DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CULTURAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS- THE EFFECTS OF STUDYING THE COURSE MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

In today's educational context, universities have the role in enabling the students to develop the competences required for their future profession, but they are also seen as important in terms of preparing the young people to easily adapt and answer to the needs of the society. In these terms, today's globalized society requires individuals who possess the competences for intercultural communication and who are able to live with and respect people who come from different cultures and have cultural beliefs different from their own.
In this regard, the aim of this paper is to examine how studying the course Multicultural Education at university can contribute in developing students' cultural diversity awareness. It is focused on exploring how much the contents covered in this course can contribute in developing and/or changing students' attitudes and perspectives regarding cultural diversity and in raising their awareness about the importance of acceptance and tolerance of multiple cultural perspectives. The study was conducted on a sample of university students from different faculties at International Balkan University in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, who were taking the course Multicultural Education in the academic 2021/2022 year. The pre- and post- measure method was applied, with the use of the Cultural Diversity Awareness Questionnaire. The questionnaire was applied once at the beginning of the semester, on a sample of 110 students, before they were introduced with the contents of the course, and again at the end of the semester, after studying the contents, on a sample of 88 students. The aim was to see if there are differences in the level of students' cultural diversity awareness as a result of studying the contents covered in the course Multicultural education, and to examine their opinions about the usefulness of the course contents for their future life.
Results have shown that the majority of the students have high or very high level of cultural diversity awareness and that there are improvements in the results of the post-measure, compared with the pre-measure, although these results were not statistically significant.

Key words: multicultural competence, cultural perspectives, prejudice, etc.

Introduction

Multicultural education is considered as a basis for many educational, social, psychological phenomena among people from different cultures and with different perspectives. Social diversity many times is considered as treasure that helps people know each other better, to live together, respect each other and accept differences between them. This requires from individuals to be able to understand how other people, who they perceive as different from them in cultural sense, are defined by their cultural background and how this guides them in their everyday behavior. Understanding how people's behavior is defined by the cultural values, norms, beliefs and expectations of one's own cultural group (Lustig & Koester, 2010) gives the basis for better understanding, tolerance and respect for others.

When individuals are not informed about other cultures, they tend to see things, which are understood or done differently from their own culture, as" strange" or even" awkward". This often leads to forming stereotypes and prejudices which affect negatively on intercultural communication. In this regard, learning about other cultures can contribute in minimizing the prejudices and establishing positive communication.

Understanding Multicultural Education

Today Multicultural education is seen as a very important aspect of individual's overall education, since it helps students to understand better people from different cultural background and contributes in developing the competence for effective intercultural communication.

According to Moawad & El Shoura (2017), "Multiculturalism means shared values of the society as a whole and appreciation of its diversity including religious, cultural, and lifestyle background. It refers to equal opportunity and antiracist society. Multiculturalism becomes an important construct for the 21th century. It allows societies and people to be unified through an appreciation of their cultural differences and linguistic background. The main merits of the multicultural society are equity, social justice and freedom. All the people all over the world seek to achieve these merits within their societies." *(*Moawad & El Shoura, 2017, pg. 802)

According to Spiteri (2017) multicultural education can be seen as subject of different definition. Accordingly, in many books many authors prefer to use intercultural education meanwhile in some other multicultural education. However, as he states multicultural education is seen in two different ways. Firstly, "in promoting understanding and sensitivity among people from different background" and secondly, "as a force that operates against oppression and is thereby based on raising people's awareness about what is oppressive in society" (Spiteri, 2017, pg.6).

Banks (2010), gives us a broader meaning about Multicultural Education, considering that it is at least three things: an idea or concept, and educational reform movement and as third as a process. Namely: "Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students—regardless of their gender, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. Another important idea in multicultural education is that some students, because of these characteristics, have a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently structured than do students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics "(Banks, 2010, pg.3).

Supporting his idea that multicultural education is educational reform movement and a process as well, he states that "Multicultural education is also a reform movement that is trying to change the schools and other educational institutions so that students from all social-class, gender, racial, language, and cultural groups will have an equal opportunity to learn" (Banks, 2010, pg.4).

According to some authors and books, multicultural and intercultural education is seen as the same and the terms are used as synonyms. But, according to Holm & Zilliacus (2009) there are differences. i.e. multicultural education aims at understanding the differences between cultures and accepting and tolerating them, while on the other side intercultural education has much deeper meaning, in terms of being able to live and communicate, interact with people from different cultural background. (Holm & Zilliacus, 2009). According to UNESCO (2006) "Multicultural education uses learning about other cultures in order to produce acceptance, or at least tolerance of these cultures. Intercultural education aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in multicultural societies through the creation of understanding of, respect for and dialog between different cultural groups "(UNESCO, 2006, pg.18).

In this paper, the term Multicultural education is used, since that is the title of the course, but here we would like to emphasize that the aim and the contents of this course actually refer to and are more appropriate to Intercultural education, understood in the already explained meaning.

Multicultural competences

Nardon et al. (2013), refers to multicultural competences as the ability to deal with cultural differences, it means different assumptions, behaviors, communication styles including here expectations and management practices from each culture. However, as they state the ways of dealing with these differences should be appropriate and effective. Namely, "Multicultural competence represents the capacity to work successfully across cultures. Being multiculturally competent is more than just being polite or empathetic to people from other cultures; it is getting things done through people by capitalizing on cultural diversity. It includes skills such as identifying cultural rules, changing and creating group cultural norms, communicating across cultures, dealing with conflict, developing trust based on relationships, understanding the constraints and opportunities imposed by the micro-context of an interaction, and manipulating those when appropriate." (Nardon et al 2013, pg.3).

According to Deardorff (2009), "Intercultural competence is the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world." (Deardorff, 2009, pg. 9). As he states the term competence is itself a contested conceptual site. Competence has been variously equated with understanding (e.g., accuracy, clarity, co-orientation, overlap of meanings), relationship development (e.g., attraction, intimacy), satisfaction (e.g., communication satisfaction, relational satisfaction, relational quality), effectiveness (e.g., goal achievement, efficiency, institutional success, negotiation success), appropriateness (e.g., legitimacy, acceptance, assimilation), and adaptation (2009, pg. 6).

Lustig & Koester (2010), assume that in intercultural interactions interpersonal competence is an even more difficult objective to achieve, because cultural differences create dissimilar meanings and expectations that require even greater levels of communication skill. According to them, people base their understanding of intercultural competence on the work of scholars who have studied communicative competence from a

primarily intracultural perspective and on the conclusions of other scholars who have studied intercultural competence (2010, pg.65).

Cultural perspectives

If we want to understand cultural perspectives, we should see and understand the culture as Adelsberger et.al (2002), say, as a critical influence factor on the acceptance and use of learning systems. According to them this phenomenon can be analyzed from two different perspectives such as institutional and learning. Namely, today it is very important in one company cultural differences to be considered, which can be offered as adaptable solutions. About learning perspective, they state that through this perspective student may have access in learning networks anytime and anywhere.

National Standards for Foreign Language Education Project (1999), defines cultural perspectives as multidimensional philosophical perspectives. Defining such as it means that those concepts include and cover meanings, attitudes, values, ideas, beliefs that underlie the cultural practices and characteristics of a society and which represents a culture's view of the world.

Prejudices

As a social phenomenon, prejudices have been studied from different perspectives. In many researches and books, it is said that in diversity and multicultural societies they can be reduced through mutual communication and interaction and accepting the cultural differences. As Cohrs & Duckitt (2012), reports there are numerous attempts in defining the prejudice. Most of these definitions see prejudice "as a negative attitude toward a particular social group and its individual members. Individual members are prejudged, because of their group membership" (2012, pg.1).

As Camicia (2007) reports referring to Banks (1994), the prejudice reduction is as one of the five dimensions of multicultural education. Although children develop prejudiced beliefs, attitudes and values at young ages, researches demonstrate that when multicultural knowledge and values combines with intergroup contact, prejudices are often reduced. There is no place for prejudices in multicultural education and through educational equality, like liberty and justice, we can reach an ideal toward which human beings work but never fully attain (Camicia, 2007; Banks, 2012).

Multicultural Education course at IBU

The course Multicultural Education is studied at International Balkan University as an elective course at university level, which means that it can be chosen from students from all faculties. The aim of this course is to introduce the students with the basic concepts of Multicultural education, with a purpose to raise the awareness about understanding and valuing different cultural perspectives and enabling them to develop competences for intercultural communication. Some of the contents covered in this course refer to introducing the students and exploring the meaning of the basic terms like: cultural values, beliefs, norms, social practices, cultural patterns; developing cultural identity; Social categorizing; Cultural biases (stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, racism); the concepts of Ethnocentrism and Ethnorelativism; Cultural taxonomies; Intercultural competence, etc.

One aspect that should be emphasized here is that one of the characteristics of International Balkan University is its multicultural environment, where the student, academic and administrative staff are from different cultures, ethnicity and religion, which allows the students to explore and experience the cultural diversity on a daily basis. In this context, the exercises and practical activities in the classes are focused in creating classroom environment that will allow the students to learn more about different cultures, to explore various cultural perspectives, examine and analyse the most common stereotypes and prejudice and develop and practice their competences for intercultural communication.

Method

The aim of this study is to assess how much studying the contents in the course Multicultural education can contribute in developing and/or changing students' attitudes and perspectives regarding cultural diversity and in raising their awareness about the importance of acceptance and tolerance of multiple cultural perspectives.

In line with the aim, the following objectives were defined:

- To examine the level of students' Cultural diversity awareness before taking the course Multicultural education;
- To examine the level of students' Cultural diversity awareness after taking the course Multicultural education;
- To examine if there are differences in the level of students' Cultural diversity awareness before and after taking the course Multicultural education;
- To examine students' opinions about the course Multicultural education.

The instrument used in this survey was Cultural Diversity Awareness Questionnaire, which aims to identify attitudes and perspectives regarding cultural diversity. The questionnaire is composed of 32 statements, which refer to examining awareness about stereotypes and prejudice, behaviour in situations when individuals are faced with them, understanding how cultural background defines and guides human behaviour, statements related with appreciation of cultural differences, how individuals interact with people from different cultural background etc. The statements are on a 5-point Likert type of scale where responses range from 1-Never to 5- Always. The obtained scores are grouped in 5 categories (very low range; low range; moderate range; high range; very high range), where higher score indicates that the person is highly aware of prejudice and biases and very aware of the impact of person's behavior on others. This implies that individuals who score high relate to others in ways that value diversity. On the other hand, lower score suggests that the person is unaware of prejudice and biases and not fully aware of the impact of own behaviour on others. Implication is that these individuals communicate with others in ways that do not value diversity[3].

In accordance with the need of this survey, additional questions were added. They referred to obtaining information about the place of living of participants, i.e. whether they live in a monocultural or multicultural environment and if they have ever lived abroad. According to Pusch (2009) being exposed to interaction

[3] Source: Special Populations and CTE Illinois-Leadership Project, 2016

with people from different cultural background or living in another country, has positive influence in developing the cultural diversity awareness and helps the people to improve the competence for intercultural communication. Questions with aim to examine participants' opinions regarding the course Multicultural education and its usefulness for their future life and career, were added as well as.

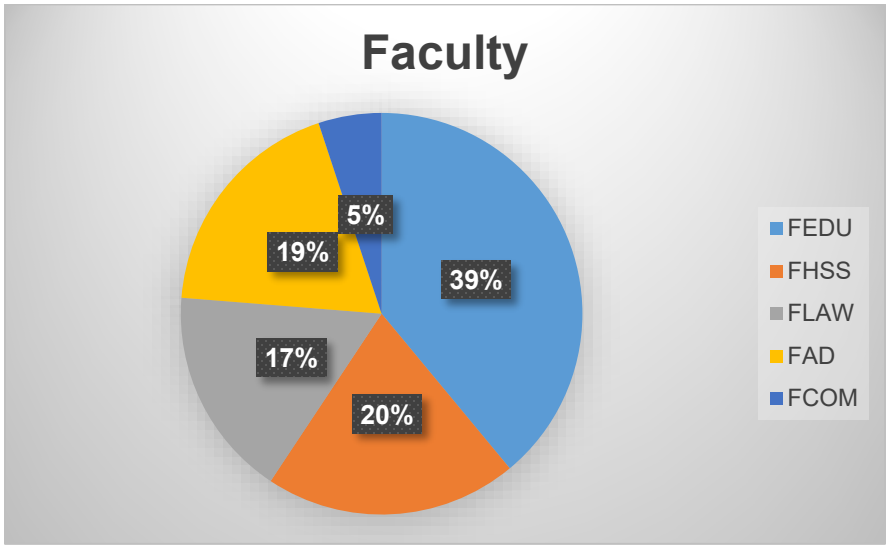
Regarding to the method used, pre- and post- measure were applied. Pre-measure was applied at the beginning of the semester, before students were introduced with the main terms and concepts in the course Multicultural education, with the aim to examine what was their current level of cultural diversity awareness, while the post-Measure was applied at the end of the semester with a goal to see the achieved level after taking the course Multicultural Education.

Sample

The sample in this survey included students from different faculties at International Balkan University, who were taking the course Multicultural Education during the academic 2021/2022 year. In the pre-measure 110 students were included, and in the post-measure 88 students. Since the aim of the study was to compare the level of students' Cultural diversity awareness before and after taking the course, the results of the same students in pre-measure and post-measure needed to match. Because it happened that some students have answered the questionnaire only once, either in the pre-measure or in the post-measure, at the end the scores of 59 students were matched, which were actually the participants in this study.

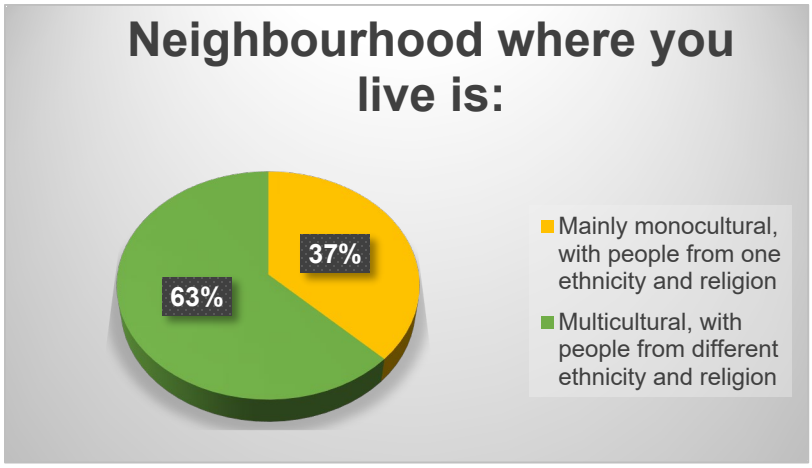
Regarding the Faculty at which students are studying, 39% were students from the Faculty of Education, 20% from Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences, 19% of the Faculty of Art and Design, 17% from the Faculty of Law and 5% of the Faculty of Communications (Graph 1). All of them were students in the second year of studies.

Graph 1. Sample of participants according the faculty



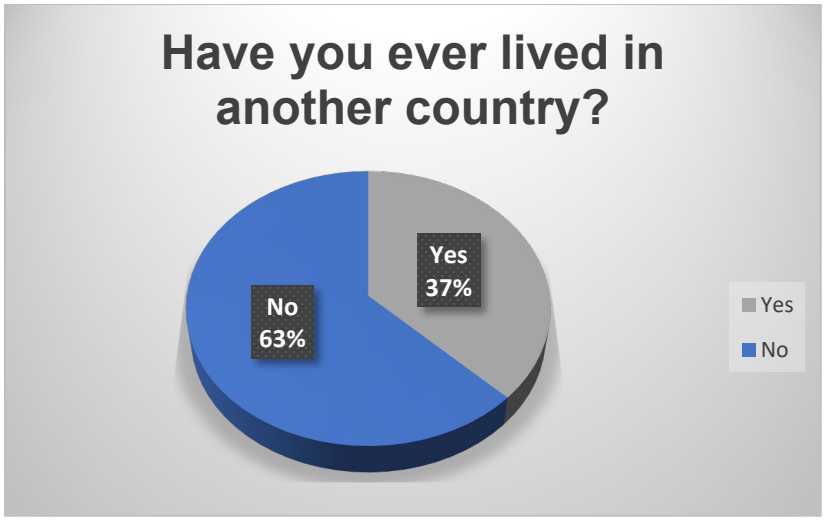
Two of the additional questions referred to the characteristics of the sample important for the purposes of this survey. Namely, regarding the place of living 63% of participants answered that they live in a multicultural neighborhood, with people from different ethnicity and religion, and 37% live in mainly monocultural neighborhood, with people from one ethnicity and religion. (Graph 2)

Graph 2. Place of living: monocultural/multicultural



When it comes to experience of living abroad, more than half, or 63% of participants answered that they haven't lived abroad while 37% have lived abroad. (Graph 3)

Graph 3. Experience of living abroad

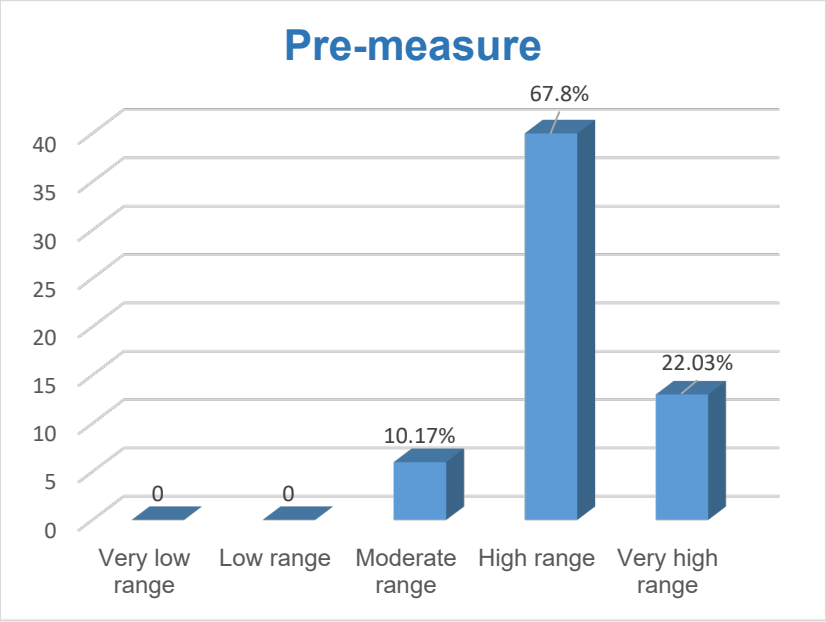


Results and discussion

In the following part the results from the pre-measure and post-measure of the level of cultural diversity awareness among the students will be presented.

Results from the pre-measure show that the majority of the students are in the high range, or concretely 40 students of a total of 59 (67.80%) are in high range and 13 students (22.03%) in very high range. Only 6 students (10.17%) were in moderate range, while there are no students with score in very low and low range. (Graph 4)

Graph 4. Results on the level of Cultural diversity awareness on the pre-measure



Pre-measure	N	%
Very low range (0-39)	0	0.00%
Low range (40-69)	0	0.00%
Moderate range (70-99)	6	10.17%
High range (100-129)	40	67.80%
Very high range (130-160)	13	22.03%

Tab. 1. Results on the level of Cultural diversity awareness on the pre-measure

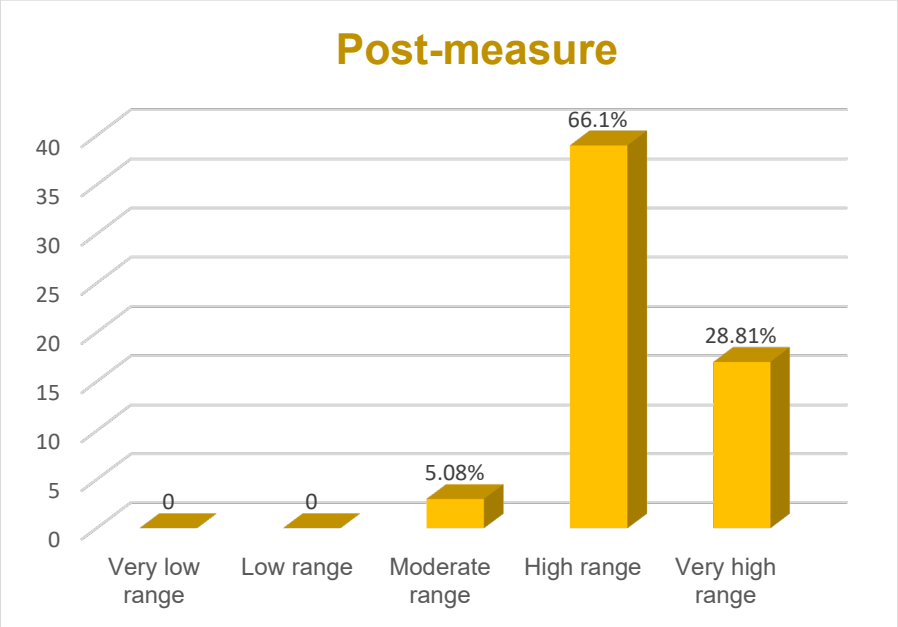
These results can be seen as a positive, since they suggest that students are aware of and understand the importance of recognizing and respecting cultural diversity.

The high results can be analyzed in line with the characteristics of the sample which were presented previously, where it was shown that big part of participants live in multicultural environment, which can affect positively on the awareness about cultural diversity. Here it also needs to be emphasized that the International Balkan University, where the survey was conducted, has students from different countries, from different ethnicity and religion. It can be argued that this multicultural environment and the everyday interaction with students from different background has a positive influence on students' experiences, but further exploration needs to be done in order to support this argument.

In the following graph (Graph 5) the results obtained in the post-measure are presented. The highest percentage of participants is in the high range (39 students, 66.10%), in very high range are 17 students (28.81%), and while in moderate range are only 3 students (5.08%). Same as in the pre-measure, there are no participants with scores in very low and low range.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that the number of students categorized in the moderate range decreased, while the number in the very high range increased. This leads us to the conclusion that students have achieved higher results, and accordingly positive change in the range of scores on the post-measure.

Graph 5. Results on the level of Cultural diversity awareness on the post-measure



Post-measure	N	%
Very low range (0-39)	0	0.00%
Low range (40-69)	0	0.00%
Moderate range (70-99)	3	5.08%
High range (100-129)	39	66.10%
Very high range (130-160)	17	28.81%

Tab.2. Results on the level of Cultural diversity awareness on the post-measure

This conclusion is supported with the analysis of the average of the total scores in both measures. Namely, the average result in pre-measure was 118.71 and in post-measure 122.32, the difference between them is 3.61, which shows that there is some increasing in the average score of participants in total. (Table 1)

Average score		
Pre-measure	Post-measure	Difference
118.71	122.32	3.61

Table 3. Average scores of pre- and post-measure

In order to compare the means in the pre-measure and post-measure, the paired sample t-test was applied (Table 4). It showed that there is no strong evidence for statistically significant improvements between the pre- and post-measure.

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	VAR. Pre-measure	4.1186	59	.55970	.07287
	VAR. Post-measure	4.2373	59	.53624	.06981

Paired Samples Test				
		Paired Differences		
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	VAR. Pre-measure – VAR. Post-Measure	-.11864	.67171	.08745

Paired Samples Test						
		Paired Differences				
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	VAR. Pre-measure – VAR. Post-measure	-.29369	.05641	-1.357	58	.180

Table 4. Paired sample t-test

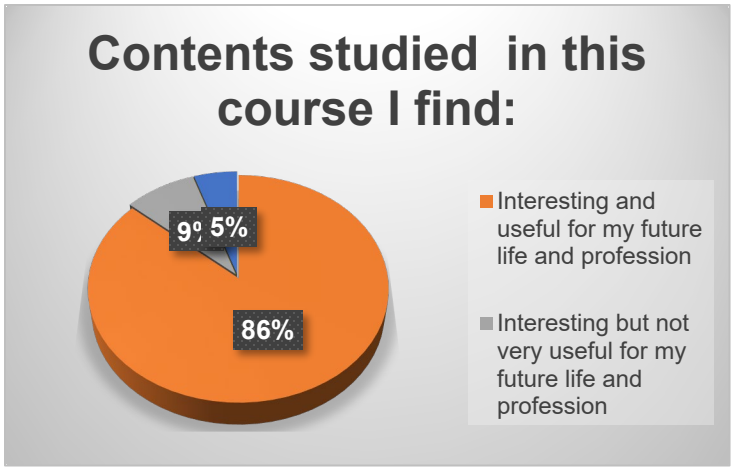
In addition, a qualitative analysis was done, in order to see in which aspects there was some improvement in achieved scores (Table 5), although, as we concluded previously, it was not statistically significant. In the table below only the scores for some of the statements where was noted bigger difference in the mean scores are presented.

Statement	Pre-measure	Post-measure	Difference
4. I challenge others when they make racial/ethnic/sexually offensive comments or jokes.	3.42	3.77	0.35
6. I do not participate in jokes that are derogatory to any individual group.	3.21	3.44	0.23
12. I connect easily with people who look different from me and I am able to communicate easily with them.	3.91	4.15	0.24
14. I work to make sure people who are different from me are heard and accepted.	3.71	4.05	0.34
19. I understand that I'm a product of my upbringing and believe there are valid beliefs other than my own.	3.7	4.03	0.33
22. I include people who are culturally different from myself in team decision-making processes that impact them.	3.91	4.22	0.31
31. I believe that race is a social construct, not a scientific fact.	3.76	4.15	0.39

Table 5. Improvements in achieved scores

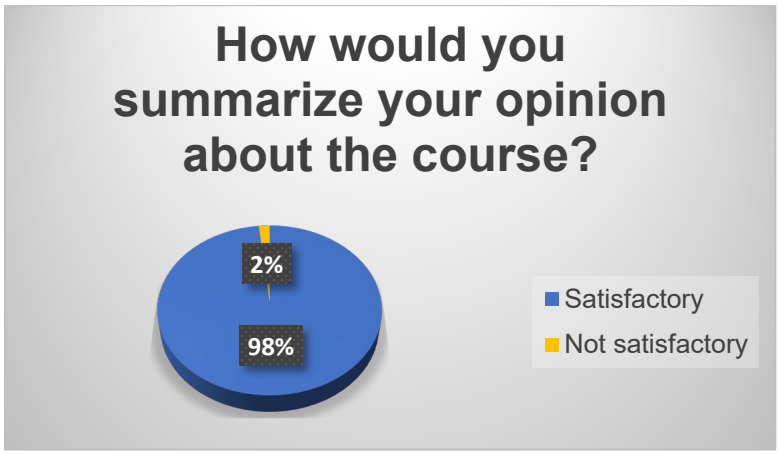
As it can be noted, improvements were seen in statements which refer to how participants behave in situations when faced with prejudice and stereotypes and beliefs related to understanding how individual's cultural background can affect and guide people's behavior. For us as lecturers this is an important finding, since it corresponds and is in line with aspects which were emphasized as important and on which was paid a lot of attention during the lectures and through activities organized in the course Multicultural education. The fourth objective of this research referred to examining students' opinions about the course Multicultural education. On the question related to the contents covered in the course, 86% of the students answered that they find these contents as interesting and useful for their future life and profession, 9% consider that they are interesting, but not very useful, while for 5% of participants were seen as boring and not useful (Graph 6).

Graph 6. Usefulness of Multicultural Education course contents



In general, majority of the students 98% have summarized their opinion about the course as satisfactory, and only 2% as unsatisfactory (Graph 7).

Graph 7. Opinion about the course Multicultural Education



These results lead us to the conclusion that students who have taken the course Multicultural education have a positive opinion about this course and the usefulness of the contents for their future life.

Conclusion

Results from this research have shown that the students at IBU who have taken the course Multicultural Education have achieved high results on the Cultural diversity awareness questionnaire and the majority of them are in the high and very high range. This was confirmed in the pre-measure as well as in the post-measure. The comparison of the scores in both measures have shown that there is a change and increasing in the score, although the results from the Paired samples t-test showed that this is not statistically significant. Still, for us as lecturers is important to see that there are improvements in developing and/or increasing students' awareness about different stereotypes and prejudices and becoming conscious how to appropriately behave in these situations, as well as understanding that cultural background has important influence in how one individual sees and understands the world and how the behavior can be guided by these cultural frames of reference. Making the students become constantly aware of the need to understand and accept and be able to live together with people who are culturally different from them, instead of choosing the easier path of labeling people and placing them 'inside the boxes' of stereotypes and prejudices is seen as the most important and beneficial outcome from taking the course Multicultural Education. This emphasizes the need of studying the contents of Multicultural education at a university setting, since it contributes in raising students' awareness and sensitivity for cultural diversity and helps them to develop the competences for intercultural communication, which both are seen as important competences in today's globalized and multicultural society.

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