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Bilingual Intercultural Education: An exploration of Second Language Learning in Ecuador

Both in the US and abroad, English is viewed as an essential skill for jobs, promotions, and higher education. In 2006, the Ecuadorian Government launched a Ten-Year Education Plan. One of the results of this program was an influx of English Language Programs across the nation. Higher education institutions created partnerships with American Universities and thousands of students have matriculated into US programs to learn English. Over the last century, Indigenous people have been actively advocating for representation in the national education system. The most recent and most successful attempt, Bilingual Intercultural Education, is pitted against tradition education models as well as immersing programs to learn languages such as English, French, and German. When discussing bilingual intercultural education in Ecuador, the conversation is limited to indigenous education programs and citizens going aboard for a more comprehensive language education.

This presentation is part of a larger comparative study that includes in depth analysis of adult second language learning programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ecuador. For the sake of brevity, I will focus this presentation on my research time spent in Ecuador. As such, I explore Intercultural Bilingual education as well as access to Kitchwa and English language programs in higher education. Prior to my trip, I conducted secondary research on this topic. This information serves as the base for my study. I used this information to craft interview questions for further research in Ecuador. On the ground, I interviewed professors and a masters student about indigenous and English language learning programs.

My early findings suggest that English is used most frequently in higher level jobs that have an international scope. In the same way that scientist and business professionals are interested in increasing English literacy, indigenous people are also fighting to preserve native languages. In many ways, these efforts are at odds competing for national resources and local support. Interviews conducted with Ecuadorian professors, helped illustrated how social hierarchy works to support English language learning programs and other western language programs over indigenous languages. Although I gleaned lots of information about the unique set up of education system in Ecuador, social identities were still missing from the conversation.

As this research continues to evolve, I remain interested in further exploring the role social identities play in access to educational programs. My prior research discusses Ecuadorian education as a national monolith and conducting mores specific interviews with people from underrepresented groups in higher education will help integrate this element. I would also like to further explore metrics such as enrollment in higher education programs