



Value of Respect for Quichua Language and Culture: concept of *Sumak Kawsay*

Valor del respeto por la lengua y cultura quichua: concepto del Sumak Kawsay

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Received on: 2020-11-16 / **Revised on:** 2021-02-18 / **Accepted on:** 2021-04-20 / **Published on:** 2021-07-01

Abstract

The moral values of good living *Sumak Kawsay* related to the respect for the Quichua language and culture represent a fundamental tool in Ecuadorian society and in school context. Therefore, the main objective of this study seeks to learn more about common and differentiating elements from the opinions of teachers and from the contents of textbooks in Ecuador. The research project was carried out in an indigenous community with 60 indigenous teachers of the rural school Mushauk Rimak located in San Lucas. A qualitative method was applied to the analysis of semi-open interviews in Spanish with the participating teachers. The results indicate that San Lucas teachers impart to students the values of respect for language and culture associated with the moral values of *Sumak Kawsay*. This aspect of the program is also reflected in the teaching materials in Quichua, component of the implementation of bilingual-intercultural education in the indigenous communities at the national level. The conclusion of the study points to the value of Sumak Kawsay as reflected in the content of textbooks and the efforts of teachers to revitalize the Quichua language and transmit the language to students despite the possibility that the bilingual program does not enjoy acceptance by all parents in this locality.

Keywords: Moral values, rural education, bilingual education, teachers, Quichua, Ecuador.

Resumen

Los valores morales de buen vivir *Sumak Kawsay* relacionado con el respeto por la lengua y cultura quichua representan una herramienta fundamental en la sociedad ecuatoriana y en el contexto escolar. Consecuentemente con esta idea, el objetivo principal de este trabajo es averiguar los elementos comunes y diferenciadores entre las opiniones del profesorado indígena y los contenidos de los libros de texto de diferentes materias escolares de Ecuador. La investigación se desarrolló en un contexto indígena ecuatoriano con 60 docentes indígenas de la escuela rural Mushuk Rimak ubicada en la parroquia de San Lucas. Se utilizó la investigación cualitativa mediante las entrevistas semiabiertas en lengua castellana, que se realizaron a todos los docentes participantes. Los resultados indican que, en la comunidad indígena de San Lucas, los docentes transmiten al alumnado el valor del respeto por la lengua y cultura quichua vinculado con los valores morales del *Sumak Kawsay*. Este aspecto está reflejado también en los materiales educativos en quichua gracias a la política de implementación de educación bilingüe intercultural en los pueblos indígenas a nivel nacional en Ecuador. Las conclusiones destacan el valor del Sumak Kawsay en los libros de textos y la labor de los docentes de rescatar el idioma quichua y transmitirlo al alumnado a pesar que la aceptación del programa bilingüe no es unánime entre los padres y las madres de familia de esta localidad.

Descriptor: Valores morales, educación rural, educación bilingüe, docentes, quichua, Ecuador.

1. Introduction

Character education and its development involves an effort to help people, especially young people, to acquire some fundamental behavioral values such as commitment, honesty, tolerance and justice. In this way, it is one of the most pressing social needs that the community has to monitor and act.

On the one hand, the school has a fundamental role in developing character education through a curriculum that promotes students' ethical values such as respect and close union towards society and oneself (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Cortés, 2003). Above all, the school is the place where moral culture is developed, based on a set of educational practices designed to teach knowledge and coexistence (Dewey, 1971), as well as a world of values (Puig et al., 2012).

On the other hand, both families and indigenous communities, in a coordinated and responsible way, have a didactic objective that is mainly based on forming customs and developing positive behaviors that lead to the learning and practice of values of their sons and daughters. Thus, the foundations are laid in the family for the formation of the values of children, and later to transmit them and work them systematically in rural school (Herrera & Herrera, 2009).

This paper provides the results of the opinions of 60 teachers from the bilingual intercultural school Mushuk Rimak in San Lucas (Ecuador) regarding the values of *Sumak Kawsay* (Good Living), which are transmitted to students in the rural indigenous school, highlighting the value of respect for quichua language and culture.

We have analyzed these beliefs of indigenous teachers about moral education, because there is little research on this topic in indigenous populations and we think that the contributions of a rural school context with these characteristics can be relevant and may have a certain impact on different actors involved in education: teachers, students and researchers.

1.1. The indigenous rural school in Ecuador

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, Art. 1/2008, the State of Ecuador is recognized as a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual country that accepts, admits and defends cultural diversity. In Ecuador, as a multicultural state that promotes interculturality, we are concerned about how indigenous students in rural schools can attend basic education without leaving school, despite living in a complex and diverse society characterized by social inequalities and racism.

There is an imbalance between urban and rural school in Ecuador, being rural school characterized by social differences, mainly by the increase in poverty and the reduction of the budget granted by the central government to rural education. This inequality lies in historical injustices as a result of the processes of colonization, expropriation of land of indigenous people, "ethnic and linguistic shame" (Villagómez, 2018, p. 46), constant discrimination and oppression over the centuries.

In order to preserve their ancestral languages, defend and consolidate their territories, indigenous population has proposed the establishment of rural bilingual intercultural education schools and the State has adopted educational programs that revolve around the right to learn in their own languages. It should be noted that the Ecuadorian educational system currently respects the collective rights of indigenous nations and their communities, since students can access intercultural school and be trained in the official languages of the State (Ministry of Education, 2013). Consequently, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education recognized and established a Model of the Bilingual Intercultural Education System (MOSEIB) since the indigenous population needs to receive teaching in their own native languages alongside Spanish, because it is important for them and for the Ecuadorian State that the original languages survive in the time.



As can be seen, MOISEB is an important part of Ecuadorian education and teachers have the opportunity to teach in indigenous languages at different stages of compulsory education. The main objective of the program is to eliminate high percentages of illiteracy, since 42% of students do not complete their studies, especially in Elementary school, and to strengthen education as a whole (Chireac et al., 2017). Despite the implementation of bilingual education programs throughout the state, illiteracy is high mainly due to inequality and poverty, two factors that limit access of indigenous children to education. According to Torres (2005), other factors to be taken into account in relation to school dropout are domestic work incompatible with school life and the use of language that indigenous people do not understand.

It is known that the Spanish language remains being a symbol of access to a better social life and political power, and it has gradually displaced the original languages, and consequently, promoted an abandonment of the mother languages by the indigenous people. This phenomenon has arisen as a result of the social marginalization and discrimination suffered by indigenous people in different Latin American countries. Acculturation, in the framework of asymmetric bilingualism, has resulted in the abandonment of one's own languages and the acceptance and use of Spanish in all spheres of social life, especially for communicating.

One of the key objectives of intercultural bilingual education in Ecuador underlines the right of indigenous group to be taught in their mother tongues in order to preserve the survival of these languages and to recognize them officially alongside Spanish. In intercultural bilingual education, it is extremely important to highlight the teaching of the two languages in contact and the elaboration of adequate didactic resources focused on the Ecuadorian indigenous student, a methodology that is represented in the recognition and maintenance of Quichua, one of the most important indigenous languages of the

American continent, as an essential component of an ancestral culture.

Because of the importance of preserving and rescuing the values of the Quichua language as a minority language, our study considers to analyze the extent to which it is possible to relate teachers' beliefs about the moral values exposed in the culture of *Sumak Kawsay* (Good Living), especially focused on the respect of the Quichua language with the moral values presented in the school curriculum. The contrast between the reality presented in teachers and the moral values described in the textbooks has led us draw conclusions and different interpretations that will provide us with guidelines for reflecting on the necessary needs of teaching strategies and school program, but also on the teaching and learning of character education in relation to respect and attitudes toward the Quichua language.

1.2. Character education and its relationship with the culture of *Sumak Kawsay*

We based the analysis on the theoretical foundations of Lickona (1983) and the research team at Cortland, according to which the moral culture of a school is understood as the behavior and practices of agents of a school.

Lickona's character education proposal is set up in two types of strategies: classroom and school. On the one hand, in relation to class strategies, the author raises nine dimensions, of which, for our analysis, we will highlight the following: A) the teacher as an ethical model and mentor; b) the class as a community that cares for its members; c) values through the curriculum; d) awareness and responsibility at work.

On the other hand, as regards school strategies, we have chosen the three dimensions that the school needs to develop in character education: A) working beyond the classroom; (b) collaboration between families and the educational community in the task of character



education; (c) creation of a positive moral culture in school.

Overall, Lickona's proposal points out that it is necessary in educational communities to develop various types of learning: *learning to think, learning to do, learning to learn, learning to be, and learning to live together and to live with others*. In the educational context, a committed pedagogy is necessary, which is sensitive to interpersonal relationships, aimed at recognizing, accepting and motivating the student (Duch, 1997). In this sense, the teacher is not only a holder of knowledge, but is also a person committed to his/her educational role, offering the students education and training, and for this reason he/she must exercise as a model. Its role as a moral agent is based on encouraging the motivation and self-esteem of students in the involvement of processes of moral education and values, on fostering a climate of tolerance in class, on resolving conflicts, on continuing the development process of students, instilling in them values of community, civic and dialogic sensitivity.

Character education in indigenous schools in Loja (Ecuador) is based on sharing personal and socio-moral values such as solidarity, cooperative work, respect and tolerance.

From sociocultural theory, Vygotsky (1964, 1988) affirms that the process of human development is mediated by social interaction and it emphasizes the idea that the origin of thought is based on the realization of collaborative tasks. According to Rogoff (1993), children in several communities acquire skills and knowledge through mediation processes guided by other expert members when conducting joint activities. This is also the case for students of the rural indigenous school *Mushuk Rimak*, who develop their learning through interactive routines with their families (Rosemberg & Amado, 2007). These routines are composed of community-specific knowledge that is effectively developed in the school setting with the values taught by the family and those of the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1987).

Likewise, according to Alvarez and Del Rio (2001), the task system in each culture offers awareness models that express ways of thinking linked to the tasks carried out. The school and the community are training agents with their own values. In the indigenous school and through the culture of *Sumak Kawsay*, the direct collaboration of people who make up a community is seen in the decision-making on issues affecting the group in a global way. In this way, the school and its organizational structure are privileged places to live and appreciate the life of the group.

But what does *Sumak Kawsay* culture mean and what are the moral values indigenous people of Ecuador and the students of the rural community of San Lucas need? To answer this question, we mention Martín Ibáñez (1976, p. 34), who asks, "What is the meaning of life? The answer is simple: The completion of values. A man who does not do something valuable is useless, is lost." From the indigenist philosophy, *Sumak Kawsay* is a concept that has emerged from the ancestral thought of the Andean population, and that represents a way of living along with nature. "It is the ideal sense of life. It is a concept made up of two words: *Sumak* [meaning] the good, the beautiful, the harmonic, the perfect, the ideal and *káusai* [meaning] life, existence" (Viteri, 2003, pp. 46-48). From the etymological point of view, *Sumak Kawsay* could be translated through the expression "full life or existence".

The values according to which the Ecuadorian people are guided are based on the well-known Andean trilogy "Do not be lazy, do not be a liar, do not be a thief" (*ama killa, ama llulla, ama shua*) (Kowii, 2011). They also include values such as solidarity, generosity and reciprocity, as well as advice and the act of listening. In indigenous communities, the elderly are the people who guide and correct the behavior of other members in order to achieve and preserve *Sumak Kawsay*. Respecting the advice guarantees to obtain the wisdom of the elders and, at the same time, to lead to *Sumak Kawsay* through respect for social norms.



According to Ortiz (2009), this concept is based on the links between people based on the principles of reciprocity, solidarity and equality.

The indigenous family, as a family unit, occupies a central place and family is in charge of forming and teaching the value of solidarity and sharing with the other what is offered by *Pachamama* (Nature), considered a living being that encompasses the vegetal and the whole humanity. Generosity (*kuna*) and reciprocity (*kunakuna*) derive from solidarity, and these are values learned by children at home from childhood. From this conception for the Ecuadorian indigenous people, there is the value of equity and social balance, abandoning the thought of the personal enrichment of some family, aspect considered negative and differentiating in the social ties within communities. Mutual help is “wash your face with both hands. It is also breaking imposition, selfishness and individuality. It is the contribution of what the other lacks and needs” (Chancoso, 2010, p. 224).

Thanks to the dream of all indigenous people to reach *Sumak Kawsay* (Radcliffe, 2012), and thanks to solidarity and reciprocity, they have been able to survive throughout history periods of discrimination, inequality, racism and marginalization. Additionally, it should be noted that the indigenous people have claimed its linguistic rights by participating strongly in the defense for the maintenance of the Quichua language, as an ancestral minority language of great importance in the Ecuadorian linguistic landscape and the humanity as well. The attempt to preserve its language roots has caused the establishment of bilingual intercultural education schools, especially in the rural area. Accepting another language and culture means recognizing our own language and culture and actively respecting others in their own language (Sánchez, 1998). Bilingual intercultural education involves valuing the Quichua language and culture present in a school and organizing the curriculum according to the linguistic needs of the students.

In this way, *Sumak Kawsay* is a deeper concept that not only refers to moral values that are reflected in acquiring material benefits, but also it represents the inner wealth and the dialogue that requires respect for the minority languages of indigenous people, because knowledge is embedded in them.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

In this research participated 60 indigenous teachers who teach in Spanish and Quichua, belonging to the rural school *Mushuk Rimak* located in the parish of San Lucas in the Ecuadorian highlands, 55 km from the city of Loja. The village of San Lucas belongs to the Quichua Saraguro people formed by descendants of the Incas.

The school has 388 students and offers three levels of education: Initial, basic and high school. The school is located in an area with 95% of indigenous students. Although people of San Lucas are Quichua, most of the population does not use the native language since it was replaced by the Spanish language. The only recent sociolinguistic study available of the region, carried out by King (2001) notes that all students of San Lucas are native speakers of Spanish. As for its traditions, it is a village that has preserved traditional Quichua clothing, so it is no surprising that the whole community has a different appearance than other Ecuadorians.

With regard to the values of this people, we emphasize community solidarity, reciprocity, the search for their own identity, the effort to preserve their own language and Quichua culture.

2.2. Procedure

For this study, semi-open interviews were conducted at *Mushuk Rimak* School with questions about the assessment of the Quichua language, the attitudes of the Quichua language, the teach-



ing materials in Quichua, and the bilingual and intercultural education. By using qualitative research through interviews, the initial script designed in with all project members were modified based on the responses received in order to raise other questions relevant to the study.

Interviews lasted from 20 to 25 minutes and were conducted in June 2018 by several Ecuadorian and Spaniards teachers. The semi-open interviews had the advantage of drawing on a model of questions or topics prepared by taking into account the objectives of the research. The interviewers were free to introduce additional questions and guide the conversation according to the importance of the speech given by the participants (Hernández et al., 2014). In some cases, in-depth interviews proposed by Flick (2012) have been chosen, through flexible and free conversations to clarify some topic of interest to our research. Familiarity with the situation of a foreign culture, with indigenous people, with their own language, with the daily routines of teachers and the whole community, and thus with the content of our research, has been key to conducting interviews (Kvale, 2011).

Interviews were subsequently recorded and transcribed. Before beginning the interviews, we visited the school several times to gain the trust of teachers and the management team. The social interaction created with the indigenous community interviewed has been a key element for the willingness of the interviewees and for the quality of the responses. At all times, interviewers have paid special attention to the environment for interviews using an informative introduction with the subjects interviewed and a subsequent reaction collection.

3. Results

This section presents the results on respect for the Quichua language and culture in a synthesized way, according to the opinions of indigenous teachers participating in the interviews. We will also contrast some elements that infor-

mants highlight as important with the values that appear in the textbooks of the students of Basic Education, always taking into account the culture of *Sumak Kawsay*.

One of the main problems in globalized societies concerns the loss and death of minority languages, as the general risk of replacing some languages increases (Martí et al., 2006). Languages, heritage of humanity, are monuments of every culture (Nettle & Romaine, 2000) and living organisms that participate in the identity of each group, in the transmission of values, feelings, knowledge, emotions and ideas, hence they are very important because they contribute to the cultural heritage of any country (Rippberger, 1992). In the face of such linguistic diversity, we must be cautious of the economic, political and cultural factors that have weakened the indigenous languages not only of Latin America, but also of many parts of the world.

With regard to the respect given to the Quichua language in the interviews, we have found that the indigenous teachers believe that the Quichua language is valued at school as a language of their ancestors:

Yes, it is highly valued as it is an ancestral language of our people of America, and it must be preserved in our daily cultures and we must learn it. (M9)

We try to rescue language and instill in our students the respect for Quichua because current youth do not know language. We try to partly recover the language and convey its values. (M55)

Quichua is part of our living, it is part of our ancestors, our language, our everything. It is the most important thing and we must continue to value it. We are rescuing what our ancestors have left us. We are rescuing the measures of bilingual intercultural education. (M27)

What we want in our rural school is to give value to our language, to convey respect for



the language, but it is difficult because it is not practiced in families. With this bilingual education we are revaluing language. There are enthusiastic teachers who practice language. All teachers at this school know Quichua. One of the requirements for working in bilingual education is to be bilingual. (M34)

From the previous opinions we conclude that teachers appreciate and convey the values and respect for the Quichua language to their students through the rescue of the language that they consider their typical way of living, thinking and acting, which is very different from the Hispanic culture.

On the one hand, following Lickona's theoretical foundation on class strategies, we consider the role of the indigenous school teacher as an ethical model and mentor, who helps students build knowledge in the ancestral language in classroom situations that facilitate learning curricular concepts and procedures. On the other hand, the teacher transmits through the dialogue values and principles of moral culture that are reflected in respect for the Quichua language and culture, for traditions and for the entire community.

In this sense, recognizing and granting the value that the minority language deserves, each student is seen as a subject with an identity of his or her own. Generating in indigenous students, who are sometimes discriminated against by mestizos, recognition and assessment, allows to create an environment of respect and tolerance in the classroom and in the same institution. Likewise, the class becomes a community that cares for its members, which is another dimension proposed by Lickona. The opening and understanding of the other occurs in the classroom according to the needs and specifications of each student.

Another factor lies in the values through the curriculum that involves introducing ethical content into school content, transforming the curriculum into values. Interviewees claim that the content of the Quichua language is used in

class when translating any word from Spanish to Quichua. Teachers claim that the representatives of the Ministry of Education created the materials in the Quichua language and that they, as teachers, try to work closely with these authorities. However, indigenous teachers of San Lucas consider that they are sometimes the ones who produce their own teaching materials so that these are coherent with the reality of the socio-cultural context of the population of San Lucas. We highlight the words of a teacher who says:

We transmit moral and ethical values to our students at the oral level. The education we had was an imposed education where everything was elaborated, where the teacher only created content that was in the texts according to the curriculum and did not adapt it to the reality of the environment. Our ancestors have told us that they have introduced Spanish to us by force and the Quichua language has also been forgotten by force. (M12)

As can be seen, in the past, the contents of school texts in Quichua were not coherent with the context of indigenous communities. Recently, work has been done in this regard, and teaching materials and textbooks have changed.

Values of the Quichua language and culture in the school curriculum through the culture of *Sumak Kawsay* can be taught from all subjects in textbooks prepared by the Ministry of Education. As an example, we mention the textbooks of the subject Arts, in which topics are raised on myths, stories and legends of Ecuadorian indigenous societies. In addition, detailed explanations are presented on ancestral cultures, original people, cultural and artistic works and manifestations of different historical periods and different Ecuadorian indigenous cultures. Students have the possibility to use the materials in the textbooks and to carry out different creative activities through drawing, formal and informal conversations with other students and with the teacher, and to develop textual, visual, or auditory documents that reflect their ideas, feelings, and emotions.



Textbooks present the indigenous cultural component as well as the values of the Quichua language and culture through an active methodology with activities involving the building of knowledge of students, as well as reflection, inquiry and experience. We must also highlight the textbooks of Spanish Language and Literature, in which the values of respect for the Quichua language appear through dialogues, activities and explanation of the most important words that shape the culture of *Sumak Kawsay*:

Minga: Quichua word used to name the collective work that benefits the inhabitants of Andean communities. It is also used to refer to the work friends do to help each other. For example, *mingas* are conducted to build houses, clean land, clean schools, install fences, build roads, or party. During *minga* a person receives food and drink in exchange for the work (Spanish Language and Literature, 3rd Grade, Basic General Education)

Pachamama: In Quichua it means Mother Earth, but it goes beyond its physical appearance. It expresses a relationship of respect and care that Quichua people have on it. In the Quichua worldview, Earth is like the generous mother who gives them all they need to live; therefore, as a gift and to compensate, Quichua people must respect and care it. (Spanish Language and Literature, 7th Grade, Basic General Education)

For indigenous people, good living is related to *Minga* and *Pachamama*, which are moral principles that are transmitted in families and in school, since the first year of schooling. Solidarity and reciprocity are values that are embodied in relations of equality and mutual respect within a community. The education for solidarity that is taught in the Ecuadorian school has a strong moral content because it has its roots in the formation of attitudes and habits and in the consolidation of values. This type of development education is a significant model through which we want to encourage the parti-

cipation of the whole community in joint work, and to favor the responsibility of each member (Sánchez, 1998). It is precisely the dimension raised by Lickona that refers to awareness and responsibility at work.

Lickona's last contribution is the center's three-dimensional strategies that are also contemplated in our study. First, working beyond the classroom is based on the importance of presenting opportunities for students in school and community service through altruistic behaviors (Rubio, 2012). A clear example of work beyond the classroom was the joint participation of students and their families in the construction of the Quichua-Spanish language laboratory. Active participation in community work was an initiative of children based on the model of the other family members who are immersed in their daily tasks. Although few indigenous families transmit the Quichua language to their sons and daughters at homes (Paronyan & Cuenca, 2018), children value language and respect the values conveyed to them in the formal setting. However, teachers state that, given the little interest of families on the Quichua language, the work developed by teachers with the students is not significant and the language is in reverse:

Organizing Quichua language workshops with parents is worthless if they do not value the language. I speak Quichua, but I did not learn it at school. I learned it from my parents. My parents spoke everything and all the time in Quichua. (M37)

There seems to be a problem. Globalization may have a lot of influence, as they do not care about language, then it is a problem for teachers. (M46)

Some families do not care about the language, they do not care if Quichua is rescued or not, they are already used to speaking Spanish. (M4)

This lack of interest to the Quichua language is the result of years of oppression, discrimination and marginalization of indigenous people.



According to families, Quichua is a language with little or no value, considered inferior to the Spanish language, which does not present for their sons/daughters a way to ascend and obtain a certain prestige in society. For the most part, families value the language only from the heritage of their ancestors, but refuse to perpetuate and pass on the language to their descendants.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Following Lickona's proposal of character education, we have observed that teachers in the indigenous community of San Lucas convey to students the value of respect for Quichua language and culture linked to the moral values of *Sumak Kawsay*.

In recent years, values of respect for Quichua have also been transmitted through Quichua language textbooks and the implementation policy of intercultural bilingual education in indigenous people at the national level in Ecuador. It is a reality that teachers also develop their own materials so that their students understand the linguistic and cultural situation of each territory where rural indigenous communities are located. This aspect is an element of support and reinforcement for continuing the work of the educational authorities of Ecuador in charge of elaborating textbooks.

The low assessment of minority languages and the fact that their speakers are in a situation of social inequality with respect to the majority group is well known (Canuto, 2017; Vernimmen, 2019), for this reason, emphasis should be made on the interest of preserving the Quichua language through the publication of educational materials that inform the foundations of wisdom and knowledge of indigenous values, culture and traditions (UNICEF, 2014).

At present, the textbooks highlight content on the value and respect for the Quichua language and for the culture of good living through texts, with activities that students can do in the classroom with their teachers. We emphasize the

work that is carried out in this sense through other curricular contents. We agree with Varela et al. (2018) in that the teacher must be morally, ethically and pedagogically committed to the sociocultural environment around him/her so that he/she can develop and transmit the values to the students and produce a positive impact on them. In the indigenous context, we believe that the teacher should strive to establish close ties with families in order to make them aware that the Quichua language deserves to be positively valued, respected and transmitted to their sons and daughters. Working from home and not just from school, the Quichua language could change its status and become a prestigious language.

Reducing the gaps in inequity between the two languages in contact in the shortest period of time does not only require an increase in effort on the part of indigenous teachers who have a positive attitude and transmit values of respect for the minority language, but also a better collaboration of families and the support of governments that must fight for the protection of linguistic rights and the search for measures and strategies that effectively address the objective.

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