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Mons. Abraham Escudero

Autor de correspondencia.

Rosa Ángel Roa Rodríguez
Rosa.roa@ufhec.edu.do

Autores

1. Máster Universitario en Formación del
Profesorado de Educación Secundaria en la
Especialidad de la Enseñanza de Lengua
Castellana y Literatura.

Universidad Federico Henríquez y Carvajal
(UFHEC) Rosa.roa@ufhec.edu.do
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6430-3422>

2. Doctor en Lingüística Aplicada. Formador
de Profesores ELE.

Universidad de Granada antxon@ugr.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1955-0232>

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Curriculum, Teaching, and Human Rights as Drivers of Critical Interculturalism in Dominican Elementary Education

Currículo, docencia y derechos humanos como impulsores de una interculturalidad crítica en la educación primaria dominicana

Rosa Ángel Roa Rodríguez¹, Antonio Álvarez Baz²

Abstract

This research explores how the curriculum, teaching, and human rights can be integrated to promote a commitment to critical interculturalism as a guiding principle at the elementary school level in the Dominican Republic. In a context characterized by rich cultural diversity, the study proposes moving beyond exclusively inclusive approaches to adopt an educational model that challenges structural inequalities. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines interviews with teachers, principals, and educational specialists—through data triangulation—the study confirms that, while diversity is valued, there are both training and organizational limitations to its implementation. It proposes incorporating critical intercultural competence as a cross-cutting theme in the curriculum, with an emphasis on respect, equity, and social justice. In addition, fifteen lines of action—academic, institutional, and ethical—are proposed to consolidate this transformative approach. In conclusion, although a clear commitment persists, a lack of coordination between teacher training, pedagogical practices, and institutional policies is identified; therefore, urgent transformations are required to ensure a context-specific, equitable, and inclusive education that demonstrates in practice what it preaches.

Keywords: Critical interculturalism; elementary education; cultural diversity; teacher education; human rights.

Abstract

This research explores how curriculum, teaching, and human rights can be integrated to foster a commitment to critical interculturality as a guiding principle at the primary level in the Dominican Republic. In a context characterized by rich cultural diversity, the study proposes moving beyond exclusively inclusive approaches and adopting an educational model that challenges structural inequalities. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines interviews with teachers, principals, and educational technicians, and applying data triangulation, the study confirms that although diversity is valued, there are limitations in both continuing professional development and organizational structures for its implementation. It proposes incorporating critical intercultural competence as a cross-cutting theme in the curriculum, emphasizing respect, equity, and social justice. In addition, fifteen academic, institutional, and ethical lines of action are suggested to consolidate this transformative approach. In conclusion, although there is a clear commitment, a lack of coordination between teacher training, pedagogical practices, and institutional policies is identified; therefore, urgent changes are required to guarantee context-specific, equitable, and inclusive education, demonstrating in practice what is preached.

Keywords: critical interculturality, primary education, cultural diversity, teacher education, human rights.

Introduction

The current reality regarding migration reflects not only an increase in human displacement but also the profound inequalities that this entails. Today, more than 281 million people live outside their countries of origin (IOM, 2024), many of whom face situations of discrimination, exclusion, and rights violations. In the field of education, this situation manifests itself in classrooms that, although they profess diversity, perpetuate exclusionary practices and are not particularly sensitive to cultural differences. A country like the Dominican Republic is a microcosm of cultural diversity. The influence of Taíno, European, and African communities—and, more recently, other immigrant communities, including Haitian, Venezuelan, Colombian, and Chinese communities, among others—has created a rich but also complex environment. In this context, cultural diversity presents an opportunity to enrich students' educational experience, development, and growth. Critical interculturalism emerges as an indispensable approach, as it is not limited to promoting the coexistence of cultures but rather questions and seeks to transform the structures that reproduce inequality in the educational sphere. According to Holguín (2024), "critical interculturalism is a transformative stance that requires space for deep reflection and sensitivity toward power and cultural diversity— —that goes beyond an essentialist or superficial approach" (p. 21). From this perspective, the Ministry of Education's

cross-cutting human rights policy (2025) emphasizes the importance of incorporating a human rights approach at all educational levels and in all educational processes, guiding teacher training, curriculum content, and school practices toward the creation of an inclusive and just environment. As noted in this document, the education system must “cultivate the teaching of human rights in the Dominican Republic and the responsibility to create the necessary means to ensure their protection” (Ministry of Education, 2025, p. 3).

The General Education Law 66-97 establishes that the curriculum must be flexible and adapted to the country’s social and cultural reality. According to MINERD (2023), its objective is to educate students who value diversity and national heritage. Ordinance 04-2023 and the Horizon 2034 Plan reinforce the need for inclusive and democratic environments, in line with the objectives of the National Development Strategy 2030 (Law 1-12), which establishes education as a means to build a more just, supportive, and cohesive society.

However, despite regulations that support this cultural integrity, their implementation in the classroom remains limited by a lack of teaching resources and teacher training. Therefore, there is a need to investigate critical interculturalism in Santo Domingo, with the aim of ensuring that diversity is not only recognized but that structural inequalities are transformed. Promoting this approach in elementary schools would enable students to develop critical awareness, skills for peaceful coexistence, and respect, while also fostering a more just, inclusive, and culturally enriching education. This study employs a mixed-methods approach with a descriptive and correlational design to analyze perceptions and practices in Santo Domingo’s elementary schools. Methodological triangulation was employed through interviews, observations, and analysis of MINERD documents, supplemented by statistical tests (chi-square and ANOVA) and a review of regulations (Order 05-2024, Fundamentals of Cultural Identity, and the Horizon 2034 Plan). The study is based on a review of current regulations that underpin the recognition of cultural diversity and on empirical evidence revealing inconsistencies in their implementation. Special emphasis is placed on critical intercultural interaction, conceptualized as a framework that goes beyond the superficial recognition of diversity, promoting educational practices that challenge existing structures of power and inequality.

Globalization, migration, and social changes have made interculturalism a key pillar of education in Latin America and the Caribbean. UNESCO states that interculturalism seeks to ensure inclusive education and respect for human rights. This concept has

evolved from the simple promotion of cultural coexistence to the promotion of active and transformative dialogue. Globalization and migration have increased the diversity of societies. Europe recorded more than 385,000 undocumented immigrants and 3.7 million documented immigrants in 2023, while the number of immigrants in Latin America rose from 8.3 to 14.8 million between 2010 and 2020. In the Dominican Republic, 87% of immigrants are of Haitian origin. Unlike multiculturalism, which is limited to recognizing the existence of different cultures, intercultural relations foster relationships based on dialogue, equality, and social transformation (Hernández, 2023). In Dominican elementary school classrooms, where students from diverse backgrounds and worldviews come together, there is an urgent need for a pedagogical approach that goes beyond mere tolerance and recognition of difference.

Interculturality is presented as an approach that helps us understand, comprehend, and respect others, valuing diversity as a resource rather than a limitation. In this global context of constant change, interaction between cultures is now a fundamental and essential part of social life. According to Diezt (2017):

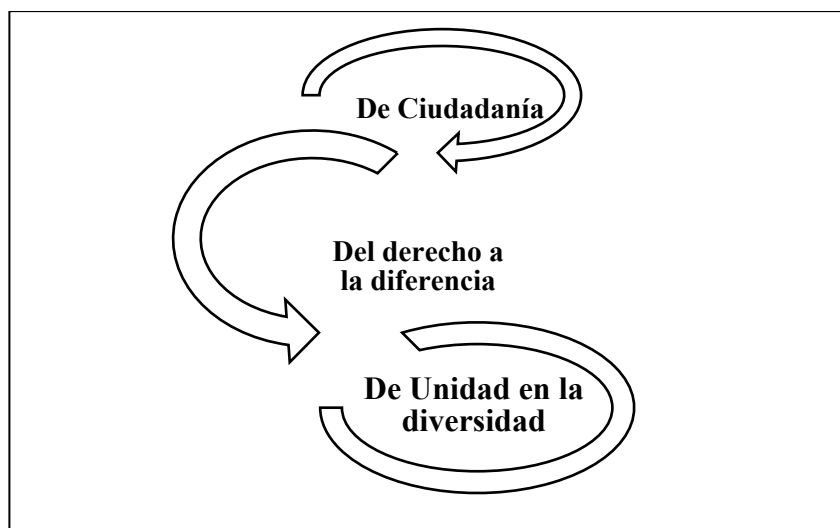
Interculturalism in Latin America dates back to the 20th century, when Venezuelan and Mexican anthropologists began to refer to intercultural education and intercultural health as new forms of interaction between state-led national integration and non-indigenous actors. (p. 196)

This indicates that interculturalism is rooted in valuing and enriching equal conditions and respect for the different cultures of each people. From a theoretical perspective, it is based on the recognition of dialogue as a process that fosters mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among different cultural groups. In other words, through dialogue, people can better understand the ideas, values, and traditions of those who are different from them, which helps build a peaceful and respectful coexistence.

However, interculturalism is grounded in three fundamental principles that facilitate cooperation and harmonious coexistence among all stakeholders (Kremer, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates how these principles come together to form the framework of interculturalism.

Figure 1.

Fundamental Principles of Interculturality



Note: Adapted from Kremer (2019)

In this vein, an intercultural pedagogy should be implemented, which refers to the set of approaches, methods, techniques, and resources that guide and enable learning in environments where different cultures converge. Its purpose will always be for educational processes to promote non-discrimination through dialogue, respect, and cooperation among all stakeholders, even if they come from diverse cultures.

In light of the above, the contributions of Álvarez Baz (2012), Leiva (2019), Nushi and Leka (2024), and Alfonzo de Tovar and Clouet (2024) agree that the development of intercultural competence requires transformative teaching practices, with trained teachers, participatory methodologies, and inclusive approaches that promote respect, cooperation, and the recognition of diversity in educational contexts.

1 Table

Comparative Table: Models and Strategies for Intercultural Teaching

Author / Year	Model or Approach	Main Themes	Proposed Strategies	Teaching
Álvarez Baz (2012)	Intercultural pedagogy in language teaching.	From the cultural to the intercultural; the role of the teacher as a mediator and of students as social and autonomous agents.	Cultural analysis activities, debates, resolving misunderstandings, role-playing, and the use of CEFR and PCIC inventories.	
Leiva (2019)	Intercultural teaching competencies in Chile.	Coexistence and cooperation; academic equality; teacher commitment in multicultural contexts.	Participation in community activities, organization of school events, and attention to diverse learning styles and paces.	
Nushi and Leka (2024)	Intercultural education in the poetry of García Lorca.	Literature as a cultural and critical tool; intercultural sensitivity through literary texts.	Individual reading, group discussion, cultural contextualization, stylistic analysis, cross-cultural comparison, creative writing.	
Alfonzo de Tovar and Clouet (2024, UPV)	Intercultural remote collaboration after the pandemic.	Model based on Fantini & Tirmizi (2006): knowledge, attitudes, skills, awareness.	Virtual/in-person collaborative projects, interaction on digital platforms, joint assignments, small virtual rooms, guided intercultural communication.	

Note: Adapted from Álvarez Baz (2012), Leiva (2019), Nushi & Leka (2024), and Alfonzo de Tovar & Clouet (2024).

In light of the above, a critical intercultural attitude—as opposed to more functional approaches—not only promotes the coexistence of cultures but also actively challenges the power structures that perpetuate inequality (Grajales, 2023). This approach entails a political and educational commitment to teaching that values diversity as a source of learning while simultaneously confronting discriminatory

practices and historical exclusion. The concept of critical interculturality is reinforced by the work of Walsh (2009), who defines it as a process aimed at transforming dominant social, cultural, and epistemic relations. In the field of education, Freire (1970) has contributed to this perspective by emphasizing the importance of a liberating pedagogy based on critical consciousness. Recently, authors such as Holguín Vaca (2024) and Jiménez Morales & Abril Hervás (2024) have updated the debate and highlighted how a critical intercultural attitude manifests itself in the context of migration and in Latin American public education policies. In the Dominican Republic, recent studies show that a critical intercultural attitude is still in the early stages of development at the elementary level, as practices focused on the superficial recognition of diversity remain prevalent (Lora, 2020; Reyes, 2020). However, schools must incorporate a critical intercultural perspective that goes beyond the superficial recognition of differences. According to Aguilar Bobadilla (2024), it is essential to challenge the power relations that generate inequality and to promote a curriculum that values students' knowledge and identities. Critical interculturalism emerges as a political, pedagogical, and knowledge-based response to cultural relations that have historically been marked by intrusions and characterized by inequality.

This definition encompasses the belief in multiple ways of being, thinking, and understanding the world, and is reflected in educational practices that foster social justice, mutual respect, and horizontal dialogue among different forms of knowledge. Despite this, various studies indicate that not all forms of interculturalism contribute to the necessary structural change. For this reason, a distinction is made between functional interculturalism and critical interculturalism.

Understanding the difference between functional and critical interculturality is key to transforming educational inequalities. This includes revising teacher training and the curriculum to incorporate cultural diversity as a driver of change, inclusion, and democratic citizenship.

The curriculum is a key avenue for integrating critical interculturalism into the education system. According to Grajales (2023), it must go beyond simply making diversity visible; it must challenge power structures and ensure equitable participation in the classroom. Aravena and Quiroz (2024) emphasize that teacher training is essential, as it is teachers who translate policies into concrete actions. However, as several studies point out (Santos & Méndez, 2022; Rodríguez & Morillo, 2021), many teachers are not sufficiently prepared to address cultural diversity from a critical

perspective. Although the MINERD reforms (2022, 2024) have made progress on inclusion issues, there is still a need for clearer and more effective implementation regarding the management of diversity in classrooms. Teacher training in the Dominican Republic still has significant gaps. Many teachers are not sufficiently prepared to meet the demands of the competency-based curriculum or to address cultural diversity. Although refresher programs exist, their scope is limited in this critical intercultural area. It is recommended that higher education be strengthened by focusing on diversity, human rights, and inclusion to improve the quality of education throughout the country.

Critical interculturalism is closely linked to human rights. Education must go beyond imparting knowledge to ensure equality and social justice (Santos & Méndez, 2022). According to SDG 4, inclusive education that values diversity is promoted as a way to strengthen respect, global citizenship, and social cohesion (UN-ECLAC, 2022). Authors such as España Palop (2025) and Delcheva (2024) offer innovative pedagogical approaches that integrate culture and promote collaborative and democratic learning. An analysis of the theoretical framework shows that critical intercultural interaction is key to inclusive education in elementary school classrooms in the Dominican Republic. This approach proposes integrating the curriculum, teacher training, and human rights from a transformative perspective that not only recognizes cultural diversity but also challenges structural inequalities and promotes respect for difference as the foundation for learning and democratic coexistence.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach based on source triangulation—that is, the integration of different perspectives to strengthen the validity of the results (Flick, 2022). Structured interviews were conducted with teachers, principals, and educational specialists. This strategy allowed for the comparison of perspectives from different levels of the education system, which enriched the analysis and interpretation of the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Flick, 2022).

To this end, a comprehensive triangulation of the interviews conducted with various key stakeholders in the education system was carried out to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings. We organized and analyzed in depth the interviews with the 7 principals and management teams of the schools, 15 teachers from multicultural schools, as well as 15 educational specialists from the Ministry of Education and its

national, regional, and district offices. The objective was to obtain relevant information regarding knowledge of interculturalism, the various competencies needed to address cultural diversity in the classroom, multidisciplinary approaches, and the importance of developing intercultural competence in elementary school classrooms.

To this end, a statistical triangulation approach was employed. First, the reliability of the instruments was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated acceptable reliability for the questionnaires administered to teachers and educational technicians at elementary schools. In contrast, Aiken's V coefficient was used as a key statistical measure to evaluate the consistency and validity of the judgments made by the experts. Since the criteria of Relevance, Coherence, Clarity, and Precision were rated on an ordinal scale from 1 to 4, it was essential to determine to what extent these judgments reflected reliable agreement among the evaluators and, consequently, the validity of the instruments or criteria used. This yielded an overall Aiken's V coefficient of 0.841, indicating acceptable content validity.

Results

The triangulation of sources, statistical analysis, and literature review revealed commonalities, tensions, and gaps. All stakeholders valued cultural diversity as key to elementary education in the province of Santo Domingo. Participants from the education sector—including principals, teachers, and educational specialists—recognize cultural diversity as a current and valuable reality in schools. However, while diversity is viewed positively, both teachers and principals admit that they do not feel prepared to effectively integrate it into their practice. They identify barriers such as a lack of language skills and strategies for adapting the curriculum. MINERD specialists point out that the national education program maintains a homogeneous structure and lacks clear competencies for addressing multiculturalism. This reflects the lack of specific educational guidelines and limits the implementation of critical intercultural education. These findings align with recent studies that emphasize the need to strengthen teacher training in critical intercultural aspects (Jiménez Morales & Abril Hervás, 2024; Holguín Vaca, 2024). Using statistical tests including the chi-square test and ANOVA, the results showed no statistically significant differences among the groups of stakeholders consulted. This indicates that perceptions regarding the importance of cultural diversity in educational practice are consistent and convergent across all levels and among all stakeholders, reinforcing the idea that there is a

general consensus on the importance of diversity management in the school environment. Aiken's V coefficient was used to assess the content validity of the questionnaire using IBM SPSS Statistics v25 software; this yielded an overall Aiken's V coefficient of 0.841, indicating acceptable content validity.

Table 2.

Summary of Aiken's V by Criterion

Criterion	Average V
Relevance	0.883
Clarity	0.810
Consistency	0.839
Accuracy	0.832
Overall V of the instrument	0.841

Note. Interpretation: $V \geq 0.90$ = excellent; $0.70 \leq V < 0.90$ = acceptable; $V < 0.70$ = insufficient (Aiken, 1980).

These results indicate that the instrument is of high quality in all these aspects, with values close to the thresholds indicating that it is relevant, clear, coherent, and accurate.

Similarly, the results obtained from the perceptions of the various educational stakeholders show that cultural diversity exists in schools, but this diversity must be managed, as there remains a gap in the effective implementation of strategies and practices that translate these guidelines into concrete and consistent actions.

Table 3.

Perceptions of Different Educational Stakeholders.

Stakeholder	Perceptions Main	Recent MINERD documents	Areas of Agreement	Discrepancies
Principals and management teams	They view cultural diversity as a normal part of daily life; some see it as an advantage, while others point to language barriers.	Horizon 2034 Plan (MINERD, 2025); Ordinance 05-2024 (educational inclusion).	They value diversity as a principle of inclusion.	There is a lack of formal mechanisms (management, support systems) to overcome language barriers.
Teachers	They recognize that diversity impacts the classroom (language, curriculum adaptation), although they value its pedagogical richness.	Cultural Identity Booklets (Educando, 2024).	They agree that diversity is enriching.	Limitations in resources and teacher training persist when it comes to addressing multiculturalism.
Educational Specialists	They point out that the curriculum promotes homogeneity and lacks clear competencies for multiculturalism.	Ordinance 05-2024; Horizon 203 Plan.	They recognize the need for intercultural competencies in the curriculum.	They identify a gap between policy discourse and curricular practice.
Summary	Converging perception: diversity exists and must be managed.	Official policy supports respect for cultural diversity.	General consensus: Diversity is an educational value.	Lack of implementation: the rules need to be put into practice

Note: Prepared by the author, based on data triangulation.

The use of structured interviews with teachers, principals, and technical staff allowed for the triangulation of sources, which lent stability to the results. This methodology, supported by current educational research (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Flick, 2022), revealed that critical intercultural attitudes, although acknowledged in discourse, are not yet reflected in daily practice. In this context, it is recommended to strengthen initial and in-service teacher training, revise curricula, and develop educational policies that integrate intercultural competencies related to human rights.

Analysis of the interviews showed that critical intercultural attitudes are present in the discourse of educational stakeholders but do not systematically translate into teaching practice. This gap between what is said and what is done aligns with the arguments put forward by Grajales (2023) and España Palop (2025), who caution that intercultural interaction cannot remain merely a matter of statements but must be actively integrated into the classroom. It also confirms the findings of Walsh (2009) and Jiménez Morales and Abril Hervás (2024) regarding the urgent need for educational policies that promote teacher training with a critical and transformative approach.

Conclusions

The study shows that the Dominican Republic is fertile ground for advancing toward a critical intercultural education. Teaching staff possess a high level of ethical and emotional sensitivity, but they need institutional support and specialized training to translate this sensitivity into transformative practice. The inclusion of critical intercultural competence as a central pillar of the curriculum is not only essential but also necessary to strengthen a humanistic, decolonial education oriented toward the common good.

In this context, implementing this approach in elementary education would play a significant role in fostering critical awareness among students regarding their own identities and those of their peers, as well as in developing the skills needed to coexist and collaborate in intercultural contexts with respect and equity.

Furthermore, ensuring an education geared toward the development of critical interculturalism would be necessary to eliminate inequality gaps and pave the way for a new pedagogical system that fosters the coexistence of different languages, beliefs,

and traditions. This would not only promote the holistic development of each student but would also strengthen community ties, respect, and cultural appreciation.

The Primary Level Curriculum Reform, together with Ordinance 04-2023 and the Horizon 2034 Plan, provides a favorable regulatory framework. However, the necessary coordination between the curriculum, teacher training, and institutional management is still lacking to consolidate a critical, inclusive, and transformative intercultural education that truly recognizes human rights.

In response to the challenges identified in the Primary Level Curriculum Reform (MINERD, 2023), this paper presents a proposal for a cross-curricular competency that addresses the need to strengthen an inclusive, relevant education centered on respect for the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity of Dominican students.

With the aim of highlighting critical interculturalism as a cross-cutting theme in the elementary school curriculum, promoting teaching strategies that foster democratic coexistence, intercultural dialogue, equity, and social justice across all subject areas, the program sets forth the following objectives:

- To develop students' skills in coexisting respectfully, engaging in dialogue, and understanding other cultures.
- To provide teachers with clear guidelines for applying a critical intercultural approach in their daily practice.
- To enrich the national curriculum with a critical perspective that integrates local knowledge, global diversity, and the principles of social equity.

In line with this, the following Critical Intercultural Competency is proposed:

Interact, communicate, and learn in a reflective and respectful manner in diverse contexts, valuing cultural pluralism as a source of knowledge and acting with empathy, justice, and social equity.

According to the OEI report and the book **Dominican Education toward 2021: Reflections, Approaches, and Experiences** (OEI, 2021), the pillars for improving the education system are teacher training, curriculum quality, and equity. The same document notes that there are still shortcomings in teacher preparation to address diversity, which justifies the need for a competency that addresses this dimension from a critical and inclusive perspective.

Based on the results obtained during the research, fifteen action guidelines are proposed, formulated across three strategic dimensions: academic, institutional, and social/ethical. The objective of these guidelines is to promote the effective inclusion of the critical intercultural dimension as a cross-cutting theme in the Dominican Republic's elementary education curriculum. From an academic perspective, the study emphasizes the need to integrate this competency into curriculum development, revamp teacher training, and promote the creation of context-specific materials. At the institutional level, changes are proposed in educational management, learning support, and community participation. Finally, in the social and ethical sphere, the development of public policies, materials, and cultural activities that promote equality, social justice, and respect for cultural diversity is encouraged. Each line of action is grounded in existing regulations and strategic plans, such as the adaptation of primary education programs (MINERD, 2023), Decree 03-2013 on quality teacher training, the Horizon 2034 plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4 and 10). The table below presents a coherent and actionable roadmap for advancing toward a more inclusive, context-specific, and transformative education, in line with the cultural challenges facing the Dominican education system.

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