



Review article

Intercultural Communicative Competence in the teaching of foreign languages. A review

La Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. Una revisión

Competência Comunicativa Intercultural no ensino de línguas estrangeiras. Uma revisão

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Received: August 16, 2023

Accepted: February 27, 2024

ABSTRACT

Intercultural Communicative Competence presupposes going beyond the linguistic aspects of the language, as it aims to develop knowledge as a fundamental basis for promoting values and skills to form intercultural speakers. Through this review, the current state of the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence in foreign language teaching in Cuba will be ascertained; what approaches, methodologies or techniques are used for its development; and from the results, assess how to contribute to the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence in students of the Foreign Language Teacher education Program. This review focused on articles in Cuban education journals.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence; teaching; foreign languages.

RESUMEN

La Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural presupone ir más allá de los aspectos lingüísticos de la lengua, pues tiene como objetivo desarrollar el conocimiento como base fundamental para fomentar valores y aptitudes y formar hablantes interculturales. A través de esta revisión se constatará el estado actual del desarrollo de la Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en Cuba, qué enfoques, metodologías o técnicas se usan para su desarrollo y, a partir de los resultados, valorar cómo contribuir al desarrollo de la Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural en estudiantes de Licenciatura en Educación, Lenguas Extranjeras. Esta revisión se enfocó en artículos en revistas cubanas de educación.

Palabras clave: Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural; enseñanza; lenguas extranjeras.

RESUMO

A Competência Comunicativa Intercultural pressupõe ir além dos aspectos linguísticos da língua, pois visa desenvolver o conhecimento como base fundamental para a promoção de valores e competências e para a formação de falantes interculturais. Através desta revisão será verificado o estado atual do desenvolvimento da Competência Comunicativa Intercultural no ensino de línguas estrangeiras em Cuba, quais abordagens, metodologias ou técnicas são utilizadas para o seu desenvolvimento e, com base nos resultados, avaliar como contribuir ao desenvolvimento da Competência Comunicativa Intercultural em estudantes de Bacharelado em Educação, Línguas Estrangeiras. Esta revisão concentrou-se em artigos de revistas educacionais cubanas.

Palavras-chave: Competência Comunicativa Intercultural; ensino; línguas estrangeiras.

INTRODUCTION

In the current global scenario, where cultures are increasingly interconnected thanks to technological advances, it is necessary, from education, to go beyond passive coexistence. It is important to "achieve an evolutionary way of coexistence in multicultural societies, promoting the establishment of mutual knowledge, respect and dialogue between different cultural groups" [UNESCO (2006), p. 18].

To do this, it is necessary to develop special skills, knowledge, motivations and attitudes to communicate efficiently with people who have other customs, beliefs, values, traditions and social norms. The harmonious integration of these components contributes to the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which is considered key to developing and

participating successfully in current life and society.

The above is consistent with one of the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Particularly, Objective 4.7 aims for students to acquire the knowledge necessary to promote sustainable development through education, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and respect for cultural diversity.

To respond to such social demand, the development of intercultural competencies has been incorporated into educational programs, professional training programs, and the teaching of foreign languages, among others. In the teaching of foreign languages, for example, the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is proposed, a development that presupposes going beyond the linguistic aspects of the language itself to promote values, attitudes, motivations, knowledge and skills typical of efficient intercultural communicators. It presupposes, as ICC is understood in the present research, the integration of intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills, intercultural attitudes and intercultural critical awareness, which provides the tools to communicate in foreign languages effectively and appropriately across cultures.

In the current Cuban context, with growing international cooperation, the development of the ICC has become essential. Therefore, the Cuban Educational System has included the development of said competence within the framework of its improvement at the national level. Our schools need to offer solutions for the training of new generations in a complex world that is developing rapidly. The training of foreign language teachers is also being improved, as shown in the Professional Model of Plan E of the Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Language Education.

This work aims to offer a review of research articles on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the teaching of foreign languages in Cuba. Based on the analysis, we seek to provide a synthesis of the key contributions, approaches adopted, and results obtained in the articles studied. Furthermore, it is intended to highlight the trends identified in terms of methodologies used, target audiences, and challenges faced in the development of the CCI, pointing out opportunities for future research in this field.

Search and selection

This review focused on research articles, mainly empirical research, in 15 Cuban education journals indexed in EBSCO, Scielo, REDALYC, REDIB, DOAJ and LATINDEX. The selected articles must address the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the teaching of foreign languages.

The search for articles is based on the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page *et al.*, 2021), to carry out a systematic review. Taking as reference Álvarez-Cruces *et al.* (2021) the systematic review was carried out in three stages: "...search and selection, information extraction and analysis of the articles" (p. 159).

In the first stage, the search, selection and analysis of the data was carried out. The search was then reviewed and coding was performed. In the second stage, searches were carried out in databases of Cuban education magazines. First, keywords are selected based on the UNESCO thesaurus.

The search focuses on three structures and their synonyms: Intercultural Communicative Competence, foreign language teaching, and intercultural/interculturality. The time range for the search is an important factor; research articles published in a range of approximately seven years are selected, between January 2016 and July 2023. The search included articles in English and Spanish.

In the duplicate phase, 10 articles were eliminated, leaving only one version of them. Finally, only articles that had the keywords, already mentioned, in the title and/or summary were chosen; the rest were eliminated.

The search results are reviewed taking into account the established selection criteria. Duplicate articles are eliminated, in languages other than Spanish or English, another geographic area (Cuba), or that address the development of the ICC.

The systematic search in Cuban education magazines yields 170 results, of which 20 are selected to be analyzed.

DEVELOPMENT

Based on the analysis of the articles, a detailed exploration of the key contributions and approaches adopted in each study on Intercultural Communicative Competence in foreign language teaching is offered. Through the analysis, the theoretical foundations, methodologies used, most important terms used and proposals presented in each article are examined. The approach provides a panoramic and detailed vision of the richness and diversity of pedagogical strategies, digital resources, and intercultural dynamics that the authors have explored in the development of the Intercultural Communicative Competence of their students.

The article "Interculturality in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages for medical purposes" (Betancourt *et al.*, 2016) focuses on the integration of interculturality in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages with medical orientation. The proposal focuses on incorporating interculturality, highlighting the relevance of adapting teaching methodologies to the specific needs of medical students. The research presents a qualitative approach, which highlights the importance of understanding students' experiences and perceptions in

intercultural contexts. The proposal, although specific in its scope, contributes to the enrichment of intercultural communication skills in a professional field with particular demands.

The article, which proposes the use of cinema as a pedagogical tool (Sánchez *et al.*, 2018), demonstrates an evolution towards more dynamic and visual strategies to promote Intercultural Communicative Competence. The proposal consists of using cinema as a pedagogical means to improve the Intercultural Communicative Competence of foreign language students. The novel approach suggests an adaptation to the preferences and learning abilities of contemporary students.

The article that addresses cultural diversity in the training of Special Education professionals (Calzadilla-Concepción & Rodríguez-Velázquez, 2018) highlights the importance of integrating cultural diversity in the preparation of professionals, recognizing the need for sensitivity and intercultural competencies in this field. The qualitative methodology used seeks to thoroughly explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants, offering a more complete understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the training of Special Education professionals. The approach contributes to the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive pedagogical strategies.

The article that addresses interculturality as a challenge for the Latin American School of Medicine (Brito Ravelo & Reinoso Cápiro, 2018), highlights the need to address interculturality as an integral part of medical training in this specific context. The research does not clearly specify the methodology used, which could affect replicability and complete understanding of the results. Despite this, the proposal highlights the importance of adapting medical training to cultural diversity, recognizing the significant influence that interculturality can have on the preparation of health professionals.

In relation to the use of the *think aloud technique*, to promote oral expression and develop intercultural competencies (Cedeño *et al.*, 2019), an inclination towards cognitive and participatory strategies is observed. The proposal is to use the *think aloud* technique with an intercultural approach to improve oral expression and intercultural competence of students. This orientation highlights the importance of conscious verbal expression to improve students' intercultural competence, encouraging active reflection on intercultural issues.

The article, which develops a conceptual framework to guide the development of intercultural competence (Caraballo *et al.*, 2019), proposes a parameterization of intercultural competence in English as a foreign language, dividing said competence into three dimensions: cognitive, procedural and axiological. For the authors, intercultural competence is a component of communicative competence. Through the theoretical framework, the authors aim to integrate intercultural competence in the teaching-learning process of English, which constitutes a reference for future research on the topic.

The article, which explores the influence of intercultural communication among university students on the formation of attitudes and values (Mijares Nuñez & Peña Deulofeo, 2020), proposes activities for intercultural exchange between participants. The study is based on the idea that intercultural communication shapes human behavior and helps build their attitudes and beliefs. It is based on an interactionist perspective of culture and on the principles that interpret language as a social practice. It is a qualitative study, based on the experiences between Cuban and American students as part of a bilingual immersion program. With the implementation of this proposal, the participants' way of thinking, acting and feeling about the other culture changed.

The article, which focuses on the need to enhance intercultural competence in the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language in the Cuban context

(Vega Puente & García Cao, 2020, p. 93), is based on the development of intercultural competence in six specific principles. The principles "are aimed at strengthening the link between cultural and linguistic learning in the teaching-learning process of English in accordance with the demands of the development of this competence in the Cuban context" (Vega Puente & García Cao, 2020, p. 93). Systemic-structural methods, analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, abstraction-generalization, and documentary analysis are used at the empirical level. The article proposes fundamental guidelines in the understanding of intercultural training.

The article, on the experiential pedagogical experience of interculturality as a component of medical professional identity in the training of medical students, incorporates experiential experiences of interculturality in medical training. The partial implementation of the methodology for the training of interculturality is also presented here, composed of four procedures and several actions to be carried out by professors and students of the Medicine career (Abad *et al.*, 2020).

The article "Website for assessing intercultural communication in oral presentations of architecture students" focuses on a website designed to evaluate intercultural communication in oral presentations of architecture students. The proposal is to use a website to evaluate intercultural communication in the context of oral presentations. The designed website includes teaching materials, methodological guidelines, evaluation criteria and evaluation rubrics to help Architecture students evaluate their level of intercultural communication in English, through oral presentations in multicultural contexts (Sánchez Carrera & Pérez Morales, 2020).

A similar proposal is the website to address the sociocultural component in the teaching of the English language (Alonso Águila *et al.*, 2021), which reflects the growing influence of technology and digital resources in intercultural education. The

proposal consists of the creation of a website aimed at addressing the sociocultural component in the teaching of the English language. The change suggests a response to the digitalization of society and highlights the need to integrate technological tools in the teaching of foreign languages.

The article, which addresses intercultural communication in international collaboration (Pérez Morales *et al.*, 2021), highlights the importance of intercultural communication in contexts of international collaboration. The approach reflects an evolution towards a globalized perspective of intercultural competence, recognizing the relevance of these skills in international and multicultural environments. In this research, four profiles or courses are obtained aimed at satisfying the needs of master's and doctoral students involved in research stays in Belgium.

The article "Intercultural communication: a challenge for university teachers of multicultural groups" deals with intercultural communication as a challenge for university teachers who work with multicultural groups. This research focuses on carrying out a synthesis of Cuban studies on the topic, proposing a definition of this type of communication and assessing the role of the teacher as an intercultural communicator in multicultural university contexts (Lazo & Peón, 2022).

"Africa in America, for the teaching of English at the University" (Acosta Padrón *et al.*, 2022), is an article that focuses on the integration of topics related to Africa for the teaching of English at the University. The proposal is to include African culture in America in the teaching of English. The contribution of texts and digital tasks, aimed at the linguistic and pragmatic, is valuable, which demonstrate the relationship between language and culture and offer opportunities for the development of intercultural communication.

For its part, "Intercultural training in the Bachelor's Degree in Spanish Language for Non-Spanish Speakers. Study Plan E"

(Vázquez & Cabrera, 2022) refers to the need to promote intercultural training in the teaching of Spanish as a second language. It focuses on cultural diversity and how it can be a valuable resource in the classroom. The study uses a variety of methods, including documentary analysis, to examine how intercultural training can be integrated into the curriculum. The proposal is to integrate intercultural training into the curriculum to improve the teaching of Spanish as a second language. He suggests that this can help students develop a greater understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

The article "Interculturality in the framework of contemporary educational trends. Its pedagogical value" explores interculturality in the context of contemporary educational trends. It focuses on how cultural diversity can be a valuable resource in the classroom and how it can be used to improve teaching. No specific details are provided on the methodology used. The proposal is to explore the pedagogical value of interculturality within the framework of contemporary educational trends. It suggests that interculturality can be a valuable resource to improve teaching and learning (Dueñas & Albert, 2022).

In contrast, work that addresses intercultural competence in the training of translators (Rodríguez Abelarde *et al.*, 2023) points out the need to explore the relevance of intercultural-interlinguistic competence, underlining a specific emphasis on linguistic skills. The proposal is to explore the relevance of intercultural-interlinguistic competence in the training of translators. This perspective indicates a continuity in the importance of linguistic foundations, although now integrated with a more acute awareness of interculturality.

Throughout the analysis of the articles under review, the notable evolution in the understanding and approach to Intercultural Communicative Competence in the teaching of foreign languages is highlighted. From their study it is obtained that they offer diverse perspectives and valuable proposals for the development of

Intercultural Communicative Competence. Among the results are: strategies, websites, methodologies, courses and study guides, which in one way or another contribute to the development of the CCI. Some articles propose innovative pedagogical strategies, such as the use of cinema or the *think aloud technique*, to improve Intercultural Communicative Competence (Sánchez *et al.* (2018), Cedeño *et al.* (2019)). Others approach this type of competence from a more conceptual perspective, exploring its pedagogical value in the context of contemporary educational trends (Vega Puente and García Cao, 2020). Several articles focus on specific contexts, such as: medical training, special education, and English teaching [Abad *et al.* (2020), Brito Ravelo & Reinoso Cápiro (2018), Lazo and Peón (2022)]. Others propose including specific cultural content, such as African themes, in English teaching, thus enriching students' cultural perspective (Acosta Padrón *et al.*, 2022).

The diversity of specific contexts, such as medical training (Abad *et al.*, 2020), teaching English for architects (Sánchez Carrera & Pérez Morales, 2020), or special education (Calzadilla-Concepción & Rodríguez-Velázquez, 2018), reflect the expansion of Intercultural Communicative Competence to diverse disciplinary areas. These studies reveal the adaptability and applicability of intercultural strategies in different educational contexts, highlighting the universality of intercultural competence as an essential component of education.

Most articles are aimed at foreign language teaching professionals, including architecture students, doctors, university teachers, and EFL students. Some proposals focus on the formation of attitudes and values, highlighting the importance of intercultural communication in the comprehensive development of students. Some works have direct implications in the training of foreign language teachers, especially those that address challenges in intercultural communication in specific educational contexts ((Vázquez & Cabrera, 2022).

The result is that, among the research articles reviewed, no reference is made to the term Intercultural Communicative Competence explicitly; However, among the most recurrent terms in the research reviewed are intercultural competence (Sánchez *et al.*, 2018; Alonso Águila *et al.*, 2021; Cedeño *et al.*, 2019; Pérez Morales *et al.*, 2021; Rodríguez Abelarde *et al.*, 2023; Vega Puente and García Cao, 2020; Caraballo *et al.*, 2019); interculturality or the intercultural formation process (Calzadilla-Concepción and Rodríguez-Velázquez, 2018; Abad *et al.*, 2020; Vázquez and Cabrera, 2022; Dueñas and Albert, 2022; Betancourt *et al.*, 2016); intercultural communication (Brito Ravelo and Reinoso Cápiro, 2018; Sánchez Carrera and Pérez Morales, 2020; Mijares Nuñez and Peña Deulofeo, 2020; Lazo and Peón, 2022); and intercultural education (Acosta Padrón *et al.*, 2022).

In the field of bibliographical references, the recurrent presence of authors such as Byram (1997), Zarate (1995), Liddicoat (2007), Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) and the Council of Europe (2001) suggests that these theorists have influenced the conceptual construction of Intercultural Communicative Competence. However, the lack of absolute consensus on a single model to follow highlights the richness and diversity of theoretical approaches used by researchers.

Regarding research methods, the predominance of qualitative approaches in several studies (Sánchez *et al.*, 2018; Abad *et al.*, 2020; Cedeño *et al.*, 2019; Sánchez Carrera & Pérez Morales, 2020; Herrera Arencibia *et al.*, 2021; Mijares Nuñez & Peña Deulofeo, 2020; Vázquez & Cabrera, 2022; Acosta Padrón *et al.*, 2022; Dueñas & Albert, 2022; Betancourt *et al.*, 2016) reflects the preference for exploring experiences and perceptions in depth. Although some incorporate quantitative or mixed methods, the qualitative trend highlights the importance of a deep understanding of intercultural phenomena.

The combination of data collection methods, such as: observation, survey, document analysis, interview and the

judgment of specialists or experts, denotes the complexity of addressing Intercultural Communicative Competence from multiple perspectives. However, the lack of specific details on the implementation and evaluation of these strategies in some articles reveals an opportunity for improvement in the presentation of results and methods, seeking greater clarity and replicability.

An identified challenge is the lack of methodological details, the absence of information on how the proposed strategies were implemented and evaluated. Although some articles address specific challenges for teachers, there is an opportunity to delve deeper into the impact of these strategies in the training of foreign language teachers. The approach could contribute to a more effective and sustainable implementation in initial foreign language teacher training.

The analysis highlights the relevance of Intercultural Communicative Competence in various educational contexts and disciplines. The incorporation of specific topics, such as: interculturality in the teaching of English for medical purposes (Betancourt *et al.*, 2016), or the inclusion of African cultural content in the teaching of English (Acosta Padrón *et al.*, 2022), enriches the cultural perspectives of the students, thus contributing to a more comprehensive training.

CONCLUSIONS

The articles analyzed offer valuable perspectives for the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the teaching of foreign languages. Innovative pedagogical strategies, digital resources and approaches focused on intercultural communication are highlighted.

Most of the proposals are aimed at foreign language teaching professionals, covering various contexts such as medical training, special education, and English teaching.

Some proposals, especially those that address challenges in intercultural communication in specific educational contexts, have direct implications for the training of foreign language teachers.

Although Intercultural Communicative Competence is not explicitly mentioned in the articles, other terms such as intercultural competence, interculturality and intercultural communication are recurrent. The authors rely on diverse bibliographical references, highlighting the lack of consensus in choosing the same model to follow.

The use of qualitative methods predominates in most studies, although some opt for quantitative or mixed methods. The combination of data collection techniques such as: observation, surveys, document analysis, interviews, and specialist criteria is common. However, the lack of methodological details is identified as a challenge, which makes the replicability and evaluation of the proposed strategies difficult.

The need to address specific challenges for teachers and delve into the impact of the proposed strategies in the training of foreign language teachers is highlighted. The lack of detailed information on the implementation and evaluation of the proposals presents an opportunity to improve the replicability and evaluation of the effectiveness of these strategies.

This review will serve as a basis for subsequent empirical studies aimed at the development of ICC in the training of foreign language teachers.

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Conflict of interests:

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contribution:

The author participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.

Cite as

Lucena Jiménez, I., Salvador Jiménez, BG (2024) Intercultural Communicative Competence in the teaching of foreign languages. A review. *Mendive. Journal of Education* , 22 (2), e3621.
<https://mendive.upr.edu.cu/index.php/MendiveUPR/article/view/3621>



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