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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

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