



INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITIES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

DESARROLLO DE LA COMPETENCIA INTERCULTURAL A TRAVÉS DE LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS EN LAS UNIVERSIDADES: UNA REVISIÓN SISTEMÁTICA

Nelly Margarita Padilla Padilla¹, Eduardo Heredia-Arboleda²

{nelly.padilla@unach.edu.ec¹, eheredia@unach.edu.ec²}

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RESUMEN: La globalización, la movilidad académica y la internacionalización de la educación superior han incrementado la necesidad de desarrollar competencias que permitan a los estudiantes comunicarse eficazmente en contextos culturalmente diversos, por lo que la enseñanza del inglés trasciende el dominio lingüístico y constituye un espacio favorable para el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural. Sin embargo, su integración en la educación universitaria presenta dificultades relacionadas con la preparación docente, la evaluación, la articulación curricular, el uso pedagógico de tecnologías y las oportunidades de interacción intercultural. El objetivo fue analizar la evidencia científica sobre el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural mediante la enseñanza del inglés en la educación superior, identificando las principales estrategias, metodologías, dimensiones y resultados de aprendizaje reportados. Se realizó una revisión sistemática de la literatura científica, con enfoque cualitativo y alcance descriptivo-analítico, siguiendo las directrices del modelo PRISMA 2020. El proceso comprendió las etapas de identificación, cribado, evaluación de elegibilidad e inclusión de estudios, mediante la búsqueda de publicaciones académicas relacionadas con estudiantes universitarios, enseñanza del inglés y competencia intercultural. La información de los estudios incluidos fue organizada mediante una matriz de análisis documental y sometida a una síntesis temática cualitativa para su interpretación comparativa. Los resultados evidenciaron que las principales estrategias fueron la telecolaboración, el intercambio virtual, el aprendizaje colaborativo, los proyectos interculturales, la interacción directa y el uso pedagógico de tecnologías digitales. Asimismo, la competencia intercultural presentó un carácter multidimensional, integrado por conocimiento, conciencia, actitudes y habilidades. Se concluye que la enseñanza universitaria del inglés constituye un medio pertinente para desarrollar la competencia intercultural cuando el aprendizaje lingüístico se

¹Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-25743946>

²Master in Teaching English as a Foreign Language Professor at the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Language - es School
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4099-9811>



articula con experiencias de interacción, reflexión y negociación de significados, siendo necesario fortalecer la formación docente, la integración curricular, las estrategias didácticas, la evaluación y las oportunidades de contacto intercultural.

Palabras clave: *competencia intercultural, enseñanza del inglés, educación superior, interacción intercultural, intercambio virtual*

ABSTRACT: Globalization, academic mobility, and the internationalization of higher education have increased the need to develop competencies that enable students to communicate effectively in culturally diverse contexts. Therefore, English language teaching goes beyond linguistic proficiency and constitutes a favorable context for the development of intercultural competence. However, its integration into university education presents difficulties related to teacher preparation, assessment, curricular articulation, the pedagogical use of technologies, and opportunities for intercultural interaction. The objective was to analyze the scientific evidence on the development of intercultural competence through English language teaching in higher education, identifying the main strategies, methodologies, dimensions, and reported learning outcomes. A systematic review of the scientific literature was conducted using a qualitative and descriptive-analytical approach, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The process comprised the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and study inclusion through the search for academic publications related to university students, English language teaching, and intercultural competence. Information from the included studies was organized using a documentary analysis matrix and subjected to qualitative thematic synthesis for comparative interpretation. The results showed that the main strategies included telecollaboration, virtual exchange, collaborative learning, intercultural projects, direct interaction, and the pedagogical use of digital technologies. Furthermore, intercultural competence was found to be multidimensional, comprising knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills. It is concluded that university English language teaching constitutes a relevant means of developing intercultural competence when language learning is integrated with experiences of interaction, reflection, and meaning negotiation, making it necessary to strengthen teacher training, curricular integration, teaching strategies, assessment, and opportunities for intercultural contact.

Keywords: *intercultural competence, English language teaching, higher education, intercultural interaction, virtual exchange*

INTRODUCCIÓN

Globalization, academic mobility, the internationalization of higher education institutions and the expansion of digital domains have modified the modalities in which university students acquire knowledge, communicate and relate to the academic and professional sphere. In this context, learning a foreign language, especially English, has ceased to be solely the acquisition of a series of grammatical contents and linguistic skills of the language to become a tool to participate in interactions characterized by cultural diversity. In this manner, university



education faces the challenge of training professionals capable of communicating effectively with persons possessing values, experiences, ways of conceiving reality and sociocultural norms different from their own. Intercultural competence, thus, has acquired a growing importance within the processes of university formation and of teaching of foreign languages (1).

In what refers especially to its university framework, intercultural competence is linked to knowing how to address different cultural perspectives, to being aware of diversity, to confronting prejudices and stereotypes, to modifying forms of communication, to establishing adequate and efficacious relations with persons of different cultural contexts, and for this reason, its development distances itself from the simple acquisition of information about other countries or cultures. The coming literature indicates as central idea that intercultural competence develops as a multidimensional construction that gathers knowledge, awareness, attitudes and skills to behave in an adequate form in intercultural situations (2). In fact, the investigation framed in the construction and validation of a scale directed to the university student body identified with clarity dimensions related to knowledge, awareness, attitude and skills, a term that also puts in evidence the complexity of the construct and the necessity of studying it in its globality within the educational processes.

The teaching of English as a foreign language occupies a place for which they are especially significant. English is considered a language of international communication and permits persons to establish a relation, even without sharing the mother tongue. Therefore, the university students who obtain linguistic skills in English need to understand that intercultural communication is not limited to the mastery of grammar, verbal fluency, etc. A good intercultural communication supposes reading meanings taking into account the context, knowing the puzzle of positions that there is, knowing how to carry out the bad interpretations, being capable of fitting the interpretations, being disposed to negotiate the meaning with culturally diverse interlocutors. From this point of view, the teaching of the English language can be a good place in which to develop intercultural linguistic competencies in a joint manner.

This relevance has been corroborated by reviews of the recent literature. (3) analyze 325 scientific publications on intercultural competencies in higher education and find that there is present a good part of contributions related to the teaching of languages, the international practices, the virtuality of collaborative learning. The authors establish in turn that a tendency is appreciated toward the exploitation of virtual interaction and of the experiences of international learning as modes of potentiating the education of their students regarding global contexts. Those results make evident that intercultural competence has taken root as a transversal dimension of higher formation instead of being considered a property of the language programs.

Thus, the learning of English as a foreign language has passed from being more indissolubly linked to models that stood out for the learning of the linguistic system toward proposals that have the language as instrument of social and cultural interaction. In this sense, the incorporation of the intercultural dimension makes that the learning activities not only treat the



comparison of customs or characteristics of determined countries, but that they carry with them processes of reflection on the own culture and on the different manners in which the members of each culture construct meanings. A systematic review on intercultural communicative competence in the EFL contexts yielded the conceptions of the teachers, the evaluation, the teacher formation and the factors associated with the implementation of intercultural competence as relevant areas of investigation and puts in manifest that intercultural competence depends both on the characteristics of the students and on the didactic decision-makings realized by the teachers.

The inclusion of intercultural contents in the English classes also responds to the necessity of surpassing a static vision of culture, since offering information on the food, the festivals, the clothing or the traditions can contribute to the cultural knowledge, but is insufficient to create a competence that permits carrying out actions in real communicative situations. Intercultural competence needs opportunities to be able to analyze worldviews, recognize differences, reflect on the own values and participate in communicative exchanges where divergent visions can appear. Precisely for this reason, the educational proposals that are considered contemporary tend to favor, in the activities that they develop, collaborative exchanges, activities of intercultural contact, projects, reflective discussions and the communication mediated by digital technologies (4).

For the most cited strategies in the work of recent authors (5) are those of virtual exchange and telecollaboration. These are designs in which students of different countries participate in academic activities as a whole in digital spaces, videoconferences, forums or communicative applications. Their importance rests on that they offer the contact with culturally distinct interlocutors without the necessity that there be necessarily international physical mobility. [9] have worked with the telecollaborative conversations of two groups of university students of English as a foreign language, in this case of the English students of Kuwait and of Colombia and have shown how this type of experiences can help to promote intercultural competencies in the process of interaction in students of different environments. On the other hand, recent studies have demonstrated that telecollaboration can propitiate intercultural communication since it can be considered an environment that can permit an authentic interaction between native and non-native speakers in English.

Digital technologies have special relevance, given that hybrid and virtual models of university education proliferate. Digital spaces can increase the opportunities of intercultural exchanges, offer the possibility of carrying out transnational collaborative projects and introduce the students to perspectives of difficult inclusion from conventional materials. Nevertheless, the mere technology does not give place to intercultural competence. The investigation shows that the digital activities require a careful pedagogical design, the existence of intercultural objectives and the intervention of the teaching staff so that the interaction can arrive beyond the mere exchange of information. For this reason, the technology must be considered as a resource at the pedagogical level that requires mediation and a curricular design and not as an educational objective.



Another important aspect is collaborative learning. The interaction between students can permit finding or rescuing opportunities to contrast perspectives, negotiate meanings and arrive at knowing other manners of interpreting a same situation. In this sense, intercultural competence can be linked to the quality of the relations that are established within the classroom and to the capacity to form part of the cooperative activity. One of the investigations developed with university students of Ethiopia studied intercultural competence as a possible explanation of the cooperative learning in EFL and of the life in the classroom, being one of the aspects considered important for the educational dynamics in the university (6). This type of evidences permit beginning to understand that the intercultural development does not only consist in the communication with foreign persons that can be known, but that it can also have an impact in the ambit of the educational interactions, in what refers with the others in the culturally diverse university communities.

Direct intercultural interaction is another of the forms of developing these competencies. In an important review of the literature realized by (7), the authors demonstrate that there have been identified for the university students of English as a foreign language, both in the Spanish ambit and in other international ones, problems that have to do with their scarce intercultural experience, with their scarce linguistic competence and with their scarce opportunities of practice of the communication. From these situations, the existence of different forms of intercultural contact is recognized that include experiences in direct mode, media contacts, autonomous activities and opportunities outside the traditional educational institutions.

Evaluation is also a problem for the integration of intercultural competence in the ambit of higher education. Due to its multidimensional nature, using traditional tests that measure the linguistic knowledge would not be sufficient to establish the intercultural development of the students, but instruments that contemplate cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions are needed. In this same line, recent investigations have developed and validated specific instruments for the evaluation of intercultural competence in the case of university students, evidencing differentiated dimensions of intercultural competence in terms of development of knowledge, awareness, attitudes and skills (8). The existence of valid instruments is a fundamental element to take into account for the evaluation of educational programs and will show if the implemented strategies are capable of provoking observable changes.

Despite the impulse of the investigation of intercultural competence, certain challenges are observed that have to do with its adequate inclusion in the university programs of teaching of English. One of these challenges is the preparation of the teaching staff. The review carried out by (9) observed that the teacher formation, the conceptions of the teaching staff, and the evaluation are very recurrent themes in the ambit of the investigation on intercultural communicative competence in EFL contexts. The relevance of this situation is especially relevant, since the inclusion of intercultural contents would require that the teacher know how to select valid materials, avoid stereotypes, conduct delicate conversations and promote a process of critical reflection.



The curricular redesign is another challenge in this sense; intercultural competence can appear implicitly in the English plans, without being enriched effectively as a learning outcome. When this takes place, the intercultural activities can depend on isolated initiatives of the teachers and not on a curricular articulation. The international review on intercultural competencies realized in the ambit of higher education indicates precisely the necessity of reinforcing its inclusion in educational experiences, collaborative practices and processes of internationalization. It is evident that the intercultural dimension needs, on the other hand, an articulation between curriculum, didactic strategies, teacher formation and mechanisms of evaluation (10).

In this particular, the problematic has a special relevance for contexts of universities where English is the language in which the academic and professional mobility is developed. The learners, the students can find themselves with interlocutors belonging to diverse countries, participate in exchange programs, appeal to international scientific literature, attend congresses, integrate themselves in multicultural work teams, etc., in all of them in which the linguistic and cultural competencies are in close relation. The possibility of communicating in an adequate manner implies not only knowing the language; it also implies the comprehension of each one of the social and cultural norms that impact on the interpretation of the messages and on the construction of the interpersonal relations.

In this sense, the systematic analysis of the recent scientific production in relation to the development of intercultural competence from the teaching of English in higher studies is justified. The systematic review permits structuring the existing evidence and observing the investigative tendencies, as well as describing the pedagogical strategies utilized and analyzing the learning outcomes that have been exposed in the different contexts. The existence of previous reviews is an evidence of a field of investigation in expansion, but also of the dispersity of approaches, instruments, populations and educational experiences utilized to address intercultural competence.

The review commented here is justified by the necessity of reuniting the recent evidence that is linked, in this case, with the teaching of English in higher education. The analysis will permit identifying which have been the strategies utilized to favor the intercultural development, what dimensions of the competence have been included in the study and which have been the principal educational results found. On the other hand, it will be able to give account of difficulties that are explained by means of the teacher formation, the curriculum, the evaluation, the technologies and the opportunities of intercultural contact. In relation to this problematic, this review of the scientific literature has as object to analyze the scientific literature that addresses the development of intercultural competence through the teaching of English in the studies of higher education, putting special attention on the identification of the methodologies, the approaches and the learning outcomes reported in recent investigations. In a more concrete manner, it is expected to identify the principal currents of the scientific investigation, analyze the methodologies utilized to promote intercultural competence, examine the learning outcomes and, finally, recognize the challenges and opportunities for the integration of intercultural competence as part of the university programs of teaching of English. These objectives are coherent with the objectives of the investigation contained in the degree project.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and review model

The study was conducted as a systematic review of scientific literature following the methodological principles established by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020). A qualitative and descriptive-analytical approach was adopted because the purpose was to identify, organize, compare, and interpret scientific evidence concerning the development of intercultural competence through English language education in higher education.

The systematic review design was considered appropriate because the study did not involve the direct intervention of a university population. Instead, the analysis focused on previously published research addressing pedagogical strategies, intercultural interaction, digital technologies, telecollaboration, virtual exchange, collaborative learning, assessment, teacher training, and the development of intercultural competence in university English-language contexts.

Review question

The review was guided by the following research question: What pedagogical strategies and educational approaches have been reported in the scientific literature from 2021 to 2026 for the development of intercultural competence through English language education in higher education?

The review also considered the following complementary questions: What dimensions of intercultural competence are developed through these strategies? What learning outcomes have been reported? What role do digital technologies, teacher mediation, assessment, and curricular integration play in the development of intercultural competence?

Protocol and reporting framework

The review process was structured according to the PRISMA 2020 statement, particularly with respect to the identification of information sources, search strategy, eligibility criteria, study selection, data extraction, and synthesis of findings. The process was organized into four principal stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion.

The use of PRISMA was justified by the need to provide transparency and reproducibility in the selection of the scientific evidence included in the review. The process also allowed the reasons for exclusion to be documented and the final corpus of studies to be clearly distinguished from the broader bibliographic background used to contextualize the research.

Information sources



The literature search was conducted using the following academic databases and scientific information sources: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, PubMed, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories.

Priority was given to peer-reviewed scientific publications indexed in recognized academic databases. The search was limited to publications available between January 2021 and the date on which the search was completed in 2026.

The selection of these information sources was based on their relevance to research in higher education, applied linguistics, English language teaching, educational technology, and intercultural competence.

Search strategy

The search strategy combined descriptors in English and Spanish using the Boolean operators AND and OR. The principal descriptors included:

- “intercultural competence”
- “intercultural communicative competence”
- “English language teaching”
- “English as a foreign language”
- “EFL”
- “higher education”
- “university students”
- “telecollaboration”
- “virtual exchange”
- “intercultural learning”
- “English language education”

Different combinations of these terms were applied according to the search characteristics of each database. The principal search concept combined the intercultural competence construct with English language education and higher education. Additional terms related to telecollaboration, virtual exchange, digital technologies, collaborative learning, and intercultural learning were incorporated to identify studies addressing specific pedagogical approaches.

The search strategy was designed to maximize the identification of studies directly related to the research question while reducing the retrieval of publications unrelated to university English-language education.

Eligibility criterio

Studies were considered eligible when they met the following inclusion criteria:



- Publications dated between 2021 and 2026.
- Studies conducted in higher education contexts or involving university students or university teachers.
- Research addressing English language teaching or English as a foreign language.
- Studies explicitly addressing intercultural competence, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural communication, intercultural awareness, or interaction among individuals from different cultural contexts.
- Studies examining pedagogical strategies, educational approaches, technological interventions, intercultural interaction, or learning experiences associated with the development of intercultural competence.
- Publications providing sufficient information concerning the participants or educational context, methodology, intervention or strategy, and principal findings.
- Peer-reviewed scientific articles and other scientific publications considered relevant to the research question.

Studies were excluded when they met one or more of the following criteria:

- Duplicate records.
- Publications unrelated to English language teaching and intercultural competence.
- Studies focused exclusively on linguistic competence without an intercultural component.
- Studies conducted exclusively at primary or secondary education levels when their findings could not be reasonably related to higher education.
- Publications without sufficient methodological information.
- Documents in which the main results could not be identified.
- Publications whose central topic was outside the scope of the research question.

Study selection process

The study selection process was organized into four stages consistent with the PRISMA 2020 framework.

During the identification stage, records retrieved from the selected databases and information sources were compiled into a single bibliographic database. The records were subsequently reviewed to identify and eliminate duplicate publications.

During the screening stage, titles and abstracts were examined according to the previously established eligibility criteria. Records that were clearly unrelated to English language education, higher education, or intercultural competence were excluded.

During the eligibility stage, the full texts of potentially relevant publications were examined. At this stage, studies were excluded when they did not meet the inclusion criteria or when the methodological information and results were insufficient for analysis.



Finally, during the inclusion stage, the studies that satisfied all eligibility criteria were incorporated into the final analytical corpus.

The complete selection process was represented using a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, which presented the number of records identified, duplicates removed, records screened, full-text articles assessed for eligibility, excluded studies and the final number of studies included in the qualitative synthesis.

Data extraction

Data from the included studies were organized using a documentary analysis matrix. The matrix contained the following variables:

- Author and year of publication.
- Country and educational context.
- Study population or participants.
- Higher education level.
- Research methodology and design.
- Pedagogical strategy or educational intervention.
- Intercultural competence dimension addressed.
- Instruments or data collection techniques.
- Main findings.
- Principal contributions to intercultural competence development.

The extraction process was conducted systematically to facilitate comparison among the selected publications and to identify recurring patterns across different educational contexts.

Data synthesis and analysis

Because of the methodological and contextual heterogeneity of the included studies, a qualitative thematic synthesis was performed instead of a statistical meta-analysis.

The analysis was conducted in three phases. First, the selected studies were classified according to their relevance to the research question and their methodological characteristics. Second, the extracted information was organized into thematic categories. Third, similarities, differences, contributions, and limitations reported across the studies were comparatively interpreted.

The thematic synthesis resulted in six principal categories: telecollaboration and virtual exchange; collaborative learning; direct intercultural interaction; digital technologies; teacher training and performance; and assessment of intercultural competence.

In addition, the dimensions of intercultural competence identified across the literature were grouped into four principal components: knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills. This organization allowed the findings to be interpreted beyond linguistic achievement and to



consider the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions associated with intercultural development.

RESULTS

Study selection

The study selection process followed the four stages recommended by the PRISMA 2020 framework: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. A total of 412 records were identified through the selected information sources. After removing 87 duplicate records, 325 records were screened by title and abstract. Of these, 242 were excluded because they did not meet the predefined eligibility criteria. Subsequently, 83 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which 58 were excluded for specific reasons. Finally, 25 studies met all the inclusion criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis (31).

The included studies were selected according to the established eligibility criteria, considering research conducted in higher education contexts, involving university students or teachers, and explicitly addressing intercultural competence, intercultural communication, intercultural awareness, or intercultural interaction within English language education. Studies that focused exclusively on linguistic competence without an intercultural component, as well as studies conducted exclusively in primary or secondary education, were excluded.

The final corpus consisted of 25 studies, which provided evidence on telecollaboration, virtual exchange, collaborative learning, intercultural projects, videoconferencing, digital technologies, culturally responsive teaching, critical reflection, and direct intercultural interaction. Due to the methodological and contextual heterogeneity of the studies, the evidence was synthesized qualitatively rather than through statistical meta-analysis.

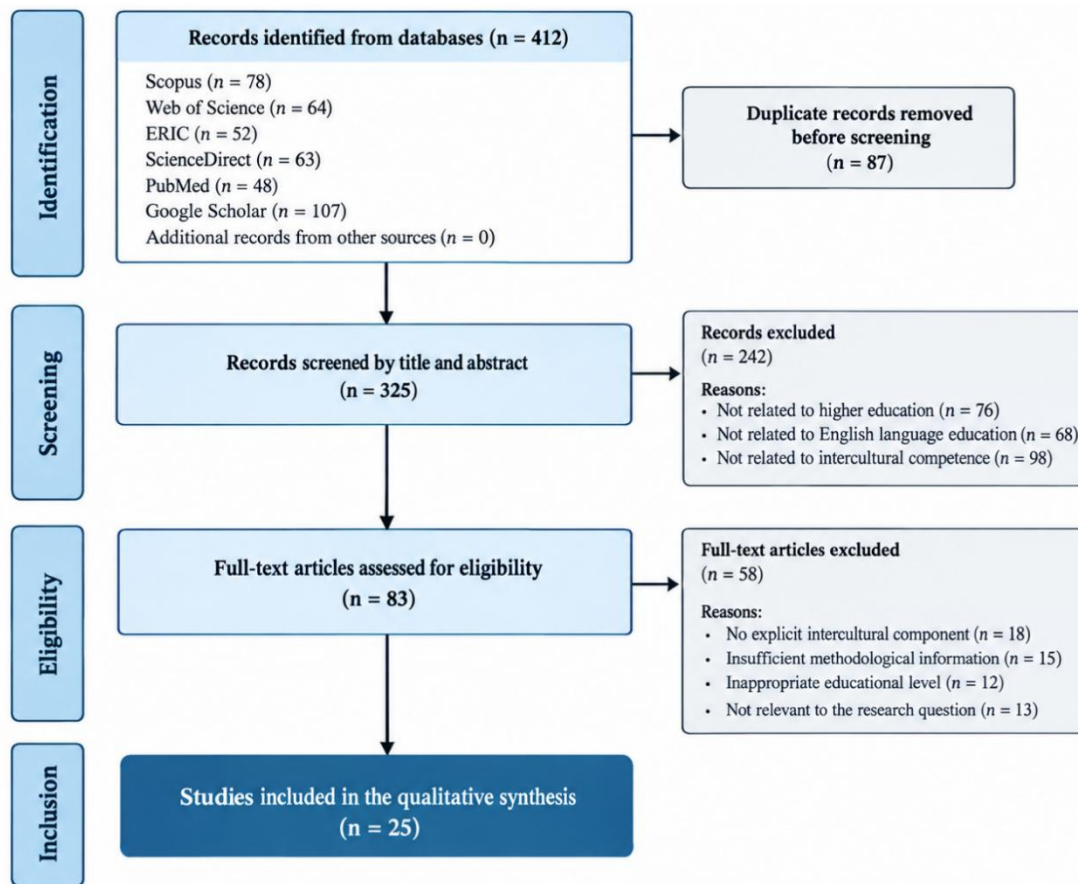


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process.

Characteristics of the included studies

The 25 studies presented diverse geographical, methodological, and educational contexts. The evidence covered higher education institutions from different regions, including Asia, Europe, Latin America, Africa, and other international contexts. Most studies focused on university students learning or using English as a foreign or additional language, while some examined the role of teachers, intercultural pedagogy, or institutional approaches.

The methodological approaches included qualitative studies, quantitative and mixed-methods research, systematic reviews, conceptual analyses, case studies, and intervention-based studies. The most frequently identified pedagogical approaches were telecollaboration and virtual exchange, followed by collaborative learning, intercultural projects, culturally responsive teaching, videoconferencing, and digital learning environments.

The studies showed that intercultural competence was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct involving **cultural knowledge, intercultural awareness, attitudes, and interactional skills**. Several studies additionally distinguished cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions,



emphasizing that effective intercultural learning requires not only knowledge about other cultures but also openness, reflection, interpretation, negotiation, and appropriate adaptation during intercultural encounters.

Table 1. Characteristics of the studies included in the systematic review

Author/year	Country/context	Participants/context	Method/design	Strategy/approach	Intercultural dimension	Main finding
Zhou et al., 2024	International/EFL	EFL learners	Systematic review	Intercultural approaches in EFL	Knowledge, awareness, attitudes, skills	Intercultural competence is a multidimensional component of effective EFL education.
Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023	International higher education	University students	Systematic review	Intercultural competency development	Multiple dimensions	Higher education requires explicit strategies for developing intercultural competencies.
Bekere & Teketel, 2024	Ethiopia	University students	Quantitative study	Intercultural competence measurement	Knowledge, attitudes, skills	Intercultural competence can be assessed through multidimensional instruments.
Ertay & Gilanlioglu, 2024	Higher education	University students	Scale-development study	Intercultural communicative competence	Attitudes, awareness, skills	The study supports the measure



						ment of different dimensions of intercultural communicative competence. Meaningful intercultural contact contributes to the development of intercultural competence when accompanied by reflection.
Zhou & Burhanudeen, 2023	EFL/higher education	University learners	Empirical study	Intercultural contact	Awareness, attitudes, skills	
Iswandari & Ardi, 2022	EFL contexts	EFL learners	Systematic review	Intercultural competence in EFL	Knowledge, awareness, attitudes	Intercultural competence should be integrated into EFL teaching rather than treated as an additional component.
Alghasaba & Alvarez-Ayureb, 2023	Kuwait–Colombia	38 university students	Telecollaborative study	Telecollaborative conversations	Knowledge, attitudes, skills	Eight weeks of structured intercultural interaction



Telecollaboration study, 2023	International EFL context	University students	Empirical study	Telecollaboration with native/non-native speakers	Behavioral, affective, cognitive	promoted curiosity, openness, cultural knowledge, and interactional skills. Telecollaboration promoted behavioral, affective, and cognitive dimensions, with behavioral aspects particularly prominent.
Haregu et al., 2024	Ethiopia	University students	Empirical study	Cooperative learning in EFL	Attitudes, interaction	Cooperative classroom experiences were associated with intercultural competence and positive classroom relationships.
O'Dowd, 2021	International higher education	University learners	Review/empirical synthesis	Virtual exchange	Knowledge, awareness, skills	Virtual exchange provides opportunities for intercultural learning



O'Dowd, 2021	International higher education	University students and educators	Conceptual/ review study	Virtual exchange	Intercultural awareness	through structure d online interaction. Virtual exchange has significant potential for internationalized and intercultural education.
Gruber & Bailey, 2021	Colombia–Germany	University students	Virtual exchange study	International virtual exchange	Awareness, attitudes, skills	Cross-cultural online interaction facilitated comparison of perspectives and intercultural learning.
Knipp Silva & Scarlota, 2021	Higher education/ EFL	University students	Telecollaborative study	Telecollaboration	Interaction and awareness	Telecollaboration expanded opportunities for authentic intercultural communication in EFL contexts.
Peraza & Furumura, 2022	International higher education	University learners	Project-based study	Project-based learning and virtual exchange	Knowledge, awareness, skills	Combining project-based learning with virtual



						exchange supporte d intercultu ral interactio n and collabora tive learning. Telecolla borative environm ents facilitate d intercultu ral learning through sustained online interactio n.
Gutiérrez - Santiuste & Ritacco- Real, 2023	Higher education	University students	Empirical study	Telecollaborat ion	Intercult ural interacti on	Telecolla borative environm ents facilitate d intercultu ral learning through sustained online interactio n.
Liao & Li, 2023	EFL higher education	University students	Empirical study	Culturally responsive teaching	Cultural awarene ss, commun ication	Culturally responsiv e pedagogy supporte d oral English develop ment while incorpora ting cultural perspecti ves.
Syam et al., 2023	EFL higher education	University students	Qualitative study	Communal/co llaborative learning	Attitudes , interacti on	A commun al perspecti ve encourag ed intercultu ral engagem ent and collabora



						tive classroom participation. Intercultural competence was related to attitudes toward English accents and linguistic diversity.
Gokgoz-Kurt, 2023	EFL higher education	University students	Empirical study	Intercultural competence and language attitudes	Awareness, attitudes	Translanguaging supported communication and negotiation of meaning in intercultural online interactions.
Yeh et al., 2024	International telecollaboration	University students	Empirical study	Oral translanguaging in telecollaboration	Interaction, communication	Virtual exchanges using English as a lingua franca created opportunities for intercultural communication and perspective sharing. Student-created
Nguyen et al., 2024	International higher education	University students	Virtual exchange study	English as a lingua franca	Communication, awareness	
Baluyan et al.,	Higher education	University learners	Project-based study	Learner-made video projects	Knowledge,	



2024						reflectio n	digital videos supporte d cultural explorati on, reflection , and intercultu ral learning. Internati onal peer interactio n provided opportun ities to develop intercultu ral understa nding within university settings. Intercultu ral compet ence requires integratio n of knowledg e, attitudes, awarenes s, and interactio nal abilities.
	D'Orazzi & Marangeli, 2025	Internation alized university	University students	Empirical study	Student-to- student international interaction	Awarene ss, interacti on	Intercultu ral compet ence requires integratio n of knowledg e, attitudes, awarenes s, and interactio nal abilities.
	Munezane, 2025	Japan	University students	Conceptual/ empirical study	Intercultural communicativ e competence	Knowled ge, awarene ss, attitudes , skills	Intercultu ral compet ence requires integratio n of knowledg e, attitudes, awarenes s, and interactio nal abilities.
	Zhou et al., 2026	China	Chinese EFL undergradu ates	Empirical study	Intercultural contact	Awarene ss, attitudes , interacti on	Intercultu ral contact was associate d with changes in learners'

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Pedagogical strategies for intercultural competence development

The synthesis identified **telecollaboration and virtual exchange as the most recurrent strategies** for developing intercultural competence in university English education. These approaches enabled learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to communicate directly, compare perspectives, negotiate meanings, and reflect on cultural differences. Their effectiveness was particularly evident when interaction was accompanied by structured tasks and teacher guidance.

Collaborative learning also emerged as an effective approach, particularly when activities promoted meaningful interaction rather than simple division of classroom responsibilities. Collaborative tasks encouraged students to share experiences, compare cultural perspectives, negotiate meanings, and develop attitudes of respect and openness toward diversity.

Intercultural projects and digital resources provided additional opportunities to connect English language learning with cultural exploration. Learner-produced videos, online discussions, forums, and collaborative digital activities allowed students to investigate cultural practices and representations while developing their communicative abilities.

Dimensions of intercultural competence



The reviewed studies consistently presented intercultural competence as a multidimensional construct. **Cultural knowledge** involved understanding values, practices, norms, beliefs, and perspectives associated with different cultural groups. **Intercultural awareness** involved recognizing both one's own cultural assumptions and those of others.

The **attitudinal dimension** was associated with curiosity, openness, respect, tolerance, and willingness to engage with cultural difference. The **skills dimension** involved the ability to interpret cultural meanings, discover information, interact appropriately, negotiate meaning, and adapt communication according to the sociocultural context.

Some studies additionally identified **cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions**. The cognitive component was related to interpretation and understanding; the affective component to emotional disposition and openness; and the behavioral component to the ability to adapt interaction and communicate appropriately across cultures.

Table 2. Synthesis of intercultural competence dimensions, strategies, and outcomes

Dimension	Main strategies	Principal outcome
Cultural knowledge	Virtual exchange, intercultural projects, cultural materials	Understanding cultural practices, values, and perspectives
Intercultural awareness	Critical reflection, cultural comparison, intercultural contact	Recognition of one's own cultural assumptions and those of others
Attitudes	Telecollaboration, collaborative learning, intercultural interaction	Curiosity, openness, respect, and positive disposition toward diversity
Skills	Interaction, negotiation, collaborative tasks	Interpretation, discovery, negotiation, and intercultural communication
Cognitive	Reflection, analysis, comparison	Improved interpretation and comprehension of cultural differences
Affective	Intercultural contact, virtual exchange	Greater openness and positive attitudes toward cultural diversity
Behavioral	Telecollaboration, videoconferencing	Greater adaptation and appropriateness during intercultural interaction

Role of digital technologies and teacher mediation

Digital technologies were frequently used to facilitate intercultural interaction through videoconferencing, virtual exchange platforms, discussion forums, collaborative activities, and digital projects. However, the findings indicated that technology alone did not guarantee intercultural competence development. Its effectiveness depended largely on pedagogical



planning, explicit intercultural objectives, meaningful interaction, reflection, and teacher mediation.

The teacher's role was therefore identified as an important factor in the implementation of intercultural learning. Effective mediation included the selection of culturally appropriate materials, prevention of stereotypical representations, management of sensitive cultural topics, promotion of reflection, and guidance during intercultural interactions.

Assessment and curricular integration

The literature review made it possible to identify a consistent tendency toward the incorporation of intercultural competence as a transversal component of university English teaching. The examined studies show that the learning of a foreign language in higher education has evolved from predominantly linguistic approaches toward proposals that consider interaction, the negotiation of meanings, cultural awareness, and the capacity to function appropriately before persons belonging to different sociocultural contexts. This tendency coincides with recent reviews that have signaled the growth of research on intercultural communicative competence within language teaching and higher education (11).

Telecollaboration and virtual exchange

Telecollaboration constituted one of the strategies with greatest presence within the recent literature. Its utilization responds to the increase of internationalization processes and to the expansion of virtual learning environments, which make it possible to establish contact among university students located in different countries without necessarily requiring physical mobility.

Particularly relevant evidence was provided by (12-14), who analyzed telecollaborative conversations among 38 university students from Kuwait and Colombia. The experience was developed during eight weeks and incorporated online activities preceded by pedagogical accompaniment. The authors identified socioaffective and cognitive behaviors related to the framework of intercultural communicative competence, especially those linked with attitudes of curiosity and openness and with cultural knowledge. Skills related to discovery and interaction were also observed when the students addressed social and religious topics.

This result is significant because it demonstrates that virtual interaction can surpass the superficial exchange of information when there exists prior pedagogical planning. The experience evidences that contact among students of different cultures does not automatically guarantee intercultural development. On the contrary, it requires orientation, preparation, and structured activities that make it possible to interpret differences, formulate questions, contrast perspectives, and negotiate meanings.

A similar tendency was identified in investigations on telecollaboration in higher education. (15,16) analyzed intercultural communicative competence by means of videoconference and classified the interactions into behavioral, affective, and cognitive dimensions. The results



showed predominance of behavioral communications, followed by the affective and cognitive, which evidences that virtual interaction experiences can generate observable manifestations of intercultural competence.

The review also made it possible to identify that telecollaboration can be particularly useful when it is intended to develop competencies that can hardly be acquired through static cultural materials. Communication with real interlocutors introduces situations of uncertainty, differences of interpretation, and negotiation that require that the student utilize simultaneously their linguistic and sociocultural knowledge.

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning constituted a second relevant category. Its importance is related to the possibility of generating spaces where students confront their perspectives, share experiences, and participate in activities that require cooperation.

The reviewed evidence makes it possible to interpret that collaborative work contributes to intercultural development when the tasks are designed to generate significant exchange and not solely to distribute responsibilities. In this sense, interaction among students can favor the identification of cultural differences and reflection on one's own values.

The literature also signals that intercultural competence can be related to the quality of the relationships that are established within culturally diverse university communities. The study developed with Ethiopian university students included in the base document addresses precisely intercultural competence as an element related to cooperative life and classroom dynamics. (17) This approach broadens the comprehension of intercultural competence, since it does not restrict it to contact with foreign persons, but links it with everyday academic coexistence.

Therefore, collaborative learning can acquire a double function. On the one hand, it facilitates linguistic practice of English through peer exchange; on the other, it generates opportunities to comprehend different perspectives and develop attitudes of respect, openness, and disposition toward diversity.

Intercultural interaction and contact with other cultures

The review evidenced that intercultural contact constitutes another important mechanism for favoring the development of intercultural competencies. However, contact must be differentiated from a simple exposure to cultural contents.

The analyzed studies coincide in that presenting information about foods, festivities, clothing, or customs may contribute to cultural knowledge, but does not necessarily develop the capacity to act appropriately before intercultural situations. Intercultural competence requires processes of reflection, interpretation, comparison, and negotiation of meanings.

This distinction coincides with the review of (17), which analyzes intercultural communicative competence within the teaching of English as a foreign language and highlights the need to consider the capacity to communicate effectively with persons of other cultural contexts. The



study, published in Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, recognizes the growing relevance of intercultural competence within university English teaching.

The evidence also shows that intercultural contact can adopt different modalities: face-to-face, virtual, media, and autonomous. This diversity is relevant for universities that do not dispose of ample international mobility programs, since technologies make it possible to construct intercultural experiences without students having to displace themselves physically.

Digital technologies as mediators of intercultural learning

Digital technologies represented a transversal category. Their presence was related principally to videoconferences, communication platforms, forums, collaborative activities, and virtual exchange experiences.

Nevertheless, the results indicate that technology by itself does not constitute an intercultural strategy. Its contribution depends on the pedagogical design that accompanies it. When digital resources are used solely to transmit information, learning may remain at a descriptive level. In contrast, when intercultural objectives, interaction among students, reflection activities, and teacher accompaniment are incorporated, technology can facilitate experiences of greater depth.

The evidence proceeding from telecollaboration studies supports this interpretation. In the experience of university students from Kuwait and Colombia, for example, virtual interaction was accompanied by pedagogical orientation and structured activities, and behaviors associated with intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills were observed.

Likewise, research on telecollaboration in higher education demonstrates that videoconference can be used to analyze behavioral, affective, and cognitive dimensions of intercultural competence (18).

Table 3. Main strategies identified for the development of intercultural competence

Strategy	Main characteristic	Intercultural dimension favored	Identified result
Telecollaboration	Virtual interaction among students of different contexts	Attitudes, knowledge, and skills	Greater intercultural interaction
Virtual exchange	Academic activities with students of other countries	Awareness and cultural openness	Contrast of perspectives
Collaborative learning	Work among peers and groups	Attitudes and social skills	Negotiation of meanings
Intercultural projects	Collaborative resolution of tasks	Knowledge and reflection	Integration of perspectives
Videoconference	Synchronous intercultural	Cognitive, affective, and	Direct interaction



	communication	behavioral dimensions	
Digital resources	Videos, forums, and platforms	Knowledge and cultural awareness	Broadening of cultural experiences
Critical reflection	Analysis of experiences and differences	Intercultural awareness	Recognition of prejudices and stereotypes

Source: own elaboration on the basis of the reviewed literature (19,20).

Dimensions of intercultural competence

One of the principal results of the review was the identification of the multidimensional character of intercultural competence. The examined literature made it possible to group the dimensions into four large components: knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills.

Knowledge was related to the comprehension of cultural practices, values, norms, and perspectives. Awareness was linked with the capacity to recognize both the characteristics of other cultures and one's own cultural assumptions. Attitudes comprised openness, curiosity, respect, and disposition to interact with different persons. Finally, skills were related to the capacity to interpret, discover, interact, and negotiate meanings.

This organization coincides with recent investigations that have worked on the measurement of intercultural competence in university students. The base document signals that the instruments developed in this sphere have differentiated dimensions of knowledge, awareness, attitude, and skills. In particular, (21) studied the psychometric properties of a measurement of intercultural competence in university students, while (22) developed and validated a specific scale for students.

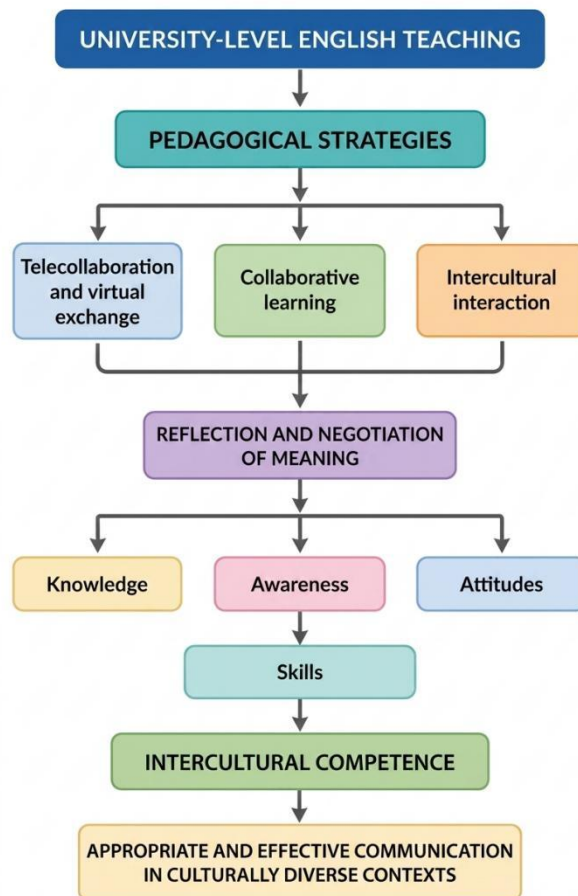


Figure 2. Conceptual model of the development of intercultural competence through English teaching.

Assessment of intercultural competence

Another important result corresponded to the difficulties associated with assessment. The review showed that traditional tests of linguistic mastery do not make it possible to value completely intercultural development. This is explained by the multidimensional nature of the construct.

An adequate assessment must consider not only what the student knows about other cultures, but also the manner in which they interpret situations, manifest openness, respond before differences, and utilize strategies to establish appropriate communicative relationships.

Works on the development and validation of instruments represent an advance in this direction. The literature included in the document identifies instruments destined for university students that consider cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. This evidence indicates that assessment must be integrated from the design of educational programs and not incorporated solely at the end of an intervention.



Role of the teacher

Teacher training appeared as a transversal factor. The reviewed literature evidences that the incorporation of intercultural contents requires teachers capable of selecting appropriate materials, avoiding stereotyped representations, managing conversations on sensitive topics, and orienting processes of reflection.

The systematic review of (23), centered on intercultural communicative competence in EFL contexts, identified as recurrent topics teachers' cognitions, assessment, the development of teachers' intercultural competence, teacher training, and associated factors. The authors analyzed 19 peer-reviewed studies published between 2011 and 2021, which made it possible to identify trends and research needs related to teacher preparation.

Consequently, the development of intercultural competence does not depend exclusively on the characteristics of the students. Teacher planning determines which cultural experiences are presented, which questions are formulated, what type of interaction is generated, and what opportunities exist for critical reflection.

Curricular integration

The review also made it possible to identify that intercultural competence may appear in an implicit form within English programs without constituting itself as a clearly defined learning outcome. This situation can provoke that intercultural activities depend on particular initiatives of certain teachers.

The evidence suggests that effective integration requires articulation among curriculum, didactic strategies, teacher training, technological resources, and assessment. Intercultural competence must be formulated as an educational outcome that can be worked on and observed progressively.

Table 4. Synthesis of dimensions, strategies, and results

Dimension	Associated strategies	Principal evidence
Knowledge	Virtual exchange, projects, cultural materials	Comprehension of cultural perspectives and practices
Awareness	Critical reflection, cultural comparison	Recognition of one's own cultural referents
Attitudes	Telecollaboration, collaborative learning	Curiosity, openness, and respect
Skills	Interaction, negotiation, and collaborative tasks	Interpretation and intercultural communication
Behavioral dimension	Videoconference, telecollaboration	Adaptation of interaction
Affective dimension	Intercultural contact	Positive disposition toward other cultures
Cognitive dimension	Reflection and analysis	Interpretation and comprehension of differences



Source: own elaboration based on (22,23).

As a whole, the results show that the strategies with greatest potential are those that integrate linguistic learning with experiences of cultural interaction. Telecollaboration stands out for providing authentic contact; collaborative learning favors the negotiation of meanings; digital technologies broaden the opportunities for interaction; and critical reflection makes it possible to transform the cultural experience into learning.

Strategy	Qualitative nivel (trend)	Assessment
 Telecollaboration		 High
 Virtual exchange		 High
 Collaborative learning		 High
 Digital technologies		 High
 Critical reflection		 Moderate-high
 Intercultural projects		 Moderate-high
 Face-to-face contact		 Moderate
 Intercultural evaluation		 In development

Figure 3. Qualitative tendency of the identified strategies.

Note: the representation corresponds to a qualitative synthesis of the presence and thematic relevance observed in the reviewed literature; it does not represent a statistical effect size.

Finally, the review evidenced that the international literature is considerably broader than the specific production of certain Latin American contexts. The base document recognizes the dispersion of approaches, instruments, populations, and educational experiences, which makes it difficult to carry out universal generalizations. For this reason, the results must be interpreted considering the institutional, linguistic, and sociocultural particularities of each university.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present review make it possible to sustain that the development of intercultural competence through university English teaching requires surpassing a limited conception of linguistic learning. The analyzed evidence shows that grammatical and lexical mastery constitutes solely a part of communication, while effective interaction in culturally diverse contexts demands knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills to interpret and



negotiate meanings. This perspective coincides with (24,25), who identified intercultural communicative competence as a relevant component within contemporary English teaching and evidenced the growth of research on this thematic.

Telecollaboration presented special relevance because it makes it possible to reproduce situations of intercultural communication without depending exclusively on international mobility. The results of the study of (26,27) are particularly representative, because the participation of students made it possible to observe attitudes of curiosity and openness, in addition to intercultural knowledge and skills. This coincides with the tendency identified in the present review and makes it possible to consider that virtual contact acquires greater value when there exists pedagogical mediation.

However, the results also show that technology does not constitute by itself a guarantee of intercultural development. The experience of (28) demonstrates that videoconferences can generate different behavioral, affective, and cognitive manifestations, but their educational value depends on the form in which the interactions are structured. Therefore, technological innovation must be subordinated to linguistic and intercultural objectives clearly defined.

Another relevant aspect corresponds to collaborative learning. Interaction among peers offers conditions to contrast interpretations and negotiate meanings, but requires activities that generate a true communicative need. When group work is limited to dividing tasks, the opportunity to develop intercultural competencies may be reduced. In contrast, when students must explain perspectives, resolve differences, or construct products jointly, the intercultural dimension acquires greater depth.

Assessment represents one of the principal challenges. The results coincide with (29,30), who identified assessment as one of the recurrent research topics in intercultural communicative competence. Likewise, works on instrument validation show the need to evaluate different dimensions of the construct and not limit oneself to cultural knowledge. This implies that universities should consider indicators related to awareness, attitudes, interpretation, interaction, and communicative adaptation.

Finally, teacher training emerges as a necessary condition for the sustainability of intercultural strategies. The teacher must be capable of selecting culturally balanced materials, avoiding stereotypes, promoting reflection, and conducting discussions on cultural differences. Consequently, the incorporation of intercultural competence demands an articulation among curriculum, teacher training, technologies, methodological strategies, and assessment.

This review presents some limitations. First, the methodological and contextual heterogeneity of the included studies limited the possibility of conducting a statistical meta-analysis and required a qualitative thematic synthesis. Second, the review was restricted to publications available between 2021 and 2026 and to the selected information sources, which may have excluded relevant studies indexed elsewhere. Third, the diversity of intercultural competence frameworks and assessment instruments made direct comparison across studies difficult. Finally, the predominance of evidence from international contexts limits the generalizability of the findings to Latin American and Ecuadorian higher education settings.



CONCLUSIONS

The systematic review made it possible to conclude that university English teaching constitutes a pertinent space for the development of intercultural competence when linguistic learning is articulated with experiences of interaction, reflection, and negotiation of meanings. The strategies identified with greatest relevance were telecollaboration, virtual exchange, collaborative learning, intercultural projects, and the pedagogical use of digital technologies. These methodologies favor opportunities for students not only to know other cultures, but to develop attitudes of openness, awareness of their own cultural referents, and skills to communicate adequately in diverse contexts.

Likewise, it was concluded that intercultural competence possesses a multidimensional character and cannot be assessed exclusively by means of traditional tests of English mastery. The reviewed evidence recognizes components related to knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills, so that its assessment requires instruments capable of observing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. [3,4] In this sense, intercultural contact acquires greater educational value when it is accompanied by explicit objectives, teacher orientation, and reflection activities.

Finally, it was evidenced that the effective integration of intercultural competence depends on pedagogical and institutional conditions that transcend the incorporation of technologies or isolated cultural contents. Teacher training, curricular redesign, the planning of activities, assessment, and opportunities for interaction must function in an articulated manner. Although the international literature offers favorable evidence on the analyzed strategies, there persists the need to broaden research in Latin American and Ecuadorian universities, especially by means of longitudinal studies and designs that make it possible to value concrete changes in the dimensions of intercultural competence.

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