

An Attempt to Develop Students' Intercultural Competence: A Class Planned Using Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)

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Abstract

This paper reports the researcher's attempt to develop learners' intercultural competence in teaching one of the English classes by using the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). It also examines the effectiveness of this attempt by using the students' reflection texts of their group project and post-semester student survey comments as data. It was found that many of the intended competences were used throughout the semester of learning, especially in the group project. Although individual differences in terms of achievement were observed, awareness seems to have been raised. Moreover, even though the focused competences in lesson planning were "skills," it was found that the students seem to have also used many competences in "attitudes" and "knowledge and critical understanding." Implications of the findings, limitation of the study, and suggestions for further research and pedagogy are discussed.

Keywords: RFCDC, intercultural competence, intercultural communicative competence, global citizenship competence, project-based learning

1. Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) is,

“a set of materials that can be used by education systems to equip young learners with all of the competences that are needed to take action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to participate effectively in a culture of democracy, and to live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies” (Council of Europe, n.d.-a, para. 2).

It was published in 2018 by the Council of Europe, “an international organization in Strasbourg which comprises 46 countries of Europe,” with six observer states, including Japan (Council of Europe, n.d.-b, para. 1). For language teachers, the organization may be better known as an organization that put together

the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR.

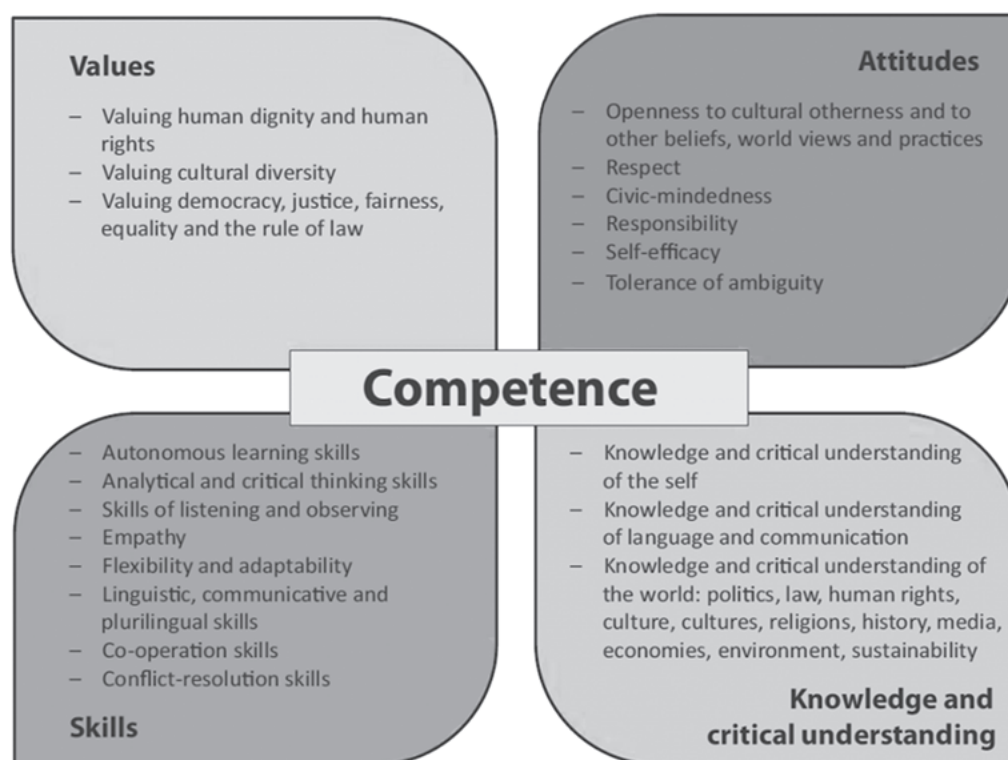
As for how RFCDC originated, the Council of Europe (2018a) states that there has been an “increasing focus on education as a central element to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law,” which “need to be continuously maintained and fostered” (p. 13). As circumstances change, “people need to develop existing competences and acquire new ones,” where education institutions play an important role (p. 13). In this context, a comprehensive and practical framework focusing on competences was established to support education institutions.

RFCDC consists of three volumes. Volume 1 explains the context, concepts, and model, and Volume 2 includes the descriptors of competences for democratic culture, which are “statements referring to concrete observable behavior of a person with a certain level of competence” (Council of Europe, 2018b, p. 11). Put simply, the descriptors serve as a can-do list. The 135 key descriptors and 2,059 detailed descriptors “support the assessment of the current level of proficiency” and “serve as a reference and a toolbox for educators” (p. 11). Volume 3 is the guidance for implementation, in which process-oriented methods and approaches—including co-operative learning and project-based learning—and content-based methods and approaches are introduced.

RFCDC embodies 20 competences, which are subdivided into four areas: “values,” “attitudes,” “skills,” and “knowledge and critical understanding.” The so-called “butterfly model” in Figure 1 below visually illustrates the framework.

Figure 1

Model of Competences for Democratic Culture



Note. From “Figure 1: The 20 Competences Included in the Competence Model” by Council of Europe (2018a) (<https://rm.coe.int/a-model-of-the-competences-required-for-democratic-culture-and-intercu/16809940c3>)

Each competence is leveled into “basic,” “intermediate,” and “advanced” descriptors. For example, regarding competence 12 (Skills of listening and observing), the two basic descriptors shed light on learners’ careful and attentive attitude in listening, while the intermediate descriptors require them to pay attention to the speakers’ body language, meanings, and intentions. Further, the advanced descriptors require them to be aware of what the speakers imply and of possibly different behaviors of people from different cultures. In this way, as the descriptors’ levels go up, the skills required become more advanced and integrated. All the key descriptors of RFCDC are displayed in Appendix A.

This paper aims to report the researcher’s exploratory attempt to give lessons to enhance students’ intercultural competence and examine its effectiveness by using RFCDC as a framework. Among the four competence areas of RFCDC, this research focused on the “skills” area in planning lessons since this area of competence could be aligned well with the learning outcomes.

2. RFCDC in Pedagogy and Research

Building on the history of education fostering learners’ global citizenship and democratic awareness, the RFCDC has increasingly been used in education and research, especially in Europe, since its publication in 2018. In terms of education, Tenenbaum et al. (2022) report their pilot study, which examined whether a new curriculum based on RFCDC could increase children’s endorsement and knowledge of children’s rights using the pre-test-post-test design. The two-year-long intervention, designed based on RFCDC by the group of researchers, was delivered to the third graders in the first year of their study in “intervention” schools in Bulgaria, Italy, Norway, Romania, and Spain, between September 2019 and May 2021. As many as 127 children in the “intervention” schools and 120 pupils in the “comparison” schools in the same cities, in which the curriculum was not taught, responded to both pre- and post-tests to examine the effectiveness of the intervention from two perspectives. Their endorsement of children’s rights was assessed by asking the participating children’s thoughts on the protagonists’ behavior in eight hypothetical vignettes, while their knowledge of children’s rights was assessed by asking them to define a right and coding their answers. Children in the intervention group increased their endorsement of children’s rights at post-tests more than those in the comparison group and showed modest increases in their knowledge of children’s rights as well. They suggest that future evaluations in countries outside Europe would help ascertain the effects of the curriculum in non-European contexts.

Ingoglia et al. (2021) report how they tried to foster democratic and intercultural competences in the primary school contexts, by carrying out the Erasmus⁺ Project “Children’s Voices for a new Human Space” (CVS). The project lasted from September 2018 to December 2021, and it targeted both teachers and pupils in five European primary schools located in Bulgaria, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Romania, by drawing on RFCDC. Through the activities involving 35 teachers and 200 pupils, the project created the CVS training course for teachers, the CVS curriculum for children, and the CVS App for trainers and teachers. The two-year curriculum had two modules: the first module, “Our voices for our schools,” used a project-based learning approach, and the second module, “Our voices for our towns,” used a service-based learning approach (p.54). The efficacy of the project will be assessed by examining the democratic

and intercultural competence of teachers and children, teachers' satisfaction with the CVS App, parents' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and scholastic communities' views.

The RFCDC has been used as a research and evaluation tool as well. With an aim to assess how undergraduate students' learning experiences contribute to their democratic competences, Geier and Hasager (2020) report the impact of service learning and active-citizenship learning on their civic-mindedness and democratic awareness. The quantitative survey was based on two empirically validated tested scales—the Civic-Minded Professional Scale (CMP) and the Civic-Minded Graduate Scale (CMGS)—and the subscale based on RFCDC. The researchers surveyed 96 undergraduate students of two universities: the University of Hawaii at Mānoa and Salzburg University of Teacher Education. It was found that both pedagogies—service learning at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa and active citizenship learning at Salzburg University of Teacher Education—promoted civic-mindedness in various aspects. The majority of the participants from both universities had a positive belief in their own ability to undertake actions, and the vast majority were found to believe that they can make a difference in society. The results support that, in higher education, both pedagogies are effective in cultivating a culture of democracy, independent from particular national or cultural contexts.

Peraza and Furumura (2022) examined how project-based learning (PBL) in a virtual exchange (VE) program for Costa Rican and Japanese students has contributed to developing their intercultural competence by using RFCDC as a framework. It was found that the PBL positively impacted their intercultural communicative competence in all four areas of RFCDC.

The practices and research mentioned above are a part of the growing body of research and pedagogies using RFCDC worldwide. In Japan, too, there has been increasing awareness of RFCDC in educational contexts, and some research and pedagogical practices have become public. Sakurai et al. (2021) translated the 135 key descriptors of RFCDC into Japanese, which is now linked to the RFCDC website. The same group of researchers conducted a pilot study to examine the appropriateness of RFCDC as an assessment tool for global citizenship competences in Japanese tertiary contexts (Miyamoto et al., 2021). It was found that the framework worked well overall, with some issues deriving from the participants' inability to understand some key descriptors translated into Japanese.

Moriyama (2021) used RFCDC to examine whether the 8th International Student Forum held in 2019 provided the participating students with intercultural citizenship education opportunities. He maintains that the forum provided the space for the participating students to use competences in all four areas. He also confirms that the students actually used the competences by examining the participants' written reports. Matsumoto and Kitazawa (2022) piloted teaching models incorporating RFCDC in Japanese universities' language and language-related academic courses. It seems that more research and pedagogies using RFCDC are called for in Japanese contexts as well, given the growing need to foster democratic and intercultural competences.

3. The Class

The class reported in this paper is an elective English class offered to both undergraduate and

graduate students at a university in Japan. The class is intended for advanced learners of English interested in studying abroad in the future, although there is no English proficiency requirement for registration. The motto of this class is to study “in” English; this is a CLIL-based or content-based English class.

The researcher taught this English class in the fall semester of 2021. The class met once a week for 90 minutes and had 15 lessons, including two Active Learning Hours (ALHs), where students were supposed to learn actively and autonomously outside of class. Following the university policy under the pandemic situation, the lessons were mostly given online. The last four lessons were in Hy-Flex style, where students had a choice of attending class either face to face or online. It turned out that about half participated online, and the other half participated face to face during this Hy-Flex period.

Out of the 19 registered students, the TOEFL ITP scores of 18 students were available. One student did not take the test because the TOEFL ITP test was not administered at the university in 2020 due to the pandemic. The students' scores ranged from 480 to 663 (mean: 532; standard deviation: 54). Except for a few highly proficient students, student scores ranged between 480 and 557, indicating that most students belonged to B1 level of CEFR with some to B2.

Given the motto of “studying ‘in’ English” and students' interest in studying abroad in the future, the class was planned for the students to acquire content knowledge, language-related knowledge and skills, and intercultural competence. The theme of the class was Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the students learned and practiced presentation skills as well. Although the students were not required to take the class consecutively during the spring and fall semesters, the two classes were designed to expose them to different topics and to let them practice various skills for studying abroad. (The class theme in the spring semester was culture and media literacy, and the students learned and practiced discussion skills.)

As can be seen in Figure 2, this class was divided into two phases: Phase I (ten lessons including one ALH) and Phase II (five lessons including one ALH). In Phase I, ten teacher-led lessons were given. The topics included the basics of SDGs, climate change, refugees, and racial discrimination. A worksheet was prepared and posted one week before each lesson on Moodle, a learning management system used at the university. In class, students shared their understanding of the materials given as homework, did information-gap activities, and shared their opinions on the materials they read and listened to. They practiced presentation skills in each class as well. Each student gave a mini presentation and wrote a short reaction paper as a final product.

Figure 2

Class Sequence and Structure

Lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Date	10/6	10/13	10/20	10/27	11/3	11/10	11/17	11/24		12/1	12/8	12/15	12/22	1/12	1/19	1/26
Phase	1				2	1				2						
Style	Online	Online	Online	Online	ALH	Online	Online	Online	ALH	Online	Online	Hy-Flex	Hy-Flex	HyFlex	HyFlex	
Topic	SDGs	SDGs	Climate Change	Climate Change		Refugees	Refugees	Refugees			Racial Discrimination	Gender Bias	Poverty in Africa	Girls' Education in India	Gender Roles	
Presentation Skills		Eye Contact	Gestures	Voice Inflection		Using Visuals	Explaining Visuals	Explaining Visuals								
Reaction Paper							Explanation				# 1					# II
Individual Mini Presentation						Explanation			Preparation	Mini Presentations	Self-Evaluation & Reflection					
Group Project				Explanation								GP #1	GP #2	GP #3	GP #4	Self-Evaluation & Reflection
				Meeting #1	Meeting #2						Meeting #3					
Survey																Student Survey

The lessons in Phase I were planned in light of the competences in the “skills” area of RFCDC. It was because focusing on the “skills” seemed to be compatible with the learning outcomes of the class. In Phase I, students were expected to use the 18 descriptors. For example, in the first lesson on refugees, the students shared their prior knowledge about refugees, checked the UN website for basic information, including definitions, analyzed how the refugee issue is related to SDGs, reported key information from the assigned website, and conveyed their reactions. In the second lessons, after the listening activity of watching a video clip about UNHCR, they reported on their findings and shared their responses to the materials assigned as homework. As preparation for the third lesson, students chose one of the four short (5-minute) designated TED Talks, watched it, and prepared their reactions. They shared the summary and their reactions in class in small groups, which served as an information-gap activity. Table 1 displays the competences aligned with the homework and class activities in Phase I.

Table 1

Competences Expected to Be Used by Students in Phase I

Competences	Descriptors	Assignments and Activities	Context
10. Autonomous Learning Skills	58, 60, 61, 62	-Visiting assigned websites to obtain knowledge	HW
		-Noting down key information or reporting a summary of an outside source	HW
		-Finding sources and doing research for individual presentations	HW
		-Completing self-evaluation and writing reflections of individual presentations	HW
11. Analytical and Critical Thinking Skills	64, 65	-Sharing prior knowledge about the topic	Class
		-Watching or reading the materials and writing reactions	HW
		-Organizing and preparing individual presentations	HW
12. Skills of listening and observing	70, 71, 72, 73	-Checking comprehension of the materials given as homework in groups	Class
		-Listening to peers' summary and reaction of the materials (info-gap activities)	Class
		-Group discussions	Class
		-Practicing presentation skills	Class
		-Listening to individual presentations	Class
13. Empathy	76, 77, 78	-Group discussions	Class
14. Flexibility and adaptability	82	-Group discussions	Class
15. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills	88, 89, 90	-Preparing reactions and writing reaction papers	HW
		-Group discussions	Class
		-Giving individual presentations	Class
16. Co-operation skills	94	-Group discussions	Class

Note. "HW" refers to homework, and "Class" refers to class activities.

Phase II consisted of one ALH for preparation and four student-led lessons. Each group gave a 60-minute presentation-and-discussion (P&D) session by selecting a topic related to SDGs, finding a video clip fit for their topic, researching, and creating a handout and slides. In addition to presenting, each member led a group discussion. Finally, the presenting group received feedback from the participants and reflected on their performance. Table 2 shows the topics and the video clips chosen by each group.

Table 2

Topics and Video Clips Chosen by Each Group of Students

Group	1	2	3	4
Presentation Title	Closing the Gap	Energy Poverty in Africa	Girls Education	Gender Roles
Title of the Video	How to design gender bias out of your workplace	How to bring affordable, sustainable electricity to Africa	A bold plan to empower 1.6 million out-of-school girls in India	Ballroom dance that breaks gender roles
Speaker(s)	Sara Sanford	Rose M. Mutiso	Safeena Husain	Trevor Copp and Jeff Fox
Type	TEDx Seattle 2020	TED Summit 2019	TED 2019	TEDx Montreal 2019
Length	13:17 min.	13:00 min.	9:50 min.	15:25 min.

In Phase II, it was expected that the students would use seven competences, or more specifically, those outlined in 27 descriptors. Table 3 shows how those competences were aligned with the preparation, execution, and reflection of P&Ds, or the group project. The descriptors which were expected to be used only in Phase II are written in boldface.

Table 3

Competences Expected to be Used by Students in Phase II

Competences	Descriptors	Activities and Behavior	Context
10. Autonomous Learning Skills	58, 59 , 60, 61, 62, 63	-Finding reliable sources for group projects -Asking for clarification for comprehension to peers -Doing research for group projects -Doing self-evaluation and reflecting on group projects	Prep P&C Prep Post
11. Analytical and Critical Thinking Skills	64, 65, 67	-Analyzing how the topic is related to SDGs -Citing outside sources -Checking multiple sources for fact check	Prep Prep Prep
12. Skills of listening and observing	70, 71, 72, 73	-Listening to the opinions of project members -Listening to others in group discussions -Understanding the speakers' intended meaning through body language and speech	Prep Class Class
13. Empathy	76, 77, 78	-Sensing whether the group members need help -Trying to see others' viewpoint in discussions	Prep Class
14. Flexibility and adaptability	82, 83 , 84 , 85	-Being flexible while preparing -Dealing with unexpected situations applying new skills or knowledge in P&Ds	Prep Class
15. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills	88, 89, 90	-Giving opinions in preparatory meetings -Giving opinions in group discussions -Signaling the understanding (or lack of it) of others' opinions in discussion	Prep Class Class
16. Co-operation skills	94, 95 , 96 , 97	-Building good relationship with project members -Playing the assigned roles responsibly -Trying to reach consensus while preparing -Sharing progress while preparing	Prep Prep Prep Prep

Note. "Prep" refers to preparation, "Class" refers to class activities, "P&C" refers to preparation and class activities, and "Post" refers to post-presentation assignment.

Since the lessons were given online and students could not meet face to face for preparatory meetings, measures were taken to let students prepare using class time. As can be seen in Figure 2, preparation time for Phase II was incorporated in the lessons in Phase I, in addition to preparation outside of class. Besides, while ALH is usually autonomous work done by students outside of class, it was scheduled to be done

using the regular class time when the researcher was not available for teaching. So, the students did use 90 minutes of class time. In this way, it was hoped that the students' burden would be reduced.

4. Research Questions

For the purpose of examining the effectiveness of this English class in 2021 in developing students' intercultural competence in light of RFCDC, the following research questions were addressed.

1. Which competences of RFCDC did the students achieve or become aware of by experiencing group projects?
2. Which competences of RFCDC did the students achieve or become aware of through the semester of learning?

5. Procedure

To answer the above two research questions (RQs), a mixed-methods approach was taken. The students who took the class and who gave consent to using their reflections, self-evaluations, survey responses, and comments became the participants. The entire procedure of soliciting participants, obtaining their consent, and collecting data was approved by the university's research ethics committee. The participants' reflections and comments, which were qualitative in nature, were coded for analysis, and their self-evaluation responses and survey responses were analyzed quantitatively.

5.1 Competences Learners Acquired or Became Aware of Through Group Projects (RQ 1)

To answer the first research question regarding the group projects, the researcher mainly used the students' reflection texts of the group projects as data. Filling out self-evaluation and writing reflections of their group project in English were part of their required course work, and the students filled out the Google Form linked to Moodle, within one week from their group presentation dates. In this submission form, there was a section for the students to choose whether or not to give consent to the researcher's using their responses and comments for research. In this section, necessary information was provided, in both English and Japanese, so that they can make an informed decision: the assurance that whether to give consent does not influence their course grade; the procedure for withdrawing from being the participants in case they changed their minds; that their personal information would be deleted from data and thus would not be disclosed. Consequently, all 19 students completed their work and agreed to let the researcher use their texts for research purposes.

For analysis, their reflection texts were manually coded by the key descriptors in the "skills" areas of competencies, following the procedure described in Ota (2019) and Sato et al. (2019). The coded results were then compared with the key descriptors outlined in Table 3. The same reflection texts were also coded by the competences in the three remaining areas of competence—"values," "attitudes," and "knowledge and critical understanding." Their self-evaluation response data of their group projects, rated on a five-point Likert-like scale (1: Disagree-5: Agree), were used as supplemental data. Descriptive statistics were

calculated using Microsoft Excel.

5.2 Competences Learners Acquired or Became Aware of Through the Semester (RQ 2)

To probe the answers to the second research question regarding the students' semester of learning, the researcher conducted an anonymous student survey. An email with a link to the Google Form created by the researcher was sent to the students after the last lesson. The necessary information for them to make decisions on whether to participate in the survey was provided bilingually in the same manner as described in 5.1.

Eleven participants responded to the survey with their consent to using their responses for research. Since the survey was optional in participation and not part of their course work, the survey was made for them to respond in the language of their choice, and most of them wrote their responses in Japanese, which were translated into English by the researcher. The translated comments were manually coded by the competences of RFCDC. For coding procedures, Ota (2019) and Sato et. al (2019) were referred to. The responses to the survey questions, which were to be answered on a five-point Likert-like scale (1: Disagree-5: Agree), were used as complementary data to investigate students' evaluation of the class this semester.

6. Results

6.1 Competences ("Skills") Referred to in the Students' Reflections

In the students' reflections of the group project, out of the 27 key descriptors that the researcher expected the students to use, 19 key descriptors (70%) were referred to positively as achieved, and 14 key descriptors (52%) were touched on in the context of awareness raised and/or as not achieved. There were eight key descriptors (30%) that were not referred to at all in their reflections. Table 4 summarizes the students' reflections, matrixed by competences and the nature of the students' references.

Table 4

Key Descriptors in Student Reflections

Competences ("Skills")	Expected to be Used (27)	Achieved (19)	Awareness Raised (14)	Not Referred to (8)
10. Autonomous learning skills	58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63	58, 59, 60, 61, 63	60, 63	62
11. Analytical and critical thinking skills	64, 65, 67	64		65, 67
12. Skills of listening and observing	70, 71, 72, 73	70, 71, 73	70, 71, 73	72
13. Empathy	76, 77, 78	76	76	77, 78
14. Flexibility and adaptability	82, 83, 84, 85	82, 83, 84, 85	83, 84, 85	
15. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills	88, 89, 90	88	88, 90	89
16. Co-operation skills	94, 95, 96, 97	94, 95, 97, 98	94, 95, 97	96
Coverage of descriptors (%)		70%	52%	30%

Note. The numbers in parentheses show the number of key descriptors.

6.2 Reflections Showing Accomplishments ("Skills")

Student reflections—which are shown below without any correction of grammatical errors—reveal how they worked and felt through the group project. One student's reflection shows that a positive relationship has been built (descriptor 94) through the group project, which positively impacted their

performance.

As positive points, . . . all group members participated in rehearsal. In the rehearsal, we checked how we give a presentation so that we completed our presentation without big mistakes. Also, after the rehearsal, we talked some time, and we became friends. Thanks to this, during the presentation, when the small trouble happened, all members cooperated, and we solve before it becomes big problem.

Another student's text shows that enthusiasm has been generated for the shared goal of the success of their P&D (descriptor 98), in addition to the positive relationship built (descriptor 94).

This group [project] was an overall fruitful experience for me because I got to realize the importance of the people in the team. It was one of the first times I could open up to people in the group and have fun while making our presentation. Every one of us was excited and eager to make our presentation session worthwhile for the audience, and the overall atmosphere and attitude of each of us were positive. I realized for the first time that teamwork and the quality of your team members are one of the most important aspects of creating a project.

6.3 Reflections Showing Regrets and Awareness ("Skills")

On the other hand, some students confessed their regrets. One student regretted that she did not advise the members even though she was aware of the shortcomings of their work (descriptor 76).

We should add more tables, graphs, and images to our slides. In our performance, we have many numerical values. Many members use only numbers. More than that, I regret not telling them about that in our preparation. I hesitated to advise members, but I should for our better performance. This is my fault in this group project.

Another student regretted that the members did not share their progress status while preparing (descriptor 97).

As points for improvement, I mention that all members did not share out progress. I and one group member took charge of making the documents, and we did not know that other members did not make a few slides until just before the presentation. I made the slides about comprehension question and one of my group members made many slides. If we had shared our progress and I had known about the slides, one member did not have to make such many slides. I think this should be improved.

6.4 Areas of Competences Touched on in the Students' Reflections

The students' reflections also touched on the five (83%) competences in the "attitude" area of the framework and two (67%) competences in the "knowledge and critical understanding" area, in addition to the eight (88%) competences referred to in the "skills" area. There was no reference to "values" in their texts. Table 5 summarizes the findings.

Table 5

Competences Referred to in Student Reflections by Areas

Area of Competence (20)	Competences Referred to	Coverage (%)
Value (3)		0%
Attitude (6)	5. Respect 6. Civic-mindedness 7. Responsibility 8. Self-efficacy 9. Tolerance of ambiguity	83%
Skills (8)	10. Autonomous learning skills 11. Analytical and critical thinking skills 12. Skills of listening and observing 13. Empathy 14. Flexibility and adaptability 15. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills	88%
Knowledge and Critical Understanding (3)	18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self 19. Knowledge and critical understanding of language communication	67%
Total (20)		70%

Note. The numbers in parentheses are the number of competences in RFCDC.

6.5 Reflections on Competences in “Attitudes” and “Knowledge and Critical Understanding”

In addition to those referring to the “skills,” there were reflections referring to other areas of competences. One student’s text unveils respect shown to other members (5. Respect) and the ability to collaborate (6. Civic-mindedness) through the project.

This is the first time for me to create a group presentation in English, so I felt uneasy at first. However, group members are kind and accepted my ideas, so I came to say my ideas frankly. Through this group project, I learned it is important to listen to each idea to create presentation. It leads to diversity the ideas and can brush up the content. Also, I learned how to organize clear presentation. I want to say thanks for my group members.

Another student’s text shows that she reflected critically on her thought (18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self): “I can reflect my unconscious bias by myself. With group members, I realized gender bias in our ordinally day, too.”

6.6 Students’ Self-Evaluation

The students’ comments are endorsed by their self-evaluations. Their autonomous learning skills, as seen in their choice of video clips and quality of background research, were self-evaluated very highly with smaller standard deviations (means: 4.68-4.95; standard deviations: 0.23-0.48). Their cooperation skills were also self-evaluated highly but with a larger standard deviation (mean: 4.63; standard deviation: 0.60), implying individual or group differences. Their linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills, as seen in their self-evaluation of presentation and discussion facilitation skills and the effective use of various presentation skills, were self-evaluated lower with larger standard deviations (means: 3.16-4.26; standard deviations: 0.65-1.38), implying individual differences. In short, many students showed confidence in research-related autonomous learning skills, while there were some differences in self-perceived cooperation skills and linguistic and communicative skills. Table 6 presents the summary.

Table 6

Self-Evaluation of the Group Project by Students

Competences	Statements	Mean	SD
10. Autonomous learning skills			
	We effectively provided background information which was helpful for the audience.	4.68	0.48
	The video clip we chose was interesting.	4.95	0.23
	The video clip was reliable and appropriate for this group project.	4.89	0.32
15. Linguistic, communicative and pluriLingual Skills			
	We facilitated the presentation and discussions well.	4.26	0.65
	I had good eye contact with the audience.	3.79	0.85
	I used effective body language.	3.16	1.38
	I used voice inflection effectively.	3.58	1.17
16. Cooperation			
	In our group, we cooperated well with one another while preparing.	4.63	0.60

Note. N=19

6.7 The Competences of RFCDC Referred to in the Student Survey Comments

Many of the competences referred to in the student survey comments overlapped those in their group project reflections. Four competences in “attitude,” five in “skills,” and two in “knowledge and critical understanding” were touched on in both. See Table 7 for the summary.

References to the descriptors which was not referred to in student reflections were found, as well. One student expressed her desire to participate in the activities to help those in need (descriptor 36 in 6. Civic-mindedness): “I learned that there are many ways to help refugees and the poor from Japan, and I would like to participate in those activities.” Another student wrote how she improved her skills by experiencing presentations (descriptor 46 in 8. Self-efficacy): “Creating slides in English was difficult because I did not have much experience, but I learned a lot from the classmates’ slides. I could improve my skills of creating slides, writing a manuscript, speaking, and presenting.” Another showed her motivation for further improvement (descriptor 106 in 18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self): “Thank you for the feedback on my work. I would like to improve my skills by taking it into account.” Another student described what makes the speech attractive (descriptor 112 of 19. Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication): “Using TED Talks helped us improve our listening skills. Besides, they include important techniques in presenting in English, such as speaking, gestures, and the organization to attract the audience.”

Moreover, one competence (4. Openness to cultural otherness) was referred to only in the student survey. They seemed interested in learning about peers’ opinions and perspectives through group discussions. One student wrote: “The content of the presentations on SDGs was so interesting that I felt like speaking with my classmates in Japanese.” Another student wrote: “It did not seem easy to give solutions to the topics discussed in class, but it was great that I could listen to my classmates’ opinions.” Both comments seem to endorse their interest in learning about people’s beliefs, values, and worldviews, as in descriptor 21.

Table 7

Competences Referred to in Student Survey Comments by Areas

Area of Competence (20)	Competences Referred to	Coverage
Value (3)		0%
Attitude (6)	4. Openness to cultural otherness 5. Respect 6. Civic-mindedness 8. Self-efficacy 9. Tolerance of ambiguity	83%
Skills (8)	10. Autonomous learning skills 12. Skills of listening and observing 13. Empathy 15. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills 16. Co-operation skills	63%
Knowledge and Critical Understanding (3)	18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self 19. Knowledge and critical understanding of language communication	67%
Total (20)		60%

Note. The numbers in parentheses are the number of competences in RFCDC.

6.8 Student Survey

Those who responded to the survey questions seem to be satisfied overall with this English class in 2021 (mean: 4.91; standard deviation: 0.30). As for the topic and materials, they found them to be interesting and perceived that they contributed to the learning of both content and language (means: 4.64-4.91; standard deviations: 0.30-0.50). The presentation skills exercises were perceived positively in general but with individual differences (means: 4.55-4.64; standard deviations: 0.67-0.93), and the individual presentations seem to have functioned as a learning experience (means: 4.64-4.73; standard deviations: 0.47-0.67), both of which seem to have contributed to the students' self-perceived improvement in presentation skills (mean: 4.55; standard deviation 0.52). The group project seems to have served as an even greater learning experience (means: 4.73-5.00; standard deviations: 0.00-0.65). Solid support for the group project in the following year was found, with individual differences (mean: 4.36; standard deviation 0.67). Table 8 displays the details.

Table 8

Summary of Responses to the Student Survey

Statements	Mean	SD
Topic & Materials		
The SDG topic was interesting/stimulating.	4.73	0.47
I learned new content knowledge and perspectives on SDG-related topics from this course.	4.91	0.30
I learned new English-related knowledge and skills in this course.	4.64	0.50
Presentation Skills		
Presentation exercises for body language (posture, eye contact, and gestures) were helpful.	4.55	0.93
Presentation exercises for voice inflection were helpful.	4.64	0.67
Presentation exercises for using and explaining visuals were helpful.	4.64	0.67
Individual Presentations		
By watching my classmates' presentations, I could notice or learn something new.	4.73	0.47
Watching the video recording of my rehearsal helped me to realize what can be improved.	4.64	0.67
Writing presentation reflections helped me to reflect on my own performance objectively.	4.64	0.50
I feel that my presentation skills improved through presentation exercises and two presentations.	4.55	0.52
Group Projects		
As a presenter, I learned and noticed something through the process of this group project.	5.00	0.00
Peer feedback helped me realize strengths and shortcomings in our presentation and facilitation.	4.91	0.30
As a listener and participant, I learned and noticed something through group projects.	4.73	0.65
I recommend doing Group Projects in the next year's ACT II.	4.36	0.67
Overall		
Overall, I am satisfied with this course.	4.91	0.30

Note. $n=11$

7. Discussion

7.1 Competences the Students Achieved or Become Aware of Through the Group Project

From the students' reflections, it seems that they had opportunities to try to use many of the "skills" that the researcher had intended for them to use. Some skills were referred to as accomplished, while some were yet to be accomplished. Since awareness is the starting point for improvement, the fact that they became aware of these competences is of paramount importance. Investigation of the reasons behind differences in achievement of the competences may contribute to a better understanding of the students' struggle, which may lead to effectively assisting them in the group work process.

In addition to the "skills," the primary focus in lesson planning, the students touched on many competences in the "attitude" and "knowledge and critical understanding" areas of the RFCDC, although the researcher had not consciously planned lessons for the mastery of these competences. This shows how closely related the competences are, especially those between "attitude" and "skills," implying that these two areas of competence can be considered together in planning.

Eight key descriptors in "skills" were not referred to in their reflections, although the researcher had expected the students to use them. It may appear that they did not use or acquire them, but perhaps it does not necessarily mean so. The first possible explanation is that the students did use some but did not refer to them because using them had become a matter of course. For example, selecting reliable sources while doing research (key descriptor 62 in 10. Autonomous learning skills) and supporting opinions with evidence (key descriptor 65 in 11. Analytical and critical thinking skills) had already been mastered by the students. In a sense, they became a matter of course for them.

The second reason may be that those skills were minor points for reflection. For example, watching the body language of the speakers to find out their meaning (key descriptor 72 in 12. Skills of listening and observing) and asking the speaker to repeat (key descriptor 89 in 16. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills) had been taught in Phase I of the class, and the students have been using the skills in class in the researcher's observation. There seemed to be individual differences in their mastery, but they might have been minor points in their reflections compared to other elements. These skills were not focused on in the itemized self-evaluation of the group project, either.

The third possible reason is that the students were not conscious of using some skills. For instance, the students did build consensus to achieve group goals (key descriptor 96 in 16. Co-operation skills), but they were unconscious of using this skill partly because it was not explicitly taught or perhaps because they have been doing so in the contexts up to secondary education and/or outside of class.

Of course, there must have been skills not used by the students in part due to the absence of context for using the skills. Contexts for using the intended competences need to be in place after careful planning so that the students can develop the target skills.

7.2 Competences the Students Achieved or Become Aware of Through the Semester

The student survey comments confirm their awareness and/or mastery of many of the same competences in the "attitude" and "skills" areas of RFCDC. In addition, there are additional descriptors and competence referred to only in the survey comments, all of which were in the "attitude" and "knowledge and critical understanding" areas of RFCDC, which had been out of the scope of the researcher's class planning. This confirms the interrelatedness of competences in RFCDC and gives suggestions about future class planning for effective and integrated incorporation of competences. Another implication of the student comments related to the additional descriptors and competence is the importance of investigating the students' perceptions and thoughts from multiple perspectives. The survey comments seem to have uncovered the students' hidden meditation and complemented their reflections.

The survey responses seem to affirm, in general, how this English class in 2021 was taught and facilitated. The students seem to have undergone various challenges through the course work, which turned out to be learning experiences for many. Of course, individual differences and the fact that approximately one-third of the voices of the registered students were missing need to be considered.

Variance in support for the group project in the following year may be explained by group dynamics as well as the fact that the preparation was done online. One student wrote, "I hesitate to recommend doing Group Projects in the next year's [class] because it was difficult for me to communicate via zoom meetings with group members. I can't see the facial expressions of members." Online preparation added a burden to this student, which the researcher did not notice then. This comment suggests the importance of noticing the students' difficulties to remove them early by paying attention to their behavior and SOS signals.

8. Conclusion

This paper has reported the researcher's attempt to develop students' intercultural competence in

teaching one of the CLIL-based English class by using RFCDC as a framework. The paper has also examined its effectiveness using the students' reflection texts of the group project and post-semester student survey comments as data. Many but not all of the intended competences were used, especially in the group project, with varying degrees of mastery. In addition, even though the focus in lesson planning was competences in "skills," the students seem to have also used many competences in "attitudes" and "knowledge and critical understanding." From the findings, lesson planning by integrating the areas of RFCDC, especially the "skills" and "attitudes," is suggested.

Since this attempt is exploratory, there are limitations to this study. First, while the student reflections of the group project were rich and detailed, student comments on other aspects and activities of the class were limited. From the questionnaire survey data, the group project seems to have been the core learning experience and the most memorable aspect of the course. Yet, more data on other aspects of the class would have brought additional findings and insights. Thus, devising ways to obtain students' voices about class activities, homework, and reaction papers, for example, can be sought.

Second, the students' change in values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge is not quantifiable only from the reflections and survey comments. Although these written text of reflections and comments are valuable resources for the researcher to investigate learner perceptions, they cannot adequately demonstrate students' development. One possible solution to this problem is to conduct a questionnaire survey asking about the students' self-perceived competences using RFCDC before and after the semester, which will be the next agenda for the researcher.

Lastly, there is a possibility that the students surmised the researchers' intention or purposes in writing reflections, doing self-evaluations, and responding to the survey. Since the researcher was also the teacher of this class, it may have been possible that the students responded in a way favorable for the researcher. In addition, approximately one-third of the students' voices were not heard in the post-semester survey and thus not reflected in this paper. This can also be the limitation since they may have more critical views on or attitudes toward this class.

From a pedagogical perspective, based on the findings, trying to seek possibilities of incorporating the additional competences in this class may be worth experimenting with. In doing so, aligning the target competences with learning outcomes is necessary. Providing the contexts for using them is crucial as well.

Also, applying the framework to teaching other classes or in other contexts can be explored. For example, teaching another group of students, focusing on different target competences, is worth trying. Furthermore, providing the opportunities of cross-cultural exchange, either face-to-face or virtually, and examining the effect, as in the literature (e.g., Moriyama, 2021; Peraza & Furumura, 2022) can also be sought.

Appendix A: The Key Descriptors of RFCDC

Values

1. Valuing human dignity and human rights

1	Argues that human rights should always be protected and respected	Basic
2	Argues that specific rights of children should be respected and protected by society	Basic
3	Defends the view that no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment	Intermediate
4	Argues that all public institutions should respect, protect and implement human rights	Intermediate
5	Defends the view that when people are imprisoned, although they are subject to restrictions, this does not mean that they are less deserving of respect and dignity than anyone else	Advanced
6	Expresses the view that all laws should be consistent with international human rights norms and standards	Advanced

2. Valuing cultural diversity

7	Promotes the view that we should be tolerant of the different beliefs that are held by others in society	Basic
8	Promotes the view that one should always strive for mutual understanding and meaningful dialogue between people and groups who are perceived to be “different” from one another	Basic
9	Expresses the view that the cultural diversity within a society should be positively valued and appreciated	Intermediate
10	Argues that intercultural dialogue should be used to help us recognise our different identities and cultural affiliations	Advanced
11	Argues that intercultural dialogue should be used to develop respect and a culture of “living together”	Advanced

3. Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

12	Argues that schools should teach students about democracy and how to act as a democratic citizen	Basic
13	Expresses the view that all citizens should be treated equally and impartially under the law	Basic
14	Argues that laws should always be fairly applied and enforced	Basic
15	Argues that democratic elections should always be conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud	Intermediate
16	Expresses the view that, whenever a public official exercises power, he or she should not misuse that power and cross the boundaries of their legal authority	Intermediate
17	Expresses support for the view that courts of law should be accessible to everyone so that people are not denied the opportunity to take a case to court because it is too expensive, troublesome or complicated to do so	Intermediate
18	Expresses support for the view that those to whom legislative power is entrusted should be subject to the law and to appropriate constitutional oversight	Advanced
19	Expresses the view that information on public policies and their implementation should be made available to the public	Advanced
20	Argues that there should be effective remedies against the actions of public authorities which infringe civil rights	Advanced

Attitudes

4. Openness to cultural otherness

21	Shows interest in learning about people's beliefs, values, traditions and world views	Basic
22	Expresses interest in travelling to other countries	Basic
23	Expresses curiosity about other beliefs and interpretations and other cultural orientations and affiliations	Intermediate
24	Expresses an appreciation of the opportunity to have experiences of other cultures	Intermediate
25	Seeks and welcomes opportunities for encountering people with different values, customs and behaviours	Advanced
26	Seeks contact with other people in order to learn about their culture	Advanced

5. Respect

27	Gives space to others to express themselves	Basic
28	Expresses respect for other people as equal human beings	Basic
29	Treats all people with respect regardless of their cultural background	Intermediate
30	Expresses respect towards people who are of a different socio- economic status from himself/herself	Intermediate
31	Expresses respect for religious differences	Advanced
32	Expresses respect for people who hold different political opinions from himself/herself	Advanced

6. Civic-mindedness

33	Expresses a willingness to co-operate and work with others	Basic
34	Collaborates with other people for common interest causes	Basic
35	Expresses commitment to not being a bystander when the dignity and rights of others are violated	Intermediate
36	Discusses what can be done to help make the community a better place	Intermediate
37	Exercises the obligations and responsibilities of active citizenship at either the local, national or global level	Advanced
38	Takes action to stay informed about civic issues	Advanced

7. Responsibility

39	Shows that he/she accepts responsibility for his/her actions	Basic
40	If he/she hurts someone's feelings, he/she apologises	Basic
41	Submits required work on time	Intermediate
42	Shows that he/she takes responsibility for own mistakes	Intermediate
43	Consistently meets commitments to others	Advanced

8. Self-efficacy

44	Expresses a belief in his/her own ability to understand issues	Basic
45	Expresses the belief that he/she can carry out activities that he/she has planned	Basic
46	Expresses a belief in his/her own ability to navigate obstacles when pursuing a goal	Intermediate
47	If he/she wants to change, he/she expresses confidence that he/ she can do it	Intermediate

48	Shows that he/she feels secure in his/her abilities to meet life's challenges	Advanced
49	Shows confidence that he/she knows how to handle unforeseen situations due to his/her resourcefulness	Advanced

9. Tolerance of ambiguity

50	Engages well with other people who have a variety of different points of view	Basic
51	Shows that he/she can suspend judgments about other people temporarily	Basic
52	Is comfortable in unfamiliar situations	Intermediate
53	Deals with uncertainty in a positive and constructive manner	Intermediate
54	Works well in unpredictable circumstances	Intermediate
55	Expresses a desire to have his/her own ideas and values challenged	Advanced
56	Enjoys the challenge of tackling ambiguous problems	Advanced
57	Expresses enjoyment of tackling situations that are complicated	Advanced

Skills

10. Autonomous learning skills

58	Shows ability to identify resources for learning (e.g. people, books, internet)	Basic
59	Seeks clarification of new information from other people when needed	Basic
60	Can learn about new topics with minimal supervision	Intermediate
61	Can assess the quality of his/her own work	Intermediate
62	Can select the most reliable sources of information or advice from the range available	Advanced
63	Shows ability to monitor, define, prioritise and complete tasks with- out direct oversight	Advanced

11. Analytical and critical thinking skills

64	Can identify similarities and differences between new information and what is already known	Basic
65	Uses evidence to support his/her opinions	Basic
66	Can assess the risks associated with different options	Intermediate
67	Shows that he/she thinks about whether the information he/she uses is correct	Intermediate
68	Can identify any discrepancies or inconsistencies or divergences in materials being analysed	Advanced
69	Can use explicit and specifiable criteria, principles or values to make judgments	Advanced

12. Skills of listening and observing

70	Listens carefully to differing opinions	Basic
71	Listens attentively to other people	Basic
72	Watches speakers' gestures and general body language to help himself/herself to figure out the meaning of what they are saying	Intermediate
73	Can listen effectively in order to decipher another person's meanings and intentions	Intermediate
74	Pays attention to what other people imply but do not say	Advanced
75	Notices how people with other cultural affiliations react in different ways to the same situation	Advanced

13. Empathy

76	Can recognise when a companion needs his/her help	Basic
77	Expresses sympathy for the bad things that he/she has seen happen to other people	Basic
78	Tries to understand his/her friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective	Intermediate
79	Takes other people's feelings into account when making decisions	Intermediate
80	Expresses the view that, when he/she thinks about people in other countries, he/she shares their joys and sorrows	Advanced
81	Accurately identifies the feelings of others, even when they do not want to show them	Advanced

14. Flexibility and adaptability

82	Modifies his/her opinions if he/she is shown through rational argument that this is required	Basic
83	Can change the decisions that he/she has made if the consequences of those decisions show that this is required	Basic
84	Adapts to new situations by using a new skill	Intermediate
85	Adapts to new situations by applying knowledge in a different way	Intermediate
86	Adopts the sociocultural conventions of other cultural target groups when interacting with members of those groups	Advanced
87	Can modify his/her own behaviour to make it appropriate to other cultures	Advanced

15. Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills

88	Can express his/her thoughts on a problem	Basic
89	Asks speakers to repeat what they have said if it wasn't clear to him/her	Basic
90	Asks questions that show his/her understanding of other people's positions	Intermediate
91	Can adopt different ways of expressing politeness in another language	Intermediate
92	Can mediate linguistically in intercultural exchanges by translating, interpreting or explaining	Advanced
93	Can avoid successfully intercultural misunderstandings	Advanced

16. Co-operation skills

94	Builds positive relationships with other people in a group	Basic
95	When working as a member of a group, does his/her share of the group's work	Basic
96	Works to build consensus to achieve group goals	Intermediate
97	When working as a member of a group, keeps others informed about any relevant or useful information	Intermediate
98	Generates enthusiasm among group members for accomplishing shared goals	Advanced
99	When working with others, supports other people despite differences in points of view	Advanced

17. Conflict-resolution skills

100	Can communicate with conflicting parties in a respectful manner	Basic
101	Can identify options for resolving conflicts	Basic
102	Can assist others to resolve conflicts by enhancing their understanding of the available options	Intermediate

103	Can encourage the parties involved in conflicts to actively listen to each other and share their issues and concerns	Intermediate
104	Regularly initiates communication to help solve interpersonal conflicts	Advanced
105	Can deal effectively with other people's emotional stress, anxiety and insecurity in situations involving conflict	Advanced

Knowledge and critical understanding

18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self

106	Can describe his/her own motivations	Basic
107	Can describe the ways in which his/her thoughts and emotions influence his/her behaviour	Basic
108	Can reflect critically on his/her own values and beliefs	Intermediate
109	Can reflect critically on himself/herself from a number of different perspectives	Intermediate
110	Can reflect critically on his/her own prejudices and stereotypes and what lies behind them	Advanced
111	Can reflect critically on his/her own emotions and feelings in a wide range of situations	Advanced

19. Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication

112	Can explain how tone of voice, eye contact and body language can aid communication	Basic
113	Can describe the social impact and effects on others of different communication styles	Intermediate
114	Can explain how social relationships are sometimes encoded in the linguistic forms that are used in conversations (e.g. in greetings, forms of address, use of expletives)	Intermediate
115	Can explain why people of other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions which are meaningful from their perspective	Advanced
116	Can reflect critically on the different communicative conventions that are employed in at least one other social group or culture	Advanced

20. Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (including politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, the environment and sustainability)

117	Can explain the meaning of basic political concepts, including democracy, freedom, citizenship, rights and responsibilities	Basic
118	Can explain why everybody has a responsibility to respect the human rights of others	Basic
119	Can describe basic cultural practices (e.g. eating habits, greeting practices, ways of addressing people, politeness) in one other culture	Basic
120	Can reflect critically on how his/her own world view is just one of many world views	Basic
121	Can assess society's impact on the natural world, for example, in terms of population growth, population development, resource consumption	Basic
122	Can reflect critically on the risks associated with environmental damage	Basic
123	Can explain the universal, inalienable and indivisible nature of human rights	Intermediate
124	Can reflect critically on the relationship between human rights, democracy, peace and security in a globalised world	Intermediate

125	Can reflect critically on the root causes of human rights violations, including the role of stereotypes and prejudice in processes that lead to human rights abuses	Intermediate
126	Can explain the dangers of generalising from individual behaviours to an entire culture	Intermediate
127	Can reflect critically on religious symbols, religious rituals and the religious uses of language	Intermediate
128	Can describe the effects that propaganda has in the contemporary world	Intermediate
129	Can explain how people can guard and protect themselves against propaganda	Intermediate
130	Can describe the diverse ways in which citizens can influence policy	Advanced
131	Can reflect critically on the evolving nature of the human rights framework and the ongoing development of human rights in different regions of the world	Advanced
132	Can explain why there are no cultural groups that have fixed inherent characteristics	Advanced
133	Can explain why all religious groups are constantly evolving and changing	Advanced
134	Can reflect critically on how histories are often presented and taught from an ethnocentric point of view	Advanced
135	Can explain national economies and how economic and financial processes affect the functioning of society	Advanced

Note. The key descriptors in Appendix A are from “Chapter1 The key descriptors “(pp.15-23) of Volume 2 of RFCDC (Council of Europe, 2018b)

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