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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURAL
COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Inclusive Education, as an educational paradigm that permeates a Higher Education context, involves facing a series of starting assumptions, such as considering human being diversity in all its complexity, as well as assuming education as a central strategy in the search for social inclusion. Among Inclusive Higher Education features, we have interculturality, understood as a dialogue between cultures to promote coexistence and guaranteeing of Human Rights. The research aims at identifying and characterizing differential groups according to different features of human diversity present among the students entering the Universidad del Norte, as well as knowing the needs, obstacles, particularities, and potentialities and development of the intercultural competence they present in order to project their trajectory in the institution. Specifically, regarding students' intercultural competence, it is assumed as the development of intercultural effectiveness and the understanding of differences and respect towards diversity. All this with the purpose of elaborating proposals that favour and ensure the conditions for an Inclusive Higher Education.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive Education and Intercultural Education are two educational approaches which come together in their foundations. Education, as a social phenomenon, makes possible the interaction among people characterized by having constitutive differences representing human diversity. Thus, it is necessary for the educative systems to develop proposals attending the diversity in education scenarios. These proposals arise from inclusive approaches, which aim at to enable the full participation of people in every human life dimension.

Inclusive Higher Education has basic principles such as interculturality understood as a process of dialogue among cultures in search of coexistence and Human Rights guarantee (MEN, 2013). Interculturality concept relates to the deep recognizing of the diversity proper to the human species in terms of cultures or world visions, which include not only diverse food, dances and costumes, but also different systems of values, diverse knowledge accumulation, and different ways of learning (Mato, 2008, p. 17).

Results presented here have been obtained within the Project “Diversity and Inclusive Education in Universidad del Norte”, which aims at exploring and identifying differential groups of students of Universidad del Norte (Barranquilla, Colombia), knowing their main features (a sample of human diversity presented in the institution), with the purpose of analyzing and understanding their needs and potentialities, as well as risk factors of social/academic exclusion, which may influence on their social and educative inclusion. This work corresponds with official strategies and policies implemented by the Colombian National Minister of Education. This minister since 2017 has been fostering a higher education for all men and women from inclusive approaches. Besides, the work here presented has been developing in a higher institution environment which has realized how its student population profile has become diverse in the last years, increasing the diversity in classrooms and in the institution.

2. Problem Statement

We start from the premise that education contexts and institutions should respond to the needs of the diverse populations they attend, as well as to protect and promote their rights (MEN, 2013), as it is stated in current legislations and world trends in order to guide the Colombian Higher Education and the proposal Education for All by UNESCO.

The realization of official policies for an inclusive higher education results in curricular university proposals that meet four fundamental elements, according to UNESCO (2003): the first one recognizes inclusion as a process that must constantly search best ways of respect for diversity. The second one refers to inclusion as the element that identifies and eliminates barriers in order to plan best education policies and practices. The third element recognizes the importance of the participation of everybody in education contexts. Last element refers to the need of paying more attention to more vulnerable or at risk of exclusion groups. The participation is the essential element, understanding that student’s involvement in cultural, curricular and community aspects is fundamental (Booth & Ainscow, 2004).

Students must participate, but this must be conscious and informed. They must be able to participate and be in line with the inclusion approach in the process. If, as we said above, interculturality

is a basic component of Inclusive Education, it is necessary to know the development level of students' intercultural competence, in order to diagnose their potential or difficulty when participating for the creation of an institutional environment crossed by inclusion.

Pozo-Vicente and Aguaded-Gomez (2012) consider the development of students' intercultural competence will allow them to face the challenges and changes implied in living together in diverse cultural contexts, from a local environment to an international one, favoring an effective social and professional adaptation through the acquisition of cultural awareness, respect, tolerance and adequate communication with the other, putting aside the ethnocentrism.

In this research, Intercultural Competence is assumed from Aguado (2003)'s perspective that implies two basic sub-dimensions. Firstly, *intercultural efficacy* (among diverse cultures) development, defined as the understanding of the own culture; the acquisition of skills to maintain effective intercultural relationships; the identification of communicative and conduct patterns fostering discrimination; to show knowledge of characteristics and codes used in diverse cultures; to show adaption and trust when dealing with topics of inequality, prejudice and power abuse (p. 150). Secondly, development of the *understanding and respect for differences and diversity*, which includes awareness of diversity that characterizes people and groups; analysis of personal values about sexism, racism, prejudice and discrimination; development and integration of the understanding of stereotypes and their impact on own conduct (p. 151).

3. Research Questions

In this sense, results here presented try to answer the following question: ¿which is the level of development of the cultural efficacy competency (among diverse cultures) and that of the competencies of understanding and respect for differences and diversity in higher education students?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to analyze the development of intercultural efficacy competency and understanding and respect for differences and diversity competencies in students of Universidad del Norte who attend the course "Intercultural Education".

5. Research Methods

The 140 students participating in the study belong to a higher education institution from the Colombian Caribbean coast, and are distributed in the undergraduate programs as follows: Psychology (39,3%), Law (12,9%), Civil Engineering (12,1%), Childhood Pedagogy (9,3%), International Business (8,6%), Architecture (4,3%), Social Communication (3,6%), Industrial Engineering (3,6%), Business Administration (2,9%), Mechanical Engineering (2,1%).

Most of the participants (92%) range in ages from 18 to 23. Women are 76,4% whereas men are 23,6%. A great percentage of respondents (83%) belong to an upper-middle socioeconomic level.

The research is quantitative in nature, with an exploratory-descriptive design (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2010). Data were collected by using an Intercultural Competence Self-perception

questionnaire (Cano, Ricardo, & Del Pozo, 2016), applied to first-year students enrolled in the virtual course “Intercultural Education” in the two academic semesters of 2017, and the first semester of 2018. The survey is made up of 23 items, distributed in 9 indicators, as follows: six correspond to “Intercultural Efficacy” competence, and the other three, to “Understanding and respect for differences and diversity” competence. The rating scale used is: “Not at all” (1), “Barely” (2), “Fair Extent” (3), and “Large Extent” (4).

Table 01. Indicators of students’ intercultural competence

| Sub-competence | Competence Indicators |
|---|--|
| Intercultural Efficacy | Indicator 1: Increase of understanding of the own culture. |
| | Indicator 2: Be aware of the legitimacy of cultural visions different from our own. |
| | Indicator 3: Show knowledge of characteristics and codes used in diverse cultures. |
| | Indicator 4: Identify communicative and conduct patterns fostering discrimination |
| | Indicator 5: Acquire skills to maintain effective intercultural relationships. |
| | Indicator 6: Show adaption and trust when dealing with topics of inequality, prejudice and power abuse. |
| Understanding and respect for differences and diversity | Indicator 7: Be aware of diversity that characterizes people and groups. |
| | Indicator 8: Analyze personal values about sexism, racism, prejudice and discrimination. |
| | Indicator 9: Develop and integrate o the understanding of stereotypes and their impact on own conduct. |

Note: Source: Cano, Ricardo and Del Pozo (2016) based on Aguado (2003, p. 150-151)

6. Findings

The results of the study (Table 2) are presented firstly in a comprehensive way, showing the development level of students’ Intercultural Competence (General Competence), followed by the results of the sub-competencies “Intercultural Efficacy” (Competence 1) and “Understanding and respect for differences and diversity” (Competence 2). Finally, findings are grouped by indicators associated to sub-competence dimensions (Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills) (Table 1, Table 2).

According to results showed in Table 2, most of students express to have a high level of Intercultural Competence, as well as of the “Intercultural Efficacy” sub-competence and the “Understanding and respect for differences and diversity” sub-competence (levels 3 and 4 of the rating scale, with averages of 84%, 85,5% and 82,5%, respectively).

When analyzing the data related to indicators of the dimensions of the sub-competencies (Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills), it is worth stopping at some results which shows development levels of dimensions that deserve to be taken into account in order to generate learning scenarios that will allow their strengthening.

Table 02. Results of Development of Intercultural Competence (general, by sub-competence and by indicators). Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of data supplied by the study

| Value Likert Scale | INDICATORS | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--|------|------|
| | I1 | I2 | I3 | I4 | I5 | I6 | I7 | I8 | I9 |
| 1 | 0,4 | 0,9 | 1,9 | 4,8 | 6,8 | 0 | 3,6 | 0,4 | 8,9 |
| 2 | 6,4 | 4,3 | 23,1 | 11,4 | 23,6 | 3,3 | 17,1 | 2,5 | 20 |
| 3 | 41,6 | 37,9 | 50,3 | 40,3 | 39,3 | 40,3 | 43,6 | 39,6 | 35 |
| 4 | 51,6 | 56,9 | 24,7 | 43,5 | 30,3 | 56,4 | 35,7 | 57,5 | 36,1 |
| SUB- COMPETENCIES | | | | | | | | | |
| | Intercultural Efficacy Sub-competence | | | | | | Understanding and respect for differences and diversity sub-competence | | |
| 1 | 2,5 | | | | | | 4,3 | | |
| 2 | 12 | | | | | | 13,2 | | |
| 3 | 41,6 | | | | | | 39,4 | | |
| 4 | 43,9 | | | | | | 43,1 | | |
| GENERAL COMPETENCE | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 3,4 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | 12,6 | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | 40,5 | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | 43,5 | | | | | | | | |

Concerning the sub-competence “Intercultural Efficacy”, results show a high development in the three dimensions: Attitudes (I1 and I2), Knowledge (I3 and I4) and Skills (I5 and I6). That is, in general the participants consider essential the need of understanding their own culture and of being aware of the legitimacy of cultural visions different from their own; most of them are able to identify and show understanding of the features of different cultures and patterns that foster discrimination; besides, they have the abilities to maintain effective intercultural relationships, showing trust and adaptability in situations of inequality, discrimination, abuse and stereotypes, among other. Nevertheless, it is necessary to call the attention to results of indicators I3, I4 and I5, in which an important percentage of students (25%, 15,2% and 30,4%, respectively) express a development level between *Not at all* and *Barely*. This deserves attention in relation to the knowledge about the codes of different cultures, the identification of conducts that produce discrimination and the ability of establishing and maintaining efficient relationships with culturally diverse people.

As for the results of the sub-competence “Understanding and respect for differences and diversity”, they show high levels of development in all the indicators corresponding to the dimensions Attitudes (I7), Knowledge (I8) and Skills (I9). That is, most of participants are aware of the diversity that characterizes people and groups. An important percentage consider that it is worth strengthening their personal values regarding to racism, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination (30,7% of I7), and that they have to develop and integrate still further the understanding of stereotypes and the the impact of their own conduct facing differences and diversity (28,9% of I9).

7. Conclusion

This study, as well as the one carried out by Cano, Ricardo and Del Pozo (2016), coincide in stating the necessity of a methodological complementarity because findings show that the self-perception of the competency mastery by students might be overrated. Thus, it is necessary to know if their attitudes and knowledge have an impact on their academic, professional and relational tasks when exposed to experiences in environments culturally different from theirs. In the same way, these results must be taken into account at the moment of thinking students' participation mechanisms in Inclusive Education proposals.

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