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## **Ecuadorian universities towards intercultural education: Attitude of lecturers in Guayaquil**

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### **Abstract**

This research analyses the university lecturers' attitude about intercultural education. The study was carried out in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, where university classrooms are multicultural spaces due to the confluence of students from different ethnic groups as well as national and international migrants. The 'Scale of attitudes toward multicultural education' was adapted to the Ecuadorian context and applied to 167 university lecturers. For conducting the survey, the snowball technique was selected, and the questionnaire was distributed via email. The reliability assessment showed an internal consistency index of 0.88. The results show a subjects' favourable attitude towards intercultural education; however, there still exist a small group of lecturers slightly leaning towards the rejection of intercultural education.

**Keywords:** Attitude, intercultural education, lecturers, multicultural classrooms, university.

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## 1. Introduction

Ecuador, Latin American country, is recognised worldwide for its cultural diversity, diversity that was acknowledged for the very first time in the current constitution of this country (Asamblea Constituyente, 2008). According to Ecuador National Institute for Statistics and Census (INEC), out of the 14,483,499 Ecuadorians, 71.99% identified itself as mestizo, 7.4% as *montubio* (a word used in Ecuador to refer to a peasant), 7.2% as Afro-Ecuadorian, 7% as Indigenous (14 nationalities and 18 indigenous identities) and 6.1% as white. Due to this cultural mosaic, governments promoted various development programmes, all of them with a common denominator: the strengthening of intercultural relations in the territory (SENPLADES, 2015).

A favourable sociocultural context accompanied the institutionalisation of this discourse. On the one hand, the recognition of indigenous, Afro-descendants and *montubios* organisations in the country and Latin America; on the other, the emergence of 'progressive' governments in the region (Guerrero Guerrero, 2016; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). A contextual interculturality element in Ecuador is the strong relation with the '*Sumak Kawsay* or good living' discourse (Gudynas, 2014; Quijano, 2002; Walsh, 2012), which introduces ancestral indigenous worldviews at the centre of policies. This idea was born from the criticism of the economic development proposed by the capitalist model, and it is proposed as a life alternative for the future (Gregor Barie, 2014; Radcliffe, 2012).

The sphere of education was included in the proposed social transformation projects. Reforms at all levels of education were implemented, some well accepted, including several formulated by the educational institutions themselves, and others oriented vertically from the institutional apparatus created by the government for the control of education in the country (Araujo & Bramwell, 2015; Garcia Liscano, Garcia Liscano & Liscano Solano, 2017). Higher education, scope for the development of this study, was one of the most affected sectors after the release of the Organic Law of Higher Education (LOES, 2011) and the creation of governmental institutions, such as the Council of Higher Education (CES, for its acronym in Spanish) and the Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (CEAACES, for its acronym in Spanish). The Academic Regime Regulation (Consejo de Educacion Superior, 2013) proposes, in its TITLE III 'about Interculturality', a series of guidelines for the planning, execution and regulation of the criteria of interculturality for each area of knowledge and training. Specifically, it stipulates the conception of subjects, projects and even degrees and majors that include the knowledge, technologies, worldviews and practices of indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and *montubio* ancestral peoples. At the same time, it regulates equal opportunities for access to higher education and the development of special programmes addressed to historically forgotten minorities: indigenous people, people of African descent and *montubios*.

In this sociocultural plot, the Ecuadorian universities are thrown into an unexplored world. Research initiatives are recognised; some of them focused on the field of bilingual intercultural education (Arellano, 2008; Garcia Liscano et al., 2017; Jimenez, 2015); others on the results of community outreach projects (Polaino & Romillo, 2017), and the rest on strategies conceived in the teaching-learning process (Gafas Gonzalez, Herrera Molina, Brossard Pena, Roque Herrera & Ferrera Larramendi, 2016). However, it has been found that most of these projects lack diagnostic studies on the attitudes and perception about the phenomenon, usually leading to the project rejection. Due to the sociodemographic characteristics of the country, there are only few universities whose classrooms do not contain students from different ethnic groups. However, in the history of Ecuadorian education, and in the universities specifically, the form of address interculturality had never been demanded and regulated such effervescently as almost one and a half decade ago (Araujo & Bramwell, 2015; Granda Merchan, 2017).

The university lecturer, object of study of this research, began to address subjects or topics about the multicultural, pluricultural and interculturality in the classrooms, even in majors pertaining to the exact sciences. Didactic exercises often arose within the lectures, as if it were the first time that

the presence of culturally diverse students was noticed in the classroom; or at least, there exists a lack of records of research studies that evidence this aspect earlier.

The objective of this research is to identify the university lecturer's attitudes related to intercultural education. For this, the Attitude Scale towards multicultural education was used (Rodriguez Lajo, Cabrera Rodriguez, Espin Lopez & Marin Gracia, 1997). The study has a great importance for the Ecuadorian university education since it will allow to measure the lecturers' attitude toward multicultural education. Perhaps in other educational contexts, talking about multicultural classrooms or intercultural education may be the result of international migratory flows of a globalised world. But, in the Ecuadorian context, the form of address this issue essentially depends on the country ethnic composition, in addition to the national and international migrations that make the classrooms multicultural spaces par excellence.

## 2. Background

Intercultural education is the constant construction of knowledge generated in the contact with others, which is one of its main challenges. The work and analysis context diversity has led to a theoretical-practical work developed in two aspects: the European model of intercultural education, aimed at dealing with the diasporas (Fernandez, Luna & Eisman, 2014), and the other, the Latin American model, thought from the indigenous and Afro-descendant's communities (Didou-Aupetit, 2013; Jorge Navarro, 2014). For both models, intercultural education is not a goal to be achieved, but a constant construction process that must be renovating and that prepares lecturers for situations of contact with the diverseness.

The term multicultural refers to the spatial and temporal coexistence of different cultures and subcultures, whereas the term intercultural suggests a process of coexistence and dialogue that promotes social justice for all, and recognition of cultural diversity (Walsh, 2012). Then, the university, in its broadest sense, becomes a multicultural space and therefore, the ideal setting for the development of intercultural relations; not only among culturally diverse students but also in contact with lecturers and administrative staff (Albert & Triandis, 1985).

In this education paradigm, the lecturer takes a stance as a facilitator in solving cultural conflicts, therefore, he must know how to choose a neutral discourse free of discrimination and stereotypes. Authors such as Crawshaw (2002) and Vila Banos (2006), explain that lecturers should focus more on the development of intercultural competences than intercultural strategies; that is, intercultural competences provide the ability for people to relate to 'others' in different contexts and moments (Coyer, 2014).

A term reiteratively found in the intercultural education literature to define the lecturer is intercultural mediator (Garcia-Navarro & Martins, 2017). Lecturers must be willing to share meanings, experiences and affections with people from other countries or with ethnic minorities. The demands upon lecturer's expertise on interculturality in classrooms or multicultural spaces are becoming more and more challenging. The knowledge of the country history, the international context, language proficiency and even aspects of non-verbal communication in the region are essential requirements for this cause (Mirabal Martinez & Pinuel Raigada, 2014). In order to achieve this performance and to promote intercultural competences among students, there must be a favourable lecturer's attitude towards intercultural education (Aguado Odina & Mata Benito, 2017). From the scientific literature, based on theoretical and practical reflections from different regions of the world, the complexity of intercultural education is shown (Garcia-Raga, Grau & Lopez-Martin, 2017; Pasquale, 2015). Therefore, the authors of this article decided to find the attitude that university lecturers have regarding intercultural education.

### 3. Methodology

The present research was made to university lecturers in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. Fourteen universities, between public and private, currently function in this city. The questionnaire used is the Scale of attitudes towards multicultural education (Rodriguez Lajo et al., 1997). This scale was initially conceived to measure the attitudes of primary school lecturers to multicultural education, so that, their items were adjusted to fit in the university context. Although the scale refers to measuring the attitude towards multicultural education, in its year of creation the term ‘intercultural’ was rarely used, and therefore, intercultural education was as well. However, it analyses each item of the scale, corroborating that they adapt to the approaches of intercultural education and the sociocultural context of the universities of Guayaquil.

**Table 1. Scale of attitudes towards multicultural education**

No	Approach
1	The dynamics of a class with students of different ethnicities favours its socialisation
2	In classes with students of different cultures more varied and attractive contents are worked
3	The presence of students of different ethnic minorities in the classroom causes greater stress in the lecturer
4	The contact with other ethnic groups that students have in multicultural educational situations prepares them better to adapt to changes and the future
5*	The presence in the university of lecturers of different ethnic minorities hinders the joint planning of the subjects
6	Multicultural educational situations harm minorities because the prejudices and stereotypes of lecturers prevent equal treatment for all students
7	If students from different cultures coexist in a class, the diversity of materials used is more motivating for learning
8	Having ethnic minority students in the class makes the task of the lecturer more difficult
9	Groups of students from different cultures originate learning experiences in the most enriching classroom
10	The presence of ethnic minorities harms the average academic level of the class because it requires a slower learning pace
11*	Students educated in universities where students of different minorities live together are more understanding towards other groups of ‘different’ people (elderly, disabled, disabled children ...)
12	Students of different ethnic minorities would progress more according to their possibilities if they studied in universities of their own ethnic group
13	Classes with students from different ethnic minorities favour educational innovation and stimulate the lecturer in the investigation of new methodologies
14	The presence of students from different cultures causes a greater number of discipline problems in the classroom
15	Students have better academic performance when they are with classmates of different ethnic minorities
16	The lecturer adapts better to the rhythm of the class if they do not mix students of different ethnic minorities
17*	The students are more interested in knowing other cultures (their music, their literature, their lifestyles) when in the university they work with multicultural curricula
18	The presence of students of ethnic minorities in the class causes more problems than advantages
19*	Since all cultures are so valid and meaningful, the university should welcome and embrace cultural diversity
20*	In the university, the students of minority cultures should be grouped into classes separated from the majority, to provide them with individualised attention
21*	The university should support cultural diversity because it is an enrichment for all its members
22	The presence of students of different minorities in the class causes problems of coexistence due to

- conflicts of values among the students
- 23\* The university, due to its regional character, should focus exclusively on teaching its own culture, although students of different ethnic minorities attend it
- 24 Having students from different cultures in your class makes the lecturer more understanding and tolerant
- 

\*modified from its original version

For the statistical analysis, the original question groups proposed by the authors of the categories were kept: effects on the students (items 1, 4, 11, 15, 6, 10 and 22), effects on the teaching staff (items 13, 24, 3, 8 and 16), effects on classroom work (items 2, 7, 9, 5 and 14), role of the university (items 17, 19, 21, 12, 20 and 23) and finally, item 18 has no correspondence with any specific category (Rodriguez Lajo et al., 1997, p. 109). Likert scaling was also used ((1) totally disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure/neutral, (4) agree, (5) totally agree), as well as the initial variables of sex, years of work experience at multicultural universities and the region where the university is located. The scale keeps 24 items equal to its initial proposal. The change made to the identified items consisted mainly in the substitution of the word 'school' for 'university'. Likewise, item 23 was modified, the initial version referred to 'the school of the host country' and was changed to 'The university because of its regional character' (see Table 1).

The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms using the snowball technique, i.e., the link of the questionnaire was sent by email and forwarded to colleagues working at other universities in Guayaquil. Different inclusion criteria were met by the people who filled the questionnaire: to be a lecturer, to be currently working at a university in Guayaquil for at least 1 year. The average time for filling the form was approximately 9 minutes. The statistical software IBM SPSS was used for the study and analysis of the extracted data.

#### 4. Analysis of results

The study involved 167 lecturers in total. The frequency of participation of men was 57.5% (96) and females 42.5% (71). With respect to the geographical location of the respondents, 88% (147) said they worked in universities in urban centres, and 12% (10) in universities located in suburban areas. The amount of years worked by the respondents as lecturers ranged between 2 and 8 years, with 76.7 (128) of the total number of respondents; while there was a relation between the years worked and the recognition of multicultural classrooms. The internal consistency of the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.88.

The analysis show that most lecturers agreed with intercultural education. Next, the positive and negative variables that formed the questionnaire were grouped accordingly. In the intersection of the variables, a dispersion of the results is evident, showing many lecturers who chose the not sure/neutral attitude. This data reveals lecturers who do not have an attitude created with respect to the problem, a fact that may constitute a partial conclusion of the study.

##### 4.1. Category 1: effects on students

This category examined the perception of lecturers about the existence of multicultural classrooms and the development of intercultural competences they have on students. For the analysis, the positive items (I1, I4, I11 and V15) and negative items (I6, I10 and I22) were organised, expecting that for the positive items the answers oscillate between the points 4 and 5 of the Likert scale, whereas for the negative items the answers be located in the points 0 up to 2. The internal consistency of the positive variables was 0.81 while for the negative variables was 0.77.

Figure 1 shows the results by items (I). Regarding the positive variables, all were in the range of 3–4, corroborating the general tendency of the questionnaire in favour of intercultural education.

However, the I15, which refers to the improvement of academic performance in multicultural classrooms, the average of scores is in the first quarter of that range. The more detailed analysis of this variable indicated that 57 lecturers are not sure of this improvement and another 43 disagreed with the item. With respect to the negative items, only the I6 is in the expected range, while the I10 and I22 do not have a criterion created on the academic level of the multicultural classrooms because of the ethnic differences and the non-existence of conflicts of values in the classrooms (I22).

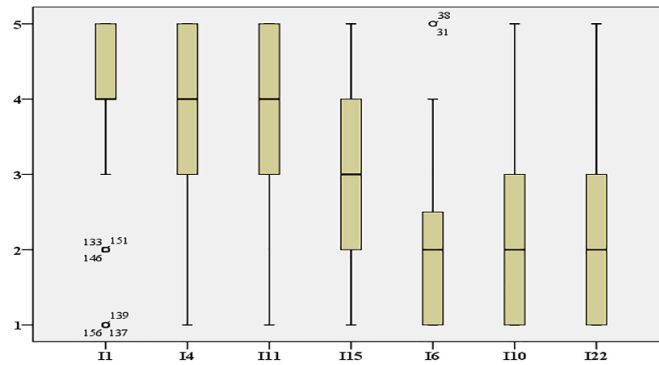


Figure 1. Frequency mean of first category

#### 4.2. Category 2: effects on lecturers

With these items, the opinion of lecturers about the effects that intercultural education causes on themselves was analysed. The grouping of items was I13 and I24, positively constructed and the I3, I8 and I16 in negative form. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.85 and 0.51, respectively. The results show (see Figure 2) that lecturers agreed that multicultural classrooms foster educational innovation (I13) and at the same time, make the lecturer more tolerant and understanding (I14). The detailed analysis of each item showed that the presence of students from different ethnic groups caused stress in the lecturer (I3). The I8 was the one that showed the greatest dispersion in the results of this category. In it, 28 lecturers agreed that ethnic minorities make their task more difficult, 7 totally agreed and 40 do not have a straight opinion.

The I16, which refers to a better adaptation of the lecturer to the rhythm of the class without students from different ethnic groups, the criteria were more unified leaving 73% of the sample in the expected range. Comparing the data with the initial scale applied in the context of its creation, there is a relation with the criteria I3, I8 and I16. The authors acknowledge that the lecturers agreed on these negative effects of multicultural classrooms: stress, making the tasks more difficult and adaptation to the rhythm of the class (Rodriguez Lajo et al., 1997, p. 116).

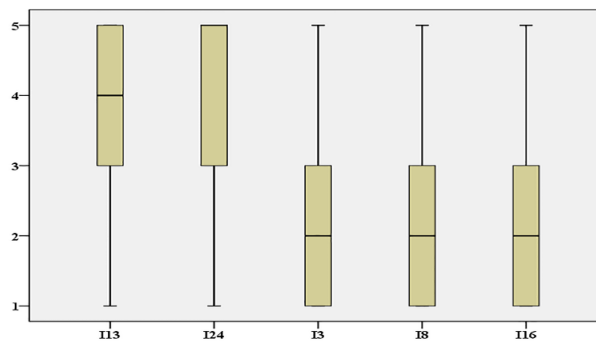


Figure 2. Frequency mean of second category

#### 4.3. Category 3: effects on the classroom

This category characterises the work environment in multicultural classrooms. It is composed of items I2, I7 and I9 positively written and I5, I14 are negatively written. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.90 and 0.67, respectively. The results show (see Figure 3) a similar tendency to the previous category. The lecturers agreed with the positive items, which refer to more dynamic and attractive classes, the process of a greater amount of content in the classroom and better learning experiences. The I5, refers to the fact that the culturally diverse lecturers in the universities hinder the planning, although there was concurrence for the disagreement, it is evident that certain lecturers consider an obstacle the ethnic difference of the teaching staff.

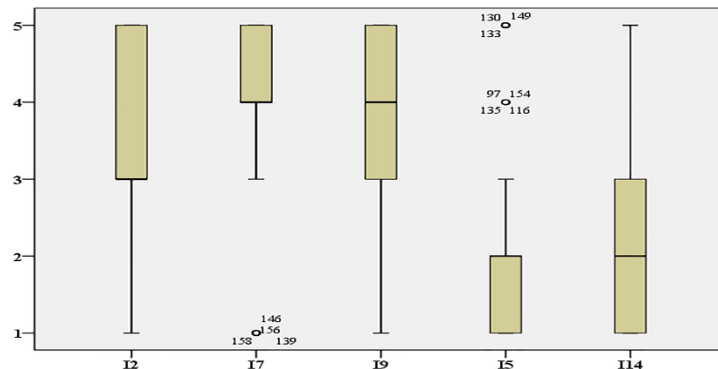


Figure 3. Frequency mean of third category

#### 4.4. Category 4: role of the university

The items I17, I19 and I21 built positively and the items I12, I20 and I23 negatively conceived make up the criteria to measure this category. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.93 and 0.32, respectively. There was a coincidence among lecturers to agree with the positive items: multicultural curricula increase interest in other cultures of students, universities must welcome and promote respect for cultural diversity (see Figure 4). The low index of the Cronbach coefficient among the negative items is striking. Deepening in this aspect, it is noted especially with the I20 and I23 that many lecturers were in total agreement with the approach. Aspect that explains why there is not a unified response inclination with respect to these criteria.

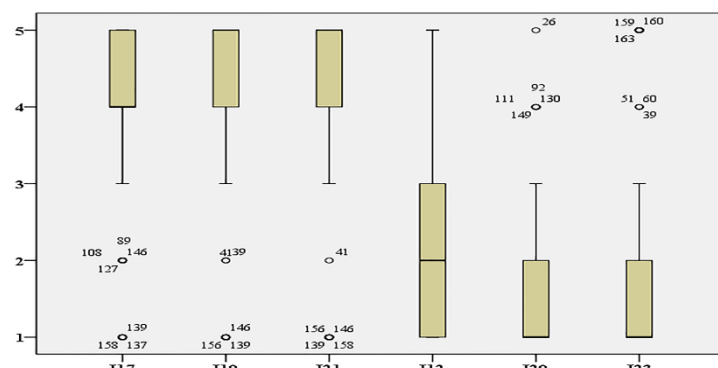


Figure 4. Frequency mean of quarter category

Item 18, declared as a general criterion, the mean frequency indicated 2.21, placing the answers in the interval (Not sure/neutral). Although the tendency shows not being sure of the advantages of intercultural education, 53 and 58 lecturers indicated that they strongly disagree and disagree,

respectively, with the approach that intercultural education causes more disadvantages than advantages, representing 66.4% of the sample surveyed.

The strongest correlation of the questionnaire occurred between I21 and I19 ( $\rho = 0.884$ ), and refers to the role of the university in welcoming cultural diversity due to the cultural enrichment it causes among its members. Another significant correlation that links lecturer and institution was established between I21 and I24 ( $\rho = 0.833$ ), recognising that in more diverse universities, lecturers are more understanding and tolerant. The I7 and I9 presented high relation also ( $\rho = 0.846$ ), establishing that the use of diverse materials in the classroom provokes more motivating learning experiences in the students. Also, the correlation of the I18 with the other items was analysed, organised by categories, trying to find the criteria that explain the disadvantages of intercultural education (see Table 2).

The general analysis of the correlations shows that lecturers consider that the presence of ethnic minority students causes more problems than advantages due to the indiscipline events created in the classroom (I18 and I14,  $\rho = 0.744$ ), followed by the criterion that makes the lecturer's task more difficult (I18 and I8,  $\rho = 0.733$ ). However, the most common correlation between the items (I18 and I11,  $\rho = 0.007$ ), shows the incidence among lecturers that students who live with ethnic minority students are more sympathetic towards other groups.

By breaking down the correlations between categories, the effects on students, the strongest relationship (I18 and I22,  $\rho = 0.640$ ), explains that multicultural classrooms generate more problems than advantages due to conflicts of values between students. For category 2, effects on lecturers, there was a consensus among lecturers about stress and the difficulty of adapting to multicultural classrooms. The category 3, work in the classroom, shows how lecturers consider that the presence of groups of lecturers of ethnic differences hinders joint planning. Finally, category 4, the role of the university, that there was a great synchronism among lecturers about the role of the educational institution in the reception of ethnic minorities, from the stronger relationship of this general item (I18) with an item of the category (I18 and I20,  $\rho = 0.401$ ), there is a criterion that ethnic minorities should study in separate groups.

**Table 2. Correlation between I18 and categories**

<b>Correlation I18—Category 1</b>	<b>I1</b>	<b>I4</b>	<b>I11</b>	<b>I15</b>	<b>I6</b>	<b>I10</b>	<b>I22</b>
Pearson correlation	0.071	-0.155*	0.007	-0.097	0.419**	0.608**	0.640**
Sig. (Bilateral)	0.361	0.045	0.929	0.214	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Correlation I18—Category 2</b>	<b>I13</b>	<b>I24</b>	<b>I3</b>	<b>I8</b>	<b>I16</b>		
Pearson correlation	-0.114	0.011	0.529**	0.733**	0.400**		
Sig. (Bilateral)	0.142	0.889	0.000	0.000	0.000		
<b>Correlation I18—Category 3</b>	<b>I2</b>	<b>I7</b>	<b>I9</b>	<b>I5</b>	<b>I14</b>		
Pearson correlation	0.095	0.135	0.038	0.647**	0.744**		
Sig. (Bilateral)	0.220	0.082	0.622	0.000	0.000		
<b>Correlation I18—Category 4</b>	<b>I17</b>	<b>I19</b>	<b>I21</b>	<b>I12</b>	<b>I20</b>	<b>I23</b>	
Pearson correlation	-0.056	-0.198*	-0.104	0.210**	0.401**	0.050	
Sig. (Bilateral)	0.470	0.011	0.180	0.006	0.000	0.518	

## 5. Discussions and conclusions

This research analysed the attitudes of university lecturers towards intercultural education in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. The results showed that there is a favourable attitude toward intercultural education in general. However, there are certain behaviours in the results to be analysed. The first is the dispersion in the answers. This scale was made for culturally diverse schools by the growing wave of emigrants arriving in Spain, it was expected that adverse responses to the same approach. However, Guayaquil, multicultural city, where university lecturers face diverse students daily, manifested the stress and difficulty that multicultural classrooms cause in them, claiming that they



adapt better to the rhythm of the class without ethnic minorities in the classrooms. This fact shows the great challenge that constitutes intercultural education today and provokes to rethink the theoretical constructions about 'how it should be' (Fernandez-Castillo, 2009) and deepen the reality of university lecturers in the different multicultural contexts they face daily.

The results obtained in the I10, show the concordance of the majority that the multicultural classrooms do not affect the academic performance of the group. However, in the opinion of certain cases, good academic performance for studying in multicultural classrooms is not always directly proportional. There were even lecturers who supported the segmentation by cultural groups to have with them a differentiated attention. Specifically, in the case of Ecuador, criteria such as these can be found, since students from ethnic communities, for the most part, come from the socioeconomically unfavourable sectors and denominated by some authors as 'historically forgotten subjects' (Walsh, 2012). From the educational point of view, these students attend schools where the preparation is questionable or simply, the criteria and results of learning of the general education that makes the entrance to the university diverge.

With the creation of Ecuadorian institutions for the control of university education, regulations were not only established for student entry but also in the hiring and evaluation requirements of their lecturers. Due to this, the presence of lecturers of Afro-Ecuadorian origin, aborigines and a significant number of foreigners was increased. Isolated cases responded in favour that this cultural diversity in lecturers causes problems in planning, while 79% disagreed with this approach. The presence of culturally diverse lecturers has led to the inclusion of new themes within the classrooms, as well as new experiences in teaching at the university.

Despite there being some dispersion in the responses of some items, the lecturers agreed on the role of the university as an institution that should foster intercultural relations. There was also an unanimity about multicultural classrooms that makes them more understanding and tolerant people. With respect to students, it prepares them for the future and prepares them for situations with disadvantaged people socially and culturally diverse. Another positive aspect to highlight was the coincidence of criteria in the use and innovation of new learning techniques in the classroom by lecturers.

Faced with these analyses, it can be concluded that the main challenge for lecturers is in the classrooms, during the process of teaching in the classrooms, where different aspects arouse new forms and techniques of teaching. However, meeting daily with multicultural classrooms prepares them for life in a general way, not only lecturers but also students, and promotes in the university institution the search for strategies and formulas for the development of intercultural education. The Ecuadorian context for its cultural diversity suffers from studies that analyses the advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses of intercultural education in the territory. This research, developed in the city of Guayaquil, the Ecuadorian coast, shows criteria on intercultural education not unified. Therefore, it is recommended to extend the study to other regions of the country: sierra and Amazonia, to learn from the experience of university lecturers in other sociocultural contexts and their attitude towards intercultural education. Confronting the criteria of the lecturers of these three regions, although they belong to the same country, their cultural characteristics are different; it will be one of the authors' next research studies and perhaps a limitation of this study.

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