

Bilingual And Intercultural Border Schools Project (PEBIF): A Cross-Border And Integrativa Project In The Iberian Peninsula

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Abstract

The internationalization of education is one of two priority objectives of educational institutions, as it is considered of strategic importance for their development and project. However, this concept does not allow us to adequately understand the collaboration that occurs in educational matters between neighboring countries, particularly in border areas where this cooperation enables constant exchanges, shared professional experiences, joint activities, cross-border collaborations. The border between Spain and Portugal has these characteristics. The “Bilingual and Intercultural Schools of Frontera Project”/Projeto Escolas Bilíngues e Interculturais de Fronteira (PEBIF) is a proposal that seeks an intercultural education supported by bi/plurilingualism and intercompreensão. The general objective of the project is to promote cooperation between Spain and Portugal in the educational, social and economic development of border territories, through the creation of a network of schools that provide the population with knowledge and skills associated with bilingualism and interculturality, relevant to citizenship, for then two studies and for the employability in both countries. This article presents the PEBIF project, both in its

structuring theoretical principles and in the implementation carried out, in addition to two most relevant results obtained at that time.

Keywords: fronteira; bi/multilingualism; interculturality; intercompreensão; border school

1. Introduction

The internationalization of education is one of the objectives that we can say that guides, to a large extent, the current activities of educational organizations and institutions, particularly in Higher Education. Although decisive steps have been taken in internationalization in this first quarter of the 21st century, this is a process that has its roots in the Middle Ages, but as we currently understand it, it began in the 20th century and is closely linked to the globalization (Altbach and Teichler, 2001 ; Araujo et al., 2023 ; Bartell, 2003 ; Scott, 2006). With regard to Europe, the initiatives promoted by the Council of Europe ¹ and the European Union, with their collaboration and mobility programs, have played a very active role (Doiz et al., 2011 ; Robson and Wihlborg, 2019) and, of course, in Higher Studies and Research, with the creation of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area that promotes mobility (Adapa, 2013; Crosier and Parveva, 2013 ; Matesanz, 2010 ; De Wit et al ., 2015 ; Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018).

The concept of internationalization, according to Knight (2021), relates nations, people, cultures, institutions and systems, and has differentiated developments according to the organizations and institutions that choose this path. Internationalization is not a homogeneous concept since this type of process occurs together with the identity and needs of the institutions that develop it, which inevitably causes differences between the internationalization projects carried out

by the different institutions that promote them. . This, in itself, is not something negative, but simply that institutions establish alliances with those organizations that have similar interests and objectives.

In any case, any internationalization plan is supported by three terms: international, intercultural and global (Knigh, 2021), concepts that we will discuss and that have been widely analyzed (Margison, 2006; Sabet and Chapman, 2023; Stromquist, 2007). It is interesting the differentiation that Knight (2014; 2021) establishes between internationalization, in the sense of national relations, and globalization, a concept that is related to the global flow of economy, ideas or culture. In accordance with this differentiation, we could say that internationalization implies a bi-/multilateralism in which people, organizations/institutions and nations are involved with the will to collaborate beyond their borders, while globalization responds to broader flows in which The starting points can be multiple and more diverse, and the transformations they imply are more general at a global level, without there necessarily being an express will for this global phenomenon to occur.

The concept of internationalization in education, as it is being developed, for example, in universities, does not always make it possible to make visible the different nuances of these processes, particularly when organizations, institutions and educational systems intervene in the establishment of internationalization agreements. culturally distant and with distant languages, which entails resorting to a second language, generally English (Doiz et al., 2011; Phillipson, 2008; Rose and McKinley 2018). However, this does not presuppose that there is a greater relationship and homogeneity in the internationalization processes that occur between organizations / institutions and centers in neighboring countries, separated

by minimum distances and often with close or related languages. There are differences between the respective educational systems, linguistic and cultural differences between countries that share borders, differences that, in practice, tend to be seen as barriers. Therefore, there is, in fact, not much difference in internationalization agreements between neighboring countries and those internationalization relationships that are established with distant countries. This is, for example, the case of Spain and Portugal², which share a border, very close countries, but for many administrative issues, with great differences. The very name of this border “A Raia/La Raya” in Portuguese and Spanish respectively is, in itself, revealing of its unmarked character, reduced to a line. However, internationalization between Spain and Portugal is limited and not preferential compared to other countries, although, of course, there is internationalization between the two countries, which has increased in recent years (Baena-González et al., 2023 ; Mascarenha et al. , 2022).

Perhaps, to define what the relationship between centers of Spain and Portugal is like, it would be more specific to resort to the 'transnational' concept and, above all, when we limit ourselves to the border area, the most appropriate term seems to us to be 'cross-border'. , for the reasons that we are going to explain.

If it is relatively easy to define and delimit the concept 'internationalization', to which we have referred in the previous paragraphs, the same is not true of its analogue 'transnationalization', a less frequent term in both Spanish and Portuguese. However, the concept 'transnational', according to its usual meaning (spanning or traversing several nations) is used by the European Union in relation to cooperation between countries and regions within the framework of the European Committee of the Regions³. The European Union promotes this

cooperation with the aim of helping its socio-economic development and addressing the border issue. One of the pillars of the territorial cooperation of the European Union (Interreg) is transnational cooperation (Interreg B)⁴, which has defined 11 areas of intervention⁵ for the period 2021-2027, made up of regions and/or countries that are in neighborhood situation and form a territorial continuum with shared interests. The southwestern area of Europe (South West Europe) is made up of the Iberian Peninsula, Ceuta, Melilla, the Balearic Islands⁶ and the south of France closest to the Peninsula. In this way, Spain and Portugal, except for the Atlantic islands of both countries, form a regional area for the European Union, together with a part of southern France. It is, therefore, a geographical continuum made up of three countries, between which there are two internal borders of the European Union, that of Portugal with Spain and that of Spain with France. The borders within the European Union share two fundamental characteristics that are closely related: (i) the membership of their countries to the Schengen⁷ area and (ii) the right of free movement of people and goods. The free movement of people is a basic pillar of the European Union that is based on the Maastricht Treaty of 1992⁸. The application of this Treaty meant the gradual elimination of internal borders in application of the Schengen Agreements⁹, to which all member countries of the European Union have been accepting or are in the process of doing so; Spain and Portugal have been part of this conglomerate since 1995¹⁰. The European Union has been deepening the right of its citizens to move and reside in any EU territory, in accordance with Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. However, the EU recognizes that full implementation of this Directive has not yet been achieved¹¹.

In recent years, relations between Spain and Portugal have intensified in favor of transnational collaboration of a commercial, political, and also educational nature (Moreno, 2020). The joint Declaration of the XXX Hispano-Portuguese Summit in 2018 is proof of this. Specifically, in the field of education, article 16 of this Declaration explicitly includes the commitment of Spain and Portugal to supporting educational experiences in cross-border areas. Therefore, a term is introduced that specifies this transnational relationship, since when this relationship is limited to the border area, the Declaration itself calls it transborder. is proof of this. Specifically, in the field of education, article 16 of this Declaration explicitly includes the commitment of Spain and Portugal to supporting educational experiences in cross-border areas. Therefore, a term is introduced that specifies this transnational relationship, since when this relationship is limited to the border area, the Declaration itself calls it transborder.

This geolocation of transnational relations in the texts agreed between Spain and Portugal implies the participation of regional and local educational communities, teachers and families in order to promote bilingual education, exchange learning practices, promote knowledge and recognition mutual, strengthen ties of coexistence and value cultural diversity. For all this change, the Declaration explicitly cites the cooperation of Ibero-American multicultural educational institutions and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), which has taken an active part in this proposal and has promoted the Bilingual and Intercultural Border Schools Project / Projeto Escolas Bilingues and Intercultural Borders (PEBIF). This project, in which the OEI, the Ministry of Education of Portugal, the Departments of Education of Castilla y León, Extremadura and Andalusia of Spain, the Complutense University of Madrid and the University of Aveiro (both

universities on an equal footing providing scientific advice). This is a project with a duration of four years, 2020-2024, which is organized into academic years¹³, since it involves the development of learning projects in schools. The importance of this cross-border project, the objective of this work, is supported in 2023 by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Spain and Portugal in the *Joint Declaration (2023)* of the XXXIV Spanish-Portuguese Summit, which includes a collaboration protocol between the governments of Portugal and Spain, which includes the Frontera Bilingual and Intercultural Schools Project / Projeto Escolas Bilingues e Interculturais de Fronteira / Projeto Escolas Bilingues e Interculturais de Fronteira (PEBIF).

This article shows the theoretical approach of the project, its implementation, its initial results and future projection. After the brief presentation and contextualization of the preceding project, its objectives, what its structuring concepts are, its methodology and implementation, the first results that have been obtained, what sustainability it has and what type of projection and degree are explained in successive sections. of replicability it may have in the future. The article ends with some brief conclusions about the achievements of PEBIF at a transnational level.

2. A cross-border educational project supported by bi-/multilingualism and interculturality

The border areas between Spain and Portugal are characterized by a notable linguistic, cultural and identity diversity and are located in regions far from financial and political decision-making centres. Furthermore, these areas are less densely populated and have a less developed economy. The socioeconomic revitalization of these most vulnerable regions is closely linked to cross-border

cooperation, and education and culture are fundamental vectors of their bilateral relationship. As we have already pointed out, this is stated in the Joint Declaration (2018) of the XXX Hispano-Portuguese Summit, which marked the beginning of this project; the Common Cross-Border Development Strategy (2020), signed by both countries in 2020; and, the joint declarations of the successive Summits that Spain and Portugal have held annually. Thus, the Joint Declaration (2020) in Guarda, the Joint Declaration (2021) in Trujillo and the Joint Declaration (2022) in Viana do Castelo, include among their planned actions “establishing a network of bilingual and intercultural border schools in both countries, promoting articulated curricular projects” (Common Strategy for Cross-Border Development, 2020, p. 7). In general, in all the documents emanating from these bilateral meetings, both countries commit to supporting local and regional educational experiences that promote bilingualism and interculturality.

The OEI, recognized in the Joint Declaration (2018) as a strategic partner, has promoted the Frontera Bilingual and Intercultural Schools Project / Projeto Escolas Bilingues e Interculturais de Fronteira (PEBIF), given its extensive experience in educational projects in Ibero-American and cooperation countries among them. At the time the project design began (2019), some cross-border educational experiences had already occurred in which Spanish and Portuguese were the languages involved. However, the context and the very conception of the project have been different. We are referring, as previous experiences, to the Projeto Escolas Interculturais Bilíngues de Fronteira (PEIBF), developed between 2005-2016, at the initiative, initially, of Argentina and Brazil, and which was later joined by Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela. The project was promoted by Mercosur, therefore, a project with a supranational background, which has had relevant

results (Haygert and Sturza, 2017 ; Oliveira and Morello, 2019 ; Calvo and Erazo, 2019 ; Sturza 2017). The project sought to introduce, or increase, the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese in schools, with a view to creating a joint school system that prioritized the teaching of both languages (Oliveira and Morello, 2019) . In the words of Oliveira and Morello (2019, p. 8) “The PEIBF constitutes, therefore, the first initiative aimed at bilingual and intercultural teaching with a focus on the promotion of Portuguese and Spanish in partner schools on the Border.” The differences with the European PEBIF project between Spain and Portugal are many, for obvious reasons of geolocation and organization, since neither the development context, nor its scope, nor the final objectives of both projects are the same, although they share essential basic principles, as we will see.

The PEBIF between Spain and Portugal is based on the idea that border schools are spaces of transformation, to the extent that continuous interactions occur there that contribute to transforming their environment, involving the school community, families and the most extensive community in which they are integrated. Its objective is to promote cooperation between Portugal and Spain in the educational, social and economic development of the border territories, providing children and young people who live in these regions with quality education, which includes knowledge, skills and values associated with bilingualism and interculturality. These values are relevant for citizenship, further study and employability in both countries. The schools participating in the project form a network that creates and shares knowledge, positive attitudes and innovative educational practices to promote bi/plurilingualism, interculturality and sociocultural diversity in their closest environment, the border. In this sense, cross-border education is a starting point for the inclusion and appreciation of languages

¹⁴ and cultures in the educational system, even if the objective is not the teaching of languages directly.

In addition, the following are also objectives of PEBIF:

- a) train and train teachers in multilingual, intercultural and digital skills by investing in their continuous training;
- b) promote bilingual and intercultural pedagogical practices that can be exchanged in the school community (teachers, students and their families) and with local institutions;
- c) produce multilingual educational resources, with special attention to Portuguese-Spanish bilingualism, through continuous monitoring of school practices;
- d) establish collaboration networks between educational institutions and teachers through digital platforms, so that the interaction of various actors participating in the project and the sharing of educational and cultural resources is possible;
- e) promote the articulation of schools with higher education institutions and other local actors, specifically the municipalities themselves, in border regions;
- f) make border schools radiating centers that transmit the advantages of bi-/plurilingual education, which make it possible to learn about the richness that linguistic diversity and interculturality represent.

These border experiences can be useful in other spaces, since the advantages of an integrative education with these values can occur in other contexts. A cross-border project like PEBIF provides a new place for the languages of the participants, the languages of children and young people, thus allowing them to improve their academic performance. Furthermore, they awaken in students an interest in the

linguistic and cultural diversity that is close to them and allow them to work on multilingualism and interculturality within the school curriculum, integrating knowledge, skills, languages and cultures.

2.1 Structuring concepts of the PEBIF

The EBIF project has been built on three pillars that structure and articulate all the project's actions. None of these three axes has priority over the other two, but all three are fundamental for the development of the project because they interact and allow its cohesion: a) interculturality and intercultural education; b) bi-/multilingualism; c) intercomprehension. These three elements are the basis of the project and their essential nature in it means that we have considered them structuring concepts. Its representation is a large triangle, at the base of which are the linguistic principles, on which interculturality and intercultural education are based and together they make up the concept 'border school', according to figure 1, shown below.

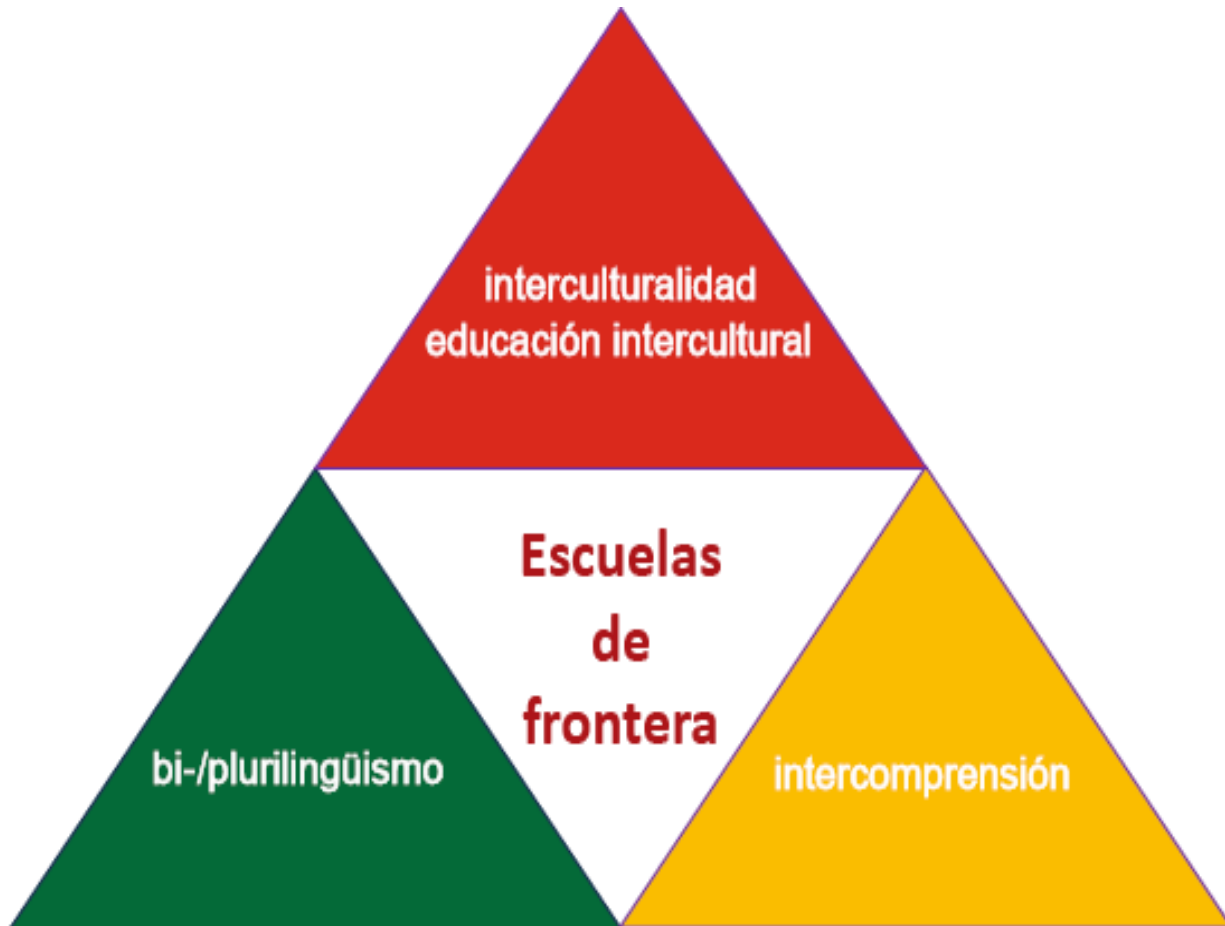


Figure 1. Structuring principles of the PEBIF

Source: self made.

2.1.1 Interculturality and intercultural education

The term interculturality has been acquiring multiple meanings. By interculturality we understand the exchange between different cultures that are within the same society or a certain social space considered. But we also understand more specialized meanings, linked to certain areas such as education, in which “interculturality is understood as an individual's ability to act together with others, taking into account the otherness of cultures” (Byram and Hu, 2013 , p.14). In this sense, interculturality, according to García et al. (2007) , involves concepts

such as interaction, solidarity, mutual recognition, correspondence, human and social rights, respect and dignity for all cultures. Intercultural exchanges and the acceptance of interculturality generate positive attitudes and acceptance of the cultural diversity of other members of society.

But this positive attitude towards interculturality also requires prior knowledge and work, which brings us to intercultural education, which implies the awareness of the individual and his desire to “cooperate with people from diverse cultures” (Bleszynska, 2008, p. 539). , to build a future in polyphony, union and solidarity. Along the same lines, Bennett (2009) refers to intercultural education as an intentional and systematic process, closely associated with curricular design, which places emphasis on the subjectivity of cultures and the promotion of intercultural interaction, placing languages as central elements of this process. In general, an intercultural education proposal involves the development of actions aimed at knowledge, appreciation and production of and in different cultures (André, 2005) . It means putting (dis)similarities in the spaces of dialogue, promoting understanding and respect for what each history, each society, each community and each subject presents as its own and specific.

The understanding of being among, without being the same, constitutes the deep meaning of interculturality, which is not confused with the approach to cultural phenomena and facts, such as the celebration of dates, events or achievements, much less with the hierarchization of cultures, reinforcing prejudices and closed perspectives, both simplifying. On the other hand, intercultural education proposes actions that should lead children and young people to live intercultural experiences in the most varied social practices and to reflect on them. The transformation of stereotypical opinions about others and about oneself in interaction with others is,

therefore, one of the permanent challenges of intercultural education and a basic principle of PEBIF. For border schools that form pairs with each other, in the work perspective proposed by this project, interculturality can acquire new dimensions in which, in addition to being a field of reflection on the cultural practices of the other, it can also be an experience of being in the place and culture of the other and building new practices with it, from the perspective of the “third space” (Kramsch and Uryu, 2012) or the “othering” proposed by Dervin (2010; 2015) .

In this sense, in educational terms, interculturality can be addressed as:

a) a set of social practices that prioritizes being with others, working with them, and producing new knowledge collaboratively. Joint project planning and the definition of the projects themselves in a negotiated manner, in which students and teachers from the countries involved actively participate, are ways of making this concept of interculturality a reality. The exchange and teacher training processes that are carried out jointly are also in line with this sense;

b) a set of knowledge about each person, their forms of expression, and social organization. In this case, one seeks to know the other from various elements related to their history, geography, politics or arts, among others, expanding the ways of understanding the community, region and country of the other. This informative dimension of interculturality encompasses all knowledge about the various areas of science, arts and humanities that can be part of the aforementioned learning projects.

c) a set of physical and virtual spaces for learning, interaction and the exchange of shared knowledge that is generated in schools and with all members of the educational community. Through technology, the physical space of schools can be transcended and virtual school communities created in which individuals from

different sides of the border participate, providing a favorable environment for bi/multilingualism and interculturality.

2.1.2 Bi-/multilingualism

In these dimensions of interculturality, bi/plurilingualism occupies a central place, whether through the practice of intercomprehension or through the production of knowledge in different languages. But you can also move towards immersion practices in which, in addition to understanding, oral and written uses of the other's language are preferred. In this case, the development of joint projects with coordinated activities in different languages is a valuable way to raise awareness and initiate students in learning another language, which is being explored in various second and foreign language teaching programs. (Araújo, 2019). The production of knowledge in different languages implies that the student can learn languages in all modalities of oral and written production and comprehension. Intercultural and bilingual education in border schools is a social challenge for an education that values and promotes the diversity of people and communities, involving the acquisition of the language and the teaching/learning processes and the development of competencies in three areas: communicative, intercultural and strategic, through access to bilingual study plans and the implementation of interdisciplinary projects. It is taken into account that in the border territories the languages are in contact, they mix, they get closer and they are constantly distinguished, occupying, depending on the context and geographical situation, the places of local languages, transnational linguistic communities, regional languages and international languages and the official languages of the States.

Admitting these dynamics of approach/distance as central in the procedures for studying and approaching languages and cultures in educational programs on the border, implies assuming a perspective that recognizes languages as central elements of transformation of social, cultural and economic. The approach to the promotion of the Portuguese and Spanish languages, from a perspective of bi-plurilingualism and intercomprehension, is based on curricular management that must be carried out in a communicative approach, that is, one that promotes the use of the language in context. and, whenever possible, developed through the negotiation and implementation of significant tasks and actions within the educational project of each school.

2.1.3 Intercomprehension

The third pillar on which the PEBIF is based is intercomprehension, understood as a communicative interaction resource that generates a multilingual discourse produced by speakers who do not share the same languages, who do not have sufficient competence in a second language or do not want to use it in the communication. For this reason, they use languages from the same linguistic family to communicate, generally their respective mother tongues, in our case, Spanish and Portuguese (Matesanz, 2017). The linguistic knowledge of the participants in the project (both adults and children) is quite heterogeneous in terms of knowledge of the language of the neighboring country, whether Spanish or Portuguese.

This situation makes intercomprehension a key communicative resource for collaboration between participants. The linguistic proximity of Spanish and Portuguese, languages between which there is a high intelligibility (the linguistic distance is not identical for Spanish and Portuguese, both in reading

comprehension and oral use) has facilitated communication at all times. Although one of the objectives of the project is to promote and move towards Spanish-Portuguese bilingualism on the border, this is not a direct goal of the project, but the PEBIF wants to propose in a holistic way the knowledge of the 'other side of the border', languages and cultures, interculturality and bi-/plurilingualism through intercomprehension as a means of access to this, each person speaking in their own language and putting themselves in a position to listen to and understand the language of the other. This practice of intercomprehension, common in any situation of contact between languages of the same family and, particularly when there is a high mutual intercomprehension, as is the case of Portuguese and Spanish, has proven to be fundamental in the joint activities carried out.

There are many works that have been developed on intercomprehension and didactics of intercomprehension in the field of Romance languages; For a global perspective of the trajectory of this concept in language teaching, see De Carlo (2019). These studies have shown that educational practices aimed at intercomprehension favor the development of plurilingual and intercultural communicative competence in its various dimensions (cognitive, strategic, socio-relational, instrumental), in line with what is included in the updated document of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020), and which has been taken into account in the PEBIF, both in its general design and in the learning projects. These projects could not have been carried out without the support of technologies.

The use of specific platforms created for the training of instructors in intercomprehension, for communicative exchange and for learning intercomprehension has made it possible to connect speakers located in distant

geographical spaces. This previous experience in using platforms for the development of multilingualism and teacher training has proven to be a way to create a feeling of community made up of diverse languages and cultures. Given the health circumstances in which the project began, caused by the pandemic that caused SARS-CoV-2, previous work on distance intercomprehension has allowed teachers, thanks to the internet, to be able to work online, demonstrating that Technologies are a factor that allows borders to be erased and eliminated.

3. The implementation of the PEBIF and first results

3.1 Methodology and project design

The project has a strong teacher training component, which is why the research-action-training methodology has been chosen as it is considered the most appropriate for our purposes; For a quick review of works on action research focused on teacher training, see Fernández and Johnson (2015). This methodology, specifically, is applied in Phases 2 and 3 of the project, which focus on teacher training. The suitability of the methodology is justified because it is based on professional practice and has as its starting point the questions that teachers ask themselves in their daily actions. The teachers seek to answer these questions through systematic interpellations of action. Furthermore, this methodology promotes interaction between education professionals, while having an emancipatory, formative and transformative character in accordance with the positive and proactive attitudes of teachers.

The research-action-training methodology recovers the premises of training for four fundamental reasons: (i) teachers are considered reflective professionals - Reflective Practicuns- (Shön, 1995); (ii) the school and, by extension, the school community are considered spaces for professional development and knowledge

construction; (iii) teaching knowledge is built and valued in the composition of an ecology of knowledge (Santos, 2020); and, (iv) multilingual and intercultural dialogue and exchange is at the basis of interactions between and with teachers. Therefore, if we had to summarize what research-action-training is and what its fundamental characteristics are, we would say that it is a methodology focused on the professional development of teachers that allows the school to be transformed through a reflective process that links research, action and training, since the research is carried out on the teachers' own practice, allowing an intervention in teaching practice that aims to improve it. It is characterized by promoting (self-)reflective, situational, participatory, shared and collaborative practice. It entails a cyclical and systematic process of teacher learning oriented towards praxis, while it is a process inseparable from the teacher's thinking-doing.

Finally, it is constituted in a spiral, having as its starting point small cycles motivated by practical issues, which expand and become denser and deeper. What is intended to be achieved with the use of this methodology in the PEBIF is, first of all, that teachers who work on the border carry out a critical and systematic analysis of teaching practices; that carries out a shared assessment and construction of new teaching knowledge in the school context; that border teaching practices are (re)signified and changes are promoted in the school culture and, finally, that it seeks the integration of the activities and practices carried out in relation to the border in the curriculum, taking into account a perspective of interculturality and bi/multilingualism in accordance with the space in which their teaching activity takes place. As Nóvoa (2019) points out, "It is necessary to reinforce the logics of partilha and the logics of professional cooperation", something to which the EBIF project has contributed.

The project is articulated in four phases, and all of them have already been implemented, but it must be noted that, to the extent that the PEBIF project is an open project whose first year was in the 2021-2022 academic year, these phases are renewed, that is, they are done again, at least partially, as we will see in the implementation. Furthermore, it should be noted that the project has a mixed implementation, in-person and remote, whose combination, depending on the needs of the project, makes them complementary, thus achieving greater efficiency and versatility. This is possible thanks to technology, a key point for the development of the project. The project has its own work space, apart from other technological resources provided by the educational centers and institutions involved. The four phases of the project are briefly described below:

- Phase 1. Identification of participants.
- Phase 2 . Capacity development and continuous training for teachers.
- Phase 3. Construction and support of learning projects
- Phase 4. Extension of bilingualism and interculturality from border schools

The identification of the participants (Phase 1) has been led, and is led, by the OEI as it is the strategic partner of the project. Without going into details, the OEI works in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education of Portugal and, on the Spanish side, with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and the Departments of Education of the Autonomous Communities of Castilla y León, Extremadura and Andalusia. The continuous collaborative work maintained by these institutions has allowed the establishment of a network of border schools made up of pairs of schools ¹⁵. It is interesting to note that the work between schools has not only been carried out on a horizontal axis, as suggested by the idea

of a pair of schools and the location of the schools themselves, but that a vertical axis has been encouraged because it What is sought is to create a common border space in which the relationship between schools is not limited to its counterpart on the other side of the border. Although the border between Spain and Portugal is diverse if it is crossed longitudinally, however, it is not so extensive as to make it difficult to create a community of border schools with shared interests by sharing related problems and proposing possible solutions. , in many cases, valid for everyone.

We could say that Phases 2 and 3 constitute a unit and are, without a doubt, the central parts of the project due to their importance, work and temporal extension. The transformative effect of a project of these characteristics begins with the training of teachers (Phase 2), who need specific knowledge and tools to address the requirements of a cross-border project of these characteristics. Talking about a border zone requires adequate training of teachers who work in the field (Ferreira-Martins, 2019), so that the objectives of the PEBIF are discussed with students in a manner consistent with the context. As Ferreira-Martins (2022) points out, the acquisition of knowledge, competencies and skills by teachers are necessary to develop a positive appreciation of interculturality, of cultural and linguistic diversity among students of different origins; analyze whether national and local linguistic planning is appropriate to the particularities of the border and adjusts to local sociolinguistic and educational demands; select the languages (and the variety, or varieties) with and on which we work in order to value the variety used in the area, make the border visible and highlight its cultural elements; take advantage of the students' prior linguistic knowledge since this allows students to promote awareness of the positive value of local multilingualism

and place them alongside internationally spread languages. In this phase, within the theoretical training and under the research-action-training methodology, the teachers prepare joint learning projects in pairs from schools.

Phase 3 corresponds to the implementation of the learning projects. It is the most complex and longest phase of the project since the design and implementation of these learning projects is carried out jointly by pairs of schools. It is the moment in which teachers work with students and interact more directly with the school with which they are a partner. The learning projects are all different in relation to the topic chosen, resources used, activities carried out, etc., but all of them are integrated into the school curriculum of the centers (even though they are different in each country) and, likewise, they all follow a common structure that includes 6 stages: (i) linguistic mapping, (ii) choice of topic, (iii) planning, (iv) implementation, (v) evaluation and (vi) dissemination.

Phase 4 responds to the idea that the network of bilingual and intercultural schools on the Spanish-Portuguese border must become a radiating focus, so that this initiative can be replicated in other border areas and, with adaptations, even in areas of linguistic and cultural diversity.

3.2 First results

The implementation of the project has been carried out in its entirety and in all its phases, using, as noted, a hybrid format, in-person and online, with intense networking in which collaboration between all agents and participants in the project has been decisive for the success of PEBIF. The data offered by the OEI itself on the development of Project ¹⁶ are very eloquent and show the scope and magnitude of the project. 16 schools (from Spain and Portugal), 39 teachers, 16 directors, 631 Primary Education students, from 1st to 6th grade, 3 scientific

coordinators from two Universities (University of Aveiro and Complutense University of Madrid), 24 trainers have participated in it. of teaching staff, 2 research fellows and 3 research support collaborators, in addition to 12 representatives of the educational organizations involved in the project. 68 hours of training have been given and 4 learning projects have been carried out, one for each pair of border schools.

The training provided is always focused on the three structuring concepts, although they have been worked on (depending on the duration of the course) with different levels of depth. There are three training sessions that have been given: the first training was brief and took place at the end of the 2020-2021 academic year, lasting 6 hours and in online format; The second training lasted 50 hours, took place throughout the 2021-2022 academic year and was carried out in a hybrid, in-person-online format; The third training was carried out in the 2021-2022 academic year online and lasted 12 hours. The adaptation to the reality and development possibilities of the projects (which require a very high degree of coordination at a transnational, national, regional, local level and, of course, the availability of the participating centers) means that the training has been adapted that the project entails, as we will see below, which has not diminished either its interest or its ability to attract attention among the teachers to whom the training is directed.

Although it was planned to start the first year of the project at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, the pandemic only allowed for a brief online training action, titled “Bilingualism and interculturality on the Spain-Portugal border” (May 24 and 26, 2 June 2021, 6 hours long). The results of this initial training action were surprising, and the first linguistic mapping that we have (or at least that

we have references to) was obtained from some of the schools on the border of Spain and Portugal. The linguistic mapping was done using as a tool the linguistic biographies made by the students of the participating schools. The records of these biographies allowed us to know the linguistic reality of the schools and the attitudes of boys and girls towards languages, both those that are part of their daily lives and those that are familiar or interest them, among which, for Of course, there are Spanish and Portuguese, but also, for example, Fala, the historical language of a small area on the border (in the north of Extremadura) and other languages. All of them are languages that are close or that they have only heard of but that, in any case, must be considered in an education that looks at plurilingualism and interculturality as pillars of teaching, particularly in areas in which the linguistic component has a great weight, such as borders. In figure 2 you can see some of the examples of this first linguistic mapping of border schools.

The implementation of the project during the 2021-2022 academic year allowed all phases of the project to be completed, leaving Phase 4 open, since the dissemination of the PEBIF, as is usual in a large-scope project, can occur at any time during its development. . This second year of the project (October 14, 2021, Elvas - May 20, 2022, Ciudad Rodrigo) was developed in a hybrid format, with in-person training meetings and activities carried out within the framework of the learning projects and with activities and meetings held online, both for teacher training and during the implementation of learning projects, in which the students have been the true protagonist. The learning projects are the most relevant and tangible result of the PEBIF project, apart from other results obtained, in our opinion, also very relevant, although there is no doubt that the majority of them revolve around the learning projects or emanate from them. Each pair of schools

carried out collaboratively, working in a network with their corresponding school and, at specific times with the rest of the pairs of schools, a learning project, in accordance with the common guidelines with which they had previously worked in the training theoretical-practical and that have been outlined above.



Figure 2. Example of linguistic biographies made by the students of one of the pairs of schools.

Source: self made.

The themes of the projects, freely chosen by each of the four working groups, responded to criteria of interculturality and linguistic choices in accordance with the interests of the groups, as revealed by the titles chosen for the projects: Group

1: O trabalho eo respect that unites us/ The work and respect that unites us; Group 2: A nossa história, force of the present/ Our history, force of the present; Group 3: Os Guardiões da Raia/ The Guardians of the Raya; Group 4: Agua sem fronteiras/Water without borders. In all of them, with the necessary adaptations based on the learning projects designed, the general objectives of the PEBIF and its curricular insertion were worked on. This is an aspect that must be highlighted since the curricula of schools are different in each country and between them within the same country, particularly in Portugal. The insertion of the learning projects into the respective curricula of each pair of schools has required on the part of the teachers and trainers a deep, detailed and refined study of the curricula and the proposed themes. The four proposed topics are different and all have been adapted to the curriculum of the courses in which they have been developed. This effort at curricular insertion is one of the most positive results of the projects and deserves particular attention and recognition, something that is not possible to do in detail in this expository work.

Another of the results that we consider most relevant and that has had the most interest, in particular, for the students, are the activities designed for each project. The students of the centers that made up each pair of schools have participated in them in an active, joint and coordinated manner. All of them have been marked by their plurilingual and intercultural character, by the interactions of intercomprehension, by the formation of small cross-border communities in which it was impossible to know which side of the border each of those boys and girls who learned by playing, speaking, came from. their own language and accepting that of the other, sharing experiences of their environment, in short, intertwining languages and cultures. Not all students have had the opportunity to meet

physically, unfortunately, because the organization of these cross-border meetings requires complicated logistics, among other things because they are smaller. This point needs a rethinking by the political authorities. Furthermore, it should be noted that in all of them the entire school community has been involved, in one way or another, families, who in many cases have participated in the activities themselves, public and private organizations in the environment that have voluntarily contributed to the activities. some project activity.

The evaluation of the learning projects has also made it possible to give visibility to some of the project's strengths. Teachers and students have been asked directly and indirectly¹⁷ about specific aspects of the learning projects and also the PBEIF. These evaluations have allowed us to have concrete data, for example, on linguistic attitudes, particularly towards the main languages, Spanish and Portuguese, but also towards other languages; They have also provided detailed information on the value given to tangible and intangible heritage, and, an aspect that has always been highly valued, has been the possibility of meeting children from the other side of the border. Likewise, aspects for improvement have also been pointed out that must be reviewed before the design and implementation of future learning projects.

Regarding the dissemination of the learning projects, they have been disseminated in local media¹⁸, on social networks¹⁹ and in local and regional exhibitions. Also, little by little, scientific publications are appearing that collect these educational experiences (Leardine et al., 2021 ; Rodríguez et al., 2023) and the results are being disseminated at scientific conferences and scientific dissemination (Araújo et al. , 2020 ; Leardine et al., 2021), both in Spain and Portugal, which is recorded in publications of proceedings, summaries and on the network itself.

The third year of the PEBIF, carried out in the 2022-2023 academic year, has only included theoretical-practical training for teachers, in which the contents of the project have been adjusted and contacts have been expanded for the incorporation of new participants, since Phase 1 adjustments impact the entire organization of participants and require meticulous organization that inevitably takes time. It is planned that all phases of the project will be developed in the current academic year 2023-2024 (fourth year). At the time of writing these pages, Phase 1 is being updated for the third annuity.

4. Sustainability of PEBIF and future perspectives

One of the problems that projects have is their sustainability beyond the execution periods in which they are developed. The PEBIF has an initial duration of four years, until 2024, and, if the governments of Spain and Portugal, together with the OEI, continue to support this initiative, it may have a longer duration, as has happened with other educational projects that have been consolidated thanks to official support, the cases of the BILINGÜEX Program, Bilingual Sections, in the Autonomous Community of Extremadura and the José Saramago Program, in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, to name, possibly, the most relevant Spanish projects in linguistic matters in Communities that have border with Portugal. However, the project itself has been designed so that it can be replicated (at least on a smaller scale) so that there are possibilities of maintaining it regardless of the official support it receives. Given the objectives of the PEBIF, the direct beneficiaries (students who acquired plurilingual and intercultural skills and teachers who followed the training) and indirect beneficiaries (teachers not participating in the project, families, museums, cultural centers, libraries, non-participating schools, teachers' associations of languages, among others) may

continue to intervene in favor of interculturality and the cultural and linguistic diversity of the border. The participating local institutions will also be able to continue collaborating, since the possibilities of participation in the project are flexible and allow adaptations according to each of them.

Likewise, the participating universities and teacher training centers, incorporating a plurilingual and intercultural perspective in their ongoing training processes and in their lines of research, will be able to function as a focus for training language teachers from an intercultural point of view over the long term. term.

The research-action-training methodology used in the PEBIF, both for teacher training and in student projects, favors the capacity for critical analysis of the educational, cultural and linguistic demands that develop in the region and thus become as an agent for mobilizing local policies in favor of bi-/multilingualism, social cohesion and interculturality. The promotion of the creation of collaboration networks is a guarantee of continuity and will promote the sustainability of the project principles in the border area, favored, without a doubt, by the concurrence of technologies that make it possible.

The results of the project that have already been advanced in this article, the digital resources created by the teachers and available on the project platform (currently partially for public use), as well as the publications and scientific events emanating from the PEBIF, will serve as a basis for new learning projects and initiatives that other schools can join, adapting these proposals and materials to their educational and geographical context.

5. Conclusions

The synthesis of the Bilingual and Intercultural Border Schools Project that has been outlined in this article allows us to understand the scope of a cross-border

educational proposal based on bi-/plurilingualism, intercomprehension and interculturality. If we had to point out what has been achieved so far, we believe that it is inevitable to highlight the implementation of a truly cross-border Primary Education educational project in the border area between Spain and Portugal, sponsored by the OEI as a strategic partner. The PEBIF is a project that requires that all participants in it assume their collaboration and active participation in intercultural and plurilingual education proposals that are presented as complementary. This positive attitude towards multilingualism and interculturality means that the use of multilingual discourses (oral and written) is naturally accepted, overcoming positions of monolingualism. We have also observed a growing interest in the cultural manifestations that occur on the other side of the border, due to their traditions and customs, of which the older participants (teachers) were aware or had participated in them but that, many of them, They were new to a good part of the students.

The border, understood from a double perspective, horizontal (pairs of schools) and vertical (longitudinal, with all the project participants who have formed an educational community on the border of Spain and Portugal) is configured as a particularly favorable space for intercultural and plurilingual education. These spaces that open up through intense collaboration between border schools are worthy of attention from governments and educational institutions. We close the article with an almost inescapable quote from Fernando Pessoa ²⁰ about the border between Portugal and Spain: “Dir-se-ia that the two countries reparam for fim no facto apparently evident that a border, separates, also unites.”

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