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## Attitudes and perceptions towards cultural diversity and interculturality in the university context. A comparative study

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### Abstract

The university context is a privileged space for intercultural training of future professionals in education, a stage where approaching theoretical models and practical, useful and effective strategies to cultivate in the young students of the university degrees of education desire to understand and develop intercultural in their future teaching activities. However, studies in the University classroom, to detect attitudes and educational conceptions to multiculturalism and cultural diversity have been scarce. In this article show the most relevant results from a recent comparative study within the framework of the educational innovation project called “Building interculturality and culture of diversity in the University context” (PIE15-31) conducted with University students in 1st and 4th year of the degree of primary of the faculties of Education Sciences of the University Public of Navarre and Malaga University.

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### 1. Introduction

Today the attention to cultural diversity is understood as a challenge of the first order to strengthen equity and equality (Leiva, 2010). The positive promotion of cultural diversity is therefore understood as a guarantee of social cohesion, solidarity, as a response to the need to improve educational and social coexistence (Santos-Rego, 2009).

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That teachers become competent intercultural level will depend on two basic axes: the pedagogical concept on the meaning of interculturality and intercultural training (Leiva, 2010). This last aspect will be which ensure the quality of their professional activity (Aguado, Gil & Mata, 2008; Soriano, 2012), and will positively influence to achieve the purpose of intercultural education: achieving coexistence, respect and mutual student's assessment, so that this climate of respect and tolerance is transferred to the society in which we live.

The Interculturality can be defined as a pedagogical and social and community process whereby an appreciation of cultural diversity and the search for spaces of encounter, dialogue and Exchange is promoted to move towards an inclusive coexistence, where the conflict is conceived as an essential and necessary aspect to the empowerment of individuals and social groups. The interculturality has been a much-debated issue in formal and non-formal educational contexts, especially in schools and in the stages of primary and secondary education. However, the University context has been a training space with a rather small number of studies about the attitudes of future teachers, and, in truth, we cannot deny that it is a space quite privileged for the intercultural formation of professionals of education (Soriano & Peñalva, 2011).

Indeed, we can argue that the stage of university education is today very relevant as space for the acquisition and development of intercultural competencies, as well as learning of functional and relevant practical skills and theoretical constructs to instill in the young students of the university degrees of education desire to understand and develop interculturality in its future job as teachers (Lopez & Hinojosa 2012; Sales, 2006).

The initial and ongoing training of teachers should have a strong intercultural component, which ensures the quality of their professional activity (Leiva, 2011). If the intercultural theme were part of the curriculum, would be achieved: (1) adapt the training principles of educational reforms arising from the new European Space for Higher Education and consequently the principles emanating from the Declaration of Bologna (Peñalva & Soriano, 2010); and (2) provide teachers the knowledge, skills, strategies and personal and professional instruments allowing you to educate and educate themselves for intercultural citizenship (Aguado, Gil & Mata, 2008).

The school must not only generate significant knowledge, also citizenship critical and intercultural (Leiva, 2011), because it is the institution responsible for all people of every generation to become citizens (Martinez & Zurita, 2011). For this purpose the formation of the master is promoted in intercultural competence. Citizen not born, becomes, and Europe is a multicultural reality in which it is necessary to educate the citizen democratic and intercultural (Buendia, Gonzalez, Pozo & Sanchez, 2004). So the educational field is the main area of development of interculturality (Leiva, 2011).

The initial teacher training should develop intercultural competence, which is a combination of specific capabilities such as: (1) positive attitudes toward cultural diversity; (2) the ability to communicate; (3) the ability to manage conflicts in intercultural situations; and (4), the ability to be aware of their own culture and how this affects vision and interpretation of reality (Jandt, 1995; Deardorff, 2009). Thus, the development of intercultural competence for a citizenship type can be achieved, more reflexive and critically.

Margalef & Álvarez (2005) point out that the improvement of university educational practices, promoted the process of European convergence, could make objective through three aspects. The implementation of curricular transformations for the transition to the new degree studies, something already achieved today. The launch of a new way of conceiving the teaching and learning, aspect implicit in the process of change. And appropriate pedagogical training of all university lecturers.

To make intercultural education should start from practice, to reach the theory and returning on the practice, trying to improve it in the process. It should become properly: (1) in content intercultural, knowing what are and what other cultures, (2) learning to be critical of the information transmitted over various "others", (3) learning to understand and respect other ways of perceiving reality, (4) learning to value other cultures and cultural identities, encouraging and promoting contact between them. All these aspects must be taken into account when designing a training plan that established the basic curricular, didactic and pedagogical lines in relation to interculturality (Peñalva & Aguilar, 2011).

## 2. Methodology

In this study seeks to know what type of competences related to knowledge can be showed that students know in grades of teaching and pedagogy concerning cultural diversity and interculturality. For this purpose a specific measuring instrument is used: questionnaire "Attitudes and perceptions towards cultural diversity and interculturality

in the University context". The advantages of applying this questionnaires are several: (1) is a questionnaire designed specifically for the study of the basic and personal skills that university students in terms of attention to cultural diversity, (2) is a questionnaire that has already been applied to a sample of 201 students of a specific context (University of Malaga), and that will allow the comparison of results with other also specific context (Public University of Navarre).

### 2.1. Participants

The sample consists of a total of 181 students of studies degree in nursery and primary education, and degree of pedagogy of the Public University of Navarre (UPNA) and Malaga University (UMA). The student body belongs to courses 1st and 4th of these degrees. Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample by gender and course.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by sex and course

	Sample UPNA						Sample UMA					
	Total		Male		Female		Total		Male		Female	
	N	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%
Gender	58	100%	6	10,3%	52	89,7%	123	100%	42	34,1%	81	65,9%
Course												
1°	35	60,3%	4	11,4%	31	88,6%	101	77,1%	38	37,6%	63	62,4%
4°	23	39,7%	7	30,4%	16	69,6%	22	16,8%	4	18,2%	18	81,8%

### 2.2. Procedure

The employee questionnaire combines questions closed questions of scale Likert type. It has been elaborated within the framework of the project of educational innovation, called "Building intercultural and culture of diversity in the University context" of the Malaga University. The instrument is called "Perceptions towards cultural diversity and interculturality in the University context", and consists of 56 items with a poly character, in which the items are structured around five dimensions:

- The phenomenon of immigration in the educational context
- Cultural diversity and its relationship to school coexistence
- Interculturality as a pedagogical proposal
- The resources and educational support in terms of attention to diversity
- Practical development of interculturality

The questionnaire has been validated through review of judges belonging to different areas of knowledge with an average of 25 years of teaching experience, various Spanish and foreign universities. The reliability of the same has also been noted through a pilot test and the subsequent calculation of Cronbach's alpha, using the statistical program SPSS 22.0. The result is a coefficient of  $r = 0,857$  with a confidence level of 95% ( $p < 0.05$ ). If we understand a range of 0.600 is considered acceptable, we can say that the questionnaire is highly reliable. This is ratified to see that the different coefficients for each item are located between 0,824 and 0,843, which shows that any item produced large variations in the overall content of the questionnaire and that everyone, without exception, have a high reliability.

## 3. Results

To obtain the results presented in this study, we have selected a number of items of the questionnaire, in order to group information obtained in two dimensions of analysis: (1) perceptions of the different cultures that expresses the sample (table 2), and (2) perceptions of the sample about the interculturality (table 3).

Table 2. Perceptions of different cultures

	UPNA				UMA			
	Course 1°		Course 4°		Course 1°		Course 4°	
	N=35		N=23		N=101		N=22	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Do you think that Maghrebi students can have a problem in their educational inclusion?								
pretty	6	17,1%	7	30,4%	26	25,7%	11	50%
little	9	25,7%	5	21,7%	27	26,7%	4	18%
Do you think that students from the countries of Eastern can have a problem in their educational inclusion?								
pretty	5	14,3%	5	21,7%	8	7,9%	2	9%
little	10	28,6%	9	39,1%	28	27,7%	8	36%
Do you think that latin american students can have a problem in their educational inclusion?								
pretty	2	5,7%	5	21,7%	8	8,1%	1	5%
little	13	37,1%	11	47,8%	30	30,3%	11	50%
Do you think that students of Asian origins can have a problem in their educational inclusion?								
pretty	2	5,7%	2	8,7%	16	15,8%	5	23%
little	12	34,3%	8	34,8%	30	29,7%	2	9%
Do you think that the cultures of students from countries of the European Community can pose a problem in their educational inclusion?								
pretty	1	2,9%	1	4,3%	2	2,0%	2	9%
little	9	25,7%	13	56,5%	36	35,6%	6	27%

Table 3. Perceptions about interculturality

	UPNA				UMA			
	Course 1°		Course 4°		Course 1°		Course 4°	
	N=35		N=23		N=101		N=22	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The principles of interculturality must necessarily form part of educational projects for all schools, not only in the centers with the largest number of pupils of immigrant origin								
Agree	26	44,8%	11	19,0%	55	54,5%	19	86,4%
Little agreement	0	0,0%	3	5,2%	8	7,9%	1	4,5%
It is necessary that in classrooms and in school all the students know and is approaching the cultural elements of each present nationality								
Agree	19	32,8%	10	17,2%	47	46,5%	18	81,8%
Little agreement	1	1,7%	2	3,4%	7	6,9%	0	0,0%
Interculturality is directed to all students and their families both immigrant as native								
Agree	20	34,5%	12	20,7%	51	38,9%	13	9,9%
Little agreement	2	3,4%	2	3,4%	14	10,7%	3	2,3%
Interculturality is not a special modality of education for immigrant students, but a quality and educational value that all schools should have								
Agree	22	37,9%	14	24,1%	51	50,5%	13	59,1%
Little agreement	1	1,7%	1	1,7%	14	13,9%	3	13,6%
What is your opinion about interculturality at school?								
It is only a good idea without practical application	2	3,4%	3	5,2%	12	11,9%	0	0,0%
It's a romantic idea about the cultural interaction	1	1,7%	0	0,0%	3	3,0%	1	4,5%

It is a practical necessity that also requires a reflection of teachers	13	22,4%	14	24,1%	39	38,6%	8	36,4%
It is a proposal critical in education	1	1,7%	0	0,0%	5	5,0%	2	9,1%
It is a reflection on current education	1	1,7%	1	1,7%	9	8,9%	2	9,1%
It is a positive appreciation of cultural diversity	17	29,3%	5	8,6%	32	31,7%	9	40,9%
In my experience, schools are open to promote the active participation of families, both the native as the immigrant								
Agree	3	5,2%	2	3,4%	21	21,2%	2	9,1%
Little agreement	12	20,7%	8	13,8%	38	38,4%	10	45,5%
I believe that it is necessary to know the values and educational conceptions of family immigrants in order to improve educational care for children								
Agree	20	34,5%	8	13,8%	33	33,3%	13	59,1%
Little agreement	1	1,7%	0	0,0%	13	13,1%	1	4,5%

Respect to the first dimension, one can observe that there are differential perceptions regarding the possibilities of educational inclusion of different cultures (table 2). There are differences between the first and fourth courses of both universities, and differences between the universities. Differences between courses, generally you can see how first-year students perceived less difficulty for inclusive education of foreign students than students in fourth grade. In addition, in both courses, first and fourth, refers to that culture which presents more difficulties of inclusion is the Maghreb, followed by the cultures linked to the Eastern countries and Latin American countries. Differences between universities, you can see that UMA students perceive major difficulties for inclusion among students of North African, Asian and European origin. Front of the students of the UPNA that claims to be students from the countries of Eastern and Latin Americans who present greater difficulties in their process of inclusion.

Respect to the second dimension (table 3), differences, can be found again, between the courses and universities. In the first course of the UPNA, the show presents significant differences in their perceptions on different aspects related to interculturality. First course sample declares very according to the principles of interculturality to form part of educational projects for all centers, or values and educational concepts of immigrants as a means families are known to improve educational care for children.

It is significant how these perceptions vary in the fourth course, time in which students agrees little aspects as that schools promote effectively the active involvement of immigrant families. Analyzed the same items for courses in the UMA, is observed in the fourth course (unlike in the UPNA), the majority of students defends that the intercultural principles are part of the educational projects of the centers, or to know the values of families immigrants face to the educational care of their sons and daughters. With respect to the item related to the effective promotion of the participation of the immigrant families in the centres, at both universities students of fourth agrees indicate that this is not so in reality.

For the opinions that manifests the sample regarding interculturality at school, you can see that the highest percentages of response, in both University and courses concentrate on items indicating that: interculturality is a practical necessity which requires also a reflection by teachers, and that is an appreciation of cultural diversity.

#### 4. Conclusions

The results obtained indicate that the show presents in general attitudes and positive perceptions towards cultural diversity and diversity. Arises with all the convenience of having an impact on the development of factors as indicated by Leiva (2010, 2011 & 2012). These factors would be related to (1) the cognitive dimension (focused toward critical training on students of immigrant origin), (2) the dimension attitudinal (focusing on the development of the receptivity toward consideration of multiculturalism as a project of all), (3) emotional dimension (centered on the promotion of the valuation of individual identities against the group associated with cultural origin), and (4) the procedural or methodological dimension (based on the development of the conception that the intercultural should be developed not through specific activities, but through educational activities integrated in the curriculum development of schools).

Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2009) argues the need to increase the initial teacher training in interculturality. Called the attention throughout the study check how the differences between the first and fourth, courses always play against the intercultural competence of students. The cognitive dimension, the critical knowledge of the foreign students, develops from the traditional conceptions of the same. According to these, the less valued culture is the Maghreb, most in the current geopolitical context. This is well reflected in the data observed in table 2. It shows also how the concept of cultures becomes more restrictive as they progress courses. The attitudinal dimension or receptivity towards intercultural model as a project of all is an aspect that seems well-developed in the sample (table 3).

The Intercultural education, as an education for all, is not a perspective generally adopted in the programs of initial formation (Coelho, Oller & Serra, 2011); but it is not in the conceptualization that students handle.

It should not be forgotten that says Leiva (2010), as teachers will be competent intercultural level if they have a proper conception of the interculturality, and if they are trained in interculturality. The aspects that need to be present in the initial teacher formation (from a model of intercultural training based on competencies) are: instrumental training, to conceptual formation, reflexive training, critical and ecological training, and pedagogical training.

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