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# Intercultural dimension of public educational policies in pedagogic formation. Machala Technical **University. Ecuator**

Dimensión intercultural de las políticas públicas educativas. Formación docente. Universidad Técnica de Machala

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#### ABSTRACT:

This descriptive research with a quantitative and qualitative approach was developed with the objective of characterizing the intercultural dimension of educational public policies in Ecuador. The methodological strategy was systematized through documentary and statistical review methods. The results showed that the in-training teachers recognize in practice the application of interculturality, although there are gaps in theoretical knowledge. Likewise, aspects to be kept in mind in the improvement of the strategies implemented in the Basic Education teacher training field were suggested. Keywords: public policies, cultural diversity, teacher formation

#### RESUMEN:

Esta investigación descriptiva con enfoque cuanti-cualitativo se desarrolló con el objetivo de caracterizar la dimensión intercultural de las políticas públicas educativas en Ecuador. La estrategia metodológica se sistematizó a través de métodos de revisión documental y estadístico. Los resultados develaron que: los docentes en formación reconocen en la práctica la aplicación de la interculturalidad, aunque existen vacíos de conocimiento teórico. Asimismo, se señalan aspectos a tener presentes en el perfeccionamiento de las estrategias implementadas en la carrera de formación docente para la Educación Básica. Palabras clave: política pública, diversidad cultural, formación preparatoria de docentes

# 1. Introduction

Interculturality is a term in fashion and each discipline, Philosophy, Literature, Law, Politics, Sociology, Pedagogy, etc., defines and classifies it from its own perspective, using different shades of meaning. The polysemy of this term is controversial and acquires different meanings in different concrete historical contexts and processes; but beyond the controversies, in practice these concepts do not differ significantly; it is a word that refers to the dynamics of the relationships established in different multicultural contexts, to the cultural practices and lifestyles of the communities, peoples and nations, which grow with the communication among cultures. For Barabas (2014) that intercultural dialog "is the mechanism which brings about interculturality, thought to be the most developed form of dialog among cultures and civilizations" (p.4).

It is a responsible and respectful dialog which can only be achieved as a right of all the cultures in the same conditions by means of the intercultural education of the new generations. Cultural diversity as a dimension of education was introduced in the 70's and 80's to promote cultural customs in educational institutions. Problems of the cultural minorities such as the negative atmosphere in schools, the lack of multicultural conscience and institutional discrimination have begun to be considered (Ibarra, 2009).

Such is the importance given to intercultural education in multicultural contexts all over the world that in recent years several national and international studies have been carried out in search of alternatives to preserve the ancestral cultures of aboriginal peoples amidst an ever increasing world globalization; among the foreign studies are the ones carried out by Balda (2015); Fernández, Torres and García (2016); Hecht (2015); Hernández (2017); Hernández and Gibson (2015); Mendoza, Dietz, and Mateos (2019); Paladino (2015); Pöllmann (2016, 2018); Pöllmann and Sánchez (2015); Santoro (2014); Treviño, Villalobos and Baeza (2016); Turra and Ferrada (2016) and Vargas (2016) who document from an empirical position a range of perceptions, experiences and attitudes highly pertinent for the fields of intercultural education, among which can be mentioned the epidemic socio-cultural phenomenon of "intercultural illiteracy" and unawareness of the indigenous languages.

Ibarra (2009) considers that this situation takes place, to a great extent, because for a long time the main objective of the educational systems was to achieve a change toward a more positive attitude in the students concerning ethnic issues, but little or no attention was paid to the improvement of academic results. The diversity initiatives followed were focused on educational support for access to education and school retention of the minorities, while the ethnic study programs have been implemented very slowly.

Likewise, Vargas (2016) suggests that in some Latin American countries their States are not able to negotiate the monopoly of education, which is considered a tool to construct the model of nation desired. In the case of Ecuador, the State is somehow getting back the control that had been lost after the political ascend of the Ecuadorian Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities, which weakens the influence of the indigenous organizations as political mediators in favor of the intercultural policies.

On the other hand, Ecuadorian authors such as Altman (2016); Benito (2015); Granda (2017); Illicachi (2015); Krainer and Guerra (2016); Krainer, Aguirre, Guerra and Meise (2017); Lara and De La Herrán (2016); Rodríguez (2018) and Villagómez (2017), have also reported a lack of mastery of the aboriginal languages among the teachers. These authors have also noticed the existence of projects that, in spite of responding to the public policies, they do not take into account the individualities of the context, and consequently the educational demands of the aboriginal peoples to be taught in their own native languages and territories is an aspiration that has not been satisfied yet in most cases.

Nevertheless, in the national context there are other characteristics present; as in other Latin American countries, in Ecuador, interculturality is a political goal to achieve in all aspects of social life, especially in the educational sector where policies have been created to promote bilingual intercultural indigenous education, with emphasis on the teaching and learning of the aboriginal languages and cultures (Barabas, 2014).

Public policies in Ecuador have legal support in the 2008 Constitution of the Republic, the 2010 Organic Law of Higher Education, the 2011 Organic Law of Intercultural Education and the Code of Childhood and Adolescence, modified in 2014. These legal tools have regulated educational life in Ecuador in the last decade; they are a body of laws, dispositions, guidelines and resolutions which constitute the pedagogic doctrine of the nation and define the objectives of the educational activity for the preparation of the new generations.

These policies respond to the peculiarities of the country, which by definition is a multicultural and plurinational state; with a population that is a blend of indigenous, white, black and mixed race people; with a diversity of languages and cultures. Respect to this cultural polychromy is the basics to the existing public policies, where interculturality is present as an expression of democratic equity for the dynamics of cultural, economic and social changes (Espinoza, 2019); Espinoza, Herrera and Castellano, 2019 and Hernández, 2017)

The existence of a legal frame that contains the educational public policies, which according to Mendoza et al. (2019), is one of the most advanced in the Latin American continent in terms of indigenous rights; as well as the institutional recognition of interculturality are not enough for the concretion of the intercultural principles that support the educational system of the country; it is necessary to change the curricula, syllabi and methodologies at all teaching levels, from initial and kindergarten to university education (Kaluf, 2005), as part of the building process of a new educational system that really recognizes and values multicultural diversity and which fosters opportunities for intercultural learning (Muñoz, Quintrigueo & Essomba, 2019; Pérez & Luis, 2015 and Villalta, 2016).

But more than that, a change of mind and attitude of all social sectors and particularly of all the members of the educational community is required. Only in that way it will be possible to achieve a fair and inclusive socio-cultural development of the different ethnic groups, peoples and nations of the country.

This change requires the implementation of creative methodological and educational strategies that permit to change the climate of school coexistence and academic culture, based on pedagogy and a curriculum capable of preserving the finest educational practices. The effectiveness these strategies depends not only on the facilities for access to education and school retention of student populations from minority cultural contents, but also on the improvement of academic success, social inclusiveness and the posterior insertion of these students in the labor market (Ibarra, 2009).

It is necessary to approach this sensible aspect from the pedagogic contexts of the teachers, who are responsible for the education of girls, boys, adolescents and youths, as future builders of a new fairer and more equitable Ecuador, with an authentic respect for cultural diversity.

Then we can ask ourselves: Do teachers-to-be know the acts, guidelines and resolutions that rule education from an intercultural perspective? How do they perceive the intercultural dimension in the process of pedagogic formation? Do they see cultural diversity as a right of the ethnic groups, peoples and nations that inhabit Ecuador? What do they think about their preparation to contribute from their teaching practice to the concretion of interculturality?

The present study was done in search of answers to these questions with the aim of characterizing the intercultural dimension of the public educational policies applied to the Basic Education courses at the Machala Technical University.

# 2. Methodology

According to the constitutional recognition of pluriculturality in Ecuador, the present pedagogic formation curricula of Basic Education, as part of the public educational policies should include interculturality criteria by means of:

- Learning models. Contextualization of learning through educational methodologies that promote recognition of cultural diversity and knowledge dialogs. Development of reference to knowledge of different visions of the world, epistemologies or perspectives of peoples, nationalities or socio-cultural groups.
- Academic programs. Creation of specific subjects in academic programs or courses, which integrate ancestral knowledge and have a practical application in some fields of professional formation, provided that coherence and pertinence are guaranteed.
- Intercultural models of Higher Education. Creation of comprehensive intercultural educational models, through the design and implementation of courses, programs or the creation of Higher Education institutions or specific academic units for these purposes (Higher Education Council, 2017, art. 50).

Taking as theoretical referents what has been previously discussed, since the 2016-2017 academic period in the teaching formation course for Basic Teaching at Machala Technical University, some methodological strategies have been developed to contribute to the implementation of policies related to intercultural education; so it was considered appropriate to carry out the present descriptive study with a quanti-qualitative approach to know the learners' opinions about public educational policies.

The methodological strategy was systematized by means of documental review, analytic-synthetic, inductive-deductive and statistic methods.

Documental review permitted the consult and study of the normative instruments that rule the educational activity in the multicultural context of the country, scientific articles and specialized bibliography, as well as thematic Web pages, blogs and Web sites related to the topic using the Google searching engine, all which along with the analytic-synthetic method allowed the epistemic construction of the theoretical referents.

By means of the inductive-deductive method it was possible to generalize the results in the context of the population object of study.

The statistic method was used for the planning, gathering, processing and analysis of the data obtained through a questionnaire. The data were processed with the SPSS (version 15) statistic software; absolute and relative frequencies were determined and summarized in descriptive tables and graphs.

The population consisted of 329 learners from the Basic Education course at Machala Technical University during the 2017-2018 academic period. The sample consisted of 180 learners chosen randomly, who were given a questionnaire which was a variant of the one validated by Colmenor and Pegalajar (2015), in their study "Questionnaire for future Secondary Education teachers on their perceptions about attention to the diversity", adapted to the intercultural context and objective of this study.

The questionnaire used had three blocks of questions grouped in the following categories:

- Knowledge of the legal guarantees of interculturality
- Interculturality criteria present in the course curricula
- Preparation of the teachers-to-be

No.	Questions						
<b>A.</b> Kr	nowledge of the legal guarantees of interculturality						
1	It is a school duty to pay attention to all the student body, without distinction of ethnic group, people or nation of origin						
2	I know the legal frame which protects intercultural education						
3	Public educational policies are applied in the context of the study course						

4Indigenous students should adapt themselves to the western customs to succeed5Education of indigenous peoples in their native languages is indispensableB. Intrulity criteria present in the course curricula6Learning is contextualized in the lessons by means of methodologies that promote recognition of cultural diversity and knowledge dialogs, taking into account the different visions of the world, epistemologies or perspectives of peoples, nationalities or socio-cultural groups7Practical activities or examples about attention to the cultural diversity are present in the lessons8The subjects integrate ancestral knowledge and its practical application in a coherent and pertinent way9More attention should be paid to interculturality in the course curriculum10The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity11I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity12I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education13Attention to cultural diversity should play an important role in my future teaching practice									
B. Int=rculturality criteria present in the course curricula         6       Learning is contextualized in the lessons by means of methodologies that promote recognition of cultural diversity and knowledge dialogs, taking into account the different visions of the world, epistemologies or perspectives of peoples, nationalities or socio-cultural groups         7       Practical activities or examples about attention to the cultural diversity are present in the lessons         8       The subjects integrate ancestral knowledge and its practical application in a coherent and pertinent way         9       More attention should be paid to interculturality in the course curriculum         10       The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity         11       I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity         12       I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education	4	Indigenous students should adapt themselves to the western customs to succeed							
<ul> <li>Learning is contextualized in the lessons by means of methodologies that promote recognition of cultural diversity and knowledge dialogs, taking into account the different visions of the world, epistemologies or perspectives of peoples, nationalities or socio-cultural groups</li> <li>Practical activities or examples about attention to the cultural diversity are present in the lessons</li> <li>The subjects integrate ancestral knowledge and its practical application in a coherent and pertinent way</li> <li>More attention should be paid to interculturality in the course curriculum</li> <li>The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity</li> <li>C. Preparation of the teachers-to-be</li> <li>I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity</li> <li>I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education</li> </ul>	5	Education of indigenous peoples in their native languages is indispensable							
diversity and knowledge dialogs, taking into account the different visions of the world, epistemologies or perspectives of peoples, nationalities or socio-cultural groups         7       Practical activities or examples about attention to the cultural diversity are present in the lessons         8       The subjects integrate ancestral knowledge and its practical application in a coherent and pertinent way         9       More attention should be paid to interculturality in the course curriculum         10       The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity         11       I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity         12       I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education	B. Ir	iterculturality criteria present in the course curricula							
<ul> <li>8 The subjects integrate ancestral knowledge and its practical application in a coherent and pertinent way</li> <li>9 More attention should be paid to interculturality in the course curriculum</li> <li>10 The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity</li> <li>C. Preparation of the teachers-to-be</li> <li>11 I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity</li> <li>12 I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education</li> </ul>	6	diversity and knowledge dialogs, taking into account the different visions of the world, epistemologies or							
9       More attention should be paid to interculturality in the course curriculum         10       The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity         C. Preparation of the teachers-to-be         11       I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity         12       I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education	7	Practical activities or examples about attention to the cultural diversity are present in the lessons							
10       The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity         C. Preparation of the teachers-to-be         11       I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity         12       I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education	8	The subjects integrate ancestral knowledge and its practical application in a coherent and pertinent way							
C. Preparation of the teachers-to-be         11       I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity         12       I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education	9	More attention should be paid to interculturality in the course curriculum							
11       I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity         12       I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education	10	The syllabi provide an appropriate treatment to cultural diversity							
12       I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education	C. Pr	eparation of the teachers-to-be							
	11	I am ready to implement strategies to deal with cultural diversity							
13 Attention to cultural diversity should play an important role in my future teaching practice	12	I am receiving the necessary preparation to face the challenge of bilingual intercultural education							
	13	Attention to cultural diversity should play an important role in my future teaching practice							

The learners evaluated each question by marking them from 1 to 3 points, according to this scale:

- 1 Entirely agree
- 2 Partially agree
- 3 Disagree

The surveyed subjects were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, as to keep as low as possible the likely bias produced by stress.

# 3. Findings / Results

On the basis of the referents previously stated, this section is dedicated to the presentation of the most remarkable findings, taking into consideration the learners' criteria.

Table 1

### 3.1. Awareness of the legal guarantees of interculturality

Table 1 summarizes the answers to the questions related to the learners' knowledge of legal guarantees concerning interculturality.

Question	Criteria							
Question		%	2	%	3	%		
It is a school duty to care about all the student body without distinction of ethnic group, people or nation of origin	92	51,1	73	40,6	15	8,3		
I know the legal frame that protects intercultural education	10	5,6	23	12,8	147	81,7		
Public educational policies are applied in the course context	88	48,9	90	50	2	1,1		
Indigenous students should adapt themselves to the western customs to succeed	14	7,8	38	21.1	128	71,		
Education of indigenous peoples in their native languages is indispensable	98	54,4	76	42,2	6	3,3		

Elaborated by: Author

Concerning the duty of educational institutions to offer their services to all kinds of students no matter their origin, there are different criteria, predominating those who totally or partially agree. They also consider that educational public policies are applied in the context of the study course and that education in the own language of the students is indispensable for a true intercultural education.

On the other hand, 71,1% of the students disagree with the idea that the indigenous students should adapt themselves to the western customs to succeed, although more than 28% of them partially or totally agree.

It is significant that 81,7% of the surveyed subjects express that they do not know the legal framework that supports the intercultural educational system of the country.

There is a tendency to the tacit recognition in practice of the laws that rule public educational policies concerning interculturality; however, there is no manifest knowledge of the legal frame.

### 3.2. Interculturality criteria present in the course curricula

Table 2 shows the data obtained from the learners' answers about the interculturality criteria that should be included in the Basic Education course curricula according to what is stated in Article 50 of the regulation for the Academic Regime of the Higher Education Council: learning models, academic schedules and intercultural models of Higher Education.

Question		Criteria							
		%	2	%	3	%			
Learning is contextualized in the lessons by means of methodologies that promote recognition of cultural diversity and knowledge dialogs, taking into account the different visions of the world, epistemologies or perspectives of peoples, nationalities or socio-cultural groups	58	32,2	91	50,6	31	17,2			
The lessons include activities and/or practical examples of attention to cultural diversity	55	30,6	85	47,2	40	22.2			
Subjects integrate ancestral knowledge and their practical application coherently and pertinently	58	32,2	85	47,2	37	20,6			
Interculturality should be paid more attention in the study course curriculum	101	56,1	65	36,1	14	7,8			
The syllabi adequately reflect the treatment to cultural diversity	18	10	54	30	108	60			

Elaborated by: Author

The data in table II reveal the limitations in the methodologies to promote recognition of cultural diversity and knowledge dialogs, from the epistemological diversity of the different peoples, nationalities or socio-cultural groups which inhabit the Ecuadorian geography; more than 67% of the student body partially agree or disagree with these methodologies.

A similar situation takes place concerning the intercultural practices in class. A 56,1% totally agrees that it is necessary to pay more attention to interculturality in the curriculum, which contrasts with a 60% who disagree with the fact that the programs provide an adequate treatment to cultural diversity.

These results show a tendency towards acceptation of inclusion of interculturality criteria in the study course curriculum; however, there is a marked trend to consider inadequate the treatment of cultural diversity in the syllabi.

#### 3.3. Preparation of teachers-to-be

Figure 1 Summarizes the results of the answers given to the questions about the learners' opinions regarding the preparation they receive in their course of studies



Elaborated by: Author Source: Learner questionnaire

Although more than 69% agreed that the formation they receive will permit them implement strategies oriented to attention to the diversity, 64,4% did not consider to be ready to face bilingual intercultural education and all of them consider that their teaching practice is a necessary space to develop skills that allow them to face the challenge of cultural diversity.

### 4. Discussion and conclusions

The results stated above reveal the learners' criteria and permitted to fulfill the objective of the study. The learners admitted not to fully know the legal frame that supports these policies; however, they recognize the main statements in practice, such as to guarantee the aboriginal peoples the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations, which should be reflected in public education; the right to education of the indigenous girls, boys and adolescents in the continuity of the ancestral practices of the aboriginal peoples, preserving their customs and tradition (National Assembly of Ecuador, 2008, Art. 57); also the guarantee their autochthonous languages are used as their main language and Spanish as a language of intercultural communication (National Assembly of Ecuador, 2008, Art. 347).

On the other hand, there is a tendency to include interculturality criteria in the study curricula; however these norms have not been clearly stated in the Basic Education teacher training syllabi; there is not explicit mention of concrete opportunities of intercultural formation and actions to materialize contacts with indigenous peoples and communities; which coincides with the results of studies done by Altmann (2016); Ayala et al. (2019); Benito (2015); Krainer et al. (2017); Lara and De La Herrán (2016) and Rodríguez (2018).

On this respect Leiva (2017) considers that intercultural school programs sometimes are limited to the exaltation of folklore of the different aboriginal cultures, ignoring the relational and emotional component of learning, and for this reason, intercultural education should have flexible curricula that permit to:

Design complementary extracurricular activities which improve the integration of the students with school life.

Deepen in the self-formation and Exchange of ideas as a mechanism to improve intercultural educational practices.

Integrate intercultural education in the curricula implemented in schools.

Educate in values related to tolerance and solidarity in the area of human relations.

Promote the value of interculturality, integrating in the educative act the wealth that exists in the knowledge and respect of the own culture and the culture of the others.

Likewise, Ibarra (2009) considers that educational institutions should implement different activities, among them increase the number and kinds of programs of student service and create new initiatives of cultural awareness, as well as the creation of ethnic study programs.

In relation to the criteria concerning the inadequate preparation to assume bilingual intercultural education due to the complete ignorance of the indigenous cultures and principally of the native languages (intercultural illiteracy), which is an obstacle for the treatment of diversity.

In this sense Kroskrity (2010); Lagos (2015) and Leiva (2017) consider that it is not sound to give up the idea of achieving a teaching learning process in the own language of the students, otherwise it would be against the linguistic ideology of the learners, with a negative impact on their meaningful learning, which requires anchoring ideas (symbols, concepts, mental models, images, propositions or formulas) which acquire meaning from the worldview of each student rooted in their culture of origin.

Not using the native language in the learning process and the insufficient number of indigenous teachers and professors are a handicap for the development of education; these insufficiencies hinder the application of the guidelines established for the public educational policies. There are points of contact with what was expressed by Rodríguez (2018):

"in the bilingual intercultural educational processes studied, there is a tendency to use more Spanish instead of indigenous languages and cultures that is favored by the lack of formation of indigenous and mixed race teachers in interculturality and bilingualism, which results in the general predominance of the Hispanic-mixed race-western bias in the educational processes" (p.233).

Consequently, the teaching practice still relies on western idiosyncratic basis which affect the quality of educational pertinence; disclosing the asymmetry between theoretical discourse and praxis; hindering the creation of spaces for new relationships among the State, indigenous organizations and other social sectors (Krainer et al., 2017); in this way, as Altmann (2016) has said, "interculturality is a way of sweetening the assimilation mandate" (p. 34).

Lara and De La Herrán (2016) state that interculturality inclusion as a core for the education and defense of the conception of the personal and collective reality from the wealth of complexity and universality as commitment with the future of the country are present in the public educational policies as part of the Ecuadorian legislation; they consider that a Pedagogy which does not take these elements into consideration as its main principles is not able to guarantee the rights to cultural diversity.

In short, it can be concluded that the intercultural dimension of the public educational policies applied in the Basic Education course at Machala Technical University is characterized by its recognition in practice, although there are gaps of theoretical knowledge; the teaching learning process implements actions that show the presence of interculturality criteria in the course curricula, although insufficiencies in the methodological approaches of the syllabi are still present since in praxis there is not concretion of interculturality in the formative spaces; the main obstacles in the implementation of these policies are intercultural illiteracy and the insufficient formation of indigenous teachers; aspects that are kept in mind in the improvement and reorientation of the strategies applied in the formative process since the 2016-2017 academic period.

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