

Developing intercultural competence among Chinese-speaking university students of Spanish through the films of Pedro Almodóvar

JINZHU QU

JUAN RAMÓN GUIJARRO OJEDA (CORRESPONDING AUTHOR)

University of Granada, Spain

Received: 2025-02-15 / Accepted: 2025-10-03

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.viXV.33688>

Porta Linguarum ISSN paper edition: 1697-7467, ISSN digital edition: 2695-8244

ABSTRACT: Numerous studies have revealed that teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) in China from a communicative and intercultural approach faces serious obstacles due to the cultural characteristics of Chinese-speaking students, such as passivity, fear of mistakes, the search for perfection, dependence on the teacher, and reluctance to work in groups. These factors perpetuate teaching that focuses mainly on linguistic aspects. To reverse this situation, the Chinese Ministry of Education implemented in 2022 new requirements for SFL teaching in universities, which would allow this student body to align with international standards in language teaching. Among the nine key competencies defined, intercultural competence stands out as a tool for increasing motivation, success, and cultural integration. In this context, the present research analyses the intercultural competence development of 15 Chinese-speaking SFL students at Jilin University (China). For this purpose, educational tools based on Almodóvar's films have been designed and implemented, supported by studies that highlight his treatment of complex and universal sociocultural themes from a profoundly Spanish perspective. The qualitative results demonstrate the effectiveness of these resources in overcoming the predominant structuralist approach, fostering intercultural competence in its affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions, and increasing students' motivation and sense of participation.

Keywords: Spanish as a Foreign Language, Chinese-speaking university students, intercultural competence development, communicative competence in Chinese SFL students, Pedro Almodóvar's films as intercultural resources in SFL

Desarrollo de la competencia intercultural en estudiantes universitarios sinohablantes de español a través del cine de Pedro Almodóvar

RESUMEN: Numerosos estudios revelan que la creciente enseñanza de ELE en China desde un enfoque comunicativo e intercultural se enfrenta a serios obstáculos debido a las características del alumnado sinohablante, tales como la pasividad, el miedo a los errores, la búsqueda de la perfección, la dependencia del profesor y la reticencia a trabajar en grupo. Estos factores perpetúan una enseñanza centrada principalmente en los aspectos lingüísticos. Para revertir esto, el Ministerio de Educación de China implementó en 2022 nuevos requisitos para la enseñanza de ELE que permitan alinearse con los estándares internacionales en enseñanza de lenguas. Entre las nueve competencias clave definidas, destaca la intercultural

como herramienta para aumentar la motivación y la integración cultural. Así, la presente investigación analiza el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural de quince estudiantes de ELE de la Universidad de Jilin. Se han diseñado e implementado instrumentos educativos basados en el cine de Almodóvar, respaldados por estudios que destacan su tratamiento de temas socioculturales complejos y universales desde una perspectiva profundamente española. Los resultados cualitativos demuestran la eficacia del plan para superar el enfoque estructuralista, fomentando la competencia intercultural en sus dimensiones afectiva, cognitiva y conductual, e incrementando la motivación y el sentido de participación.

Palabras clave: Español como lengua extranjera, estudiantes universitarios sinohablantes, desarrollo de la competencia intercultural, competencia comunicativa en estudiantes chinos de ELE, el cine de Pedro Almodóvar como herramienta intercultural en ELE

1. INTRODUCTION

Driven by the growing demand for Chinese-Spanish bilingual professionals and the development of economic and cultural connections between China and Spanish-speaking countries, learning Spanish as a university major in China has become increasingly popular. Since its inception in 1956, with only 41 students, it has grown to exceed 25,000 students today (Yu, 2021).

Although universities have offered quality teaching that improves language proficiency, their effectiveness in the development of communicative and intercultural competencies has been deficient (Manzanares & Guijarro, 2023). International educational frameworks have promoted these competencies as key objectives, emphasising their importance in foreign language classrooms to prepare students for a globalised world, where effective multicultural communication and interaction are essential (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Council of Europe, 2002). This approach involves not only mastering the language but also understanding and adapting to different sociocultural contexts, which enriches the learning experience and enhances students' ability to function in real environments.

In response to this situation, the Chinese Ministry of Education (2022) established new requirements for the teaching of SFL in universities, highlighting communicative and intercultural competencies as two of the nine essential competencies to be developed in the curriculum. Therefore, the selection of teaching materials that benefit the development of these competencies and increase student interest and motivation has become a key consideration for educators.

In consideration of these premises, this study arises from the emerging need to adopt and evaluate the effectiveness of innovative teaching methods that foster a deeper understanding of intercultural communicative interactions based on authentic contexts to overcome traditional methodologies. Therefore, and based on previous studies on Almodóvar's films in SFL contexts (Ruiz, 1995; Fernández, 2008; Guijarro & Ruiz, 2011; Barbazán, 2014), this study has as its main objective to study the effectiveness of three films by Pedro Almodóvar, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984), *Hable con ella* (2002), and *Volver* (2006), as efficient resources that help develop the intercultural competence of Sino-speaking SFL students (Jilin University), in a motivating and communicative learning environment.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Hispanic studies in China

To respond to the demands of a globalised culture and economy between China and Spanish-speaking countries, the Spanish Section of the Steering Committee for Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education edited the Didactic Guide for the Degree in Spanish Language and Literature (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2022) and, thus, addressed the shortcomings highlighted in the previous programmes, which can be summarised in the fact intercultural competence is relegated to linguistic-communicative aspects and classroom practice is focused on intensive listening and reading in order to accumulate knowledge (Lu, 2000). According to this Guide, the general objective of this degree is to train Spanish language professionals and bilingual or multilingual multidisciplinary individuals to meet the need for international exchanges, economic and social development, as well as teaching and academic research in Spanish as a foreign language.

For the first time, intercultural competence has been conceived as one of the nine competencies that students must develop during their learning process. In addition, international communication, critical thinking, and practical competence are closely related to the fundamental principles of interculturality. Although most subjects are designed to develop communicative competence in Spanish, sociocultural content also forms an important part of the teaching-learning process. This diversity of sociocultural content enriches the curriculum and offers students a broad and global vision of cultures, improving their sensitivity and respect for cultural diversity, their intercultural understanding, and their communicative competence in an intercultural context.

2.2. Characteristics of Chinese students

Passive participation and silence in class, especially in communicative activities, have been repeatedly mentioned by Spanish and Chinese-speaking SFL teachers (Sánchez Griñán, 2008; He, 2008; Méndez Marassa, 2009; Zhu, 2010; Zhao, 2025). He (2008) attributes this to a variety of basic rules of society that Chinese students must comply with, such as respect for the teacher's authority, recognition of the collective that avoids interrupting the large group, modesty, and the prevalence of actions over words, aspects inherited from the Confucian and Taoist traditions. In addition, the avoidance of error predominates because it is perceived as a failure and lack of effort (Zhu, 2010; Galloso Camacho, 2014) and the preference for individual work, but they are also diligent, persistent, perfectionist, affectionate, competent in memorisation, and willing to learn (Sánchez Griñán, 2008). However, adaptation to new communicative and dynamic methodologies only requires a period of adaptation to overcome the shock, as Couto Frías (2010) noted. Moreover, in recent times, a shift from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation with more cultural, linguistic, and professional contextual motivation has been observed (Song, 2019). This change in motivation implies a change in the training offered in universities and that a balance between linguistic and (inter)cultural content is sought in order to be successful in intercultural encounters.

2.3. Interculturality in SFL

Although the concept of intercultural competence originated and developed in the West in the 1980s and 1990s (Zarate, 1986; Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Ek, 1986), it was introduced to foreign language teaching in China by Daokuan He and Wenzhong Hu, two Chinese researchers. Since then, Chinese scholars have begun to explore its impact on foreign language teaching-learning in the country (Dai, 2018). In their studies, they found that many Western theories have ignored the influence of the moral component, an aspect of constant importance in Chinese culture (Lin, 1996; Gao, 1998, 2002; Xiao & Chen, 2009; Manzanares & Guijarro, 2022; Álvarez, 2023). Therefore, Dai and Chen (2015) added the moral dimension, which together with the three dimensions mentioned by Chen and Starosta (1998), make up intercultural competence: affective (openness, relational self-concept, active empathy, mutual appreciation), cognitive (cultural knowledge, critical cultural awareness, cultural integration, intercultural perspective), behavioural (interaction skills, identity negotiation, relationship building, creative tension) and moral (mutual respect, sincerity, tolerance, responsibility).

In Chinese SFL classrooms, due to the marked linguistic (Sino-Tibetan vs. Latin origin; logographic characters vs. Latin alphabet; absence of gender, number, and verb conjugations in Chinese; Chinese tonal phonetics; sounds such as “rr”; and cultural differences (harmony, collectivity, modesty, and respect for authority vs. Individualism, social life, and passion) between China and Spanish-speaking countries, turning Chinese-speaking students learning Spanish as a college major into speakers with good Spanish proficiency in just four years is already a great challenge, and even more so in native speakers (Qu, 2018; Manzanares & Guijarro, 2022).

Like communicative competence, intercultural competence is not acquired instantaneously but is a gradual and continuous process that develops over time through continuous learning and critical reflection (Wessling, 2009). Therefore, assessment should be conducted comprehensively, considering the various components of each stage or level (Byram, 1997), and focus on the continuous process of learning rather than simply on a final outcome (Deardorff, 2006; Lázár et al., 2007; Fantini, 2009; Dai & Chen, 2014; Zhao, 2025).

Among the most recognised components that build intercultural competence, Lázár et al., (2007), Byram (1997) and Fantini (2009) stressed the importance of assessing the ability to behave appropriately in a new cultural context (know-how), the acceptance of a new perspective of the world (know-how to be) and sociocultural knowledge (knowledge). In this way, the cognitive, behavioural and affective dimensions of the learner can be better understood. Of the three dimensions, sociocultural knowledge is the easiest to evaluate because of its objectivity in acquisition.

Once the components to be assessed have been identified, it is essential to develop clear and specific indicators to make the assessment of this abstract competence concrete and measurable (Deardorff, 2006; Dai, 2018). For example, the affective dimension encompasses self-concept, curiosity, open-mindedness, nonjudgemental attitude, social relaxation, active empathy, and mutual appreciation (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Byram, 1997; Dai & Chen, 2015; Zhang, 2020; Zhao, 2025).

2.4. Pedro Almodóvar in SFL

When it comes to incorporating Hispanic films in the SFL classroom, the works of Pedro Almodóvar are a frequent choice because of the authentic use of the Spanish language, as well as for developing themes, characters, and cultural situations that are a good reflection of Spanish society from the late seventies of the last century to the present day, such as religion, gender, marginality, bullfighting, politics, or rurality vs. urbanity (Monterubbianesi, 2011; Brodalka, 2017; Guijarro & Ruiz, 2011; González, 2021).

Several SFL classroom experiences have used Almodóvar's films, such as Ruiz (1995) who analyses the use of *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (1988) to enrich linguistic comprehension and improve the pragmatic competence of students, including the learning of nonverbal language such as gestures and facial expressions typical of Spain. Vilchez (2006), on the other hand, examined *Hable con ella* (2002) paper on pragmatic aspects such as politeness, tone, word choice, and sentence structure, which are essential for respectful and effective communication. In addition, it allows researchers to explore the deep cultural aspects of Spain, such as friendship, love, bullfighting, and the conception of death.

Fernández (2008) developed a series of educational activities using the film *La flor de mi secreto* (1995) to foster an intercultural, critical, and comprehensive perspective on various values, attitudes and behaviours present in Spanish society. This approach not only seeks to improve students' linguistic and cultural understanding but also develops their empathy and critical analysis from an intercultural perspective.

Guijarro Ojeda and Ruiz Cecilia (2011) discuss how the films *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984) and *La ley del deseo* (1987) are effective examples in the SFL classroom to explore how gender roles and sexual identities are represented, constructed, and negotiated in Spanish culture.

In the Chinese-speaking context, Barbazán (2014) implemented a selection of Spanish films, including Pedro Almodóvar's *Atome* (1989), *Los abrazos rotos* (2009), and *Volver* (2006), to familiarise Chinese learners with Spanish culture, as well as challenge and expand their perceptions of women in Spanish society.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling method was employed, as the study required participants to meet specific inclusion criteria: they had to be students majoring in Hispanic Studies at Jilin University, possess a Spanish proficiency level around B2, necessary for the didactic tasks, and have access to an internet-connected device capable of supporting the Microsoft Teams application. This approach was necessary because not all students would have been able to follow the original-language film viewings and the associated communicative tasks. Although this type of sampling does not ensure statistical representativeness, it allows for greater richness and depth of information. Furthermore, given the specificity of the context, replication in similar educational settings could produce comparable results.

Consequently, the sample was finally composed of 15 students (14 females and 1 male) aged 19–26, of whom 4 were at B1 level, 7 at B2 level and 4 at C1 level. Among them, 13 are in China, while 2 are participating in an international exchange in Spain.

Table 1. *Participants*

GROUP	PSEUDONYM	GENDER	AGE	YEAR	LEVEL
Group 1	Ana	Woman	21	Fourth	C1
	Benjamin	Man	22	Fourth	C1
	Nieve	Woman	26	Master	C1
Group 2	Tamar	Woman	23	Fourth	B2
	Tatiana	Woman	22	Fourth	B2
	Yaquelin	Woman	21	Fourth	C1
Group 3	Elena	Woman	20	Third	B2
	Latifa	Woman	20	Fourth	B2
	Lidia	Woman	19	Third	B2
Group 4	Calypso	Woman	20	Second	B1
	Lola	Woman	21	Second	B2
	Nebula	Woman	19	Second	B1
Group 5	Cristina	Woman	19	Second	B1
	Lis	Woman	18	Second	B1
	Susi	Woman	19	Second	B2

3.2. Data collection techniques

3.2.1. *Film corpus and its didactic instruments*

The film corpus selected to investigate interculturality in SFL has focused on the films *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984), *Hable con ella* (2002), and *Volver* (2006). These films were chosen because they mark three different moments in Almodóvar's career, which allows us to work with the students, in addition to the cultural elements, on a certain diachronic perspective of the axiological elements inherent to Spanish culture.

The intercultural topics of discussion selected for each film session were based on the theoretical and practical principles included in the theoretical framework of this study. Although they are not the objects of this paper, the three work sessions include a complete design of communicative tasks and activities that correctly articulate the pedagogical scaffolding.

The intercultural topics that were discussed in each session are as follows:

Session 1: *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984). Topic 1: Gender equality in historical perspective Spain-China: politics, social roles, labour market, and challenges to tradition. Topic 2: Women's marginality and sex work: legality, culture, and contexts.

Session 2: *Hable con ella* (2002). Topic 1: Discussion on bullfighting: Spanish tradition and Chinese traditions. Topic 2: Gender stereotypes from an intercultural perspective: women and bullfighting.

Session 3: *Volver* (2006). Topic 1: Sexual violence: experiences and values from an intergenerational and intercultural Spain-China perspective. Topic 2: Origin, meaning, and vital influence of superstitions in Spain-China intercultural perspective. Topic 3: The culture of death from a Spain-China intercultural perspective. Topic 4: Rurality vs. urbanity, life, social interactions, and architecture. Topic 5: Care in Spain and China: feminism, older adults, ageism.

3.2.2. Research techniques

In this study, focus group discussions and participant observation were used as research techniques. In order to conduct effective discussion groups considering the characteristics of Chinese-speaking students, the participants were divided into five groups of three students each, as stated in section 3.1, to conduct dynamic discussions around the tasks of the teaching plans.

During the discussion processes, the researchers, also observers, reviewed the verbal and nonverbal expressions of the students, noted the interactions in the group, and observed the participants unwilling or unable to participate and, in turn, recorded their own sensations, feelings, and impressions.

All discussion sessions were recorded on the Microsoft Teams Platform with the consent of all participants. The data will be used in research only and will be ethically safeguarded. Once the various research reports have been published, the data will be permanently destroyed.

3.3. Data analysis techniques

The data were analysed using content analysis techniques, grouping the results into three categories or variables and their sub-variables advanced by the different interculturality studies, based on the ideas proposed by Chen and Starosta (1998), Byram (1997), Council of Europe (2002) and Dai and Chen (2015), complemented with our classroom observations.

For the sake of research objectivity, we quantified the number of positive contributions of all participants within each category and subcategory to determine how they evolved during the three group discussion sessions. Furthermore, based on the consensus among researchers such as Deardorff (2006), Lázár et al. (2007), Fantini (2009) and Dai and Chen (2014), who agree that the assessment of this competence should be continuous to fully understand the student's developmental trajectory and adjust teaching in a timely and flexible manner, students' intercultural competence has been assessed in three consecutive stages.

The following are the established categories that are useful for this study.

Table 2. *Categories and subcategories of content analysis*

COMPETENCE	CATEGORIES	SUBCATEGORIES
Interculturality	Affectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Curiosity and openness · Respect, equality, empathy and diversity
	Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Own sociocultural knowledge · Others' sociocultural knowledge · Recognition of sociocultural prejudices and stereotypes
	Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Interpretation and analysis of sociocultural norms and conventions · Intracultural and intercultural linkage and comparison · Critique of sociocultural norms and conversations

3.4. Procedure

Between March and July 2022, contact was established with those responsible for the Spanish Association of Jilin University to explore who would be the potential participants based on the conditions of the level of communicative competence in Spanish. At the same time, and until October 2022, the communicative and intercultural programming to be implemented afterwards was designed. The research was planned to be carried out face-to-face, but the strong restrictive measures in China due to COVID-19 forced it to be performed via telematic means.

The research was conducted over three months from November 2022 to January 2023 in three progressive sessions.

Given the extended viewing time of the films and the preferences of most students, it was decided that the films would be viewed independently by the students before the sessions as many times as they needed, allowing more efficient use of time during the encounters to focus on interactive activities. Likewise, from the first to the third session, adjustments were made to the programming based on the continuous evaluation of the researchers and students of the pedagogical process as a whole.

Finally, from January 2023 to February 2025, data organisation, processing and analysis were carried out.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we explore the evolution of students' intercultural competence, as determined through group discussions. The results will be organised according to the affective, cognitive and behavioural variables of intercultural competence. They also provide a detailed view of group dynamics and their impact on students' learning and adaptation to multicultural environments (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Byram, 1997, 1997; Council of Europe, 2002; Deardoff, 2006; Lázár et al., 2007; Fantini, 2009; Dai & Chen, 2015).

4.1. Intercultural affectivity

First, Table 3 presents the results on the affective dimension of interculturality.

Table 3. *Group results of intercultural affectivity*

		INTERCULTURAL AFFECTIVITY		
		CURIOSITY AND OPENNESS	RESPECT, EQUALITY, EMPATHY AND DIVERSITY	TOTAL
Group 1	Stage 1	0	8	8
	Stage 2	1	7	8
	Stage 3	1	8	9
Group 2	Stage 1	1	5	6
	Stage 2	1	3	4
	Stage 3	0	3	3
Group 3	Stage 1	3	8	11
	Stage 2	1	1	2
	Stage 3	0	5	5
Group 4	Stage 1	2	7	9
	Stage 2	1	0	1
	Stage 3	0	4	4
Group 5	Stage 1	0	8	8
	Stage 2	3	1	4
	Stage 3	2	5	7
Total of the 5 groups per stage		Stage 1		42
		Stage 2		19
		Stage 3		28

Overall, no obvious progress was observed in the affective dimension of intercultural competence for all participating students. Compared with the other two dimensions, the level of competence demonstrated in this dimension became basic and was derived mainly from the aspects of respect, equality, empathy, and diversity, as established by the Chinese Ministry of Education (2022). The lack of progress can be attributed to multiple factors. One of them may be the inherent complexity of assessing this dimension in students, given that it is intrinsically related to aspects of culture that Weaver (1986) considered subjective, internal, and non-tangible, which are shared among natives and are difficult to acquire monographically.

Another factor may be their close connection to moral qualities (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2022). Although scholars such as Lin (1996), Gao (1998), and Deardorff (2006) emphasised these qualities as essential components of intercultural competence, these are private standards that evolve over time and personal experiences, making them unsuitable for assessment by a teacher or researcher in a classroom setting. These two characteristics presented challenges both for the direct observation of this dimension in students and for the establishment of uniform categories that would allow for an accurate and comprehensive assessment of its development.

Furthermore, this low performance is also related to the fact that the focus of this teaching plan was not primarily on this dimension, but rather on the behavioural dimension. The establishment of the focus responds to the fact that, on the one hand, the participating students belonging to intermediate and advanced courses had already developed considerable intercultural sensitivity before the start of the programme, through multiple exposures to various cultural situations throughout their curricular learning.

On the other hand, it responds to the need to consider the students' urgent weaknesses in order to maximise their overall performance in intercultural competence in an educational programme that consisted of only three sessions. This pedagogical prioritisation aligns with Deardorff's (2006) proposal on the need for an educational design with prioritised approaches to teaching target cultures to meet specific educational purposes.

4.2. Intercultural knowledge

Table 4 presents the results of the cognitive dimension of interculturality.

Table 4. *Group results of intercultural knowledge*

		INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE			
		OWN SOCIOCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE	OTHERS' SOCIOCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE	RECOGNITION OF INTERCULTURAL PREJUDICES AND STEREOTYPES	TOTAL
Group 1	Stage 1	6	1	2	9
	Stage 2	4	4	6	14
	Stage 3	14	3	0	17
Group 2	Stage 1	6	4	4	14
	Stage 2	13	7	5	25
	Stage 3	19	5	0	24
Group 3	Stage 1	3	12	3	18
	Stage 2	12	2	5	19
	Stage 3	14	0	0	14
Group 4	Stage 1	4	2	1	7
	Stage 2	7	12	1	20
	Stage 3	6	0	0	6
Group 5	Stage 1	6	5	0	11
	Stage 2	5	4	5	14
	Stage 3	9	2	0	11
Total of the 5 groups per stage				Stage 1	59
				Stage 2	92
				Stage 3	72

Regarding the cognitive dimension, progress was observed in all students in groups 1 and 2. Specifically, most of these students (four out of six) showed improvement in the second stage. One student made progress in the third stage, while another exhibited progres-

sive improvement throughout the programme. This result reflects that despite the variety of individual responses to the teaching plan, the overall performance indicates that students in higher grades (fourth year and Master's) with a level between B2-C1 acquire sociocultural knowledge more easily through films and discussions.

This progress was mainly derived from the development of their own cultural knowledge. However, this fact does not imply that students adopt a completely monocultural perspective, which researchers such as Meyer (1991) and Denis and Matas (2002) relate to the ethnocentric and exotic description that contributes to misunderstandings and stereotypes that undermine the development of intercultural competence. In contrast, one's own sociocultural knowledge manifested in the discussions reflects reactions to sociocultural phenomena observed in the Spanish context through Spanish films.

Therefore, it would be more appropriate to interpret that students exhibit both a multicultural and an intercultural perspective, enhancing their self-analysis and self-revelation in a process of clash and fusion between internal and external knowledge within an intercultural context. The general progress observed in this dimension has supported Fantini and Tirmizi's (2006) theory, according to which such a process helps mitigate ethnocentric bias and favours the development of intercultural awareness. These findings help to reinforce the principles set forth by the Chinese Ministry of Education (2022), particularly regarding the importance of fostering dialogue between a strong sense of personal identity and international outlook. Furthermore, such actions require well-developed humanistic and scientific qualities, along with a spirit of cooperation and innovation, in order to maintain an active and open attitude towards intercultural phenomena and to critically analyse them.

Although the students strengthened their own sociocultural knowledge, no comparable progress was observed in their understanding of foreign cultures. The students' level in this last aspect did not show obvious changes and remained low. Nevertheless, this element maintains a dynamic relationship with the interpretation and analysis of sociocultural norms and the convention domain of the behavioural dimension.

Since students in both groups were in their higher years, they already possessed a broad knowledge of both Hispanic and world aspects and could deepen their understanding through analysis and interpretations of their own. In fact, the subcategory of interpretation and analysis of sociocultural norms and conventions is also dynamically linked to one's own sociocultural knowledge. However, the discrepancy observed in the increases in own versus others' knowledge may be because students share a common cultural background. Thus, in many cases, their discourses about their own norms and conventions were not detailed, which has indirectly corroborated Miquel and Sans' (2004) theory about the importance of learning culture in a dry way to facilitate the decoding of numerous linguistic and cultural cues among native speakers. Moreover, it has confirmed García Cantos' (2012) proposal on the need to immerse oneself in contextualised observations of the culture under study to achieve both explicit and implicit understanding of the culture.

Like the level of other's sociocultural knowledge, the level of recognition of prejudices and stereotypes of these students also remained at a basic level, with no evident changes throughout the programme. This result was mainly due to the selection of the films used in the didactic program, which directly influenced the coverage of sociocultural topics. The fact that some selected films did not contain relevant content on prejudice and stereotypes may have limited the students' development in this aspect.

The variability in the results of the development of the three underlying aspects of the cognitive dimension revealed a weakness of the teaching plan in achieving balanced development in this dimension. This limitation is largely attributed to the absence of activities specifically designed to address each aspect individually, as this is not the primary focus of this research. However, if the main educational objective is to enhance and deepen particular components of this dimension, excerpts from different films that address similar or identical sociocultural themes, in which these elements are clearly highlighted, are considered more effective.

In contrast to the generally stable development observed in the cognitive dimension among the first two groups, the evolution of this same dimension in the last two groups was particularly varied, characterised by fluctuations, stagnations and even declines. This phenomenon reflects that the mastery of sociocultural knowledge of second- and third-year students, who had a level of B1 to B2, varies considerably depending on the topic covered. For example, an “inverted U-shaped” pattern of development was observed in almost all female students in groups 4 and 5, where an increase was recorded in the second stage, mainly due to their understanding of topics such as superstitions. However, this knowledge often remained superficial and quantitative, so the participants did not achieve a deep understanding of the cultural context necessary to develop intercultural skills.

The varying performances achieved by each group suggest that the teaching plan did not have a uniform impact on the development of intercultural awareness among all students. Moreover, its close linkage with the degree of familiarity with the sociocultural topic covered among the students in less advanced courses has again supported Walker and Noda’s (2000) theory of the need for more extensive contextualised practices to approach the level of competent intercultural speakers. Thus, revising and expanding the current plan in terms of both depth and breadth are considered imperative. It would be beneficial to reduce the number of sociocultural topics covered in each session to allow for greater depth in each session and to facilitate the internalisation of sociocultural knowledge. At the same time, similar plans of this type could be introduced in the classroom to provide students with more time and exposure to diverse intercultural contexts.

However, as mentioned above, insufficient development in this dimension can also be interpreted as an indication of improved intercultural skills because the cognitive and behavioural dimensions are closely interrelated: detailed and deep understanding of sociocultural knowledge is recognised as an interpretive and analytical skill, while the identification of stereotypes and prejudices accompanied by analysis and reflection is considered critical skill. Both skills related to strategic and flexible research are essential components and abilities within the behavioural dimension, as established by the Chinese Ministry of Education (2022).

4.3. Intercultural behaviour

Table 5 presents the results of the behavioural dimension of the intercultural dimension of the study.

Table 5. *Group results of intercultural behaviour*

		INTERCULTURAL BEHAVIOUR			
		INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS AND CONVENTIONS	INTRACULTURAL AND INTERCULTURAL LINKAGES AND COMPARISONS	CRITIQUE OF SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS AND CONVERSATIONS	TOTAL
Group 1	Stage 1	4	4	9	17
	Stage 2	10	1	7	18
	Stage 3	18	8	1	27
Group 2	Stage 1	5	2	9	16
	Stage 2	8	2	8	18
	Stage 3	11	12	8	31
Group 3	Stage 1	6	5	7	18
	Stage 2	10	1	6	17
	Stage 3	14	9	6	29
Group 4	Stage 1	2	4	8	14
	Stage 2	1	3	1	5
	Stage 3	8	6	4	18
Group 5	Stage 1	0	2	7	9
	Stage 2	7	0	4	11
	Stage 3	12	9	2	23
Total of the 5 groups per stage				Stage 1	74
				Stage 2	69
				Stage 3	128

Regarding the behavioural dimension, most students (73.3%) made significant progress after the implementation of the teaching plan, and this progress was particularly noticeable in the last stage. This suggests that the development of intercultural skills requires time to accumulate relevant experiences and internalise knowledge. Specifically, improvements were observed mainly in the skills of interpreting and analysing sociocultural norms and conventions and intracultural and intercultural linkages and comparisons, indicating that the plan was effective in deepening understanding and comparing cultures. This effectiveness also meets the requirements of the Chinese Ministry of Education (2022) for teaching cultures in the curriculum, which state that such teaching should facilitate students' strategic and flexible engagement in intercultural activities strategically and flexibly, as well as help them carry out intercultural communication efficiently.

However, their effectiveness in developing the critique of sociocultural norms and conventions was limited, which may be due to the variability of the sociocultural topics addressed, some more controversial and others more neutral, which may have influenced the low performance in this aspect. This reflects that there is still considerable room for improvement in this aspect, which Byram (1997) and Chinese Ministry of Education (2022) consider essential for students to develop "knowing how to engage," characterised by critical thinking. This approach may also be a priority in future iterations of the programme for students to reach the later stages of intercultural competence acquisition: reflection on cultural phenomena and understanding based on cultural empathy, proposed by Barros García et al., (2002), and cultural involvement and internalisation based on deep reflections, identified by Denis and Matas (2002).

In addition, there was a notable diversity in the rate of progress in intercultural skills among the students. For example, some who initially presented a lower level in the group managed, over time, to match or even surpass their peers who started at a more advanced level. This phenomenon illustrates that the evolution of intercultural skills can be gradual or sudden. Despite these variations, it is noteworthy that most of the students experienced considerable improvements in this aspect in only three sessions. This has confirmed the effectiveness of the teaching plan in facilitating this evolution by providing students with opportunities to practice and consolidate their intercultural skills in an intensive, contextualised, active, autonomous and cooperative manner, corroborating Byram and Fleming's (2001) proposal that participation and self-learning are indispensable factors in turning students into competent social actors in intercultural settings.

5. CONCLUSIONS

By way of conclusion, Table 6 presents the evolutionary data of the three dimensions under consideration of the different sub-competences of interculturality evaluated.

Table 6. Overall results of the 5 groups by dimensions and stages

COMPETENCE	SUB-COMPETENCE	STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
Interculturality	Affectivity	42	19	28
	Knowledge	59	92	72
	Behaviour	74	69	128
	GRAND TOTAL	175	180	228

Although the affective dimension of intercultural competence did not register obvious advances, considerable progress was observed in the cognitive and behavioural dimensions. The improvements achieved in intercultural knowledge are centred on self-knowledge, indicating a positive evolution towards greater self-awareness and cultural self-revelation.

However, this progress did not uniformly extend to understanding other cultures or recognising prejudices and stereotypes, underscoring the need to reinforce these aspects in future interventions. In terms of intercultural skills, progress was observed in analytical, interpretive, and comparative skills related to sociocultural norms and conventions. However, critical skills related to these norms and conventions remain areas that require further attention in future research.

Finally, if we jointly quantify all the records of the intercultural competencies and sub-competencies evaluated, we see how there is a positive evolution in the number and quality of intercultural records, which go from 175 records in the first stage to 180 in the second stage and reach a significant evolution to 228 items in the third and last stage of work.

Therefore, we can confirm that the intercultural work plan designed, implemented, and evaluated based on three films by Almodóvar, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984), *Hable con ella* (2002), and *Volver* (2006), has been effective in developing the intercultural competence of the beneficiary population, as well as a useful pedagogical tool for communication and motivation in a Chinese-speaking university context, Jilin University.

These results also show that the traditional cultural conditioning factors of Chinese

students are not determinants in preventing the development of communicative and intercultural competences in Spanish as a foreign language.

Considering the preceding discussion, this study demonstrates that the plan contributes to achieving the principles outlined by the Chinese Ministry of Education (2022) in its definition of interculturality in SFL, which include intercultural qualities, knowledge, and competencies. Among these, particular emphasis is placed on moral integrity and a strong sense of social responsibility, both essential to Chinese culture, as well as cooperation and innovation, strong humanistic and scientific qualities, and linguistic, literary, and regional knowledge (including history, economics, and culture). The cultivation of these elements supports the development of intercultural competence by fostering sensitivity to differences and the ability to analyze them, promoting an active and open attitude toward multicultural phenomena, encouraging strategic and flexible approaches to intercultural activities, and aiding individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in achieving effective intercultural communication.

6. STATEMENT

This paper presents unpublished partial results from the doctoral dissertation “*Evaluación de un plan de enseñanza basado en el cine de Pedro Almodóvar para desarrollar las competencias comunicativa e intercultural en estudiantes universitarios sinohablantes de ELE*” (2025), carried out by Jinzhu Qu under the supervision of Professor Juan Ramón Guijarro Ojeda, within the Doctoral Programme in Education at the University of Granada (Spain).

7. REFERENCES

- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (1984). *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* [Film]. Tesaurus, S.A.
- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (1987). *La ley del deseo* [Film]. El Deseo, S.A.
- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (1988). *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* [Film]. El Deseo, S.A.
- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (1989). *Átame* [Film]. El Deseo, S.A.
- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (1995). *La flor de mi secreto* [Film]. El Deseo, S.A.
- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (2002). *Hable con ella* [Film]. El Deseo, S.A.
- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (2006). *Volver* [Film]. Cameo, El Deseo, S.A.
- Almodóvar, P. (Director). (2009). *Los abrazos rotos* [Film]. El Deseo, S.A.
- Álvarez, A. (2023). El tratamiento de la competencia intercultural en alumnos sinohablantes en inmersión total. In S. Borrell et al., (Coords.), *Plurilingüismo y enseñanza de ELE en contextos multiculturales. Actas del XXIII Congreso Internacional ASELE* (pp. 101-111). ASELE.
- Barbazán, D. (2014). *Percepciones de estudiantes chinos sobre las mujeres españolas, en el cine. Cultura en la clase de ELE*. PhD Dissertation, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain.
- Barros García, P., López García, M. P., & Morales Cabezas, J. (2002). La lengua en su entorno. Implicaciones intra e interculturales aplicadas a la enseñanza de las lenguas. In M. Pérez Gutiérrez & J. Coloma Maestre (Eds.), *El español, lengua del mestizaje y la interculturalidad. Actas del XIII Congreso de la ASELE* (pp. 165-173). ASELE.
- Brodalka, J. (2017). *El cine en la enseñanza de ELE en los institutos suecos: Películas de Almodóvar como herramienta didáctica para tratar contenidos culturales y valores éticos*. BA thesis, Karlstads Universitet, Sweden.

- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. & Fleming, M. (2001). *Perspectivas interculturales en el aprendizaje de idiomas: enfoques a través del teatro y la etnografía*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, G. M. & Starosta, J. W. (1998). *Foundations of Intercultural communication*. Allyn y Bacon.
- Consejo de Europa (2002). *Marco común europeo de referencia para las lenguas: aprendizaje, enseñanza, evaluación*. Instituto Cervantes.
- Couto Frías, M. S. (2010). Alumnos chinos, ¿solos o acompañados? *Monográficos SinoELE*, (10), 118-126.
- Dai, X. D. (2018). *Estudio de la competencia intercultural*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. (戴晓东, 2018, 跨文化能力研究, 外语教育研究出版社).
- Dai, X. D. & Chen, G. M. (2015). On interculturality and intercultural communication competence. *China Media Research*, 11(3), 100-113.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266. DOI: 10.1177/1028315306287002
- Denis, M. & Matas Pla, M. (2002). *Entrecruzar culturas. Competencia intercultural y estrategias didácticas*. De Boec & Larcier S.A.
- Ek, J. A. Van. (1986). *Objectives for foreign language learning (Vol I)*. Council of Europe.
- Fantini, A. E. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence: Issues and tools. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 456-476). SAGE Publications.
- Fantini, A. & Tirmizi, A. (2006). *Exploring and assessing intercultural competence*. World Learning Publications.
- Fernández, M. A. (2008). Interculturalidad con La flor de mi secreto. *MarcoELE*, 7. https://www.marcoele.com/descargas/7/interculturalidad-manuel_fernandez.pdf.
- Galloso Camacho, M. V. (2014). Sistema de enseñanza en el aula de ELE en China. *Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada*, 13(1), 115-132. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5031521>
- Gao, Y. H. (1998). El “Tao” y el “Instrumento” de la competencia en comunicación intercultural. *Investigación en la Enseñanza de Idiomas*, 3, 39-53. (高一虹, 1998, 跨文化交际能力的“道”与“器”, 语言教学研究, 第3期).
- Gao, Y. H. (2002). El desarrollo de la competencia en comunicación intercultural: “cruzar” y “superar”. *Idiomas y enseñanza de Idiomas*, 10, 27-31. (高一虹, 2002, 跨文化交际能力的培养: “跨越”与“超越”, 外语与外语教学, 第10期).
- García Cantos, M. C. (2012). *¿Por qué mi tortilla no sabe a España?: Interculturalidad y malentendidos culturales en el aula de E/LE: el caso del español y el alemán. Análisis y propuestas*. MA thesis, Universidad de Alicante, Spain. <https://rua.ua.es/dspace/handle/10045/27339?mode=full>
- González Ayestarán, M. (Diciembre 1, 2022). Pedro Almodóvar: pasión y esperpento manchego. *Revista dossier*. <http://revistadossier.com.uy/cine/pedro-almodovar-pasion-y-esperpento-manchego/>
- Guijarro Ojeda, J. R. & Ruiz Cecilia, R. (2011). Los discursos del género en español como lengua extranjera: A propósito de Pedro Almodóvar. *Hispania*, 94(1), 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/23032081>

- He, X. J. (2008). El silencio y la imagen china en el aula de ELE. *Linred: Lingüística en la Red*, 6, 1-20. https://linred.web.uah.es/articulos_pdf/LR_articulo_31102008.pdf
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Lázar, I., Huber-Kriegler, M., Lussier, D., Matei, G. S. & Peck, C. (2007). *Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence. A guide for language teachers and teacher educator*. Council of Europe.
- Lin, D. J. (1996). Nuevas exploraciones en la competencia comunicativa intercultural. *Revista de la Universidad Normal de Fujian*, 3, 58-62. (林大津, 1996, 跨文化交际能力新探, 福建师范大学学报, 第3期).
- Lu, J. S. (2000). *Enseñanza e investigación del español en China: informe bilingüe español-chino*. Madrid: Asociación de Amigos de China.
- Manzanares Triquet, J. C., & Guijarro Ojeda, J. R. (2022). Pasado y presente de los estudios hispánicos en la República Popular China: una revisión de la literatura. *Ogigia. Revista Electrónica De Estudios Hispánicos*, 31, 155-180. <https://doi.org/10.24197/ogigia.31.2022.155-180>
- Manzanares Triquet, J. C., & Guijarro Ojeda, J. R. (2023). Factores afectivos en la enseñanza de español como lengua extranjera en contextos sinohablantes: una revisión de literatura. *Forma y Función*, 36(1), 123-143. <https://doi.org/10.15446/fyf.v36n1.100789>
- Méndez Marassa, E. (2009). Problemas de los estudiantes chinos de español. Ejercicios específicos. *Suplementos SinoELE*, 1, 1-99. <https://www.sinoele.org/images/Revista/1/mendez.pdf>
- Ministerio de Educación de China (2022). *Guía didáctica para el grado en lengua y literatura españolas*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. (中国教育部, 2022, 普通高等学校本科西班牙语专业教学指南, 上海外语教育出版社).
- Miquel, L. & Sans, N. (2004). El componente cultural: un ingrediente más en las clases de lengua. *redELE: Revista Electrónica de Didáctica ELE*, 0, 1-13. <https://www.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/dam/jcr:944a0387-f1ca-4204-8c55-1575678f4fa8/2004-redele-0-22miquel-pdf.pdf>
- Monterubbianesi, M. G. (2011). *La comunicación no verbal del español actual a partir de la filmografía de Pedro Almodóvar y su aplicación a la didáctica de E/LE*. PhD thesis, Universidad de Granada, Spain.
- Qu, J. Z. (2018). *Estudio contrastivo entre el español y el chino. Su influencia en el aprendizaje del español a sinohablantes*. BA thesis, University of Jilin, China.
- Ruiz, G. (1995). *Vídeo en clase (Un experimento sobre la enseñanza de la competencia comunicativa a alumnos de español como lengua extranjera)*. PhD thesis, University of Granada, Spain.
- Sánchez Griñán, A. J. (2008). *Enseñanza y aprendizaje de español como lengua extranjera en China. Retos y posibilidades del enfoque comunicativo*. PhD thesis, University of Murcia, Spain.
- Song, Y. (2019). Estudio empírico de la motivación del alumnado universitario en China para estudiar el Grado en Filología Hispánica. *Onomázein*, 46, 129-145. <https://doi.org/10.7764/onomazein.46.08>
- Vílchez, J. A. (2006). *La enseñanza del componente pragmático a través de fragmentos de películas*. MA thesis, University of Alcalá, Spain.
- Walker, G. & Noda, M. (2000). Remembering the future: Compiling knowledge of another culture. In D. W. Birckbichler & R. M. Terry (Eds.), *Reflecting on the past to shape the future* (pp. 187-212). National Textbook Company.
- Weaver, G. (1986). Understanding and coping with cross-cultural adjustment stress. In R.M. Paige (Ed.), *Cross-cultural orientations: New conceptualizations and applications*, (pp. 111-146). University Press of America.

- Wessling, G. (2009). Didáctica intercultural en la enseñanza de idiomas: algunos ejemplos para el aula. *MarcoELE*, 9, 267-281. https://marcoele.com/descargas/expolingua_1999.wessling.pdf
- Xiao, X. S. & Chen, G. M. (2009). Communication competence and moral competence: a Confucian perspective. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 4(1), 61-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447140802651652>
- Yu, M. (2001). El español en China. In L. García Montero et al. (Eds.), *El Español en el mundo 2021: Anuario del Instituto Cervantes* (pp. 657-683). Instituto Cervantes. https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/anuario/anuario_21/asia_oceania/china.htm
- Zarate, G. (1986). *Enseigner une culture étrangère*. Hachette.
- Zhang, Z. (2020). Técnicas de investigación cualitativa como instrumentos de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la competencia comunicativa e intercultural de estudiantes sinohablantes de ELE. *MarcoELE*, 30, 1-14. https://marcoele.com/descargas/30/zhang-competencia-intercultural_sinohablantes.pdf
- Zhao, M. (2025). *La competencia intercultural en el aprendizaje del español por sinohablantes. Propuestas didácticas para el aula E/LE*. PhD dissertation, Universidad de Alcalá, Spain.
- Zhu, F. F. (2010). Material complementario del manual Español Moderno (Pekín, 1999), Nivel Elemental. Actividades prácticas para el aula. *Suplementos SinoELE*, 2, 1-136. <https://www.sinoele.org/images/Revista/2/fangfang.pdf>