

## Intercultural Educommunication Model for the Training of Women Entrepreneurs MEIFE, Imbabura- Ecuador

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### Abstract

Education is the basis for the development of society, and its prioritization by a state or nation is fundamental to achieve comprehensive social transformation. Its absence, poor quality or limited access, originate deep inequalities, high poverty rates, intergenerational illiteracy, low self-esteem and scarce employment generation. In this context, entrepreneurship emerges as an alternative for the progress of local economies, mainly led by women. The objective of the study was to design an Educommunication model for the training of women entrepreneurs, which promotes the strengthening of their skills and abilities. To this end, a mixed qualitative-quantitative method was used, with the participation of three women's associations: mestizo, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian from the Province of Imbabura in Ecuador. The results of the research indicate that around 79% of the participating women did not complete their studies at the different levels offered by the formal education system in the country. In addition, training options are scarce, dispersed and do not respond to their socio-economic reality. In response to this reality, the Educommunication model was built in a participatory way, with emphasis on gender equity and interculturality, as a tool to reduce the poverty gap in the rural sector.

**Key words:** Inter-cultural education, Women's employment, Non-formal education, Didactic model, Communication, Local community.

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### 1.Introduction

Education in Latin America, which continues to be one of the most unequal regions in the world, has not achieved the transformations in social structures required by modernity for the sustainable and integral development of its inhabitants. However, it is still identified

as one of the main axes for well-being in the economic, productive and environmental spheres. Associated with this longed-for progress, there have been frequent struggles for gender equity in recent decades. Historically, the role of women continues to be linked to domestic

activities, taking care of the house, children and the elderly who make up the family.

This way of conceiving the role of women in society implies a worsening of the conditions of poverty and increases the levels of unemployment that affect the female gender with greater force. This fact is even more evident in developing countries where the incorporation of women into professional economic activity is low in relation to developed countries. This inequality is reflected in the labor market where, in 2019, the ratio of employed men to population was 70.3%, while for women it was 46.6%, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2020, p. 30).

To include the issue of equity as a priority in global policy, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations General Assembly (2018), establishes in its goal five, the need to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, emphasizing that gender equity is inescapable for social development, because this concept is associated with decision-making and reflects the equal power relationship between both sexes, while opening the possibility of achieving women's independence (León, 2017).

For Latin America and the Caribbean, gender equity is identified as one of the five propositional approaches related to women's rights along with human rights, intersectionality and interculturality, parity, representative, participatory and secular democracy, as

well as sustainable and inclusive development (ECLAC, 2016).

For its part, Ecuador has made significant progress within the country's constitutional framework, which establishes, in the Constitution of the Republic (2008), the duty of the State to "guarantee the effective enjoyment of human rights without any discrimination and recognizes that all persons are equal and shall enjoy the same duties and opportunities" (p.21). It also addresses women's rights in different areas, including the forms of work and their remuneration, education and social security, sexual and reproductive rights, and the recognition of unpaid domestic work as productive labor.

The constitutional mandate is materialized through the Ecuadorian political and economic agenda, through the search for the reduction of gender gaps described in the Development Plan 2017-2021 "*Toda una vida*" (All your life), led by the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (Senplades, 2017). This guiding instrument for national planning establishes the strategy for the promotion and consolidation of gender parity and equal access to management positions in the public and private sector, as affirmative action measures.

However, in the world, there is still a perception that women lack certain skills to perform certain professions or jobs, which is a latent example of gender discrimination, affecting women's self-esteem and social interaction. This situation is especially visible in the labor

field due to the insufficient valuation of women's contribution to the economy.

From this conception, the wage differentials in relation to their peers in the same jobs are noticed. "In most countries, women on average are paid about 20% less than men" (ILO, 2019, p. 24). Factors that caveat the gender pay gap to a greater or lesser extent are the concentration of women in a much smaller range in sectors and occupations with respect to those in which men predominate. Occupational segregation also arises, in part, due to stereotypes and prejudices on the part of employers in their hiring and/or promotion decisions. This is compounded by work-related violence and harassment against women, especially in sectors or occupations in which they constitute a minority, which can also act as deterrents, discouraging women from entering or remaining in better-paying jobs and choosing to be self-employed by being excluded from the professional labor market (Pillinger, 2017).

The reality for rural women is more complex, since in this sector there is traditionally a gender-based division of labor. For this reason, it is necessary to bear in mind -when preparing development proposals- the current and potential contribution of the different members of the farming family, valuing the contribution of each of them and, from the perspective of equal opportunities, especially that of women. It should be noted that the family organization emphasizes the distribution of male and female activities, which are

complementary in the objective of earning income and maintaining family reproduction. However, this does not mean symmetry in the relations between men and women, because the family also constitutes a space of inequalities and negotiation (Carlosama, 2013).

In the Andean countries, the role of men and women, from a cultural point of view, do not have the same way of relating to the environment. The specificity of women in this area is evident in the knowledge, use and preservation of the environment, which is essential for the treatment of diseases, food security, habitat management and soil and seed conservation, as well as water resource management. Women represent on average 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, but "it varies considerably by region, from about 20% in Latin America to 50% or more in parts of Asia and Africa, as indicated by the *Food and agriculture organization*" (FAO, 2014, p. 35).

One of the factors contributing to the reduction of gender inequalities is the incorporation of women into formal education. Formal education refers to what takes place in a country's education and training system. It is official, structured, established by public organizations or recognized private institutions, and the results are certified with qualifications, which are considered by the authorities and the national education system.

Increased education of women and girls contributes to increased economic

growth. Higher educational attainment accounts for approximately 50% of economic development in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012) countries over the past 50 years, of which more than half is due to girls gaining access to higher levels of education and achieving greater equality in the number of years of education between men and women. However, according to the United Nations-Women (UN-Women, 2015), for most women, substantial gains in education did not translate into better labor market outcomes.

In Ecuador, 37% of women's access to education is still limited due to early pregnancy, mothers who live in rural environments or who experience pregnancy during their adolescence, which is 7% more than young women living in urban environments, according to data provided by the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP, 2020).

Faced with this situation, one alternative for access to education is to venture into non-formal education, which is characterized by a deliberate choice of the individual, which takes place outside the formal systems, and can be carried out by any organization with educational and training purposes, including volunteering, national public administration, private social service and companies.

The advantage of non-formal education is that it can be accessed by people of all ages through courses, workshops, seminars, among others, adapting to the time available to each

individual according to their needs and interests.

The range of initiatives and programs that the non-formal title has adopted are many and varied, including literacy and basic education for adults and youth, remedial programs for school dropouts, preschool education and various types of educational work linked to development initiatives.

Due to the lower access of women to education as a consequence of the aforementioned conditions, between 2000 and 2015, within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, equal access to primary education was emphasized. However, the presence of inequities in this area has led to a rethinking of the goal through the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2018), which seeks gender equality in the areas of access to education, health care, decent work and representation in political and economic decision-making processes.

For the reasons described above, education should be considered a key factor in achieving gender equity, overcoming social, professional and economic marginalization, with a view to reducing poverty levels. Similarly, the transformative power of education is fundamental to reduce gender violence, which, as indicated by the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador (INEC, 2019), affects 64.9% of women in Ecuador.

In response to this reality, it becomes urgent to develop innovative educational models that offer the media and information technologies as an

alternative for access to non-formal education for small producers, farmers, entrepreneurs, women, and people from marginalized sectors, in order to democratize knowledge and promote equity and social inclusion of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

#### *Training for entrepreneurs*

The definition of entrepreneur has different meanings and approaches that have emerged in the vast specialized academic literature. But there is a coincidence among them, which establishes that an entrepreneur is an agent of social transformation with competencies to act appropriately in a free market economy with equal opportunities (Godoy et al., 2018).

When analyzing entrepreneurship from the perspective of the social perception of this action, the activity of entrepreneurship is traditionally linked to creativity, conquest and adventure, concepts that are historically related to men, associating it with the forms of exercising power, and with the way of conceiving the sexual division of labor, which frequently relegates women to the domestic and private sphere, and men to the external and public sphere (Pineda, 2014).

Ilie et al. (2017) state that gender discrimination in Latin America is a factor that harms women's participation in entrepreneurship, directly impacting the economic progress of families and, consequently, their contribution to national economic development.

As a result of the discrimination that affects women when seeking employment, which is reflected in fewer opportunities and lower income than men, their interest in developing ventures that allow them a better job position and more satisfactory income has been boosted (León, 2017). However, research shows that the decision to start a business is much more complex for a woman since, generally, the decision to develop an enterprise is conditioned by variables such as time flexibility, the location of the enterprise and the possibility of adjusting to raising children or taking care of the household (Pineda, 2014).

Studies conducted by groups of researchers at the Business School of the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE Business School, 2017), reach, among others, two revealing conclusions indicating that, "entrepreneurs employ more men than women (72%) and entrepreneurs hire more women than men (67%)" (Ilie et al., 2017, p. 10). These data are ratified by Minniti & Nardone (2007, cited in Pineda, 2014, p. 241) who observe that, when women acquire the knowledge for entrepreneurship and the confidence in their skills, they are much more likely to start their own business.

Women's enterprises tend to have innovation as an important sign, and have a higher growth rate, even though they lack a greater impetus in the internationalization of their businesses. In addition, the number of women's enterprises that close before three years is higher than that of men, mainly due to

personal reasons related to the family, which, although it is an important reason for entrepreneurship, also becomes a factor in the abandonment of enterprises due to the responsibility of caring for the family nucleus (García et al., 2018).

At the same time, in the productive area, several countries in the region have adopted policies to promote economic development through associative processes, cooperative systems, among others, which are in line with the Social and Solidarity Economy model (Coba & Díaz, 2014). This model allows the economic development of family groups or associates to improve their living conditions.

This impulse to entrepreneurial activity may be the response of individuals to personal economic needs, as well as the result of the perception of business opportunities. However, its efficiency may be diminished by the lack of preparation of entrepreneurs who, empirically, assume the risk of starting a new business (Hidalgo et al., 2018).

In order to increase the possibility of success of new entrepreneurs and increase the number of ventures, it has become necessary to develop educational processes that lead to increase the efficiency of the entrepreneurial process and, in this way, improve the economic conditions and indicators of nations (Bjerke, 2008).

That is why education for entrepreneurship implies considering this activity not only as a functional strategy, but also as a culture that leads to a particular way of thinking and acting in

society, a culture that must be linked to the concept of freedom (Álvarez & Albuquerque, 2012). And, as an educational process, education for entrepreneurship should start from the premise that the individual *is not born* as an entrepreneur, but is a subject that can be trained as an entrepreneur, acquiring the necessary skills for this through an organized teaching-learning process.

In the case study, according to *The Global Entrepreneurship Index 2018*, in Ecuador is in the place 96th out of 137 countries in the global entrepreneurship ranking, with its greatest strength in *start-up* skills that is associated with the capacity shown by individual entrepreneurs, while the country's greatest weaknesses in terms of entrepreneurship are in internationalization and the risk of acceptance of its products (Ács et al., 2017).

This positioning of the country in terms of entrepreneurial conditions implies the need to develop educational actions to increase the number of entrepreneurs and generate models that allow the training of citizens at all levels.

This allows to understand the importance that the promotion of educational processes for entrepreneurship in formal and non-formal education has acquired in the economic agenda of governments.

In terms of formal education, several proposals are aimed at incorporating entrepreneurship training programs in basic and secondary education to provide tools that contribute to the economic stability of young people

in the event of school dropout, as a way of promoting new ways of thinking and acting to face complex problems and react to a fatalistic and passive culture (Álvarez & Albuquerque, 2012).

Other proposals point to the importance of educational programs embedded in higher education, which offers greater opportunities for university graduates to succeed in the management of their professions. This leads higher education institutions to have a more active role in the economic drive of a country, beyond the academic and research aspects (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1998), and has fostered the incorporation of universities into the triple helix model that associates houses of study with industry and government in a productive interaction (Paños, 2017).

Within the scope of non-formal education, the training of entrepreneurs allows closing the economic gap opened by social, ethnic or gender inequality existing in society and contributes efficiently to employment and to the increase of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of each nation (Álvarez & Albuquerque, 2012).

*In any case, formal and non-formal education show some essential characteristics for the training of entrepreneurs, which are focused on promoting creativity, innovation and independence of the individual, and in turn, transforming the subject into a promoter of social welfare, in what is known as *entrepreneurship*.*

This search for characteristics that are more dependent on the individual

has led to the separation of the trends in education for entrepreneurs, whether formal or non-formal, into those that aim at education by objectives and those that focus on the formation of competencies.

Education focused on objectives is more closely linked to the initial conception of the training of small entrepreneurs whose purpose was to set up companies. For its part, in education focused on the development of competencies, the training process redirects its goals to an education *for* entrepreneurship instead of an education *about* entrepreneurship; and seen from formal education, the development of skills and competencies should be managed at all educational levels (Iglesias, 2010, 2018; Cavero & Ruiz, 2017).

These competencies respond, in turn, to the model of entrepreneurship. On the one hand, the economic sciences develop a functional approach, which focuses on *what to* develop according to local and national economic needs; the human sciences focus on *who* undertakes and *why*; and finally, the managerial sciences focus on the process, i.e., on *how to* make a venture develop and be successful (Osorio & Pereira, 2011).

Education for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (EpIE), as Cavero & Ruiz (2017) call it, seeks to improve the capabilities of citizens by increasing their employability and improving their professional life, revealing the entrepreneurial potential of each person impelled by new pedagogical approaches (Álvarez & Albuquerque, 2012). But it

also manages a second objective that is associated with the conformation of competitive businesses that are maintained over time. Particularly, in Ecuador, entrepreneurship development is more than an economic variable (Cavero & Ruiz, 2017), it is an action for social equity. It is supported by various models according to the purpose to be achieved, and the approach adopted. From there, an initial categorization can be made of models based on objectives and those that seek to develop competencies.

Faced with this reality, the construction of an educational model with solid theoretical and practical bases is proposed, not only in the pedagogical framework, but also taking into account different perspectives, such as psychology, anthropology, sociology and economic sciences. In response to this need, the Doctoral Thesis entitled *Intercultural Educommunication Model for the Formation of Entrepreneurs (MEIFE) of the Province of Imbabura*, developed within the Doctoral Program Training in the Knowledge Society of the University of Salamanca (Spain), was developed, as a vindication and principle of the peoples and nationalities of the country, for a just society, aimed at promoting social and economic progress of the family, local and regional, through human and ethical development that promotes equity, freedom, democracy and critical thinking, building a culture of peace and harmonious coexistence.

## 2. Methodology

The research was carried out through a mixed approach, which contemplates the use of characteristics of quantitative and qualitative methods, allowing for a better description of the study sample and a better consolidation of the results (Figure 1). It is supported by a field design, which made it possible to obtain information directly from the women selected for the study.



Figure 1. Methodological phases applied in the design of the educational model for entrepreneurs in the province of Imbabura-Ecuador.

Source: Own elaboration

### a. Participatory construction

The research, in terms of the collection of secondary information in the institutions in charge of territorial public policy, was the starting point for the definition of the target groups, resulting from the crossing of variables such as ethnic diversity and gender (kichwa, afro descendants and mestizos) that had active enterprises and formal organizational processes. Thus, the participation of three associations of women entrepreneurs in the Province of Imbabura was established: the association of women

farmers "Frutos de mi Tierra" (Fruits of my Land), which develops its activities in the Urcuquí canton; the central committee of women of the Union of Peasant and Indigenous Organizations of Cotacachi (UNORCAC) "La Pachamama nos alimenta" (Pachamama feeds us), and the association of women "Las Choteñitas", formed mainly by Afro-Ecuadorian women from the Chota Valley, Ibarra canton.

A diagnostic study was carried out using two research techniques: direct observation, the results of which were recorded in a field diary, with the objective of describing the infrastructure and operating conditions of the associations and the main characteristics of the women entrepreneurs. And, the application of a survey to 84 women members of the participating associations, whose questions were related to socioeconomic factors, fundamentally oriented to access to education.

It is important to note that prior informed consent was obtained from the study groups in accordance with the ethical norms of the research process.

#### b. Structuring of information

The information obtained from the surveys, the participatory workshops and the interviews with the women leaders was tabulated and systematized in a schematic manner according to the research requirements. The data were organized in relation to the study variables.

#### c. Model proposal

For the proposal of the Intercultural Educommunication Model

for the Formation of Entrepreneurs (MEIFE) of the Province of Imbabura, a structure was developed consisting of foundations, dimensions and transversal axes (Figure 2). The same that originates in a philosophical positioning rooted in the Andean cosmovision, which assumes one of the essential bases of social relations in the region, which is part of the idiosyncrasy of the citizens, and is manifested to a greater or lesser degree in everyday actions. In addition, the Andean worldview has been acquiring, in Ecuador, increasing visibility within the social, legal and relational aspects, opening the possibility of conceiving a reality where the subject is an integral part of the context from the essence, and contributing to the acceptance of interculturality in the nation.



Figure 2. Elements that make up the educational model for entrepreneurs in the province of

Imbabura-Ecuador.

Source: Own elaboration.

### 3.Results

The structuring of the educational-communication model is based on a

participatory process of women entrepreneurs where it is important to characterize the participants of the study, in an age range between 18 and 55 years, in which 80% of the respondents are located in the age group of the economically active population (EAP). Within the EAP, 50% of the women surveyed have completed basic education in the formal system; 6% of them have not been able to access education, a situation that deprives them of the development of skills and abilities that women can acquire if they have the opportunity to receive training. There are several causes that are directly related to this problem, including the number of children and pregnancy at an early age, which makes it difficult to complete their studies, an issue that is reflected in the results obtained, where 43% of the participants have between one and three children, and 36% have up to six offspring. The fact of being a mother at an early age meant that 79% of the women were unable to finish their studies, causing the gap in access to education to widen and the opportunity for economic dependence to be limited.

A relevant fact in the research is that 10% of the members are pursuing higher education, a reality that in the future will contribute as support for the promotion of women's associations, new opportunities and personal challenges.

On the other hand, access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is a key factor for strengthening the management of enterprises, skills and abilities of women

in the associations of the cantons of Ibarra, Urcuquí and Cotacachi.

The study found that 32% of the respondents' households have access to free-to-air television, and 54% have internet connection in their homes. Regarding home devices, it was found that there is at least one computer in all households, and with the increase in the supply of cellular equipment in the market, it was concluded that 89% of the interviewed women have access to this device. It should be noted that the increase in the use of cell phones has an impact on the knowledge of social networks in 56% of those who use them daily, opening this reality the opportunity for women to be trained in non-formal education programs.

In terms of gender equity, the study indicates that 37% of women are heads of household, which is higher than the national average of 25.6% (INEC, 2013).

On the other hand, the study identified that more than 50% of the women in the associations have an imminent need to contribute income to their families, since the number of children is a factor that has been recognized as a cause for the decrease in economic independence, due to their role as mothers and protectors. However, poverty in developing countries is the factor that forces women to look for new and innovative ways to generate economic resources, where one motivation is the development of home-based enterprises.

To achieve the transformation of this reality, it is essential to build educational and communicational programs and materials in accordance with the interests and competencies, as well as with the ages and conditions of the population that consider interculturality and gender equity as transversal axes, achieving social strengthening, offering women the possibility of accessing state and private benefits for the promotion and consolidation of productive proposals.

Based on these results obtained from the surveys applied, an analysis of the ontological, epistemological, axiological and praxeological foundations of MEIFE is presented below, which facilitates the understanding of the characteristics of the curricular design through which the training of entrepreneurs will be conducted in order to respond to their needs.

The ontological foundation describes the entrepreneur as a person who possesses internal and external motivations that enable him/her to seek business development, either out of necessity or opportunity, whose personal characteristics are the triggers to drive his/her search for personal economic solutions. Consequently, he/she acts by innovating or taking risks to establish a business that is efficient and sustainable over time.

In the Andean cosmovision, the subject is conceived as an integral part of reality, as a participant that constructs, destroys and reconstructs relationships with its social and natural, tangible and

intangible environment, which distances it from the position of externalization of the perception of reality.

Epistemologically, the interactions necessary to develop a venture require the assumption of systems theory to seek new non-linear logics, in line with Prigogine (1994; cited by Martínez, 2011, p. 7), which he termed as awareness of discontinuity, within which dialogic processes are favored.

The approach to this systemic complexity that analyzes the human being and society holistically, as a suprasystem made up of biological, physical, chemical, social, cultural, ethical and spiritual systems, requires a more integrative epistemological approach. Hence, a hermeneutic paradigm is assumed in the MEIFE to be able to develop the processes of analysis of entrepreneurship and, consequently, of entrepreneurship training, due to its greater capacity to deepen the quality of phenomena and contextual relationships, both in externalities and internalities (Larrea & Granados, 2016).

It is evident that this training of entrepreneurs must address a complex reality and, therefore, it is necessary that it be based on equally complex approaches. Hence, it is necessary to consider the scientific knowledge developed from economic theory, administration and management from a positivist paradigm, but, at the same time, through a multidisciplinary approach that also incorporates aspects of a more humanistic training.

In the axiological foundation, there is a change of focus from a utilitarian one to a holistic one, which is only possible if entrepreneurship training is developed from another ontological and epistemological positioning different from those that have traditionally governed entrepreneurship.

For this reason, MEIFE does not only seek to train women entrepreneurs focused on business profitability, but also attends in an integral way to the education of a citizenship strongly related to the progress of the community, balance with the environment and self-confidence. At MEIFE, the importance of the integral formation of the subject leads to the development of solidarity, associativity and the common good.

The result of the interaction of the epistemological and axiological frameworks leads to the development of an educational proposal for entrepreneurship that, at the praxeological level, implies the development of a curriculum design for the training of entrepreneurs, supported by experiential and collaborative learning that appropriates the tools of socio-constructivism and allows the development of critical thinking in entrepreneurs.

MEIFE therefore proposes a praxis that manifests itself as a process of permanent formation that values the opportunities present in the environment, but also those opportunities that can be created by the subject based on an analysis of the complexity of the system.

The system, on the other hand, is a dynamic reality that must be analyzed and constructed based on reflective knowledge (Osorio & Pereira, 2011), complemented by a dialogic process. The foundations must be complemented with three dimensions: knowledge, attitude and practice.

The model is based on training by competencies, according to knowledge, attitudes and practice, by identifying the conceptual, attitudinal and procedural competencies that the entrepreneurs will be able to develop during the training.

The conceptual competencies that dimension knowledge within the model are: (a) opportunity seeking; (b) administrative, economic and financial education; and, (c) planning and management.

The MEIFE focuses on a sustainable environmental ethic that is coherent with the Andean cosmovision. It is not only the declarative aspect of the actions necessary for the development of environmentally friendly enterprises, but this ethic must be reflected in the procedures and proposals of enterprises.

The procedural competencies go beyond the participants achieving the creation of successful enterprises that are in turn sustainable in the medium and long term. The model seeks a more integrative vision of social, cultural, natural and economic variables in an environment of equity and respect that promotes gender equality and values interculturality.

This teaching model, through their own experience and that of other

entrepreneurs who have already faced the difficulties and scope of their business creation processes, allows participants to continue learning from their experiences and provides them with tools that respond to realities close to them and demonstrate the paths that were considered for problem solving. Hence the importance of learning by doing (Álvarez & Albuquerque, 2012), which assumes that the training model for entrepreneurs is anchored to the constant interaction between businessmen, academics and entrepreneurs before, during and after the formation of enterprises by the participants.

The MEIFE dimensions shape the curricular design in which the competencies to be attained by the subjects are made explicit, which, as a whole, lead to the development of critical thinking as a creator and participant in a social context in equity, democracy and freedom (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Diagram of the entrepreneur training process from the MEIFE dimensions within the communication ecosystem. Source: Own elaboration

Once the communicational ecosystem has been established, it is necessary to design the curriculum, where MEIFE has determined four transversal axes, which are: (1) innovation and entrepreneurship; (2) sustainability; (3) inclusion and interculturality; and, (4) educommunication.

The curricular design, which responds to the model of education for entrepreneurs, is based on strategies for the development of holistic thinking, and on life-long education processes that correspond to the non-formal education approach.

The aforementioned characteristics should foster in entrepreneurs the capacity for self-learning, their leadership skills to establish alliances and form networks, a greater link with social reality, and the

responsibility to make their own decisions and assume their commitments (Vargas, 2017).

Regarding sustainability, the model behaves as a theoretical construct that provides pragmatic support to the philosophical framework of the Andean cosmivision. Sustainability is understood as the capacity to manage natural resources in a way that respects the environment and is aware of the need for future generations to be able to make use of them, favoring social welfare and respect for life.

Consequently, the training model, while seeking to promote entrepreneurship, is moving away from economicist and developmentalist theories to give way to sustainability as a transversal axis. This change implies that the approach to the use of resources and redistribution of wealth must also be differentiated.

According to the educational model of the Universidad Técnica del Norte (2019), which also considers sustainability as a transversal axis, it is proposed that the entire training process should be related to respect for the environment and ecological commitment of the Andean peoples.

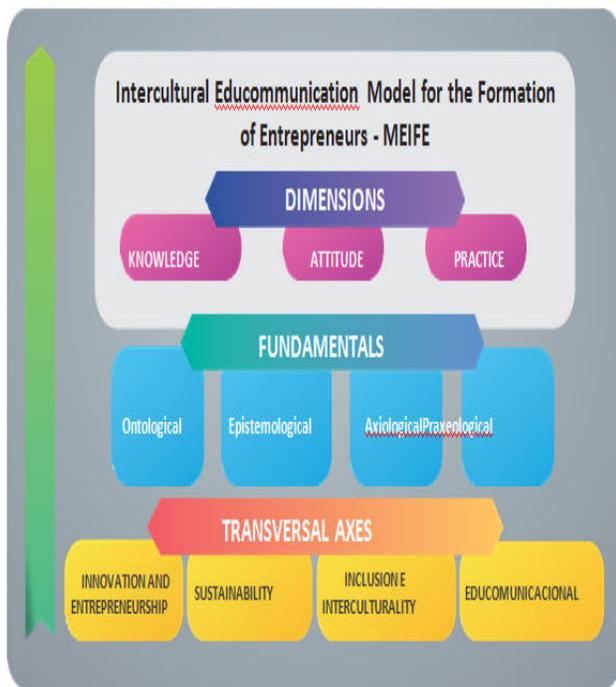
Inclusion is a cross-cutting element of MEIFE because it must train a citizen with the capacity not only to generate a business, but also to visualize a more just and equitable society that allows him/her to promote its construction and consolidation through the economic inclusion of individuals

regardless of their gender, ethnic group or social class.

As for educommunication, it is conceived within the model, in addition to being a communicational tool, as a concept that transversalizes the training of entrepreneurs. Therefore, the concept proposed by Kaplún (1998) is adopted, which refers to it as an educational process that enables the development of critical thinking, critical reading of the media and fosters collaborative learning through subjective and dialogic communication processes.

The Latin American model of educommunication has been projected as a process that promotes equality, freedom and democracy as human and political rights. It also allows the consolidation of authentic and free cultural forms in which spaces for participation and interaction can be created (Bustamante, 2007). These processes of interaction and participation are characterized, in turn, by being processes of horizontal, free, democratic and voluntary communication that foster community cohesion (Kaplún, 1998).

Educommunication as a process of dialogic and critical interaction allows the networked management of organizational resources in terms of social change focused on new forms of symbolic construction, reaffirmation of conscious decision-making processes, exchange of knowledge and self-expression of active citizenship (Cebrián, 1998; quoted by Castro 2011, p. 124).



**Figure 4.** Outline of the proposal of the intercultural educommunication model for the training of entrepreneurs in the province of Imbabura-Ecuador.

Source: Own elaboration

In summary, with all the elements presented, the proposal of the intercultural educommunication model for the training of entrepreneurs is schematically presented in Figure 4.

#### 4. Conclusions

The development of effective educational models that contribute to the sustainability of entrepreneurship and innovation is a pressing need that must be addressed and implemented. So far, these models in Ecuador have focused mainly on formal education as elements of the curriculum, both in high school and university education, efforts that have been insufficient to meet the needs of the

population in terms of entrepreneurship and its importance in the country's economy.

One of the challenges is to build educational-communication models through training mechanisms that promote gender equity and interculturality in order to achieve sustainable enterprises through formal and non-formal education. As mentioned by the OECD (2012), greater economic growth will be achieved and, therefore, a reduction of inequality gaps in society once women and girls have greater opportunities and access to the right to education in any of its modalities, ratifying that education is one of the factors that contribute to reduce inequalities. In this sense, the media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are tools that, given their broad social deployment, make it possible for the population to access training programs that improve their quality of life and increase their job opportunities.

Through educommunication, a transversalization in non-formal education for entrepreneurs will be achieved, reaching a model of critical and collaborative thinking, based on dialogue and collective participation processes.

MEIFE seeks to train entrepreneurs in an integral way towards the construction of a society strongly related to the progress of the community, the balance with the environment and self-esteem, the subject as an articulator-facilitator entity, with principles of solidarity, associativity and sustainability

of individual processes, such as entrepreneurship; and, at the same time, energizing the ecosystem.

In short, educommunication contemplates the generation of training contents oriented to the consolidation of critical thinking, constant interaction and added value in the attitudinal dimension of the entrepreneur, being the model presented in this study a concrete proposal to reduce inequalities in access to education and a strategy for poverty reduction in Imbabura and Ecuador.

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