

## The Implementation of the Intercultural Education in Foreign Language Classrooms

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### Abstract

*Cultural diversity, despite being a reality in society throughout history, increased considerably last century. Educational research focuses on giving a response to the negative attitudes that emerged due to this increase. After many years of investigation, researchers concluded that the Intercultural Approach was the only method to manage cultural integration. Taking this into account, the article proposes different methodologies that help to promote Intercultural Education within the Foreign Language classes. In the same way, after the analysis, two activities are proposed based on these methodologies that seek to promote attitudes of tolerance, equality and solidarity among students. The objective of the article is to prove that educating in values should be the first objective of education and to offer methodological resources to guide students' learning. Thanks to this, students will be citizens capable of interacting and respecting the cultural diversity present in societies.*

**Keywords:** intercultural education, cultural diversity, educational reform, didactic proposal, diversity management.

### 1. Introduction

The cultural diversity present today in societies is not a current issue, that is, it has been a constant in Humanity for centuries (Dassetto, 2006). In the past, many travelers wrote chronicles of their trips where they expressed their impressions about cultures, languages, traditions or religions that were different from their own, and also they tried to explain how other people lived (Salaverry, 2010). Therefore, the History of Humanity is a story of encounters, mixes and interactions between different groups: cultures, traditions, religions and even languages that have interacted for thousands of years until today. Throughout history, travelling has not only been the result of the desire to know or explore, but as explained by Arnesen et al. (2008:12) many of these trips have been for other reasons: "People have travelled and crossed national borders throughout history for a variety of reasons: either by force, necessity or will because of natural disasters, poverty, desire for a better life, new future, desire for adventure, colonialism and refuge from wars".

Therefore it is proven that the cultural diversity that worries both researchers focused in education and in society is not a new fact but the entire contrary, it has been a constant throughout the centuries. As Arnesen et al. (2008:13) explained: "Some countries have a long history of multiculturalism as a multitude of cultures and religions have coexisted for centuries, with period characterized by peaceful relations and others by antagonism and conflicts, even civil wars. Some countries, although comprising a number of minority populations, have in the wake of nation building, been based on a mono-cultural and mono-lingual orientation based on a notion of a homogeneous population often influenced by a dominant elite".

As mentioned, the reasons for which cultural diversity has been influenced are many, among which it is important to highlight the empires in the Ancient times, colonialism, the Industrial Revolution, the numerous wars or the present globalization. As the previous quote explains, all these aspects mentioned are linked to the need of having power and this is the reason why many cultures have been forced to accept the dominant culture as their own with the only aim of surviving. Bearing in mind that History has always been marked by this fact, and therefore it should not be treated as an isolated problem of our time, it is remarkable that since the last century there has been a big increase in convergence between different cultures (Salaverry,2010). The increase came in the mid-twentieth century thanks to the process known as globalization, a process of opening to the outside due to the development of transports and communications.

As a consequence of this global opening, the labor market was more liberal and, as a result of this, there has been a very large increase in migratory movements (Beas, 2010). These movements are not isolated movements that happen in only one part of the world, but as can be seen in the graph attached at the end of the article, immigration is part of a global reality that has increased and that continues to do so. As shown in the United Nations (2007) chart, current societies, therefore, are much more plural societies. The image shows how people change their place of residence within the same continent or even changing the continent, which means that they not only face leaving behind their lives but they also have to confront a society that is probably different in terms of culture or traditions. According to Castro Solano (2012), due to these migration flows, many people face the harsh reality of understanding another culture, or the learning of another language in order to communicate themselves.

This current world presents a complex outlook, with many interactions and daily transformations. Societies, in this context, should be fair and free societies where the interaction between cultures is based on the principle of tolerance and solidarity. But nothing is further from reality (Palomero, 2006). Although globalization could be understood, and it is by a part of society, as an opportunity to learn how to live with people from different cultures or traditions; there is another part of the population that sees globalization as a threat to the system that has been perpetuating the hegemony of certain cultures throughout years (Díe, Melero and Buades, 2012). The world that is drawn in the attached graph has become a serious problem, as explained by Rehaag (2010), globalization has been a great homogenizing model in all societies since most of them are based on the same economic system and it has perpetuated this system and its inequalities. The same statement is supported by Gómez Lara (2012) who explains that not only inequalities are perpetuated but increased year after year, power relations are already established and those with power are those who manage the current situation at their will. Therefore and going back to the quote by Arnesen et al. (2008), the homogenization that has been presented throughout history also continues to be a reality today, and this is the problem that must be solved by means of research.

Cultural homogenization has not done anything else than strengthen feelings close to racism or intolerance. Moreover, according to Díez (2010), education today is aimed at perpetuating this system of competition and power, the educational system do not manage inequalities, and do not promote educational equity because it is not profitable for the private company. Therefore, it is important to implement educational reforms that strive to end these negative thoughts about cultural diversity (Tuts, 2007).

With this, it is important to understand the educational reform under the premise of educational universalization, being it understood not as a reform that not only does not perpetuate the established but that struggles to be a guarantee for the future (Batallán and Campanini, 2008). This project of a global educational reform will be based on a complete change at the educational system, not only focused on school but focused on generating a socio-educational change as a response to the current situation (CeiMigra, 2012). The last goal of this education will be to abandon homogenization and to put into practice methodologies and approaches that work on dialogue between different social groups and that explain the positive aspects of heterogeneity (Palomero, 2006).

## ***2. Methodologies to promote Intercultural Education in Second Language Acquisition***

Taking into account everything mentioned in the introduction, it is not surprising that there is an emphasis on the need to rethink education at all levels, and always bearing in mind that the main objective is to educate in values such as tolerance, respect, justice and equity. As explained by Díe, Melero and Buades (2012:45):

“Education would be called to train for the ethical debate in which the basic consensus of society is forged. This training would include the tools to dialogue with different thought traditions for the search of the common good. [...] it is even more worthwhile for education to teach the art of listening, critical reflection and dialogue in the shared search for truth and the common good.” Education for them should train students for ethical debate, that is, they explain that it is important that students can respect and can dialogue with other cultures seeking the good for society and not for themselves. Education, therefore, more than an education based on knowledge and subjects, will be an education based on reflection and dialogue, an education based on the promotion of values.

After many investigations and failed models in the search of putting into practice this education based on values, in the last years it has been concluded that the Intercultural Education is a method that can provide an answer to the management of diversity. That is why the methodologies presented below are active methodologies that promote the intercultural model. The objective is that students do not only learn a subject but that they develop positive attitudes towards diversity, and even more, they can value, respect and dialogue with different people.

In order to present methodologies that can offer understanding among the diverse cultures in today's society, it is necessary to review what has happened in a general way in the last decades in the foreign language classrooms. In the past, the teaching of a language considered culture as secondary. In the schools, the activities proposed were activities that did not promote an approach to culture (Álvarez González, 2010). Learning the culture of the new language was highly difficult due to the little emphasis teachers gave to that and it was almost impossible to learn about other cultures through the second language. According to García-Vinó and Massó Porcar (2006) the total mastery of language learning was possessed by grammar until the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when the Communicative Competence was introduced.

The demographic changes that took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century gave rise to the greater attention to culture and communication between cultures. The diffusion of cultures was much more important than in the past, so Padilla (2013) explained that this had to be addressed within the classrooms, offering students the appropriate strategies to be able to communicate with other cultures and engage personal relationships. Therefore, it is important to put into practice active methodologies where the student is the main protagonist of the learning process and where they can fully develop their intellectual abilities but also can interact with their classmates and with the teacher. The main objective according to Padilla (2013:390) is that "the student acquires efficacy in any communicative context and can understand other cultural values".

The methodologies that will be presented follow the model of extolling the diversity presented by Shuali (2012), who explains that this approach is based not only on the knowledge of diversity but on the appreciation of it, on the understanding and positive evaluation. And after the brief chronological review of the language teaching carried out, it is only necessary to propose methodologies based on oral competence, as this will help students to dialogue and share their opinions and experiences with the rest.

The first methodology proposed is the communicative approach, which according to Beghadid (2013), establishes communicative and learning strategies with the objective of motivating students and creating classrooms where the communication between students and teacher is as fluid as possible. The proposed activities will be activities that focus on the students, for example, role-plays, theatres, or debate projects. The activities will be adapted taking into account the level of the students and allowing them to exchange ideas and to create an atmosphere of respect inside and outside the school. As the authors Lamy and Hampel (2007:19) explain, this method is of great importance for the teaching of a language in relation to interculturality since students: "[...] think of language as contextualized and see language learning as an interpersonal process situated in a social and cultural content and mediated by it." The proposed activities will work not only the oral skill of the second language but also social aspects relevant for the students.

The second methodology to be discussed is the natural approach, which emerged at the end of the seventies and in which communication is the paramount. Tejada, Pérez and Luque (2005) define this methodology as a methodology focused on dialogue, since this is the main objective; they explain that learning a second language should be done involuntarily, just like a baby learns the mother tongue. Students in this way may be more spontaneous in their responses and this will facilitate the exchange of experiences, feelings and thoughts. The activities proposed under this approach are very useful with regard to interculturality because it requires a great participation of the students. According to Álvarez (2013), grammatical or vocabulary learning will be left aside in the activities proposed under this approach, but it is of higher importance due to the emphasis is on tolerance and respect among students.

The third methodology to be analyzed is task-based learning, which is described by Powers (2008:74) as: "[...] task-based instruction is suitable for all ages and backgrounds, especially young learners. All children have learned their L1 in a contextualized setting, learning grammar and structure inductively. Their focus is on meaning, not form. [...] task-based instruction can be combined with more traditional teaching methods, can provide motivation due to tasks being relevant and immediate [...]".

As Powers indicates, it is very important to work under this method because it can be linked to other methodologies and work towards respect for others. This approach does not seek to give importance to the formal perfection of the language but the entire contrary, language is the vehicle through which students share their experiences or opinions. According to Flórez and Constanzo (2011) the teaching of languages from this approach is based on the presentation of the real world of students. That is, they present a reality that is common to them, that they know and about which they can exchange opinions.

This method will not focus on acquiring complete language mastery, students will make mistakes and they will be corrected by the others or by the teacher; the importance is not grammatical perfection but to be able to communicate. And the fourth methodology is cooperative work, defined by Gutiérrez del Moral (2009) as the activity carried out jointly by two or more people, with the aim of achieving a result and learning. The cooperative work is of great importance for Intercultural Education, because thanks to this method the students will not only have to pay attention to their will but also to the rest of the group, in this way students will have to attend to the diversity presented in their class and respect it. In this methodology, the teacher proposes an activity and establishes the rules, but the students are the ones who manage their time and their tasks, thus having to work on understanding, justice and tolerance with the rest (Casanova, Álvarez and Gómez, 2009).

Intercultural Education requires great participation on the part of the teachers but also of the students, since they are the ones who must develop positive attitudes towards diversity. The activities proposed by the teacher, following these mentioned methodologies, will give students the necessary tools to learn about respect and tolerance to others. The aforementioned methodologies are relevant because they can be worked in isolation but once the students understand how each methodology works, they can work together to further enhance the possibilities that arise.

### ***3. Activities based on intercultural aspects in Second Language Acquisition***

The theoretical review proposed by the article has highlighted the importance of implementing an educational reform that addresses the management of cultural diversity in the first place. With this educational reform in mind, different methodologies or approaches have been proposed in order to be put into practice in the Foreign Language subject. All these methodologies are proposed because of the importance they attach to communication and to the students' oral skill. Thanks to these methodologies, students will be able to interact with their classmates and to obtain a more positive view of diversity in their society.

The activities developed below have been designed for the subject of Foreign Language, but it would be interesting to work under these methodologies mentioned in all the subjects. Each subject can adapt the active methodologies related to interaction between students, since it is of higher interest that the students work the Intercultural Education in all the areas and not in an isolated way. It means, this approach is a global methodology that should affect every subject and not only the School-based Education Project with activities on special days or weeks addressing culture and tolerance.

#### **3.1. Role-playing:**

Intercultural communication is essential for the acquisition of values such as those mentioned above, that is why experimentation in this sense, even though it is simulated, is very important. According to Vilà (2007), simulation is a technique that proposes to acquire knowledge not only formal but also affective and behavioral. Role-playing is done in small groups, so it is interesting to carry out the activity following the methodology of cooperative groups. In the same way, since it is about exchanging opinions following the role assigned to each student, it can be affirmed that the students will involuntarily follow the natural approach to communicate with the others. The implementation of both methodologies will be very interesting for the development of the activity to be satisfactory, since the teacher will act as a moderator but the students will be the ones who will freely exchange opinions.

The simulation allows students to put themselves in the role of another, that is, to know their vision of reality, their feelings or ideas. The activity is proposed with the objective of developing students' empathy and of creating a work environment based on respect and dialogue. Through this activity you can work on social problems, inequalities, racist attitudes, violence, since by changing characters the game can be opened to any dynamic that the teacher or even the students want to work.

The learning outcomes are diverse, since not only will formal aspects of the language be worked through spontaneous dialogue among students, but social problems can also be worked on. All the methodologies used in the role-playing help to develop these aspects mentioned: the natural approach will help the development of the oral competence of students, who will be able to express their role during the simulation without feeling self-conscious in case they make a grammatical mistake; and the cooperative work will encourage them to help the others and to find a common solution to the problem posed by the simulation.

For all mentioned above, it is considered that role-playing is an activity that promotes diverse learning outcomes and all of them are positive. The students will exchange points of view and they will put themselves in the role of other people, thus acquiring values such as tolerance or solidarity.

### **3.2. Task-based:**

Task-based learning, as mentioned, encourages students to focus more on content than on form. The proposed activity is based on several of the tasks that Fernandez and Navarro (2010) mention in their didactic proposals. The project combines various tasks proposed by the authors with the aim of deepening the full knowledge of a country, thus providing the final task with a great theoretical and practical project about the country and its culture. The authors propose the different parts that make up a society as small tasks, so the activity will encompass all those small tasks in a single one that tries to show a general vision of the country's culture. The students will have one country each one, and they will have different topics to investigate: food, traditions, festivities, housing, education, climate, religion... The purpose is to show to the rest of their classmates how they live in the country that they have to investigate about. In order to make the activity more motivating for students, they can perform different mini-projects such as: making typical food, wearing traditional clothes, making a big poster with festivities or building a mock-up of a house or a monument.

The final objective of the activity is not only that the students are able to investigate independently, but that they can share everything they have learned about a different culture with their classmates. As mentioned, the activity will be based on the autonomous study of a specific place, and its *modus vivendi*, so that students can establish similarities and differences between them and what is exposed. At the end of the task and after sharing the projects, the students will acquire key points to understand how other cultures live and to value them positively.

The learning outcomes are diverse and depend a lot on the motivation of the student to develop their creativity. The projects will develop interculturality, as they not only have to investigate the countries but also defend them in front of the class, which will encourage respect and solidarity. Thanks to share all the projects, everyone will learn about other realities and they will come to the conclusion that there are more similarities than differences among societies.

For all the mentioned above, it is considered that task-based learning activities, such as the one explained, foster attitudes of respect and understanding between cultures. The tasks will motivate the students to be creative, they will leave aside the linguistic or grammatical perfection and they will strive to be original, being the acquisition of the interculturality the base and the main objective.

### **4. Conclusions**

The main objective of the article was to analyze current society, taking into account the cultural diversity present in all societies and establishing measures of educational action in order to work towards a more tolerant and inclusive society. This cultural diversity has to be worked in the classrooms, as commented by the Ministry of National Education of Colombia (1999:22): "The person who is educated in an intercultural environment is an individual rooted in his or her own culture but open to the world, an individual who looks at what is foreign from his own, and who observes and interacts with the outside world from his self-affirmation and self-assessment." Bearing in mind this statement made by the Ministry of National Education of Colombia, it is not surprising that it seeks to reform the educational systems in a way that provides an answer to this need of today's society.

Therefore, and keeping in mind the objective of this study, the analysis has been divided into three blocks. Firstly, a theoretical review on cultural diversity in the History of Humanity: from past to present societies. Secondly, a proposal of four methodologies under which contact between cultures can be worked within the Foreign Language classes, proposing approaches that are based more on content than on form, which is, giving more importance to the relationships and to the interaction between classmates than to the linguistic correction. And thirdly, the article has proposed two activities based on these mentioned methodologies with the aim to make students able to work together and show differences and similarities between their culture and the one they work on.

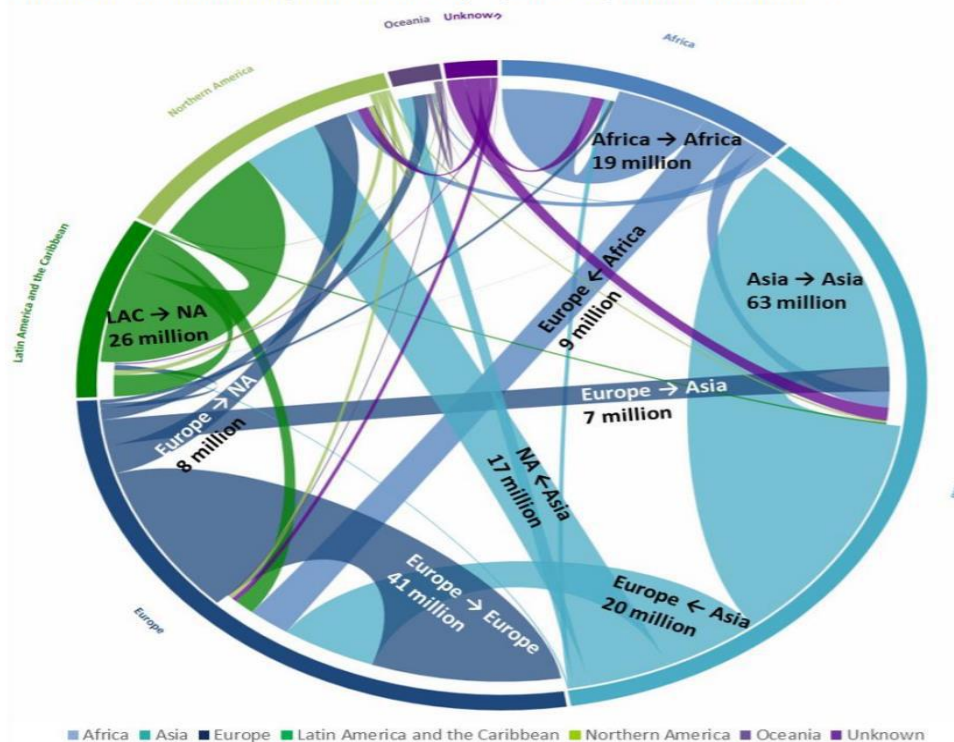
The clearest evidence that emerges after reading all the theoretical information presented in the first part of the study is the imperative need to work on culture and relationships between societies in schools. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, education should not only attend to formal content but should help students to make good relationships and learn to live all together in a globalized world.

For this, as mentioned, it is necessary to implement a global educational reform that makes this need a reality. The reform has to offer tools that make students tolerant, respectful, supportive, fair and inclusive. The educational reform has to address all of the above mentioned, so it is necessary to include new methodologies that can work in all subjects, having set the example of Foreign Languages. Thanks to putting these explained methodologies into practice, the teacher will no longer be the one who teaches the theoretical content because the students will be those who investigate and those who interact with the objective of acquiring knowledge and respecting diversity. The mentioned methodologies do not only seek to promote cultural diversity but also thoughts, religions, ethnic groups, traditions... The daily work will be based on activities proposed following these methodologies, such as those developed in the article, and in this way the students will acquire attitudes of respect and tolerance for the rest of classmates and for their ways of understanding life.

In the future, the lines of research are diverse, since research on interculturality is wide. It is necessary to deepen the educational reform proposal based on everything mentioned in the article, as well as to analyze more methodologies that can manage diversity and that work on social relationships. With all this, it is expected that educational research investigating about diversity grows and that it will be established as one of the most important ones in order to improve social values.

### Figures

Number of international migrants classified by region of origin and destination, 2017



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