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Intercultural universities in Mexico: decolonizing the intercultural philosophy of education

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methodological approach, to critically rethink the problems of cultural and linguistic inclusion that indigenous peoples face. The modern/colonial world-system and the geopolitics of knowledge that hegemonic countries impose upon others are introduced. Then, this study describes the historical and political context that led to the creation of inclusive initiatives in universities. Later, it explains the educational philosophy that intercultural communication adopts in two educational centers. As a result, this work discusses the intercultural communication between indigenous and hegemonic populations.

Este artículo desarrolla un enfoque metodológico cualitativo, descriptivo y analítico, para repensar críticamente los problemas de inclusión cultural y lingüística que enfrentan los pueblos indígenas. Se realiza una introducción al sistema-mundo moderno/colonial y la geopolítica del conocimiento que los países hegemónicos imponen a otros. Luego, se describe el contexto histórico y político que llevó a la creación de iniciativas inclusivas en las universidades. Posteriormente, se explica la filosofía educativa que adopta la comunicación intercultural en dos centros educativos. Como resultado, se discute la comunicación intercultural entre poblaciones indígenas y hegemónicas.

KEYWORDS

Intercultural communication; intercultural university; colonial difference; critical thinking; philosophy of education; Mexico

Introduction to the world-system and the geopolitics of knowledge

This work explores and analyses the historical evolution of intercultural dimensions in the universities of Mexico in order to better understand the teaching practices of educators in the promotion of indigenous rights of language, identity and cultures (Palaiologou & Zembylas, 2018). The critical analysis is focused on the outcome of public educational policies implemented during the last decades to assess the levels of language and intercultural communication. It explores the importance of intercultural universities (IUs) including linguistic aspects in higher education policies. Then, an intercultural and decolonising perspective is developed with the aim of reinforcing a transdisciplinary philosophical teacher and student training.

Since the critical opening of intercultural communication, Elias and Mansouri (2020) reasoned that public policies for intercultural education should focus on decolonising the curriculum to turn it into a strategy to resist, unlearn, and dismantle unjust practices, assumptions and institutions. Kessi et al. (2020) argue this decolonial perspective allows the construction of alternative spaces, networks, and forms of knowledge. From this vision, 'decolonising knowledge' implies facing the

‘coloniality of power’ imposed by the West. This involves critical and cross-border thinking in intercultural policies that promote ‘a critical vision on a multilevel scale, where phenomena can be thought of as inter-retro-acting on a constant local, national, regional and global scale’ (Collado, 2017, p. 40). In other words, the inclusion of the worldviews of indigenous peoples, persons of mixed race and Afro cultures that are on the ‘world periphery’ must be rethought in order to overstep the monocultural processes caused by modern Western coloniality.

According to the World-System analysis presented by Wallerstein (2006), the axis of geopolitical enunciation of knowledge arises in the ‘central countries’ since they are the best to set the guidelines for progress, modernisation and globalisation. Mexico was a country historically colonised by the European powers as a ‘peripheral country’, whose ancient wisdom is marginalised in the political, academic and scientific contexts (Tinajero & Englander, 2011). For this reason, a ‘decolonising turn’ is necessary to promote intercultural philosophical dialogue between the various epistemes, which implies including indigenous people and other social groups historically marginalised by the epistemic political power matrix (Bai et al., 2014).

For Maldonado-Torres (2007), Western modern philosophy made Europe the epistemic center of the world. This colonial geopolitical axis of knowledge is expanded in the teaching fields of schools, institutes, and universities in the so-called ‘peripheral countries’ or ‘third world countries’. According to Collado et al. (2019), the difficulty of deconstructing this colonial imaginary lies in rethinking the intercultural philosophy of education to transform educational processes and innovate with intercultural regenerative practices. For this reason, this work analyses the history of subordinate peoples in Mexico to identify the neo-colonial control strategies that the State has historically designed and executed to maintain the status quo, and reproduce a single logical thought in their societies.

According to Nemogá-Soto (2017), the uses and abuses of power in educational contexts have been expressed through colonial public policies that render invisible unequal relations. In this sense, Giroux (1978) states that the hidden curriculum is a side effect of schooling that reinforces existing social inequalities. Then, unequal distribution of cultural capital has greater consequences in the lower and poorer classes. For Perry and Southwell (2011), elites coerce the notion of interculturality to control and manipulate spaces and times. School shapes people’s epistemes, and for this reason, it is necessary to promote an understanding of the position and politics of language(s) in intercultural communication. That is why this work seeks to disseminate new ideas about how IUs in Mexico could cause ruptures among power groups and mainstream knowledge.

Historical analysis of public policies for indigenous higher education in Mexico

Like many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the indigenous populations of Mexico were made invisible during the Spanish colonisation and the subsequent process of national construction. Many peoples adopted the Spanish language as their mother tongue and assumed Catholicism as a religion. According to Álvarez (2012), indigenous populations were violently invisible during the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) although their participation was essential. In the late 1930s and into the early 1940s, they received the ‘benefits of a renewed Mexico’. The agrarian reform, the appearance of the unions and their ‘assimilation’ into the national society through a Castilianising education stand out.

R. Martínez (2006, p. 247) expresses that ‘by 1916 it was possible to distinguish, among the different revolutionary factions, several clear trends concerning cultural policies’. One of them was led by Torres Quintero, heir of the thought of Justo Sierra and supporter of Castilianisation as a requirement for national integration. In opposition, the members of the Mexican Indian Society sought better knowledge of indigenous cultures and languages before thinking of any assimilation mechanism. In 1916, Gamio was a pioneer in Mexican anthropology and indigenism. In his work *Forjando Patria*, he argued that in order to form a ‘true homeland’—coherent and defined—indigenous groups should assimilate into the social and political life of the country through the

adoption of the language and hegemonic culture. Henceforth, the concept of hegemony is to be understood as the force that imposes arbitrary power and legitimises relations of structural domination.

After the Mexican Revolution, Mexico began to modernise. In 1925, the philosopher Vasconcelos published the essay entitled ‘The Cosmic Race’. His ideological traits held that ‘the white man’ was the invader of the world and his temporal power would be displaced by the creation of a new human type or cosmic race, linguistically Hispanicised as a result of overcoming the past, and the miscegenation of the primitive races: Amerindian-red, African-black and Asian-yellow. This approach produced a cultural indoctrination, where the mixed race acquired the culture, religion and language of the white man. Vasconcelos acted as the intellectual leader of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) [Secretary of Public Education], created in 1921 by the President of the Republic, Álvaro Obregón. During his tenure, the attempts to impose Western culture on the indigenous population generated many controversies.

For R. Martínez (2006), integrationist politics gained more momentum in Mexico immediately after the celebration of the Sixth Assembly of Education in 1963, which approved the bilingual method of literacy. This caused, among other effects, the creation of the Servicio Nacional para Promotores Bilingües [National Service for Bilingual Promoters] (1964) and the Dirección General de Educación Extracurricular [General Directorate for Extracurricular Education] (1971), which in 1978 would become the Dirección General de Educación Indígena (DGEI) [General Directorate for Indigenous Education], which originated the system of Educación Bilingüe-Bicultural (EBB) [Bilingual-Bicultural Education]. This education sought to ‘achieve socio-cultural integration based on the re-evaluation of the culture and language of each ethnic group to acquire knowledge of the “national culture”’ (Martínez, 2006, p. 251). In other words, school education continued to be a transformer of local culture based on a differentiated assessment of the different cultural models in which the modern-urban occupied a privileged position.

In 1993, the General Law of Education recognised the importance of promoting education in indigenous languages, but the program lacked an academic project that systematised methodological and curricular aspects. The government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) recognised the rights, cultures, languages and traditions of indigenous communities (through the reform of the 4th constitutional article drafted in 1992) while decreeing that the Spanish language was to be imparted compulsorily within the framework of indigenous education (Martínez, 2015). This caused the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) [Zapatista Army of National Liberation] of Chiapas to make a call in 1994 to overthrow the outgoing President of the Republic at the time, whom they described as illegitimate for leading a dictatorship monopolised by the power party (Álvarez, 2012). It also demanded the recognition of indigenous peoples, the exercise of their autonomy and rights over their lands. It should be noted that the movement organised by the EZLN triggered sharp criticism because Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesman of the insurgents and military chief of the revolution, was a literate person of ‘mixed race’ and not an ‘underfed’ and uneducated indigenous man. However, with the epistemic rigidity of society, the economic and political situation of the country, together with the neglect of indigenous peoples, demanded the presence of a visceral character. This person, at least in virtue of his aforementioned ‘objective’ identification traits, could make himself heard in order to turn the gaze upon the territories and indigenous populations (Santiago, 2019).

Later, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994–2000) assumed the presidency. From the beginning of his government, he dealt with social, political, and economic problems accumulated during the Salinas administration. A key antecedent of Mexico’s new educational policy was the signing of the San Andrés Accords Larráinzar in 1996, which expressed the commitments and joint proposals that the Federal Government and the EZLN had pledged to push for the exercise of the full autonomy and self-determination of the native population. In 2000, the Comisión para la Concordia y Pacificación (COCOPA) [Concord and Pacification Commission] presented a bill that did not fully recover the agreements. Despite not being fully satisfied, the EZLN accepted on the assumption

that, in a subsequent document, it would fully acknowledge their requests. But the Government 'rejected the idea of indigenous autonomy, considering it highly dangerous for the stability and integrity of the country' (Stavenhagen, 2010, p. 434). At that time, the State had ratified the International Organization for Analysis Convention that defended the right of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own cultures, ways of life and institutions, and their right to participate effectively in decisions that affected them.

After the end of the Zedillo administration, Vicente Fox Quesada (2000–2006) assumed the presidency. During his presidential campaign, he vowed to pacify Chiapas and send the bill on indigenous rights and culture that had made COCOPA to the Congress, supported by the San Andrés Accords Larráinzar. However, he did not fulfill the agreements when assuming the presidency of the Republic. During the Fox administration, the specialised agency of the SEP, the *Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe (CGEIB)* [Coordination of Bilingual and Intercultural Education] created by the Agreement of the Federal Executive published in the Official Journal of the Federation in 2001. Thus, the intercultural approach was incorporated into the *Sistema Educativo Nacional (SEN)* [Education System Nacional], which allowed the evaluation of progress 'in equity, intercultural development and social participation in all types and modalities of education' (Casillas & Santini, 2009, p. 127).

Some states of the federation and the CGEIB collaborated to create IUs that were close to the indigenous communities. Thus, the SEN sought to address the problem of segregation suffered by indigenous youth and other structurally marginalised people who did not have access to universities founded in the modern-colonial model. According to Casillas and Santini (2009), these spaces are an important source of generation and dissemination of relevant knowledge for the communities themselves. They open spaces to promote the revitalisation, development, and consolidation of native languages and cultures. In order to do so, they resort to the design of projects of traditional wisdom. Also, they promote the economic, cultural, and social development of indigenous peoples, preserving their identity.

Interestingly, IUs were created under the mandate of a liberal, conservative and right-wing government that was not recognised for its proximity to the indigenous and identity rights agenda. To Tapia (2016), IUs were created as an instrument of social policy where the government signed a paradigm of development or sought to expand enrollment, build human capital, and increase competitiveness to improve indicators of access to educational, and poverty services (Blasco, 2004). Based on the above, it is possible to say that this form of interculturality seeks to assimilate indigenous populations and not to change the conditions in which social relations and exchanges are generated. According to some research and comparative studies, the free participation and consultation of indigenous peoples in the construction of the educational programs of these universities has been almost null or nonexistent (Tapia, 2016; Tipa, 2018).

One of the possible reasons for the criticism and distrust generated by the purposes of the IUs is due to the strong influence of the methodologies and political stakes of popular education in Latin America, in which community actors make decisions in favor of their social welfare. However, it is important to emphasise that these meeting spaces allow the questioning of the historical conditions of inequality and the strengthening of the ties among the oppressed population. In this way, they will be in a position to dialogue and creatively coexist with hegemonic epistemologies. Likewise, the rapprochement among previously unknown cultures allows the deconstruction of atavistic imaginaries that normalise violence (Marcelín, 2019).

President Fox's six-year plan contemplated the creation of ten institutions between 2001 and 2006. Currently, the CGEIB has created eight institutions and has made official four others as local initiatives. There is also a set of local intercultural education initiatives, promoted by non-governmental actors, created outside the CGEIB and the respective state governments. Some of these initiatives have applied for official recognition of their studies and others are projects with difficulties to continue operating (Tapia, 2016).

This historical analysis allows us to critically reflect on the Mexican public policies of ‘indigenous education’ designed by non-indigenous people. It also notes that indigenous people have become subjects of law, but not of autonomy. For this reason, the production of intercultural and inclusive research, and educational projects requires a decolonising treatment that makes visible the colonial violence inflicted on subalternate cultures and identities (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2016). In this sense, universities should move towards decolonising the hegemonic political-epistemological axis and (re)valorising other practices, worldviews, knowledge and spiritualities that allow facing current socio-environmental problems.

Material and methods

The focus of this work is to explore and analyse the evolution of the educational and linguistic rights of indigenous populations, driven by the social movements that emerge in response to the violence they faced. The explorative, analytical and documental method is used to obtain qualitative information to historically contextualise the evolution of public policies for intercultural education. This allows better understanding on how the IUs in Mexico are educating students in language and intercultural communication.

With this background information, the work presents two case studies. The first case study is from the Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas (UNICH) [Intercultural University of Chiapas]. Here, the authors present the general results of an investigation using an interpretative approach as a method and interviews with indigenous and mixed race teachers as a technique to gather the information. For the most holistic interpretation possible, it was necessary to resort to the observation of social practices and documentary reviews. In this way, ideological positions were revealed, and inter- and intra-ethnic power relations were crystallized. This information is discussed and collated with important previous findings. The second case study is from the Instituto Superior Intercultural Ayuuk, Oaxaca (ISIA) [Higher Intercultural Institute Ayuuk, Oaxaca]. This research includes the studies on intercultural education presented by teachers and researchers, and IUs in Mexico stand out (Dietz, 2009; Dietz & Mateos, 2013; Marcelín, 2019; Mato, 2016; Schmelkes, 2009; Tapia, 2016). Both cases describe pedagogical mechanisms used to address intercultural education. The review of the literature that analyses intercultural philosophical discourse allows us to discuss critically the results of this case study.

Intercultural universities in Mexico: a case study

Ethnic identity involves self-ascription and ascription attributed through ‘objective identification’ traits, such as language, accent, and skin color (Marcelín, 2019). In Mexico, IUs are educational institutions located in rural regions populated by indigenous peoples. Although they are not exclusive to indigenous people, their location favors the empowerment of indigenous students (Dietz, 2009). For Schmelkes (2009, p. 6), the objective of the IU is ‘to respond to this basic justice criterion from an educational equity viewpoint of increasing the proportion of indigenous students in higher education’. For this reason, affirmative action is granted and interculturalisation processes at the institutions were created. As Young (1971) explains, school institutions are a ‘black box’ that reproduce social status. This is why two things are necessary: 1) the opposition to the uncritical vision of considering schools as a neutral ideological instrument, and 2) the need to deepen the analysis of schools as reproducers of social stratification. From this sociological vision of education, we analyse two IU case studies. The first case study is from the UNICH. The material and data collected are presented as the results obtained during the research carried out by the authors. This information is discussed and collated with important previous findings. The second case study is from ISIA. This research includes the studies presented by people who have long been engaged in research on intercultural education.

The Intercultural University of Chiapas (UNICH)

The city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, located in Chiapas region, has faced changes in its economic, social and political organisation due to the arrival of migrants from other municipalities in the region. One of the most important reasons that caused thousands of migratory displacements was the Zapatista movement of 1994, which attracted the attention of Mexicans and foreigners, giving rise to a cosmopolitan city (Tipa, 2018). In this context, the UNICH headquarters, set up in 2004, is where non-indigenous and indigenous Tzeltal, Tsoltzil, Choles, Mam, Zoques and Tojolabales coexist. UNICH offers five degrees: Intercultural Communication, Language and Culture, Alternative Tourism, Sustainable Development, and Intercultural Medicine. The other IUs located in different parts of Mexico also started with 'classically' intercultural careers. One of the main difficulties detected is that these degrees are extremely ambiguous in their professional orientation. The bachelor's degree in Language and Culture deals with contents similar to those offered by bilingual teaching programs; however, until recently, they could not participate in calls for positions as basic education teachers. The objectives of the bachelor's degree in Sustainable Development are similar to those of Agronomy, but it does not professionalise the young people who study it as agronomists (Dietz & Mateos Cortés, 2019).

In the intercultural model of the UNICH, two very important curricular spaces were created: the Centro de Revitalización y Estudio de las Lenguas (CREL) [Center for the Revitalisation of Language Studies] and the Axis of Community Relations. The former is in charge to teach the subjects of native languages: Zoque and Mayan, Spanish, and English to students enrolled in any of the degrees. All are compulsory subjects that belong to a transversal axis. The latter establishes links between the university and the rural/indigenous community so that they carry out participatory diagnosis, planning, project development, execution, monitoring and evaluation activities, attending to and solving a community problem (Sartorello, 2016).

Spanish is the language of instruction in all subjects, except for native language subjects. This fact has favored the persons of mixed race, Spanish speakers, who manage to have higher grades. However, the Community Linkage Axis allows the reversal of these relations of academic domination and submission because it requires indigenous students to capitalise on their social, territorial, cultural and linguistic knowledge, and to take advantage of their family and community networks to easily access communities, and have support for the execution of academic and outreach activities (Ortelli & Sartorello, 2011). In other words, that academic program is a mechanism of school counter-culture. In daily life and public spaces, however, maternal indigenous languages create borders of confidentiality at school (Marcelín, 2019).

According to Sartorello (2016), the coexistence between indigenous and non-indigenous implies an intercultural conflict that is the product of persistent structural asymmetries among ethnic groups. Their study shows that the struggles are between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, not between indigenous people from different peoples and speakers of different native languages. Consequently, indigenous young people adopt an ambivalent behavior. On the one hand, they show a certain emotional attachment to their family environment and communities of origin; on the other hand, they show value-oriented aspirations and an urban way of life that leads them to assume different lifestyles and deny certain identity traits of their own. By denying aspects of their own identity, the indigenous youth develop discriminatory behavior towards members of the same social group.

In this same order of ideas, Marcelín (2019) warns that the ideological attachment to a social group (economic, linguistic, ethnic, generational, and sexual) determines the construction of meanings about the world. That is, each group usually (re)creates imagery that benefits its own and harms others. It seems that violence is a complex phenomenon that is not only limited exclusively to the struggle for power between the indigenous and non-indigenous ethnic groups. Although on some occasions the indigenous group is seen as something homogeneous, hierarchical and classificatory, relationships are also configured within it. According to Bastiani and Moguel (2010), these

intercultural and intracultural conflicts adopt three forms of violence in IUs. Firstly, power/knowledge struggles between indigenous and non-indigenous. Each ethnic group considers their knowledge to be good, valid and useful, and other knowledge invalid and useless. Secondly, power struggles between members of the subaltern group. Indigenous teachers and students who take advantage of power have inhabited urban regions for longer, mastered the hegemonic language ('have no indigenous accent'), worn Western clothing, and practiced the dominant religion. Thirdly, recovery and revitalisation of the indigenous. Teachers and students have decided to voluntarily claim ancestral knowledge; and the speeches they deliver reveal historical resentment.

Regarding discrimination against the indigenous population exercised by non-indigenous people, Sartorello (2016, p. 723) maintains that the '*coletos, mestizos* or foreigners, several of them sympathisers of the Zapatista movement, who work in non-governmental organisations, civilian associations, human rights centers, universities, and research centers (...) have learned to relate more horizontally.' Referring to the intellectuals and activists who serve as UNICH teachers, Marcelín (2019) explains that while some have learned to develop an intercultural communication with indigenous people, others have adopted subtle ways of exercising violence against them.

Guitart and Bastiani (2010) explain that the curricular recognition of ethnic groups has changed the narratives of the students, and the meanings (stereotypes and negative prejudices) that they had regarding indigenous and persons of mixed race. In other words, the decolonising change in intercultural philosophy of education was established by the UNICH. The valuation of persons of mixed race towards indigenous people and of indigenous people towards persons of mixed race and themselves has improved. Besides, UNICH teachers have appropriated a discourse on critical intercultural education which discusses 'respect' and 'peaceful coexistence' among cultures.

As a direct effect, Marcelín (2019) and Sartorello (2016) reflect on the socio-political processes of exclusion and inclusion experienced by UNICH teachers and students, and conclude that racism resides in the subjectivity of people. It is expressed in very subtle ways that make invisible the colonial and neocolonial power relations that underlie the institution. They also agree that educational processes have failed to consolidate a methodology to guide intercultural dialogue that arises from the juxtaposition of different epistemic rationalities. Nevertheless, the creation of positive anti-discrimination policies and the use of maternal indigenous languages are experienced as instruments of political and ideological fights. UNICH's intercultural educational model is a potential ally in decolonising political struggles. We conclude that the IU must configure a locus of enunciation and educational theorising in order to surpass monoculturalism and head toward a critical and inclusive multiculturalism.

The Ayuuk Intercultural Higher Institute (ISIA)

The second case study is the higher-level intercultural education project in the Ayuuk region in Oaxaca, Mexico. The ISIA arose from the Mixe AC People's Services Organization (SER-MIXE). Since 1982, these *comuneros* self-assigned to the Ayuuk indigenous people (Mixe) have been developing critical and decolonising thinking about intercultural education, and its relationship with the language and culture of the region. In 2004, SER-MIXE and the Sistema Universitario Jesuita (SUJ) [Jesuit University System] signed an agreement for a group of researchers to carry out a regional diagnosis, which was carried out between 2005 and 2006. Based on the results of these studies, the educational model of ISIA was designed and, in 2006, it began its operation in the community of San Juan Jaltepec de Candayoc, where three degrees are offered: Administration and Sustainable Development, Communication for Social Development, and Intercultural Education. Unlike IUs, the ISIA sought to bring together conventional careers and those aimed at intercultural education. Currently, low-income youth from indigenous and peasant communities—Ayuuk, Ikoots, Gnu savi, Diidxazá, Popoluca, Chinanteca, Zoque, Rarámuri, Tzeltal, Nahua, Wixarika, Chontal—and persons of mixed race attend (Salazar, 2018). Some of the advantages of ISIA include welcoming

all applicants and subsidising food for students by offering dining services, facilitating enrollment and re-enrollment fees through payment installments or through contribution/work. These strategies have enabled economic support for students, but the problem of economic barriers has not yet been solved (León, 2015).

Against the colonial order, the ISIA defines education as ‘wanting to learn, awakening, opening up to the new, getting involved in the task and thus appropriating the responsibility of learning to achieve autonomy’ (ISIA, n/d, p. 21). According to the reflections raised by Lebrato (2016, p. 793), transferring community practices ‘to the space of the institution implies giving a critical re-meaning of school and legitimate knowledge, as well as an appreciation of these elements, which are key to indigenous autonomy.’ In effect, ISIA’s intercultural educational model is characterised by the interrelation between teaching, participatory action research and community ties. This interrelation is manifested in the Community Stays Program (PEC), whose purpose is to articulate the knowledge learned in the classroom with the problems of reality. The development area of ISIA has an experimental field in which research processes are carried out. It also includes Agroecological practices that allow for the conservation of natural resources and dialogues among the educational community, peasants, and organisations that favor the rescue of local knowledge. In this way, we conclude that ISIA is a project that integrates elements of community life into everyday actions. Among other examples, they include the practice of *tequio* (a very common custom that consists of complete obligatory work for the members of the community to help the community), university assemblies, organisation in student committees, and the participation of the entire university community in parties and celebrations of the community.

Results: compare and contrast

When discussing the results of the critical analysis of these higher education centers in Mexico, it can be understood that the plurality of forms of knowledge comes from different sociocultural, and historical origins. While endogenous philosophical worldviews are created by local indigenous cultures, westernised science is produced by global hegemonic cultures. In light of the evidence, it is possible to conclude that there is an ontological verticalisation of the status enjoyed by the Eurocentric and subalternised epistemes of Mexican indigenous peoples in the academic world. Intercultural resistance from the south and below demands recognition of collectives subalternised by a society that claims to be democratic but whose practices are based on historical inequalities. In the words of Spivak (1987), it is possible to say that this has generated a legitimate strategic essentialism insofar as it allows the achievement of the social and political objectives of these collectives. But intercultural communication is a prescriptive and normative project that requires working methodologies that favor complex multi-ethical, inter-religious and inter-generational interactions among members of the same group or others. It has also been shown that Western-Eurocentric science and endogenous-indigenous wisdom are complementary and permeable.

In turn, it is also possible to detect three differences regarding the implementation of the intercultural educational project at UNICH and ISIA. Firstly, unlike UNICH, ISIA is less focused on the contents of curricular knowledge and more focused on the media and the social relations that are (re)created. ISIA attaches great importance to experiential learning through indigenous praxis and does not prioritise the approach to knowledge of culture/worldview. ISIA is an intercultural institution, not only Ayuuk, which is also why it has difficulties when trying to teach concrete knowledge. Without this realisation, there is a risk that intercultural inclusion remains in the abstract and intercultural dialogue among different cultures and thoughts are not fully delved into.

Secondly, while a predetermined discourse on interculturality circulates at UNICH, at ISIA there is no ‘homogeneous’ discourse on interculturality. This means that people from diverse socio-economic classes, languages, religions, ethnic identifications, perspectives on indigenous, Western education and knowledge can be part of the critical intercultural education project.

Thirdly, most ISIA internal teachers and students are more interested in using and hybridising knowledge/technologies to achieve their goals, than choosing only one to live. In contrast, urban and non-indigenous volunteer teachers express that there is no indigenous wisdom framework at the university. These differences in their criteria and opinions reveal the deep hierarchy that continues to exist when declaring the Western as universal and the indigenous as local. UNICH teachers and students also replicate this collective colonial imagery and tend to reject their own culture and language, and overestimate the Western.

A very significant similarity between both projects is that, at the beginning, the bachelor's degrees' profile and their field of work were unknown to the population. Although pluralism was recognised in the Constitution between 1994 and 2001, the discourse did not materialise in mechanisms or policies in all areas of public service. Currently, insufficient spaces have been created for these profiles, which are ultimately absolutely necessary (Hernández, 2017).

These results analysed from a critical, decolonising, intercultural and transdisciplinary philosophical thought, show us the complexity inherent in the educational phenomenon that exists at UNICH and ISIA. Therefore, good governance practices of public policies in education should be based on the particular needs of the population since the implementation of a project can have different effects depending on the context in which it is inserted into. On the other hand, it is necessary to restore the previous *status* of endogenous knowledge, wisdom and epistemes, within their communities. In this sense, the subalternised dimensions must initiate an intercultural and intergroup communication that strengthens the processes of identity affirmation that allow confronting the epistemological verticalisation of Western hegemonic knowledge.

Conclusion and recommendations

By conducting a brief exploratory analysis of the historical and political evolution of how the rights of indigenous Mexicans have been recognised and valued, it is possible to better understand the current situation of IUs in Mexico. As it has been described, in the last decades, philosophical, educational and ethnopolitical movements led by indigenous peoples were organised in many states of the federation, such as Oaxaca, Chiapas, Michoacán, Veracruz, and others. As argued by Mendoza (2009), the great diversity of the indigenous population in Mexico explains the heterogeneous evolution that has co-existed when addressing public policies for intercultural education within the Mexican State. This situation of ethnic-philosophical diversity implies that we critically rethink how to preserve, promote, and transmit to future generations their cultural idiosyncrasies, their languages, and their ethnic identity. We must also reflect upon the transdisciplinary pedagogical training of the IUs, and improve the professional profile of teachers in the field of intercultural education.

For these reasons, it can be concluded that good intercultural and decolonising educational practices must produce IUs that serve the rich Mexican plurality. The education of the future must train intercultural, decolonising and transdisciplinary subjects (Dravet et al., 2020). These higher education spaces should focus on training students to act as intercultural mediators in various social fields (Aguado et al., 2010). In turn, the IUs must promote postgraduate research focused on regional studies that address health, rights, language, intangible heritage, artistic manifestations, and spiritual worldviews from transdisciplinary philosophy and intercultural communication as dialogue of cultures. In general, these studies will serve to enhance critical intercultural education in the curricular programs of the Mexican IUs.

In this direction, Collado et al. (2020) postulate that intercultural educational praxis is inherent in the philosophical worldviews of Latin American peoples: theorising intercultural educational practice and practicing decolonising pedagogical theories. Therefore, the management of intercultural and plurinational educational public policies implies adopting a critical and decolonising approach to emancipate and legitimise the dimensions violated by monocultural logics

(Walsh, 2012). In this way, critical interculturality is conceptualised as a counter-hegemonic struggle that breaks with totalising rationality, and with the colonial structure of hierarchical geopolitical power. For this reason, it is essential to rethink the philosophical guidelines of intercultural education that must be consolidated at UNICH and ISIA.

According to the contributions of Navarro (2018), actions from the axis of IU community linkage favor intercultural dialogues between Western and indigenous knowledge. At the same time, collaborative networks among social actors are also established to address the problems of vulnerable populations and improve their quality of life. The teaching of indigenous languages, meanwhile, plays a very important role in building intercultural communication links with the community (Ferri, 2014). From the axis of community engagement, a critical intercultural dialogue can be generated among students and teachers who are part of the UNICH and ISIA. On the one hand, this space allows initiating processes of reflection and sensitisation on the historical and unfair conditions towards indigenous peoples, and the role that these could play in the vindication of their ways of being, living and coexisting in this world. As an effect of this, it would avoid promoting paternalistic and benevolent attitudes in which communities receive 'help from outsiders'. It would also fight against bureaucratic restrictions and the lack of medium and long-term follow-up of students and the communities with which they are linked. On the other hand, it makes it possible to assume that the experience built is an essential contribution to the educational process. Therefore, it should go beyond a practice added to the study programs through integrative projects in order to assume them as a global contribution to the educational process.

With these delineations of an intercultural philosophy of education, it aims to create trails geared toward a horizon of inclusion, in the short and medium-term, of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, and Oaxaca. Critical and decolonising thinking should be inherent in the IU study and research programs in Mexico in order to achieve an authentic and genuine critical intercultural education. The intercultural philosophy to improve the professional profile of transdisciplinary educators requires the integration of scientific knowledge with indigenous wisdom (Eppert et al., 2015; Mateos, 2017). Fostering critical and cross-border thinking will help consolidate indigenous cultures as subjects of law and autonomy. It will also promote the creation of new educational public policies for intercultural inclusion. Those are concrete actions that contribute to citizen emancipation through good educational practices in IUs and go beyond intercultural policies to develop a horizontal and transdisciplinary approach with communities.

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