly involved in the phenomena of this study. As e-ethnographer, my role centres on uncovering and analysing the students' relevant attitudes and behaviour of the investigated culture.

1.2 Sequence of the study

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 1 is a short summary of the study. It includes an introduction of the subject of the study, the aim of the study and the research questions, the sequence of the study, and the definitions of the main concepts and context needed for better understanding of the thesis. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework. It contains the previous research on the subject and the theory that explains and predicts the phenomena being investigated. The compendium of models puts together the foundation and pillars of the current research. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the research strategy, approach and method. The results of the research are presented in Chapter 4 and thereupon discussed in Chapter 5. A list of references retrieved for this study can be found in the last part. The thesis ends with the Appendices and Acknowledges.

1.3 Definition of terms and context

The central concepts of the thesis are telecollaboration, in a specific context mentioned as e-collaboration, and interculturalism. Telecollaboration has been defined in different ways; three terms and the current trend will be explained below. Interculturalism and multiculturalism need also to be clarified in order to consequently understand the concept intercultural competence, the core in this study.

E-collaboration or telecollaboration

Collaboration is defined as the interplay between communication, coordination, and cooperation in the Encyclopedia of E-collaboration (Kock, 2008). Communication is the conversation to negotiate and reach conclusions during an incremental process, coordination is the supervision of people, activities and resources in circumstances of collaboration, and cooperation means working together in the common workspace, by performing shared tasks and with a mutual target.

Telecollaboration has been alternatively labelled with many terms concerning different approaches, depending on the educational perspective and the pedagogical focus of the professionals (O'Dowd, 2018). The terminology comprises the following notions: e-collaboration (Kock, 2005), telecollaboration (Guth & Helm, 2010; Helm, 2013), virtual exchange (Helm, 2015), online intercultural exchange (OIE) (Thorne, O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016), collaborative online international learning (COIL) (Rubin, 2017), and eTandem (O'Rourke, 2007).

The term e-collaboration embeds a broader concept than telecollaboration. Its industry related origin is involved in Kock's definition: "[...] *collaboration using electronic technologies among different individuals to accomplish a common task*" (Kock, 2005, p.1).

Telecollaboration is described by Guth and Helm (2010, p. 14), based on Byram's definition (1997), as an "[...] *internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/national backgrounds, set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence through structured tasks*". These bilateral exchanges focus mainly on acquiring pragmatic competence or linguistic development in a second language, but also on improving intercultural communication competence across shared multicultural learning situations (Guth & Helm, 2010).

Telecollaboration has been the most referred of all terms as confirmed by the titles of the immense quantity of research carried out in the context of foreign language learning in higher education. Over time, the term "virtual exchange" appears to be positioned as covering the different terminology applied on this certain field of practice (O'Dowd, 2012).

Interculturalism vs. multiculturalism

Interculturalism differs from the term multiculturalism regarding UNESCO's guidelines.

Multicultural means culturally diverse and includes ethnical, national, linguistic, religious and socio-economic diversity whilst intercultural refers to evolving relations between different cultural groups. Interculturalism has been defined as "*the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through*

dialogue and mutual respect on a local, regional, national or international level" (Guidelines on Intercultural Education, 2006, p. 17). Accordingly, in a multicultural society, cultural groups do not need to interact with each other. Interculturalism is a more dynamic concept, that requests multiculturalism and the exchange of the different cultures with understanding and respect (Barret, 2013).

Omori (2017) notes that the terms intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication can be interchanged at times. They discern in terms of the focus of the research: intercultural communication focuses on the interaction with different cultures meanwhile cross-cultural communication focuses additionally on comparing the different cultures. This study is meant to focus on the interaction, not on the comparison of different cultures and because of that the term intercultural communication is used.

Intercultural awareness and Intercultural communicative competence

Intercultural awareness and intercultural competence are noticeable concepts across research concerning helping and educating people.

Awareness is described in the Encyclopedia of E-collaboration (Kock, 2009, p. 644) as "*the human beings' capability of perceiving the activities of the others and their own activities in the context of collaboration*". The definition adds that groupware or collaborative software generally provides elements and information to enable awareness.

Intercultural awareness is fundamental in communication between people from different cultures and comprises cultural self-awareness and awareness to others (Zhu, 2011). It needs to be supplemented with cultural knowledge. To have cultural knowledge means to be familiar with certain cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviours of another ethnic group (Adams, 1995).

Intercultural competence is "*the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes*" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 249). Many other terms are used in literature referring intercultural competence as for example cross-cultural awareness, which can cause confusion.

Regarding Coperías Aguilar (2010) the intercultural communication competence can be understood as meaning the interaction in a foreign language, therefore the competence of the participants in the exchange is also related to their language knowledge. People from different countries and languages bring their knowledge about their own country and about that of the others when they interact socially. The success of the interaction will partly depend on the establishment and continuation of human relationships based on attitudinal factors. Knowledge

and attitude are influenced by the processes of intercultural communication. (Coperías Aguilar, 2010).

Both terms intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence can nowadays be used indistinctly in communication literature (Arasaratnam, 2016).

The intercultural communicative competence can also be assumed as a crucial human aptitude to subsist in today's multicultural communication context (Tran & Seepho, 2016). Tran & Pham (2017) reiterate the importance of developing this skill aiming to become an effective intercultural communicator and fitting in the cross-cultural and globalized community.

2. Literature review

2.1 Prior research on telecollaborative and intercultural learning

The methodology of telecollaborative learning between language students from different cultural backgrounds and locations has been applied by innumerable models and approaches, considering diverse pedagogical objectives and learning contexts. Consequently, the research in the educational field in regard to acquisition and development of language and intercultural communicative competence within these telecollaborative environments is extensive.

The investigations have mainly been centred on the nomenclature of the concept telecollaboration; the different initiatives applied in the telecollaborations; the difficulties encountered by practitioners and participants in the implementation of the practices; the students' outcomes, and on the inclusion of this practice in academic programmes (O'Dowd, 2018). Nevertheless, telecollaboration continues expanding in academic terms regarding new perspectives and focus as well as in non-tandem-based projects (O'Dowd, 2016).

The following sections provide a review of previous research that is significant for this study concerning telecollaborative learning, intercultural competence and all three telecollaborative, intercultural and linguistic learning.

2.1.1 Telecollaborative learning

Literature on telecollaborative learning in diverse disciplines is expansive.

O'Dowd, in an earlier study (2006) sustains that Network-based Language Teaching (NBLT) and telecollaboration offer a powerful alternative to traditional classroom-based culture learning methods, as they allow learners to interact and learn directly from actual members of the target culture while remaining in their home environment. The students can be involved in

semi-authentic intercultural communication. They are given the opportunity of learning more about their peers' culture in a more real and inspiring way when connecting two multicultural classes by activities such as creating websites together, discussing a book or a movie or comparing their cultures (2006).

Intercultural communicative competence through telecollaboration (O'Dowd, 2011) refers to the complexity of organizing and executing telecollaborative projects. However, the researcher emphasises in this study that the research findings reviewed show the great potential that the collaboration holds for the development of intercultural communicative competence in education, after proving the rich intercultural learning both, teachers and students, experience in these practices. Secondly, O'Dowd (2011) states that telecollaboration should be understood as an essential practice in language programmes instead of just an extra activity and therefore it should be integrated into foreign language education.

In his article *Telecollaborative networks in university higher education: Overcoming barriers to integration* O'Dowd (2013) presents his findings from extensive quantitative and qualitative studies on telecollaboration in European higher education. The research identifies the difficulties found by the practitioners when organizing online intercultural exchanges at university level and the strategies to overcome them.

After his participation at the Telecollaboration in higher education conference in Dublin on April 2016, O'Dowd identified some tendencies on this field that he compiled in an article published the same year. He anticipated the proliferation of practices in higher education based on the development of students' lingua franca (mainly English), which subsequently would expand the telecollaborative partnerships and networks. In addition, he foresaw the increase of the use of videoconferencing for online intercultural interaction.

In a recent work (2018), O'Dowd clarifies the terms telecollaboration and virtual exchange and also presents an analysis of different initiatives and models of telecollaboration mainly performed across higher education, in a tandem-basis, and in the European context. He concludes the article by stating that all the varied and magnificent work performed in the field, despite challenges and problems, shares common educational goals. Goals listed by Guth & Helm (2010) as "[...] *the development of transversal skills, digital literacies, intercultural awareness and the ability to live and work together with people from other cultural backgrounds*".

In her doctoral thesis, Canto (2020, p. 3) explains telecollaboration based on O'Dowd's (2011) definition as "*the application of synchronous and asynchronous online communicate tools to bring together (classes of) language learners in geographically distant location to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative task and project*

work". By reviewing different cases of video communication and virtual worlds, Canto studied the effects of computer mediated communication through telecollaboration with native speakers on foreign learning, by considering their understanding of target cultures. Her empirical research showed that virtual collaborative exchanges endorse intercultural learning, provide opportunities to develop cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

2.1.2 Intercultural competence

As Arasaratnam (2016) explains, intercultural competence has been a subject of study since the 1960's. Researchers already acknowledged some fundamental features as flexibility, stability, curiosity, openness to other perspectives, and sensitivity in intercultural communication when adapting to a new culture. Their work on identifying and assessing the variables in acculturation² continued in the next decade. This time they centred their approaches on cross-cultural competence and effectiveness. In the 1980's, they created a special Journal (International Journal of Intercultural Relations) dedicated to ICC. The studies continued referring to the interaction of two specific cultures and from interpersonal communication extended to intercultural contexts. The research in the following decade raised many theorems about the components of ICC. Effective and appropriate communication in intercultural contexts represented the core of multiple studies. The question of competence as innate and/or learned arose and the constitution of the International Academy for Intercultural Research in 1997 meant important progress toward interdisciplinary collaboration in research (Arasaratnam, 2016.)

The labels for this subject have been very diverse due to the multiple studies. However, Deardorff proved in 2006 the consensus on ICC amongst experts and published the SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence three years later (Arasaratnam, 2016). The consensus among researchers consists of the fact that ICC refers to effectiveness, as the ability to achieve one's goals, as well as to appropriateness, i.e., to display estimated and accepted behaviour in context (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2010).

Arasaratnam and Doerfel developed a model of ICC in 2005 after studying the ICC not from one's self-perspective but from the other's perspective, encompassing this way various cultural perspectives. By an inductive approach on the participants' response, they counted five variables which contribute to ICC: "[...] *experience, listening skills, positive attitudes towards other cultures, motivation to interact with people from other cultures, and ability to empathize*

² adaptation to a different culture, usually the dominant one

or enrol in cognitive and emotional role-taking behaviour." (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2010, p. 227).

The need of measurement of ICC of the culturally diverse groups of participants in cooperation programmes prompted Asaratnam (2009) to develop a new instrument of measure. A study described the development and empirical testing of this tool by performing regression, factor and correlation analyses. The instrument should not only evaluate a person's ICC but also all participants' ICC with multiple cultural backgrounds. The promising results obtained led to future research and potential models.

A new study implemented by Arasaratnam and Banerjee (2010) investigated for the first time the relationship between sensation seeking and behaviours in intercultural communication, and also how ethnocentrism³ effects the other variables in an intercultural communicative context. Based on literature in health communication, the researchers started from the concept that sensation seeking is a personality variable associated to adventure and risk. Furthermore, sensation seekers enjoy experiences that are physiologically stimulating and related to intense emotions. They gathered data from participants' surveys and the results confirmed the positive relationship between sensation seeking and ICC. The high sensation seekers appear to have favourable attitudes toward those from other cultures and therefore motivation to search for opportunities for intercultural interaction. The relationship between ethnocentrism and ICC appeared to be negative despite the presence of the other positive variables: sensation seeking, motivation to engage in ICC and attitude towards other cultures.

The subsequent Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (IMICC) created by Arasaratnam and Banerjee generated new research. The authors investigated the factors that influence cultural competency and developed a new model, analysed in section 2.1.3. Arasaratnam and Banerjee's first model presented the following five variables that conceptualise ICC: empathy, experience, motivation to engage in intercultural communication or MTEIIC, listening ability, and attitude towards other cultures or ATOC. The most recent version of IMICC model incorporates the two previously tested variables: sensation seeking and ethnocentrism. The attitudes between the university students towards other cultures are one of the main components in this model. Although it was previously based on research only addressed in the Western context, the authors encouraged researchers to extend their study for the new model to develop. Research has already been conducted also even in other continents. (Arasaratnam, 2017).

³ belief that one's own culture is better than all others

Both, Deardorff's model of Intercultural Competence and Arasaratnam's Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (IMICC) are examined and developed in next section, building the theoretical framework of this study.

Besides the development of models for measurement, Arasaratnam's wide research on intercultural competence has contributed to the understanding of this very relevant concept that grows alongside a world-wide diversity. She evokes the fact that a great part of the theories in ICC stem from the United States and that the definition of intercultural competence as "*the ability to understand and interact with people of different cultures in authentic and positive ways*" is an occidental concept that could be furtherly studied (Arasaratnam, 2016, p. 1). The majority of experts in the subject come from developed parts of the world, hence their point of view does not represent manifold cultural views. In contemporary research, researchers need to take into consideration that it cannot be assumed that participants in a dyadic intercultural interaction come from only two distinct cultural perspectives, there might be those who are bicultural or with blended cultural identities (Arasaratnam, 2016).

The definitions and terms of intercultural competencies are numerous according to Deardorff (2009) and they depend on the language and culture. The consensus definition would be: "*communication and behaviour that is both effective and appropriate when interacting across difference*" (Deardorff, 2006, p.241).

Deardorff's last book *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles* (Routledge/UNESCO, 2020) presents a methodology for developing intercultural competence in different contexts around the world; an overview of tools for the individuals to improve their key elements (self-awareness, openness, respect, flexibility, empathy, awareness of others and cultural humility) in order to "[...] *understand, and appreciate difference, develop relationships with those across difference, engage in intercultural dialogue, and bridge societal divides*". (Deardorff, 2020, p. 1).

The opportunities for developing the intercultural competencies can be formal and non-formal, but both comprise the three main domains of learning: cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural. Consequently, they will include communication and behaviour. Deardorff's overview is based on a formal approach: story circles. Deardorff reminds that the development of intercultural competencies is a process for life, and for that reason a sole experience is not enough if the objective is to develop intercultural competencies. However, if the objective is the process itself then the development could be possible. That process' goals could include rising one's own cultural self-awareness, awareness of others, connecting respect, increase empathy and discovering similitudes with the most different. (Deardorff, 2020).

Deardorff's model of intercultural communication (2008) supported by Arasaratnam's models constitute the main theoretical base of this study.

2.1.3 Trends on telecollaboration

This section presents contemporary research and trends based on practices that relate to intercultural and linguistic competence in telecollaborative projects.

Çiftçi and Savaş (2018) investigated 17 research papers published from 2010 to 2015, related to language and intercultural learning within telecollaboration that excluded studies on tandem basis. Individual studies were synthesized into a more theoretical level. Through their qualitative meta-synthesis, they could report emerging research trends, observe patterns in telecollaborative practices and identify six main subjects studied in the investigations. The themes included research trends, the participants' view on their experiences, language and intercultural learning through telecollaboration, challenges experienced within the telecollaboration projects, and needs for more effective telecollaboration.

Within the research trends, Çiftçi and Savaş studied the technology applied and the environments designed, the contexts, countries and participants of the studies and the varied points of focus in telecollaborative language and intercultural learning. The majority of participants showed positive telecollaborative experiences, based on lively engagement with other students of the target language and from different cultures, and they admitted being willing to participate in future telecollaborative projects. (Çiftçi and Savaş, 2018).

Godwin-Jones (2019), in his study "Telecollaboration as an approach to developing intercultural communication competence.", asserts Çiftçi and Savaş (2018) and other researchers' estimation that telecollaboration should be methodically implemented in foreign language education because of its effectiveness in language acquisition and development of intercultural communicative competence. Nevertheless, other researchers consider telecollaboration ineffective when it is applied occasionally, and it can reinforce stereotypes in cultures involved. Some studies support the use of telecollaboration as an important class-based guide for development of ICC whereas others believe in the autonomous learning by accessing the multiple informal resources which are very easy to access online nowadays. This and other great advances on telecollaboration in teaching education are observed in his research, as the emerging trend of using lingua franca, predominantly English, in virtual exchanges. The capability and effectiveness of native speakers as cultural and linguistic experts in bilateral exchanges has been overestimated in previous practices. The native speakers represent the power position in these exchanges meanwhile non-native speakers remain in a more equivalent level. It appears that projects involving other foreign languages

are decreasing (O'Dowd, 2016), this trend could contribute to enforce the global position of the English language world-wide, since it is also the lingua franca in global commerce and communication, and to drop the promotion of plurilingualism and diversity. Accordingly, this should boost us, other foreign language teachers, to proliferate the practices in telecollaboration in order to contribute to the enforcement of diversity in globalization.

In the last years, the research on intercultural competence in telecollaborative projects and other virtual exchanges has significantly increased. However, not all findings accomplish the positive expectations. The article *Building Intercultural Competence Through Virtual Team Collaboration Across Global Classrooms* (Swartz, Barbosa & Crawford, 2019) describes the 6-week collaboration online between pupils in three European countries. The researchers take into account the cognitive, affective and behavioural factors on intercultural competence in their investigation. They state that intercultural competence includes ICC and intercultural sensitivity (i.e., the capability to identify differences in behaviour, perceptions and feelings in intercultural communications), that differences between cultures exist, that there are difficulties in intercultural interaction, and that collaboration can succeed when being aware of these factors. They discuss the effectivity of their project in developing the students' intercultural competence by observing not only their ICC but their intercultural sensitivity. The first one is based on the Intercultural Communication Competence scale developed by Arasaratnam (2009) and the second is analysed by using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), which focuses on the affective factor, and was developed by Chen and Starosta in 2000. ISS includes five factors: intercultural engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment and interaction attentiveness (Swartz, Barbosa & Crawford, 2019).

Despite organizational difficulties due to students' lack of commitment and the instructors' differences in expectations and deadlines, the overall response expressed appreciation of the experience. The project's outcomes appeared to be positive, but the study also showed some changes before and after the project regarding understanding, attitude and behavioural awareness, and thus a growing dislike of intercultural interaction. Changes are categorized under awareness of verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal communication; appreciation of cultural differences; ethnocentric tendencies and stereotypes plus fears, confidence, and awareness of difficulties coping other cultures.

The instructors await encouraging their students in new telecollaborations. They refer Starke-Meyerring and Andrews' (2006) emphasis in the need of enjoying despite the difficulties of collaborative practices. The motivation to embrace joy in an intercultural learning experience, although hesitation, is a prerequisite for instructors and students (2019). Investigation in future projects is suggested so as to improve the participants' awareness of cultural variances and their aptitudes in intercultural interaction (2019).

2.2 Theories and models on culture and interaction

The different theories and models reviewed in this chapter basically focus on culture and interaction, i.e. dimensions of culture, intercultural competence and awareness, as well as communication in computer-supported workspaces.

To enter in context, or quite literally “to break the ice”, it is interesting to review the iceberg analogy of culture developed by Hall (1959, 1976). This metaphor visualises that few aspects of culture stand explicit, are observable and easy to identify as the tip of an iceberg. This part can be felt by the senses and includes art, language, cooking, dancing, folk dresses, and other elements commonly associated with culture. The superficial part formed by behaviour and language is the visible summit, the formal level. By contrast, beneath the surface of the sea where the iceberg floats, other manifestations of culture stay implicit, hardly revealed and difficult to be observed but they cannot be ignored since they affect the behaviour that is visible above the water. Attitudes, values, beliefs, communication style, perception, concept of time, personal space, body language, cultural approach to interpersonal relationships, and social norms are aspects corresponding to a deeper part. The real fundamentals are submerged in the human subconscious, the informal level. (Hall, 1959.) He points out that culture is communication and counterwise communication is culture. By trying to summarize the meaning and inseparable connection of these two concepts he explains that each culture influences the communication based on the cultural behaviours and it is culture itself that communicates. The behaviours are apparent and when entering a new culture, the original aspects that dictate those behaviours will be revealed. The cultural behaviours are communication systems that are developed within different groups in interaction not just by the communication itself. The expressive forms of communication are considered a reflection of the culture that originated them. He sees culture as a structured system of codes, a space of human interaction where communication takes place. (1976).

2.2.1 Dimensions of culture, an international view on interculturalism

In UNESCO's Guidelines on Intercultural Education, interculturalism is defined as the presence and engagement of different cultures, as well as the opportunity of generating common cultural expressions in communication and mutual respect on local, regional, global, or international basis. Interculturalism requests multiculturalism and the exchange of the different cultures with understanding and respect. (2013).

The definitions of culture are countless inasmuch as perceived from different views depending on the discipline and its nature (Nadeem, Mohammed & Dalib, 2017).

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) has been used mainly to understand cross-cultural differences in business, but it also applies to education.

The following graphic shows the six dimensions of culture:

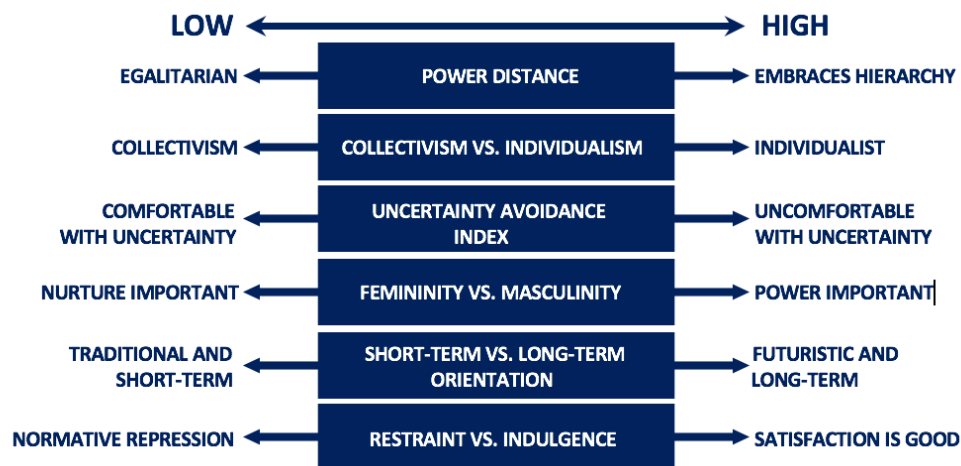


Figure 1. Hofstede's six categories that define culture. (Adapted from CFI Education Inc., 2015).

Taking into account Hofstede's second dimension, Finland is characterised as a quite individualist culture with 63 points out of 100 and the Netherlands hold an even higher score of 80. Spain, on the other hand, grades with only 51 points. In individualist societies as the Finnish and the Dutch, people prioritise their own interests over that of the group. Communication may be more open and direct. The word "I" predominates over "we". Individual choices and decisions are expected to be taken and personal opinions may be asked for. People may take individual initiatives in certain situations. *"In individualist societies, offence causes guilt and a loss of self-esteem"* (Hofstede Insights, 2019). This dimension defines the level at which individuals integrate into different societies and their sense of belonging to the group (Hofstede, 2011).

Nowadays society is turning increasingly global and governments are promoting international cooperation. Geert Hofstede (2015) states:

For gaining an international perspective we have to become unconscious of our own culture, admit the variety of cultures, when we are meeting people from elsewhere. There is no substitute for personal international experience. In addition, we can acquire knowledge about differences in national cultures in the present world, as referred in research. (1:05)

Hofstede's assumption that all individuals in a nation have the same culture and his definition of culture based on statistics have been repetitively criticized. On the other hand, other studies consider the adequacy of his research and methodology (Mc Sweeney, 2002).

2.2.2 Intercultural communicative competence

Intercultural competence “[...] typically describes one’s effective and appropriate engagement with cultural differences”, viz., it encompasses effective and appropriate communication. Competence itself is defined, within an occidental sense, as the “ability to understand and interact with people of different cultures in authentic and positive ways”. Effectiveness includes an individualistic stress since it refers to the success in achieving one’s purposes in a communication exchange, i.e., from one self’s perspective, whilst appropriateness has a contextual angle as it is seen also from other person’s point of view (Arasaratnam, 2016, p. 1). Other individual-centred variables are e.g. mindfulness, self- and other awareness, listening skills, positive attitude toward other cultures, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, language skills, adaptability, cultural knowledge, ethnocentrism, and sensation seeking. Contextual variables are *inter alia* common goals, incentives, perceptions of equality and perceptions of agency⁴. Arasaratnam (2016) undergirds that the great part of research, models and theories on intercultural competence have focused on the individual. There are many important theories and models, but few well-formed and widely tested. No leading one at the moment.

Hereby I analyse chronologically some relevant models for the current study: Byram’s model (1997), Deardorff’s models (2004, 2008), Arasaratnam and Doerfel’s model (2005) and Arasaratnam and Banerjee’s developed model (2011). The observation and data collection for this study will be predominantly based on Deardorff’s model (2008) and particularly supported by Asaratnam’s (2011), hence these are more extensively discussed below.

According to Byram (1997) the intercultural competence refers to the ability of foreign language learners to interact with people from other countries and cultures. The intercultural communicative competence embraces sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, socio-cultural and social competence, in addition to linguistic skills. A person improving the intercultural communicative competence can communicate and interact with others in their lingua franca. They will respect each other and their different cultures, being willing to continue developing their skills in communication (Byram, 1997).

Byram’s model (1997, p. 73) for developing intercultural communicative competence includes totally five elements or “savoirs” to be acquired or developed by the learner: “savoir être” or attitudes (showing curiosity and openness); “savoirs” or knowledge of social groups and of social processes of interaction; “savoir comprendre” or skills of interpreting and relating (the ability to interpret documents or events from other cultures and relate it to one’s own); “savoir apprendre/ faire” or skills of discovery and interaction (ability of acquiring and operating new

⁴ Sense of agency is defined as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.

knowledge of a culture and cultural practices in interaction) and “savoir s’engager” or critical cultural awareness/political education (ability to evaluate critically perspectives, practices and products in other cultures and countries as in one’s own). These elements focus mainly on culture and the relations between cultures, i.e., interculturality that means interaction which, in turn, is communication, languages.

Deardorff’s first model of intercultural competence was created in 2004. It complements Byram’s model and emphasises the need to improve self-awareness, openness, and transformation (2006). The figure below illustrates the next model developed two years later.

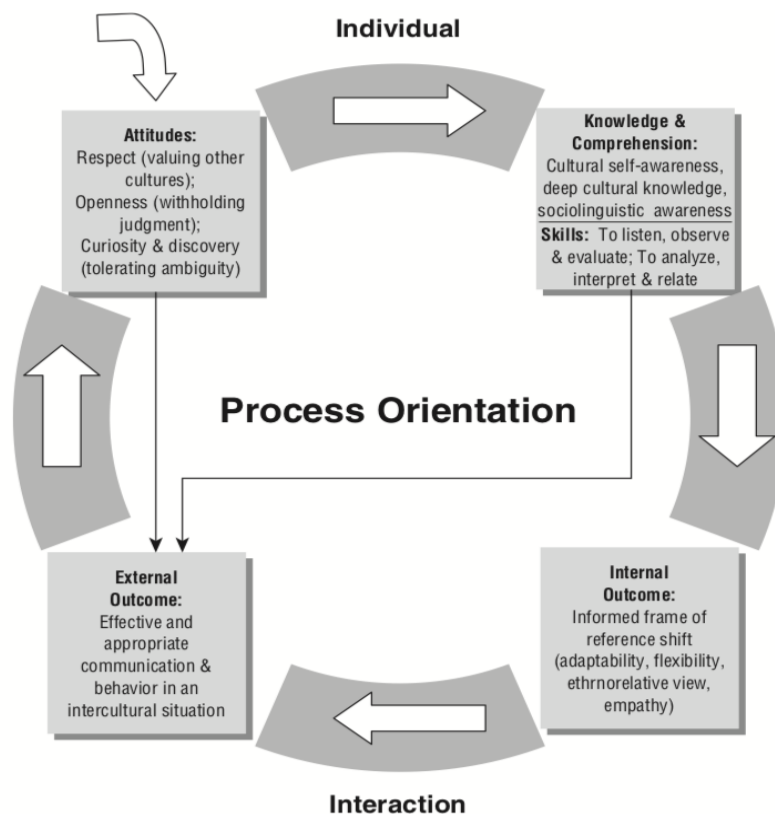


Figure 2. Caption. Deardorff’s Model of Intercultural Competence. (Deardorff, 2009).

According to this later model of Deardorff (2009), the following areas are important parts of intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge and comprehension (cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness), skills (to listen, observe & evaluate; to analyse, interpret & relate) and outcomes.

Deardorff suggests that one starts with attitudes, then move from individual level (attitudes) to interaction level (outcomes).

Attitudes (corresponding to Byram’s “savoir être”) include the respect for the cultures of others (valuing cultures), openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures (tolerating ambiguity) thus curiosity and discovery (withholding judgement). Deardorff (2009)

explains that openness and curiosity imply a disposition for risking to move out of the comfort zone. She refers to LeBaron and Pillow (2006) who consider that openness gives the possibility to see from different perspectives and curiosity sets the basis for creative ways to change differences into possibilities. Durden et al. (2016) suggest a way of developing cultural competence in terms of curiosity and discovery by asking open-minded, open-ended questions and for more information to the members of a cultural group. Additionally, by trying to detect verbal and nonverbal actions that can be less appropriate in certain cultures.

Deardorff (2006) emphasizes in her model the importance of attitudes as openness, respect, and curiosity and discovery as starting point, requisite and the most critical elements in the process. This model demonstrates that the process for development and improvement of intercultural competence is continual, we continue to attain competence with new relationships, and consequently we may not never achieve final intercultural competence.

As also illustrated in the model, it moves from the individual level to the interactive cultural level coming to outcomes, differentiated by internal and external.

The internal outcome includes adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view and empathy. An individual can achieve a modicum of external results without having fully achieved a shift in the frame of reference. Notwithstanding it is not required, it enhances the external outcome of intercultural competence, which she describes as observable. (Deardorff, 2006).

The step called "Knowledge and Comprehension" includes cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness. Intercultural awareness is essential in communication between people from different cultures. It involves both the awareness of one's own culture and the awareness of another culture (Zhu, 2011).

The external (observable) outcome covers effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in an intercultural situation. Effectiveness and appropriateness are directly related to language fluency, cultural sensibility and attachment to cultural norms of a person (Deardorff, 2009). The importance and the role of the language in intercultural competence have a direct impact on international education and need further research in Deardorff's opinion (2006).

Deardorff states that the more components acquired and developed from her model, the bigger intercultural competence results as an external outcome. However, she also sustains that it is not limited to those components included in the model (Deardorff, 2006).

According to Durden et al. (2016, p. 5) "*Displaying the cultural competency behaviours of active listening, empathy, and effective engagement can help us to create a welcoming environment and establish the appreciation of similarities and differences among cultures*".

In 2005 Asaratnam and Doerfel carried out a study in order to develop a culture-general model of ICC not only focused on West. The perspective from both the communicator as well as from the other person with whom she/he communicates in a specific interaction should be considered in order to best evaluate if they behaved in a socially expected and accepted manner. For this reason, both students from Utrecht University and from Hanken School of Economics in Vaasa interacting online will be observed for the current study.

After collecting qualitative data from participants representing different cultural backgrounds, Arasaratnam and Doerfel's findings showed that an intercultural competent communicator in a particular intercultural exchange, possesses the identified five qualities that allow him/her being also competent in other exchanges. The qualities were represented by the model's variables: empathy or the capacity to relate to another person at a cognitive and emotional level; experience or prior involvement in intercultural communication; motivation to interact with people from other cultures; global attitude toward other cultures, and listening ability, to be a good listener in a conversation. (2010, 2005). According to Nadeem, Mohammed and Dalib (2017, p. 15), empathy is described by Arasaratnam (2004) as "[...] *an individual's ability to engage in cognitive and emotional role taking and to adapt his or her behaviour appropriately to the situation*". Intercultural experience is understood as a former acquaintance of other cultures and involvement in intercultural communication. This variable was substituted by sensation seeking in the following research, since a person with no previous experience as intercultural communicator could still be perceived as competent (Arasaratnam, Banerjee and Dembek, 2010).

Motivation, defined as the ambition to participate in intercultural interactions in order to learn and understand other cultures, was measured using a 7-item motivation scale (Arasaratnam, 2006). Listening ability or interaction involvement is one person's cognitive and behavioural engagement in communication by listening the other communicator. ATOC or global attitude is a positive, non-ethnocentric attitude towards people from new cultures. (Arasaratnam et al., 2010).

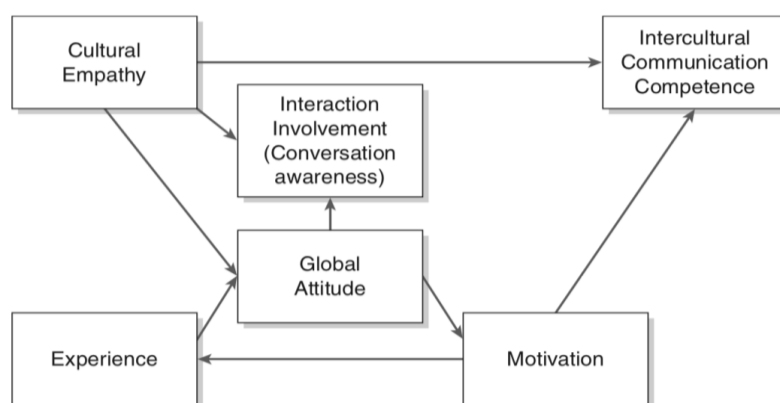


Figure 3. Caption. Arasaratnam's Model of Intercultural Competence (Arasaratnam, 2008).

They also proved that intercultural competence combines one's personal abilities and contextual variables. Supported by the findings of their study, a first model was developed and in turn, a new instrument of ICC was generated.

The Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (IMICC) is based on Deardorff's theory and on the results of Arasaratnam and co-authors' previous studies in 2006, 2007 and 2010. The model in 2011 presented the developed five variables that conceptualise ICC: empathy, experience, MTEIIC (motivation to engage in intercultural communication), listening ability, and ATOC (attitude towards other cultures). Additionally, sensation seeking, and ethnocentrism were incorporated. (Nadeem, Rosli & Dalib, 2020). Ethnocentrism, the conviction that one's cultural perspective is the right one, goes through three phases: denial, progression and minimization. This last stage is achieved after acceptance of one's own culture as a valid one within many other, adaption in behaviour to adapt to the other culture and assimilation of other global perspective into one's own sense of identity (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). Sensation seeking has been associated to dangerous activities or games, never to hazardous activities but to public activities with intercultural individuals. This variable was connected with individuals from new cultural backgrounds and also to empathy. From an international higher education perspective this indicates that high sensation-seekers are predisposed to participate in intercultural contact-seeking behaviour such as study-abroad programmes, for example (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017).

Arasaratnam-Smith (2017) in her overview of ICC models includes Fantini's framework (2006) for assessing intercultural competence in case studies. The frame identifies four dimensions (knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness) and categorizes eight qualities of which patience, flexibility, suspended judgement, tolerance for ambiguity and humour are not included in other models.

Intercultural behaviour: empathy and awareness

In order to develop a model for guiding training and research cross-cultural programs, Brisnis, Landis and Brandt (1983, pp. 3-8) found necessary to firstly conceptualize the term intercultural behaviour regarding the distal effects⁵ of the actions. They defined intercultural behaviour as an "*action that produces a significant change in the judgements of the actor's social or skill competence by people from another cultural background*". Behaviours can be different as the cultures of the actors change. They took a psychological perspective to look at behaviour as the viewpoint of the person behaving and the other people with whom that person is interacting.

⁵ distal effect = any influence that particular responses of an organism may have on the environment
<https://dictionary.apa.org/distal-effect>

As distal variables Brisnis et al. (1983) considered characteristics and thought processes that the person brings to the intercultural action. These functional intercultural skills are: past experiences with persons of the host culture, perceived role and norm differences, anxiety that results from intercultural behaviour (regarding it as a personal characteristic or a state evoking in a particular situation), increased ability of working together when having a common assignment and a consequent centralized goal, a broad perceptual and cognitive set to view the world, and the ability to take another's point of view to "become" the other.

The thought processes refer to people's way of thinking about their inputs and judgments regarding their own and the others' behaviour as stereotyping and the imposition of one's opinion. People should be prepared for adjustments in intercultural interactions and training can help it. If the training includes information about the behaviour of the others it will be easier to explain the behaviour from the others' point of view. Stereotypes are concerned with people but not individually. People group features and statements are classified into categories to respond to them as a form of generalization, hiding individual differences. Stereotypes give people information and help to organize thinking. They can be useful, but they can also be dangerous if they include false descriptions for individuals being inappropriate to the category, which would require great effort and time to overcome the conception. Training cannot stop stereotyping but can present the nature of the stereotypes and their mistakes. Consequently, people can search for further and better information than the stereotype describes. (Brisnis et al., 1983).

Zhu (2011) considers stereotypes being one obstacle that can be found in the process of cultivating intercultural empathy. To be empathetic, understanding others by entering their world or "standing in somebody else's shoes" is necessary in intercultural communication in addition to the understanding of cultural awareness.

As already mentioned in the first section of this study, cultural awareness alludes to the sensitivity and understanding of another cultural group, where awareness refers to the development of openness and flexibility for people in relation to others. Cultural awareness needs to be supplemented with cultural knowledge, i.e., to be familiar with certain cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviours of another ethnic group (Adams, 1995).

Intercultural awareness is essential in communication between people from different cultures. It involves both the awareness of one's own culture and the awareness of another culture. Lack of intercultural awareness can easily lead to misinterpretation of the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the people interacting. A person can understand and interpret interplay in an appropriate way in his/her culture but being inappropriate in the others', which can result in

misunderstandings in the communication. Language students in cross-cultural situations should try to cultivate empathetic perceptions and principles in foreign language learning in order to effectively improve their communicative competence. Only the understanding of cultural awareness is not sufficient, they need to be empathetic. (Zhu, 2011).

Empathy's role in the context of international higher education has widely studied after being considered a key component in development of intercultural competence. It can be demonstrated by several abilities as to connect emotionally with others, showing compassion, to listen actively and mindfully and having different perspectives of situations. At its first stage empathy is passive and helps to simply recognize the other as a human being, the second stage allows a spontaneous change from just noticing a global similarity to be inside the other, the third involves consideration and communication and the last stage ethical responsibility. (Calloway-Thomas, Arasaratnam-Smith and Deardorff, 2017).

Zhu (2011) asserts that in foreign language education and intercultural communication, empathy is called intercultural empathy and he defines it as "*placing himself into the cultural background of the target language and being able to effectively communicate his understanding of that world*". (2011, p. 116-117). It is not about mixing cultures. It consists of projecting one's cultural frame of reference in another culture without leaving one's own perspective, by keeping the native cultural identity and being aware of other identities of people with different cultural background.

Intercultural empathy assures effective intercultural communication since empathy brings one person to experience the other person's feelings and behaviour, reflect on them and compare them with one's own. Cultural empathy is not sympathy or identification with an explicit culture, but a rational understanding and acceptance of different cultural values and beliefs. It is not necessary to agree with different cultural values and beliefs to understand them; nor to agree with the different cultures so they become similar and develop empathy. (Zhu, 2011).

In addition to stereotypes, Zhu (2011) reviews two other obstacles that can be found in the process of cultivating intercultural empathy: prejudices and lack of cultural sensitivity. Stereotypes should not be used to describe individual behaviour, only as the behavioural norm for the group. However, they influence our assumptions on how the other people relate to us and to others, which do not let us see other similarities. Prejudices are a premature judgement or a negative attitude towards others. They are not based on objective facts, but usually on stereotypes. Cultural sensitivity refers to the skill of being aware that cultural differences and similarities exist and of respecting other cultures.

Zhu ratifies that many factors interfere in the achievement of a good intercultural communication. Intercultural communication can be enhanced by cultural empathy while it can

be negatively affected by the three factors named above. In order to develop empathy and reach effective communication, he suggests being persistent in keeping open communication, perceptive to dissimilarities in other people’s way of communicating (words, voice and body language) and honest and ready to take risks. As well as, not to have prejudgments, to be interested in other cultures, to adapt to other’s behaviour and norms plus to be open, compassionate and respectful amongst other cultures. (2011).

2.2.4 Virtual interaction and communication

The CEFR proposes as methodology options for teaching a foreign language the use of audiovisual media in its option f): “[...] *as interactive work method, through the electronic contact with other schools, other classrooms and even with other students*”. Concerning the interaction and communication of the Spanish students, the “*Common European Framework for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*” compiled by the Council for Cultural Cooperation, Education Committee in Language Policy Division in Strasbourg presents different characteristics scaled after the level (2020, p. 72). The characteristics of students at A2 level in “Overall spoken interaction” and particularly in “Conversation” are listed below in figure 4.

A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can establish social contact (e.g. greetings and farewells, introductions, giving thanks). Can generally understand clear, standard language on familiar matters directed at them, provided they can ask for repetition or reformulation from time to time. Can participate in short conversations in routine contexts on topics of interest. Can express how they feel in simple terms, and express thanks. Can ask for a favour (e.g. to borrow something), can offer a favour, and can respond if someone asks them to do a favour for them.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of their own accord, though they can be made to understand if the interlocutor will take the trouble. Can use simple, everyday, polite forms of greeting and address. Can converse in simple language with peers, colleagues or members of a host family, asking questions and understanding answers relating to most routine matters. Can make and respond to invitations, suggestions and apologies. Can express how they are feeling, using very basic stock expressions. Can state what they like and dislike.

Figure 4. Caption. CEFR. Overall spoken interaction, Conversation. (Council of Europe, 2020).

Regarding online interaction, under the division “goal-oriented online transactions and collaboration”, the CEFR states that a student at A2 level “*can interact online with a supportive partner in a simple collaborative task, responding to basic instructions and seeking clarification*”. Plus, considering online conversation and discussion, a Spanish student at A2 level can manage simple exchanges online with provided enough time. In another scale called

“Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers” it is shortly stated that a student with A2 level can indicate when he/she is following. (2020, pp. 85-86, 88).

Telecollaboration takes place in a computer-supported workspace, using a computer mediated communication. A brief appreciation on how communication fosters and mediates in group work online will be useful for a better understanding of the telecollaboration.

The Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is defined as a process whereby electronic messages between senders and receivers are transmitted in a synchronous (e.g., videoconference) and/or asynchronous mode (e.g., chat and messenger tools). In synchronous mode the information is transmitted continuously as it is generated, whilst in asynchronous communication the interlocutors have more time to reflect before action (Fuks, Raposo, Gerosa, Pimental & Lucena, 2008, p. 637). By CMC people can communicate and collaborate without limitations of time and space. CMC technologies are tools that facilitate the communication between group members. It is important to know how people collaborate more effectively using these technologies by distance. (Zakaria, 2008).

The Encyclopedia of E-collaboration (2009) presents Kock’s 3C Collaboration Model, a model for the analysis, representation, and development of collaborative software by means of the interplay between the 3Cs: communication, coordination, and cooperation.

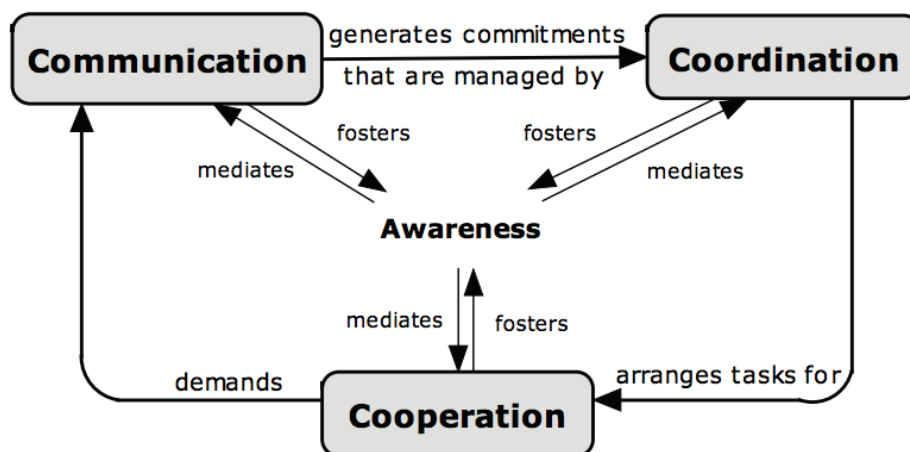


Figure 5. Caption. Kock’s 3C collaboration model instantiated for group work. (Kock, 2008).

On a general term, the Encyclopedia of E-collaboration defines awareness as the human’s ability to perceive the other’s activities and one’s own in a collaborative context. Groupware or collaborative software generally provides elements and information to enable awareness in the interplay (Kock, 2008). The awareness support in a computer-supported workspace is less effective due to the limitation of means that allow sensory organs to perceive information. On the other hand, and when filtering irrelevant information, this also leads to a reduction of distractions that disturb face-to-face collaboration (Baker, Greenberg and Gutwin, 2001).

2.3 Summary of the theoretical framework

Hofstede defines six dimensions of culture in his cultural dimensions' theory (1980) as well as the level at which individuals integrate into different societies and their sense of belonging to the group. Despite the critics against the validity of this theory, it has been applied internationally and confirmed that it can support scholars and practitioners to distinguish between different national cultures and their influence. Taking also into account his statement about the continuously increasing globalization of our societies, I consider this theory useful when observing the students interacting in multicultural groups. It enables my task of e-ethnographer to see some hardly revealed and rare observable parts as per Hall's iceberg analogy of culture (1976), in the respondents. Moreover, it can benefit in better understanding their behaviour and attitudes towards other cultures during their telecollaboration when perceiving more sharply some dimensions of their own cultures.

In my study I aim to examine the students' behaviour which stays in the visible part of the iceberg and also their expressions of attitudes, which correspond to a deeper part and are difficult to observe regarding Hall's analogy. However, I intend to see the findings in this part as a deeper culture and since they are related to the behaviour. In order to facilitate my observation, I centre it on the three specific attitudes: respect, openness and curiosity and discovery, already categorised, and for that considered observable, in Deardorff's model of Intercultural competence as explained later in section 2.2.2.

As Arasaratnam corroborates, of the numerous important theories and models on intercultural competence few are considered completed and adequately tested. All five models reviewed in the section "Theories and Models on culture and interaction" apport valuable information about the fundamental variables conceptualizing intercultural competence and some have been applied for cultural competence assessment. The observation and data collection for this study will be predominantly based on Deardorff's model (2008) and particularly supported by Asaratnam's model of intercultural competence (2011) since this is a latest model, it refers more specifically to communication and it includes other current variables. The students' changes or degree in intercultural communicative competence are not measured in this investigation. The study aims to obtain an appreciation of the attitudinal and behavioural aspects of the students in their intercultural communication when interplaying on a virtual space.

Both, the students from Utrecht University and from Hanken were observed when interacting online for the current study according to Asaratnam and Doerfel's study (2005). The researchers stated that both perspectives from the communicator and from the receptor of the

communication in a specific interaction should be considered in order to best evaluate whether they behaved in a socially expected and accepted manner.

In order to study the respondents' intercultural communicative competence during their e-collaboration, two parts in Deardorff's model will be examined: attitudes and external outcome. Attitudes are considered by many scholars, as well as by its author, an essential component and starting point in the process of fostering intercultural competence. Attitudes apply to the individual level whilst external outcome concerns the interaction level. This is consistent with Arasaratnam and Doerfel's (2005) conception of intercultural competence of one's personal abilities and contextual variables. Attitudes between the university students towards other cultures constitute also one of the main components in Asaratnam and Banerjee's model. In my observation, the focus was placed on respect for the cultures of others, openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures, and curiosity and discovery, referring to the attitudes and in order to find the answer to the first research question: *How do students express their attitudes during intercultural telecollaboration?*

Deardorff sustains that an individual's external results can be observable without having fully achieved a shift in the frame of reference, that is "Internal outcomes" or "Knowledge and comprehension". The observation considered the "External outcome", and specifically "Appropriate communication and appropriate behaviour". Hall (1979) considers communication connected to behaviour, that culture influences the communication based on the cultural behaviours and that it is culture itself that communicates. These two united aspects will help to find the answer to the second research question: *How do students behave when interacting in intercultural telecollaboration?*

The consensus definition of ICC, as well as Deardorff's model, compasses appropriateness and effectiveness. Appropriateness can be seen from another person's point of view and as expected and accepted behaviour in relation to cultural sensibility and cultural norms, meanwhile effectiveness refers to an individual's skill to achieve his/her own purposes and from his/her own perspective (Arasaratnam, 2016; Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2010). Since the students' purposes are not investigated in this study, the effectiveness will not be considered either.

Deardorff additionally states that the more components acquired and developed from her model, the bigger intercultural competence results as an external outcome. Nevertheless, she also sustains that it is not limited to those components included in the model. (Deardorff, 2006). According to this, any other relevant ability observed as a pattern in the collaborative practice will also be presented as a finding of the research.

Other models and theories presented will support the identification of other possible variables in the communicators' engagement to other cultures, which also contribute to their intercultural competence.

The participants in this virtual exchange may develop and become aware of their intercultural competence through their interaction in a computer-supported workspace. This aspect can be expressed for example when/if they are persistent in keeping open communication since they need to perform a conducted task; when/if they perceive dissimilarities in other people's way of communicating (words, voice and body language) and are honest and ready to take risks. It can be challenging to uncover this aspect that includes both, the respondents' cultural self-awareness and their awareness to others with only a one single observation and to study uniquely awareness is not the purpose of this study so, despite its essential role in intercultural communication, it will not be examined in the observation.

3. The method

The empiric part of this study is based on qualitative research using the methodology of virtual ethnography. Data was collected through non-participant semi-structured observation when the students collaborate online. Ethical issues are addressed before the start of the study.

Haverinen (2015) points out that ethnography can be used both as a research method and as an approach for analysis of qualitative data. She quotes Boellstroff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor (2012, p. 6) when describing ethnography as a “[...] *flexible, responsive methodology, sensitive to emergent phenomena and emergent research questions*”.

In this study I examine the students' intercultural competence through telecollaboration where the social interaction is researched by ethnographical approach and method, in order to answer the research questions:

1. How do students express attitudes during intercultural telecollaboration?
2. How do students behave when interacting in intercultural telecollaboration?

Ethnographic observation is the method to be employed for data collection since it helps to uncover the variables that conceptualise intercultural competence phenomena and allows the researcher to interpret the students' action in a social situation online.

3.1 E-ethnography as approach in a qualitative study

E-ethnography, also known with the prefixes internet, cyber-, digital, virtual, electronic, and

online before the term ethnography, will be pursued as research approach in the present study. The origin, development, and use of the discipline are described below.

Ethnography

Ethnography enables the researcher to describe, explain and form interpretations and views of human action in social contexts and will provide an overall understanding and description of the concrete phenomenon to be studied (Genzük, 2003).

Up until the 1800s, anthropologists simply conducted their research from their homes, reading stories and information written or collected by missionaries and other travellers. Later, in the mid- 1900s, they needed to travel to a distant location to be able to observe and analyse different cultural behaviours in field. Then they transcribed field notes and interviews and draught sketches by hand, took photos and used their body and mind to analyse people's behaviour. Today's ethnographers can use their computers or other devises, anywhere with internet connection and instantly enter the digital environment to observe and research people's behaviour, interactions and cultures. Helped by technological tools, programmes and apps, ethnographers can collect and analyse digitalised data in form of pictures, notes, recorded audios and videos, both online and offline. Haverinen (2015, p. 79) summarizes the situation as follows: "*They use technology to study the use of technology in a world of networked relationships mediated by the internet*". In this study I observed the students' videos asynchronously, that is not at the same time as when the students interacted during their telecollaboration but afterwards.

Anthropologists have become increasingly interested in the combination of ethnography and internet to analyse networked lives and relationships, intending to understand cultures online and offline. The internet is a wide compendium of technologies and applications with unlimited possibilities, a network of interlinked computers connecting people globally, and a provider of information, tools, and environments for research. Haverinen (2015, p. 82) summarizes: "[...] *what it embeds and mediates are the experiences, emotions, knowledge, visual imagery and text that formulate our world and how we understand it.*"

E-ethnography

The concept e-ethnography has developed since the early 1990s and the terms to describe it have changed following its progress. First, internet technology was mainly based on text, therefore the researchers focused on the analysis of text-based virtual domains and collaborative software. Later, they concerned the creation of communities and the distribution of the related information in this new type of media. The terms cyberspace, cyborgs and cyber culture appeared in this phase.

Towards the end of the 1990s, when the private use of internet turned into more commercial and popular (used by the masses), ethnography tried to generate consciousness about the rising use of internet and studies began focusing on users. Later, during the first years of the new millennium, the prefix digital budded and ethnography started focusing more on the material and on offline environments, whereas the term virtual ethnography is centred around researching phenomena and cultures in online environments. The concept virtual has also been understood as non-real and is nowadays related to online gaming environments and shared worlds with imagined people and spaces. Murthy (2011) defines digital ethnography as ethnography mediated by digital technologies.

The ethnographic site, i.e. the field for the ethnographic approach or where the internet can be studied ethnographically, can vary. Depending on the research questions and settings of the ethnographers, the focus can be on online, offline or both views. It can also be in a distant location or in situ regarding geographical terms. Haverinen (2015) refers to Marcus (2014) staying that is not relevant where the ethnographic research takes place but where its context is. The current research scoped what happened when the respondents e-collaborate in intercultural groups. I, as the researcher, observed their online interaction but I did not participate in the groups' sessions.

E-ethnography offers the possibility of combining both the digital and the analogue, the online and the offline, as well as provide and share information. Although ethnographic research has traditionally been followed by a qualitative analysis, nowadays ethnographers can choose to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from the internet.

After comparing qualitative research to quantitative studies, Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012) emphasise some key ideas: qualitative research places more emphasis on the study of phenomena from an insider perspective, i.e. the researchers immerse themselves in the phenomena they study; it uses interpretive frameworks or methodologies and it needs to be open to change during investigations. This means that qualitative researchers should not only plan a rigorous research strategy, but they should be sensitive to changing contexts and situations where the research takes place. Qualitative research should be conducted strategically, with flexibility and in context (Pekkola, 2014). Regarding Meinefeld (2004) the qualitative research is much more open and emergent than other approaches and the researcher effects the research (Cohen et al., 2007).

As the researcher of this study, I am not independent from the phenomena of the study when being the respondents' teacher; the study conducts e-ethnography, an interpretative methodology, and it can be affected by variations during the process of investigation.

Accordingly, a qualitative analysis of the data obtained is an appropriate implementation for studying the students' competence of the cultural exchange in their telecollaboration.

3.2 Observation as method for data collection

The ethnographical research may include language and culture learning, study of a particular field or domain and a combination of historical, observational, and interview methods (Genzuk, 2003). The method for data collection in the current study was ethnographical observation.

The activity of a person or a group online can be recorded with different applications for later observation and analysis of their use of internet (Haverinen, 2015). The data was collected by recording the videoconferencing in Jitsi meet (or Skype) and saving the videos in Dropbox. Semi-structured observation of the videos selected was conducted for the ensuing analysis.

In observations respondents are acting naturally which minimises the possibilities for wrong or made-up statements, whereas in questionnaires the validity of the respondents' attitude and their descriptions on their own behaviour can be very doubtful. The difference between what it is said and what it is done can become a problem. The time when the methods are undertaken has also a significance on the research (Bryman, 2018). By observation, the researcher gets the opportunity to collect data in social situations that are taking place naturally and in immediate location and time. For this reason, this mode of research permits to gather more valid and authentic data than others (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). In order for not to miss important information in my research when the students interact online, they were told to record the whole videoconference and not only the part when they do the tasks, no matter which language they use then.

Structured observation refers to direct observation of the human behaviour helped by a previously categorized register based on theory. The structured or systematic observation has not been popular among many researchers, it has mainly been used for classroom research (Bryman, 2018), mostly used with infants and young children. The characteristics of each behaviour need to be precisely defined so the researchers agree on the categories and can check the frequency when the categories occur under analysis (Dictionary.apa.org, 2020). On the other hand, unstructured observation does not require tables with categorisation of the behavioural aspects to be studied. Instead, it aims to note the participants behaviour and giving a narrative description of it. It is usually associated with non-participant observation (Bryman, 2018). Semi-structured observation has a schedule of questions but will collect data to clarify them in a less precisely, predetermined or systematic manner (Cohen et al., 2007). In both structured and unstructured observation, the researcher usually is close to the phenomenon

of the study but not part of the social action. Non-participant observation refers to a situation which the observer is not attending. (Bryman, 2018).

Semi-unstructured observation was used for collecting data in this study because I was not participant in the situation to be observed and I used a semi-structure template and not a precisely categorized table for collecting observational data (see Appendix C, Template 1 and 2). As observer I was close to the situation to be observed due to the fact that I am the teacher of the students in Vaasa.

3.3 Settings for the study

In August 2019, the Director of the Centre for Language and Business Communication at Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki gave his approval for the telecollaboration project with a European University, within the Spanish language teaching. Following that, my search for a European University that would be interested in cooperation started immediately thereafter. I had an interest in a northern European language context, preferably bi- or multilingual, to increase linguistic and cultural diversity within my research setting. Furthermore, I had prior familiarity with Dutch culture. Thus, I tried to find contacts in the Netherlands. The first step consisted of taking contact with some Spanish teachers at different Dutch universities via LinkedIn. Still waiting for answers, I took an alternative approach via Google search which gave, among the first results, information about the Spanish University teacher at Utrecht University who quickly and happily approved my proposal. She is an Assistant Professor and coordinator of the Spanish courses at the University of Utrecht and holds a doctorate in Telecollaboration backed by a vast experience in this field at higher education.

The courses offered by the Centre for Languages and Business Communication emphasise business and academic context as well as intercultural communication. The university students at Hanken School of Economics, Vaasa Campus take courses in the two national languages Swedish and Finnish (6 + 6 ECTS) and at the minimum in two foreign languages (6 + 6 ECTS) at Bachelor level or at least 5 ECTS at Master level. Thus far, Hanken offers only two Spanish courses (i.e. Español 1A and Español 1B) in Vaasa. The first one was held during the autumn term and the second during spring term 2020. The courses grant 3 ECTS each. The respondents of this study form a group of 20 students of Economics, participating in Español 1B at Hanken, plus 42 students at Utrecht University, attending bachelor or master's degrees

in different disciplines and studying Spanish as an optative subject. Both groups aiming a target level of A2⁶.

On the basis of my teaching experience, I would characterise the group of students in this study as a quite typical beginner's group at Hanken, i.e. most of them in their first year at the University.

In this group dynamics were functional, and they acted coherently as a group. My contact and confidence in them were good as usual. There were talkative, social and open students but also some more quiet and introvert students. They were happy with the course and had been motivated until March when they start showing spring fatigue and disillusion. The group had never been engaged in a virtual exchange earlier. When I told them about this project, they started asking curiously about it, about my study as well as about the Netherlands and the Dutch culture. I even discussed Hofstede's dimensions of culture with them and some of them got very interested in the subject.

The students at the Dutch and Finnish universities were assigned to intercultural groups of three to four persons (i.e. one or two Finnish and two or three Dutch). They collaborated on two tasks as part of an oral assignment in both universities which accounted for 30% of the final grade for the students of Spanish at Hanken. The tasks were originally prepared by the coordinator of the Spanish courses at Utrecht University and we slightly modified them together.

The students in Finland working in pairs had to perform these two tasks twice, since the total number of the participants in Finland was half of the participants in the Netherlands. The groups were formed two weeks before the project started.

Both the culture and the students' personalities were reflected on their attitude about meeting and working with new people. Regarding this, six students at Hanken freely chose to cooperate individually and with two other students from Utrecht University and the rest 14 preferred to work in pairs and with 2-3 different students from the peer university. These ones had to repeat the same tasks twice so the two students totally worked with 4-6 peer students.

The project was executed during the weeks 11 and 12 (9th to 22nd March 2020), with the implementation of a task per week. The project coincided with the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Finland. The students had already started their telecollaboration when Hanken suddenly changed from in-class into online teaching, on Friday the 13th of March, being the first university in Finland in applying this measure.

⁶ Second level of six in the CEFR by the Council of Europe.

The tasks were announced one week before the project started. The components of each group decided together, by email or in their first meeting online, the schedule for their two (or four) weekly meeting sessions.

For the implementation of the tasks, they used Jitsi meet, a videoconferencing on-line programme that offers free tools, is open source, and WebRTC⁷ compatible. The use of Skype was offered as optional later due to difficulties regarding the quality of the videoconferencing with Jitsi. The videos of their sessions were recorded and saved in Dropbox for future observation. The students received guidelines about how to use these programmes helped by a YouTube video tutorial provided by the teacher at Utrecht University and by an instruction manual made by me, as their teacher at Vaasa.

The dynamic collaborative tasks in this e-collaboration educational project deal with culture, habits and stereotypes. Task 1 focuses on getting to know their peer colleagues and their cultures a bit better. During the session for the performance of this task they can discuss about young people in their home countries and about Spanish, Finnish and Dutch stereotypes among other stereotypes interesting for the group. Task 2 focuses on customs and habits (personal and in their own countries). During this session they can discuss for example about their studies, universities, timetables. These assignments can benefit the participants to develop their competence of the diverse cultures through their intercultural interactions.

3.4 Data transcription and theory-driven analysis

Using ethnographic methodology in order to study social and cultural relationships on the internet, is challenging for researchers, sociologists and culture analysts. A known concern is the vast amount of data that the investigators using qualitative methods can obtain and how to handle or limit it (Pekkola, 2014). Documenting the participants' observation is important in digital environments due to the amount of information shared and provided in a very quick tempo, which can be difficult to remember later on.

A deductive analysis based on the theoretical framework of the study, which agrees investigation, assessment and understanding of collaborative performances (Skelcher & Sullivan, 2008), contributed to the evaluation of the findings.

3.4.1 Election of the videos

A total of 13 intercultural groups of 20 students studying at Hanken, Vaasa and 42 in the University of Utrecht telecollaborated in two or four different sessions, depending on if the

⁷ Web Real-Time Communication

students in Vaasa worked in pairs or alone. The ones working in pairs needed to repeat the tasks in two different groups, since the students from Utrecht were double the amount. They recorded 39 videos totally, two or four per group (a group recorded both tasks together in only one video). To facilitate the order and storage of the videos they were named by the date in six digits, the group number, number 1 or number 2 for first or second telecollaboration and which task the group performed.

For my thesis I observed and analysed five videos that reflected good information for my study. This amount is considered by the aim of the study, which is not to obtain any general conclusions but to identify abilities of intercultural communication. When observing the last two videos I noticed the same patterns and same subcategories than in the previous observations, consequently I stopped the observation in order to avoid attaining saturation. My choice was initially founded on samples with better technical quality of the recordings: with no lagging, no sound problems and visualizing all the members. The second requisite was the participants being as natural as possible in the conversation and more confident with their Spanish knowledge. I did not choose the videos where the group had prepared the tasks by memorizing or reading loud the questions and answers; talking only freely without focusing on the subject of the task; neither those with very short conversations due to their very basic Spanish level. With less than a half of the videos adequate for observation, I chose the videos where conversations outside the task were also recorded and more cultural diversity. Then I selected the videos from different groups and performing different tasks too.

The students were not previously asked about their cultural backgrounds, but I assumed many of them being bicultural or with blended cultural identities. Hanken is a Swedish speaking university with many bilingual Finnish-Swedish students. Utrecht University uses to welcome high quotes of international students every academic year.

As a result, I observed and analysed the following five videos (three videos correspond to the performance of task 1 and the other two videos of task 2) to with totally 19 correspondents (9 Hanken students and 10 Utrecht students):

1) Video 1 saved as "200311_GRUPO 7_ECO 1_T1"

A group formed by two men from two Swedish-speaking cities in Finland (the Åland island and Jakobstad) studying at Hanken, Vaasa, and two women studying at Utrecht University: one of them living in a village in the countryside, and the other one wearing a religious garment. They performed task 1.

2) Video 2 saved as "200312_GRUPO 8_ECO 2_T2"

A group formed by two Swedish-speaking Finnish women plus one Dutch man and one woman

who has grown up in the Netherlands, but in a half Kurdish, half Turkish family. They performed task 2.

3) Video 3 saved as “200319_GRUPO 5_ECO 1_T2”

A group formed by two bilingual Finnish men and two Dutch women studying at Utrecht University. One of the Hanken students has a relationship with a Dutch woman so he is more aware of this culture. They performed task 2.

4) Video 4 saved as “200319_GRUPO 9_ECO 2_T1”

A group formed by two bilingual Finnish women and two Dutch men studying at Utrecht University. They performed task 1.

5) Video 5 saved as “200311_GRUPO 12_ECO 1_T1”

A group formed by one bilingual Finnish man, a Dutch woman and German man studying at Utrecht University. The German student is located in Berlin, his hometown, due to the coronavirus pandemic. They performed task 1.

3.4.2 Method for the data analysis

The data collected in this study is evaluated by following the theory-driven content analysis method.

Cohen et al. (2007) define content analysis as a form of qualitative data analysis that consists of the process of summarizing and exposing the central contents of the collected data and their messages. Furthermore, the researchers refer to Krippendorp (2004), who states that content analysis describes the noticeable aspects of communication (who says what, how and to whom) and deduces the background (purposes, reasons and context) and the consequences or effects of the communication.

This method has its origin in the analysis of mass media and public speeches but nowadays it is applied to examine any form of communicative material. Cohen et al. refer Weber (1990) to underline that it can be used for problems at intercultural and social structure and interaction, “[...] *to study groups as microcosms of society*” (Cohen et al., 2007 p. 476). More specifically the theory-driven approach provides the researchers the instrument for analysing, assessing and understanding collaborative performance (Skelcher & Sullivan, 2008).

One of the aims of using this procedure is to reduce vast amounts of written data respecting its quality by classifying it in few categories. These categories usually originate from theoretical constructs, but they can also be developed from the material itself and be adapted to the empirical data. In my study I classified the data obtained after observation applying Deardorff’s model of Intercultural Competence (2006). I derived my classification from the model’s groupings “Attitudes” and “Appropriate communication and behaviour”. I subsumed the

categories “Respect”, “Openness” and “Curiosity and discovery” under “Attitudes” in order to be more explicit. In addition, these main categories other subcategories were developed from the transcriptions and material collected from the observation and referred to the theoretical framework of this study.

This method is used to describe attitudinal and behavioural responses in communications (Palmquist, 2021), essential part in this study.

The content analysis method is also appropriate for this study since it enables computer-assisted analysis to be undertaken and the analyst can observe without being observed. It is systematic and demonstrable because it uses codes and categories. Furthermore, and since it uses permanent data, it allows verification as well as a second analysis if needed.

Cohen et al. (2006) expound the process of content analysis in three essential features: to divide text into divisions of analysis, to undertake statistical analysis of the divisions and to present the analysis in an efficient way. Other important features are to examine the relation between the categories, to study the origin of the themes and the testing, development and generation of theory.

The whole process includes firstly the definition of the research questions, population, sample, context, units of analysis, and codes. Codes can be a word or abbreviation that define concepts in different ways. This will be followed by the construction and subsequent handling of the codes and the categories (sort data into key headings, list topics within each key heading, put them into groups avoiding category overlap plus comment and review the groups and their messages). Afterwards the data analysis will be conducted and summarized at the same time that possible interferences are generated. (Cohen et al., 2006).

3.5 Reliability, validity, and ethical issues

Reliability and validity in semi-structured observation and in theory-driven analysis

It is not easy to achieve an adequate level of reliability with structured observations. Validity presumes reliability. E.g., the observers’ capacity of attention can become worse and this can make the study less reliable.

The validity is affected by mistakes in implementation: if the instrument for observation is not handled as planned or if the respondents change their behaviour when knowing that they are observed.

Besides the threat of validity due to subjective observation, there are other risks to validity and reliability in observation: e.g. the observer may be unaware of essential previous events when

looking only at the present; the informants can be not representative of the sample for the study; the presence of the observer can cause diverse behaviours and the researcher reaction when seeing a non-motivated group can also affect the study (Cohen et al., 2007). Even not being synchronously with them when they interact, the students knew beforehand that their recordings would be observed by me as both their teacher and the researcher.

All the videos had already been observed twice in my role as teacher, for the students' oral evaluation. In this first visualization I concentrated only on my students' linguistic knowledge and improvement on their oral skills.

I planned thoroughly the observation for this study. I read again the theoretical framework and I prepared the templates for the notes regarding Deardorff's Model of Intercultural Competence.

Since the study concerns interaction between all the participants and the videos last from approx. 20-40 minutes each, they were observed in sequences of maximum 20 minutes. Meanwhile observing the videos for the first time to examine intercultural communication, I took raw notes regarding any category, by hand, and in a blank paper. I observed the videos three or more times if needed. Those notes were transferred later to a Word document, classifying them and filling one template for attitudes and another one for external outcomes, i.e. an observation's protocol based on Deardorff's model of intercultural competence (see Template 1 and Template 2 in Appendix C). Empathy that conceptualises intercultural communicative competence regarding Arasaratnam's model IMICC was also marked when uncovered under the observation. I read the notes of each group, improved them, added more or/and changed into other subcategory when necessary. I visualized the videos another time for confirmation of the notes. After this and regarding the patterns and most interesting comments, I developed the subcategories presented in section 4.

I examined the videos in detail in order to guarantee the maximum reliability and validity for this study. Achieving solid results and an authenticated statement, regarding not only the linguistic development but the intercultural competence, would help to propose Hanken the implementation of telecollaboration with other European countries in the Spanish teaching programme and not only as an extra activity (as proposed by O'Dowd, 2011).

Since the categories when conducting content analysis can be deduced by the researcher, the closer to inference the more reliability may be compromised (Cohen et al., 2006 p. 479). The nearness to empirical data and its support to the construction of the categories reinforces the reliability. Cohen et al. (2006) add that categories need to be thorough in order to address content validity. The categories in the analysis of this study refer to the theoretical construct and previous findings in the literature. The main categories are literally labelled after

Deardorff's model of Intercultural Competence (2006) and the subcategories are thoroughly named in reference to this and other models and previous research referred in the theoretical framework for this study.

Ethical issues

Some special ethical issues need to be acknowledged before beginning an ethnographic research, since it occurs among human beings (Genzuk, 2003, p. 8). Even Haverinen (2015, p. 86) points out that using ethnography as the methodology in an online environment, as in the current study, offers many possibilities but it also raises many considerations regarding ethics, access, protections of privacy or anonymity and publicity. The ethics in an internet ethnographic approach entail carefully examination for each particular case.

Ethnographers must assure that the participants of the community where the research will be undertaken are not harmed or exploited due to the study. Therefore, the participants need to be informed about the research scope and the researcher must gain their informed consent before starting. The respondents were asked whether they prefer to be named or to use a pseudonym in the written report and if they wanted to see the results of the research. As an ethnographer, I need to concern cautiously their choices before, during and after the research.

As Genzuk's guidelines (2003, p. 8) suggest, the students observed and questioned, as well as their University teachers, will remain anonymous. The participants were not asked about their gender, ages, place of birth, religious affinities or cultural backgrounds. An agreement from both Universities was signed by the Spanish teachers responsible for the telecollaboration, as well as by their respective superiors. The students signed up a consent form supplied by the researcher regarding the ethical conditions of the research, in order to approve on condition that the data obtained in the project can be used for academical purposes and whether the collected material is allowed to be published or not. The students kept contact via email, so they were only asked for a first name or an appropriate pseudonym and an email address, no telephone number or other private data was needed for the exchange. Some of them did exchange them under their own choice and responsibility.

Furthermore, the use of digital tools, data collection from the internet and the respect of the internet researcher to the Web are also important ethical matters. Murthy (2011, p. 167) quotes Robinson's (2011) claim: "*[...] if our identities in cyberspace are extensions of our off-line identities, they must be afforded the same ethical consideration as they would be given in the off-line world*".

The videoconferencing programme Jitsi meet does not require an account, nor downloading and everyone can be invited to participate via a custom URL. It allows chatting while

videoconferencing with an integrated chat and also sharing documents and the desktop. It is a fully encrypted 100% open-source videoconferencing solution which can be used for free without time limits. The researcher can easily observe the interaction of all the participants of the group in the video conference. The big screen shows the person/s who is/are talking at that time and small captures of all the persons are continuously shown down on the left side. The programme makes it possible to save the videos and send them to Dropbox. The files of the study were later deleted from Dropbox and kept in an external storage.

The students were anonymised. Their family names were not required for the study. In the template for field notes they are coded HAS1/HAS2 as per Hanken Student and UUS/UUS2 as Utrecht University Student (Annex C). To preserve the participants' words, avoid source identification and minimise the risk of exposing the identity of the participants, many scholars choose to paraphrase textual data. In this current study, the participants' words are mainly paraphrased. The students communicated in a A2 level of Spanish when doing the tasks, otherwise they could use English. Their words were literally transcribed only if they were imperative for the study.

Franzke, Bechmann, Zimmer, Ess (2020) and the Association of Internet Researchers present the guidelines IRE 3.0 for researchers, students, members of the association and technical developers facing ethical concerns in their work. This new document (AoIR, 2019) includes different ethical considerations depending on the stages of the research: initial design (including ethical issues seeking grant funding), processes (including acquiring data), analyses (using techniques or instruments), dissemination (publicizing research findings and data) and close of the project (destruction of research data and related material). Franzke et al. (2020 p. 5) presume thus ethical pluralism and cross-cultural awareness: "*Cross-cultural awareness is required when internet research projects involve either researchers and/or subjects/participants/informants from diverse national and cultural backgrounds*".

4. Results

This chapter reports the results of the observation of the videos recorded. Based on the context, previous research and the theory of this thesis, I investigated group dynamics in the students' telecollaboration intending to uncover expressions of their attitudes and behaviour related to intercultural competence. Observation endorses ethnography as the descriptive qualitative research method of this thesis.

The students' virtual interaction was recorded in real time; however, no participant synchronous observation was undertaken. I carried out the observation some time later. The

raw data and transcripts collected during the observation is included in the thesis, although not in this section. The templates filled with the notes taken are displayed at Appendix D, whereas the compiled and thorough analysis of the results will be exposed hereunder.

Following a theory-driven analysis, the data collected and displayed in this section was classified in five main categories as per Deardorff's model of Intercultural Competence (2006). The main categories in the classification of the results are: 1. Respect, 2. Openness, 3. Curiosity and discovery, 4. Appropriate communication and 5. Appropriate behaviour. The first three review expressions of attitudes and the following two review behaviour. The findings are also supported by Arasaratnam's models (2005, 2011), the model of Durden et al. (2016) and Fantini's framework (2006).

Since the results are multiple and of equal significance, I chose to present them in a systematic disposition. I present first a hierarchy chart of each main category divided in subcategories to further illustrate the key findings. Afterwards, in order to help the reader to better understand each finding, I display a short explanation of a result with one example or more if significant. When naming who expressed the examples, I use the code HAS1 or HAS2 for Hanken students and UUS1 or UUS2 for Utrecht University students. Each result is followed by the next result, its explanation and its example/s. After listing the results of every main category, I include a short summary of them. Finally, at the end of the section, a brief synthesis of all the key findings from every subcategory is added to provide a narrative connection to the discussion of the results, in the following section.

The findings regarding the respondents' manifestation of attitudes towards an intercultural situation refer to the first research question: *How do the students express attitudes during intercultural telecollaboration?* They are based on the first step in Deardorff's Model of Intercultural Competence (2006), categorized as "Attitudes" in the model, and including: Respect, Openness, and Curiosity and discovery.

1. Respect

The category labelled "Respect" was divided into subcategories according to figure 6.

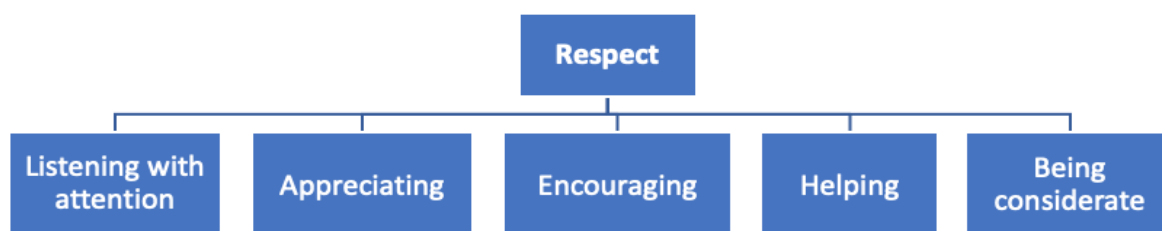


Figure 6. Description of the category "Respect" in subcategories.

The respondents showed respect for the cultures of others by listening with attention to their peers' explanations and welcoming them. They smiled, nodded or agreed with a simple "ok" or "yes" when the peer colleagues talked about their customs and habits, noticing and appreciating cultural diversity. For example, a Hanken student (HAS2) told her peers in Utrecht that Finns are barefoot at home and she even showed them her foot. They listened with attention. UUS1 responded with "ok" meanwhile UUS2 commented appreciatively that she is Turkish and they also are barefoot at home (VIDEO 1).

They demonstrated that the others' and their own cultures are valuable by encouraging the other students. A student from Utrecht University (UUS2) constantly said "very good" or "that's nice" when a Hanken student (HAS2) talked about their university associations, the canteen and student life in Vaasa (VIDEO 2).

The students showed kindness and politeness in helping the others to follow the conversation in their lingua franca. They translated into English or repeated the sentence in another way trying to make them understand. For example, in VIDEO 1 an Utrecht student (UUS2) asked and explained in English when noticing that the others (UUS1, HAS1 and HAS2) did not understand.

They made considerate statements valuing other cultures, such as "I like my university because it is international" (UUS1, VIDEO 2) or towards cultures in the group "They are just different cultures!" (HAS2, VIDEO 3).

Respect was shown by appropriate mindsets. The students were considerate, well-mannered and polite towards each other and valued their peers, their cultures and cultural diversity. No bad reaction, arrogance or disrespect was observed. No one showed any inappropriate sign or word against the others and the others' cultures.

1. Openness

The category labelled "Openness" was divided into subcategories according to figure 7.

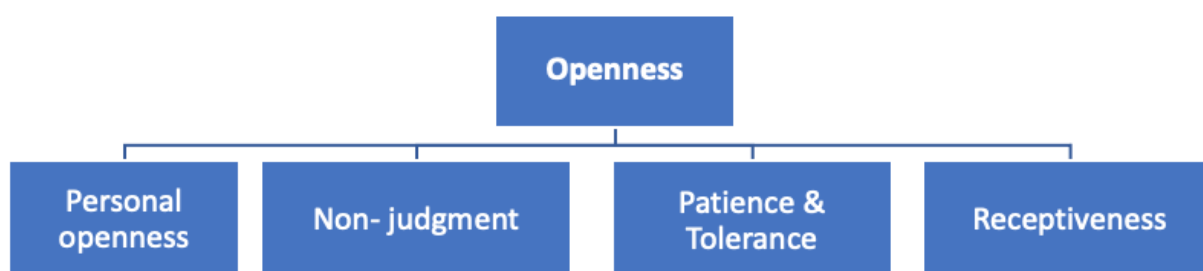


Figure 7. Description of the category "Openness" in subcategories.

The students were open about themselves, their own customs and other aspects regarding their own culture. For example, an Utrecht University student (UUS2) revealed personal information. She said that she started drinking alcohol at the age of 16. Her fellow student at Hanken (HAS2) asked why and she said that it was just a question of different cultures (VIDEO 3). Two Finnish students (HAS1 and HAS2) admitted that they did not like going to sauna (VIDEO 1).

The students were non-judgmental and they were disposed to accept their peers' judgements, even when disagreeing. The student UUS2 in VIDEO 4 identified himself as a typical Dutch young man when smoking marihuana, being tall and big, practicing sports and liking going out. He waited for the other students' reaction and judgement regarding cannabis and asked if they smoked it. HAS1 answered she did not and that it is illegal in Finland. No judgements followed.

The students showed patience and tolerance and accepted diverse cultural differences. For example, HAS1 showed to be very patient during the complete recording. He did not express any worry or nervousness. He was calm. He waited for his turn to talk and spoke serenely. He listened to his peer colleagues talking about diverse stereotypes and differences between cultures. They also accepted HAS1 being quiet. When suddenly a student (UUS1) could not see him in the screen of her computer, he kept calm and asked the student to wait a minute. Then he continued as normal (VIDEO 5).

The students were receptive to different cultures, ways of thinking, feeling and behaving without any sensation of being challenged or threatened. They discussed stereotypes without any difficulties. In VIDEO 1, VIDEO 4 and VIDEO 5 the groups performed task 1 which included the discussion of stereotypes. They discussed about what they considered stereotypes about their own cultures and about their peers' culture. The students knew in advanced that the task referred to Spanish and Latin-American, Finnish and Dutch stereotypes, but they happened to meet also students from other cultural backgrounds. The stereotypes considered in each video are the following:

VIDEO 1: "There are a lot of bikes in the Netherlands" (HAS1), "All the Finns have a sauna" (UUS2), "Dutch people eat a lot of fries" (UUS2), "All Dutch like cheese" (UUS1), "Dutch are very tall" (UUS1), "Dutch have blue eyes" (UUS2).

VIDEO 4: "Dutch are tall" (UUS2), "Dutch smoke marihuana. I think it applies Amsterdam" (UUS1), "Finns have saunas" (UUS2), "We [do not] walk with wood shoes" (UUS1), "I live alone with two other students" (UUS2), "In Finland it is always cold and snowy" (HAS1), "We are very shy. We do not talk to unknown people, for example in a bus" (HAS2), "We drink a lot of alcohol, especially Vodka" (HAS1), "Spanish people sleep siesta and eat paella" (UUS2), "Spanish people have dinner very late" (HAS2).

VIDEO 5: “All people in Holland eat Gouda cheese” (UUS2), “Dutch people go by bike everywhere” (UUS2), “Dutch are very tall” (UUS2), “We drink a lot of alcohol” (HAS1), “In Holland people smoke marihuana.” (HAS1), “Dutch are very direct when speaking” (UUS1), “Dutch people are stingy. They don’t want to spend money. They are not generous ” (UUS1), “All Germans drink sparkling water” (UUS1), “Finnish people have sauna at home” (UUS1), “Finnish people drink a lot of alcohol” (UUS1), “People in Finland are very calm” (UUS2), “Germans like travelling” (UUS1), “Dutch do like [travelling] too” (UUS2), “Spanish people like siesta” (UUS2), “Spanish people are machos” (UUS1), “Germans are a bit unfriendly for example in restaurants and supermarkets” (UUS2), “Germany is a very bureaucratic country” (UUS2).

Openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures was likewise shown by appropriate attitudes. The students were open when talking about themselves and their cultures withholding judgements. They were open-minded and tolerant. They did not show any prejudices and they were willing to welcome new cultures. No bias or prejudices were observed.

2. Curiosity and discovery

The category labelled “Curiosity and discovery” was divided into subcategories according to figure 8.

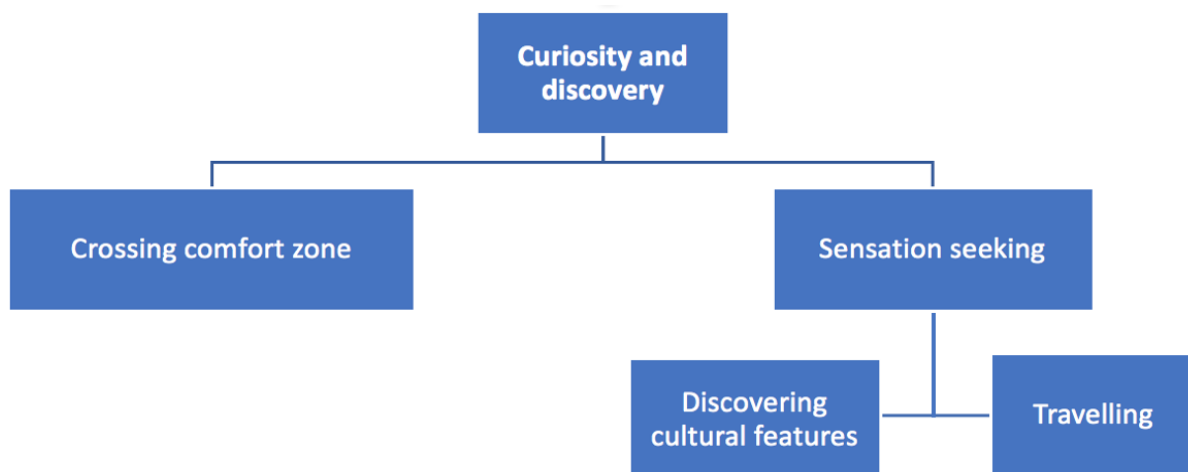


Figure 8. Description of the category “Curiosity and discovery” in subcategories.

The students attempted to ask things they did not feel comfortable with. They dared to discuss a delicate or controversial subject, entered the uncomfortable zone and became aware of the differences in their respective cultures. However, they did not show to accept them. For example, a Hanken student (HAS2) asked his peer from Utrecht University (UUS2) at what age the consumption of cannabis is allowed in the Netherlands (VIDEO 3).

The respondents' attitudes as sensation seekers were also observed in the videos. They showed interest in other cultures expressing their wish to travel to certain countries for pleasure, cultural trips or for study-programs. In VIDEO 1 an Utrecht student (UUS1) asked the other students in the group where they would like to travel. She admitted herself being interested of travelling to Indonesia, Mali and Ecuador. Another student (UUS2) in VIDEO 5 explained for his peers that he was living with his parents in Germany, his home country, due to the pandemic. He did not identify himself as a typical German student since the majority do not study abroad. He was attending three different studies at Utrecht University. He revealed his motivation to search for opportunities for studies abroad and a positive attitude towards sensation seeking. UUS2 at VIDEO 2 told her peers her wish of visiting Finland in the near future.

They also demonstrated their willingness to meet other cultures. The participants asked their peers with curiosity about different cultural features. They showed also curiosity by learning expressions related to their language, their gastronomy, customs, habits or other cultural aspects. For example, a Hanken student (HAS2) asked his fellows from Utrecht University (UUS1, UUS2) what was behind the English expression "going Dutch" (VIDEO 1). Another Hanken student (HAS) asked his peer colleagues in the Netherlands about Dutch food. He told them that her girlfriend liked "*stroopwaffels*" and "*poffertjes*" and he wanted to know what the latter were precisely (VIDEO 3).

The curiosity about people from other cultures and the discovery of intercultural learning was demonstrated by appropriate attitudes. The overall observation was that students were willing and interested to meet other cultures. Some of them however showed less curiosity.

The findings regarding the following two categories of appropriate communication and appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation are related to the second research question: *How do students behave when interacting in intercultural telecollaboration?* They are based on the final step in Deardorff's Model of Intercultural Competence (2006), categorized as "External outcomes" in the model. Empathy, classified in Deardorff's Model as internal outcome, is considered a behavioural variable according to Durden et al. (2016), a significant variable in Arasaratnam and Banerjee's model (2010), and a quality in Fantini's framework (2006). Consequently, it was included in this category of results under the division "Appropriate behaviour".

3. Appropriate communication

The category labelled "Appropriate communication" was divided into subcategories according to figure 9.

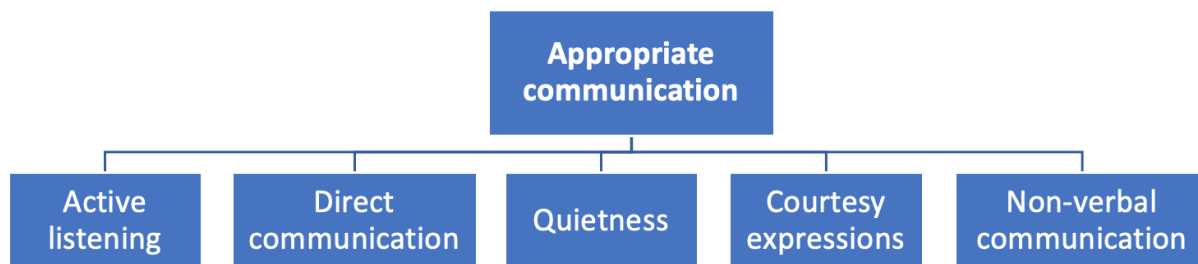


Figure 9. Description of the category “Appropriate communication” in subcategories.

The respondents actively listened to the other members of the multicultural group. They waited for the others to finish their statements and they took their turn to talk later on. The students HAS1 & HAS2 in videos number 2, 3 and 4, HAS2 in video 1 and UUS4 in VIDEO 5 showed to be active listeners by keeping silent and responding afterward to the others’ discussion.

Most of the students from Utrecht University were direct in their questions or answers. For example, in VIDEO 4, the groupmates were performing their first task about stereotypes when a Hanken student (HAS2) told her peers that Finnish people did not talk to unknown people, only to family and friends. UUS2 immediately asked if she did it. An Utrecht student (UUS1) in VIDEO 5 admitted that a stereotype about Dutch people is that they say things straight.

In four videos, the students from Utrecht University lead the conversation and kept it going. In the fifth video this ability was shared in the group. Utrecht students were more talkative and open than the Hanken students. They asked and clarified in English if the other students did not understand showing respect and also an appropriate communication. For example: the student UUS2 in VIDEO 1; the students UUS1, UUS2, and HAS2 in VIDEO 2; UUS1 in VIDEO 4 and UUS2 in VIDEO 5 explained some words in English so the others could follow their intercultural communication.

Hanken students minced their words, they showed being more introvert and quiet in the conversation than their peer colleagues. An example was the student HAS1 in VIDEO 5, also considered heretofore an example of patience and tolerance. HAS1 in VIDEO 1 is another example. The exceptions to this pattern were the students HAS2 in VIDEO 2 and HAS2 in VIDEO 3, who were talkative and good communicators.

They used polite questions and expressions also when talking outside the tasks. The student HAS1 said “*Nice to meet you*” as farewell at the end the task and UUS1 asked in a gracious English for permission to leave the meeting: “*Do you mind if I leave?*” (VIDEO 1).

The students use non-verbal language with hand or facial gestures. An Utrecht student (UUS1) with blended cultural background and another one not originally from the Netherlands were very expressive and move constantly their hands when talking in VIDEO 2 and VIDEO 5. A

Hanken student (HAS1) was very communicative by his facial gestures (VIDEO 3). The student HAS2 became very happy and showed thumbs up when UUS2 said that she and UUS1 would come to Finland. HAS2 asked out of the tasks how their university had been affected by the pandemic. UUS2 said their University would close the following day. “Ours from tomorrow too!”, responded HAS2. UUS2 virtually slapped hand in a “high five” to her (VIDEO 2). In most cases the screen showed only the correspondents’ face or the upper part from their shoulders, so their hands could not always be seen.

They used interjections to express different emotions as giving compliments and encouraging each other. For example, an Utrecht student (UUS2) in VIDEO 4 used many interjections like “oh!” or “ah!” to express admiration, surprise, happiness, encouragement or approval. Another student (UUS1) in VIDEO 1 said “Wau!” to express surprise and admiration when HAS2 talked about Swedish being the second official language in Finland.

An appropriate communication occurred by listening to each other, respecting turns to talk, encouraging and giving compliments, using polite language, keeping the conversation going, following one’s own norms and customs but also respecting the others. The communication was slow in the first video due to some technical issues and to language knowledge limitations, but fluent in the other four videos. No inappropriate or aggressive communication was observed.

4. Appropriate behaviour

The category labelled “Appropriate behaviour” was divided into subcategories according to figure 10.

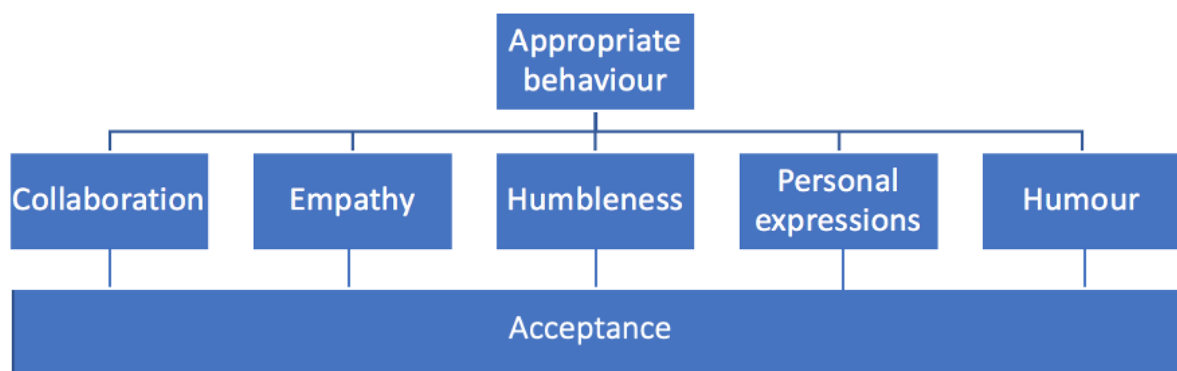


Figure 10. Description of the category “Appropriate behaviour” in subcategories.

The students collaborated and supported each other in confusing situations, clarified misunderstandings and continued performing their task. The Finnish respondents were responsible for recording and saving the videos. They collaborated with their peers and provided support when technological difficulties arose regarding the application used for

videoconferencing or other matters on the recording. A Hanken student (HAS2) in VIDEO 3 was an example for helping his peer colleague with the connection of her camera.

Expressions of empathy toward other cultures were clearly shown. In a particular case (VIDEO 3) a Dutch respondent (UUS2) displayed empathy towards her peers when they discussed the different legal ages for consuming alcoholic beverages in Finland and in the Netherlands and about at what age young people started drinking. She said it was a question of different cultures. The student UUS1 in VIDEO 5 was also respectful and empathic with the others in another cultural matter.

The respondents acted with humbleness and did not try to impress the others. For example, when UUS2 in VIDEO 5 told the peer colleagues that he was studying three different degrees at the same time at Utrecht University or when HAS2 in VIDEO 2 told the peers about the good education and benefits that Hanken offered: the food, the great university associations, etc. They did not behave haughtily, in an unfriendly or arrogant way or considering themselves better than the others.

In VIDEO 1, VIDEO 2 and VIDEO 3 some students at both Utrecht University and Hanken appeared to be worried and expressed unease in different ways: by turning a cord of the sweater all the time, constantly touching their hair or looking at their nails, eating chocolate, drinking water very often or by using dry snuff. In one case the student made noises and spoke when eating, but the others kept on conversing. Some of them expressed anxiety as a personal characteristic or a state evoking in these particular intercultural situations.

The respondents laughed and smiled repeatedly during the telecollaboration. Some students showed humour and a Finnish participant (UUS1, VIDEO 3) made funny face gestures twice to keep the participants motivation. Humour is not a variable studied by Deardorff or included in other models, but it is part of Fantini's framework (2006) for assessing intercultural competence in case studies. Humour was demonstrated by different persons in all the videos and joy was also revealed in every interaction. For example, UUS2 explained to her groupmates in VIDEO 2 that surprisingly in the Netherlands there was a city with more "coffee shops" than secondary schools. HAS2 kidding and with humour responded "Very good!" and laughed for a while.

In addition to these subcategories, I could observe acceptance and as the only reaction from the students towards each other's' behaviour. No expressions of non-acceptance or disappointment of the others' behaviour are shown in the videos.

An appropriate behaviour was shown by supporting others having difficulties, by being humble, empathic, following one's own norms and customs but respecting also the others' culture. Some expressions of discomfort or worry about the situation were understandable. No

unacceptable or discouraging behaviour was observed. Ethnocentrism, belief that one student's culture is better than all others, was not exposed.

Regarding the results listed above it can be indicated that videos 1, 2 and 3 presented the most findings as seen by the number of examples presented in each observed ability. This can be also determined by the quantity of notes taken during the observation and stated in the first six filled templates (two per video).

In this section I identified five main categories: respect, openness, curiosity and discovery, appropriate communication and appropriate behaviour as expressed by the correspondents in the telecollaboration. The students expressed respect by appreciating with a smile or nodding their peers' explanations about cultural differences; encouraging them; helping them with the communication and making considerate statements towards other cultures. They did not have any bad reaction nor expression of arrogance or disrespect.

The students expressed openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures by being open about themselves, non-judgmental and disposed to accept their peers' judgements, receptive to different cultures, not feeling challenged or threatened and being patient and tolerant. They discussed stereotypes without hindrances or difficulties. They did not express any prejudices nor bias.

They expressed curiosity and discovery by taking risks to discuss and ask about uncomfortable subjects and showing sensation seeking when expressing their wishes to travel to certain countries for pleasure, cultural trips or for study-programs and also when searching information and asking their peers about different cultural features. However, some of students did not show curiosity.

The participants in the telecollaboration communicated appropriately by following one's own norms and customs regarding communication but also respecting the others (direct communication and silence), listening to each other and respecting turns to talk, using polite language, encouraging and giving compliments verbally or through non-verbal communication. Sometimes their communication was slow or temporary interrupted.

They behaved appropriately by following one's own norms and customs regarding behaviour but respecting also the others' culture (humour), collaborating and supporting each other with difficulties, being empathic as well as humble. Some expressions of anxiety about the situation were understandable. Ethnocentrism was not exposed.

The previous results characterized the participants' attitudinal expressions and appropriate communicative and behavioural expressions towards intercultural telecollaboration. They will be discussed in the following section of this thesis.

5. Discussion

This section explores the relevance and consequences of the results of the study. It includes an interpretation of the findings related to the research questions, the implication of the findings, and possible limitations. Accordingly, after a general discussion, the section is divided into four subsections: an ethnographic interpretation of e-collaboration in the context of this study, a method discussion, hindrances possibly affecting the results, and the conclusion of the study.

The research questions for this study, *How do the students express attitudes during intercultural telecollaboration?* and *How do students behave when interacting in intercultural telecollaboration?* sought to visualise the university students' attitudes and behaviour in an intercultural practice of SFL learning. The purpose was to examine their intercultural competence when they collaborate online.

The results indicate that the university students cultivated intercultural competence during the virtual exchange; they demonstrated holding requisite attitudes and their appropriate behaviour denoted outcomes in the development of intercultural competence.

In line with Deardorff's model (2006), the development of intercultural competence starts with attitudes and ends in external outcomes. In terms of attitudes, the students showed respect for their peer students' cultures, openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures, as well as curiosity and discovery.

The students expressed respect or valuing cultures (Deardorff, 2006) by listening to each other, by being encouraging, by helping each other, or by making considerate statements about each other's cultures. Respect is not only shown at the beginning of a process as Deardorff illustrates, but also during the whole session. No bad reaction, nor a disrespectful sign or word against each other's cultures was observed from the students.

Active listening, empathy and effective engagement are essential components in cultural competence according to Durden et al. (2016). The students demonstrated these abilities when creating a welcoming environment in their telecollaboration. Active listening constitutes an individual variable in Deardorff's model that contributes to attain cultural competence. However, this variable is not considered a requirement in the process. The model illustrates these so called "skills" as its second step and as part of the individual level. These particular skills are expressed by the students in the practice of collaboration at the same time as other variables. This contributes to appreciate my hesitation on Deardorff's model concerning the preestablished order of the process. My visual perception of the process is instead illustrated

by the IC in the centre and surrounded by the different components or abilities, connected but excluding the sequential order. My interpretation will be presented at the end of this section.

Deardorff's first model (2004) already emphasised the need of openness. Openness was shown by the students who were open about themselves and about aspects of their own culture. They were non-judgmental and willing to accept the judgements of others. They admitted differences, were receptive to different cultures and could discuss stereotypes without any hindrances. According to O'Dowd (2010), researchers consider that telecollaboration could reinforce stereotypes of the cultures involved, that is, more people would believe in a specific and commonly agreed perception. Likewise, Zhu (2011) warns about stereotypes, prejudices, and lack of cultural sensitivity as obstacles in the process of cultivating intercultural empathy. Empathy is an essential ability in fostering intercultural communication. Contrariwise, here the results indicate that the students' discussions about stereotypes (which definition is explained in their assessment), helped them to clarify the ones that were not accurate and did not correspond to the conceptions of the aspects or people they described or concerned. The students did not try to impose their own opinions.

Curiosity and discovery also emerged before and during the telecollaboration. As Deardorff refers, curiosity sets the foundation for creative ways to change differences into possibilities (LeBaron and Pillow, 2006). The participants tolerated ambiguity and they felt curious already at the beginning of the project when it was explained for them in previous lessons at the university. The explanation awakened the students' interest in the project and some of them got very curious about Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Most of them already showed their interest towards the Dutch culture and they requested more information about their peers. They got very happy to receive an "ice-breaking" video from the Spanish teacher and her students at Utrecht University prior their group tasks. In response, a very nice introduction video was prepared and sent to the Dutch university. The video contained a presentation of Hanken School of Economics, the classroom, and the participants in the Spanish course. The participants also showed curiosity about cultural features in the videos recorded for the assignments. They had searched information beforehand about the peers' cultures or they learnt it from them, and they contrasted it further on when performing the tasks. Their disposition to discovery was also reflected by their wishes and dreams about travelling to other countries, not only to Finland and to the Netherlands.

Some Hanken students already showed this attitude of curiosity and discovery when they were told about the organisation of the telecollaborative project, about Hofstede's dimensions of culture, and about my thesis.

Sensation seeking is a personality variable in Arasaratnam's model of ICC (2011) referring the willingness to participate in intercultural contact-seeking behaviour. Sensation seekers enjoy exciting experiences associated to adventure and risk. Arasaratnam and Banerjee (2011) state that sensation seekers enjoy emotionally intense and physiologically stimulating experiences. Afterward, Arasaratnam (2017) adds that sensation seekers are willing to be part in intercultural contact-seeking behaviour such as travelling abroad for study programmes. The wish of studying in Finland was also expressed by two Dutch students in one of the videos.

As per Deardorff (2004), curiosity can be shown by detecting verbal or non-verbal actions that can be less appropriate in a certain culture. This is not exposed in the videos. On the other hand, the students felt curious and they dared to verbally ask about aspects they felt uncomfortable with (for example about the legal consumption of marijuana in the Netherlands, which is an illegal practice in Finland, or the differences in legal ages for alcohol consumption in both countries) and contrasted them with their own culture. These abilities allowed the participants to be aware of the existence of differences and similarities within their cultures, without any need of accepting them. They demonstrated empathetic considerations and values during the Spanish language learning, which Zhu (2011) considers a requirement for language students in cross-cultural situations in order to improve cultural communication. This empathy or cultural sensitivity allows the students to be placed into the cultural background of the target language and of their peers' in order to better understand them and to achieve an effective intercultural communication.

The results correspond with previous research that showed that the foreign language learners hold the aptitude to communicate and interact with people from other countries and cultures in their lingua franca when improving the intercultural communicative competence and linguistic knowledge (Byram, 1997). This endorses also that the intercultural communicative competence comprises sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, socio-cultural and social competence, plus linguistic knowledge. Likewise, according to Coperías Aguilar (2010), the ICC can be understood as the interaction in a foreign language. Therefore, the competence of the participants in the exchange is also related to their language knowledge. People from different countries and languages bring their knowledge about their own country and about the country of the others when they interact socially. The success of the interaction will partly depend on the establishment and continuation of human relationships based on attitudinal factors. Both knowledge and attitude are influenced by the processes of intercultural communication.

The communication showed to be appropriate. More students from Utrecht University were open and direct in their statements to their Finnish peers; meanwhile these were more introvert and quiet. Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of culture partially support this cultural feature. On

the other hand, the individualism that the Finnish and the Dutch societies are characterised with in the second dimension of his theory is not covered in the telecollaboration. Regarding Hofstede's second dimension, the students may take certain individual initiatives during their telecollaboration. Nevertheless, they did not show priority for their own interests over those of the group. Instead, they expressed the sense of belongingness to the group already during the first task. They helped their mates with technical uses and/or with the language. The students held the conversation by asking and encouraging the others and some called their peers by their names showing closeness and friendship. This could be understood as the opportunity the telecollaboration within groups of students from diverse cultures offers to encourage fellowship among the participants and to reduce individualism in reference to other abilities that conceptualise cultural competence. In a big scale, this could not be assumed as individualism and isolation but as collectivism and globalisation.

The non-verbal communication in CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) is restrained and can lead to misunderstanding. The body language, as well as humorous expressions, can be negative when having different interpretations and not sharing the same sense of humour. This is however not the case in this telecollaboration. There were no reactions of misunderstanding in any case in the videos. It would be interesting to investigate Victor Borge's quote: "*a smile is the shortest distance between two persons*" in relation to telecollaboration.

The behaviour was likewise appropriate. The concept "appropriate behaviour" can be dispersed and could be understood differently from diverse points of views and different cultures. Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005), as well as Arasaratnam and Banerjee (2010), defined this variable as the socially expected and accepted manner. Later, Arasaratnam adds (2016) that appropriateness is also seen from other persons' point of view and has a contextual context. Following these concepts, an appropriate behaviour was understood as a considered behaviour, accepted or contemplated to be normal by all the participants. The multiple examples in the recorded videoconferences of the students' interactions confirm this. Furthermore, their joy in interacting with other students from other cultures is clearly perceptible. Especially nowadays, when the mobility is restricted due to the current pandemic, they considered the telecollaboration being an amusing activity for their studies online and a perfect occasion for interaction with other students from home. This also agrees with Arasaratnam's (2016) definition of intercultural competence as "*the ability to understand and interact with people of different cultures in authentic and positive ways*" and likewise with the definition of Durden et al. (2016) as the ability to interact and build significant relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds. Some of them invite their fellows to visit them in their country and others even made new friends and shared their Instagram accounts or started a WhatsApp chat group to keep in contact.

Brisnis et al. (1983, p. 3-8) defined intercultural behaviour as an “*action that produces a significant change in the judgements of the actor’s social or skill competence by people from another cultural background*”. Characteristics and thought processes that the person brings to the intercultural action are considered by them as distal variables in intercultural behaviour. The students listed functional intercultural skills, which can be recognised in the videos. Among these intercultural skills they named some past experiences with persons of the host culture (for example a Hanken student has a Dutch girlfriend); they perceived role and norm differences (for example regarding alcohol drinking in Finland and in the Netherlands), and they showed anxiety (for example when using dry tobacco, eating sweets, touching their hair or looking at their nails all the time). Anxiety that results from intercultural behaviour can be a personal characteristic or a state evoked in a particular situation. They also demonstrated an increased ability of working together when having a common assignment and consequently a centralized goal. Despite being quite individualistic cultures according to Hofstede, the students cooperated nicely in their assignment and they did not prioritise their own interest over that of the group. They showed a broad perceptual and cognitive set to view the world (when learning for example that the use of marihuana is legal in the Netherlands) and the ability to take another person’s point of view to “become” the other (showing empathy). The researchers affirmed that people should be prepared for adjustments in intercultural interactions and that training can help in the preparation. If the training includes information about the behaviour of the others, it will be easier to explain the behaviour from the others’ point of view. The students prepared the tasks about the peers’ culture and the Spanish culture. They collected some previous information and discussed later stereotypes concerning their own culture and the other cultures. Brisnis et al. (Ibid.) also stated that training cannot stop stereotyping but can present the nature of the stereotypes and their mistakes so that people can search for further and enriched information, as the students did when discussing stereotypes. The reactions to the others’ cultural features are not many (a couple of correspondents do not show any of them) but adequate regarding the extent of this study. However, it is important to highlight that the students showed no expressions of non-acceptance or disappointment towards the behaviour of the others, which endorses that they behaved appropriately during their cultural interaction.

The results support the consensus definition of ICC as it refers to appropriateness, i.e., to display estimated and accepted behaviour in context (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2010). The definition also includes effectiveness and the ability to achieve one’s own goals. The latter has not been examined for this study from the affective and behavioural perspective, as already mentioned, due to the difficulty of identifying it from others’ perspective or not knowing beforehand the students’ own purpose and goals.

The students not seemed to be very observant about their peers' cultural features. Instead, they concentrated on handling the language in order to perform a good task in Spanish. They are young and they are continuously learning when meeting and interacting with people from other cultures. The assignment eased to discover these features. However, as Hall's iceberg analogy of culture (1976) shows, few aspects of culture stand explicit, are observable, and can be easily identified like the visual part of an iceberg. This part includes behaviour, language, clothes, food and other aspects that can be felt by the senses. The invisible part of the iceberg hides other manifestations of culture that are hardly revealed and difficult to be observed such as attitudes. This deeper part also includes beliefs, values, communication style, perception, concept of time, body language, cultural approach to interpersonal relationships, and social norms. Some of these cultural aspects could be identified from the students when analysing the videos. Nevertheless, real fundamentals, submerged in the human subconscious (Hall, 1956, 1979), could not be recognised.

As presented and discussed above, the data collected from the samples indicates that the students, on a personal level and on an interaction level, accomplished with the requisites of attitudes and behaviour needed in the process of cultivating intercultural competence. According to Deardorff's model, the skills and knowledge are part of the development of intercultural competence, but not a prerequisite to attain it. Based on that, the students can also show some external outcome even not showing skills and knowledge. This statement, although proved, can be difficult to assent and instead could be understood as the fact that an individual can acquire skills and knowledge during the whole process.

Deardorff (2006) sustains that the more components acquired and developed from her model, the bigger intercultural competence results as an external outcome. Other components can also be learnt. The achievement of the students in terms of level or improvement of learning, was not evaluated. However, different variables in the students' process of cultivating cultural competence, from Deardorff's model and from other models, were observed.

Figure 11 below presents a personal interpretation of intercultural communication in telecollaboration based on Deardorff's Model of intercultural competence, Arasaratnam's Model and Kock's 3C Collaboration model for group work. Only the skills and abilities observed and discussed in this study have been taken into consideration:

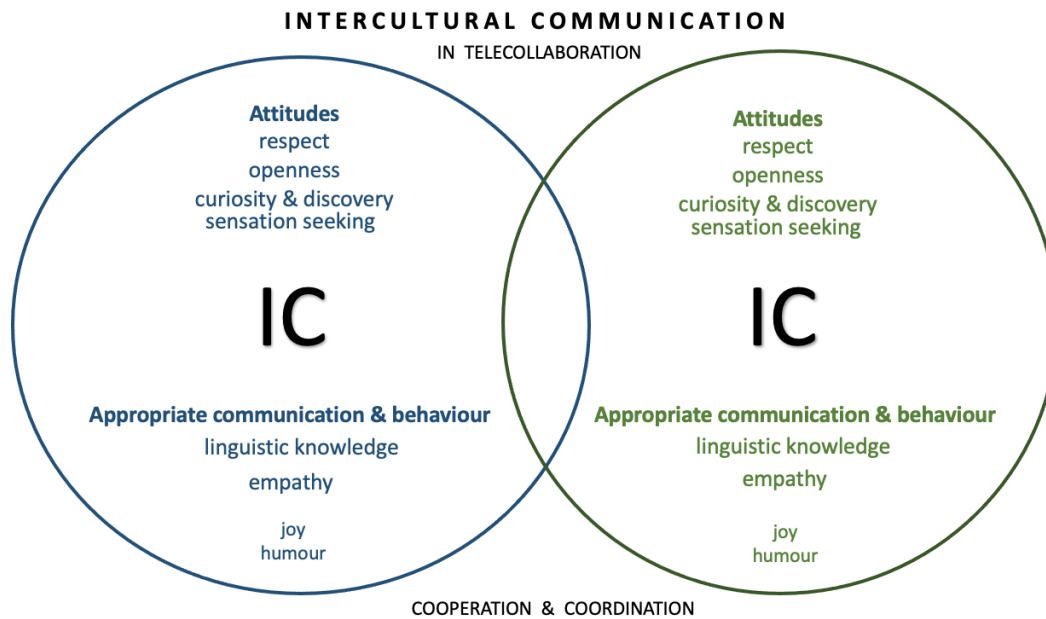


Figure 11. An understanding of Intercultural Communication based on the findings of my study.

The two circles in different colours represent individuals from different backgrounds interacting and communicating in an intercultural situation. Their intercultural competence stays in the centre and is surrounded by their abilities. The expressions based on different models and observed and discussed in the study are included in figure 11. These skills can be shown during the interaction without any certain sequence, not appear at all, or appear in another situation. The development of intercultural competence is an individual life-long process and this figure represents it in a certain situation of e-collaboration. Coordination and cooperation stay essential in telecollaboration as per Kock's 3C collaboration model for the interplay in group work in a computer-supported workspace.

5.1 An ethnographic interpretation of e-collaboration: a digital echo-culture

The dynamic collaborative tasks in this educational project by e-collaboration were related to culture, habits and stereotypes. These three aspects of the observed and studied culture are described in this section after my perception as an ethnographer.

From an ethnographic point of view, I could define the telecollaboration in this specific context as a culture of cooperation; a collaborative culture in which the individuals help each other to accomplish a common task without meeting cultural prejudices or obstacles. Some students, mostly the ones at Hanken, were more skilled in the technical part of the telecollaboration and they helped their peers with it. Other participants, mostly the ones from Utrecht University, had

a more fluent Spanish language or more confidence in their knowledge and supported their colleagues' conversation when performing the tasks. Although both groups of students belong to individualist societies, they cooperated effortlessly.

The students from Utrecht University seemed to be more used to meeting people with diverse cultural backgrounds. One possible reason for this is the fact that their university welcomes every year many exchange students from all over the world. The population of the city is about six times bigger than Vaasa and, in 2020, the university of Utrecht had an enrollment of approx. 35300 students. The students at Utrecht University participating in this virtual exchange studied different disciplines. Thus, they only knew each other from their common Spanish course. Despite this, they were more open and felt more comfortable working with unknown people from other cultures. Furthermore, they were more talkative than their peers in Finland. Approx. 2550 students studied at Hanken year 2020. The students at Hanken all study economics and participate in other common subjects. However, they showed to be quieter and shyer in the videos. The combination and collaboration of these two different groups worked perfectly in this context.

I could observe different habits in the performance of the task: some students individually prepared themselves in advance, few improvised during the interaction, but most of them agreed previously within their group on how to perform it together.

The telecollaboration, and especially the online language teaching, counts with some general stereotypes. The most expanded statement is that beginners of a foreign language cannot be taught online, or at least, it is not considered as an effective learning method when starting to learn a language. The in-class teaching is preferential. As their teacher and from my observations, I could appreciate the effectiveness of the digital didactics and of the virtual exchanges. My students were more concentrated when performing tasks in the computer-supported space than in class. It has been studied that the perception of information of our sensory organs decreases in these spaces. Conversely, that helps to filter irrelevant information and reduces other disturbances that occur in face-to-face collaborations. The technology and internet connections work smoothly nowadays in Europe. Hence, the sound and image of the participants do not differ much from the in-class teaching. Biases about the weaknesses and disadvantages of online learning might have changed after the current pandemic.

Another preconception is that tandem language learning constitutes a better option for the students since they learn each other's mother tongue. The participants are "language experts" in their own language. In this telecollaboration the students learnt a common foreign language, a lingua franca. The fact that they were at approximately the same level in Spanish permitted

them to dare to practice the language in a more relaxed situation. They did not feel much pressure for not understanding each other well and they did not have the need to be at a very good level to be able to communicate with a native speaker.

It is also said that when living abroad, one defends and appreciates her/his own culture the most. In this telecollaboration the participants felt proud of their own cultural or multicultural features even when they were not living abroad. They did not become arrogant, they did not show off, nor did they depreciate other cultures. In fact, they respected and appreciated the other cultures.

To sum up, I would define the observed culture of e-collaboration between the two European countries as a “digital echo”. The word “echo”, in different spellings and meanings, can be associated to diverse aspects reflected or characterised in the observed culture. “E-co” could be an abbreviation for e-collaboration but also for European countries in reference to the countries participating in this project. “Eco” also represents a shortening of ecological, which would denote the sustainable development of the education through virtual exchanges.

Digitalization and the use of new technologies allow international and intercultural interactions and collaboration without the need of physical mobility. This, in turn, contributes to the mitigation of sustainability issues, such as climate change. The students learn digital competences by exploiting the potential of sustainable ICT that will be useful also in their professional lives. Global issues require global interaction, collaboration, and solutions. Accordingly, challenges related to sustainability development need interdisciplinary and intercultural competences in order to be mitigated or solved.

Furthermore, and most of all, the word “echo” describes the continuous expansive learning produced by telecollaboration. Virtual exchanges can be performed in shorter and longer cycles. The sound waves are reflected back from surfaces, and therefore, the sound is repeated. Interaction entitles to reflection and feedback, which consequently allows for expansive learning.

The sound waves produced by an echo depend on each other. The participants in the virtual interaction represent a social interdependence; they are positively depending on each other. The sound waves travel at 343 m/s through the air and faster through solids. They transfer energy from the source of the sound. Telecollaboration transfers energy in form of knowledge and culture.

In this way, the culture of telecollaboration in language learning can be compared to a “digital echo” when contributing to the propagation of cultures and to the expansion of internationalisation.

5.2 Discussion of the method

I chose to collect qualitative data, which places more emphasis on the phenomena that are studied (Cohen et al., 2007). Virtual ethnography focuses nowadays on researching phenomena and cultures in online environments (Haverinen, 2015). In this study, ethnographical observation is the chosen method for data collection and theory-driven content analysis is preferred for evaluating the collected data.

Diverse aspects of the research method and approach are reviewed in this section. The main subjects discussed below stay the task as a qualitative researcher, as an e-ethnographer and as an observer as well as the correspondents' participation.

Qualitative researchers should plan a detailed research strategy (Cohen et al., 2007), but they should still be flexible to change contexts and situations where the research takes place (Pekkola, 2014). The current pandemic probably disturbed the functionality of Jitsi since many people in the world suddenly started to communicate online and made use of this free and open-source videoconferencing programme. The students became overwhelmed for some time, and the connections weakened and worsened. As their teacher and also the researcher of the study, I encouraged them to use Skype instead when they had big issues with Jitsi. The poor quality in some of the videos moderately disturbed my task as an e-ethnographer as well as the students' communication. Fortunately, there were numerous videos to analyse and many with good quality.

Cohen et al. (2007) mentioned that Meinefeld (2004) maintains that in qualitative approaches the research is much more open and emergent than in other approaches. The researcher has an influence on the study. My own culture could affect the interpretation of the results. I am Spanish, I have lived in a Swedish-speaking community in Finland for 22 years and my partner is Dutch. The thread of subjective observation was already accepted as a risk to validity and reliability in observation (Cohen et al., 2007). Nevertheless, my wide understanding for at least these cultures eased the interpretation of the observations and at the same time developed my intercultural awareness. As Franzke et al. (2020, p.5) presume, ethical pluralism and cross-cultural awareness are necessary in a research process when acquiring and also when destructing data. They are also needed "... *when internet research projects involve either researchers and/or subjects/ participants/informants from diverse national and cultural backgrounds*". In consequence of my own cross-cultural awareness, I could observe many different cultural features and generalised ways of acting that the students did not seem to be aware of. For example, one student drank tea from an littala cup, a Marimekko rag was used in a kitchen, another student ate Fazer sweets, another one removed dry snuff from his mouth and yet another student left the shoes by the entrance in her apartment.

As e-ethnographers currently proceed, I used my computer to collect and analyse offline, digitalised data in form of videos. I observed the students' online interaction and I studied their attitudes and behaviour to identify their culture. The telecollaboration, the context of the research, was online whilst the observation, the focus of the approach, took place offline and asynchronously. Not to have to observe their interaction in real time allowed me working with flexibility on time but still with real and valid information.

In non-participant observation the observer is not attending, but usually the researcher is close to the phenomenon of the study. This describes my position in this study, which helped to understand the students' interaction and eased my task as an observer. However, sometimes I found it difficult to separate my role as an ethnographer in this study from my job as a teacher. For example, when trying not to take into account a students' feedback about the telecollaboration only meant for the course and not to be included in this study.

Besides the threat of validity due to subjective observation, the presence of the observer can alter diverse behaviours (Cohen et al., 2007). The students knew that the teacher/researcher would observe the recordings. This could have influenced their behaviour even though they knew that they were not synchronously observed.

By observing, the researcher counts with the opportunity of collecting data in social and natural (or semi-natural) situations in immediate location and time (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, this type of research allows the researcher to collect more valid and real information than other methods. Responses in a questionnaire or statements in an interview can be completely different from interactions in video observations. Observation minimize the amount of non-natural or invalid information. (Bryman, 2018). As this is the case, I could collect more useful and authentic information from the correspondents' videos when they interacted online than the information I had obtained by using other methods.

A known concern named by Pekkola (2014) is the big amount of data that can be collected when using a qualitative method and the difficulties to handle or limit it. This was not an issue in this study since it was planned in detail. I used direct observation of the human behaviour helped by a previously categorised register and I collected data in a predetermined or systematic way by using encoded templates. Technology helped to handle the data. In addition to contribute to make interactions across cultures a common experience in our global 21st century, technology helps to collect valuable information as well as to handle and limit the data.

I finally acknowledge that I could obtain a general and adequate view of the students' disposition towards the cultures of others when collaborating online. However, one's own cultural competence can benefit by being aware of one's own preconceptions and attitudes towards other cultures. Consequently, the observations could have been complemented by

conducting interviews or sending questionnaires to the participants aiming to involve them even more in the development of their cultural awareness, to examine their own goals, and to explore their attitudes towards intercultural telecollaboration more deeply. This would have resulted in a bigger outcome and endorsement of the results of this study.

5.3 Challenges possibly affecting the results

This study was performed as planned and the results agreed for the most part with the literature review. Nevertheless, the study explored various challenges or difficulties. I address here three factors that did not limit my study but could have influenced the students' behaviour and interaction and consequently my observation:

A new online experience for the students

Virtual collaboration with European students for developing oral skills in a foreign language was a completely new experience for the Spanish students in Hanken. Their peer students were unknown. They spoke Spanish in a semi-authentic situation for the first time. Despite their high ITC skills, an unknown and new didactic method can also affect the students' capability, attitude and behaviour. The fact of being recorded and observed is still not comfortable for all students and it is possible that this circumstance made them behave differently than in class. This could also have affected their general behaviour when trying to accomplish the tasks as well as when interacting or communicating within other cultures.

The students' lack of awareness of the others' cultural expressions could also agree with the Encyclopedia of E-collaboration regarding computer-supported workspaces. Kock (2008) defines awareness as the human's ability to perceive the other's activities and one's own in a collaborative context. He underlines the fact that despite of the collaborative software nearly always provides elements and information that allow awareness during interaction, the awareness is not so effective when interplaying in a computer-supported workspace. The reason for that is that the means allowing sensory organs to perceive information are limited. Instead, Baker et al. (2001) state that this also leads to less interferences than when collaborating face-to-face. Although this is part of the process of developing intercultural competence in telecollaboration, I did not focus my observation on the online domain, but on the students' intercultural interplay.

The knowledge of SFL

Intercultural communication competence refers to the interaction in a foreign language (Coperías Aguilar, 2010). Therefore, the competence of the participants in the exchange is also related to their language knowledge. The CEFR (2001) states that a student at level A2

“can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going on his/her own accord”. The communication between the correspondents was held at a beginner’s level in the studied foreign language. Both courses at the respective universities shared a goal level of A1.2-A2, i.e. a basic user level. Managing to communicate some more information or express further opinions than what it was asked in the tasks, appeared to be difficult for them. They were limited in what they were able to add to the conversation. Therefore, their basic skills in the Spanish language remained one of the impediments for their fluent communication.

Even though they were previously informed about the possibility of using English to discuss any other subject outside the tasks, they concentrated on the assignment, so the side interaction became very poor and did not offer much relevant information for the study. This restrained the observation and hindered their communication.

Multiculturalism

Arasaratnam (2016) considers participants in a dyadic intercultural collaboration coming not only from two distinct cultural backgrounds but having multicultural identities. The students had not been asked in advance about their culture. I assumed the Swedish-Finnish and Dutch cultures being predominant. When observing the videos, I realised the existence of other cultural settings. This was also the case for the students. The tasks concerned the prevalence of Spanish, Dutch and Finnish cultures, stereotypes and habits. However, some participants had backgrounds in more than only one cultural group, different to the ones considered in the task. For example, two students at Utrecht University were exchange students coming from other European countries and another student’s family came from an Asiatic country.

On the other side, most of the students in Utrecht were not knowledgeable about the Swedish-Finnish culture of their peers in Vaasa. At the beginning, they struggled to understand that Hanken offers most courses in Swedish and not in Finnish. This could have turned into a limitation of the development of intercultural awareness since it needs to be supplemented with cultural knowledge (Adams, 1995), but it did not prove to be a limitation of the study. Instead, this awoke their interest. The students in Utrecht became more curious about the culture of the Swedish-speaking population in Finland. The Finnish students in Vaasa had very limited occasions to meeting exchange students, at least during the first year of their studies, and they became very interested in the Dutch culture and other cultures.

As previously proved by O’Dowd (2006, 2011), the students are given the opportunity to learn about their peers’ culture when they need to discuss their cultures. O’Dowd also states that telecollaboration should be integrated in the language education and should not occur only as an extra activity. In March 2021, a second telecollaboration took place between 80 students of

Spanish as a Foreign Language at Utrecht University and 80 students at Hanken, Vaasa and Helsinki. The main purpose of our virtual exchange consists in incorporating this e-collaboration as the standard oral assessment in the course Español 1B at Hanken.

Despite all challenges that were encountered, it is necessary to recall that enhancing cultural competence is a lifelong process (Deardorff, 2020). We all progressively develop and improve our cultural competence through different experiences, one single experience is not sufficient.

5.4 Conclusion

Based on the literature review and the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the students presented appropriate attitudes for the development of intercultural communicative competence in their telecollaboration with peer students from other cultures. They displayed respect, openness, curiosity and a desire to discover other cultures. They demonstrated their abilities as good listeners and appropriate communicators when interacting in a multicultural group and in a virtual workplace. They also showed appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation as well as engagement, humour and embracement of joy. The tasks supported them to be aware of the other countries' generalised habits, customs, and stereotypes, which appeared to contribute to enhanced cultural competence. Even though the practice was brief, it posed good learning opportunities and perhaps even contributed to the students' life-long process to develop into global citizens.

Previous research confirmed the potential that telecollaboration holds for the development of intercultural communicative competence in higher education, even in small-scale practices. As a part-time teacher, my effort feels like as a humble contribution foremost to the students' learning, to the university's curriculum and a small input to the internationalisation of the Finnish higher education. Hopefully, this can inspire other scholars and teachers in tertiary education to use similar practices and research on the field, and thus contribute to telecollaboration. This could develop the exchange of intercultural communication, preserving and promoting cultural diversity and consequently internationalism.

Further research or practical implementation

The potentials for research in this field are countless. Research centred on non-tandem based practices, on innovative technologies and digital learning methods thus on other foreign languages than English would widen the network of telecollaboration and promote plurilingualism and diversity. More individual-centred variables such as effectiveness could be studied and analysed in future projects endorsing intercultural communicative competence by using not only observation but complementary methods of research such as questionnaires or

group interviews. To examine humour or joy in telecollaborative practices in higher education is a less appraised scope but interesting to investigate. Positive psychology in SFL teaching through virtual reality is also a subject of my interest. To develop a new model of ICC specific for telecollaboration could be a project with a bigger dimension. In addition to all these possibilities, I propose primarily to promote and support the participation of part-time teachers in intercultural exchange programmes online, giving them and their students related possibilities of cultural development and internationalisation.

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Appendices

A. Consent agreements

Consent agreement on participation in this academical study

CONSENT AGREEMENT ON PARTICIPATION IN AN ACADEMICAL STUDY

Researcher: _____

Supervisor: _____

Project title (preliminary): Intercultural competence in Finnish Higher Education by telecollaboration between European countries.

Purpose of the study: The main purpose of this study is to investigate intercultural competence through the telecollaboration of students at a Swedish-speaking Finnish University and a Dutch University in their common interest of learning Spanish as a foreign language.

Procedure: As part of the oral assessment of the Spanish courses in the respective universities, Hanken School of Economics in Vaasa (FI) and Utrecht University in Utrecht (NL), the students will collaborate online on two tasks in intercultural groups of 3-6 people. Each task will be performed by videoconference using Jitsi and submitted to their teachers in week 11 and 12. The online sessions will be recorded, and the videos saved in Dropbox for both teachers to assess their students' oral skills. The researcher will observe the recorded videos from your sessions. After that, your group may also be interviewed about your intercultural perspectives and experience in this virtual exchange project. The interviews will take place by videoconferencing and they will be recorded in the same procedure.

Confidentiality: Your personal data will be kept confidential. Only your personal contact details will be shared with the other students from the peer university. Other information and related materials will be available to the researcher only. All information about you will be anonymised.

Risks: There are no expected risks to you participating in this project since the research results and personal information will be anonymise in order to protect your identity.

Benefits: You can enhance your intercultural communicative competence, language and ITC skills in this project, and also, your participation will represent a contribution to research in this area.

Participation: It is voluntary and your decision will be respected. If you chose not to take part in the project it will not affect your participation in the course in any way.

Use of the results of the research: The research will be published and results may be presented at research meetings, and conferences, in other publications and as part of a Master thesis being produced by the researcher, who is also part-time Spanish teacher at Hanken School of Economics of Vaasa. Your personal information will be kept anonymous.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign this consent form.

I hereby consent and do voluntarily offer to follow the study requirements and take part in the study.

In _____, ____ of _____ 2020,

Name _____ Signature _____

*Muchas gracias por tu colaboración,
Paula Alagarda Durán.*

Consent agreement on e-collaboration within two European High Schools

CONSENT AGREEMENT ON E-COLLABORATION AND A THESIS STUDY WITHIN UNIVERSITIES

Type of cooperation: E-collaboration in the oral assessment of the Spanish courses 1 (level A2) between Hanken School of Economics in Vaasa (FI) and Utrecht University in Utrecht (NL).

Purpose: The main purpose of this e-collaboration project is to assess the students of the Spanish courses in respective universities in their oral language acquisition and to promote intercultural competence between them.

Procedure: As part of the oral assessment of the Spanish courses in respective universities, the students will e-collaborate on two tasks in intercultural groups of 3-5 people. Each task will be performed by videoconference by *Jitsi meet* and submitted to their teachers in weeks 11 and 12. The online sessions will be recorded and the videos saved in *Dropbox* for both teachers to assess their students oral skills.

Parallel, the Spanish teacher at Vaasa (FI) will examine the students' intercultural awareness for the final Thesis of her Master studies in Adult Pedagogy. The researcher will observe the recorded videos from the sessions. If further data collection is needed for the study, some groups may also be interviewed about their intercultural perspectives and experience in this virtual exchange project. The interviews would take place also by videoconferencing and would be recorded in the same procedure.

The students' participation in this study is voluntary, respected and will not affect their participation in their Spanish courses in any way. They will be informed about the study and asked for consent. The results of the study may be presented at research meetings and conferences, in publications and as part of the Master thesis being conducted by the researcher. The students' personal information will be anonymized in order to protect their identity.

Spanish teacher and researcher:

Aware of this e-collaboration and of the Spanish teacher's Thesis study, I hereby consent and agree on participation:

In _____, ____ of _____ 2020,

Name _____ Signature _____

In _____, ____ of _____ 2020,

Name _____ Signature _____

Muchas gracias por el apoyo y la participación.

Esperando una telecolaboración exitosa para todos,

Paula Alagarda Durán.

B. Oral tasks.

Oral task 1 to perform by the students in their telecollaboration

TAREA DE TELECOLABORACIÓN 1GENTE CON GENTE

CONOCIENDO A MI COMPAÑERO

El objetivo de esta tarea es conocer a tu compañero y su cultura un poquito mejor.

Durante la sesión vais a hablar de cómo son los jóvenes en vuestro país y de estereotipos españoles, finlandeses y neerlandeses.



01 ASÍ SON LOS JÓVENES ESPAÑOLES, FINLANDESES Y NEERLANDESES. ¿Y TÚ?

Hay investigaciones que dicen que "los jóvenes en Holanda son los más felices del mundo", que "el 50% de los jóvenes finlandeses opta por la educación técnica" y que los jóvenes españoles "se independizan a los 29 años." ¿Te sientes identificado?

Explica a tu compañero cómo son los jóvenes de tu país [piensa en dónde y con quién viven/ estudiar vs trabajar/ familia y amigos/ idiomas, etc.]

¿Y tú? ¿Eres un joven típico de tu país?

02 ESTEREOTIPOS

¿Sabes lo que es un estereotipo?

estereotipo

Del gr. στερεός *steredós* 'sólido' y τύπος *týpos* 'molde'.

1. m. Imagen o idea aceptada comúnmente por un grupo o sociedad con carácter inmutable.

- ¿Qué estereotipos conoces sobre la cultura o el país de tu compañero? Por ejemplo.
"Muchas personas piensan que en España todo el mundo duerme la siesta"
"La gente cree que todos los neerlandeses fuman marihuana."
"Todos los finlandeses tienen sauna en casa"
- Tu compañero te va a decir los estereotipos que conoce de tu país y tú tienes que comentar si son verdaderos o falsos.
- Y tú, ¿conoces algún estereotipo más sobre tu propia cultura? Coméntalo con tu compañero.

TAREA DE TELECOLABORACIÓN 1GENTE CON GENTE

PARA CONOCER MEJOR A TU COMPAÑERO



03 ¿QUÉ QUIERES SABER DE TU COMPAÑERO?

Hazle seis preguntas a tu compañero para poder conocerlo un poco mejor. Puedes preguntarle sobre su familia, sus gustos... ¡lo que quieras!

Recuerda: es importante hablar con naturalidad y no leer.

Oral task 2 to perform by the students in their telecollaboration

GENTE Y COSTUMBRES

TAREA DE TELECOLABORACIÓN 2

Esta tarea final también es para conoceros un poquito mejor. El tema principal: hábitos y costumbres.

CONTEXTO

Tus compañeros extranjeros vienen a tu país. Tienes que comentar con ellos vuestras costumbres [y las tuyas personales] y hacer referencia a alguna diferencia que crees que van a encontrar.



CON TUS COMPAÑEROS

1. Habla de algunas costumbres o hábitos de tu país que están muy generalizados [por ejemplo en España la siesta, comer mucho, dormir poco, etc.]
2. Puedes comentar los horarios de comidas, ocio, trabajo, comercios, etc. ¿Qué diferencias con los de su país pueden encontrar en su visita? ¿qué es importante saber en tu país respecto a ellos?
3. Y tú, ¿qué costumbres tienes?
4. ¿Qué hábitos tienen los jóvenes en tu país?
5. ¿Qué diferencias conocéis entre las costumbres españolas/latinoamericanas y las vuestras? Escribid una lista.
6. ¿Cómo es tu universidad? ¿Qué se puede estudiar? ¿Qué idiomas estudias?
7. ¿Qué hábitos tienen los estudiantes en tu universidad? ¿Hay estudiantes de otras culturas en tus clases?

RECUERDA:

Es importante hablar con naturalidad y no leer

C. Semi-structured templates

Template 1

ATTITUDES			
	<u>Respect for the cultures of others</u>	<u>Openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures</u>	<u>Curiosity and discovery</u>
HAS1*
HAS2
UUS1**
UUS2

* Hanken Student

** Utrecht University Student

Template 2

EXTERNAL OUTCOME		
	<u>Appropriate communication in an intercultural situation</u>	<u>Appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation</u>
HAS1
HAS2
UUS1
UUS2

D. Filled templates after observation

VIDEO 1: 200311_GRUPO 7_ECO 1_T1

ATTITUDES			
	<u>Respect for the cultures of others</u>	<u>Openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures</u>	<u>Curiosity and discovery</u>
HAS1	shows no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word against the others' cultures does not support HAS2 much	says that he is from a small island and lives there but would prefer to live in a city, not in nature <i>"I do not like sauna"</i> works in Åland for the summer	not shown (is quite shy, thus his Spanish knowledge is very poor)
HAS2	agrees with a "yes" or an "ok" when the peer colleagues talk about their customs	says openly that he does not like sauna either and that he is Swedish speaking and does not speak Finnish, <i>"we are not typical"</i> <i>"I don't play football, I play computer games"</i> (the others laugh)	is a bit afraid to ask but curious to know what is behind the expression <i>"going Dutch"</i> and if Dutch people are greedy asks out of the task how long they have studied Spanish since they speak Spanish so much better!
UUS1	helps one member when he is lost in the exercise, shows kindness agrees with the stereotype that Dutch are greedy, just smiling, not taking it as an offence	openly explains having a sister living with her and their mother, and two brothers living with her father does not like cheese thinks that UUS2 has a big family	asks if they work and how youngsters are in Finland (in the task) but besides how a student lives in Finland and prices for renting apartments wants to know if they prefer living in a city or in a village, closer to nature. She likes nature, other cultures, and wants to travel to Perú, Bolivia and Chile <i>"This summer I am going to travel to Italy with my boyfriend and a friend"</i> asks HAS2 if it is not common to speak Swedish in Finland
UUS2	shows support with no verbal language, thumbs up	says that she has four sisters and one brother has no comments about her culture or religion does not like cheese either and she is short, despite that all Dutch are tall	asks where they would like to travel. She would like to travel to Indonesia, Mali and Ecuador

EXTERNAL OUTCOME		
	<u>Appropriate communication in an intercultural situation</u>	<u>Appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation</u>
HAS1	<p>listens with attention</p> <p>he does not speak much</p> <p>prefers to stay quiet and calm when he does not understand and does not know the answer</p> <p>asks many times what something means</p>	<p>waits for being questioned (is quiet thus his Spanish knowledge is very poor)</p> <p>drinks water all the time without bothering</p> <p>takes out dry snuff in the middle of the conversation, unnoticed by the others</p> <p>does not support HAS2 much</p> <p>waits for HAS2 to come back when being kicked out from Jitsi</p>
HAS2	<p>listens with attention</p> <p>starts the conversation in a good mood, kidding on the technics: <i>"So it still works, good!"</i> and where to save the video makes the others laugh</p> <p>says <i>"what does it mean?"</i>, <i>"one moment, pls."</i>, <i>"can you repeat, pls.?"</i> often</p> <p>is very expressive with face gestures e.g., showing surprise</p> <p><i>"Nice to meet you"</i></p>	<p>waits for his turn to speak</p> <p>(drinks tea with litala cup and has Marimekko rag in the kitchen)</p> <p>eats Fazer sweets making lots of noise with the package (but tries not to) speaks when eating it, sits with one foot on the chair and stretches his arms</p> <p>does not support HAS1 much</p> <p>smiles and laughs as nervous expression</p>
UUS1	<p>calls her mates by their first names</p> <p>admits their conversation and communication went well despite it was difficult to understand each other cause of <i>"a pretty bad connection"</i> <i>"It would have been a way easier to talk in person"</i> <i>"We tried our best!"</i></p> <p>encourages the others</p>	<p>gets surprised when the Finnish students say that they have studied Spanish for about six months and the students in Utrecht only for one and a half, but she does not criticize their low level, neither the Finnish students take it as such</p> <p>is moving all the time, nervous</p>
UUS2	<p>calls her mates by their first names</p> <p>both Dutch students keep the conversation going, are more talkative, repeat in different ways to be understood</p> <p>asks and explains in English if the others do not understand</p> <p>asks politely for permission to leave the meeting: <i>"Do you mind if I leave?"</i></p>	<p>no comment or reaction about the person eating often</p> <p>goes closer to the computers micro and speaks louder to be better understood</p> <p>calm even though she has a very bad connection and sound</p>

VIDEO 2: 200312_GRUPO 8_ECO 2_T2

ATTITUDES			
	<u>Respect for the cultures of others</u>	<u>Openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures</u>	<u>Curiosity and discovery</u>
HAS1	shows no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word at all	says Finns need personal space, keep distance (UUS2 says this is good for Corona virus and all laugh)	is quiet, does not show curiosity
HAS2	agrees, nods and smiles just laughs and ironically says "very well!" when UUS2 tells them that surprisingly in NL there is a city with more coffee shops than Secondary schools	very open during the whole conversation explains Finnish people do not speak with unknown people in the bus, in the street, ... tells about their university, the great university associations, the food, ... says Finns are barefoot at home and shows her foot (at the background you can see the entrance of the apartment and the shoes at the door)	asks out of the tasks how their university has been affected by the pandemic. UUS2 says it will be close the following day. "Ours from tomorrow too!"
UUS1	is considerate agrees, nods, smiles and laughs	remarks the good quality in teaching at their University trains a lot and takes always a cold shower afterwards has humour also	not shown
UUS2	agrees by smiling and laughs encourages the others: "you speak very good English, guys" "you are very sportive, UUS2!" does not like young people using their mobiles all the time, but it is ok	very open during the whole conversation is very happy, continuously laughing admits reading every night before bedtime "as a grandma, isn't it?" (she laughs, not HAS1 & HAS2). explains she is Turkish/Kurd and they also are barefoot at home. She drinks lots of Turkish tea, speaks Turkish and German says she always dances and smiles	she is reading an interesting book about the story of an Indian likes her university a lot because it is international wants to travel to Finland

EXTERNAL OUTCOME		
	<u>Appropriate communication in an intercultural situation</u>	<u>Appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation</u>
HAS1	listens with attention waits for the other to talk	supports her classmate calm
HAS2	waits for her turn to talk but also keeps the conversation going, connecting with positive expressions as " <i>Perfect</i> ", " <i>Great!</i> ", " <i>Very good</i> ", ... sings " <i>working night to fight...</i> " when saying they both are studying and working. They all laugh after the song	becomes very happy, shows thumbs up when UUS2 says that she and UUS1 will come to Finland positive and enthusiastic engagement is very helpful to the others by saying in Spanish the word they do not know or explains it in English
UUS1	calls their mates by their first names asks for forgiveness when she cannot express herself correctly very expressive with gestures ("high five") and moving hands when talking says that the Dutch have a very strong guttural sound and shows it loudly and laughing afterwards, not ashamed reacts positively to the others' comments about their habits or customs " <i>very nice!</i> " " <i>that's good!</i> "	positive and enthusiastic engagement is very helpful to the others by saying in Spanish the word they do not know or explains in English smiling and happy
UUS2	calls his mates by their first names waits for his turn to talk	calm, very happy and shows positive engagement

VIDEO 3: 200319_GRUPO 5_ECO 2_T2

ATTITUDES			
	<u>Respect</u> for the cultures of others	<u>Openness</u> towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures	<u>Curiosity and discovery</u>
HAS1	no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word at all smiles and nods when the peer colleagues talk about their customs	does not speak much	curious to know at what age Dutch people are legally allowed to smoke marihuana
HAS2	just smiles when their peers talk about smoking weed in the Netherlands nods or agrees with an ok or yes when the peers talk about their customs	explains thoroughly the use of Swedish language in Hanken, that they are bilingual, and that Swedish and Finnish are official languages. says openly that some Finns do not like Swedish language, but he does	curious to know at what age Dutch people are legally allowed to drink alcohol and asks if they bought it the day they turned 18. asks about Dutch typical food. Says that her girlfriend likes "stroomwafels" and "poffertjes" and wants to know what it is
UUS1	no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word at all smiles and nods when the peer colleagues talk about their customs	admits liking "poffertjes" a lot and explains what it is	gets very surprised ("Wau!") when HAS2 talks about the Swedish language in Finland asks very curiously more about it because it is " <i>So interesting!</i> "
UUS2	admits she started drinking at 16 discusses the difference in ages to be legally allowed to consume alcoholic beverages in their respective countries and the customs related to HAS2's question " <i>why?</i> " she responds that it is just different cultures shows intercultural empathy	admits youngsters in the Netherlands are a bit arrogant	asks about Finnish typical food

EXTERNAL OUTCOME		
	<u>Appropriate communication in an intercultural situation</u>	<u>Appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation</u>
HAS1	<p>listens with attention</p> <p>adds kindly information to his classmate's statement when needed</p> <p>makes funny face gestures (non-verbal communication) two times to keep the mood of the participants</p>	<p>prefers to stay quiet and calm when not understanding the others. Asks them to kindly wait for a moment, when needs to search for help</p> <p>shows humour when being called by HAS2 to answer a question, he says his name, makes the others to react positively and with empathy towards him, just laughing and repeating the question</p>
HAS2	<p>listens with attention and also keeps the conversation going</p> <p>asks kindly when not understanding "<i>repeat your question, please</i>"</p> <p>jokes with HAS1 and gives him the turn to talk back by just saying his name in good and funny manners</p>	<p>drinks water now and then without interrupting the conversation</p>
UUS1	<p>uses many interjections (oh! ah!) to express admiration, surprise, happiness, encouragement or approval</p> <p>Is direct, two times asks "what?" with not appropriate tone and face gesture, a bit too direct</p>	<p>keeps on turning a cord of the sweater the first 10 minutes, later chews gum for a while, looks at her nails and moves her hair often</p> <p>is not understood, blames herself and repeats her statement again</p> <p>shows positivism by speaking clearly and with good tone</p>
UUS2	<p>encourage UUS1 with the technical problems at the beginning of the video, showing empathy</p> <p>repeats the question to his peer when notifying he is lost demonstrates attentiveness</p>	<p>drinks water now and then without interrupting the conversation</p>

VIDEO 4: 200319_GRUPO 9_ECO 2_T1

ATTITUDES			
	<u>Respect for the cultures of others</u>	<u>Openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures</u>	<u>Curiosity and discovery</u>
HAS1	<p>shows no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word against the others' cultures</p> <p>agrees with a "yes" when the peer colleagues talk about their stereotypes</p> <p>does not react when UUS1 tells he smokes marihuana. She answers to his questions saying that she does not and that it is illegal in Finland</p>	<p>they have sauna in the building</p> <p>admits not to be a typical Finnish student because "<i>I don't go out, I do not go to the gym, I only study</i>" (the others laugh)</p> <p>when UUS1 asks her why she admits that the University studies are very important for her and she wants to get good results</p> <p>explains having a small family, only a sister but does not give more details</p>	<p>shows no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word against the others' cultures</p> <p>agrees with a "yes" when the peer colleagues talk about their stereotypes</p> <p>does not react when UUS1 tells he smokes marihuana. She answers to his questions saying that she does not and that it is illegal in Finland</p>
HAS1	<p>agrees with a "yes" when the peer colleagues talk about their stereotypes</p> <p>smiles and laughs a little when her peer says that the stereotype that Dutch youngsters smoke marihuana is stupid</p>	<p>works in an Italian restaurant in Helsinki for the summer and they have very good food and wines</p> <p>says openly that she is shy, that Finnish people do not talk to strangers at the bus</p> <p>explains having a small family, only a sister but does not give more details</p>	
UUS1	<p>smiles and laughs when HAS1 says that she does nothing else than to study and asks if she cannot do both: study and party</p> <p>clarifies twice something in English</p> <p>says that he believes that Dutch young people are the happiest in the world and comments with "<i>why not?</i>" when HAS1 says that the studies say that Finnish people are the happiest</p>	<p>says that he has four older sisters and many uncles and aunts, a big family. He likes it</p> <p>identifies himself as a typical Dutch when smoking marihuana, is tall and big, practices sport and likes going out</p>	
UUS2	<p>agrees by smiling when her peers talk about stereotypes</p> <p>admits some Dutch stereotypes apply only Amsterdam</p>	<p>says that he lives with his parents, he has four older sisters, but they do not live with them</p> <p>does not smoke marihuana often and he likes drinking alcohol</p>	<p>not much shown</p> <p>asks what they do in their free time at home during the quarantine</p>

EXTERNAL OUTCOME		
	<u>Appropriate communication in an intercultural situation</u>	<u>Appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation</u>
HAS1	listens with attention and also keeps the conversation going jokes with UUS1 repeating that she only studies when he asks about her hobbies says she lives "alone"	looks at her nails or moves her hair often smiles and laughs does not look to the camera all the time, they look to each other and to the paper supports her classmate and translates some words into Swedish when she is not sure if she understood
HAS2	listens with attention and also keeps the conversation going has a husky voice says she lives "alone"	does not look to the camera all the time, they look to each other and to the paper waits for his turn to speak supports her classmate
UUS1	uses many interjections (oh! ah!) to express admiration, surprise, happiness, encouragement or approval Is direct, two times asks "what?" jokes with UUS2 when he says he would like to watch "La casa de papel" but has no time. UUS1 asks how come if he is in quarantine and in his parents' place says he lives "alone" with two other students	hums a couple of times lets the women talk and ask first
UUS2	waits for his turn to speak	waits for his turn to speak

VIDEO 5: 200311_GRUPO 12_ECO 1_T1

ATTITUDES			
	<u>Respect for the cultures of others</u>	<u>Openness towards intercultural learning and people from other cultures</u>	<u>Curiosity and discovery</u>
HAS1	<p>shows no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word against the others' cultures</p> <p>agrees when talking about the German, Dutch, Spanish and Finnish stereotypes but kindly explains that even being a stereotype that Finnish people like metal music, only 10% of the population does like it, so it is not so popular indeed</p> <p>he comments that Dutch people smoke marijuana, UUS1 and UUS2 agree but do not discuss about it</p>	<p>admits he is living alone in a two rooms apartment, 2km from downtown and that he has sauna in the apartment</p>	<p>shows no bad reaction, nor an inappropriate sign or word against the others' cultures</p> <p>agrees with a "yes" when the peer colleagues talk about their stereotypes</p> <p>asks his peers if they like their countries. They do</p>
UUS1	<p>agrees when talking about the German, Dutch, Spanish and Finnish stereotypes</p> <p>smiles and laughs when she agrees with the stereotype that Dutch people are tall, but she is not</p>	<p>tells openly about her family: names of her siblings and ages, that her parents har a cat, rabbits and chickens</p> <p>proposes to discuss with her peer the stereotype on Dutch people being stingy. The others do not understand the word in Spanish. She explains it to them in other words. She admits it is true.</p>	<p>says that the Germans always drink sparkling water and waits for the confirmation</p>
UUS2	<p>agrees, smiles and laughs talking about stereotypes</p> <p>clarifies twice something in English for his peers</p> <p>studies in Utrecht but due to the pandemic lives in Berlin. He knows many stereotypes about the Netherlands and the Dutch culture. He has previous experience</p>	<p>does not recognise himself as a typical German youngster when studying abroad. He admits most Germans do stay in German for the studies, but he preferred to study abroad to be away from all his friends and be able to easier concentrate in the studies.</p> <p>to study at the University in his home country is much cheaper than in the Netherlands. HAS1 does not react on it despite the difference in Finland. He openly and humbly explains that he attends three different studies at the same time in the Netherlands: Political sciences, Economics and History.</p> <p>admits Germans like sparkling water and that he does it always when he is in Germany but not in the Netherlands. He shows gladly his glass and that he is just drinking it</p>	<p>explains that his siblings are very important for him and asks the others about their families</p>

EXTERNAL OUTCOME		
	<u>Appropriate communication in an intercultural situation</u>	<u>Appropriate behaviour in an intercultural situation</u>
HAS1	<p>listens with attention</p> <p>answers plainly and simply</p> <p>waits for his turn to speak or when the peers ask him</p> <p>once interrupts the dialog between his peers but it is due to the bad connection (they all notice but do not react in a bad way, they just continue)</p> <p>says "one moment, pls.", "one minute, pls."</p>	<p>smiles a bit, no big expressions</p> <p>hums once</p> <p>very calm and quiet (shows only his head and neck in the camera, difficult to distinguish body language)</p>
UUS1	<p>listens with attention and also keeps the conversation going</p>	<p>shows empathy when she comments the Finnish stereotype about people drinking much alcohol</p> <p>HAS1 agrees and smiles and she immediately adds that Dutch people drink also a lot of beer</p>
UUS2	<p>starts the conversation with small talk: talking about the difficult situation due to the pandemic (the reason he is in his hometown in Germany) and asking about the weather in Finland and in the Netherlands</p> <p>keeps the conversation going</p> <p>is communicative and expressive with face gestures, shows in his face when he is asking or wondering about something</p> <p>calls his mates by their first names</p>	<p>does not look to the camera all the time, looks at his paper and sometimes turns to look to the side</p> <p>moves his hands when speaking</p>

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