

# MENDIVE



## REVISTA DE EDUCACIÓN

*Translated from the original in Spanish*

### **Intercultural communication among university students: influence on the formation of values and attitudes**

### **La comunicación intercultural entre alumnos universitarios: influencia en la formación de actitudes y valores**

### **Comunicação intercultural entre estudantes universitários: influência na formação de atitudes e valores**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Intercultural communication as a form of socialization and acculturation shapes

people's behavior and helps build their attitudes and beliefs, therefore, it is a strong means to educate the new generations. However, there are few studies on this topic in Cuba. In May, 2018 a group of US students shared, for a few days, social experiences with some Cuban students as part of a bilingual immersion program, which consisted of some formal and informal communication encounters rooted in an interactional perspective of culture and in the principles which view language as social practice. This qualitative study was conducted using a survey, which purpose was to evaluate the influence of this experience on the participants' construction of new knowledge and beliefs, and their attitudes and values. Results of the application of such survey seem to indicate that despite cultural differences and somewhat different viewpoints, previous gaps in knowledge of the other culture and even prejudices, values like peace, friendship, solidarity, acceptance of differences, and attitudes like empathy, respect and politeness were fostered by that intercultural communication and these values and attitudes make possible the effective interaction among them. The intercultural communication experience lived changed the ways of thinking, acting and feeling about the other culture of the participants.

**Keywords:** attitudes; intercultural communication; values.

#### **RESUMEN**

La comunicación intercultural como forma de socialización y apropiación cultural configura el comportamiento del hombre, ayuda a construir sus actitudes y creencias. Por lo tanto, es un medio efectivo para educar a las nuevas generaciones. Sin embargo, hay pocos estudios sobre este tema en Cuba. En mayo de 2018 un grupo de alumnos

estadounidenses compartieron, durante unos días, experiencias sociales con algunos alumnos cubanos como parte de un programa de inmersión bilingüe, que consistió en algunos encuentros formales e informales de comunicación fundamentados en una perspectiva interaccionista de la cultura y en los principios que interpretan el lenguaje como práctica social. Este estudio cualitativo se llevó a cabo mediante una encuesta, cuyo propósito fue evaluar la influencia de esta experiencia en la construcción de nuevos conocimientos y creencias, así como en sus actitudes y valores. Los resultados de la aplicación de esta encuesta parecen indicar que, a pesar de las diferencias en los puntos de vista, las diferencias culturales, las insuficiencias en el conocimiento previo de la otra cultura e incluso los prejuicios, los valores como la paz, la amistad, la solidaridad, la aceptación de las diferencias y actitudes como la empatía, el respeto y la cortesía fueron fomentados por esa comunicación intercultural y que son esos valores y actitudes los que hacen posible la interacción efectiva entre ellos. La experiencia de comunicación intercultural vivida cambió las formas de pensar, actuar y sentir sobre la otra cultura de los participantes.

**Palabras clave:** actitudes; comunicación intercultural; valores.

## RESUMO

A comunicação intercultural como forma de socialização e apropriação cultural modela o comportamento do homem, ajuda a construir as suas atitudes e crenças. Portanto, é um meio eficaz para educar as novas gerações. No entanto, há poucos estudos sobre este tema em Cuba. Em maio de 2018, um grupo de estudantes dos Estados Unidos compartilharam, durante alguns dias, experiências sociais com alguns

estudantes cubanos como parte de um programa de imersão bilingüe, que consistiu em alguns encontros formais e informais de comunicação baseados em uma perspectiva interacionista da cultura e dos princípios que interpretam a linguagem como prática social. Este estudo qualitativo foi realizado através de uma pesquisa, cujo objetivo foi avaliar a influência desta experiência na construção de novos conhecimentos e crenças, assim como em suas atitudes e valores. Os resultados da aplicação desta pesquisa parecem indicar que, apesar das diferenças de pontos de vista, diferenças culturais, conhecimento prévio insuficiente da outra cultura e mesmo preconceitos, valores como paz, amizade, solidariedade, aceitação das diferenças e atitudes como empatia, respeito e cortesia foram fomentados por essa comunicação intercultural e que são esses valores e atitudes que tornam possível a interação efetiva entre eles. A experiência vivida de comunicação intercultural transformou as formas de pensar, atuar e sentir a respeito da outra cultura dos participantes.

**Palavras-chave:** actitudes; comunicação intercultural; valores.

## INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication is increasingly important in the globalized world. In Cuba, the probability of having an intercultural interaction with people from other cultures in everyday life is also increasing due to the rapid development of tourism, so it is necessary to prepare citizens so that they can publicize the reality and points of view of the Cubans.

Intercultural competence as a result of intercultural communication experiences has been defined as "... an integral set of

cognitive, affective and behavioral factors that influence the understanding of diversity and the interaction with it in a broad sense, and that may develop through education and/or experience" (Borghetti , 2017, p.3).

Wu & Marek (2018) concluded, after an extensive review of the literature that, "... intercultural knowledge is often not very present in the typical curriculum of teaching English as a foreign language. Consequently, intercultural competence has received fewer studies academics that language skills." (p.2).

Many authors have referred to the importance of intercultural communication, not only as a way of "... positively influencing the development of the foreign language" (Aba, 2015, p.1), but as a form of socialization and cultural rooting that configures behavior and helps build their attitudes and beliefs and, therefore, is a strong means to educate new generations. For example, Wu & Marek (2018) state that "... higher levels of cultural understanding make students more competent and more likely to experience success in future international relations" (p.16), while Björk, Eschenbach & Webb (2017) affirm that intercultural communication is "... a way of successfully navigating in a world of cultural diversity through openness, respect, mutual interest, exchange of views and the willingness to change perspectives" (p.1). However, Cuban students almost never experience intercultural communication, so there are few studies on this subject in Cuba.

There is a mutual influence between culture and language. Kramsch (1998) states that "Language is an integral part of ourselves: it permeates our own thinking and way of seeing the world" (p.77). He also asserts "... the words (...) reflect the attitudes and beliefs of their authors" (p.

3), that is, cultural conventions, norms of interaction and interpretation are part of the invisible ritual imposed by culture to Language users

The historical-cultural perspective of education for teaching English in Cuba (Enríquez, Mijares & Font, 2016; Acosta & Gómez, 2017) is based on the idea of language as a cultural and social product and on the interaction between culture and personality. These authors consider attitudes and values, the content of education as something that influences the development of personality and that is configured and transformed in the process of education.

This historical-cultural perspective is aligned with the "know-how" to facilitate multicultural communication at a B2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, Teaching, and Evaluation. (Council of Europe, 2018, p.231):

It can establish a relationship with members of other cultures, showing interest and empathy through questions, expressions of agreement and identification of emotional and practical needs.

It can encourage discussion without being dominant, expressing understanding and appreciation of different ideas, feelings and points of view, and inviting participants to contribute and react to the ideas of others.

It can help to create a shared understanding based on its appreciation of the use of direct/indirect and explicit/implicit communication.

The author considers that different conventions and social norms, interaction and interpretation and conversational

styles, that is, different ways of thinking, behaving and valuing, which can normally collide in intercultural communication, can accelerate this rooting process. cultural and education if properly mediated; which means fostering attitudes of courtesy, acceptance of diversity, empathy, respect and a conversational humanist-encouraging style, through the reflexive teaching of discourse. Thus, facilitating social activities in which students have the opportunity to exchange with speakers of other cultures on a variety of topics can become a means for personality development, particularly the growth of values such as peace, friendship, solidarity, based on mutual understanding and acceptance of diversity.

To design experiences of intercultural communication, it is necessary to consider three dimensions: cognitive, affective and behavioral. The framework of Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), which interprets language as a social practice, constitutes a good reference for doing so. These authors propose five principles:

Active construction: refers to the role of the student in learning and the role of facilitator of said teacher learning, to the use of methods that facilitate self-regulation, reflection, discovery and construction of knowledge in a process of social interaction.

Establishment of connections: it is identified as the need to establish connections between prior knowledge of one's own cultural linguistic framework and that of its interlocutors and of the new experiences, it faces in social interaction.

Social interaction : emphasizes the learning of communication as an interactive process, which goes beyond the learning of the language system as a historical and cultural mediated activity,

which requires continuous interaction where the meaning is negotiated from the different perspectives of the participants.

Reflection: it requires that students open themselves through empathy, complex cognitive processes and emotional reactions to new perspectives and achieve an understanding of their thinking and their own learning strategies.

Responsibility: refers to the responsibilities that students must take in the communication process such as: developing intercultural understanding and sensitivity, to be fair and respectful and communicate with others.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the influence of the intercultural communication experience designed and applied in the construction of new knowledge and beliefs, in the humanistic attitudes and values of the Cuban and North American participants.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

In May 2018, a group of American university students from Illinois College shared, for about 10 days, social experiences with some Cuban university students in the framework of a bilingual immersion program, which consisted of some formal meetings (in a classroom, under supervision and adult guide) and informal communication (in discos, parks and other recreational places in the city of Pinar del Río).

The participants were university students of about twenty years of Illinois College (12), of the University of Pinar del Río (8) and of the University of Medical Sciences (4) in Pinar del Río, Cuba. They came from different cultures, but they had many

aspects that favored interaction: students whose baths had a good command of English, equivalent to a B2 (main language used), most had studied American culture and / or had received a great influence of the media. Both groups (Cuban and North American) had a great interest in knowing the other culture.

### **Social activities designed and applied as part of the bilingual immersion program**

**Activity 1** (formal): Socialize and reflect

**Objective:** to reflect on the need to use linguistic resources in intercultural interaction, which facilitate the construction of friendship, harmony and peace between human beings and nations

**Procedures:** First, the students presented PowerPoint slides. Then, under the guidance of the teacher, the linguistic forms that allow each of the speech acts (see below) were exemplified in both languages and reflected on the importance of using these acts of verbal communication to build friendship, harmony and peace between human beings and nations:

Ask for apology

Be optimistic

Point out the positive

Accept the diversity

Be polite

Strengthen the esteem of your interlocutor

Show cognitive and emotional empathy

Avoid being rude or dominant in a conversation

Be understanding (show understanding, encourage, support the interlocutor)

Avoid judging to the other

After the previous initial reflection, students orally dramatized in pairs, composed of an American and a Cuban student, a dialogue of a conversation created by them, in which they show the integrated use of language forms (common expressions or tactics of language) that each speaker uses in a conversation in their mother tongue to behave verbally in an appropriate manner. That is to say, the interlocutors produce in English and Spanish conversations that integrate the speech acts exemplified above, as linguistic resources that allow building friendship, harmony and peace among human beings in a conversation.

**Optional:** these dialogue presentations can be videotaped as evidence, which was not done on this occasion.

**Activity 2** (formal): Who are we?

**Objective:** to accept that you can live in peace and harmony, despite having different social, historical and economic realities and perspectives.

**Procedures:** students gathered in a circle ask questions about the social realities of the other country, trying to obtain a true understanding and acceptance of the respective social, historical and economic realities and perspectives.

**Observation:** American students asked most of the questions. Other foreign students attending guests, mainly from Caribbean countries, studying Medicine in Cuba, answered most of the questions

based on their personal experiences in Cuba.

**Activity 3** (formal): La Guantanamera

**Objective:** to collaborate in the learning of communication.

**Procedures:** The simple verses of José Martí Pérez, the National Hero of Cuba, can be delivered in Spanish to small groups representing both countries (see the poems below). Then, they have to understand the message, discuss their social implications and translate the lyrics. Finally, rehearse to sing each one in English and Spanish as the content of the traditional Cuban song "La Guantanamera".

**Possible poems:**

1. Has the leopard a coat

In its dry and brown mountain:

I have more than the leopard,

Because I have a good friend.

2. I know a deep regret

Among the unnamed penalties:

The slavery of men

It is the great sorrow of the world!

3. Don't put me in the dark

To die as a traitor:

I am good, and good or good

I will die facing the sun.

4. with the poor of the earth

I want my luck to cast:

The streams of the mountains

I am more pleased than the sea.

**Optional:** the song once rehearsed can be sung for a real audience in a public place, which has been invited to have fun those days, perhaps in the company of a non-professional university musical group.

**Observation:** this activity can be very effective. The task of having to sing together in Spanish and English later forces them to do a great job of collaboration.

This time it was not completely realized.

**Activity 4** (formal): Different, but friends

**Objective:** to understand that differences in points of view do not constitute obstacles to effective intercultural communication.

**Procedures:** Students can organize in pairs or in small groups, with representation from both countries. Each could then be given a card of a topic (see the list of possible topics below) to discuss their experiences and ideas in relation to those topics, using both Spanish and English. Finally, they must submit a document with some similarities and differences that they have found between their points of view, related to the issues in question. If possible, and to end the meeting, some couples or small groups can make oral presentations in Spanish and English about the results of their interaction.

**Optional:** the results of these works could be published in an article in the newspaper

of the province of Pinar del Río in its online version, in both English and Spanish.

Possible topics:

1. Hometown. Positive and negative things
2. Work and study opportunities
3. Habits, preferences and family traditions
4. New Year's Eve, Christmas Eve and other holidays
5. Family problems and concerns
6. Community activism
7. Helping love, harmony and peace be ours
8. Build friendship
9. Good life. What is it?
10. The future of the world

**Note:** teachers should remind students that they must interact in a respectful, polite and humanistic style.

**Observation:** this was not possible due to the shortage of time. Instead, it was the content of many hours of informal communication meetings in nightclubs and city walks.

The indicators used to assess the expected influence of social activities of intercultural communication through the survey were:

State of knowledge of foreign culture (before and after experience)

Status of participants' feelings during communication meetings

State of understanding and acceptance of the ideas and views of others

Development status of the construction of new knowledge about norms and social conventions in foreign culture

State of growth of attitudes such as empathy, respect and courtesy

State of growth of values such as peace, friendship and solidarity

This qualitative study was carried out by means of a survey, whose purpose was to evaluate the influence of this experience in the construction of new knowledge and beliefs, as well as in humanistic attitudes and values.

### **Survey of Cuban and American participants in a bilingual immersion program in Pinar del Río, Cuba**

**Objective:** to evaluate the influence of some social experiences of intercultural communication on the humanist attitudes and values of students from US and Cuba.

**Protocol:** Dear students, in May 2018, social activities were organized in Pinar del Río, Cuba. It may be interesting to know the influence of the intercultural communication exchange on you; therefore, we hope you agree to answer some of the following questions. Please, the information you share honestly with us is anonymous. Thank you.

### **Questionnaire**

1. How much did you know about the other culture before this experience? Explain.
2. Were the foreign students as you expected? Explain.

3. Did you notice any similarity or difference between you and the young people of the other country? Any life project in common, for example?

4. Can you briefly refer to how you felt in the company of young people from another culture and with a different social reality? Explain the use of these references:

Attacked (victimized) 1 2 3 4 5 respected

Rejected for differences 1 2 3 4 5 accepted for similarities

Discriminated 1 2 3 3 4 5 kindly treated as an equal

Upper 1 2 3 3 4 5 lower

Happy, satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 annoying, unhappy

Confident 1 2 3 3 4 5 distrustful

Easily understandable 1 2 3 3 4 5 frequently misunderstood

Dear, important 1 2 3 4 5 not valued, unimportant

5. Do you agree that this experience has fed peace, friendship and solidarity among the participants? How?

6. Do you think that this experience will help you communicate in a more empathetic, respectful and courteous way with Cuban / American citizens in future meetings? Why?

7. Can you state that these bilingual immersion experiences in Pinar del Río helped you understand and accept the ideas and views of others? Explain.

8. Can you exemplify how these social experiences will nourish your construction of new knowledge about social norms and conventions (eg family traditions), feelings and thoughts in foreign and maternal culture?

9. Were the "contrasting" worldviews and the particular historical, ideological and political entities of their communicative interaction a problem? Explain.

## RESULTS

Below do the author of the article and some of the comments and reflections of the participating students, like quotes that argue the author's comments, make the inferences. They have been organized according to the indicators:

1. State of knowledge of foreign culture (before and after experience)

Before the experience, the Cuban participants reported having a greater influence from the United States and the Cuban media through movies, series, sports and literature, but they did not know how people really interacted in the culture. Both had slight prejudices, according to their statements in the survey:

"Before the meeting with the American students, I already knew part of the culture of their country, for example, music, television, sports" (Cuban participant).

"I met quite a lot because of the great cultural influence that the US represents for the world as a media leader" (Cuban participant).



"Before the classes we had before coming, I didn't know anything" (participant from the United States).

"There were many moments when we reflected on the relations between our countries and the false things that we are taught each other" (participant from the United States).

This situation changed radically. In addition, they learned a lot and were able to identify the differences and similarities between the two cultures.

"Yes, there were differences, they came from another country after all, but there were many similarities; they, like us, want to overcome and improve in life, some differently than others, but we all have projections" (participant Cuban).

## 2. Status of participants' feelings during communication meetings

The author considers that each participant experienced a positive climate in the interaction.

"Honestly I was hoping it would be very difficult to communicate, thus creating an awkward situation, but that was completely wrong" (participant from the United States).

"The political issue between both countries is delicate; probably that's why I never imagined that they would treat me so well" (Cuban participant).

"They were the friendliest and most welcoming people I've ever met" (participant from the United States).

"I think they felt, so much good so that most people say they want to repeat the visit, not only as academics, but also have

time to do some tourism" (Cuban participant).

They felt much respected, accepted by the similarities, kindly treated as equals, pleased, satisfied, confident, appreciated and important by the other interlocutors.

For some there were sometimes misunderstandings in the conversation, and some American participants felt inferior, probably "because their English was amazing compared to my Spanish. I felt quite ashamed and uncomfortable when I tried to speak in Spanish."

## 3. State of understanding and acceptance of the ideas and views of others

Understanding and accepting the ideas and points of view of others and not letting historical, ideological and political details were a problem. It was fundamental to build mutual respect and loving relationships, as these statements demonstrate:

"Listening to the opinions of citizens allowed me to understand the other point of view without prejudice" (participant of the United States).

"Communicating similarities, instead of differences, is the key" (participant from the United States).

"I try to keep an open mind and not let the political or world visions or historical events of the past believe in an image that is not correct" (participant from the United States).

"We were all interested in not imposing our vision of the world, but in breaking stereotypes and changing the perceptions that both had of each other. It was a very challenging experience" (Cuban participant).

"Always knowing the other cultures from the inside, from your town helps you to have a greater perception of how they are, and it is vital for a good foreign language learner to know this, since language is the expression of the culture of the people. For example, how can you understand that they speak so sadly about 9/11 if you do not know what happened that day in 2001 "(Cuban participant).

"They communicated with us and exchanged how all young people do with each other and not with any prejudice or limitation due to political barriers" (Cuban participant).

4. Development status of building new knowledge about norms and social conventions in foreign culture

All students acknowledged having learned a lot about social norms and conventions in foreign culture, as inferred from these statements:

"We all have different cultures, but we have very similar traditions in regard to family, gender and the desire to live a good life" (participant from the United States).

"These experiences gave me a precise knowledge of simple cultural aspects such as greetings, class environment and the social life of a Cuban university student" (participant from the United States).

"It is interesting to hear the way in which they express themselves about Cuban culture and what they could see here, as it was interesting to see in their slide shows the customs and part of the culture of their country, as, by for example, Halloween, or the gay pride party that one of the students presented on slides. This helps not only to know but also to respect and

understand their culture and way of thinking "(Cuban participant).

5. State of growth of attitudes such as empathy, respect and courtesy

Most participants recognize the growth of attitudes such as empathy, respect and courtesy, because of the experience despite their brevity. For example, some stated in this regard:

"I think this experience will help me to communicate more comprehensively with Cuban citizens because now I have seen firsthand what their lives are like" (participant from the United States).

"I know that what the mass media and the elderly tell us and show is not true and that they deserve the same respect they show us" (participant from the United States).

"I think that in a next meeting the communication would be much easier, considering that the young people who were visiting our country were from different regions of the United States and still behaved in a similar way and had common goals. Without fear to make a mistake I think that next time, it will be twice the developer that it is "(Cuban participant).

6. State of growth of values such as peace, friendship and solidarity

Definitely all participants agree that there was a great growth in values such as peace, friendship and solidarity, as these statements demonstrate:

"Nobody is interested in conflicts or resentments, but changes and friendly coexistence" (Cuban participant).

"This experience allowed me to have good friends and I have never felt safer in a new

place and community, and that was all thanks to the students and people we met during this opportunity" (participant from the United States).

"This experience nurtured a strong friendship between the participants. The Cuban students were very hospitable with us and treated us as if we were lifelong friends. I did not think there was even a need for peace to start" (participant from the United States).

"Experiences like this break those intercultural barriers that exist between these two countries separated by politics, but not by their peoples. In this way it is clear that nobody is interested in conflicts or resentments, but in changes and friendly coexistence" (Cuban participant).

"Yes, because it strengthens ties between nations, but also between people and, in addition, through experiences like this, friendships are formed and maintained" (Cuban participant).

## DISCUSSION

Participants in these intercultural experiences seem to have experienced changes similar to those reported by other studies on the subject, in which students, as a result of the interaction is more eager progressively accepting cultural differences and make value judgments and increase their intercultural competence (Hanvey, 1976; Wu, Marek & Wu, 2009; Wu & Marek, 2014; Wu & Marek, 2018).

The novelty of this research is manifested in relation to these studies, in some of the indicators used, for example, those related to the attitudes and values that the participants confirm to have developed

and consolidated through the planned program of activities.

This study also confirms the vision of Dörnyei (2005), who said that the motivation in learning English as a foreign language derives from the student's ability to imagine himself in the future functioning effectively in a cosmopolitan international society, because students valued this intercultural experience, the values and attitudes acquired as a boost to their knowledge and communication skills.

The study carried out in Pinar del Río reveals the connection between values such as peace, friendship, solidarity and attitudes such as empathy, respect, courtesy and intercultural communication; which will allow in the future to carry out pedagogical studies in which these attitudes and values are trained in a classroom where students share the same culture and native language as a proposal for the development of intercultural competence, that is, train from the local to face the global.

The research carried out seems to reveal, in addition, that it is not necessary to know the norms and conventions of other cultures as proposed by other authors as requirement to guarantee an effective interaction, but that it is possible to establish a respectful interaction if the interlocutors share the values and attitudes referred to in this study.

This inquiry could encourage other researchers to train indispensable values and attitudes as a more viable option for the achievement of successful intercultural communication between interlocutors from different cultures who use English as a fluent language, and to question the sociocultural knowledge as an essential condition of intercultural communicative competence, an aspect that some authors

have already raised due to the impossibility of knowing all the peculiarities of other cultures.

These results seem to indicate that, despite the cultural differences and the opposing views that arose in the discussion of some issues during the activities carried out, the previous gaps in the knowledge of the other culture, the previous prejudices resulting from the influence of the media and a program of activities such as the one that Cuban and American university students experienced in Pinar del Río, Cuba in 2018 could foster values such as peace, friendship, solidarity, acceptance of differences and attitudes like empathy, respect and courtesy; because the results of the study seem to indicate that it is these values and attitudes that make possible the effective interaction between them and not the previous sociocultural knowledge .

To conclude, it can be affirmed that it is the general opinion of all the participants that the experience of intercultural communication lived changed their ways of thinking, acting and feeling about the other culture.

This pedagogical experience, however, has limitations regarding the relatively small sample of participants, the short period of time in which it was carried out (just 10 days) and the limited number of formal activities carried out, which must be overcome in research future to reach definitive conclusions or more solid in terms of the relationship between the values and attitudes promoted in this experiment and the development of intercultural competence.

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