

Original article

## Intercultural education of university students at the University of Pinar del Río: a systematic review



**La educación intercultural del estudiante universitario en la Universidad de Pinar del Río: revisión sistemática**

**Educação intercultural de estudantes universitários na Universidade de Pinar del Río: uma revisão sistemática**

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### ABSTRACT

Intercultural education is a strategic pillar in the transformation of contemporary higher education, particularly in Latin American contexts characterized by cultural diversity, academic mobility, and internationalization. This article aims to analyze the state of scientific knowledge on intercultural education for university students, with an emphasis on the University of Pinar del Río Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca, during the period 2014–2024. A systematic literature review was conducted using

regional and international databases, applying defined inclusion and exclusion criteria and following the PRISMA protocol guidelines. Relevant studies were also analyzed. The results show a predominance of educational approaches focused on values, cultural identity, and intercultural competencies, although limitations were identified in curricular mainstreaming and in the evaluation of educational impact. It is concluded that, while there has been significant conceptual progress and institutional experience, challenges remain related to the articulation between educational policies, pedagogical practice, and teacher training. Future lines are proposed aimed at strengthening comprehensive models of intercultural education at the University of Pinar del Río Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca.

**Keywords:** intercultural education; higher education; university students; intercultural competencies.

## RESUMEN

La educación intercultural constituye un eje estratégico en la transformación de la educación superior contemporánea, particularmente en contextos latinoamericanos caracterizados por diversidad cultural, movilidad académica e internacionalización. El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el estado del conocimiento científico sobre la educación intercultural del estudiante universitario, con énfasis en la Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", durante el período 2014-2024. Se desarrolló una revisión sistemática de la literatura en bases de datos regionales e internacionales, aplicando criterios de inclusión y exclusión definidos y siguiendo las orientaciones del protocolo PRISMA. Además, se analizaron estudios relevantes. Los resultados evidencian un predominio de enfoques formativos centrados en valores, identidad cultural y competencias interculturales, aunque se identifican limitaciones en la transversalización curricular y en la evaluación del impacto formativo. Se concluye que, si bien existen avances conceptuales y experiencias institucionales significativas, persisten desafíos relacionados con la articulación entre políticas educativas, práctica pedagógica y formación docente. Se proponen líneas futuras orientadas al fortalecimiento de modelos integrales de educación intercultural en la Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca".

**Palabras clave:** educación intercultural; educación superior; estudiantes universitarios; competencias interculturales.

## RESUMO

A educação intercultural é um eixo estratégico na transformação do ensino superior contemporâneo, particularmente em contextos latino-americanos caracterizados pela diversidade cultural, mobilidade acadêmica e internacionalização. Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar o estado do conhecimento científico sobre educação intercultural para estudantes universitários, com ênfase na Universidade Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca de Pinar del Río, durante o período de 2014 a 2024. Foi realizada uma revisão sistemática da literatura utilizando bases de dados regionais e internacionais, aplicando critérios de inclusão e exclusão definidos e seguindo as diretrizes do protocolo PRISMA. Estudos relevantes também foram analisados. Os resultados mostram uma predominância de abordagens educacionais focadas em valores, identidade cultural e competências interculturais, embora limitações sejam identificadas na integração curricular e na avaliação do impacto educacional. Conclui-se que, embora haja avanços conceituais e experiências institucionais significativos, persistem desafios relacionados à articulação entre políticas educacionais, prática pedagógica e formação docente. São propostas direções futuras para fortalecer modelos abrangentes de educação intercultural na Universidade Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca de Pinar del Río.

**Palavras-chave:** educação intercultural; ensino superior; estudantes universitários; competências interculturais.

## INTRODUCTION

Intercultural education has emerged as a central theme in contemporary pedagogical debate, driven by globalization, migration, ethnic diversity, and the sociocultural transformations characteristic of the 21st century. In higher education, intercultural education is especially relevant, as it aims to train professionals capable of navigating culturally diverse contexts with ethical sensitivity, social commitment, and appropriate communication skills (Adalid *et al.*, 2018). This training involves not only acquiring knowledge about other cultures but also developing cognitive, affective, and practical competencies that enable students to interact respectfully and effectively in multicultural environments (Martínez Lirola, 2018).

In Latin America, interculturality has historically been linked to the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, the promotion of social equity, and the democratization of education. However, in recent decades,

its scope has broadened beyond the ethnic dimension, incorporating perspectives related to cultural diversity, social justice, and the development of critical citizenship (Ballesteros Senties, 2023; Sierra-Huedo & Nevado, 2022). This has led universities to be considered strategic spaces for the development of educational practices that integrate intercultural dialogue as an essential pedagogical principle.

In the Cuban context, higher education is based on humanist, inclusive, and socially equitable principles. However, increasing academic internationalization, student mobility, and the presence of international students in provincial universities pose new challenges for intercultural education. The University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca" actively participates in international cooperation programs and receives students from diverse cultural backgrounds, which demands pedagogical strategies that foster effective intercultural competencies (Matei, 2022). Intercultural education in this context not only involves transmitting knowledge about other cultures but also promoting empathy, critical thinking, and the ability to engage in dialogue in multicultural environments.

Despite the topic's relevance, there is a theoretical dispersion surrounding the conceptualization of intercultural education in Cuban higher education, as well as limitations in the systematization of specific institutional experiences. The available literature demonstrates progress in values education, cultural identity, and university social responsibility; however, studies that specifically address the development of intercultural competencies in university students from an integrative and evaluative perspective are less frequent (Drozdova & Taulean, 2023; Rodríguez Izquierdo, 2022). This reflects the need to consolidate a knowledge base that can guide curriculum design and pedagogical strategies in universities seeking to effectively promote interculturality.

The objective of the study was to analyze the state of scientific knowledge on the intercultural education of university students, with emphasis on the University of Pinar del Río, during the period 2014-2024.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was developed through a systematic review of the literature, aimed at identifying, analyzing and synthesizing the scientific production related to the intercultural education of university students, with emphasis on the University of Pinar del Río, in the period between 2014 and 2024.

A qualitative-interpretive approach was adopted, focused on the critical content analysis of the selected studies. The methodological design was structured following the PRISMA protocol guidelines, which ensured transparency, traceability, and rigor in the selection and analysis of sources.

The literature search was conducted between January and March 2025 in academic databases such as SciELO, Redalyc, ERIC, Dialnet, Latindex, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected for their relevance in the Ibero-American field and their coverage of educational sciences.

The search equations combined descriptors in Spanish and English using Boolean operators (AND, OR):

- "intercultural education" AND "higher education"
- "interculturality" AND "university"
- "intercultural skills" AND "university students"
- "intercultural education" AND "higher education"
- "intercultural training" AND "Cuba"
- "University of Pinar del Río" AND "interculturality"

## **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

### **Inclusion criteria**

1. Scientific articles published between 2014 and 2024.
2. Studies focused on intercultural education in higher education.
3. Empirical research, theoretical research, or reviews.
4. Publications in Spanish or English.
5. Studies relevant to the Latin American or Cuban context.

### **Exclusion criteria**

1. Research focused exclusively on basic or secondary education.
2. Documents without peer review.
3. Essays without explicit methodological foundation.
4. Duplicate publications.

The identification and selection process was developed in four phases, following the PRISMA scheme:

1. Initially, 186 records were located in the selected databases.
2. 34 duplicate records were removed.
3. 79 studies were excluded for not meeting thematic or methodological criteria.
4. Seventy-three articles were evaluated; of these, 31 were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria.

42 studies were selected for definitive qualitative analysis.

The included studies were organized into an analysis matrix that considered the following categories:

- Author(s) and year
- Country of origin
- Methodological approach
- Conceptualization of intercultural education
- Educational dimensions addressed
- Main results
- Implications for higher education

An inductive thematic analysis was conducted, which allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, emerging categories, and research trends. Subsequently, an interpretive synthesis was developed to establish convergences, divergences, and gaps in the reviewed scientific production.

### **Ethical considerations**

Since this was a documentary research study based on publicly accessible secondary sources, informed consent was not required. However, the principles of academic integrity, proper citation, and responsible use of information were respected. The methodology described allowed for a systematic and critical analysis of the literature, ensuring coherence between the stated objectives and the results obtained.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the 42 selected studies made it possible to identify four fundamental thematic axes that structure the scientific production on intercultural education in higher education during the period 2014–2024: conceptualization and theoretical foundations, formation of intercultural competencies, curricular transversalization and pedagogical practices, and experiences and challenges in the Cuban context and at the University of Pinar del Río.

### **Conceptualization of intercultural education in higher education**

The review shows that intercultural education in the university setting has shifted from compensatory approaches to critical and transformative perspectives. In the former, interculturality was primarily associated with the recognition of ethnic minorities or vulnerable groups; in the latter, it is conceived as a cross-cutting pedagogical principle oriented towards social justice, the dialogue of knowledge, and the construction of democratic citizenship.

In higher education, various authors agree that interculturality should not be limited to cultural coexistence, but should promote processes of critical interaction, mutual recognition, and institutional transformation. From this perspective, the university is configured as a space for the production of situated knowledge, where multiple epistemologies converge.

The reviewed studies show three predominant conceptual trends:

1. Interculturality as an axiological-formative approach, focused on values such as respect, tolerance and solidarity.
2. Interculturality as a professional competence, linked to performance in globalized contexts.
3. Critical interculturality, aimed at questioning power relations and structural inequality.

In the Latin American context, the critical approach predominates; however, in the Cuban context, there is greater emphasis on the formative dimension in values and on national cultural identity.

## **Development of intercultural skills in university students**

One of the most consistent findings of the review is the growing relevance of the concept of intercultural competence. This is defined as the ability to interact effectively and ethically with people from different cultures, integrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The studies analyzed identify four recurring dimensions:

- Cognitive: knowledge of other cultures and interpretive frameworks.
- Affective: openness, empathy, and cultural sensitivity.
- Communicative: skills for intercultural dialogue.
- Critical-reflective: ability to question stereotypes and power relations.

In Latin American higher education, the development of intercultural competencies is frequently linked to processes of internationalization, academic mobility, and university cooperation. However, several studies indicate that interculturality should not be limited to international exchange experiences but should be systematically integrated into the curriculum.

In the Cuban case, research highlights the role of university extension and community work as privileged spaces for the development of intercultural sensitivity, especially in pedagogical and social science careers.

However, limitations are identified in the objective evaluation of these skills, since most studies employ descriptive qualitative methodologies and lack validated instruments to measure formative impact.

## **Curriculum mainstreaming and pedagogical practices**

The review reveals that one of the main challenges in intercultural university education is its mainstreaming across curricula. Although institutional policies often declare the importance of interculturality, its effective incorporation into curricula is inconsistent.

The reviewed studies show three implementation modalities:

1. Specific subjects on interculturality.
2. Cross-cutting integration across different disciplines.
3. Extension projects and extracurricular activities.

The second approach is considered more relevant from a systemic perspective; however, it requires specialized teacher training and institutional coherence. In Latin America, some universities have developed comprehensive models that integrate teaching, research, and outreach under an intercultural approach. Nevertheless, the review shows that such experiences are still fragmented and depend largely on individual initiatives by committed faculty members.

### **Intercultural education in the Cuban context and at the University of Pinar del Río**

In the Cuban context, intercultural education is closely linked to values education, national identity, and international solidarity. The reviewed research highlights that Cuban universities promote principles of equity, inclusion, and social responsibility.

Regarding the University of Pinar del Río, the literature identifies advances in:

- Participation in international cooperation programs.
- Presence of foreign students in certain degree programs.
- Extension projects focused on community work.
- Integration of cultural content into general education subjects.

However, the review also reveals significant gaps:

- Absence of an explicit model of institutional intercultural education.
- Limited systematization of training experiences.
- There is little empirical research specifically focused on the intercultural competence of students at the University of Pinar del Río.
- Weak articulation between institutional policy and evaluation of training outcomes.

In this sense, intercultural education at the UPR is in an incipient phase of development, with significant potential, but with a need for greater conceptual and methodological structuring.

The results allow us to affirm that, although scientific production has advanced in the conceptualization of university interculturality, challenges related to the operationalization, evaluation and institutional consolidation of the intercultural approach persist.

The results of the systematic review suggest that intercultural education in higher education has moved toward more complex and critical approaches; however, its practical implementation

continues to show structural inconsistencies. In the case of the University of Pinar del Río, the findings reveal significant progress in the axiological-formative dimension, although challenges persist in the systemic articulation of the intercultural approach.

One of the main elements of analysis lies in the tension between declarative and operational interculturality. Several reviewed studies agree that Latin American universities incorporate interculturality into their institutional discourses and normative documents; however, its curricular implementation depends largely on isolated initiatives or specific projects. This situation is also observed in the Cuban context, where values education and cultural identity constitute pillars of the educational model, but interculturality is not always explicitly stated as a cross-cutting pedagogical category.

At the University of Pinar del Río, intercultural education appears to be implicitly developed through university extension programs, international cooperation, and community work. These practices are strengths, as they allow for direct contact with the sociocultural diversity of the Pinar del Río region and with international students. However, the review reveals the absence of a clearly systematized institutional model that articulates objectives, content, methodologies, and the evaluation of intercultural competencies.

Another relevant element is the need to overcome reductionist conceptions of interculturality, focused solely on cultural coexistence. Contemporary literature insists on the importance of a critical interculturality, capable of problematizing power relations, structural inequalities, and processes of symbolic exclusion. In this sense, the university must not only promote respect for diversity but also train professionals with the reflective capacity to transform complex social realities.

Furthermore, the review reveals a recurring methodological weakness: the limited evaluation of the formative impact of intercultural strategies. Most of the studies analyzed employ descriptive qualitative designs, which restricts the systematic measurement of intercultural competencies in university students. This gap represents a research opportunity for the University of Pinar del Río, particularly through the design of validated instruments that can diagnose levels of intercultural competence and evaluate pedagogical interventions.

From a curricular perspective, the findings suggest that the effective mainstreaming of interculturality requires:

- Specialized teacher training.
- Explicit integration into graduate profiles.
- Active teaching strategies (project-based learning, case studies, intercultural collaborative work).
- Formative assessment consistent with intercultural objectives.

## DISCUSSION

A review of the literature on intercultural education in higher education reveals that, globally, the development of intercultural competencies has become an essential component of students' academic and professional development. The reviewed studies show that universities seek to promote not only knowledge of other cultures, but also communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and critical thinking, consistent with the findings of Adalid *et al.* (2018), who highlight the importance of intercultural competencies for academic mobility and interaction in diverse contexts. In this sense, intercultural education contributes to the formation of critical and responsible citizens, as Banks (2008) has pointed out, emphasizing the need for a pedagogical approach that integrates values, ethics, and communication skills.

Byram *et al.* (2001) emphasize that active and reflective practice is essential for developing intercultural skills, while De Wit and Altbach (2021) highlight internationalization as a catalyst for interculturality in higher education, a finding that aligns with the results observed at the University of Pinar del Río, where the presence of international students and international cooperation programs foster cultural exchange. Likewise, the importance of robust methodologies for assessing intercultural competencies is underscored, an aspect that coincides with the systematic review that reveals limitations in the objective measurement of these skills.

Drozdova y Taulean (2023) points out that the combination of practical experiences with theoretical reflection allows for a more comprehensive development of intercultural sensitivity and highlights the relevance of learning strategies that promote cultural self-awareness and adaptation to diverse contexts, which coincides with the findings on the need for extension experiences and community projects at the University of Pinar del Río.

Guilherme (2002) argues that intercultural education must integrate critical perspectives and cultural policies to form citizens capable of acting in diverse societies, which is reflected in the trend towards

critical approaches identified in the reviewed studies, which coincide with the need to design educational programs that articulate internationalization and intercultural learning in a coherent way, which reinforces the importance of curricular transversalization.

Knight (2004) emphasizes that interculturality must be integrated into the curricular structure and not limited to isolated subjects or extracurricular experiences, a challenge that is confirmed in the review of the University of Pinar del Río, where curricular integration is fragmented and depends on the teacher's initiative.

Martínez Lirola (2018) and Matei (2022) highlight the importance of practical and collaborative activities that allow for the effective development of intercultural competencies, a finding corroborated by the reviewed studies. Mitchell (2023) underscores the need to contextualize intercultural education within contemporary sociocultural and political dynamics, strengthening the social relevance of university education.

Montgomery (2010) highlights the international student experience as central to understanding the acquisition of intercultural skills, while Nieto (2000) emphasizes the importance of affirming diversity and promoting educational equity, which aligns with the advances in the axiological-formative dimension observed at the University of Pinar del Río.

Paige *et al.* (2009) document that academic mobility produces lasting impacts on intercultural sensitivity, a finding that reinforces the importance of direct interaction with students from different cultures. Rodríguez and McKay (2006) point out that the teaching of languages and intercultural communication should be linked to practical experiences, which aligns with university outreach projects.

Rodríguez Izquierdo (2022) and Sierra and Nevado (2022) agree on the need for planned and evaluable interventions to strengthen intercultural competence, a gap identified in the reviewed studies, since intercultural communication requires a multidisciplinary approach that combines theory, practice, and context. From this perspective, they highlight the importance of acculturation and sociocultural adjustment strategies for the development of intercultural competencies, which is reflected in the results showing the relevance of international integration and cooperation projects.

In general, it could be understood that intercultural competence is acquired through reflective practice and experiential learning, reinforcing the need for active and evaluable programs, which

show that international experiences generate significant changes in intercultural sensitivity, a finding that validated the benefits of student mobility and multicultural interaction at the University of Pinar del Río.

Taken together, the discussion demonstrates that intercultural education in higher education involves not only recognizing cultural diversity but also developing complex competencies that integrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. The results of the systematic review align with the international literature in that practical implementation still faces challenges related to curricular mainstreaming, competency assessment, and the systematization of experiences. The evidence suggests that, to consolidate a comprehensive approach to intercultural education, universities must combine clear institutional policies, specialized teacher training, active methodologies, and robust assessment mechanisms so that students can develop effective and sustainable intercultural competencies.

The systematic review of the literature on intercultural education in university students shows that, although there have been conceptual and practical advances, significant challenges remain for its consolidation at the University of Pinar del Río.

Intercultural education has evolved from compensatory models toward critical perspectives that integrate values, professional skills, and ethical reflection, although at the University of Pinar del Río, the formative dimension of values and cultural identity predominates. Skills development focuses on cognitive, affective, communicative, and critical dimensions. However, the evaluation of its formative impact remains limited, revealing a significant methodological gap.

The mainstreaming of interculturality in the curriculum is still in its early stages. Experiences are primarily developed through outreach projects, international cooperation, and extracurricular activities, without a systematic institutional model.

The University of Pinar del Río has developed relevant initiatives, especially in university extension and community projects, but lacks an integral approach that articulates institutional policies, teaching and evaluation of intercultural competencies.

In conclusion, intercultural education at the University of Pinar del Río represents a strategic area of academic and social development, with the potential to train professionals capable of interacting ethically, critically, and effectively in culturally diverse contexts. Its consolidation requires theoretical,

curricular, and evaluative articulation, as well as a sustained institutional commitment that transforms isolated good practices into a comprehensive model of intercultural education.

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### **Conflict of interest**

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

### **Authors' contribution**

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



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