Fostering Cultural Openness regarding Language Education

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Abstract: This research explores the link between Cultural Openness and linguistic education, focusing on learning motivations and multicultural contexts, particularly for teachers and students. It emphasizes cultural openness as crucial for integrating diverse participants and supporting their development in multicultural societies. The systematic review searches for scientific articles from three databases (WOS, Scopus, and ERIC). It evaluates education levels, environments, and external influences across contexts, including native and second language teaching. Using bibliographic analysis based on the Prisma 2020 method, 21 relevant works are synthesized. This approach provides a holistic view. By critically analyzing cultural influences, this research informs pedagogical adaptation in multicultural settings, enhancing educational understanding. These results indicate that multicultural competence is the most frequently addressed topic in the studies, with intercultural education also significant. Other variables, including cultural respect, ambiguity, empathy, and intercultural communication competence, emphasize key research aspects. Promoting multicultural competence and intercultural education at all educational levels is recommended, highlighting teacher training and practices in cultural respect and empathy. The need for research and language policies that encourage Cultural Openness in curricula is also underscored. Most studies are quantitative or essays; thus, more qualitative or mixed-method studies could provide deeper insights into participants' experiences and perceptions.

Keyword: Cultural Openness

Introduction

The variable *Cultural Openness* is primarily explored in the humanities and social sciences, including cultural anthropology, sociology, cultural psychology, education, ethnography, and cultural studies. These fields examine how individuals interact, relate, and derive meaning from their cultural experiences, emphasizing openness to other cultures. It is also significant in intercultural contexts like communication and management. In education, *Cultural Openness* (Dreamson et al., 2017) refers to the willingness to engage with and understand different cultural perspectives. This concept has been translated in recent years into practices of inclusion (Qaisi, 2021) and the integration of existing educational agents, such as students or teachers themselves (Pires, 2022). *Cultural Openness and Desire to Learn* is a sub-dimension which takes part in multicultural competencies (Fink et al., 2021). Therefore, it is a variable that requires investigation, having been studied to some extent, and there is potential for further exploration. It belongs to the range of cultural attitudes and skills (Escalante et al., 2014) among which are included vision, affections and beliefs. This sub-dimension is combined with two others to understand multicultural competencies: first, cultural references (Jiménez et al., 2017), second, cultural knowledge and behaviors (Alvarez Baz, 2013).

From a linguistic perspective, particularly in language teaching, the cultural approach has been a key focus (Baker, 2016) for professionals mediating integration in classrooms with foreign students (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2021; Chu and Bomber, 2023). Cultural Openness is a main pillar of teaching, especially in multicultural contexts where students

come from other countries (Kiss and Mizusawa, 2018) or when their native language is not commonly spoken (Finck et al., 2021). Ethnographic interviews (Bateman, 2002) and Internationalization at Home (IaH) initiatives (Aubrey & Tsang, 2022) effectively promote Cultural Openness. These practices enable students to interact with native speakers and reflect on their cultural perceptions, potentially changing attitudes and increasing language learning motivation. Training in Cultural Openness is crucial for pre-service teachers' development of multicultural competencies and empathy (Peña-Acuña & Cislowska, 2024). It prepares them for diverse school environments and enhances awareness of classroom diversity. This training fosters intercultural skills, aids in adapting pedagogical strategies, encourages collaboration with families, prompts reflection on personal biases, and equips teachers for interpersonal challenges. Ultimately, this investment promotes educational equity and inclusive education.

This research aims to investigate cultural openness among educational agents and students in contexts where the latter may be immigrants or from other cultures, whether in the teaching of the mother tongue (L1) or a second language (L2), according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2017).Understanding the levels of education and the teaching context (Ley Orgánica 3/2020) is essential to gather valuable information about external factors that can influence (Dreamson et al., 2017). The outcome of this inquiry involves mapping the studies on Cultural Openness focusing on language education. This will reveal the current state of the topic—whether it is early, expanding, or well-developed— and the emphasis on teacher training in multicultural and plurilingual societies (Dimitrov & Deardoff, 2023; Sjøen, 2023) to support learners, as well as the evaluation of teaching interventions (Fatmawati et al., 2023). This study will assess sensitivity to this topic in the educational sphere, both in research and teaching. In this context, a systematic investigation has been proposed based on a previous bibliographical study on language teaching from a cultural approach (Chu & Bomber, 2023), analyzing possible methods considering the intercultural environment of current teaching processes (Markey et al., 2021). A study of both quantitative and qualitative aspects of primary studies from scientific sources has been conducted to summarize and compare existing information (Hsiu et al., 2018a). After selecting sources, the 22 works chosen for analysis and comparison, based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, will be presented.

Cultural Openness in Language education: a teaching approach

The unique term *Cultural Openness and Desire to Learn* comes from a validated questionnaire in English (Mallinckrodt et al., 2014) that uses these subdimensions to measure multicultural competencies and empathy in teaching processes. Multicultural competence refers to the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. It involves awareness of one's own cultural worldview, knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and cross-cultural skills. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person, putting oneself in their shoes and experiencing their emotions. This dimension was later used by Finck et al. (2021) who adapted and validated the questionnaire in Spanish in the Colombian context.

In recent years, studies highlight a significant rise in research on cultural intelligence (CI) in Education (Sousa et al., 2023). Various terms refer to CI (Presbitero, 2016), including cross-cultural competence, cultural knowledge, and multicultural awareness (Baker, 2016; Sousa et al., 2019). These concepts encompass fields like knowledge, experience, and culture, leading to models such as intercultural communication competence and cultural competence, which reveal the Cultural Openness of teachers and students in education (Finck et al., 2021). The importance of cultural openness and desire to learn among educational agents is essential (Bessie, 2018) for achieving total inclusion in

classrooms, especially in language teaching as a mother tongue (L1) or foreign language (L2) according to MCER (Council of Europe, 2017).

Furthermore, Deardorff (2006) addressed the agreement among intercultural experts on defining intercultural competencies. It is now recognized that cultural intelligence (CI) involves effective communication and behavior in intercultural contexts (Mallinckrodt et al., 2014), especially in education. Students must develop intercultural communication skills along with linguistic abilities (Al Sumait et al., 2022). This entails expressing oneself accurately in the target language (Sierra, 2022) and understanding cultural nuances in communication (Sandín & Núñez, 2021). Effective teaching must extend beyond grammar and vocabulary to include non-verbal and contextual elements vital for successful intercultural communication (Kastner, 2021).

Moreover, openness and linguistic diversity are crucial aspects of linguistics (Tantucci & Wang, 2022). Educators should encourage students to view learning a new language as an opportunity to explore different ways of thinking (Feng et al., 2023). This approach enhances intercultural competence and develops culturally competent, open-minded individuals (McCandless & Gooden, 2024). Thus, effectively integrating Cultural Openness and Intercultural Competence in language teaching goes beyond mere linguistic knowledge, focusing on fostering a mindset of Cultural Openness (Catarci et al., 2020; Wei, 2023).

Method

The criteria for documentary sample selection, materials, and methodology in social sciences have adhered to the guidelines established by Codina (2020) and Uddin (2010). The sources utilized consist of primary scientific databases including WOS, SCOPUS, and ERIC. These comprise two general databases and one specialized in education. The search has also been supplemented by consultations with specialized or expert registries and by reviewing the reference lists in the found studies (Kietchenham et al., 2009).

A search strategy has been employed, enabling us to select scientific articles published between 2014 and 2025, as they are contemporary and thus provide a more precise insight into current realities. To understand the selection process and to identify which articles have been discarded, reference can be made to the diagram provided in Figure 3. A qualitative textual procedural method has been chosen for research implementation due to its benefits. This method supports a multidisciplinary approach (Nishiyama & Leleito, 2018) and structural analysis (Morgan, 2022), facilitating data analysis and information search (Wigfield et al., 2016). It enables the identification of trends in Cultural Openness in teaching.

In this case, the following resources have been utilized: Operational descriptors (Uddin, 2010) delineate the filters and limits of the study (Codina, 2020), primarily involving peer-reviewed studies from 2014 to 2025 in the scientific domain. As a key search strategy (Linares-Espinós et al., 2018), free text (Hunter et al., 2022) allows information retrieval through registration fields (DOI, URI, source) based on keywords (see Figure 1) and controlled vocabulary in selected databases. The thesaurus is used for its operational efficiency (Sinuany-Stern, 2021) to avoid irrelevant studies (Barber et al., 2018). Boolean operators (AND, OR) help link concepts and access a high volume of unscreened information (AlDhaen, 2022) (see Figure 2)

Figure 1.
Key words.

| Search	Key words	Articles and sources found
#1	Intercultural competence	116
#2	Teaching languages	254
#3	Cultural openness	142
#4	Language learning	362

Figure 2.
Boolean operators.

Search	Search strategy with AND operator
#1	Learning_languages*_especial OR teaching_languages* OR languages_in_education*
#2	Cultural_openess* OR openess in culture*
#3	#1 AND #2
#4	(intercultural_competence)[Title/Abstract] AND cultural_openness[Title/Abstract]) OR cultural_education OR teaching_languages AND language_learning [Publication Type] OR random_related_cultural_education* [Title/Abstract]
#5	#3 AND #4

The inclusion and exclusion criteria (Linares-Espinós, 2018) defined the selected sample (21) and guided the description and quality analysis per the PRISMA Declaration of 2020 (Page et al., 2021).

A PRISMA flowchart is included (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses, 2020) showing the evidence collected for this systematic review and the documentary selection process (Page et al., 2021). Exclusion criteria identified include temporality (1) for studies outside the 2014-2024 range, non-scientific sources (2) from non-primary or unverified sources (3), and languages other than English or Spanish.

Figure 3.
PRISMA flowchart 2020
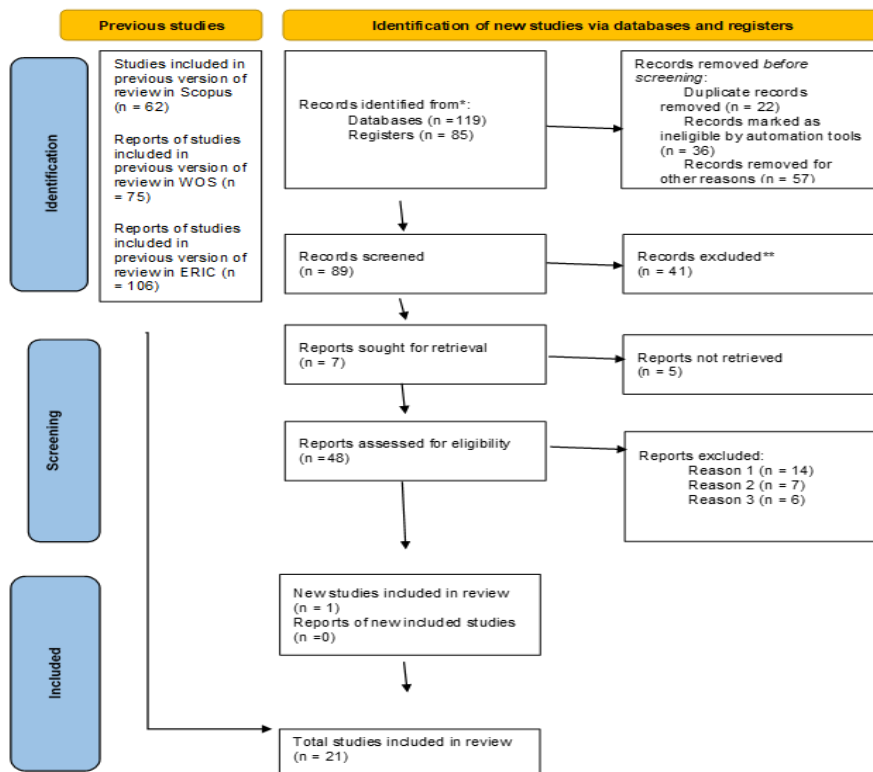
Source: Own elaboration according to Prisma 2020 (Page et al., 2021).

Results

A final selection of 21 articles has been made from these, chosen based on their relevance to the study's objectives and appropriateness of content, as depicted in Table 1. Of the 21 studies provided, the types of research are distributed as follows: quantitative (38.1%), essay (28.6%), mixed (19.0%), systematic review (9.5%), and qualitative (4.8%). The field of multicultural competence in education appears to be well-studied, particularly in the United States, which leads with the highest number of studies.

These results indicate that multicultural competence is the most frequently addressed topic in the studies, representing nearly one-third of the mentions. Intercultural education is also a significant topic, with 19% of the mentions. The other variables, although less frequent, highlight important aspects such as cultural respect, ambiguity, empathy, and intercultural communication competence, each with 9.5% of the mentions.

Table 1.
Results of the systematic review.

Author	Year	Content summary	Type of research, sample number, country
Peña-Acuña & Pintado-Giménez	2025	Cultural respect, as a subcomponent of cultural openness, is essential for quality multicultural education.	Systematic review. Sample: 18 scientific articles
Peña-Acuña	2024	Tolerance for ambiguity, as a subcomponent of cultural openness, enhances language teaching.	Systematic review. Sample: 19 scientific articles
Fernandez-Corbacho et al.	2024	Future teachers need cultural openness and empathy for a diverse, digital society.	Mixed study. Sample: 30 Students (Spain)
Grosh et al.	2023	International environments enhance students' intercultural education.	Cuantitative study. Sample: 7391 Students (The Netherlands)
Al Sumait et al.	2022	Study analyzes intercultural communication competence in university students of Kuwait.	Cuantitative study. Sample: 829 Students (Kuwait)
Finck et al.	2021	Study adapts tool measuring multicultural effects, showing reliability.	Cuantitative study. Sample: 485 Students (Colombia)
Markey et al.	2021	Diverse nursing classrooms enhance intercultural competence.	Essay
Tansey & Parks	2021	Article discusses privileged regulations hindering equity and professionalism.	Essay
Kastner	2021	Research highlights values fostering intercultural friendships.	Mixed study. Sample: 10 Recent graduates (Australia)
Olkoniemi et al.	2021	Study shows metaphors require more cognitive effort.	Cuantitative study. Sample: 63 Students (Finland)
Cummins, J.	2019	This article fosters dialogue on crosslinguistic pedagogy with bilingual students.	Essay
Azevedo & Shane	2019	This article presents an integrated cultural intelligence training program.	Essay
Kidwell	2019	Teachers need training in cross cultural education alongside language instruction.	Cualitative. Sample: Teachers 20+Students 20 (Indonesia)
Schwarzenthal et al.	2018	This dissertation recognizes cultural diversity norms affecting intergroup outcomes.	Cuantitative study. Sample: 1,975 Students (Germany)
Hsiu et al.	2018a	Research shows nursing students' cultural competence progression.	Cuantitative. Sample: 145 Students (USA)
Hsiu et al.	2018b	The faculty were culturally conscious and moving towards cultural competence.	Mixed. Sample: 13 Teachers (USA)
Kiss & Mizusawa	2018	Dissertation highlights assessment-focused English writing instruction.	Essay
Dreamson et al.	2017	Study emphasizes indigenous values for cultural inclusivity.	Documentary cualitative review. Sample: 10 policies+50LMS sites
Emaliana	2017	Study analyzes English students' needs to inform teaching approaches.	Cuantitative. Sample: 140 Students (Indonesia)
Schwarzenthal at al.	2017	Study links intercultural interaction to competence development.	Cuantitative. Sample: 631 Students (Germany)
Mallinckrodt et al.	2014	Experimental study identifies multicultural competencies with focus group and a validated measurement tool.	Mixed. Sample: Pretest 602 Students and Post test 676 Students (USA)
Butchel	2014	Comparative Experimental study that examines cultural psychology's effects on awareness and stereotypes.	Cuantitative. Samples: 20 Students +34 Students (USA)

Leung et al.	2014	Article reviews intercultural competences and proposes trait classifications.	Essay

The results can be grouped into three approaches. The three approaches of the language education are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4.
Approaches to language education from Cultural Openness.
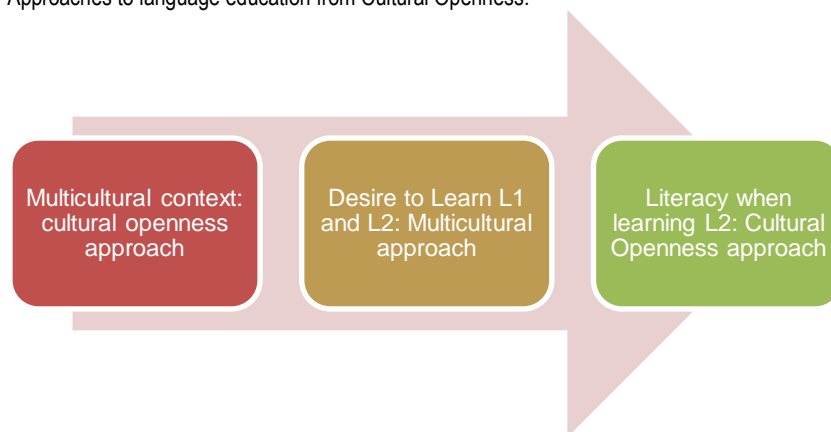
The three approaches are structured into three sections, who are explained below.

The multicultural contexts in language teaching (L1 and L2): the approach of cultural openness

The authors like Grosh (2023) or Markey et al. (2021) defend in their studies that the cultural openness in language learning is closely linked to diversity within the teaching process itself if approached from an intercultural and competency-based cultural learning perspective. The first of these, Grosh (2023), in his study, works with a group of European students from Denmark in higher education regarding a second language (L2). Markey et al. (2021), for its part provides information regarding the need to work on different strategic approaches to facilitate intercultural learning and thus promote, within the classroom, an approach of openness and acceptance of the foreign group.

Kidwell (2019) explores how culture is integrated into second language teacher education programs. Through a qualitative case study in an Indonesian teacher training program, it examines novice teachers' learning and practices in teaching culture. Data includes interviews and lesson observations with 20 teacher trainers, as well as interviews, lesson observations, and journal entries from 20 newly graduated novice teachers. Findings indicate that teachers have limited opportunities to learn how to teach culture and rarely address it in their classrooms. The study suggests that teacher education programs should provide more concrete guidance on teaching culture to enhance novice teachers' ability to foster students' intercultural competence. Tansey and Parks (2021) analyse how co-cultural communication can strengthen inclusivity in professionalism education and community formation. The authors argue that privileged norms in professionalism can perpetuate inequalities and suggest that the inclusion of non-dominant perspectives and behaviours can improve professional training. They use case studies and co-cultural communication theory to propose changes that promote greater inclusivity and equity in professionalism.

Finck et al. (2021) and Mallinckrodt et al. (2014), in their studies can be considered the precursors of the terms *cultural openness* and *desire to learn.* The first study focuses on a teaching environment for students whose mother tongue is Spanish in a Colombian

context. The author aims to provide information about the teaching process from a multicultural approach, introducing a new instrument to measure the progression of multicultural outcomes, the process of cultural openness, and the desire to learn within this group. In their study, the results offer a general vision of the approach to cultural openness for this case, since they suggest high reliability and validity of the instrument itself for some scales within the teaching process. The students that participated in the project demonstrated higher levels of multicultural competence compared to the previous validation study of Mallinckrodt et al., (2014), although there is no clear reason for this difference. It is suggested that multicultural dynamics in Colombia marked by the absence of white cultural hegemony established as in the United States, may have an influence. From the perspective of this study (Mallinckrodt, et al., 2014), the cultural openness occurs inherently when the teaching process involves foreign students or students who are learning a second language in any of the academic contexts.

The desire to learn in language teaching: the approach of the native language (L1) and the second language (L2) from a multicultural perspective

From a pedagogical perspective, the motivation to learn within educational settings, particularly concerning language, goes beyond mere cultural receptivity; it is often tied to the individual needs of students. Olkoniemi et al. (2021) focus on the teaching approach and provide insights into how they state that linguistic rhetoric becomes more complex to acquire in a second language, particularly when the mother tongue does not share the same morphological basis. In these cases, the desire to learn, as Azevedo and Jo Shane (2019) argue, can be diminished by the limitations of understanding and by other cognitive or motivational aspects.

Hsiu et al. (2018a) they also contribute to this context. In their study they defend how cultural competence and the desire to learn have developed in a group of nursing students who were acquiring skills in their native language focused on the scientific field that was applicable to them. In contrast, the inquiry carried out by Dreamson et al. (2017) provides a completely opposite view, since it indicates that pedagogical practice focused on theoretical aspects within the teaching of second languages distorts the cultural inclusivity and the desire to learn of students whose knowledge would be more limited. Kiss and Mizusaw (2018) and Emaliana (2017) coincide with Dreamson et al. (2017) conclude in their study by advocating for the adoption of a pedagogy that fosters equity and cultural diversity to maintain long-term motivation for learning from a multicultural standpoint.

Literacy in learning a second language (L2) from the approach of cultural openness

There are studies (Fernandez-Corbacho et al., 2024; Peña-Acuña, 2024, Peña-Acuña & Pintado-Giménez; Schawarzenthal et al., 2017) address the multiliteracy in multicultural environments from the language learning perspective. They defend that the intercultural contacts within language learning are positive for the development of the cultural competence and to promote the cultural openness within the group. Furthermore, they provide information indicating that competence increases with age as contact with other cultures grows. Consequently, the desire to learn about other contexts also increases, as defended by Butchel (2014) and Al Sumait et al. (2022). They both explore the need to include intercultural lessons in educational contexts of language teaching so as to foster cultural openness, precisely from a teaching approach.

Kastner (2021) focuses his study on the need to promote the intercultural relations in language teaching contexts, especially in the situations where the communities share

values or social references. In this way, active dialogue and cultural openness are encouraged in environments where language learning becomes essential (Cummins, 2019). The research conducted by Schawarzenthal et al. (2018) offers insights and significant findings regarding how the ethnic makeup and diversity climate within classrooms are significantly shaped by multiculturalism, thereby promoting cultural receptivity in student interactions.

Discussion

The main discovery of this study is the mapping of the three primary approaches being taken on the topic, as explained before. Currently, the landscape of cultural openness in language teaching educational settings reflects a growing recognition of its importance (Schewarzenthal et al., 2017). There is greater awareness about the need to integrate pedagogical practices that promote cultural openness and intercultural learning to foster the desire to learn other languages. The research highlights the positive influence of diversity in classrooms and teaching interventions in the process of cultural openness (O´Donell & Sireci, 2022). At the same time, intercultural approaches and the development of cultural competencies have become key elements to enrich the learning experience of students (Kwow et al., 2014).

There is a shift towards pedagogical strategies that not only focus on language proficiency, but also incorporate cultural and multimodal dimensions to promote, precisely, the cultural openness. Recent studies by scholars such as Grosh (2023) and Markey et al. (2021) underscore the significance of incorporating cultural diversity into the educational framework, endorsing an intercultural approach and the cultivation of cultural competencies. The inclusion of intercultural lessons, the recognition of the technical diversity and the promotion of the equity are are increasingly present aspects in language teaching educational programs (Kuronen & Tefujeff, 2020).

Cultural Openness and Desire to Learn (Finck et al., 2021) remains a crucial component and recognizes the importance of addressing the specific difficulties that students face when learning a second language (Kastner, 2021). The implementation of the inclusive and equitable practices seeks to maintain motivation and the desire to learn in the multicultural contexts (Hsiu et al., 2018b), as defended by numerous authors, A positive shift towards more holistic approaches that recognize the interconnectedness between language and culture is highlighted (Kastner, 2021). Cultural openness positions itself as a key objective for language teaching, contributing to the formation of culturally competent individuals in an increasingly diverse world (Sierra & Foucart, 2022).

When analyzing the results of the literature review, it becomes clear that Cultural Openness in language teaching is closely linked to the intercultural approach and the development of cultural competencies (Qaisi, 2021; Peña-Acuña, 2024; Pintado-Giménez, 2025). For this reason, coupled with that, the desire to learn is shaped by various factors, including the ability of teachers to adapt their pedagogical methods to the individual and cultural needs of students (Sandín & Núñez, 2021). Precisely when educators recognize and embrace cultural diversity in the classroom, cultivate an environment conducive to students' interest and motivation towards language learning (Olkoniemi et al., 2021). After the study, it can also be determined how difficulties in acquiring a second language can impact the desire to learn, particularly when the mother tongue lacks a common morphological basis (Kastner, 2021). However, innovative proposals such as cultural intelligence training can mitigate these limitations and temporarily sustain the desire to learn (San Isidro, 2022). This is evident in the inclusion of culturally relevant content and the establishment of meaningful connections between language and students' life experiences (Hsiu et al., 2018b).

Cultural Openness, therefore, becomes an essential component for understanding and mutual appreciation between students of different origins (Schawarzenthal et al., 2018). Intercultural approaches not only teach the language itself but also promote understanding of the cultural complexities surrounding that language. The study of Grosh (2023) focused on European students in Denmark highlights how the composition of classrooms and teaching interventions directly influence cultural openness and students' predisposition to learn a new language. Markey et al. (2021) reinforce this perspective, highlighting the need for strategic approaches to facilitate intercultural learning and foster openness and acceptance in the classroom.

This profound understanding contributes to breaking down cultural barriers, promoting empathy and acceptance in the classroom. Therefore, cultural openness is manifested through exposure to diverse perspectives, exploration of traditions, and promotion of respect for other cultures (Dreamson et al., 2017). Therefore, cultural openness is manifested through exposure to diverse perspectives, exploration of traditions, and promotion of respect for other cultures (Haag & Compton, 2014).

It is concluded that the interconnection between Cultural Openness and Desire to Learn in language teaching is revealed as a crucial component to enrich the educational experience. Diversity in the classroom is presented as a valuable asset, influencing not only the development of cultural competencies, but also the sustained desire to learn. Likewise, the studies examined emphasize the value of embracing intercultural methods, innovative teaching tactics, and the integration of intercultural curriculum. This analysis highlights the need to design inclusive educational environments that foster intercultural understanding and acceptance, thus contributing to the formation of individuals, including immigrant adults, who are culturally competent and motivated to explore language learning in multicultural enriching contexts.

Cultural openness in initial teacher education is essential to prepare educators to be culturally competent, equitable, and effective in a classroom with immigrant children or immigrant adults. These aspects contribute not only to the quality of teaching, but also to the well-being and academic success of students. Consequently, the variable of Cultural Openness ultimately emerges as an essential bridge toward building a globally conscious and enriching educational space.

Furthermore, it is crucial for language policies to foster cultural openness within the training of future teachers and the foundational curriculum. This approach creates an inclusive language policy that enriches the educational environment. So it is recommended to promote multicultural competence and intercultural education at all educational levels, with an emphasis on teacher training and the inclusion of practices of cultural respect, empathy, and intercultural communication. Additionally, it is necessary to integrate language policies that support linguistic diversity and encourage the use of multiple languages in educational settings to enhance cultural understanding and inclusivity.

However, given that most studies are quantitative and essays, it could be beneficial to conduct more qualitative and mixed-method studies to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions. More qualitative and mixed-method research is recommended to explore individual and group experiences in detail, as well as longitudinal studies that can observe changes and developments over time.

Additionally, it has revealed which variables are consistent and what gaps remain to be explored. These results suggest that, while there is considerable focus on multicultural competence and intercultural education, other aspects such as empathy and intercultural

communication competence are also relevant and could benefit from further research to better understand their impact and development in diverse educational contexts. Therefore, Cultural Openness is a variable that needs further exploration.

The strength of this study lies in giving sufficient relevance to the variable of Cultural Openness in relation to multicultural competence, and in revealing the need for deeper exploration, emphasizing the importance of further studies and larger samples, and for its subcomponents such as respect for cultures, tolerance to ambiguity, etc. The limitation of this study is rooted in the fact that only three databases have been used, which, although essential, do not encompass many others, nor has a literature search been conducted using terms in other languages.

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