# Intercultural Competence:
# Needed ability for the XXI century researcher

*Competencia intercultural:*
*La capacidad necesaria para el investigador del siglo XXI*

**María Cruz Cuevas Álvarez**

Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco
Av. Universidad S/N Zona de la Cultura Col. Magisterial C.P. 86000.
Villahermosa, Tabasco; México.
Correo electrónico: maria.cuevas@ujat.mx

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to establish the origin of intercultural competence derived from globalization and internationalization. At the beginning, globalization and internationalization are defined. Internationalization implies certain requirements for higher education institutions as well as for their researchers. As well as requirements, there are opportunities derived from this competence in the research field. In this paper, intercultural competence is explained, and its characteristics and skills needed are mentioned. We also mention some pedagogic suggestions in order to promote it, how to evaluate it and the benefits it would bring if implemented. If implemented, everyone involved in the research field would have access to the internationalization activities and thus promote diversity. Finally, it was concluded is that this intercultural competence needs to be conceptualized and theorized.

**Key words:** internationalization, competence, intercultural competence

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es el de establecer el origen de la competencia intercultural derivada de la Globalización y la Internacionalización. En un primer momento se define lo que es la globalización e internacionalización. La internacionalización implica ciertos requerimientos para las Instituciones de Educación Superior así como a sus investigadores. Así como hay requerimientos, también hay oportunidades derivadas de esta competencia en el campo de la investigación. En este documento, también se explica qué es la competencia intercultural, características y habilidades necesarias. También se mencionan algunas sugerencias pedagógicas para poder promoverla, cómo evaluarla y los beneficios que aportaría si se implementa. De implementarse, las personas involucradas en el campo de la investigación tendrían acceso a las actividades de internacionalización dando espacio a la diversidad. Finalmente, se analizó y se llegó a la conclusión de que se necesita formular un concepto y teorizar esta competencia.

**Palabras clave:** internacionalización, competencia, competencia intercultural

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1990's a new linking concept emerged: Globalization, movement that corresponds to all economical, political and social forces which drive the XXI century Higher Educa-tion Institutions into a major involvement in the international scenario (Altbach & Knight, 2006). All the countries in the globe had to meet some demands of the ever changing world, forcing certain banking and political institutions to make some required changes in the economy depending on scientific innovation, knowledge generation, knowledge transfer, and knowledge societies respectively (De Wit, 2011, Gorostiaga y Tello, 2011, Reyes, 2011).

These changes also made quite an impact in Higher Education Institutions which in re-turn, had to make modifications in their curricula and furthermore to include competence based programs because of a second movement referred to as Internationalization. This latter includes the latent integration of research, English as a lingua franca for the scien-tific community and in the case of Higher Education Worldwide, a major importance to the international labor market directed to scholars, researchers and scientists, and more particularly, to all related aspects with information technology. Internationalization on the other hand is related to the concept of nation and the relationship among countries in or-der to have flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas (Monroy, 2008), in order to become international (Bazúa, 2000). But other authors also emphasize the importance of diversity, multiculturality and intercultural competence (Marlina, 2013) which impacts on the scientific society due to the necessity of publishing in a different to language to reach other cultures.

According to UNESCO (2013) Intercultural Competence means having an adequate, gene-

ral and relevant knowledge about particular cultures and issues arising when interact-ing with them, holding a receptive attitude and required skills (curiosity, disposition and open-ness) that encourage contact with others; for Byram, Nichols & Stevens (2001) an inter-culturally competent person's characteristics must be: patience, tolerance and empa-thy. A powerful reason why le Conseil de l'Europe (2008) defined this competence as an essential trait in all inclusive societies as an instrument of mediation and reconciliation which promo-tes integration and social cohesion. Considera-tions that must be taken into account by Higher Education Institutions, scientific communities as well as undergradu-ate doctorates.

## Requirements derived from Internationalization

In Mexico, the National Researchers System considers of great value that their members get interconnected into multinstitutional work teams under the savoir-faîre scheme (Di-dou & Remedi, 2008).

It also requires that all the listed researchers are part of: a group of prestige, discipline-re-lated cooperation networks, international mo-bility, former members of a human re-sources coaching group directed to research, printed articles in the best foreign magazines in their disciplines in order to be considered elite and successful groups (Didou & Gérard, 2011).

In order to become part of these elite groups, Mexican researchers must be part of Interna-tionalization. For this process to be effective, it must be carried out in six developmental and implementing stages according to Knight (2009) and  Childress (2009): a) awareness, b) commitment, c) planning, d) operationalize, e) review, and f) reinforcement.

By cooperating at an international level, future researchers will have the need of deve-lop-ing Intercultural Competence along with the skills and characteristics previously men-tioned if they want to be accepted or either be part of certain networks to meet the re-quired global emerging needs.

Therefore, researchers will also be required to have the knowledge and the specific com-petence so they will be able to interact with other citizens of the world to form productive and multicultural teams and work in a respec-tful and diverse environment.

## Opportunities derived from Intercultural Competence

When a second language is learned, it allows a person to become aware of the cultu-ral differences from the native tongue to the target language. In 1987, 406 foreign compa-nies implemented a training on cultural diver-sity emphasizing the importance of sensitivity or philosophy about interculturality, noticing that even when they spoke the same lan-guage, cultural differences when interacting arouse. People working in intercultural envi-ronments needed to acquire competences on: attitudes, awareness, sensitivity, knowledge and skills in order to succeed and overcome those differences. Intercultural competence shapes people into the idea of exchange, com-munication, reciprocity, dialogue, negotiation, re-sponsibility, and mutual learning among the different groups of cultural interaction. Moreover, it is a constructivist and educati-ve approach based on respect and cultural di-versity acknowledgement.

Nowadays, both private and public Higher Education Institutions are selecting resear-chers who can be part of this Internationa-lization process, people who speak another language, specially English or other, with general and relevant knowledge about other cultures and how to interact with them effec-tively in order to create and organize networ-king (The World Bank, 2005).

If intended for publishing or lectures, this competence will enhance the ability to promote results or investigations being carried out, with the aid of foreign universities, institutions, re-search centers or even governments, by having access to different types of funds or sponsors. And in a bigger scenario, having researchers from abroad cooperating in national soil.

Keeping an open-mind allows to learn from others in order to grow personal and profe-sionally while it is intended to actively understand cultural guidelines and others'

perspec-tives, in other words, talking for discovery and communication for having an effective and appropriate relationship with foreign people and thus maintain contact for future co-operation. Therefore, meeting the needs of creating multicultural networks under the savoir-faîre scheme.

## Promoting and evaluating Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence may be carried out via a two-side promotion : at home or abroad. In Zhao's findings (2002) it is mentioned that Intercultural competence can be achieved through college activities related to cooperative learning (at home) and for Deardoff (2006), this competence is a result of Internationalization related activities. In another study performed by Hernandez (2011) in Spain, participants were aware of the importance of being interculturally competent in order to interact with people from differ-ent cultural backgrounds due to the closeness of their country to other European and Af-rican countries, such as: Portugal, France, Morocco, Algeria, among others. In a medical research performed by Hudelson, Perron & Perneger (2011) in Switzerland, it showed that participants were less competent in intercultural interactions rather than those interac-tions related to their discipline. People who showed no problem interacting with foreign-ers, had better interactions than those who did not have this competence. Qualified partic-ipants worried about immigrants, which resulted in a higher level of competency and in-tercultural communication skills than their peers.

Eventhough it is not accurate the way this competence is acquired neither is its concept as it has been mentioned by some authors. Marlina (2013) for instance, suggests certain ped-agogic strategies as well as evaluation activities with which this competence may be pro-moted and evaluated, such as: a diary, oral and reflexive presentations, essays, movie analysis, research reports, case studies and projects.

It is imperative to mention that in our time, job positions aim for the intercultural dimension, because the intercultural competence allows the acknowledgement of cultural differences and the use of them as a learning resource in order to effectively respond in specific contexts. This is conceived as the term: negotiating with reality (Antal & Friedman, 2003). The year 2010 was named by UNESCO as The International Year for Cultural Approach, action that enhances the level of priority for the world inhabitant to get closer and be in touch.

## CONCLUSIONS

As it has been discussed on this essay, it can be concluded that the geographical proximi-ty of countries or borderlines is one of the main factors for people to become more inter-cultural competent than others. Also, that these same borderlines have created the need of a competence that will make researchers able to highly participate in this Internationaliza-tion process (covenants, teacher-student mobility, and research and teaching networks).

Researchers must learn how to savoir-vivre, work as a team, collaborate with foreign peers  in order to achieve both parties' goals, be aware that everyone is different and similar at the same time so that all suggestions and ideas presented should be as important as theirs. Living in strict respect, tolerance and empathy will help them overcome the issues or dif-ferences encountered when interacting with peers from foreign cultural backgrounds thus ensuring working in an environment where diversity can exist.

Internationalization has definitely had quite an impact in the research area in Mexico by promoting certain activities that demand researchers to: make international collaboration networks, study abroad,  publish papers, give lectures, and belong to an elite and prestig-ious research group in the National Research System in order to increase indicators of any Higher Education Institution. All of the mentioned above may be achieved if those re-searchers developed the Intercultural Competence.

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