

# MENDIVE



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Original article

## The intercultural professional training of students of the Spanish major in China

La formación profesional intercultural de los estudiantes de la carrera de Español en China

A formação profissional intercultural de grandes estudantes espanhóis na China

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### ABSTRACT

Interculturality as a management model for cultural diversity finds in education an axis to influence the other institutions of the educational communities. Hence, it has been used to investigate communication problems between people of different cultures and ethnic discrimination, mainly

in the field of education. Therefore, intercultural training is one of the challenges of contemporary higher education, as it is an aspect of great importance and relevance due to its contribution to the comprehensive training of professionals. The objective of this article was to make an approximation to the process of intercultural professional training in the students of the Spanish Course of the University of Linyi, China. At the empirical level, documentary analysis was used in international databases for the collection of information Scielo, Latindex, Redalyc, Dialnet, Ebsco Host, Scopus and Google Scholar. The terms intercultural training and intercultural competence in foreign languages were used as the main search engine. The analysis of the normative documents of the Spanish career of the University was also carried out, to verify the treatment of intercultural training and its contents. The unstructured interview was applied to teachers in the communication area of the Spanish major. It was found that the Spanish manuals do not address intercultural training, teachers have deficiencies in this regard, although there is recognition of the importance of intercultural training in Spanish as a foreign language in the Chinese context.

**Keywords:** culture; intercultural education; training; interculturality.

### RESUMEN

La interculturalidad como modelo de gestión de la diversidad cultural, encuentra en la educación un eje para influir en las demás instituciones de las comunidades educativas. De ahí que esta se ha utilizado, para la investigación de problemas comunicativos entre personas de diferentes culturas y la discriminación de etnias, principalmente en el ámbito de la educación. Por ende, la formación intercultural se encuentra como uno de los retos de la educación superior contemporánea, por ser un aspecto de gran importancia y pertinencia por su contribución a la formación integral de los profesionales. El objetivo de este artículo fue realizar una aproximación al proceso de formación profesional intercultural en los

estudiantes la Carrera de Español de la Universidad de Linyi, China. En el nivel empírico se empleó el análisis documental en bases de datos internacionales para la recogida de información Scielo, Latindex, Redalyc, Dialnet, Ebsco Host, Scopus y Google Académico. Se utilizó como motor de búsqueda principal los términos formación intercultural y competencia intercultural en lenguas extranjeras. También se realizó el análisis de los documentos normativos de la carrera Español de la Universidad, para constatar el tratamiento de la formación intercultural y sus contenidos. Se aplicó la entrevista no estructurada a profesores del área de comunicación de la carrera de Español. Se encontró que los manuales de español no abordan la formación intercultural, los docentes tienen carencias al respecto, aunque existe reconocimiento de la importancia de la formación intercultural en español como lengua extranjera en el contexto chino.

**Palabras clave:** cultura; educación intercultural; formación; interculturalidad.

## RESUMO

A interculturalidade como modelo de gestão da diversidade cultural encontra na educação um eixo para influenciar outras instituições nas comunidades educativas. Por isso, tem sido utilizado para investigar problemas de comunicação entre pessoas de diferentes culturas e discriminação étnica, principalmente no campo da educação. Portanto, a formação intercultural é um dos desafios do ensino superior contemporâneo, pois é um aspecto de grande importância e relevância pela sua contribuição para a formação integral dos profissionais. O objetivo deste artigo foi fazer uma abordagem ao processo de formação profissional intercultural em estudantes do curso de espanhol da Universidade de Linyi, China. No nível empírico, utilizou-se análise documental em bases de dados internacionais para coleta de informações do Scielo, Latindex, Redalyc, Dialnet, Ebsco Host, Scopus e Google Scholar. Os termos formação intercultural e competência intercultural em línguas estrangeiras foram

utilizados como principal motor de busca. Também foi realizada a análise dos documentos normativos do curso de espanhol na Universidade, para verificar o tratamento da formação intercultural e seus conteúdos. A entrevista não estruturada foi aplicada a professores da área de comunicação do curso de espanhol. Verificou-se que os manuais espanhóis não abordam a formação intercultural, os professores apresentam lacunas neste aspecto, embora haja reconhecimento da importância da formação intercultural em espanhol como língua estrangeira no contexto chinês.

**Palavras-chave:** cultura; educação intercultural; formação; interculturalidade.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 21st century, with the continuous advance of globalization, the distance between different regions has been reduced, accompanied by more migration and flow. Internationalization has promoted the development and prosperity of the world economy, economic development, cultural exchanges between countries, as well as the development of cultural diversity, which can promote exchange and communication between different cultures, learn from the strengths of others and minimize conflicts caused by cultural differences, which are increasingly prominent. And with the number of international migrants, which worldwide reaches 272 million, which is equivalent to 3.5% of the world's population (United Nations [UN], 2019) the need for intercultural training is stronger than ever.

Hence Iglesias and Ramos (2021) affirm that:

(...) it is not surprising that in parallel interest in research on interculturality in the field of language teaching has grown. One of the main motivations that has led to

the development of this type of research has to do with the increasingly pressing need to acquire intercultural competence, both in personal, professional and educational environments. Added to this is the growing demand in digitalized societies to communicate effectively and interculturally appropriate, also in virtual environments. (p.1)

This position is also shared by Chen (2022) when he states that communication between people from different cultures is becoming increasingly frequent in the globalized world and this has led to the rise of the analysis of cross-cultural interactions (p.44 ).

As a result of these processes of international globalization, in which China is also immersed, the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language has gained momentum since its inception in the 1950s. Yu (2021) states that "Spanish is a rising value and is registering considerable expansion in China" (p. 663) both in vocational training in universities and in training without a degree, so the trend is one of development. upward.

In this context, the importance of guaranteeing, from the university, the intercultural training of future graduates is appreciated, which implies appropriating methods to learn to recognize diversity, promoting intercultural dialogues from the design of learning strategies that respond to the intercultural training needs of students.

However, despite this, Podesta et al. (2022) recognize that "(...) there is little research regarding how the skills, attitudes and knowledge that make up IC are developed, and, therefore, how to evaluate it and work on it intentionally in training."

The process of teaching and learning cultures within the framework of foreign

language training needs to take into account an intercultural conception, which emphasizes attention to the requirements in dialogue with other cultures, as well as the understanding of diversity, whose ways of The integration of culture, interculturality and education constitutes the basis for the necessary projection of responses to the constant limitations that make it difficult to achieve intercultural competence. Barrera and Cabrera (2021)

Relevant research results show that higher education is insufficient to cultivate international and cross-cultural competitiveness of talents, which makes talents cultivated in China, even college students as elite young groups, at a disadvantage in the competition of the international market. For example, in a study at Peking University, Zhou & Griffiths (2011) explored the performance of EFL learners in regards to intercultural competence. Similarly, Hao and Zhang (2009) found that Chinese students who had been involved with the English language for more than 12 years could not be communicatively competent when interacting in intercultural contexts.

For Chen (2022):

Intercultural Competence (IC) is the ability to function effectively across cultures, to think and act appropriately, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds: at home or abroad. An interculturally competent person knows how to achieve communicative purposes in different interpersonal situations effectively and to act appropriately. (p. 44)

While adding: "In recent decades, the goal of foreign language education (FLE) has expanded from language proficiency to communicative competence and also to the broader concept of IQ" (Chen, 2022, p .44).

In E/LE classes in China, currently, there are no manuals that cover CCI, especially from foreign teachers, in charge of introducing this competence. The generality is that there remain gaps about how to treat and develop CCI in class by native teachers, often due to lack of knowledge, or lack of adequate training. (Ramos, 2021)

Likewise, Chen (2022) states that "Despite the evolution of the evaluation of IC in the teaching of English as a foreign language, research still lacks models, measurements and empirical tests, studies related to the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language" (p.44).

In particular, the students of the Spanish Course at Linyi University (hereinafter, ULI), in the province of Shandong, China, beyond learning the language, with a strong grammatical component, present difficulties in appropriation of sociocultural norms, values, variants of language use, and intercultural communication, itself, that is, communication with knowledge of the context of use of the foreign language.

For all of the above, the objective of this article is to make an approach to the process of intercultural professional training in students of the Spanish Course at the University of Linyi, China.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

At the empirical level, documentary analysis was used in international databases to collect information from Scielo, Latindex, Redalyc, Dialnet, Ebsco Host, Scopus and Google Scholar. The terms intercultural training and intercultural competence in foreign languages were used as the main search engine. The analysis of the normative documents of the Spanish course at the ULY was also carried out, to verify the treatment of intercultural training and its contents.

The unstructured interview was applied to 9 professors of the program to find out their opinions on the approach to intercultural training in the program, during the 2021-2022 academic year.

## RESULTS

The application of the instruments and methods described above allowed us to obtain the following results:

- Recognition of the need for intercultural professional training as an essential aspect for university students today.

- With the rise of multiculturalism in current university education, multicultural education and intercultural professional training have become an important part of university education, currently associated fundamentally with training and internationalization processes.

- Studies related to intercultural training are generally carried out from descriptive conceptions.

- The analysis of studies on intercultural training allowed the authors of this article to identify the existence of various perspectives of analysis. Between them:

- Analysis of the intercultural training process from the pedagogical and didactic perspectives, particularly from the Didactics of Foreign Languages.
- Emphasis on social, cultural and communicative aspects in training. Not so from his professional involvement.
- Need for preparation of teachers for the intercultural training of students and in particular of students of foreign languages, English and Spanish.
- Special significance is attributed to intercultural training methods.
- Intercultural training is related to intercultural knowledge, skills, competencies and methods.

- Likewise, a transformation is perceived in the conception of intercultural training, around the contents and methods used, which from a vision focused on communication with emphasis on information from a universal perspective is transformed to particular contexts, which integrate cultural and communication elements, as well as those involved.

- It was found that most major colleges and universities in the world attach great importance to the cultivation of students' international literacy, knowledge of world civilization, multicultural knowledge, intercultural vocational training and globalization problems and intercultural competitiveness of talents, which makes the talents cultivated in China, even university students as elite young groups, are at a disadvantage in international market competition. On the other hand, it was found that, in this Asian country, intercultural training first focused on the field of Chinese-speaking expatriates residing abroad and then on the area of international business.

- Regarding the state of intercultural training in the Spanish major at the ULY, the following favorable elements were found:

- It is the first undergraduate college in the southeastern area of Shandong province that offers the Spanish major, with a longer academic period than other universities in the same province.
- Spanish majors are doctors or doctoral students. They all have experience studying or working in Spanish-speaking countries, they have intercultural experiences. The positioning is carried out according to the competencies in the Spanish language,

However:

- Intercultural vocational training is mainly based on Western cross-

cultural theories and approaches, which are not always adapted to the Sino-speaking training context. Deviations are seen in the understanding of the scope of the training, the methods are dispersed and a homogeneous approach to intercultural competencies has not been assumed.

- Only some foreign teachers address intercultural competence in classes, since there is a lack of knowledge about it and there is a lack of preparation among teachers, in a general sense.
- The intercultural training content is scarce. The Spanish manual used does not emphasize cultural elements and the use of real documents, contextualized to form cultural awareness in the target language, is insufficient.
- Due to the lack of understanding and awareness about their own culture, the students' self-confidence regarding the culture of Hispanic people is low. The overall intercultural vocational training period is short, with low intensity, and the actual training effect is not good. Students cannot accurately attribute intercultural conflicts due to lack of intercultural knowledge and sensitivity.

- The theoretical-methodological analysis of the results obtained also allowed:

- Define the process of intercultural professional training in students of the Spanish Major at Linyi University, as: the systematic transformation that is achieved through the appropriation of knowledge, skills and values; based on the integration of language, culture and profession, so that the student develops skills that not only allow him to communicate in another language, but at the same time is able to dialogue and coexist with other cultures.
- Determine the dimensions of the intercultural professional training process in the students of the



Spanish Major at Linyi University , namely: instructive, educational and developmental; for being a formative, systemic and conscious process of a contextualized and developmental nature.

According to Ramos (2021), due to China's opening policy and the intention to train interculturally competent citizens, the CCI has been introduced into the university curriculum, in the Chinese English Syllabus for English Majors (CESEM), here empathy and flexibility towards other foreign cultures and is given similar importance as linguistic skills. This author herself points out that "since 2015, in some Chinese universities the subject of intercultural communication required for the English degree has been included for the first time" Ramos (2021).

## DISCUSSION

In their study on mediation and intercultural communicative competence in teaching Spanish FL/L2, Iglesias and Ramos (2021) have found that:

In the last two decades, linguistics applied to language teaching has approached CI and ICC from different perspectives: as identity construction, as mediation, as a social semiotic activity, as a symbolic dimension, as a commitment to the educational and political perspective, as a translanguaging practice , as a (re)construction of cultural representations, as an instrument to develop civic citizenship and dialogue between cultures, as a means of collaborative participation in interaction to cross real or imaginary borders or as a translation of multilingual and cultural experience . This diversity of approaches implies a notable interdisciplinarity in the field of research, teaching, course design and the creation of materials, which is why it is

It is essential that teacher training includes both content with a solid theoretical foundation and procedures and applications adaptable to plurilingual and pluricultural contexts. (p.19)

This author herself states that, among the most influential CCI models in China, are the so-called traditional ones, which address elements such as harmony, time, the path, as well as that of Gao (2014) which proposes two dimensions, one, knowledge, theory, which includes knowledge, awareness and critical consciousness and the other, know-how, practice, which deals with attitudes, skills and strategies.

As you can see, there is a great influence of Chinese philosophy. For Ramos (2021):

These models are based on Chinese philosophical concepts that reflect the teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism, focusing on the value of harmony to achieve fruitful communication between individuals from different cultures, which would lead them to achieve ICC. Methodologically, however, they focus on the Zhōng dào - the path-, by considering the process of acquiring this competence as cyclical and non-linear. Finally, they highlight the importance of universal values such as honesty, kindness, benevolence or tolerance (...) all of them essential to build bridges between people from different cultures and,

consequently, achieve interculturally competent people.

The most contemporary models are related to the theoretical-cognitive approach and the practical-multidimensional approach.

According to Borghetti (2019), in the theoretical-cognitive approach, theory prevails over practice, which is confirmed in RICH-Ed (2021). Ramos (2021) interprets it as follows:

That is, sociocultural knowledge, similarities and differences between the maternal culture and the target culture are studied, but the affective-attitudinal dimension, which encompasses the development of intercultural awareness, the necessary skills, attitudes and abilities, remains in the background. for the acquisition of the CCI.

Regarding the practical-multidimensional approach, Ramos (2021) mentions the progressive-interactive models and the circular of intercultural communicative competence applied to educational practice. These models contemplate linguistic and cultural knowledge, the need for motivation for self-knowledge and cultural awareness, as well as skills and practice as an essential component, in the form of communicative encounters "to share cultural experiences between exchange students and Chinese speakers . as well as between local students who have studied abroad and those who have not completed stays abroad" (Ramos, 2021).

Chen (2022), in his research to analyze the validity and reliability of a new instrument for evaluating intercultural competence in Chinese-speaking ELE students, proposes a comprehensive model of IQ articulated in two dimensions: the affective dimension (intercultural sensitivity and (pre) communicative disposition) and the

cognitive dimension (intercultural awareness). The components of the cognitive dimension are verbal communication, non-verbal communication and cultural elements. As components of the affective dimension it includes involvement in the interaction, respect for cultural differences, trust, enjoyment and attention during the interaction and, finally, predisposition to interaction.

Regarding the training of ELE teachers in relation to the CCI, Muñoz- Basols et al. (2019) publish the first handbook on methodologies, contexts and resources for teaching L2 Spanish that relates linguistic research and didactic innovation.

However, intercultural professional training in China and in the ULY Spanish program, particularly, is deficient. As several authors recognize, Spanish textbooks do not address intercultural competence and teachers lack intercultural training (Ramos, 2021; Chen, 2022)

Regarding the context of ELE, Ramos (2021) states:

In E/LE classes in China, there are currently no manuals that cover CCI. Furthermore, only some foreign teachers are responsible for introducing this competence. However, not everyone addresses it in the classroom, since in general there are still gaps about how to treat and develop CCI in class by native teachers, either due to lack of knowledge or due to lack of adequate training. For this, well-planned teacher training is essential, both for native teachers and for foreign teachers. The vast majority of E/LE teachers in China are Chinese speakers, so working on CCI in class can be even more complicated than for a native.

However, Chinese Hispanists continue to explore the cultural dimension of foreign language teaching and strive to improve students' intercultural competence. The focus on cultural integration and intercultural training must be the central factor throughout the teaching of Spanish basic education. Therefore, it is recognized that in the process of teaching Spanish at the undergraduate level, intercultural professional training must always take place (Ren et al., 2022).

Although it should be noted that the development of intercultural training must be intentional (Podesta et al., 2022) through spaces and strategies for joint reflection on training and teaching practice (Rodríguez and Onrubia, 2020).

In conclusion, guaranteeing intercultural training from a professional perspective from the university is a necessity in current university education. Within this process, the development of intercultural competencies in Spanish major students plays an important role, due to the multiple opportunities this provides for students to participate in the practice of intercultural communication.

Therefore, in terms of teaching content, the teaching of Spanish courses in universities must avoid ignorance of Chinese culture, and the imbalance between the culture of Spanish-speaking countries and Chinese culture.

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#### Conflict of interests:

The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

#### Authors' contribution:

The authors participated in the design, analysis of the documents and writing of the work.

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