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## **E-LEARNING AND MULTICULTURALITY IN MEXICO**

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### **Abstract**

Since its origin as a nation, Mexico has been a meeting place for people with diverse cultural roots. This situation has two important aspects to be considered: the preservation and dissemination of the cultural richness that each group contribute, and, overcome the enormous challenge of achieving a respectful and harmonious coexistence between members of all groups. Making an effort for university students to develop knowledge, skills and aptitudes for the preservation of cultural wealth and for harmonious multicultural coexistence, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) has developed a distance course, which is the object of this paper.

### **Cultural Diversity**

As part of its commitments, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should “ensure the preservation and promotion of the fruitful diversity of cultures” (UNESCO, 2002).

If culture includes arts and letters, as well as ways of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs, then cultural diversity is “the multiplicity of ways in which the cultures of societies are expressed; when it manifests it, enriches and transmits the cultural heritage of humanity through diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment by the various generations that inhabit the planet” (SEP, 2011)

From the previous information, it can be understood that the greatest challenge to protect and promote cultural diversity is to “defend the creative capacity of culture through the multiplicity of its material and immaterial forms and to ensure a peaceful coexistence of the people who carry them” (SEP, 2011).

### **Cultural Diversity in Mexico**

As a member of UNESCO, Mexico endorsed both the 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

In that connection, the article 2 of the Political Constitution of Mexico was reformed in 2001, which currently states: “The Nation has a pluricultural composition originally based on its indigenous people. They descend from populations who inhabited the current territory of the

country since the beginning of colonization, maintaining their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or part of their culture (CPEUM, 2016).

From this recognition, regulations and institutions emerged to strengthen Mexico's position to support cultural diversity such as:

Table 1: Multicultural Regulation/Institution

Year	Regulation / Institution
2003	The General Law on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous People
2003	The Federal Law for the Prevention and Elimination Discrimination
2004	The National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination

To achieve a change in the perception of cultural diversity required a deep change, that is, from the educational field. So, in 2003 the General Education Law was reformed, specifically in its article 7, paragraph IV, to establish the following:

- “Article 7 – Education provided by the State, its decentralized agencies and individuals with authorization or with recognition of official validity of studies shall, in addition to the purposes established in the second paragraph of Article 3. Of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, the following:
  - IV. To promote through teaching the knowledge of the nation’s linguistic diversity and respect the linguistic rights of the indigenous people” (LFE, 2016).

## **Cultural Diversity in the UNAM**

Taking into account this national context, in 2004 the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) created the University Program: Mexico, as a Multicultural Nation (PUMNM) whose main consideration was: “That the Constitutional redefinition of our country as a multicultural nation was the first great national agreement that explicitly established one of the fundamental axes that should guide the transformation and adaptation of national institutions towards the crystallization of the new Mexican National Project, in this regard, the UNAM assumes these definitions as an opportunity to give meanings and meanings to ongoing university reform processes.” (PUMNM, 2004)

This program was absorbed in 2014 by the University Program of Studies of Cultural Diversity and Interculturality (PUIC). The PUIC was created on March 3, 2014 and one of its recitals indicates: “That today our University and the country in general face enormous challenges to consolidate and increase studies related to multiculturalism and the recognition of the rights of the indigenous communities by promoting research in the fields of cultural diversity, interculturality, cultural plurality as well as the heritage of contemporary societies” (PUIC, 2014).

This program has generated various strategies to achieve its purpose, such as:

- Research lines delimiting projects categorized into: University, education and interculturality; Cultural diversity, globalization and development; Immigration,

migration and cultural diversity; Interculturality, health and traditional medicine; Family; Rights of the indigenous people; Ethnopolitical Movements in Mexico and America; Population, state and cultural diversity.

- Research programs that deal themes such as: Critical assessment of the relationship between UNAM and indigenous people; Pedregal's covenant; Digital Library of Traditional Mexican Medicine (BDMTM); The indigenous people and health indicators; Immigration and cultural diversity; The Mexicans who gave us the world; Afroamerica. The Third Root; The State of Economic and Social Development of the Indigenous People; State studies; Remittances, migration and development in the indigenous communities of the actual Mexico (1980-2010); Half a century of indigenous movements in Latin America; Silent colonization. Megaprojects for development in indigenous and Afro-descendant territories in Latin America; Diagnosis of indigenous companies and training model; Visibility and constitutional recognition of the black population in Mexico; Model of socio-environmental diagnosis of the Costa Chica of Oaxaca; Indicators of the indigenous population.
- Academic projects that serve the areas of: Health and traditional medicine; The indigenous People of Mexico; State of the economic and social development of the indigenous people; Indigenous People of America; Megaprojects of development in indigenous and black territories of Latin America; The Contemporary African American people; The immigrant communities in Mexico.
- Scholarship system for indigenous students whose objective is to support student members of the indigenous people in the achievement of their effective access to higher education within our university, and to contribute financial support for their maintenance, ensuring the permanence and completion of their studies.
- Diplomats to strengthen the leadership of indigenous women whose objective is to contribute to strengthen the leadership of the indigenous women for the participation and political at different levels of management.
- Elective course: Mexico, Multicultural Nation, whose objective is that students can problematize the current situation of the indigenous people in Mexico, to recognize that cultural diversity of the inhabitants of the country is extremely broad and complex, and that it is necessary to reflect on the efforts currently being made in Mexico to build a new nation from the richness of this historical, linguistic, cultural, social and political diversity of Mexicans.

### **Elective course: Mexico, Multicultural Nation**

This course seeks the student to value the wealth of the nation's cultural heritage, by shedding some common prejudices in Mexico related to the language, culture and history of the indigenous people and their own; as well as to have theoretical, historical, political and social tools on the cultural diversity subject in Mexico and the phenomena of interculturality.

This subject is taught in 12 schools or faculties of UNAM, and it is an optional courses in three more faculties. In 2015, 1,709 students attended this course.

For students, this course has been attractive for students because of among other things for the transversality of the subject in the different schools, the interdisciplinarity, the advantage of being able to attend the classes in different schools. In this way, it's also possible to integrate students into wide student university networks.

It's also important to mention that the subject has been highly recommended among them.

In 2012, the Coordination of Open University and Distance Education (CUAED) was requested to generate the online course "Mexico, Multicultural Nation" in September 2014, this course.

The topics included in this subjects are: Mexico, Multicultural Nation; The indigenous People and Communities; Our Third Root; The Mexicans who gave us the world; The State of Development of the Indigenous People; The Environment and the Indigenous People; The Indigenous Rights; The Indigenous Women; Migration; The Indigenous Education; Health and Medicine among the Indigenous People; The Indigenous Literature; Interethnic Relations and Multiculturalism; Contemporary Conflicts and Negotiations in Latin America; Good living-sumak kawsay or development; Criticism of colonization and dispossession.

Each unit has the following structure:

- Introduction
- General objective
- Theme
- Way of working
  - Support materials
  - Media
- Way of working
- Calendar
- Accreditation criteria

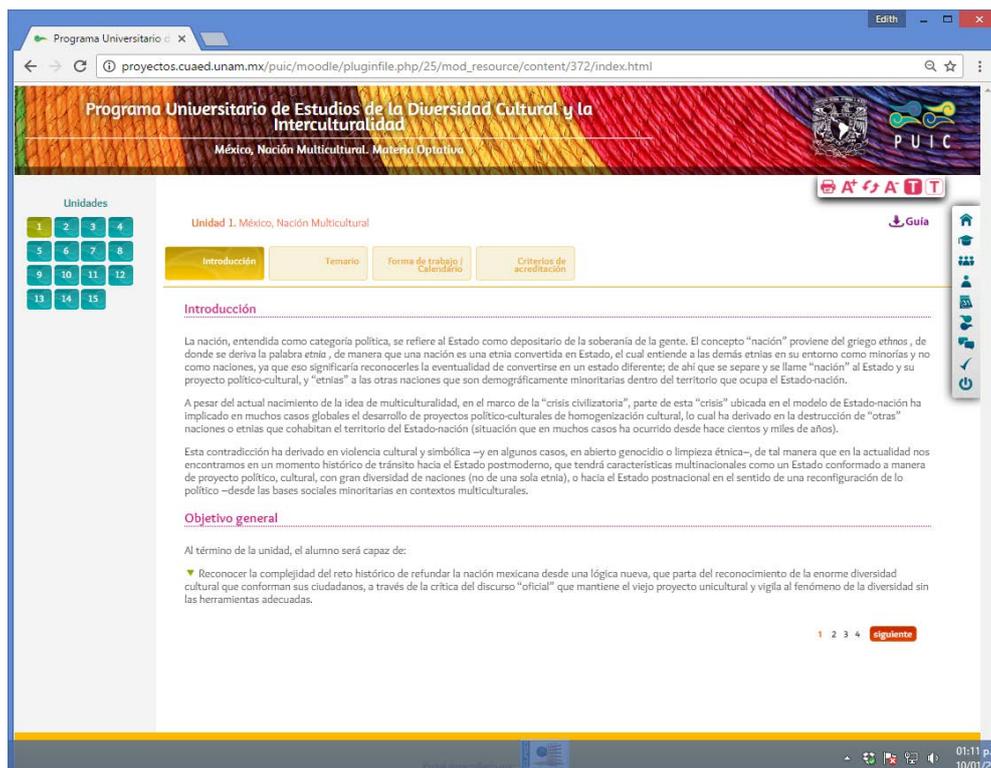


Figure 1. Unit View

For each theme the following structure is presented:

- Introduction
- Specific objective
- Content
- Glossary
- Learning Activity (optional)
- Self-assessment (optional)
- Opinion survey (optional)
- Reference sources

Additionally, the subject has two toolbars:

- Accessibility bar. It contains actions to: Print, Enlarge text size, Initial text size, Text size decrease, High contrast, and Normal contrast
- Toolbar. It contains options like: Home, Teacher, Group, My profile, Calendar, Forum, Chat, scores, and Logout

Currently the course has passed the pilot phase and it is about to begin its formal training in different schools and faculties.

## Conclusions

The respect and promotion of cultural diversity is an action that UNESCO seeks to promote in all its member countries. In the case of Mexico, laws have been adopted and programs are implemented to achieve this. Specifically, in the UNAM it has been created the University

Program for the Study of Cultural Diversity and Interculturalism to form, investigate and disseminate issues related to Multiculturalism. As part of its training strategy, it was created the transversal subject “Mexico, Multicultural Nation” that can be integrated in the curricular map of its different degrees, seeking to expand the offer by putting it online with the support from CUAED. The path has been designed to fulfill the commitment of a nation that respects multiculturalism, preserves its wealth and promotes harmony among its members.

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