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LANGUAGE LEARNING BELIEFS AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A VIRTUAL EXCHANGE PROJECT: A
CASE STUDY

BY

CARLOS ANDRES BERRIO MEJIA


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Barranquilla, Atlántico
Colombia

Master's Research Paper Director
Angela Christine Bailey, Ed.D.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Carlos Andrés Berrío Mejía, hereby declare that this master's thesis has not been previously presented as a degree requirement, either in the same style or with variations, in this or any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C.A. Berrío Mejía', is positioned above a horizontal line.

CARLOS ANDRES BERRIO MEJIA

Abstract

Several studies on learners' beliefs about language learning, the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and virtual exchange (VE) have highlighted the positive effect they have on language learning success in many contexts of instruction; however, little is known about how the integration of the three develop effectiveness in language learning in rural classrooms in Colombia.

By making use of virtual exchange project, this exploratory case study aimed to explore English language learners' beliefs about language learning and their ICCs to determine whether such exchange could positively affect said ideas and competencies for Colombian rural learners of English. This exploratory case study was carried out with a group of young students of a public, rural secondary school on the north coast of Colombia. Data was collected through the BALLI pre- and post-questionnaire for the virtual exchange program and used descriptive analysis, semi-structured interviews, and e-mail exchanges were analyzed following thematic analysis before, during and after the 14-week VE program.

Findings indicate that learners' beliefs about language learning had a positive shift. Furthermore, integration of cross-cultural interaction developed most of the dimensions of ICC: Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills of Interpreting and Relating, and Skills of Discovery and Interaction; however, the fundamental Critical Cultural Awareness was not featured on the students' performance. Virtual Exchange proved to be beneficial to language learning achievement, experience and for language learning in rural environment in Colombia.

Keywords: Virtual Exchange, Intercultural communicative competence, Beliefs, Language Learning, Rural

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation work to my beloved family. Thank you to my brothers for believing in me. My love for you can never be quantified.

This is for my parents, who have always been my support. Thank you for your unconditional love, for teaching me to believe in God almighty, the source of my wisdom, my faith and blessings.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Due to globalization, technologization, and mobility, the interrelationship between language and culture has become more characteristic of our era (Thorne, 2010). Culture has been defined in diverse ways by researchers. Among the various definitions for culture, Chamberlain (2005) states that culture represents “the values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world” (p. 197). Accordingly, understanding interculturality in the context of language education has gained higher emphasis (Alred et al., 2006).

In Colombia, bilingualism and the nationalist citizenship paradigm are reflected in the conception of English/Spanish as the prestige of majority languages that should be learned to better understand other cultures (de Mejia, 2006). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education (MEN) (2004) highlights English as a language with high economic and political significance and establishes EFL as compulsory. However, even though the ministry has repeatedly campaigned in favor of the teaching and learning of English in Colombian classrooms, this effort appears to be ineffective since it benefits and privileges a few of the population, more specifically the urban areas over the rural ones (Arango & Rodriguez, 2016).

Background of the Problem

Many language practitioners and scholars have paid remarkable attention to identifying and studying learners’ contributions to language learning (Breen, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Oxford, 2001; Wenden, 2001). In this respect, learners’ beliefs are considered influential factors different from attitude and motivation, affecting student language learning outcomes. Breen (2001) asserts that beliefs are essential to language learning as they can foster or hinder learning. Horwitz (1987) pointed out that learners’ preconceptions about their abilities or preconceived ideas about language learning and their attitudes towards English as a foreign language shape

their behavior, frequently contributing to success or failure in acquiring English as a second language.

At the international level, much of the research focuses on learners' beliefs about language learning in urban and suburban tertiary and high school education, looking at learners' performances, learning successes, and teaching practices (Lau, 2009; Liu & Zhoulin, 2015). Few studies regard the influence of learners' beliefs on English language learning in the Colombian national context (Villarreal et al., 2016). Bailey (2013), for example, focused on understanding teachers' and learners' beliefs and perspectives of English language learning and assessment in higher education at a Colombian university.

In light of the particular interest for understanding the myriad of contributive factors that influence language learning, it has been acknowledged the relationship between language and culture in the EFL context and their integration in the language classroom. The significance of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is recognized and widely proposed for ELT scenarios. Therefore, learners are expected to communicate effectively and act as intercultural mediators and world citizens. Byram (1997) defines ICC as "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p. 71). Understanding the process of intercultural competence "...requires certain attitudes, knowledge, and skills to be promoted, in addition to learners' linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence" (Skopinskaja, 2009, p. 137). Byram (1997; 2008) developed an ICC framework of five dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness. He additionally advocates for the significant role of perspectives in developing ICC. Elola and Oskoz (2008) also present arguments emphasizing that learners should assess their attitudes and beliefs and other people's beliefs and attitudes from different

cultures. Accordingly, citizenship should establish a connection between languages and identities linked to ICC.

The education of citizens in multicultural societies is related to the teachers' practice. Teachers should develop learners' interculturality and the three citizenship dimensions to help them identify as cosmopolitan citizens: feeling, status, and practice (Osler & Starkey, 2005; Starkey, 2010). Teachers should not limit education to citizenship for the nationalist paradigm but rather help learners overcome the nationalist barriers of citizenship, thus celebrating diversity and multiple identities (Kaldor, 2003).

Language classes should primarily promote students' recognition as citizens, considering the three dimensions: status, feeling, and practice (Osler & Starkey, 2005). Empowering students about their identities is the beginning of helping them value others' identities. The dimension of feeling concerns the learners' ability to identify as part of a community and other communities. The dimension of status refers to the condition of a person as legally recognized in a particular state and entitled to rights. Finally, students should be aware and responsible in the sense of agency (Starkey, 2010). Being a citizen is more than a feeling and belonging; it has to do with acting, doing, and integrating oneself into the local and global community. Language teachers need to be aware of the implications of culture and language to narrow the gap between education for citizenship and language learning by fostering students' interests in local and global issues and their concerns about other cultures. Through language and language learning, students become autonomous citizens.

In Colombia, the terms citizen and citizenship are linked to the notion of a nation-state limited to the culture of the Colombian state with little knowledge and awareness of other forms of cultures and people outside local social groups. However, there has been a growing interest in expanding that concept of citizenship to a broader viewpoint. Education for citizenship from the

cosmopolitan perspective has gained much relevance in current learning worldwide, with institutional policies aimed at developing a sense of citizenship in learners. Some policies include using language learning environments to foster and establish inclusion, acceptance, awareness of self-identity, and recognition of others as different. Finally, promoting peace and a sense of belonging.

Rationale

To date, no empirical research has been conducted on learners' beliefs about English language learning in rural high school education in the Colombian context, which has severe implications in the language educational scenario in Colombia. The study of learners' beliefs in higher education and urban public schools is different from rural schools regarding the complexity of the socioeconomic and sociocultural factors influencing learners' perceptions of language learning (Canchala, 2010). For instance, (Bonilla and Cruz Arcila, 2014; Carrero and González, 2016) have explored critical elements in rural socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts that permeate ELT education in rural communities such as lack of resources, students' demotivation to learn a different language, cultural heritage, parents' educational level and social environment among others. As a result, rural learners develop distinct motivational beliefs that affect their EFL learning process and achievement (Ma et al., 2021). Subsequently, fostering citizenship competence and global citizenship education through ESL in a rural context seems challenging. Cultural and social issues of rural life seem hard to tackle due to the disparity and the negation of their proper characteristics in the Colombian education system and language policies. Nonetheless, these rural communities have become a significant force for igniting the development and practice of language and citizenship competences due to their complexity and essential role in Colombian societal development (Botero & Galeano, 2022). Furthermore, Hernandez-Silva (2020) asserts that rural education in Colombia has the potential to tackle the

rural population development, cultural and values growth, as well as the national development and sustainability.

EFL courses in rural communities must foster the learning of both linguistic and intercultural communicative competences for learners to help them recognize their context as part of their identity and accept other identities worldwide. Students can also understand the importance of using the target language to build relationships with different cultures. Concerning this connection, Serrano (2008) asserts that global citizenship education develops “cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect, effective conflict resolution practices, tolerance, an appreciation of diversity, a concern for environmental preservation, and other skills and competences to co-exist within a democratic society” (p.67). This proposed study seeks to address this problem by exploring learners’ beliefs about language learning, specifically in a rural context in Colombia, and investigating how those beliefs affect their language-learning process. Moreover, this study aims to develop ICC through the implementation of telecollaboration.

Research Question

Promoting values, inclusion, raising awareness about social responsibility, and being active participative citizens through education has gained significant interest amongst nations worldwide, what Serrano (2008) refers to as competent citizens. Education must serve as the means and the force to overcome those barriers and social issues since it is through education that lives can be informed and transformed. In this respect, the Colombian government acknowledges the importance of preparing citizens to communicate in a second language to demonstrate competitiveness worldwide (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014). Thus, the need to create conditions for fostering and developing communicative competences in a foreign language inside Colombian classrooms.

The central goal of this study is to explore young English language learners' beliefs about language learning and their ICCs participating in a virtual exchange project to determine if such exchanges can positively affect said ideas and competences for rural environments. The general research question for this study is: what is the effect of a virtual exchange project on the rural middle school students' beliefs about language learning and their intercultural communicative competence?

The sub-questions for this study include:

1. What beliefs do rural public-school learners hold about learning English before and after the virtual exchange project?
2. What dimensions of intercultural communicative competence do students develop during the exchange?

This proposed study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Identify students' beliefs about language learning.
- Identify which ICC students exhibit during the virtual exchange.
- Compare and contrast the beliefs and the ICCs.
- Analyze the differences and similarities.

The Setting of the Study

The present study explores rural middle school students' perceptions of English language learning and the development of ICC through a virtual exchange at a rural public school in a small town of Córdoba, Colombia. The school currently serves 385 students, most of whom come from indigenous and other ethnic groups. Low economic income characterizes this population, and most families have weak traditions regarding academic achievement. The population of this

study is a mixed group of 5 seventh graders. Students' ages ranged between 13 and 15 years; they were born and lived in a rural environment.

Organization of the Thesis

This research paper will be distributed in 6 chapters. Chapter 1 will give a general introduction to the study. A brief overview, including the background of English teaching in the educational system in Colombia, is presented in this chapter. Moreover, it will include this study's aims, significance, and purpose. Chapter Two will provide relevant information about the theories, literature, and constructs to guide this study. This chapter will present and discuss the primary constructs: English language teaching, ELT in Colombia, beliefs about language learning, ICC, and how telecollaboration influences learners' beliefs and its connection, if any, to intercultural communicative competence. This chapter will end with a literature review of educational research regarding the issues of this study. Chapter Three, the methodology, will present the methodological considerations of the investigation. This chapter will explain the research method and design selected for this study; moreover, it will discuss the instruments for data collection and provide a brief, relevant description of the participants in the study and a description of ethical considerations. Chapter Four, the findings and results, will present the outcome of examining collected data. Chapter Five, the discussion, will provide more significant insights into the nature of the changes in the learners' beliefs about language learning. In addition, it will describe and inform on how telecollaboration influenced and changed learners' beliefs and how it fostered ICC. Chapter Six will state some conclusions from the research questions addressed in this study, its contributions, implications to education, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the beliefs of EFL learners in a rural culture-sharing group and the influence of telecollaboration on their language learning beliefs and the development of ICC. This section focuses on the five main theoretical underpinnings for this study. The first part of this framework presents a theoretical overview of English language teaching and learning, and subsequently, there is a discussion of ELT in Colombia. Finally, this section elaborates on constructs connected to beliefs about language learning, ICC in EFL, and telecollaboration in language learning.

English Language Teaching

History of ELT

English is used and learned by diverse groups. Today, communication in English is necessary to interact with people worldwide, as it is a language used in fields such as tourism, technology, science, economy, business, and entertainment (Crystal, 2008). As a result of globalization, language teaching and learning are not limited to language proficiency, as they were taught and learned in their origins. Still, it moved to new diverse conceptualizations and practices in response to language users' needs, giving more significance to language and intercultural communication (Arcagök & Yılmaz, 2020; Byram & Zarate, 1994; Chau & Truong, 2019).

Traditionally, the teaching of English focused mainly on the demand that learners memorize and repeat the target language structure and chunks impeding real-life communication competence. These traditional practices failed to effectively help language learners communicate using the target language in real-life situations. Lopez-Rocha (2016) remarks that learners need guidance to “develop an appreciation for the language and culture studied, an awareness of their own culture, and the development of skills that will allow them to be competent, adaptable

communicators” (p. 105). Intercultural communicative competence must be included in the language curriculum. Thus, ELT depends on education, culture, technology, and mobility. To develop intercultural competence, it seems essential to incorporate intercultural exchange for English language learners’ experience.

Language and culture, however, were not always related to the field of ELT. Agar (1994) criticizes the field of linguistics, indicating its limitation to teaching phonology and other linguistic skills like grammar as they hinder language communication. Consequently, ELT has evolved from old-fashioned theories focused on translation, memorization, and repetition to more effective ones that meet the demands of the current language learning environment. Such is the case with the Communicative Approach (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013). This approach of focusing on language as communication included traditional teaching methods and the need to develop sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic competences to use language appropriately (Canale, 1983; Hymes, 1972).

Furthermore, there is a need to accomplish the demand of integrating teaching culture along with vocabulary for more successful real-life communication in the target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Wright, 2010). Concerning the interaction of linguistic, pragmatic, and ICC in the development and evolution of ELT, Kumaravadivelu (1994) proposed some specific language principles for language teaching and learning instruction, which are to “maximize learning opportunity, facilitate negotiated interaction, minimize perceptual mismatches, activate intuitive heuristics, foster language awareness, contextualize linguistic input, integrate language skills, promote learner autonomy, raise cultural consciousness, and ensure social relevance” (p, 32).

Language has been considered a potential mediating tool for creating identity and understanding others’ cultures (Byram, 2006). Considering this, language becomes a tool used in language learning classrooms to educate about citizenship and develop intercultural

communicative competence. Citizenship and ICC should be strengthened in language education and the EFL/ESL context since they enable the learner the opportunity not only to interact and collaborate in the construction of their identity but the interpretation, negotiation, and understanding of others' beliefs, values, and behaviors.

ELT in Colombia

The Colombian education system has experienced a fundamental transformation. According to the OECD, “Colombia’s transition towards peace and higher levels of development depends on many factors, but none will be more important to the country’s future than its ability to build a strong and inclusive education system” (OCDE, 2016). One of the most noticeable outcomes is the development of ambitious policies and reforms regarding language education, addressing English teaching and learning alongside citizenship strengthening.

Being bilingual in a global world is essential. Mastering a second language means communicating better, understanding other contexts; appropriate and circulating knowledge, understanding and being understandable to others, enriching ourselves; and playing a decisive role in the country’s development. Being bilingual means acquiring more knowledge and having opportunities to be competent and competitive while improving the life quality of all citizens. (Colombia, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2005, para. 2)

Le Gal (2019) comments that ELT is not only a pedagogical and technological practice but also closely dependent upon sociopolitical and sociocultural issues. To this respect, language policies and the current situation of teaching English as a foreign language in Colombia are detached from language ideologies (Ricento, 2000; Ruíz, 1988) because “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use [...] often index the political and economic interests of

individual speakers, ethnic and other groups, and nation-states” (Krosky, 2010, p.192). Thus, ideologies influence decisions about language teaching, learning, and access.

As in most developing countries, the national government of Colombia is committed to positioning the country globally. For that reason, it has promoted an educational reform through the Colombian Ministry of Education called “Revolución Educativa, 2002-2006 & 2006-2010” (Educational Revolution 2002-2006 & 2006-2010) and the language reform called Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo, PNB (National Bilingual Program, NBP) to improve and strengthen ELT nationwide (Colombia, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2003; 2006, 2014). Policymakers have adopted foreign frameworks for the NBP. The Ministry of Education proposed and implemented strategies to develop communicative competencies in English as a foreign language in partnership with the British Council (Usma, 2009; Le Gal, 2019).

To this respect, the MEN published the Basic Standards for Competencies in Foreign Languages: English, 2005- 2006 (Estándares Básicos para el Desarrollo de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés, 2005- 2006) (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006), framed in the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (Council of Europe, 2001). The reform includes the Programa de Fortalecimiento al Desarrollo de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras, 2010-2014 (PFDCLE), Ley de Bilingüismo (Ley 1651 de 2013), and the former policy, Programa Nacional de Inglés (*Colombia Very Well*, 2015-2025), to strengthen ELT to help learners become bilingual citizens, improve the quality of education, better the local labor force and position the country at the highest standards worldwide.

Regardless of the Colombian government's efforts to promote ELT, these political actions are under criticism for their effectiveness. Cruz-Arcila (2017), Le Gal (2019), Usma (2009), and Alvarez (2014) criticize the social impact and the effectiveness of foreign language teaching policies in Colombia and suggest different actions to improve language policy decisions

and ELT in the country. Usma (2009) and Cruz-Arcila (2017) argue that language policies are imported and decontextualized and merely serve public and political purposes rather than improving ELT. These language reforms do not benefit the Colombian population and misrecognized rural context.

As shall be argued, these policies do not “translate into actions the rhetoric of the social impact of ELT.” Cruz-Arcila (2017, p. 6). Deficient language policies promote misconceptions and flawed interpretations of the language learning and teaching practices for Colombian societal development. For that reason, Le Gal (2019) proposes a transfer in paradigm in current ELT policy decisions that address the belief system, motivation, attitude, and ideologies. Alvarez’s (2014) study suggests that the cultural component of language learning must be considered in the development of language policies and should be included in the language curriculum and learners’ understanding of language learning and teaching when attempting to improve their language learning process. In addressing the current language situation and charting a path forward, learners’ beliefs must be at the forefront of impactful and sustainable language education policies. A final study found was from Bailey (2013). She concludes that language policy and access to successful language learning processes may impact learners’ experiences, beliefs about language learning and teaching, and academic achievement.

English Language Learning

Beliefs about English Language Learning

The concept of beliefs is convoluted based on its origins in philosophy and psychology. Nevertheless, beliefs about language learning have been defined in various ways in education research. They are related to what goes on inside the students’ and teachers’ minds, and they determine much of the language learning success (Stevick, 1980). For purposes of the present study, beliefs are differentiated from attitudes since they are closely related and complex

constructs. Horwitz (1987) systematically uses “preconceived ideas” to refer to systematic beliefs. She also relates beliefs as opinions that might influence learning behavior, as used in the research instrument she developed to study the beliefs on language learning, the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Some authors claim that beliefs are affective, experiential, and context-dependent (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). For Omaggio (1978), beliefs are insights and mini-theories (Hosenfeld, 1978).

On the contrary, Eisenhart et al. (1988) assert that “a belief is a way to describe a relationship between a task, an action, an event or another person and the attitude of a person towards it.” (p. 53). In addition, another definition of beliefs is that they are “general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language learning and teaching” (Victori & Lockhart, 1995, p. 224). Likewise, Richardson (1996) states that “beliefs are also defined as ‘psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true’ (p.102). Based on the information mentioned above, some researchers use different terms to refer to beliefs without providing any specific explanation, while others define the term alone.

Due to their complexity, learners’ beliefs have not been defined systematically in several studies; in this respect, Pajares (1992) asserts that beliefs are a messy construct and state a set of words that better describe and should be considered equivalent beliefs. These include: “attitude, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy” (p. 309). According to Ellis (2008), beliefs constitute mini-theories highly associated with language and language learning. The learning environment and

language learning experiences produce positive results in learners' beliefs; simultaneously, they influence learners' performance and learning product (Wesely, 2012).

In summary, beliefs can be subjective guiding principles that influence and guide learners' behavior and actions. The development of beliefs can also be affected by the learner's previous experience and social interaction in a particular context, which eventually translates into learning success or failure.

Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning

Beyond the enrichment brought on by globalization and its implications, not only the complex way culture integration in the language classroom has impacted the way learners see the world, but it also has permeated into the learner's complex system of beliefs and attitudes toward how to communicate with the world. In L2 acquisition, language learning is considered the subject of many firm theories held by EFL students (Horwitz, 1987). Accordingly, Han (2006) asserts that new mobile technologies "have also transformed how language learners interpret and make meaning, and thus how they need and want to use language" (p.22).

It has been suggested that learners come to the EFL classroom with different beliefs about language learning. Many researchers agree that learners hold strong ideas or preconceptions about the nature of language, the way it should be taught, and how it should be learned, and that learners' beliefs are an internal factor that eventually influences their learning (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Barcelos, 2003; Horwitz, 1987; Riley 1997). Furthermore, research has shown that beliefs about language learning seem to impact the learners' language learning strategies (Wenden, 1987; Riley, 1997), determining learners' success and promoting or hindering their language learning performance. Learners' perceptions as L2 users also have implications for developing language abilities, sociocultural sensitivity, intercultural skills, and self-image.

According to Kuntz (1996), beliefs can sustain or enhance learners' motivation, positively impacting their learning performance. However, unrealistic beliefs about language learning seem to adversely affect learners' motivation, attitude (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2006; Victori & Lockhart, 1995), behavior, and strategy choice (Wenden, 1987) when approaching a task. Accordingly, teachers should pay close attention to the learners' various perspectives about EFL and what influences those interpretations.

Learners' beliefs about language learning seem to be shaped by different sources. In this respect, De Costa (2011) asserts that learners' beliefs are shaped by their previous experiences. Kalaja and Barcelos (2006) state that "students shape beliefs about SLA' (and teachers') cultural backgrounds and social contexts. They are socially constructed and variable rather than stable in nature" (p.2). Understanding the concept above allows a clearer perspective on the origins of language learning beliefs, making clear that learners' beliefs are also socioculturally constructed and can be redefined to positively impact learners' performance in class, expectations, and the construction of social experiences.

Intercultural Communicative Competence in EFL

Language and culture are believed to be highly connected. Thus, the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is at the forefront of language education, including English (Byram, 1989; Alred & Byram, 2002; Belz, 2003; Deardorff, 2009). Language learners are expected to communicate effectively and be interculturally competent to relate successfully to other target language speakers (Byram, 1997). However, to be an interculturally competent speaker, complete mastery of ICC is not always required because cultural differences are widespread and constantly changing (Byram et al., 2002).

There are two reasons for this: the more obvious and the less obvious. Byram et al. (2002) affirm that a more obvious reason is that there are many languages and cultures constantly

changing in one country, and it is impossible for a language learner to have or to gain all the knowledge and understanding of those languages and cultures in interaction with native speakers and non-native speakers of the target language. It is then believed that not everything an individual knows about a culture or language will be enough. The less apparent reason is that people's values, ways of believing, and behavior are shaped by the experiences when one becomes a member of a new social group and develops a new social identity, which can be shocking or disturbing for those involved in the interactive cultural experience.

One way to provide learners with skills to communicate with people of different cultural contexts is to foster ICC. Among the various definitions of ICC, Byram (1997) defines ICC as “the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language” (p.71). According to Byram et al. (2002), an interculturally competent speaker can interact with people from other countries while building relationships using the target language. The speaker has developed skills, attitudes, and values to build those relationships and has some knowledge of his own culture and others. In this view, the development of the ICC is enhanced by employing interaction.

Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching involves recognizing that the aims are: to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence; to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values, and behaviors; and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience. (Byram et al., 2002, p. 6).

Thus, it is paramount to understand that linguistic learning and cultural teaching must be appropriately operationalized in language classrooms to provide learners with the necessary skills to become interculturally competent. Byram (1997) considers that learners with ICC can also

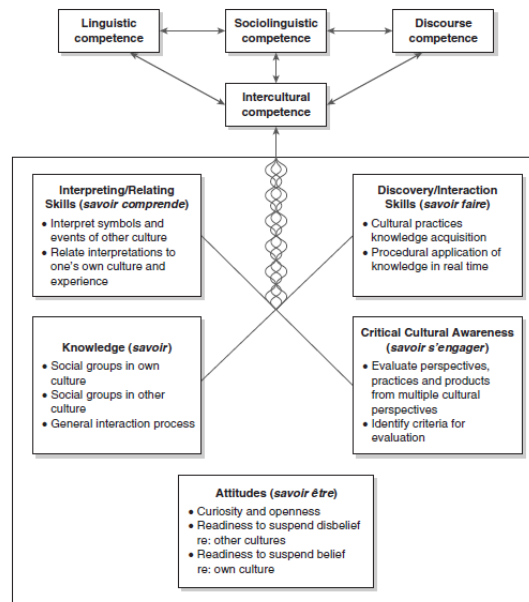
become mediators between people from different countries or cultural backgrounds. One way to visualize it is by understanding Byram's ICC model and Dearsordff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence.

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

To develop learners' ICC, Byram et al. (2002) define five *savoirs*, or dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, skills to understand and learn, and awareness (intercultural competence), together with the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies in his model of intercultural communicative competence including nonverbal communication as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Intercultural Competence Model by Byram



Note. Taken from Byram (1997).

Nonetheless, much attention has been placed on learners' second language attitudes of curiosity and openness towards other cultures and one's own, which play an essential role in developing ICC and nurturing an intercultural speaker. The attitude (*savoir être*) refers to the

readiness to become more tolerant of other cultures and one's while being non-judgmental (Byram, 1997). Therefore, attitudes, together with knowledge (*savoirs*) of social groups and other people's practices as individuals, through intercultural interaction, are considered a prerequisite for the successful development of intercultural competence (Byram et al., 2002).

The intercultural competence in Byram's model is also composed of the following skills:

- of interpreting and relating 'documents' / 'texts' based on existing knowledge and attitudes [*savoir comprendre*]
- of discovering (in own time or interaction) new behaviors, beliefs, and values [*savoir apprendre*]
- interacting in real-time based on other preconditions and skills [*savoir faire*] (this is not the only aim for language and culture teaching: *savoir-faire* is not always needed by learners). (Alred & Byram, 2002, p. 340)

Finally, as for education, another critical dimension language learners need to acquire is critical cultural awareness (*savoirs'engager*). This dimension refers to the ability of target language speakers to critically take account of their own beliefs, values, and practices and those of other cultural backgrounds and countries. A subsequent aspect of intercultural learning is that teachers and learners must be more responsible for developing intercultural awareness and competence. They become intercultural speakers and mediators if language practices are successful.

Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence

Another definition of ICC in this study is the one suggested by Deardorff (2006), for what she considers is a more understandable way to understand intercultural competence. The following section briefly explains Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence. This model

system puts together the components of intercultural competence and shows how ICC works to foster success. In Deardorff's words, ICC is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (2006, p. 13). She developed a cyclical model that helps the individual achieve and exhibit intercultural competence.

Deardorff (2006) argues that in the process of acquiring intercultural competence, an individual moves from the personal level (attitudes) to the interpersonal level (internal and external outcomes) through intercultural interaction. For the author, language for communication and knowledge of the culture are insufficient to communicate effectively and appropriately among cultures; context is fundamental for the process. The model is not just a list of elements but components of a process that results in a behavioral demonstration that exhibits intercultural competence. The aspects of the model process are attitudes, knowledge, skills, and outcomes, which lead to individual outcomes demonstrating the acquired competence.

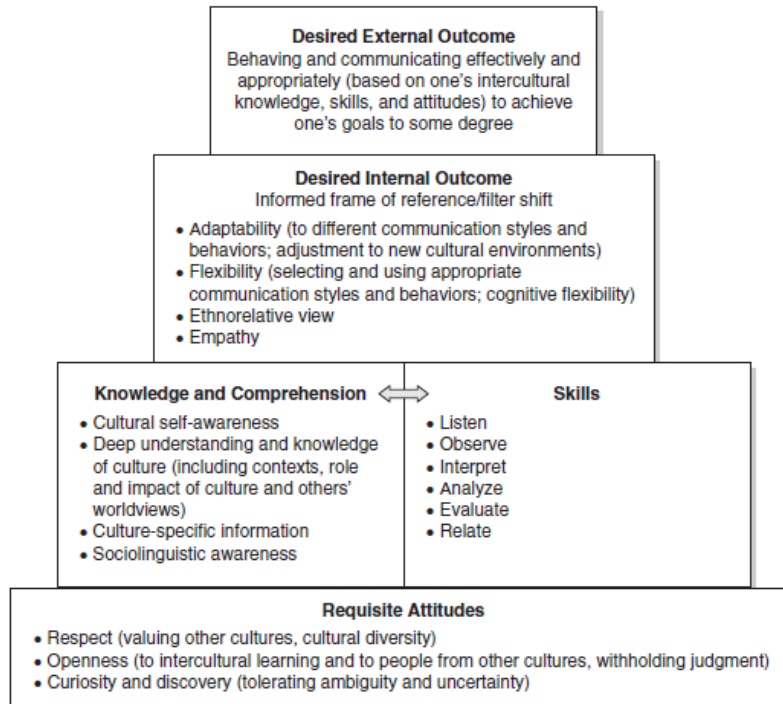
The process model of intercultural competence has fundamental components as follows:

- Attitudes: include respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery.
- Knowledge: cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness.
- Skills: listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and relating.

Deardorff includes desired internal outcomes such as adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative perspective, and empathy. External outcomes include effective and appropriate communication and behavior in intercultural situations, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence



Note. Taken from Deardorff (1996).

As seen in the models proposed above, it is essential to understand that an interculturally competent speaker acquires and develops attitudes, knowledge, and skills evidenced in the learner's behavior in culturally diverse communication contexts. After analyzing both models, it is essential to remember that attitude is the fundamental starting point for developing ICC (Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2006).

Telecollaboration (Virtual Exchange) in Language Learning

Telecollaboration is a pedagogical means to foster interaction and collaboration between socioculturally and linguistically diverse groups across borders (O'Dowd, 2007). As for this issue, the internet and communication technology-oriented environments have been employed in language education to help language learners develop their communication skills and intercultural competence. Telecollaboration in the field of language learning, hereafter referred to as Virtual

Exchange (VE), has taken a variety of names to refer to the same activity depending on the educational setting in which it is employed. The following terms have all been used as synonyms: Virtual Exchange (Helm, 2016); Internet-mediated Intercultural Foreign Language Education (Belz & Thorne, 2006); Online Intercultural Exchange (O’Dowd, 2007); Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) (Rubin, 2016); or defined more broadly in this study as “the use of online communication tools to bring together language learners in different countries for the development of collaborative project work and intercultural exchange” (O’Dowd & Ritter, 2006, p. 1) under the guidance of educators or expert facilitators. Within this definition, this type of exchange involves a/synchronous kinds of communication. Therefore, virtual collaborative projects rely upon online tools such as blogs, emails, discussion forums, text chats, audio, and video conferences (O’Dowd, 2006; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Belz, 2003; Chun, 2015; Guth & Helm, 2010). In general, they are nurtured by the availability of technology in language classrooms and alternative pedagogical approaches.

Virtual encounters can help students understand, appreciate, and respect cultural differences because they provide an ideal medium for engaging in intercultural interaction and communication (O’Dowd & Klippel, 2006). Research on virtual exchange (VE) points out other positive effects of face-to-face language learning (Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Belz & Thorne, 2006; O’Dowd & Klippel, 2006). Not only does VE help language learners develop language skills and intercultural competence (Guth & Helm, 2010; Luo & Yang, 2021), but it also helps improve written communication (Darhower, 2008; Rienties et al., 2020). VE develops oral communication skills and promotes good attitudes toward interactive communicative activities (Canals, 2020). VE also increases the development of critical thinking skills and cultural awareness (Duffy et al., 2020) and enhances learner motivation (Appel & Gilabert, 2002; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Luo & Yang, 2021; Schenker, 2012; Ushioda, 2000). VE fosters global citizenship, intercultural

awareness, and cosmopolitan open-mindedness (Verzella, 2018, O'Dowd, 2020). VE continues to support L2 acquisition through incidental noticing (Arellano-Soto & Parks, 2021) and fosters the development of digital pedagogical competence and digital literacy in language teachers and their students (Hauck, 2019).

Despite the positive impact and usefulness of VEs on language teaching and learning, it also presents several challenges. For example, O' Dowd & Ritter (2013) identified ten factors that lead to unsuccessful communication and classified them into four levels: individual, classroom, socio-institutional, and interaction. Moreover, Schenker (2013) identifies other possible limitations in implementing VE that can be time-consuming for teachers. The lack of connectivity and resources and limited access to technological tools may negatively impact learners' commitment motivation, leading to the unsuccessful development of language and intercultural competencies and the implications of unprepared teachers or facilitators (Belz, 2002; O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006).

In the Colombian context, not all learners can engage in mobility programs due to sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural factors (García & Yáñez, 2017). The internet has reached remote corners worldwide and has changed learners' second language experience. In part, the internet has made it possible to connect to almost every distant location, from urban to rural areas (Rojas, 2018). Technologization and internet-mediated communication have provided language teaching practitioners with tools and resources to engage students in authentic intercultural exchange and language learning environments. In such a context, the virtual exchange uses interactive internet technologies that engage foreign language learners from distant locations in meaningful communication to foster intercultural competence and language learning (O'Dowd, 2015).

Summary of Section

Learning a second language is a complex process that involves many internal and external factors. Chapter 2 detailed the fundamental concepts underlying this research study regarding ELT in Colombia, the importance of learners' beliefs in the acquisition of English as a second language, and the value of intercultural competence through virtual exchange between US and Colombian high school students in a rural context to help learners who seemingly do not like English be successful in language learning. This interconnectedness and its implication in the language teaching and learning process have been considered the essence of this research study. As part of the successful language learning process, it is necessary to mention that virtual exchange, or telecollaboration, has been suggested to provide a comprehensive vehicle for learners to benefit from since it allows the opportunity to interact between language learners from different cultural backgrounds. Interculturality is related to the learner's attitudes and system of beliefs (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Therefore, focusing on the affective domain, language environment, and learning experiences is fundamental for successful English language learning and the development of ICC. Colombian students in this study were provided with a meaningful learning experience to develop their communication and ICC through a virtual intercultural exchange project collaborating with US students.

Literature Review

Beliefs about Language Learning

Educational researchers have used different methods to approach beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1988; Kuntz, 1996). In 1998, Horwitz applied her Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) in a study to investigate the beliefs of 241 beginning university foreign language learners at the University of Texas: eighty students of German, sixty-three French students, and ninety-eight in Spanish, ranging in different ages and sex, and the impact of

beliefs on language learning and teaching. Horwitz (1988) reported that some learners' beliefs could be detrimental to effective language learning. She comments that students' beliefs influence the selection of learning strategies, which can affect learners' actions in the language task. Furthermore, language aptitude generates negative or unrealistic expectations and motivations. Horwitz concludes that dissonance between teacher and learner perceptions can negatively affect language learning. Besides, teacher understanding and managing learners' beliefs can help promote more successful language learning experiences.

A similar study on higher education students by Mohebi and Khodadady (2011) investigated the beliefs of 423 EFL university students in Iran about their language learning. They used the EFL BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1988) and adapted it to the Iranian context. The findings reveal that the beliefs learners held about EFL were mainly in harmony, contrasting with the beliefs of the American foreign language learners in Horwitz's (1988) study. Most students associated language skills with better job opportunities; they were more optimistic and motivated to learn English and the target culture. The findings also demonstrated that cultural backgrounds are significant factors that influence learners' beliefs about language. However, Mohebi and Khodadady (2011) still consider that learners hold many preconceptions about language learning that teachers must tackle before instruction to guarantee successful learners' performance. It can be argued that students with positive beliefs can evidence substantial changes in their attitude, higher expectations, and more motivation to learn the target language and culture. This may have positive implications for the learners' proficiency.

Many studies that deal with learners' beliefs and their relationship with other aspects of language learning have been undertaken overseas. Students' attitudes and beliefs towards language learning (Borghetti & Beaven, 2017), beliefs and motivation (Lau, 2009), language proficiency (Huang & Tsai, 2003), learner strategies (Wenden, 1987), and students' cultural

background (Barcelos, 2000) are just a few examples. Regarding the interrelation between learners' beliefs about language learning and their cultural background, Barcelos (2003) revises some studies and discusses aspects such as methodology, the definition of beliefs, and the relationship between beliefs and actions, and concludes with the advantages and disadvantages. In her review, she expounds on the interpretation of beliefs. Then, she delves into three approaches to investigating human beliefs: normative, metacognitive, and contextual. Finally, she comments on the advantages and disadvantages of examining learners' beliefs and the data collection instruments used. To conclude her analysis, Barcelos (2003) states that beliefs are shaped by social interaction and are context dependent. Further research must be done to "understand how beliefs interact with students' actions and what functions they play in students' learning experiences in class or outside class" (p.29).

From a Colombian perspective, there is an exploratory case study of students' beliefs about their English class in a public institution (Villareal Suarez et al., 2016). The participants in this research were thirty students from a public high school in Armenia. Using two focus groups, drawings, and interviews about learning beliefs, the authors found that the experience learners have in the language class influences positively or negatively the learner's belief system. Villareal Suarez et al. (2016) acknowledge the importance of Colombian learners' beliefs about language learning. Moreover, they suggest teachers must hear what learners have to say about their language classes, identify their beliefs more thoroughly and address them to improve their classroom practices. By doing so, students' language experience and foster competencies in the language classroom.

Bailey (2013) investigated 50 Colombian university students' beliefs about language learning in Barranquilla and their relationships among economic and sociocultural background variables. It was revealed that the reported students' beliefs about language learning are dynamic

and subject to change, as suggested by Barcelos (2003). Bailey (2017) suggests that teachers must reflect on their practices and address learners' beliefs to promote substantial changes in their beliefs, whereas improvement in their language proficiency occurs. Bailey (2013) concludes that "providing positive experiences and meaningful learning and addressing the student more than the method will influence language learning" (p. 512). New ways to tackle these challenges create more authentic, meaningful, and realistic experiences and learning environments. Intercultural and interlanguage experiences and contextualized learning materials and processes seem to be more suitable for the nature and purpose of the present study.

Virtual Exchange and Learners' Beliefs for the Development of ICC

Regarding learners' perceptions about learning a language and developing intercultural communicative competence, there is evidence in the Asian context regarding student beliefs and their experience in a telecollaboration exchange. Ryder and Yamagata-Lynch (2014) conducted a qualitative study to explore students' experience in a virtual exchange project. Seven university students in China and seven in the USA were the population for this study. The researchers used an activity system analysis to investigate *tensions*, referring to misunderstandings and ruptures that affect students' language learning experience in the telecollaboration scenario through discourse analysis of interviews, journals, and audiovisual materials. According to the authors, factors such as language proficiency gaps, beliefs about teaching and learning, preconceived notions of the target culture, and the differences in the level of ICC contribute to misunderstandings, thus affecting the successful online intercultural exchange. To conclude, they suggest that the instructor must be competent and a facilitator of the telecollaboration experience.

Similarly, Luo and Yang (2018) reviewed studies concerning different practices in telecollaborative exchanges for Chinese language learning during the past two decades at both university and secondary levels. They analyzed several benefits of telecollaboration for second-

language classroom development, such as fostering intercultural communicative competence, enhancing oral communication, and developing higher-order thinking skills. Aside from this, the researchers discussed five areas of telecollaborative exchanges related to teaching the Chinese language and learning, such as models, tasks, challenges, technologies, and new trends. In their analysis, Lou and Yang discussed their findings on the competencies model for telecollaborative teachers proposed by O'Dowd (2013) in four areas: organizational, digital, pedagogical competencies, and attitudes and beliefs. It is concluded that a telecollaborative teacher must be well-informed, flexible, a culturally equipped facilitator, and technologically competent. Finally, teachers need to consider the importance of their beliefs about language teaching and learners' beliefs regarding language learning, as well as openness, curiosity, and willingness about their own and other cultures, play in telecollaborative exchanges for language acquisition.

One of the few studies of language learning beliefs, culture and virtual exchange in Colombia comes from Ramírez-Lizcano and Cabrera-Tovar (2020) who explored students' perceptions about the relationship between language learning and culture through telecollaboration. The authors investigated 6 middle school students from a private institution and two French and Swedish partners with same language learning similarities. Ramírez-Lizcano and Cabrera-Tovar (2020) found that students thought language is an instrument and a mean for communication as well as culture was essential in the learning process for a better understanding and awareness of otherness and themselves. The authors concluded that telecollaboration allows learners reflect and understand their culture and others, at the same time learners' perceptions about language and culture are correlated and shaped by cultural backgrounds and cultural and language instruction experiences triggering a more effective language learning performance.

Summary of Section

The studies commented here explored and showed relevant evidence in the literature regarding practice and research on beliefs in second language acquisition, application of virtual exchange in second language education, and the development of ICC in language classes, which are significantly paramount to this purpose study. The various authors highlight the importance of attending to beliefs about language learning, the importance of attitude for the development of intercultural communicative competence, and approaches to language teaching and learning, such as Virtual Exchange, as potential factors that contribute to effective and successful language acquisition. Though research on these subjects in Colombia is growing separately, there appear to be few such studies in public schools, and none combined with the three.

Setting

The Institución Educativa Juan de Jesús Narváez Giraldo is a rural public school located in the small town of Planeta Rica, Córdoba - Colombia. Currently, the school is made up of five locations scattered throughout the rural area of the town. The school has a population of 385 students. Most of them are concentrated in two larger locations. The main one is located in the Las Pelotas community, and the latter is in the small rural community of Loma de Piedra, 20 kilometers from the central location. Both major areas offer education from preschool to upper secondary education. The minor sites implement the method of teaching Escuela Nueva or “New School.” Concerning the study population, Loma de Piedra is a community of indigenous and other ethnic groups from disadvantaged families with poor home learning environments. Most of them are large families in which parents are farmworkers, itinerant workers, and day laborers with low income; this community, with such characteristics, evidence limited economic opportunities and a high poverty rate. Furthermore, some of these families have weak academic

achievement traditions, while others have completed at least the primary or secondary stages of education.

The institutional education project aims at providing a whole quality education service. The institution does this through the implementation of an active and flexible curriculum, preparing ideal local and global citizens who can live together and in peace with their environment, are aware of the local, regional, and national culture, and who can use information and communication technologies to address the needs of their local community and the environment. According to the approach to learning, teaching and learning are based on social constructivism. As a compulsory subject, English has a devoted time of two hours per week. The school has limited and poor-quality learning resources and classrooms. One computer science lab is equipped with a TV, a CD player, very few laptop computers, and a poor and unstable connection, making the teaching and learning process quite challenging. These characteristics might represent advantages or disadvantages for language learning in rural schools and could influence learners' aspirations in life, thoughts, beliefs, values, and attitudes. The specific study was carried out with the seventh-grade English course.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter provided relevant literature for this study. It first focused on a theoretical overview of Colombia's English language teaching and ELT discussion. After that, the chapter focused on elaborating on constructs connected with beliefs about language learning, ICC, and telecollaboration, which are essential issues in this study. It is important to recall that this study explores and understands how the combination of the three aspects: learners' beliefs about language learning, a virtual exchange project, and the development of ICC impacts learners' language performance in a Colombian school. Chapter 3 deals with the methodological design relevant to situating and understanding the processes carried out in this study. This chapter will

consider the research questions that guide it, followed by the research paradigm and design adopted. Then the chapter outlines the participants, instruments, data collection, and analysis procedure. The chapter will end with a description of ethical considerations.

Chapter 3. Method

This qualitative case study investigates virtual exchange's effects on English learners in a rural school in Colombia. More specifically, this study investigates how a telecollaboration project impacts learners' beliefs about language learning, their attitudes toward English, and how it helps develop intercultural communicative competence. This study is relevant as very few studies have been conducted in rural schools in Colombia.

The following chapter will describe the research methodology chosen for this study. This section presents and discusses the research design used to conduct this study, the research design, and the participants. Then, the data-gathering methods to approach the research questions will be defined. A section for how the data will be presented and analyzed follows. Finally, aspects of validity and reliability, as well as some ethical considerations, will be detailed.

Research paradigm: Interpretivist

The following study stands on an interpretivist paradigm that aims at understanding social phenomena, human actions, and social interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It establishes that reality is complex and subjective, typically approached qualitatively, can have multiple interpretations, and there is no room for generalizability (Sánchez Santamaría, 2013). As aforementioned, beliefs are subjective because of their various interpretations. They are derived from many origins and determined or affected by several factors, such as family, home, or cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, intercultural communication involves examining people's behavior from different cultures through interaction (Gudykunst and Tsukasa, 2001). This study intends to help understand language students' interpretations of language learning and their experiences through interaction to facilitate their language performance.

Research Method: Qualitative

This study follows a qualitative approach to explore and analyze the complexity of learners' beliefs about English language learning in their context and the students' ICC development integrating telecollaboration into their classroom context. Creswell and Poth (2016) describe qualitative inquiry as “informing the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 8). The qualitative approach analyzes and understands the different subjects' perceptions of human behavior within the phenomenon under study and how those perceptions influence what they say and do in their natural setting through interaction (Hatch, 2002).

Design of the Study

Yin (2009) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (p. 13). An exploratory case study is adequate for this research because it allows the researcher to explore or better understand phenomena under review in the specific language context. The nature of this exploratory case study delved into learners' perceptions about their language experience in their language classroom and the development of ICC through a virtual exchange project as practices that influence language learning. This investigation seeks to understand better a phenomenon relating to learners' language outcomes in a Colombian school and could bring potential understanding to the current research or further explorations.

Participants

The qualitative approach allows the understanding of a social situation or behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2016), and case studies seek to understand social phenomena within a real-life context (Yin, 2009). The present study was conducted in a school in Cordoba, Colombia. The

participants in this study included a group of 22 secondary school students (16 females and six males, seventh grade) in partnership with New York City secondary school students. Participant students were beginner learners in each target language (English and Spanish). They were paired with one-on-one partnerships according to their level to ensure they could actively participate in the exchange. In the end, only data from a group of 5 seventh graders at Institución Educativa Juan de Jesús Narváez Giraldo in Loma de Piedra ranged from 11 to 13 years were used. The participants who voluntarily participated in the virtual exchange project were randomly selected for this study. The initial eligibility required that they were born and lived in a rural environment, which means they bring many preconceived ideas about learning and using English.

In contrast, some do not consider English necessary for their living, which characterizes rural life. Parental and participant consent was secured before the exchange for participating in this study. Participants' identities were protected by using only their initials at the end of their excerpts. Though this study aims to explore their beliefs about English language learning in their current natural setting, it also focuses on the development of ICC throughout EFL learners' interaction in a rural school in Colombia with US Spanish learners via telecollaboration.

Data Collection Techniques and Procedures

A specific research method involves various data collection techniques. Data was collected using different instruments that provided trustworthiness to this research: pre- and post-BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory), students' semi-structured interviews, and letters in pursuit of validity and reliability. The present study used the BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1987) considering it is the most used instrument in wealth of studies worldwide to explore and understand language learners' beliefs. (Kern, 1995; Barcelos, 2000; Mohebi and Khodadady, 2011; Bailey, 2012). Items in the survey were written in Spanish, like the questions in the interview, to ensure their validity and reliability. Also, pre and post-test results were

analyzed by mean, standard deviation for reliability and validity. Thematic analysis of the interviews also helped to improve reliability. This study can be helpful for teachers to be aware of the contribution of learners' beliefs and the development of their ICC through appropriate methods such as virtual exchanges and, thus, contribute to more successful teaching and learning practices.

Data Collection Instruments

This section will briefly explain the instruments designed to collect the information for this study, namely BALLI, interviews, and letters.

Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

For this study, students' beliefs about language learning came from pre- and post-BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) surveys. Specifically, this ESL Student Version of BALLI was adapted to ensure their validity and reliability (see appendix A) and administered to a small sample (5 seventh-grade middle school students taking English classes) in a rural context. The survey includes 11 of the 34 original statement items based on research needs. All the items were designed to be responded to on a 4-point Likert scale. The options ranged from those that (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree: to the ones which they agree, (3), and (4) strongly agree. There is no safe 'neutral' option. This 11-item adapted questionnaire of BALLI was used before and after the virtual exchange project because it would bring out students' opinions about learning and teaching English in their sociocultural context. The pre-and post-survey would yield significant contributions to knowledge as the survey is a well-known data-collection instrument for evaluating learner beliefs about language learning. Furthermore, since this instrument would allow the researcher to see if those opinions changed after the cultural exchange project, the BALLI survey was appropriate for the research.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were the second type of instrument used for collecting data. (See Appendix B). According to Barcelos (2003), “the use of interviews allows learners to elaborate and reflect on their experience” (p. 19). Nunan (1992) defined that in a semi-structured interview, the researcher/interviewer has an overall notion of the control and direction of the interview without a rigid list of questions. In other words, semi-structured interviews are characterized by their flexibility. The researcher and participant have a degree of control over the interview. Moreover, it allows the researcher to delve into and gain insights into topics such as participants’ beliefs and thoughts (Nunan, 1992).

Therefore, semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study because they allowed them to reflect on and comment openly and freely on their experiences and perceptions regarding learning English. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 Colombian students to explore and determine changes in their beliefs and attitudes towards learning English after the virtual exchange and what intercultural awareness and ICC students developed during the discussion. Also, the questions in the interview were made in Spanish to avoid any risks of misinterpretation. In this vein, the instrument provided meaningful data about their experiences, perceptions about learning English in a rural context, and attitudes and awareness toward the target culture. The interviews were conducted at the end of the exchange project following a list of 10 predetermined questions on four themes: the Virtual exchange experience, their perceived gains in learning English throughout their interaction with individuals from other cultures, their perceived changes in their beliefs about learning English and interest and confidence in interacting with people from different cultures. The questions served as a guide for the interview and allowed other follow-up questions by helping learners reflect on their learning experiences. Each interview took from 5 to 10 minutes. The interviews were recorded,

transcribed, and categorized as specific information related to the research questions was investigated.

The data from the interviews were analyzed, categorized using thematic analysis for further interpretations. This was possible through triangulation with data that resulted from students' e-mail extracts and the BALLI questionnaire. Triangulation was used for validity and give credibility to the gain insights on the subject of study (Creswell, 2012)

Letters

A third qualitative instrument used in this study to collect electronic data was e-mail letters. Oxford (1990) believes that using emails in language learning is a means of real-world interaction and a fundamental communication tool in the target language. Studies have shown that emails develop intercultural learning as cultural exchange exists when students send and receive values and information about their culture (Luo & Yang, 2018; Schenker, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), emails are a valuable source of information that provide rich data to answer research questions and an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon under study. Documents such as letters and e-mail entries resulting from the participants' virtual exchanges are considered beneficial to this study since data from students' emails can reveal how students' ICC is exhibited. Furthermore, as participants could express themselves with no limitations. Primary data and authenticity provided by the emails was not subject to manipulation providing in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2012), to ensure validity of data from the previous data collection instruments after triangulation process.

Procedure

The research procedure, based on a 12-week teaching schedule of the virtual exchange program from September to November 2018, contains several stages until conclusion of the study. The Colombian students in this research were paired with American e-mail partners, and five

partnerships were established. The participants had English encounters every Wednesday when in arrangement with the US class teacher and group. The data was collected using the pre- and post-BALLI questionnaire, e-mail exchanges, and semi-structured interviews (See Appendices A and B). Before the exchange program started, orientations and instructions about the program and its particular aim were delivered to participants. A pre-treatment (BALLI questionnaire) was given to participants. The aim of the BALLI was to identify students' beliefs about language learning before the program. The language used in the questionnaire was Spanish in order to avoid misunderstanding of their responses. During the exchange, Colombian participants were expected to write back and forth between them at least two e-mails a week: one in which they provided information about the week's topic and another in which they replied to their partner's email alternating between the two languages. The language used for the e-mail exchange was both English and Spanish. The letters and e-mail transcripts yielded valuable insights to understand better the exhibition of learners' intercultural competence. At the end of the program, they were given the post-treatment BALLI questionnaire to explore participants' beliefs about language learning for further analysis and interpretation of findings regarding the impact of the program on learners' beliefs and the shifts in their beliefs. After students answered the BALLI questionnaire, in the final week, each student was given a consent form before the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted individually. This research procedure led to the process of data analysis, findings and discussion of results.

Data Analysis

Though the research approach in this study is qualitative, some quantification techniques were employed to produce more constructive results. The collected data using various sources were organized and analyzed to address each research question in this study. The quantitative data, collected through a Likert-Style BALLI questionnaire, were analyzed using descriptive

statistics. Descriptive statistics helped describe rural public school learners' beliefs about English language learning.

The qualitative data analysis included a six-step process: First, the dataset was examined to get familiar with it. Second, a set of initial codes were generated and applied to the dataset. Third, patterns among codes were identified, and generated codes turned into themes that represent data. Fourth, generated themes were reviewed and redefined to make appropriate and accurate themes. Fifth, generated themes were named and defined. Finally, the analysis and report were produced. Triangulation was used to compare data from BALLI accordingly with qualitative data from participants' interviews and e-mails for final analysis.

Ethical considerations

Qualitative research comprises ethical considerations for data gathering and treatment (Creswell, 2009). This study investigates five young students' perceptions of language learning and the development of their ICC after a virtual exchange program. All participants were informed about the research aims and purposes and were told what was expected from them during and after the research process. All participants voluntarily accepted and signed an informed consent form to obtain consent from participants and parents. They understood that the data gathered was confidential and anonymous, and their data would only be used for research purposes until the study had been completed. Also, participants understood they could withdraw from the research study at any time without risk of harm. In order to protect participants' identities, students were designated pseudonyms.

Chapter 4. Findings Results

The previous chapter described the methodological design used in this study in detail. The chapter described its research paradigm and design, including the participants, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures, without providing specific details of the results. This chapter presents the study results from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The first section of this chapter will present the descriptive analysis of the pre-and post-virtual exchange program BALLI questionnaire, answering the first research question: *What beliefs do rural public-school learners hold about English language learning before and after?*

The second section will present the thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered during and after the virtual exchange program using semi-structured interviews and students' e-mail exchanges. Qualitative data will provide insights into the possible changes in students' perceptions about language learning and what ICC students developed during the virtual exchange program, thereby answering the second research question: *What dimensions of intercultural communicative competence do students develop during the exchange?*

Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning

The results from the questionnaire originated from the five fundamental areas in BALLI before the exchange. They were compared with those after the exchange to identify and determine any possible changes in learners' beliefs during the exchange.

BALLI questionnaire

The data relating to learners' beliefs about English language learning was analyzed to respond to the first question. For identifying which items students agreed with more than others, the 11 items were analyzed both (pre- and post-exchange) using descriptive statistics listing percentages and the Mean (*M*) and Standard Deviation (*SD*)) within the five areas: Difficulty of Learning, Foreign Language Aptitude, Nature of Language Learning, Learning and

Communication Strategies, and Motivations and Expectations (see Table 1). The results for the BALLI are presented as positive or negative shifts in beliefs. Because the population included a small sample of five students, it was deemed unnecessary to use inferential tests.

Table 1.*BALLI: Pre-and Post-Survey responses*

BALLI: Areas and statements					Test type	M	SD
<i>Area 1: Difficulty of Language Learning</i>							
	1	2	3	4			
11) El inglés es (Circulo uno):	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0	Pre-	2.20	0.44
	0.0	0.0	60.0	40.0	Post-	3.40	0.54
<hr/>							
4) Yo creo que aprenderé a hablar inglés muy bien	0.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	Pre-	2.60	0.54
	0.0	0.0	60.0	40.0	Post-	3.40	0.54
	0.0	0.0	60.0	40.0	Pre-	2.40	0.54
5) Es más fácil leer y escribir en inglés que hablar y entender.	0.0	0.0	40.0	60.0	Post-	2.60	0.54
<hr/>							
<i>Area 2: Foreign Language Aptitude</i>							
	1	2	3	4			
1) Es más fácil para los niños que para los adultos aprender una lengua extranjera	0.0	60.0	40.0	0.0	Pre-	2.40	0.54
	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	Post-	2.60	0.54
	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	Pre-	2.60	0.54
2) En mi cultura, la gente es buena para aprender lenguas extranjeras.	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	Post-	2.60	0.54
	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0	Pre-	2.80	0.44
7) Yo tengo una habilidad especial para aprender idiomas.	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	Post-	3.00	0.00
<hr/>							
<i>Area 3: Nature of language learning</i>							
	1	2	3	4			
6) Es necesario conocer las culturas angloparlantes para poder hablar inglés bien.	20.0	60.0	20.0	0.0	Pre-	2.00	0.70
	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0	Post-	2.80	0.44
	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0	Pre-	2.80	0.44
8) La parte más importante de aprender una lengua extranjera es aprender el vocabulario	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	Post-	3.00	0.00
<hr/>							
<i>Area 4: Learning and Communication Strategies</i>							
	1	2	3	4			
9) Me pongo nervioso (a) cuando hablo inglés con otras personas.	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0	Pre-	2.80	0.44
	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0	Post-	2.80	0.44
<hr/>							
<i>Area 5: Motivations and Expectations</i>							
	1	2	3	4			
3) En mi cultura, es importante hablar inglés	0.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	Pre-	3.20	0.44
	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	Post-	3.00	0.00
	0.0	20.0	40.0	20.0	Pre-	3.20	0.83
10) Me gustaría tener amigos de habla inglesa.	0.0	0.0	60.0	40.0	Post-	3.40	0.54

Note. Numbers are reported in percentages. Statements were answered via a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), and 4 (strongly agree). Statement 11, students chose between 1 (a very difficult language), 2 (a difficult language), 3 (an easy language), and 4 (a very easy language).

Difficulty of Language Learning

As shown in Table 1, items related to the difficulty of language learning are statements 4, 5, and 11. The data indicated differences between participants' perceptions about the difficulty of language learning.

Pre-exchange. Before the exchange, most participants (80%) ($M = 2.2$: $SD = 0.44$) agreed that English is difficult. Only twenty percent of students rated English as being easy to learn. Moreover, in response to Statement 5, 60% disagreed, while 40% of students agreed that speaking and understanding English is easy ($M = 2.4$: $SD = 0.54$). This indicates that most learners agreed that there are some more difficult language skills than others. Most students positioned conversational skills as being easier than reading and writing. This implies the effect of learners' previous classroom experiences on the assessment of the difficulty of the communicative skills in which learners possibly view interaction and context as factors influencing their perceptions.

Regardless of the opinions about the difficulty of the five language students, the data indicated that 80% agreed and 20% ($M = 2.6$: $SD = 0.54$) strongly agreed with the statement: "I believe that I will learn to speak English very well." These participants were generally confident and optimistic that they could learn English and have a particularly satisfactory performance in the target language.

Post-exchange. When asked about the difficulty in learning English after the virtual exchange, all the participants (100%) shifted to believing that English is an easy language ($M = 3.4$: $SD = 0.54$). Regarding ease of skills, more than half of the students (60%) ($M = 2.6$: $SD = 0.54$) agreed in response to the statement, "it is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it." However, 40% of the students felt that speaking and understanding were more difficult than reading and writing in English after the exchange. Regardless of their opinions

about the difficulty of conversational skills, responses by students, 60% in agreement and 40% in strong agreement indicate that they will learn to speak English very well ($M = 3.4$; $SD = 0.54$). Overall, these participants were more confident and optimistic that they could learn English and have a good performance in the target language after the experience

Foreign Language Aptitude

Statements 1, 2, and 7 regard the learners' special abilities for language learning.

Pre-exchange. Most participants believed that adults are superior language learners. The responses to the item, “people from my culture are good at learning foreign languages,” showed that most students, 60% ($M = 2.6$; $SD = 0.54$), believed that people from their culture are good language learners and have a natural talent for learning English. However, 40% of the participants did not consider people from their context had a talent for learning languages. When asked about the difficulty involved in learning English for them as young learners, less than half of the students, 40% ($M = 2.4$; $SD = 0.54$), agreed with the item.

In addition, there is a common belief that foreign language aptitude exists, as 80% of the students responded positively to the statement, “I have a special ability for learning a foreign language.” However, a smaller percentage of participants (20%) disagreed ($M = 2.8$; $SD = 0.44$). Thus, even though most participants agreed that they had the potential for achievement in language learning, they still considered that age was a factor that affected the learning of a second language. Accordingly, the responses to these three items indicate that many students see themselves as gifted learners; however, acquiring a foreign language is difficult.

Post-exchange. Participants reported the same feeling about the belief that people from their community are good at learning languages, and there was no variation in their perception. More than half of the participants (60%) ($M = 2.6$; $SD = 0.54$) agreed that it was easier for children than adults to learn English. In general, most of the participants believed that children

are superior language learners. There is a general belief that they all possess a foreign language aptitude. All the participants (100%) ($M = 3.0$; $SD = 0.0$) voiced their agreement that they all have the potential and the ability to learn a language. Participants still see themselves as gifted language learners; however, there was a slight positive shift to ($M = 2.6$; $SD = 0.54$) from ($M = 2.4$; $SD = 0.54$) regarding their age, making it easier for them to learn English.

The Nature of Language Learning

This item refers to various issues related to learning English, including whether knowledge of English-speaking cultures and the importance of vocabulary are necessary to learning a language.

Pre-exchange. Responses concerning the role of cultural contact were significant for this study. The results revealed a consistent disagreement on the importance of the target language culture knowledge. Students reported high disagreement (20%) or disagreement (60%) with the item, “it is necessary to know about English-speaking cultures in order to speak English correctly.” Only 20% agreed that knowledge of English-speaking cultures was necessary to learn English ($M = 2.0$; $SD = 0.70$). This indicates that many participants had lower interests in learning about the culture of the Midwest USA and did not acknowledge the importance of cultural learning English classes. This could be due to their learning context, in which they learn English as a compulsory subject in a non-English-speaking country with few opportunities to contact representative speakers of the American culture. Besides, most participants thought learning vocabulary words was the most important part of learning a language, and only 20% ($M = 2.8$; $SD = 0.44$) disagreed. This item might suggest misconceptions learners hold about the most appropriate ways to learn a language and the focus of the language task in the English learning process. These beliefs could be detrimental to learners’ language learning achievement.

Post-exchange. Responses concerning the role of cultural contact after the exchange were significant for this study. Fewer students (20%) disagreed with the necessity of knowing the English-speaking culture in order to speak English than agreed (80%) ($M = 2.8$; $SD = 0.44$) and there was a consistent agreement on the importance of the target language culture knowledge. This indicates that all participants became more aware of English culture, and their interest in learning about the target culture improved.

Regarding the importance of vocabulary in language learning, students continued to agree with item 8 (100%) ($M = 3.0$; $SD = 0.0$), stating that the essential part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words. This statement shows that students tend to believe that vocabulary words should be the focus of English learning tasks indicating pedagogical connotations.

Learning and Communication Strategies

The results in this section show learners' beliefs about behavior in social situations.

Pre-exchange. An adverse finding is that most participants feel low confidence, particularly when it comes to verbal interaction. 80% agreed that they feel shy when speaking English with others, and only a minority, 20%, felt confident and enjoyed speaking with others ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 0.44$).

Post-exchange. The results in this section showed no shift in learners' behavior in social situations after the exchange. Results indicate that most participants continued to feel low confidence, particularly regarding verbal interaction ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 0.44$). The results for this section (both pre and post) indicate a probability that learners feel anxious about making mistakes, concerned about correct pronunciation or vocabulary, or do not understand their interlocutor when they participate in communicative activities. This level of anxiety could be a factor affecting learners' performance in the language class.

Motivations and Expectations

This section concerns the desire and opportunities students associate with learning English and the role of learners' motivation and expectations as influential factors in their beliefs about language learning.

Pre-exchange. All the participants' responses were positive. 100% ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 0.44$) agreed or highly agreed that speaking English in their cultural background is important. Students rated this item highly because they associate the importance of English with better opportunities; this is probably because they relate language skills with success in life or better socioeconomic condition.

Regarding integrative motivation, 80% of students said they would like to have English-speaking friends, and only 20% of participants disagreed with this item ($M = 3.2$; $SD = 0.83$). It seems that a minimum of participants had a low desire to know representatives of the English culture. This variance in response could be more related to individual perception of how English is viewed in Colombian rural contexts and the purpose and interest of learning English to broaden their range of social interaction. Keeping in mind that most students rated highly their desire to meet representatives of the target culture, data revealed students' curiosity and open attitude to learning new things about the target language and are aware of its importance in their own culture. It is acceptable to assume that when learning English meets the students' expectations and motivations to learn the language and culture, most of them will probably improve their language performance and achievement.

Post-exchange. The results indicate that participants are highly motivated in English learning in their beliefs. All the students (100%) ($M = 3.0$; $SD = 0.0$) agreed that people in their culture feel it is important to speak English. Regarding the want to make friends with native speakers of English, all student participants agreed (60%) or strongly agreed (40%) that they

would like to have English-speaking friends ($M = 3.4$; $SD = 0.54$). Overall, participants showed “awareness” of learning English and indicated a more positive desire to have English-speaking friends.

Summary of BALLI Implications

In summary, the results for the BALLI between pre- and post-virtual exchange programs were analyzed in order to explore possible changes in students’ beliefs about English language learning. Participants’ responses regarding the five areas of BALLI were compared and analyzed to determine whether students’ perceptions shifted into meaningful differences, similarities, or negative shifts in beliefs about language learning.

Results indicated a slight change in participants’ responses to the questions between pre-BALLI and post-BALLI, establishing meaningful likenesses and differences. These changes in responses might indicate a positive effect of the virtual exchange program on students’ beliefs about English learning. Differences were found in all five areas of the BALLI.

Results from the qualitative data follow in the next section. Qualitative data sought to find the presence of ICC competence and whether ICC competence was developed in the students.

Qualitative Results

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is used to identify, analyze, and report themes in a dataset. Qualitative data from 5 student participants were collected after the virtual exchange program employing semi-structured interviews and e-mail exchanges and analyzed following thematic analysis. The study gives an account of preconceived categories or themes derived from the BALLI dimensions in Horwitz’s (1988) and Byram’s ICC model; however, the researcher was open to any emergent category from the dataset.

Semi-structured Interviews and E-mails

Students' interviews and emails enabled access to participants' thoughts and opinions about their language learning experience and intercultural behaviors, attitudes, or thoughts that served two purposes. The first was to identify evidence of intercultural communicative competence in the participants' responses after the virtual exchange and whether ICC was developed. The second purpose was to identify what possible changes in students' beliefs about language learning occurred. As a result of the thematic analysis, results provided four themes that reflect the five dimensions of Byram's ICC model: attitudes, knowledge, discovery and interaction skills, interpretation and relating, and critical cultural awareness. Below are the obtained results regarding ICC dimensions presented to reflect what the participants developed and exhibited in their responses after the virtual exchange program.

Attitudes. After the virtual exchange, participants evidenced a positive impact of the program on their attitudes toward the target culture. Byram (1997) highlighted that attitude refers to an individual's readiness to become more tolerant of other cultures and one's while being non-judgmental. Participants evidenced openness, curiosity, and interest in the Midwest USA culture and language within this dimension.

Student participants demonstrated positive attitudes toward the target culture. Sofia, for example, reported a high desire to learn more about different cultures and the target language through the virtual exchange "because while we share things about our cultures, it helps me to learn English" also, Sebastian said, "one can learn more about the culture of the people we are speaking with." It is interesting to notice that the participants answered that they had learned about their interlocutors' culture, which made them more open to a different culture and more respectful. Participants showed a willingness not only to learn but also to understand the similarities and differences between both cultures. In this respect, Salome, for example,

expressed that she would like to keep learning about the American culture “because I never thought I would know people from other countries or speak to them. That way, one gets familiar more with their community where they are from, things from there or where they live.”

Not only was the desire to know different cultures evidenced after the virtual exchange program, but their desire to interact through the target language with speakers of other cultures. A positive view towards their interlocutors is evidenced in what Gabriela said, “I like English a lot because I can learn about other things, and I also interact with partners from abroad. I meet friends and get along better in English.” This means that the virtual exchange program can potentially promote an intercultural attitude dimension in participants in the way they desire to interact and maintain relationships with their pen friends. At the same time, their interest in learning about other cultures and cultural practices was expressed.

Additionally, the student's openness and curiosity can be evidenced in the following e-mail extracts from an e-mail exchange on their home culture between Sebastian and one of his interlocutors.

Hello! My name is Sebastian, thirteen years old. My favorite sport is soccer, I am from Colombia, I watch videos in YouTube, my birthday is the 17th august. I listen to gospel music, I like math, English. I like animals, my favorite animal is the lion. What is your favorite sport? What is your favorite animal? How old are you? Nice to meet you.

[original]

In this extract, the participant begins with a salutation, and then he provides his partner with specific information about him and some facts about his life and likes. Furthermore, he ends with questions about his life and likes to get information from his interlocutors' background and culture. This opportunity to interact with real people from the target culture allowed participants

to exchange cultural information that supported the attitude of openness and curiosity of the target culture in the foreign language.

In the following extract, Sebastian demonstrated more openness to learning about his interlocutors' culture. At the same time, he developed a better understanding of the differences between cultural content.

Hola, Alli. ¿cómo estás? Espero que bien. Mi app favorita es Facebook. Tengo una vaca. Te voy a hablar de mi escuela. El nombre de mi escuela es Juan de Jesús Narvárez Giraldo, es pequeño. Vivo cerca de mi escuela. Curso grado séptimo. Desayuno en la escuela. Entro a las 7:00 a.m. y salgo a la 1:00 p.m. me gusta el inglés, matemáticas, C. naturales, e historia. CHAO. Que estés bien. [original]

The participant not only provided information about his life but also provided rich information about his cultural background. Since participants in this study are rural students, most of his information exhibited his school habits and the fact that he mentioned he had a cow, which can be considered factual detail of his cultural background. The exchange of cultural information allowed the participant to identify differences between the cultures, helping him to develop an attitude of openness and curiosity. At the same time, he was engaged in real-life interaction with people from the target culture.

Knowledge. As mentioned above, attitudes and the knowledge of social groups and intercultural interactions with others are considered a prerequisite for the successful development of intercultural competence (Byram et al., 2002). The component of knowledge was another dimension evident in participants' responses. More evidence in the interview responses indicated that the virtual exchange program developed and enhanced the knowledge about the cultures of the participants.

Participants generally extended their knowledge of their pen friends' culture and daily social practices. For example, Gabriela stated, "I learned things I didn't know about them. Well, they, for example, have lunch at school, we don't, we only have breakfast. I would like to continue learning more things from them and for them to learn from us." Learning about the target culture and behaviors, learners referred to their desire to interact and learn more about their counterparts and their culture. At the same time, they learned more about their practices and behavior. Mateo claimed, "... an opportunity like this to speak English with them is never seen, but since it happened, I would like to learn more about English, their culture and everything with them ." The fact that they knew more about them enhanced improved and developed their self-concept. What is more, Gabriela stated, "it makes me feel good, teacher, because that way I can talk to other people who are learning the language that I already know, so it's not that difficult. I really had a lot of fun with them and with teacher Trish."

Additionally, participants acquired cultural knowledge after being exposed to cultural elements during the virtual exchange. Evidence of the knowledge component in intercultural competence can be seen in the following e-mail extract.

My name is Salome. I am very good. ¿How are you? I am thirteen years old... I am short, I am intelligent, I am white... my favorite music is Reggaeton. My favorite sport is soccer ¿what is your favorite sport? My favorite food is chicken. ¿How many brothers do you have? I am have one brother and four sisters. [original]

The analysis of this e-mail data reveals that the participants were engaged in building a relationship among themselves by sharing information about their cultural backgrounds and socio-cultural behavior. This example shows that Salome wanted to know about her counterpart's social relationships at the same time, she provided information about hers. The participant's personal information related to their personality, age, physical description, family, and musical

preferences demonstrate their interest in developing a broad and better understanding of cultural practices and behaviors, contributing to the knowledge dimension's development. For example, she offers information about the influence of reggaeton music on young Latin-American people regardless of their socioeconomic status. Like Sebastian, Salome evidences her preference for soccer as their favorite sport, with which they mostly have contact. In the Colombian rural area, it is common for people, including teenagers, to prefer this sport, unlike urban areas where they can play other sports. Finally, she talks about her family and how many siblings she has. In rural areas, having larger families is considered normal. E-mail interactions can foster the development of the knowledge dimension of ICC. It allows learners to describe aspects of their culture and request information about their interlocutors' culture.

Skills of interpreting and relating. The interviews also reflected that the virtual exchange positively influenced the development of the participant's skills. The skills of interpreting and relating, as well as discovery and interaction, are necessary for developing intercultural communicative competence. Byram et al. (2002) defined the skill of interpreting and relating as “the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate to documents or events from one’s own” (p.14). By identifying their pen friends' cultural behaviors or events through the virtual exchange and comparing them to one’s own, participants have demonstrated the development of their skills. Mateo, for example, answered:

Their culture seems interesting to me because it’s very different from ours. They do things differently at their school, for example, and I like that. They don’t wear a uniform, we do, they go to school by bus and the classrooms are different, I like it. [original]

Regarding this ability, another participant’s answer revealed that after the exchange, she had noticed her interlocutors’ environment and how it related to their behavior and culture. By doing this, the participant could relate those events to her cultural patterns or behaviors. Finally,

she was able to compare and state similarities and differences among cultures. Also, Gabriela's opinion revealed that her interlocutors' culture "it's a very different culture than here. The children are different, they are fun; the classrooms, and school are very different, too." According to these statements, participants tended to put their ideas and events they found interesting from the other culture side by side and see them from their perspectives, establishing similarities, and differences. Interpreting and relating to others allowed the participants to understand that those behaviors and events are a normal part of the interlocutors' cultural identity.

The evidence of the skills of interpreting and relating was not only evidenced in the interview responses. E-mails also revealed that participants could identify their interlocutors' cultural behaviors or events and compare them to one's own through interactions. In the e-mail extracts, participants talked about their culture and schooling and compared them to their interlocutors. Supporting what Mateo responded in the interview about the people of the target culture, Salome identified her interlocutors' school dress code, which related to hers. She compared it to events in her own culture. The following e-mail extract reflects what was said previously.

Hola, Maddy ¿cómo estás? De mi escuela te cuento que entro a las 7: 00 a.m y salimos a la 1:00 p.m. mi escuela se llama I:E Juan de Jesus Narvaez Giraldo. Estoy en grado 7° y me gusta la clase de Inglés y educación física. En la escuela hay 10 profesores. Vivo lejos de mi escuela. La jornada es ne la mañana. Uso uniforme, falda y camiseta. Me gusta hablar contigo. Chao. [original]

The participant shared her view of her own culture on the school topic. She was able to relate events in both cultures to compare and find similarities and differences between them. She illustrated what she wears in her typical school day. She wrote that she wore a skirt and a t-shirt as a uniform after realizing that her interlocutors wore informal clothes to school. She found it

interesting, as well as the time they started classes in both cultures. This evidence is valuable for this study since it allowed learners to become prospective intercultural mediators.

Skills of discovery and interaction. Based on the interviews' results, discovery and interaction skills played a pivotal role in the development of ICC after the virtual exchange. Byram (1997) stated that the skill of discovery is “the ability to recognize significant phenomena in a foreign environment and to elicit their meaning and connotations, and their relationship to other phenomena” (p. 38). Participants’ interaction with their interlocutors would allow them to recognize or identify those phenomena they have little or no idea about the foreign culture; also, participants were able to operate their attitudes in discovering new cultural events. Considering these aspects of the skill, participants required a degree of attitude, knowledge of other cultures, and skills that allowed them to interact respectfully with their interlocutors.

At the same time, they developed more understanding of the target culture through the virtual exchange. Sofia, for example, declared that she felt good about virtual exchange “because there we shared and saw things that they (American students)... otherwise we hadn’t... that we hadn’t seen, nor they had seen of us... in their culture” also, she answered as follows: “I like it, I find it very cool that they don’t wear a uniform, what their school looks like, all the activities they do at their school.” It can be observed that the participant identified and acknowledged the discovery of the new events in the foreign culture with an open attitude, then compared them to her own culture. She expressed that she did not know that American students were allowed to dress casually for school, and she also compared with joy both cultural events. The discovery of the cultural event took place during the interaction with her pen friend, which provided the right conditions for developing the skill.

The fact that the participant learned about the dress code at American schools and how it differed from the dress code in her culture demonstrates that interaction allowed her to reflect,

analyze and interpret other cultural behaviors, giving a positive appreciation to something different she is used to. Moreover, Salome's appreciation of her pen friend's culture supports this finding: "weird, but I like it because they... they over there... because they don't wear uniforms, but we do, how they behave in their classes, the things they do in their school, and..." This shows that participants could analyze and differentiate cultural behaviors through the exchange and had positive attitudes toward what they discovered.

The previous analysis explains why the virtual exchange program is a facilitator of the development of the skill of discovery and interaction. Participants noticed differences between cultures and referred to different cultural behaviors between representatives of the target culture through interaction.

Critical cultural awareness. After analyzing the qualitative dataset, the presence of the critical cultural awareness component of ICC was null. According to Byram (1997), critical cultural awareness refers to learners' ability to critically evaluate their beliefs, values, practices, and documents and those of other cultural backgrounds and countries. The students' interview responses and e-mails did not exhibit this component since participants did not evaluate nor judge cultural and language issues from a critical standpoint. Students' interviews and e-mails referred to similarities and differences between cultures. However, in their responses, students did not justify nor critically evaluate their beliefs, values, or behaviors and those of their peers.

Summary of Section

Data analysis results were presented in Chapter 4. The results have helped understand students' beliefs of English language learning in their context. They also helped pave the way to understand better whether the virtual exchange affected participants' development of intercultural communicative competences. Participants' interviews and e-mails revealed the presence and the development of a positive attitude towards foreign language learning and culture.

Furthermore, interaction through e-mail exchange triggered knowledge about the target and own cultures. While most of the skills dimensions of ICC were developed, the critical cultural awareness dimension was not developed through the e-mail exchange.

A discussion of the findings follows in Chapter 5. The discussion examines, interprets, and reports the possible relationship between the learners of this study, beliefs, and ICC and VE. The results of other similar studies can support these arguments.

Chapter 5. Discussion

As previously stated in this research, the present exploratory case study sought to examine and understand the effect of virtual exchange on English language learners' beliefs about language learning and the development of their ICC in a rural middle school. According to Horwitz (1987), beliefs shape learners' behavior in language instruction, positively or negatively affecting their learning and acquisition of English. Due to the complexity of rural environments, rural learners develop distinct beliefs that affect their EFL performance and outcomes. To cope with the demands of language-cultural interconnectedness (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014), it is also mandatory to understand the interculturality process in language instruction in rural environments. In Colombia, a gap exists between language literature and language learning instruction and outcomes regarding rural contexts. Much evidence about learners' contributions to language learning exists (Breen, 2001), but rural students' language contributions still demand much understanding. Therefore, exploring and understanding how learners' beliefs influence their performance in rural contexts and how their ICC is developed and enhanced is necessary. The main objective of this research is met with the findings discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the discussion and interpretation of the findings.

Beliefs about Language Learning

It is widely asserted that belief systems are highly connected to learners' language performance and success, and that learning environments and language learning experiences trigger positive or counterproductive results in learners' beliefs (Wesley, 2012). This study found that the virtual exchange experience positively affected participants' beliefs about language learning. Data provided significant evidence that students tended to have more positive beliefs about the five fundamental areas of BALLI (Horwitz, 1985).

The analysis supports the theory that language experience can positively influence learners' perception of the difficulty of language learning (Borghetti & Tsai, 2003; Ellis, 2008). Learners tended to believe learning English was easier than before the virtual exchange experience. It seems that they changed their perception of language learning because they were engaged in a different learning experience involving real-life communication and interaction with people from the language and culture they were learning. The e-mail exchange experience encouraged them to be part of a novel and exciting way to learn the language. However, the results contradict the claims of Rieger (2009) that claims the target language has a significant impact on the beliefs about the difficulty of the language under study than the context or experience.

Regardless of their opinions about the ease of English learning, participants' perceptions about conversational skills slightly changed negatively. Some students might have found the experience more challenging. Probably, one of the reasons for this change comes from the interaction through English in the exchange program that encouraged them to face different ways of learning the language that they found English more difficult. These results might imply that more attention should be paid to learners' perceptions of communication skills and approaches to language learning.

Interestingly, despite their opinion about conversational skills, students' self-confidence and self-efficacy were increased. Overall, these participants were more confident and optimistic that they could learn English and perform well in the target language after the experience. After the exchange, students experienced a positive impact on their attitude toward language learning and culture. Learners became more aware of the importance of conversational skills to convey communication with their peers. Learners agreed that learning more English and mastering conversational skills would help them interact better with representatives of the English language

and culture. This supports Barcelos' (2003) claim about the relationship between beliefs and learning experiences in class or outside class. In particular, she mentions that cultural background influences learners' beliefs about language learning, and how learners interact with their peers shapes their perceptions of language learning.

Many students also described their concepts about foreign language aptitude as context and culture dependent. The results indicate that everyone in their context has the potential to learn a second language; however, after the exchange program, they tended to believe more that young learners are superior to adult language learners. In line with Altan (2006), this result might suggest that young participants found learning English easier and more significant during a virtual exchange program. Besides, results showed a relationship between age and students' beliefs about their disposition, potential, and ability to learn English.

In contrast, the findings in this study disagree with those of Arslan and Kafes' (2009) and Rad (2010). They found no significant relation between age and beliefs about foreign language aptitude. However, Arslan and Kafes' (2009) advocate for a significant relationship between language learners' proficiency and their unique abilities for language learning. These findings enlighten the current literature on the positive effects of virtual exchange on improving language learners' proficiency and its effect on their beliefs about language learning aptitude. Unlike the contradictory findings in the literature about the scarce affiliation between age and foreign language aptitude, the findings of this study showed that participants can reflect and elucidate their unique abilities to learn English and that those beliefs were affected by the virtual exchange program. Results reflect the literature that learners' features and beliefs about foreign languages are context and culture-dependent and might influence their language achievement.

Results also suggest that students' beliefs about the nature of language learning have increased. Learners tended to believe that knowledge of English-speaking cultures was not

necessary to speak English; however, through the virtual exchange program, results reflect that those students became more aware of this issue. More specifically, students were more interested in learning about the Midwest USA culture and acknowledged the importance of cross-cultural knowledge in language learning. Students in this study commented on their disposition to learn the culture of the people to better their language, which was probably built up by the online interaction with representatives of the culture and language they were learning.

In addition, similar results regarding how interaction affects attitudes and beliefs were identified in Wesely's (2012) study. She reported that students' attitudes and beliefs might determine learners' language achievement, how these traits are context-dependent, and how interactions between learners and the context occur based on those traits. The result implies that the importance of building relationships between the environment and different cultural influences in the language classroom is needed for effective language learning.

The findings in this study also show similarities regarding the importance of vocabulary in learning a language. Alharbi (2019) reported that vocabulary learning through social interaction with peers would help learners master language proficiency. This result implies that participants' vocabulary mastery and language learning background might facilitate or hinder their language performance through e-mail exchanges.

The results of this study show that learners' levels of low confidence and self-efficacy about language learning in social situations slightly changed. However, learners' beliefs, self-efficacy, and attitudes played an important role in foreign language learning, positively impacting learners' self-regulation when communicating with peers during the virtual exchange program..

Consistent with Wang and Zhan (2020), learners' positive beliefs and motivation in online environments played an important mediating role in successful language learning. The results in this study fit with the existing theory that engaging in real-life interaction in a virtual

exchange produces favorable effects on students' motivation to learn the English language and culture. The study found that students were intrinsically motivated. Their want to make friends with native speakers of English enhanced the desire to learn English and vice versa, indicating how motivation plays out in the interaction between English language learners and their environment (Mohebi and Khodadady, 2011). While previous research focused on learners' beliefs and motivation for language learning, results in this study demonstrated that intercultural communicative competence was also essential for language learning success (O'Dowd, 2013). Participants became aware of the importance of language learning to expand their knowledge of others and otherness.

Intercultural communicative competence

Drawing from the literature on ICC, particularly Byram's (1997) model, the study explored rural young learners' intercultural awareness and ICC during a virtual exchange program. This study found that socio-cultural communication and interaction through a virtual exchange program positively impacted learners' attitudes toward foreign language and culture learning.

Similar to Álvarez's (2019) study, participants in this study developed most of the skills dimensions of ICC. However, the findings reveal that the critical cultural awareness dimension was not affected positively by the participants. Complexities leading to failed communication in virtual exchange negatively influence the language learning process if not attended (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006). Interaction is one complex factor that needs to be considered in online communication for more successful development of critical cultural awareness.

The findings reveal that participants' attitudes toward foreign language culture developed positively after examining the effect of the exchange program on students' ICC. Participants demonstrated openness, curiosity, and an interest in English culture and language, which agreed

with Schenker (2013). After engaging in the virtual exchange, learners reported a high desire to learn more about the English language and culture to maintain social interaction and communication with English-speaking representatives. Not only did participants develop an interest in the target culture and language, but they also developed more interest and openness about their own culture. Students were able to reflect on their cultural background and were able to compare the actions and values between cultures. The study also indicated that learners were more interested in learning about culture than before the virtual exchange. This might happen because students had novel opportunities to interact in real-life communication with representatives of the desired culture, making the learning experience more meaningful considering the lack of opportunities offered by their context.

The study also indicated that learners rapidly and concisely extended their knowledge dimension. This result could be interpreted as a trace of the successful development of intercultural competence fitting with the theory of Byram et al. (2002). Regarding this dimension, the results from this study indicated that it was challenging but productive because participants could refer to their context and cultural background and learn about the target culture, practices, and behaviors. Similar results were also reported by O'Dowd (2005), who supported that e-mail exchange is appropriate for developing the Knowledge dimension since it allows learners to share precise information and understanding of both others and their cultural background more elaborately.

These findings aligned with the results of the present study. Participants acknowledged that learning about the English culture was necessary for learning English. Besides, interacting during the program helped them extend their knowledge of their pen friends' culture and daily practices. Building a relationship among Colombian and pen friends by sharing information

about their cultural backgrounds and cultural behaviors is evidence of the development and enhancement of the knowledge component of ICC of the participants.

Results indicated that the virtual exchange program positively developed both students' skills of interpreting and relating as well as skills of discovery and interaction. Participants' online interaction with similar age representatives of the English culture and language probably allowed participants better to identify their pen friends' cultural behaviors and events and compare them to their own. They could relate those events to her cultural patterns or behaviors and, finally, state similarities and differences among cultures with little or no difficulty. Likewise, Liaw and Jhonson's (2001) study showed that e-mail interaction contributed to developing more receptive abilities for other cultures. Probably, when participants acted as cultural informants or communicators of their own culture, they became more receptive learners relating their cultural events, values, norms, and behavior with those of the target culture representatives.

Participants in this study were particularly diverse. The English language learners belonged to a rural school in Colombia with similar values, norms, and events. They were engaged in intercultural interaction with representatives of the English-speaking culture from different cultural backgrounds via virtual exchange. The findings in this study showed that participants positively developed their skill of discovery and interaction, similar to Liaw and Jhonson's (2001) and Schenker's (2013) studies: the role of cultural interaction in developing the cultural enrichment regarding sociocultural relationships shaped by mutual efforts to overcome possible cultural barriers. Participants were highly interested in learning the target culture. Cultural interaction allowed them to reflect, analyze and interpret other cultural behaviors, giving their appreciation to something different than their culture and changing their view of the world.

Surprisingly, the study found that not all dimensions of ICC were developed during the exchange program. Nugent and Catalano (2015) expressed that allowing intercultural learners to sufficiently analyze and discuss their values and behaviors and those of the target culture is crucial for developing language learning and intercultural communicative competence. Critical observance of otherness is necessary for cross-cultural interaction, and this is problematic because critical cultural awareness was not exhibited in the results. Even though learners referred to learned, related, and contrasted events and behaviors between the English culture and their own, they did not engage in a deeper level of critical thinking and understanding of the target culture. This result indicates that cross-cultural interaction must require critical awareness of the target culture.

Virtual Exchanges, Beliefs, and ICC

There is little doubt that virtual exchange positively affected rural language learners' change in beliefs about language learning and their ICCs. Drawing from the literature on virtual exchange (O'Dowd, 2007; O'Dowd and Klippel, 2006) and comparing learners' beliefs about language learning and their intercultural communicative competence, this study explored possible correlations between the findings and the cultural background of language instruction. The study found that plausible correlations can be linked to the topics above, which require much understanding of the subject of study.

The results showed that students reported a higher positive attitude, openness, and interest in learning about the culture. The findings also indicated that students held positive beliefs about their motivation to learn English, the ease or difficulty of language learning, and the importance of culture in language acquisition, probably linked to learners' individual language learning experiences and cultural backgrounds. Learners living in rural conditions with challenges for language acquisition showed that motivation and a good attitude toward language and culture

hold the potential to enhance language learning achievement if a novel methodological approach like VE is included in the language practice (Appel & Gilabert, 2002; Mohebi and Khodadady,2011; Luo &Yang, 2018).

Subsequently, the study explored how learners' beliefs about language and culture impacted learners' attitudes and other dimensions of ICC and vice versa. Learners' exposure to online cross-cultural interaction influenced their attitudes and motivation to learn the target language and culture. Being exposed to representative speakers of the target culture helped learners develop openness and curiosity toward new cultural events and behaviors and become more tolerant of their own culture. They also explored and gained deep knowledge of the host culture. This desire for knowledge and motivation acted as a mechanism that facilitated learners to tackle language learning tasks. The project significantly influenced their preconceived beliefs to shift to more positive ones, their attitudes toward culture and language learning, and other dimensions of intercultural communicative competence of students in the rural school in Colombia.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This study explored young English language learners' beliefs about language learning and their ICCs before and after participation in a virtual exchange project to determine whether such exchanges could positively affect said ideas and competencies for rural environments.

Students showed their perceptions about language learning aligned within the five dimensions referenced in Horwitz's (1988) BALLI inventory before and after the e-mail exchange. Managing and promoting a shift in learners' beliefs led to a more meaningful and successful language learning experience. Also, students in this study showed significant evidence of the potential of virtual exchange to develop ICC and enhance English language learning in young school learners in rural contexts. This study sought to engage learners in cross-cultural interaction and communication, and eventually, it enabled them to develop aspects of ICC. However, critical cultural awareness was not developed. A reason might be that the e-mail exchange did not allow participants to discuss and critically evaluate the acquired cultural knowledge. Consistent with the results of Álvarez (2019), explicit guidance, planning adjustment, and more preparation are pivotal to developing ICC's less approached critical dimensions fully.

The study based on the theoretical framework not only met the central objective of understanding students' beliefs about language learning and the development of their ICCs but also evidenced the correlation among those beliefs and motivations to language and culture learning with the development of ICC for language learning achievement in particular contexts such as rural backgrounds. A meaningful shift in students' motivation toward language and culture learning and their attitude toward the target culture impacted learners' belief systems. Likewise, the positive shift in their belief system had a meaningful impact on their attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Therefore, Virtual exchange proves to be a suitable methodological approach that enhances students' language learning experience regardless of the context. Giving

the opportunity to students in limited conditions in rural areas to expand their horizons through language learning interaction and the current technological experiences greatly improved students' possibilities to grow as intercultural mediators and world citizens. Furthermore, it was evidenced that this virtual exchange program impacted learners' perceptions of themselves and others locally and worldwide, their motivation and interest towards language learning, the recognition of their culture, and their concern of other cultures. Therefore, the use of virtual exchange programs in rural education can be greatly improved by giving more relevance to culture and students' interpretations and beliefs. The combination of the three subjects proves once more that language instruction is an alternative and a significant tool to become autonomous citizens.

Limitations of the study

Even though this exploratory case study provides evidence that the virtual exchange program greatly improved learners' beliefs about language learning and their intercultural communicative competences, limitations to this research emerged and are presented in the following lines. A larger sample size would have led to more generalizable conclusions, broader studies regarding the combination of the three core subjects of this study would have provided significant information to analysis and comparison, and existence of appropriate and available technological equipment would have been more beneficial to students' performance and the results of the present study.

Given the nature of the sample, the sample size limits the generalizability of the study, and the number of participants does not represent the background conditions in other rural schools in Colombia. However, students provided significant data regarding foreign language learning and ICC comprehension for this study which can be used and extended to a larger scale

study regarding VE, learners' beliefs, and ICC in different rural and urban contexts at different levels of education (Tolosa et al., 2017).

A second limitation is the lack of previous research studies in similar Colombian rural contexts, allowing further analysis and comparison of results. This study is one of the first ones regarding this issue in Colombia. As previously mentioned, the current results could be a significant source for more extensive studies in Colombia.

The fact that there was limited access to technological equipment and unreliable internet access is another limitation because it hindered and limited the interaction time among participants, thus affecting the academic calendar and the normal development of the program. Although these challenges arose, the results of the interactions were fruitful and made cross-cultural interaction possible and enriching for language learning practices.

Pedagogical implications

Language teachers should take account of learners' perceptions about language learning in their specific cultural backgrounds, which can inform and benefit teaching practices and students' learning in Colombia. The study also informs language teachers of the pedagogical role of culture and computer- and technological-mediated approaches for language learning achievement in the language classroom to increase language outcomes.

In Colombia, curriculum designers must pay more attention to interculturality in the language class and students' background, needs, and affective factors to narrow the gap between education for citizenship, language teaching, and learning in rural contexts. Fostering students' interest in local and global cultural issues would help them become intercultural speakers and mediators. Adjustments to proper planning might give teachers and students opportunities to engage in more worthy and critical discussions, enabling them to develop critical awareness and thinking about the target culture.

Implications for Further Research

Nowadays, culture and language integration through online interaction at school levels in different backgrounds seems favorable for students, language educators, and academics. Findings showed that students' perceptions are contextualized and experiential dependent, they influence positively, or they can hinder language learning, especially in rural environments. Students' perceptions about culture and language can also enhance their motivation and attitudes toward the target culture and eventually develop interculturality if well-planned communication and interaction. Further research is needed to understand teachers' beliefs about language instruction in rural backgrounds, how they relate to learners' performance, and whether they trigger or hinder interculturality and language learning in such environments. Future studies should also consider examining the rural language students' ability to critically evaluate others' cultural behavior and stances. More alternative methodologies should be considered to understand students' behavior, perceptions, and ICCs that provide more insightful information for language learning and can be generalizable to broader contexts in Colombia.

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Appendixes

Appendix A. BALLI

Creencias Sobre el Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras (BALLI) ESL: Encuesta Estudiantes

Grado 7°

Esta encuesta se ha diseñado para identificar tus creencias y opiniones sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras (inglés). Encontrarás 11 oraciones que describen algunas creencias.

Indicaciones: Por favor, lee con atención cada ítem. Indica si estás (1) completamente en desacuerdo (2) en desacuerdo (3) de acuerdo (4) completamente de acuerdo. Con respecto a la pregunta número 11, selecciona el número que más se acerque a tu opinión.

	BALLI Items	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1	Es más fácil para los niños que para los adultos aprender una lengua extranjera	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	En mi cultura, la gente es buena para aprender lenguas extranjeras.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	En mi cultura, es importante hablar inglés.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	Yo creo que aprenderé a hablar inglés muy bien.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5	Es más fácil leer y escribir en inglés que hablar y entender.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	Es necesario conocer las culturas angloparlantes para poder hablar inglés bien.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	Yo tengo una habilidad especial para aprender idiomas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	La parte más importante de aprender una lengua extranjera es aprender el vocabulario.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	Me pongo nervioso (a) cuando hablo inglés con otras personas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	Me gustaría tener amigos de habla inglesa.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11	El inglés es (Círculo uno): 1. Un idioma muy difícil. 2. Un idioma difícil. 3. Un idioma fácil. 4. Un idioma muy fácil.				

Note: Adapted from Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 19--).

Appendix B. Semi-structured Interview

Topics: Virtual exchange experience, perceptions about learning English throughout their interaction with individuals from other cultures, changes in beliefs about learning English and, Attitude (interest and confidence) in interacting with people from different cultures.

-
- 1 ¿Qué tanto te gusta el inglés?
 - 2 ¿Cómo ha cambiado tu opinión acerca del aprendizaje del inglés después del programa? ¿es un idioma fácil o difícil?
 - 3 ¿Cómo ha sido tu experiencia en el aprendizaje del inglés a través de la tele colaboración?
 - 4 ¿Qué opinas sobre usar el programa de intercambio virtual o tele colaboración en tus clases de inglés?
 - 5 ¿Cómo te pareció la experiencia o la interacción con tus compañeros de los Estados Unidos por medio del programa?
 - 6 ¿Qué opinas sobre la cultura de los estudiantes estadounidenses?
 - 7 ¿Cómo te sentiste usando el inglés durante las actividades con tus compañeros extranjeros en comparación al inicio del programa? (te sentiste tímido, inseguro, confiado, etc.)
 - 8 ¿En qué habilidades sientes que has mejorado y en cuales no después del intercambio virtual? (habla, escucha, escritura, lectura)
 - 9 ¿Te gustaría seguir aprendiendo inglés? ¿por qué?
 - 10 ¿Te gustaría seguir aprendiendo de la cultura de tus compañeros estadounidenses por medio de las actividades de tele colaboración mientras aprendes inglés? ¿Por qué?
-