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Pedagogical Action Research as a Framework for Linguistic and Intercultural Innovation in University Education

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Abstract: The paper examines pedagogical action research as a methodological and conceptual framework for fostering linguistic and intercultural innovation in higher education. In the context of increasing cultural diversity and the globalization of academic environments, action research enables educators to systematically reflect on their teaching practices, adapt pedagogical strategies, and respond to learners' diverse linguistic, cultural, and axiological needs. The study highlights how iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection support the development of communicative and intercultural competences, learner autonomy, and reflective engagement in academic learning contexts. Emphasis is placed on the integration of collaborative learning, guided reflection, and context-sensitive pedagogical interventions that promote meaningful academic interaction in intercultural settings. The paper argues that pedagogical action research contributes to bridging theory and practice by empowering educators as reflective practitioners and learners as active participants in the educational process. The conclusions underscore the value of action research in enhancing the quality of higher education and in cultivating an inclusive academic culture that supports intercultural dialogue and value-oriented learning within university environments.

Keywords: pedagogical action research; linguistic and intercultural innovation; higher education; reflective teaching; axiological reflection

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1. Introduction

The transformation of university education is continuous, but in recent decades in particular it has experienced profound changes determined by internationalization, academic mobility, digitalization, globalization, international programs, educational migration, etc. profoundly alter the dynamics of didactic communication, transforming academic language. These changes are reflected in institutional and curricular structures, as well as in the way in which pedagogical interrelationship, meaning construction and value transmission are achieved within the educational process. Learning at the university level can no longer be approached exclusively through standardized models, indifferent to the specifics of the concrete educational context.

The process of university studies carried out in the classroom is increasingly configured as a space of intercultural interaction, in which academic language, educational values and students' cultural experiences enter into a relationship of interdependence. In this context, classes no longer represent a simple process of transmitting theoretical content, they gradually transform into a reflexive approach, subject to analysis, research and negotiation of meanings.

In these circumstances, the focus shifts from the question of what we teach to how we teach and, above all, from within which practice this process takes place. Pedagogical innovation can no longer be conceived as an external intervention or as the application of prescriptive models, but as a reflexive approach, built from within the teaching activity and grounded in the systematic analysis of real classroom experience. This change of perspective justifies the use of pedagogical action research as an appropriate methodological framework for understanding and optimizing educational practice in intercultural university contexts.

The problem underlying this study is the need to identify the pedagogical framework that allows for the innovation of teaching practices within the teaching activity, without being limited to the application of prescribed theoretical models or to interventions conceived exclusively from outside the educational practice, which do not take into account the real context of the teaching practice. Pedagogical Action Research offers such a perspective and is oriented towards improving the practice through systematic reflection, critical analysis and continuous adjustment of the contents to the contexts of reality.

The aim of the paper is to argue the relevance of Pedagogical Action Research as a tool for transversal linguistic and intercultural innovation, applicable to the teaching of university educational subjects, with an explicit focus on the axiological dimension of the teaching process.

2. Literature Review

Pedagogical Action Research has strong roots in the pedagogical and sociological literature of the 20th century. The concept is initially associated with the works of Kurt Lewin (1946), who introduced the idea of research as a cyclical process of action and reflection, oriented towards social change.

In Burnes' (2004) interpretation of Kurt Lewin's works, action research is described as a two-dimensional approach, oriented towards supporting groups in the process of managing change. On the one hand, this type of research highlights the fact that change involves concrete intervention and deliberate action. On the other hand, it emphasizes that the effectiveness of action is conditioned by a rigorous analysis of the situation, the exploration of available alternatives and the selection of the solution appropriate to the existing context.

In educational research, Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) promoted an innovative vision of the role of the teacher, which he conceived as a researcher of his own teaching practice. From this perspective, curriculum development cannot be separated from the process of pedagogical reflection, which is built and adjusted in relation to concrete educational experience. Stenhouse rejected the approach to curriculum as a prescriptive, rigid and sequential scheme, proposing instead a processual, open model that unfolds in a specific educational context, dynamic and irreducible to standardized situations.

A significant contribution is made by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2014), who define action research as a participatory, democratic and reflective process focused on improving educational practice. The authors emphasize the contextualized nature of pedagogical knowledge and reject the idea of value neutrality of education.

In the same context, John Elliott (1991) considers action research as a tool for reconciling theory and practice and argues that authentic educational change starts from the personal experience of teachers.

From the perspective of intercultural education, Michael Byram (2000) highlights the indissoluble link between language, culture and values, introducing the concept of intercultural competence as an essential dimension of contemporary education. Although focused on language teaching, this framework is also relevant for socio-educational disciplines.

Byram (2000) emphasizes that the assessment of intercultural competence does not exclusively aim at the accumulation of knowledge, but at the person's ability to act appropriately in situations where social and cultural identities become relevant. The

author shows that models of intercultural competence differ depending on the disciplinary perspective, some of which pay little attention to the linguistic dimension, in favor of cultural sensitivity and the ability to relate. At the same time, Byram warns that neither linguistic competence nor international experience, taken separately, guarantee the success of intercultural interaction, an aspect particularly relevant for the university educational context. In this sense, the introduction of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018) reinforces the idea that the development of intercultural competence is a transversal responsibility of all disciplines, not just foreign language teaching.

In this framework, pedagogical action research provides the methodological tools necessary for observing, analyzing and developing intercultural competence as a reflective educational practice, adapted to the concrete university context.

In higher education contexts characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity, intercultural competence is increasingly operationalized through the pragmatic dimensions of communication. Pragmatic communicative skills refer to the individual's capacity to understand, produce and adapt coherent and contextually appropriate discourse, in response to social, intercultural and professional demands (Dimitriu & Antoci, 2025). These skills mediate the effective use of language in authentic academic interactions and contribute to meaningful participation in intercultural learning environments.

The reconfiguration of the role of the teacher is associated with the approach of the reflective practitioner, which places critical analysis of one's own practice at the center of professional development. Researchers Stenhouse (1975) and Schön (1983) argue that educational practice constitutes a space for implementing theories and a legitimate source of generating pedagogical knowledge. From this perspective, the didactic process is conceptualized as a continuous investigative approach, in which pedagogical decisions are subject to systematic reflection and learning is understood as the result of joint construction between teachers and students. This approach provides a solid theoretical foundation for the integration of Pedagogical Action Research as a research strategy appropriate to complex and intercultural educational contexts.

In the Romanian pedagogical space, researcher Constantin Cucos (2000) emphasized the importance of axiological reflection in education, arguing that the pedagogical act is always a bearer of values. This perspective supports the integration of axiological education in action pedagogical research.

The analyzed literature highlights the convergence between action research, intercultural education and axiological reflection, but also reveals an insufficient

integrated application of these dimensions in the teaching-learning-evaluation of university disciplines, an aspect that the present study aims to address.

3. Personal Practical Applications of Pedagogical Action Research

The pedagogical action research approach presented in this study is based on experience in teaching the subjects Axiology of Education, Education through and for Values, and other courses in the field of educational sciences, conducted in academic contexts characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity.

Although languages are not the direct object of teaching, the linguistic dimension is omnipresent in:

- use of academic language;
- negotiation of conceptual meanings;
- expression and interpretation of values;
- teacher–student interaction.

Action research was used as a tool for reflection on how educational language and axiological approach influence student participation, content understanding, and intercultural dynamics in the university classroom (Antoci, 2025a).

The planning-action-observation-reflection cycles allowed (Antoci, 2025b):

- adapting teaching strategies to the cultural and educational profile of students;
- integrating axiological reflection as a constant pedagogical practice;
- using collaborative tasks that capitalize on the diversity of perspectives;
- stimulating autonomy and responsibility in learning.

Pedagogical innovation, in this framework, is not conceived as a process of methodological import or application of external models, but largely as the result of the reflexive approach carried out within everyday practice. Collaborative tasks with an intercultural dimension, guided reflection on students' linguistic and academic experiences, as well as dialogical teacher-student feedback function as mechanisms of pedagogical experimentation, through which the teaching-learning-evaluation process is continuously analyzed, adjusted and improved according to the context.

4. Reflections and Discussions

The analysis of pedagogical experience highlights the fact that pedagogical action research functions as an integrative framework, which ensures the articulation of cognitive, linguistic, intercultural and axiological dimensions in the contexts of university education.

The university teaching staff is reconceptualized as a reflective practitioner, teaching becomes a process of continuous learning and is characterized by openness, contextual design, flexibility and responsibility. At the same time, the student is positioned as an active participant, co-creator of meaning and agent of his own training.

The analysis of educational practices carried out in various academic contexts highlights that action research contributes to:

- reducing the distance between theory and practice;
- increasing the axiological coherence of the teaching act;
- strengthening an inclusive academic culture.

5. Conclusions

Pedagogical action research is asserting itself as a relevant and sustainable framework for pedagogical innovation in contemporary university education. Through its manifested character as being reflexive, participatory and contextualized, it allows the valorization of linguistic and cultural diversity not as an obstacle, but as an immense educational resource.

The integration of the axiological dimension in action research strengthens the role of university education as a space for intellectual and moral formation, contributing to the development of efficient, flexible, value-oriented pedagogical practice.

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