






**Activity system for intercultural competence development at the Facultad de Ciencias Médicas
"Enrique Cabrera", Havana**

**Sistema de actividades para desarrollar la competencia intercultural en la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas
"Enrique Cabrera", La Habana**

**Sistema de atividades para desenvolver a competência intercultural na Faculdade de Ciências Médicas
"Enrique Cabrera", Havana**

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: language influences the way of thinking, living and the relationships of its speakers because its role reflecting the realities of each human group and its use on the transmission of knowledge. This means that the communication and learning of English as foreign language includes elements present in the language culture.

Objective: to design a system of activities to build the intercultural competence in medical students of the Facultad de Ciencias Médicas Enrique Cabrera, Havana, Cuba. **Method:** a system of activities is proposed, supported by test content list, document analysis, collection and information gathered through whole research process. Several research methods were used in the study, for instance, the empirical methods (comprising the observational, survey, and interview methods), the theoretical methods (historical-logical analysis, the systemic approach and modeling). The logical thinking procedures and mathematical-statistical methods

were also used. **Results:** learning English as an international language and its corresponding intercultural knowledge is of great value in the English subject. This learning process was supported by the application of a system of activities for the training of future doctors, who must learn to communicate in this language, which implies mastering the intercultural contents that allow them to interact efficiently with people, authorities and organizations while working in the countries where they perform their functions. **Conclusions:** learning English as an international language and the corresponding intercultural knowledge, through a system of activities, is essential in the training of medical students at the Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera".

Keywords: language; culture; system of activities; intercultural competence; foreign languages; English language

RESUMEN

Introducción: la lengua influye en el modo de pensar, vivir y relacionarse de cada uno de sus hablantes debido a su papel en el reflejo de las prácticas de cada colectivo humano y la transmisión de conocimientos. Esto significa que la comunicación y el aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera incluyen los elementos de la cultura reflejados en esta lengua. **Objetivo:** realizar un sistema de actividades para desarrollar la competencia intercultural en estudiantes de Medicina de la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera", La Habana, Cuba. **Método:** se propone un sistema de actividades mediante un temario de prueba, estudio documental, recopilación e información durante toda la etapa del proceso investigativo. Fueron empleados varios métodos de investigación, en los métodos empíricos, la observación la encuesta y la entrevista. En los métodos teóricos el análisis histórico-lógico, el enfoque sistémico y la modelación, así como los procedimientos lógicos del pensamiento y los métodos matemáticos-estadísticos. **Resultados:** el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua internacional y de los saberes interculturales correspondientes es especialmente válido en la asignatura de inglés, basado en un sistema de actividades, para la formación de los futuros galenos, quienes deben aprender a comunicarse en esa lengua, lo que implica dominar los contenidos interculturales que permiten una interacción eficiente con personas, autoridades, organizaciones y obras de los países donde realizan sus funciones. **Conclusiones:** el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua internacional y de los saberes interculturales correspondientes, a través de un sistema de actividades, resulta primordial en la formación de estudiantes de Medicina de la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera".

Palabras clave: lenguaje; cultura; sistema de actividades; competencia intercultural; lenguas extranjeras; idioma inglés

RESUMO

Introdução: a língua influencia a forma de pensar, viver e se relacionar de cada um de seus falantes devido ao seu papel de refletir as práticas de cada grupo humano e a transmissão de conhecimentos. Isso significa que a comunicação e o aprendizado do inglês como língua estrangeira incluem os elementos da cultura refletidos nesse idioma. **Objetivo:** realizar um sistema de atividades para desenvolver a competência intercultural em estudantes de Medicina da Faculdade de Ciências Médicas "Enrique Cabrera", Havana, Cuba. **Método:** propõe-se um sistema de atividades por meio de agenda de teste, estudo documental, compilação e informação durante toda a etapa do processo investigativo. Foram utilizados vários métodos de investigação, nos métodos empíricos, a observação, o inquérito e a entrevista. Nos métodos teóricos, a análise histórico-lógica, a abordagem sistêmica e a modelação, bem como os procedimentos de pensamento lógico e os métodos matemático-estatísticos. **Resultados:** aprender inglês como língua internacional e o correspondente conhecimento intercultural é especialmente válido na disciplina de inglês, baseada em um sistema de atividades, para a formação de futuros médicos, que devem aprender a se comunicar nessa língua, o que implica o domínio intercultural conteúdo que permite uma interação eficiente com pessoas, autoridades, organizações e obras nos países onde desempenham suas funções. **Conclusões:** a aprendizagem do inglês como língua internacional e o conhecimento intercultural correspondente, através de um sistema de atividades, é essencial na formação dos estudantes de medicina da Faculdade de Medicina "Enrique Cabrera Cossío".

Palavras-chave: linguagem; cultura; sistema de atividade; competência intercultural; línguas estrangeiras; idioma inglês

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INTRODUCTION

The development of intercultural competence demands from the learner of a language the consistent knowledge of various linguistic and paralinguistic aspects, as well as the socio-cultural aspects of the culture or cultures studied. It also demands the development of certain skills, which implies the availability of resources on the part of the learner to carry out communication processes established with other speakers, as well as the development of values and attitudes that facilitate the communication established between both cultures.

Different studies point out the importance of intercultural competence in the processes of language teaching and learning, since language and culture maintain a relationship of mutual enrichment.^(1,2)

In this sense, Paricio⁽³⁾ states that even though intercultural competence is currently pointed out as an important element in language learning, it is not sufficiently addressed in teacher training programs. He also mentions, "Teachers must be critical and reflective professionals, capable of promoting tolerance and respect for "the other"..., and that "they themselves must become 'intercultural learners', capable of promoting the autonomous work of students and of acquiring the same skills and attitudes that they intend to develop in the latter".

This indicates that, in order to language learners to be intercultural competent, their teacher must become the very first person to develop this competence, and become a model of it themselves. Therefore, it is necessary for intercultural competence to be a key element in the training of future teachers.⁽⁴⁾

Intercultural competence, according to the Cervantes Institute⁽⁵⁾, is the ability of the student of a second or foreign language to develop adequately and satisfactorily in intercultural communication situations that frequently occur in today's society, characterized by pluriculturalism.

Intercultural communication is defined as the one which results from the interaction between speakers of different languages and cultures. The interlocutors who participate in intercultural encounters have previously undergone different socialization processes and have developed different knowledge frameworks; their intercultural competence enables them to effectively meet their communicative needs by overcoming these differences.⁽⁵⁾

Culture, for Iglesias Casal,⁽⁶⁾ can be defined as a series of habits shared by the members of a group living in a geographic space, learned but biologically conditioned, such as: the means of communication (of which language is the basis), the social relations at various levels, the different daily activities, the assets and products of that group and how they are used, the typical manifestations of both national and individual personalities and their ideas about their own existence and that of the other members.

The system is an intervention model that, according to López, *et al.*⁽¹⁹⁾ is a set of logically interrelated components that have a structure and fulfill certain functions in order to achieve certain objectives. In this sense, the system makes it possible to organize clearly the components and each of the functions to be fulfilled within it.



The interaction between people of different ethnic origin, different languages and coming from unequal historical-cultural contexts is based in communication, understood as the process of exchange of meanings in which a mutual learning takes place and in which it is necessary to know, accept, respect and enjoy the cultural differences of today's world.⁽⁷⁾

On the other hand, learning foreign language skills is essential for everyone, regardless of their social or cultural background. All this generates a change, in which are laid the foundations on which educational activities can be built to identify what is expected of the student and what is capable of doing and understanding once the learning process is completed, as well as how they should reach certain competencies.⁽⁸⁾

The mastery of foreign languages constitutes a demand for the citizens of each country, and the teaching process requires constant improvement. Thus, all levels of the Cuban national education system include the teaching-learning of foreign languages, especially English, one of the languages with the greatest international impact.⁽⁹⁾

In the literature reviewed in the area of didactics^(10,11,12) the authors point out as a tendency that the process referred above is oriented to the development of the student's communicative competence in the language studied, which presupposes the appropriation of knowledge, skills and values to be used in the interaction with others, according to the communicative context and the norms set by its speakers.

The activities to promote intercultural competence for this context must meet requirements such as: being motivating (especially for the target group of the research, who are between 18 and 20 years of age), interactive, related to professional communicative events and to the different areas of verbal activity (oral and written expression, listening comprehension and reading comprehension).

The researchers consider that it is necessary to develop in these students an idiomatic culture so they feel the need to learn the language and master it, in order to access the socialization of their own knowledge, and consequently, to achieve an improvement in the performance of the profession in all spheres of action, and in the optimization of the teaching-learning process by using the English language in their classes, recognizing and accepting it as a complement for their teaching.

The authors of this research propose as its objective the development of a system of activities to improve intercultural competence in medical students of the Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera", Havana, Cuba, in order to solve the problems of the teaching process in nursing students, and to achieve excellent results in the area of motivation and cognitive development, to link the knowledge of culture with the foreign language included in the curriculum, especially in the context in which students show difficulties to express themselves in the foreign language,.



METHOD

Several research methods were used based on the dialectical-materialist approach, which constitutes the general methodological basis of the research.

During the stage of assessment for the research, several methods were used: In the empirical methods, observation was applied to identify the main difficulties in the development of intercultural competence in second year students of the Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera", through an observation guide for class visits.

The survey was used to know the students' criteria on the pertinence of the system of activities used for the development of intercultural competence through a questionnaire. The interview was used to gather information regarding the teachers' criteria on the development of intercultural competence in these students, through an interview guide. The pedagogical test was used to evaluate the knowledge, skills and values developed.

A system of activities was proposed to be evaluated by means of a test plan, document analysis and collection of information during the entire stage of the research process.

The study of theses, digital documents, books and articles by different authors on the development of intercultural competence facilitated the research process. The instrument used was the content card. Likewise, the textbook was used to study the subject program regarding how the development of intercultural competence is promoted and what activities are used. The instrument used was the guide for document analysis; the experts' criteria were used to theoretically validate the system of activities and the pertinence of the proposal given by the authors before its use.

A questionnaire of open questions and the Delphi system were applied to carry out a structural communication technique for the selection of experts.

In the theoretical methods, the historical-logical analysis was used to evaluate the historical evolution of the conceptions on the development of intercultural competence; the systemic approach was used to elaborate a systemic conception of the activities for the development of intercultural competence in English as a foreign language.

Abstract modeling was used to design activities aimed at the development of intercultural competence in order to meet the needs of intercultural competence in professional performance.

During the development of the research, the authors used different logical procedures of thought, among which were analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, which favored the settlement of the characteristics and relationships established in the teaching and learning process in relation to the English language, the mother tongue and its culture.

In the mathematical-statistical methods were: the tabular methods of descriptive statistics to process the results of the instruments applied in the initial exploration and the characterization of the current state. The Delphi method of non-parametric statistics was used to process the data obtained from the expert consultation.



RESULTS

The origins of the communicative approach can be found in the thinking of several 20th century authors. The theoretical works of these authors in the field of Language Sciences have influenced the creation of the communicative approach. As early as the second decade of the 20th century, theories appeared that focused on the need to study language from the process, from the concrete utterances that speakers produce. For example, the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Valentin Voloshinov, Vygotsky, Bruner.⁽¹³⁾

An important aspect to address this topic is to know the concept of competence. Authors such as Castellanos, *et al.*⁽¹⁴⁾ define it as a psychological configuration that integrates diverse cognitive, metacognitive, motivational components and personality qualities in close functional unity, self-regulating real and efficient performance in a specific sphere of activity, in correspondence with the socially constructed desirable performance model in a specific historical context.

Communicative competence in foreign languages is also defined as a psychological configuration that integrates the knowledge and discursive, meta-linguistic and meta-cognitive skills. Attitudes and values required to signify, interact and regulate the contextual discursive performance in an efficient manner, whose empowerment contributes to the cultural and humanistic development of the student's personality according to his needs and the demands of his historical-cultural context.⁽⁸⁾

Today, communicative competence is studied as a socio-cultural dimension by various authors.^(1,2,3,4) Moreover, the concept of communicative competence indicates the ability to formulate grammatically and socially adequate utterances. For these authors, taking as a reference a series of previous definitions, communicative competence is conceptualized as the comprehension and production of messages, both oral and written, and involves four linguistic skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Therefore, they conclude that communicatively competent people are those who know the linguistic code and have developed the ability to know what to say, to whom and how to say it.⁽¹⁵⁾

The authors of the present research assume the concept of communicative competence proposed by Professor Vega because it expresses that it comprises the skills and knowledge that an individual must have to be able to use linguistic and trans-linguistic systems that are available to him/her to communicate as a member of a given socio cultural community. Likewise, they appropriate the concept of intercultural competence given by the same teacher. Intercultural competence refers to the dimension of communicative competence that integrates the knowledge, skills and values required for intercultural communication, that is, for the process of mutual understanding deployed in the interaction in English as a foreign language with representatives of different cultures, whose contact may be direct (between subjects) or mediated by cultural products.⁽¹⁶⁾

The key concept in the study of intercultural communication is undoubtedly that of culture. In this context, the term culture is used in its anthropological meaning. The traditional anthropological perspective defines culture as a coping mechanism: the totality of tools, acts, thoughts and institutions through which a population maintains itself.



Intercultural communication is a form of communication that aims to share information between different cultures and social groups. It is used to describe the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally arise within an organization or social context composed of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. In this sense, the intercultural approach is a critique of systems that "tolerate" cultural differences or even exalt them, as long as they remain easily identifiable.

In addition to language, intercultural communication focuses on the social attributes, thought patterns, and cultures of different groups of people. It involves understanding different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries. It plays a role in social sciences such as anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, psychology, and communication studies. This research studies a part of the development of intercultural communication skills.

Michael Byram⁽¹⁷⁾ defines intercultural communicative competence as the ability to understand and relate to people from other countries. The intercultural speaker will have the ability to see and manage the relationships between himself and his own beliefs, behaviors and cultural meanings, expressed in a foreign language, and those of his interlocutor, expressed in the same language, or even a combination of languages that may or may not be the language of the interlocutor.

The concept of intercultural communicative competence⁽¹⁷⁾ includes socio-cultural, social and strategic aspects within this competence. It also identifies four dimensions called knowledge, which are related to the students' abilities and skills. They are:

- Knowledge/Knowing: knowledge of social groups.
- Skills/Knowing how to understand: skills to interpret and relate.
- Skills/Knowing how to get involved: political education and critical cultural awareness.
- Skills/Knowing how to learn and do: skills to discover and interact.
- Attitudes/Knowing how to be: relativizing what is one's own and valuing what is not one's own.⁽¹⁷⁾

In this way, the foreign language learner becomes a speaker who communicates with a native speaker with a very peaceful interaction behavior for both, without giving up his own identity, in order to understand the foreign cultural identity and his own, an important aspect for a doctor in training.

Based on this idea it is possible to establish the components of the development of the intercultural dimension in its necessary interrelation with the discursive and linguistic relationship of communicative competence. The learning components for this research are knowledge, skills and values.⁽¹⁸⁾ Systematizing the above, the following dimensions and indicators are determined:

Cognitive dimension

It refers to the knowledge of English-speaking peoples in light of the particularities of one's own language.

Indicators:

- Knowledge of the everyday way of life: food and drink, schedules, traditions and celebrations, housing and everyday objects, work environment, leisure activities.
- Social context: institutions, social class, legal and economic order, educational organizations, personalities and relevant figures.
- Physical-geographical context: knowledge about localities, arts, religions, history, literature.
- Linguistic exponents: denoting the phenomena and processes mentioned above.

Procedural dimension

Skills to interact with representatives and cultural products of the English-speaking peoples.

Indicators:

- Compare foreign and one's own culture.
- Select communicative strategies to begin, maintain, repair, and conclude communication according to the norms of interaction in different communicative events on cultural topics in English.
- Use linguistic exponents to exchange on given cultural topics.
- Interpret and critically evaluate what the interlocutor and intercultural products express.

Axiological dimension

Embrace the values for mutual understanding and collaboration in exchange situations in English.

Indicators:

- Respect for linguistic and cultural diversity.
- Reaffirmation of one's own cultural identity linguistically.
- Suitable and respectful verbal interaction.
- Positive feelings towards the foreign language and one's own language.

These dimensions and indicators are based on the analysis of the contents of the units of the English training course in the field of intercultural communication.

A training course is a permanent and planned activity based on the preparation of the personnel who are going to perform a certain work activity.

Training courses should make every effort to delight the students with the subjects to be covered, and for this, they should be approached with creativity and dynamism; they should include participatory activities where the trainees feel confident expressing their ideas.

Better results were obtained in second year medical students When designing a system of activities for the development of intercultural competence in them, as evidenced in a test for positive, interesting and novel.⁽¹⁹⁾



CONCLUSIONS

Competence, according to the Foreign Language Institute, presupposes the link between cultural and linguistic learning that enriches the student, whatever their training, without giving up their identity, to learn to interact in English according to the communicative and social behavioral norms established by the inhabitants of the different environments in which they find themselves. The learning of the English language in medical students is essential to improve the quality of the training of the future medical professionals. For this reason, the proposed system of activities will contribute to the development of intercultural competence in medical students of the Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera".

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Complementary files (Open Data):

- [Consulta a especialistas para la validación del sistema de actividades para el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural](#) (Consultation with specialists for the validation of the system of activities for the development of intercultural competence)
- [Encuesta a estudiantes para caracterizar el estado inicial sobre la pertinencia del sistema de actividades utilizados para el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural](#) (Survey to students to characterize the initial state on the relevance of the system of activities used for the development of intercultural competence)
- [Entrevista a docentes del claustro de Inglés de la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera", La Habana](#) (Interview with teachers of the English faculty of the Faculty of Medical Sciences "Enrique Cabrera", Havana)
- [Sistema de actividades para desarrollar la competencia intercultural en los estudiantes de Medicina de la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas "Enrique Cabrera", La Habana](#) (System of activities to develop intercultural competence in medical students of the "Enrique Cabrera" Faculty of Medical Sciences, Havana)

