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**Contemporary Higher Education Reform in Ecuador:  
Implications for Faculty Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention**

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**Abstract:** Currently, there is a shortage of research on how Ecuadorian universities are coping with the contemporary reforms of higher education under the government of Correa. In 2010, *La Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior* (higher education law) defined the development, transparency and quality assurance of existing and new higher education institutions. This case study describes the challenges administrators have in recruiting, hiring, and retaining faculty in an environment where both fiscal and human resources are limited. The research reflects the current complexity of the higher education environment in Ecuador under contemporary reforms and creates a space for the discussion on the unique perspectives of administrators from both private and public institutions.

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### **Reforma contemporánea de la educación superior en Ecuador: Implicaciones para el reclutamiento, contratación y retención de docentes**

**Resumen:** Actualmente, hay escasez de investigación sobre cómo las universidades ecuatorianas se enfrentan a las reformas contemporáneas de la educación superior bajo el gobierno de Correa. En 2010, la Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior definió el desarrollo, la transparencia y la garantía de calidad de las instituciones de educación superior existentes y nuevas. Este estudio de caso describe los retos que los administradores tienen en el reclutamiento, contratación y retención de profesores en un ambiente donde los recursos fiscales y humanos son limitados. La investigación refleja la complejidad actual del ambiente de educación superior en Ecuador bajo las reformas contemporáneas y crea un espacio para la discusión sobre las perspectivas únicas de los administradores de las instituciones públicas y privadas.

**Palabras-clave:** Ecuador, reforma de educación superior, docentes con PhD, América Latina, economía de conocimiento, dependencia de recursos

### **Reforma contemporânea do ensino superior no Equador: Implicações para recrutamento, contratação e professores de retenção**

**Resumo:** Atualmente, há pouca pesquisa sobre como as universidades equatorianas enfrentar reformas contemporâneas de ensino superior sob o governo de Correa. Em 2010, a Lei Orgânica de Educação Superior definido o desenvolvimento, a transparência e garantia de qualidade de instituições de ensino superior existentes e novos. Este estudo de caso descreve os desafios que os gestores têm no recrutamento, contratação e retenção de professores em um ambiente onde os recursos fiscais e humanos são limitados. A pesquisa reflete a complexidade atual do ambiente do ensino superior no Equador sob reformas contemporâneas e cria um espaço para a discussão sobre as necessidades únicas dos gestores de instituições públicas e privadas perspectivas.

**Palavras-chave:** Equador, reforma do ensino superior, professores com PhD, América Latina, economia do conhecimento, dependência de recursos

## **Contemporary Higher Education Reform in Ecuador: Implications for Faculty Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention**

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latin America has experienced widespread efforts to improve higher education. Tünnermann (1999), reflecting on the role of higher education on development, cited the key demands of equity, quality, and relevance for higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Several countries on the sub-continent have implemented national quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms in hopes of improving higher education systems historically plagued by a lack of transparency, under-qualified faculty, and nonexistent research agendas (Bernasconi, 2006, 2008; Ferrari & Contreras, 2008; Rengifo-Millán, 2015; Schwartzman, 1993; Van Hoof, Estrella, Eljuri, & Leon, 2013). Likewise, the focus on neoliberal perspectives of the knowledge economy and globalization has led many countries in Latin America to place emphasis on the role of higher education in social, cultural, and economic development (Hunter, 2013; Schwartzman, 1993). Holm-Nielsen, Thorn, Brunner, and Balán (2005) noted that according to evidence from Latin America, one of the best strategies for “achieving new knowledge is to engage in the exchange of people and ideas rather than turn inward” (p. 39). One way in which Latin American countries are working

toward becoming knowledge producers is by improving the quality of post-secondary institutions and reforming the role of faculty in the university.

Historically, the role of faculty in the Latin American university has been filled by part-time professionals who did not engage in research nor have doctoral degrees (Bernasconi, 2006; Schwartzman, 1993). However, with quality assurance and knowledge production the leitmotifs of higher education, the role of faculty has become more complex. Faculty members now constitute the critical ingredient that influences the quality and effectiveness of higher education institutions (Austin, 2002). Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumley (2009) observed that due to the rapid growth of the academic profession, facilities for advanced degree study are not keeping up—nor are salary levels that encourage the ‘best and brightest’ to join the professorate in developing knowledge economies. Moreover, the focus on faculty research production and publication in the region has over-flung universities’ ability to supply research facilities or research review boards (Ferrari & Contreras, 2008). It is with all this in mind that the context of contemporary reform of higher education in Ecuador can be introduced.

## Contemporary Higher Education Reform in Ecuador

In 2012, Rafael Correa, president of Ecuador, was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “Ecuador probably has the worst universities in Latin America” (Neuman, 2012, para. 4). Correa, who earned a PhD in Economics from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, spent much of his tenure as president attempting to improve the quality of higher education in Ecuador. His platform as president, *Revolución Ciudadana* (Citizens’ Revolution), had been to increase public services’ access, including post-secondary education, to all socio-economic levels, while also increasing the control and quality of higher education in the country. Higher education institutions in Ecuador historically had limited government oversight before 2007, but due to reform efforts, the sector currently operates within a highly State-regulated environment (Herdoíza, 2015; Saavedra, 2012; Van Hoof et al., 2013).

Before 2007, universities enjoyed a great deal of autonomy—policies concerning student matriculation to budgeting and hiring were often homegrown and varied from institution to institution (Van Hoof et al., 2013). However, the contemporary reform of the higher education system has led to efforts to improve the quality and standardization of the country’s universities and their institutional policies. Under government auspices, new constitutional mandates, a new higher education law, and a new government-run post-secondary accrediting body have shifted the post-secondary sector from deregulation and the decentralization of a higher education system that lacked accountability to a centralized and decidedly regulated system. This shift has been met with debate and accusations from university administrators that the government was attempting to undermine university autonomy in violation of the constitution (Saavedra, 2012). Further, many fear instead of increasing quality, reform efforts will only increase bureaucracy and financial burden on the State (Saavedra, 2012). According to government rhetoric, however, the ‘third wave of higher education transformation’ has de-commodified the system, allowing for greater control in order to advance research that contributes to the development of the country (Ramírez, 2016).

Several major policy developments have changed the landscape of higher education in Ecuador. When Correa became president, he stewarded the adoption of a new constitution in 2008. In the constitution, public higher education became free for Ecuadorian citizens, thus removing tuition dollars as one source of funding and placing an increased reliance on the government for resources (Herdoíza, 2015). According to the constitution, public institutions are guaranteed funding by the State, though they are encouraged to find supplemental financial resources to fund research.

Further, the focus of higher education became one of scientific and technological research, promoting innovation and the development of solutions for the country's problems.

Further, in 2010, a new higher education law, *Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior* (LOES), defined the quality, transparency, and accountability of the system of higher education, individual institutions, and their governance (Saavedra, 2012). Under the law, a new accrediting body for higher education in Ecuador was formed. This entity, *Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior* (CEAACES), is in charge of ensuring that universities conform to the national accreditation model. CEAACES is using institutional ranking as a carrot and stick regulatory instrument to guarantee compliance to the law. From 2007 to 2014, 17 universities were closed due to their inability to meet accreditation standards after receiving a category E ranking of poor quality (Ramírez, 2016).

### The Reformed Nature of Faculty Policies and Role

Faculty policies and role in universities have been revolutionized in Ecuador's quest for higher education quality. Not only did LOES mandate the creation of an accrediting body to ensure institutional compliance, but it also authorized the creation of a regulation that governs the details of *personal académico* (academic staff) activities and hierarchy at post-secondary institutions in the country. The objective of the regulatory handbook, *Reglamento de Carrera y Escalafón del Profesor e Investigador del Sistema de Educación Superior* (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2016), is as follows:

This regulation lays down binding rules governing the career and rank of academic staff in higher education institutions, regulating their selection, admission, work, stability, pay scale, professional development, evaluation, promotion, incentives, suspension, and retirement. (Article 1)<sup>1</sup>

Due to these efforts to improve quality in Ecuadorian higher education, faculty qualifications and activities have fallen under intense scrutiny. Historically, faculty members focused primarily on teaching and very few professors were full-time employees, had degrees beyond a bachelor's or master's, advised students, or performed any type of research (Ramírez, 2013; Van Hoof et al., 2013). René Ramírez (2013), the former head of the government agency the Secretary of Higher Education, Technology, and Innovation of Ecuador (SENESCYT), remarked,

Among the perversities of the system, we found that teachers had low wages, were exploited in terms of time spent teaching, universities did not hire their teachers as *titulares* (tenure-like position), nor did institutions seek to have full-time teachers. The 'taxi teacher', who went through several universities to teach in order to make a living wage, was commonplace in the field. (p. 33)<sup>2</sup>

After the passing of the 2008 constitution and LOES 2010 and subsequent accreditation expectations and the regulation governing faculty activities, all universities became tasked with ensuring full-time, tenured professors (*titulares*) hold *títulos de cuarto nivel* (PhD or equivalent), faculty pursuing some type of research and publication, and a majority of faculty who are full-time employees. The LOES deadline of October 12, 2017—which is currently being considered for an extension by new head of SENESCYT, Augusto Barrera—for faculty to have obtained a PhD has been a point of intense debate as many believe it is impracticable. While these are challenges for the sector, the new laws and policies markedly change faculty roles in institutions of higher education in

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from Spanish.

Ecuador. Now, many faculty members must possess credentials in the form of a terminal degree, and the research and publication component has become a critical expectation of faculty work

A further stipulation is the categorization of universities into a typology: a research university or a teaching-research university. This typology classifies universities into two categories based primarily on how many faculty members have doctorates. In a research university, 70% of the faculty must hold a PhD, whereas at a teaching-research requires 40% of faculty to hold a PhD (CEAACES, 2012). This legislative demand for faculty with a PhD and Ecuador's lack of PhD programs has led many professors to leave the country to pursue a doctorate and the importation of doctorate-holders from other countries, most at the expense of the government. According to 2015 data, 2,278 faculty members out of 35,501 at universities in Ecuador hold doctorates (SNIESE, 2017). This has grown substantially from the approximately 500 doctorate holders in the higher education sector in 2008 (Medina et al., 2016).

Faculty research and publication also became of major importance under the national reform policies, which presented challenges. Van Hoof (2015) stated that in Ecuador,

The research infrastructure is dated or absent, there have never been many incentives for faculty members to do research, there is a lack of appreciation about its value and importance, professors lack an understanding of basic research methodology, and there is a chronic lack of funding. (p. 60)

Under the legislative codes, however, one of the major purposes of the higher education system is production of educational, scientific, and technological knowledge (Asamblea Nacional de Ecuador, 2010). Saavedra (2012) noted that the government discourse is that research via higher education will be “a significant contributor to technological advancements and innovation, economic growth, development, and global competitiveness” (p. 174).

As Ecuador positions itself to be a knowledge producer, the environment of higher education has become a competition for resources. Free public higher education tuition, government centralization of public university budgets and control of spending, and the threat of suspension of activities by the State-supported quality assurance unit have many universities searching for ways in which to meet the demands of the reform policies. Resource dependency theory provides a way in which to structure the discussion of higher education reform in Ecuador and the actions administrators take in response to higher education organizational change. It helps to explain that national policies and market dynamics are among the forces that shape access to resources and an organization's capacity to conduct operations and to develop organizational autonomy (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Moreover, it places emphasis on power relationships and the tactics organizations employ in order to respond to external pressures (Reale & Seeber, 2010). Due to the increased fiscal reliance public universities in Ecuador now have on the government and the limited human resources available—meaning faculty that meet the standards of the law and accreditation—to both public and private universities, resource dependence theory frames the dialogue of how universities respond to their current environment and to each other. Resource dependence theory “assumes that one cannot understand the structure or behavior of an organization without understanding the context within which it operates” (Scott, 2003, p. 118).

What remains missing from the literature, however, are the perspectives of university administrators working to ensure their institutions comply with the regulations and policies concerning faculty qualifications and expectations. Using qualitative case study methods, this research examines both public and private university administrator responses to higher education reform in Ecuador and how these institutions are coping with new accreditation standards for faculty under the law. The case study focuses on and describes the challenges administrators have in

recruiting, hiring and retaining faculty in an environment where both fiscal and human resources are limited and often controlled by the government.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the challenges administrators in higher education institutions in Ecuador face when recruiting, hiring, and retaining faculty under LOES 2010 and its subsequent policies. The research question that guided the case study is: What challenges are upper-level administrators (vice-rectors, deans of schools, and directors of programs) facing under the 2010 LOES when recruiting, hiring and retaining qualified faculty? A descriptive case study methodology was chosen for this research. Case study, like all qualitative research, searches for meaning and understanding and provides a rich description of the phenomenon within its real-life context (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). The case study is bound by focusing on administrators at public and private comprehensive (four years of study or more) universities in Ecuador. The unit of analysis is the perceptions of recruiting, hiring, and retention of faculty by administrators at comprehensive universities in Ecuador. This research received IRB approval from the author's home institution.

### **Data Collection**

Fieldwork was conducted in Ecuador in June and July 2015. Different methods of data collection were employed in order to understand the current higher education environment in Ecuador and the particular challenges administrators face when finding and keeping faculty. The first of the methods was that of the responsive interview; the interview protocol was semi-structured in nature and allowed for follow-up questions and probes for clarification and depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Questions included details concerning the participant's background (education and employment), participant's understanding of the law and accreditation standards, how the law affects their hiring decisions, how they are minimizing challenges, and how they perceive their efforts and the efforts of the country as a whole.

Table 1 lists the participants of the research, the positions they hold, and the type of institution they represent. Participants were identified and recruited via gatekeepers at two private institutions and two public institutions. Participants were also identified using criterion sampling, that is, the informants must demonstrate a certain set of characteristics, such as decision-making authority, knowledge of institutional policy, and knowledge of accreditation standards created due to LOES (Patton, 1990). Ten participants, representing vice-rectors, deans, directors and sub-directors from these institutions in Ecuador, were interviewed. Ecuador has a variety of higher education institutions and the participants characterize this variety. It is important that the public, private, liberal arts and polytechnic institutions are represented to ensure that the unique challenges of each institution are illustrated. Participants' identities are withheld for confidentiality purposes and will be referred to by a generic title and the type of post-secondary institution they represent within the findings section.

Table 1  
*Summary of Interview Participants' Positions and University Sector*

No.	Participant Position	University Sector
1	Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities	Private University
2	Director of Design and Visual Communication	Public University
3	Sub-director of Design and Visual Communication	Public University
4	Director of Information Systems	Public University
5	Vice-rector of Faculty	Public University
6	Dean of International Studies	Private University
7	Dean of Liberal Arts and Education	Private University
8	Sub-director of Civil Engineering	Public University
9	Director of Administration and Marketing	Private University
10	Vice-rector of Academics	Private University

Newspaper, organizational, and legal artifact collection rounded out the methods. LOES 2010 and university reactions to reform have been covered extensively in the news in Ecuador, thus, in order to understand the climate, it was important to keep abreast of the news. Approximately 20 organizational artifacts were collected and analyzed to discern institutional understanding of the law and accreditation standards. Artifacts included PowerPoint presentations, university research journals, websites, and university documents highlighting LOES 2010 articles and provisions. Legal documents, such as LOES 2010, and documents from CEAACES describing the evaluation model were also collected and analyzed. Moreover, SENESCYT, a government entity, has published several works discussing the reform and have made data on its programs public, thus they were also analyzed to provide a deeper understanding. These artifacts, which Hodder (1994) refers to as *mute evidence*, provided insight into the context and conditions of the field.

### Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated into English (if the interview was held in Spanish), and then analyzed using Rubin and Rubin's (2005) data analysis technique. Rubin and Rubin's (2005) data analysis "entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative" (p. 201). Data coding and analysis were completed using Dedoose Version 6.2.17, a web-based data analysis tool, for all interview data and organizational artifacts. Codes emerged from the interviews and secondary data. Analysis of coded data involved sorting and grouping related codes together (parent-child code groupings in Dedoose), and using the word cloud visualization found in Dedoose to sort, rank, weigh, and compare codes. The second stage of data analysis built toward broader implications of the research. Rubin and Rubin (2005) observed that in case-focused research, the researcher works toward building a theory by asking how far one might extend the concepts and themes discovered in one's research. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that the ultimate goal of data analysis is to "understand core concepts and to discover themes that describe the world you have examined" (p. 245).

### Findings

Several themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews of university administrators. Employing the lens of resource dependence theory highlighted the complex relationships among

higher education institutions in Ecuador and the actions taken in order to mitigate uncertainty and a lack of resources under the 2010 LOES. The findings that surfaced from the analysis include the competition between public and private universities for faculty; the preparation of future faculty; the reliance on foreign faculty; and a call for flexibility in the evaluation model on faculty qualifications.

### The Public vs. Private Dichotomy

Some countries in Latin America, like Colombia and Chile, have attempted to privatize public higher education in order to remove the financial burden of survival from the governments' shoulders—though their efforts have met with much backlash from constituents of higher education (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2012). Ecuador has taken an alternate route and brought public institutions under the financial management of the government. As a result of stricter government control over public universities and their operating budgets and making public higher education free of tuition, one major finding is the challenge of competition for faculty between public and private universities—creating an uncertain environment for public institutions and creating interdependence between the two institutional types, a characteristic of resource dependence. Because financial resources are limited for public universities, private universities are able to attract more faculty talent due to higher salaries—creating an outcome which one administrator refers to as *canibalismo* (cannibalism) of faculty among universities. A program sub-director at a public polytechnic university reported,

It [interaction between public and private universities] has become a bidding war. It has pushed salaries to become higher. At this time, a full time teacher doesn't earn less than 2,000 dollars [a month]. You can't even offer less than that anymore. In public institutions, you can't negotiate a salary, but just use what the table [government salary scale] tells you. We are at a disadvantage with private universities. Universities steal teachers from each other.

According to 2015 data from *Sistema Nacional de Información de Educación Superior* (SNIESE, 2017), Universidad San Francisco de Quito, a medium-sized private comprehensive university, had over 150 professors with PhDs, while most public institutions fell far short of this number. In the same data set, Universidad Central del Ecuador, one of the largest public institutions in the country, had only 77 professors with doctoral degrees (SNIESE, 2017). Furthermore, private universities, while being able to provide more attractive salaries, are also able to provide facilities for research that public universities may not be able to considering their lack of funding. Private institutions hold an advantage in recruitment of quality faculty given their larger budgets. A dean from a private university remarked,

When I was still getting my PhD, I was called from here [private university]. They said, “We really want you to come back, and come to work for us.” You have a decent salary that you wouldn't get anywhere else in the country... Obviously, I'm going to come here. The thing is that since you already have a good number of people with PhDs, and who are working on interesting projects, we can attract more people who would be willing to be part of a university that is not only competitive in terms of salary, but that would also provide an interesting space for research and academic debate.

Part of the new law and the accreditation and quality assurance framework requires that faculty perform research and publish. Historically, both private and public universities in Ecuador have suffered from a lack of interest and lack of funding to pursue research (Ramírez, 2013; Van Hoof, 2015). However, Ecuadorian universities have incentivized research to meet the requirements of the



law and framework by providing extra pay to faculty to perform research and thus meet the standards for institutional accreditation.

### The Preparation of Future Faculty and the Decline of the Old Guard

Due to the scarcity of faculty holding PhDs and lack of PhD programs in Ecuador, many universities are taking advantage of the funding provided by the government in order to send their faculty abroad to study. One public university official interviewed quoted over 120 faculty from his institution pursuing PhD studies abroad—financed through government funds in cooperation with the university. In order to support the reform and continue the much-needed changes, many university administrators feel it essential to contribute to the preparation of future faculty to teach in Ecuadorian universities.

As stated earlier, the current system of higher education in Ecuador does not support extensive doctoral studies and most faculty do not have the opportunity to pursue educational development in Ecuador (Van Hoof, 2015). Thus, universities (both public and private) are sending their faculty to complete their PhD at universities abroad that have been approved by the Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología (SENESCYT). Of the approximately 11,000 scholarships SENESCYT has granted to Ecuadorians to pursue degrees abroad, 3,500 of these have been granted as part of the process to raise the education level of university faculty to doctorates (Ramírez, 2016). One administrator interviewed is a doctoral student of higher education at a university in Scotland, doing research with his university intermittently, while another travels to Colombia to work on his doctorate in leadership.

Likewise, a private university dean sees her university as preparing undergraduate students to eventually obtain graduate degrees abroad and return to Ecuador. As a result, her university is an incubator for future academics.

The problem is that we don't have a critical mass in Ecuador. I have to say that I'm really proud when I listen to my students who are finishing their degrees. They are so smart. These are the academics of the future, and we are training them. These are the people who are going to be teaching at Ecuadorian universities in the future. We didn't have a tradition for that. We are really preparing students to go onto graduate school, and we're hoping that they are going to be successful. Then in the future, we expect them to come back to Ecuador, maybe [private university] or somewhere else.

Many older faculty in public universities, however, are refusing to obtain their PhDs. These older faculty members have *nombramiento* (tenure) and have been at their university for decades. The vice rector at a public university pointed out that these faculty members with *nombramiento* hold a great deal of power at their university and have the ability to both maintain their positions of power despite the new faculty requirements under the law and make it difficult for new incoming PhDs to find positions at their university. The vice rector added,

In the public universities, they [tenured faculty] are stopping the people [new PhD graduates]. The older people, the older generations that rules those universities, they are pushing them [new PhDs] and get into in the lowest levels of salary and degrees in order to let them [tenured faculty] to keep the power. You know, now there is an organization, a temporary organization for those young people coming with PhD, coming back to the country. They are organizing now to push the universities because they don't have a job now. They are now, they are here in the country or coming back to the country after four years getting the PhD and now they don't have a job.

Many see this as a holdover, however, which will dissipate if the government decides to force retirements for those with *nombramiento*. According to LOES, those who fail to meet the requirement of obtaining a doctorate by the cutoff date in 2017 will lose their positions as full-time faculty with tenured status in the university, although this demand is being reconsidered by the current head of SENESCYT. Another administrator at a private university who is also in charge of accreditation at his university referred to those older faculty with *nombramiento* as a dying breed of academic. He commented,

I'm going to use a metaphor, it's like talking about dinosaurs and sharks, both lived during the Jurassic Period, when there was the cataclysm, the dinosaurs got extinct because they were not able to adapt to the new conditions. So there are going to be two categories of instructors. The dinosaurs are going to be extinct and taken out from the system, they are already dying out. But the sharks are going to survive and govern the system until there is a new generation of sharks that will be able to manage the new system.

How universities choose to approach those faculty who do not obtain a PhD, by either inability or refusal, by the cutoff date in 2017 remains to be seen. The grandiose nature of the reform has left little room for those professors unable to move abroad to study due to personal circumstances. While one administrator referred to them as dinosaurs, older faculty still have much to bring to the table and are often the institutional memory of a university.

### Foreign Faculty Influx

In 2012, Barcelona's newspaper *La Vanguardia*, in an article, described *la fuga de cerebros*, the brain drain of professors leaving Spain's economic crisis to work in Ecuadorian universities (De Pablo & Zurita, 2012). Ecuador's newspaper, *El Universo* reported in 2013 that the Universidad del Sur de Manabí de Jipijapa employed 13 Spanish professors, five Cuban and a Nicaraguan with PhDs, while over 50 Ecuadorian professors were working on their PhDs in Mexico, Cuba, and Peru. In order to respond to the lack of Ecuadorians with PhDs in a competitive resource environment, public university have imported faculty from abroad. When critical resources are scarce, in this case faculty with doctoral degrees, members of organizations often turn to alternative sources to meet requirements (Pfeffer, 1994).

In a speech at the International Congress on University Development and Cooperation in 2011, Correa stated,

I have always believed strongly in the transformative power of the university, in addition to the important role that quality teaching plays in the training of professionals of the future, for the vital role of research, especially when research allows for paradigmatic leaps that we need so much.<sup>3</sup>

In the pursuance of the goal to create the professional of the future, the Ecuadorian government, since 2010, sponsored the Prometeo initiative which funded academics from other countries to pursue research and teach in Ecuadorian universities. "It is aimed at universities, polytechnic schools, public research institutes, and other public or co-financed institutions that require assistance in the development of research projects in areas of priority" (SENECYT, n.d.). Ecuador invested \$7 million in to the Prometeo program (Ballas, 2016). As of 2016, the Prometeo program has incorporated approximately 1,000 international scholars with doctorates into public universities and research institutes around the country (Pazos, 2016). Fully privately-financed universities, however,

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from Spanish.

were unable to receive Prometeo scholars, thus, perhaps balancing the scales between public and private institutions regarding competition for qualified faculty.

However, some debate exists among public university administrators concerning the foreign scholars. The director of a program at a public polytechnic university admitted that though having foreign faculty on staff brings new ideas to the department and support the university in meeting the requirements of LOES, he is concerned about faculty from abroad taking jobs from Ecuadorians.

We have three teachers from Spain, one from Chile and probably a Chinese and another Spaniard. They bring a new vision to what we are doing. They bring experience from Europe; all of them have worked in Europe. On the other hand, these positions are being taken by professionals from other countries that could have been filled by Ecuadorians.

Not only is finding faculty with an Ecuadorian professor with a PhD a challenge, but even finding faculty with a Master's degree in particular fields is difficult. As the director of a program at a public polytechnic university reflected, When the law came, there used to be less than 10,000 people with Masters degrees. Even though there have been extensions, this requirement has been very difficult to fulfill, they are also asking for PhDs. Now all universities have the same problem. That has been a big issue, finding teachers with Masters degrees for the subjects that we need.

Additionally, since this is a public institution, we have to follow the regulations for hiring a government employee. This takes a long time, we need to have the budget, the Ministry of Finance has to say that the money is available to pay that teacher. On top of that, they require teachers from the top universities. In private universities, decisions are made faster. It has been very complex to execute the schedule and hire the teachers that we want, for the subject that we want, and with the master's degree that we want. We have been giving these positions to foreigners that fulfill these requirements.

### **Framework Flexibility**

Altbach et al. (2009) observed that quality assurance frameworks are a growing concern for higher education around the world in an environment of ongoing change, while also becoming increasingly difficult to measure quality usefully. As constituents in the landscape of higher education quality evaluation in Ecuador, most university administrators are obliged to implement standards they feel may not capture the nature of their institution. Thus, a final theme that emerged from the interviews is the challenge of using an evaluation and accreditation framework for hiring faculty that is inflexible and not always suitable for the department or school implementing it. A dean at a private university observed,

I think every institution has a different perception, different ways to be measured. Privates are measured one way, publics are measured different way. Not everyone has a medical school, not everyone has an international program. By generalizing, you omit some important criteria for one and you add criteria for the other. It should not be standardized.

Many of the administrators interviewed felt that the inflexibility of the 2017 mandate leads to more problems than solutions. Without differentiation in the evaluation and accreditation framework, universities may lose what makes them unique. The director of a program at a public polytechnic university believes that different programs should have different standards, standards that reflect the complexity of varied degree programs. He added,

Also, it was interesting to see how goals are measured. We are trying to implement some incentives for teachers to do research, to write papers. But in industrial design, project design, they are measured with a project. That is difficult to understand here because we are all under the same model. We are trying to sell this idea because that is something that has been implemented in the US. In top universities, they don't have PhDs in design, and when we found a professional in industrial design that is doing a PhD, he is doing it in Anthropology, to compliment his studies in design. We are telling our masters [students] in design to have a PhD in design.

This lack of flexibility in the evaluation model was also noted by a dean at a private university who commented:

The model is generic and it is not adaptable to all universities, it has a specific philosophy but it has not taken into account the reality of different disciplines such as science, humanities, etc. This model is copied from the European model, from Bologna, and the American model, so it has been difficult to adapt. Also, the model has been changing because it was very idealistic at first and it was not practical.

Overall, all of the administrators who participated in this research had a positive outlook on the reform higher education is undergoing in Ecuador. All recognized that reform was necessary in order to play a role in the social and economic future of Ecuador. As one dean at a private university summarized,

I think there are going to be positive consequences. There is a renewed value in formal instruction and research. Independently if the law changes or not, in society there is this sense of urgency to go forward. To have professionals that can do research, to have our universities in the rankings, to have new innovative talent and to take on new challenges that could not be faced previously. Universities used to be focus on the transmission of knowledge, teaching. Now there is the concern of creating knowledge.

## **Discussion and Implications**

As a result of the ambitious policy developments surrounding higher education in Ecuador, faculty with advanced degrees have become of major importance to achieving institutional quality and knowledge production. Further, the State's focus on innovation in technology and science and its emphasis on knowledge production places administrators into a complex nexus of relationships between the government, public and private universities, and faculty. Public universities, constrained by their reliance on the government for financial resources, seek alternative avenues to find faculty that comply with the law. Private universities, who receive little or no funding from the government and are dependent on student tuition or other sources, have the ability attract faculty due to having both money and facilities to do research. As one administrator commented, private institutions are the winners of the reform. Moreover, in an environment where many universities depend on a limited pool of financial and human resources, Ecuadorian universities are attempting to meet the challenges of implementing an inflexible accreditation framework and law. Whether universities will be able to fully meet the requirement of LOES 2010 remains to be seen; however, the administrators' insights help to highlight several implications for the future of faculty recruitment, hiring, and retention in Ecuador.

The law states that tenured faculty should have obtained a PhD by 2017, and many institutions recognize that meeting the requirement of faculty under the law will be difficult to achieve. Without a local support structure in place in which faculty can study at the doctoral level, most universities will be relying on faculty from abroad to fill those spaces Ecuadorian should or could fill. The Ecuadorian government will need to focus more investment in creating an environment where future and current faculty can complete their degrees locally in order to continue the momentum of the reform. The academic pipeline ends mainly at the master's degree in Ecuador; however, investing in a culture of research and diverse programs will help create a workforce no longer reliant on international doctorates. Currently, only six universities offer doctoral degree programs, many in the science and technology fields, and few in the social sciences (Ramírez, 2016). Nevertheless, institutions should be careful of academic inbreeding if doctoral programs do become more prevalent in Ecuador. Inbreeding, which can often find root in emerging and developing academic systems, can stymie the development of research, new researchers, and institutional responsiveness to a changing environment (Altbach, Yudkevich, & Rumbley, 2015).

Another implication for recruitment and hiring is the inflexibility of the accreditation model. One way for programs to hire faculty with qualifications suitable for their unit is to search for accreditation from outside sources, such as the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, and work to advocate for separate accreditation frameworks for separate programs to ensure quality. As the director of the design program at a public university observed, the current framework should not be a one-size-fits all. Many programs would benefit from someone with a master's degree and work experience versus a professor with a doctorate in an unrelated field. University administrators and policymakers will need to consider the inflexibility of the model and advocate for the use of outside accreditation for programs that require it.

Preparing faculty to do research in Ecuador will also affect recruitment, hiring, and retention in the future. Due to the lack of emphasis and knowledge of research methodologies in Ecuador, many faculty will suffer from finding and keeping positions without the ability to do research within the current framework. Research abilities need to be instilled in undergraduate programs in Ecuador in order to ensure a knowledgeable workforce in the future. Research should not only be the field of doctorates, but undergraduate and master degree students, as well. Furthermore, while the government and universities are investing in providing training to current faculty on quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and how to design research studies, a more ambitious effort will be needed in order to raise Ecuador's research profile. Research conferences and research networks could be developed and held at institutions throughout the country to support the progress of novice researchers and faculty. It is important to ask ourselves, however, if performing research is absolutely necessary for all faculty and whether Ecuadorian higher education should want to mimic the norms of the United States and Europe in its systems of higher education.

## **Conclusion**

This research is essential to our understanding of the development of higher education in Ecuador, specifically considering the implementation of top-down policy. There is very little research on the current state of higher education reform in Ecuador that is not State-sponsored (i.e. SENESCYT published) and certainly little in the literature on the focus on faculty qualifications and the challenges university administrators are experiencing under the contemporary reform policies. This case study demonstrates the ways in which a developing knowledge economy and its university administrators find in which to grapple with a limited resource environment. Furthermore, it can be looked to help policy makers in Ecuador create standards that are suitable to a developing higher

education system. However, major problems have come to light. This aggressive push to improve the standards of higher education in a highly politicized environment could prove detrimental to the success of the reform in Ecuador. Faculty forced to pursue a doctorate are given little time to complete the degree and, according to the law, will be penalized if they have not obtained it by October 2017. Moreover, this push for doctorates and the short time in which to obtain one may lead to faculty pursuing less reputable degree programs. Though many faculty will return with a doctorate for the sake of fulfilling the requirement, the question remains on how well prepared faculty will be for the new research expectations of the reform policies. Research into how faculty are responding to the law and the new role they are expected to fulfill as researchers is an avenue for further research. Administrators and faculty are under intense pressure to ensure that Ecuador meets its goals as a country pursuing knowledge and innovation, but its institutions and constituents may suffer in order to achieve these lofty ends.

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