



Research Article

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Building Critical Interculturality from Decolonial Pedagogy: Experiences in Bilingual Institutions in Ecuador

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Abstract

Introduction: The study explored the evolution of interculturality within the bilingual educational sphere in Ecuador, assessing its impact on decolonial pedagogy in intercultural learning institutions. Objective: The study investigated teachers' experiences and perspectives on interculturality, identifying strategies that foster diversity and cultural preservation. Methods: Using a qualitative and ethnographic approach, data were gathered from two intercultural bilingual institutions located in different regions. Through direct observation, documentary analysis, and interviews, the perspectives and dynamics of educational actors were collected. Findings: Teachers perceive interculturality as a tool for coexistence and mutual respect; however, despite the varied interpretations of the concept, challenges were identified in implementing bilingual intercultural education. The results indicated that the State often marginalized other languages and traditions, confining EIB to Kichwa and enforcing a folklorized and restrictive perspective. Conclusions: Intercultural education in Ecuador necessitates a more in-depth analysis, moving beyond the rigid framework of hegemonic power and encouraging the inclusion of cultural diversity. This transformation demands comprehensive public policies and enhanced intercultural training for educators to strengthen engagement among social actors and foster educational practices that promote equity and participation across all levels of schooling. Conclusions: Limitations of the Study and Future Research: Given that this study focused on two specific institutions, the conclusions and analysis may be somewhat generalized, limiting their applicability to other educational contexts. Furthermore, considering the diverse perspectives on interculturality, it is essential for future research to examine more thoroughly the impact of theoretical frameworks on pedagogical practices.

Keywords: Interculturality, Decolonial Pedagogy, Education, Public Policy, Educational Actors

1. Introduction

The struggle for resistance and the construction of Indigenous identities have been shaped by diverse discursive processes which, while seeking to connect social phenomena with history, have primarily addressed specific issues without deeply exploring how power and knowledge influence individual

identity formation (Fitzmaurice, 2021). This perspective has limited the understanding of Indigenous identity, frequently linking it to historical events without examining the underlying factors that contribute to its evolution (Ortiz & Rentería, 2019). Within this framework, power and knowledge emerge as fundamental components for comprehending these identities and their connection to interculturality, seeking to offer a more comprehensive perspective on their continuous struggle for resistance and adaptation (Jacobs, 2019).

Relations of power and knowledge have constrained the interpretation of Indigenous identity; influenced by hegemonic discourses, historical frameworks have evolved towards alternative forms of knowledge production (Mendes de Menezes, 2024). In this regard, Cepéda (2022) argues that regimes of truth dictate what is considered true or false, thereby neglecting the examination of the mechanisms that govern individual conduct. Interculturality within Indigenous identities has been moulded by constraints that restrict autonomy and self-determination under dominant power structures, diminishing the capacity for independent decision-making and action. This necessitates a reassessment of how these systems influence their lives and contemporary practices (Sand, 2023).

Power is exerted within the educational frameworks of Intercultural Bilingual Education through discourses and interpretations that, instead of recognising the voices of Indigenous peoples, reconfigure them from a hegemonic standpoint (Mendoza-Zuany, 2020). In this context, the enunciative locus sustains the foundations of power, disregarding the pre-existing dynamics within Indigenous movements. This critical perspective acknowledges that power operates through "de-constructive" mechanisms framed as essential, reinforced by epistemological structures that regulate and embed themselves within the interactions between the State, intercultural education, and the Indigenous movement (Quichimbo Saquichagua, 2022).

In this context, disputes within intercultural processes suppress attempts to harmonize ideals divided by political acts, as discursive positions are constructed based on academic dogmas that view power as a dynamic force within society that both constitutes and transforms it simultaneously (Antonelli, 2023).

Thus, interculturality in Latin America has been intrinsically associated with Indigenous communities and Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE), fostering divergent perspectives between marginalisation and integration (Oliveros & Candia, 2022). Rodríguez (2018) argues that since the early years of the Republic, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities were systematically excluded from the educational system due to concerns that acquiring literacy and linguistic proficiency would empower them to assert their rights within the social framework. Subsequently, in the mid-20th century, national administrations sought to formulate policies aimed at the ostensible inclusion of Indigenous communities within political, educational, social, and cultural spheres in collective public domains (Wance, Rifdan, Takdir, & Ferdian, 2023).

This perspective, although it may appear radical, recognises that power materialises through "de-constructive" mechanisms that regulate the interactions between the State, intercultural education, and the Indigenous movement, with reciprocity functioning as a fundamental pillar in delineating the roles of each actor within these policies (Caniguan, 2020). Thus, the tensions and conflicts within Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) and interculturality surpass attempts to reconcile ideals, as discursive stances are grounded in academic notions of power as a continuous force that permeates, reshapes, and structures society (Antonelli, 2023).

Discursive violence arises through symbolic processes that exert a profound influence on society (Carrizo, 2021). The interplay between individual viewpoints and societal forces has concealed this phenomenon beneath a veneer of inclusion and equality. Chumaña (2022) argues that the enforcement of Spanish within Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) exemplifies how the homogenising vision of national governments fosters a prevailing monoculturalism, in which white-mestizo thought has supplanted the ancestral practices and cultural expressions of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

In this context, discursive violence transcends direct coercion, permeating perceptions and symbolic interpretation. Within this representational framework, a complex network of influences is

constructed, where individual standpoints and social microdynamics interact and intertwine, thereby sustaining the continuity of discursive violence (Rodríguez & Crippa, 2023). Hernández-González (2023) observes that inclusion and equality, although seemingly progressive principles, conceal underlying tensions and disparities. Beneath an inclusive narrative, power dynamics and biases that sustain social hierarchies remain entrenched.

Between 1970 and 1980, bolstered by academic engagement, social movements, pivotal events such as the Barbados meeting, and the establishment of organisations like the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the notion of interculturality began to take shape as a fundamental pillar in advancing initiatives within Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) (Aceldo & Quito, 2021). Constitutional reforms in the 1990s positioned interculturality as a core programmatic axis for national administrations, encompassing everything from early childhood education to the ongoing professional development of Indigenous educators within their own communities. In this manner, education became an essential component of Indigenous peoples' social and political struggle (Pauca, 2023).

Intercultural education in certain Latin American nations has evolved over time in response to a series of social and cultural transformations (Leyton, 2019). In 1994, the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN) was established as the first intercultural community university in Latin America (Zapata Webb, 2020). Since then, eleven intercultural universities have been founded in Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador, alongside academic programmes influenced by Indigenous worldviews. Although these initiatives were not originally designed to dismantle the conventional educational model, the majority have been implemented in Ecuadorian institutions, including the private Universidad Politécnica Salesiana and the public Universidad de Cuenca (Espinoza & Ley, 2020).

Interculturalisation processes within Latin American education have not arisen solely from the will of the States but rather as a consequence of social movements and struggles from the margins, amplifying the voices of those historically "defeated" [UNICEF, 2021]. In this respect, doctrinal spaces have broadened paradigmatic perspectives, aiming to interpret the world through a historical lens while projecting it towards the future. In this sense, Tym (2022) argues that interculturality has cultivated an awareness within Indigenous communities of their historical subjugation, compelling them to establish objectives that transcend ethnic definitions, focusing instead on the interpretation and representation of their identity.

Initially, their self-representation did not seek to differentiate itself from white-mestizo thought; rather, it underscored learning processes and practices that recognise the influence of dominant power. However, within the educational sphere, identities were reaffirmed and redefined to adjust historically imposed relationships to accommodate the needs of others (Turra, Lagos, & Valdés, 2018). The development of intercultural education involves the comparison and evaluation of cultures that have been reshaped and reconfigured. This process begins with confrontations that amplify the voices of groups deprived of their identity and ideological frameworks. Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities, and the LGBTQ population constitute collective subjects who disrupt hegemonic structures, exposing differences that challenge dominant hierarchies (Mancinelli, 2021).

Since the 1970s, the notion of interculturality has emerged in multiple forms, enabling an understanding of its influence within the Latin American context. Its interpretation and theorisation vary according to the perspective of the interpreter: the State conceptualises it through institutional frameworks, whereas organisations articulate it through their representations and imaginaries. This diversity has rendered interculturality in education a multifaceted issue, generating interpretative gaps shaped by colonial and elitist conceptions of identity (Alarcón, Fernández, & Leal, 2020).

Morales et al. (2021) define interculturality as intrinsically linked to Indigenous populations and Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE). In Ecuador, Indigenous or community-based educational foundations were established as early as the 1940s. The 1998 Constitution incorporated the notion of interculturality as an acknowledgment of Indigenous identity, grounded in resistance, political self-

determination, and collective mobilisation. Subsequently, in the 2008 Constitution, this concept extended across multiple spheres and societal domains, where historical processes materialised through social and political resistance.

In Ecuador, the notion of interculturality has been embedded in sociopolitical discourse since the 1990s, advocating for bilingual intercultural educational processes from an Indigenous standpoint. For instance, Vélez (2011) observes that the earliest Indigenous education initiatives can be traced back to 1940 with schools in Cayambe, founded under the leadership of Dolores Cacuangó. Furthermore, initiatives such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the Andean Mission, and the Popular Radio Schools were established (Krainer & Guerra, 2016). These programmes, alongside the *Sasiku* Project, have contributed to the consolidation of intercultural education and the empowerment of Indigenous community leadership.

In higher education, programmes were developed to include historically marginalised groups, democratising access to academic spaces previously reserved for white and mestizo populations. Although initially limited in reach, these initiatives enabled international organisations to support and expand such efforts. A notable example is the Bachelor's Degree in Intercultural Bilingual Education, launched in 2002 at the University of Cuenca, which sought to offer Indigenous students culturally relevant academic content. Throughout this historical evolution, interculturality has been embedded in IBE and educational programmes for Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities. As Gómez (2017) observes, these initiatives were grounded in ethnic and culturalist paradigms, incorporating Indigenous communities into educational structures historically designed for elites, while simultaneously reinforcing essentialist and folklorist portrayals (Waldmüller, 2017).

During the 1980s, interculturality evolved beyond an exclusive focus on Indigenous populations, emerging as a political category aimed at shaping a new societal framework. Within this context, education became a pivotal mechanism that not only idealised Indigenous peoples but also redefined the state's approach, positioning Indigenous communities as knowledge producers rather than subordinate subjects (Quichimbo, 2019). Nevertheless, as Mosquera *et al.* (2020) highlight, the intercultural domain progressively became confined to educational discourse, suggesting that higher education for Indigenous peoples was predominantly centred on teacher training, while other fields of knowledge were overlooked. Consequently, the state curtailed professional opportunities for Indigenous individuals beyond pedagogy, thereby disregarding its own constitutional mandate, which acknowledges Ecuador as a Plurinational and Intercultural State.

Since the 2008 Constitution, interculturality has been established as a cross-cutting axis within public policy, replacing the previous concepts of pluriculturalism and multiethnicity. This shift allowed for the creation of laws and regulations, such as the 2010 Higher Education Law, the 2011 Intercultural Education Law, and the 2013 Communication Law, all promoting inclusion and diversity across various domains (Quichimbo, 2019).

In summary, this article seeks to examine the diverse perspectives on interculturality that have been assimilated and embedded among educators in two Ecuadorian academic institutions. This is intrinsically linked to the principles and directives established within the Intercultural Bilingual Education System Model (MOSEIB). This critical analysis is part of a broader research project focused on intercultural educational practices, which are expressed through varied approaches and underpinned by discourses grounded in decolonial pedagogy and critical interculturality.

2. Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach, prioritising the collection of participants' experiences and viewpoints through verbal, audiovisual, and symbolic analysis tools (Hernández y Fernández, 2014). Its primary aim was to examine discourses and practices concerning interculturality from the standpoint of educational actors. With a descriptive scope, the research sought narratives that encapsulated subjective representations of interculturality, positioning collective memory as a cornerstone of the decolonial perspective (Walsh, 2013). Furthermore, the explanatory dimension

facilitated a deeper analysis of the phenomena and specific features of discursive interactions through direct engagement with participants.

The study employed the ethnographic method, which prioritises contextual description and interpretation, as outlined by Restrepo (2016). This approach enabled ongoing interaction between theory and practice, facilitating adaptation to evolving circumstances (Ferrándiz, 2020). Ethnography seeks to depict social phenomena based on the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences, generating knowledge through daily reflexivity. This methodology produces both situated and transferable insights (Restrepo, 2016; Ferrándiz, 2020). The research was conducted in an Intercultural Bilingual Millennium Educational Institution in the northern highlands and an Intercultural Educational Unit in the Amazon region, enabling the observation of cultural and territorial diversity in practices and perspectives on interculturality in Ecuador.

In the ethnographic fieldwork, multiple techniques were utilised, with participant observation serving as the principal method. This was supplemented by documentary and bibliographic analysis to verify and triangulate the collected data. The instruments employed encompassed observation records, interview protocols, and documentary analysis sheets, all of which were validated by national and international experts in higher education.

For participant selection, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was employed, as proposed by Hernández et al. (2014), whereby individuals were selected based on their willingness to collaborate and their accessibility to the research team. Prior to participation, they provided informed consent voluntarily, with anonymity and confidentiality safeguarded through the use of alphanumeric codes in the collected data.

Overall, the research was conducted in four interrelated and non-linear phases. Initially, the theoretical-methodological framework was examined, encompassing the state of the art alongside epistemological and methodological foundations to substantiate the instruments and theoretical corpus. The second phase involved the design and validation of the instruments through the operationalisation of categories and subcategories, supported by expert review. In the third stage, fieldwork was carried out, comprising three weeks of data collection in each IBE institution. Lastly, in the fourth phase, interviews were transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti software to facilitate an in-depth analysis.

Thus, the methodology was essential for understanding the diverse sociocultural dynamics, adopting a broad perspective on educational actors and enabling a contextualised analysis of intercultural practices and discourses. In this regard, the use of tools such as verbal, audiovisual, and symbolic analysis facilitated an in-depth exploration of experiences and representations of interculturality. Building on this, the integration of a decolonial perspective, grounded in collective memory and emerging narratives, broadened the interpretation of the findings within educational communities.

The non-probabilistic convenience sampling presented both advantages and challenges in the construction of knowledge. While it facilitated access to key participants and enabled a deeper understanding of their experiences, its primary limitation lay in the difficulty of generalising the findings. The selection of subjects based on their availability and interest may have influenced the diversity of perspectives represented. Nevertheless, in qualitative research, the focus is placed on the depth of analysis and the richness of the data collected rather than on its statistical representativeness.

Therefore, the flexibility of sampling within Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) allowed for the adaptation of processes to the diverse sociocultural dynamics of each community, capturing the complexities of educational practices across different territories. Moreover, data triangulation through observations, interviews, and documentary analysis minimised methodological limitations, ensuring the rigour of the analysis. Thus, the methodological design not only addressed the epistemological requirements of the research but also contributed to the strengthening of IBE and the understanding of interculturality within the Ecuadorian educational context.

3. Results

The findings outlined below are derived from data gathered by an interdisciplinary team comprising educators, researchers, and students involved in research groups. This study centred on examining the discourses and practices related to interculturality, with particular attention to the perspectives of educational actors. The objective was to (re)conceptualise pedagogical decoloniality and decolonial pedagogy, encouraging critical reflection and investigating strategies to challenge the disciplinary structures perpetuated within educational systems. Figure 1 presents the semantic networks generated in Atlas.ti, facilitating the identification of connections between citations, memos, codes, and notes.

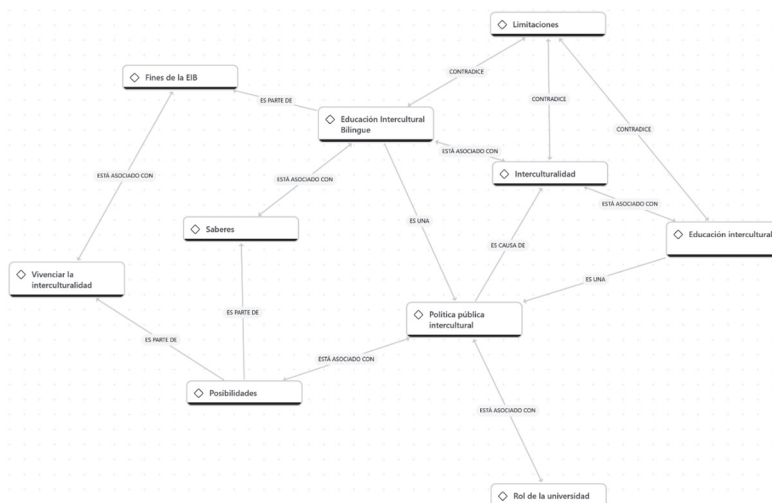


Figure 1. Interculturality and Intercultural Bilingual Education: Relationships and Challenges

For analytical clarity, the findings are organised into three sections. The first explores teachers' understandings of interculturality, intercultural bilingual education, and intercultural education. The second analyses the role of the educational system in institutionalising interculturality through public policy. Lastly, the third examines how interculturality is enacted in educational practice and the constraints faced in everyday implementation.

3.1 *Interculturality, Intercultural Bilingual Education, and Intercultural Education: What Are the Differences?*

Teachers' conceptualisations of interculturality are primarily centred on a descriptive approach that emphasises cultural, identity-related, linguistic, and ethnic expressions. In Ecuador, interculturality is grounded in respect for the cultural diversity of Indigenous and mestizo communities, which comprise 18 peoples and 14 nationalities, each possessing distinct territories, knowledge systems, and traditions (Espinoza, 2020; Ayala, 2017). This reciprocal recognition fosters coexistence among cultures, with participants perceiving interculturality as an exchange of knowledge and a means of fostering harmonious interactions between individuals and social groups (E5 CH, 22 March 2024). Additionally, they associate it with nationality, customs, traditions, and languages (E5 AÑ, 17 mayo 2024).

Participants highlight the relationship between interculturality and the official recognition and use of languages. For some, "interculturality represents the convergence of multiple cultures," with

bilingualism or multilingualism serving as a bridge for communication and cultural exchange among communities (E1 AÑ, 16 May 2024). They assert that interculturality is manifested through the customs, traditions, and linguistic diversity of each group (E2 AÑ and E3 AÑ, 16 May 2024).

Vernimmen (2019), asserts that Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) in Ecuador originates from Indigenous struggles, arising as a response to historical marginalisation and the absence of recognition of native languages. This educational model fosters the use of two languages, striving to safeguard and revitalise the mother tongue as an emblem of identity and cultural resilience: "Intercultural bilingual education seeks to revitalise the mother tongue" (E3 CH, 22 March 2024).

Participants contend that IBE should not be restricted solely to Indigenous communities; rather, it should evolve into an inclusive state policy benefiting the entire population (E4 CH, 22 March 2024). Nevertheless, they perceive that it is presently regarded as exclusive to particular groups, confined to specific subjects and centred on *Kichwa*, thereby neglecting other sectors and languages (Espinoza-Freire & León-González, 2021).

For some, Intercultural Education fosters coexistence and mutual respect among cultures, recognising the value of each one's knowledge: "It is a way of living together respectfully with different cultures" (E3 CH, 22 March 2024). However, among educators, the concepts of Interculturality, Intercultural Bilingual Education, and Intercultural Education are often interpreted in restricted or ambiguous ways (Fleming, 2023; Portera, 2021). Shared perspectives include mutual respect, appreciation of diversity, identity, and language revitalisation, highlighting the challenges of implementing interculturality within the educational framework (Roiha, 2021; García, *et al.*, 2019).

It is not implied that educators possess a misguided understanding of interculturality; rather, as Stuart Hall argues, political contexts shape theoretical frameworks. Paucar (2023) asserts that in Ecuador, interculturality has been intrinsically linked to the Indigenous movement and its struggles for rights, primarily associating it with identity, bilingual education, and language—fundamental demands of the Indigenous movement since the 1990s. Constructing a critical interculturality is imperative. How can this be accomplished? The challenge lies in establishing "pedagogical spaces" where individuals can actively engage in learning, unlearning, and reflection, as Walsh (2013) proposes, to question and transform entrenched social structures, fostering a counter-hegemonic perspective.

This "critical interculturality" transcends imposed divisions, aiming for a holistic understanding in which society converges under diverse principles, as established in the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution.

3.2 Constructing Interculturality through Public Policy: A Collective Challenge

The findings reveal that educators primarily acknowledge certain fundamental elements of public policy, such as the principles of a Pluricultural and Intercultural State enshrined in the 2008 Constitution (Madrid, 2019). Nevertheless, many are unfamiliar with the *Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural* (LOEI), which regulates educational rights and obligations in Ecuador. This gap in awareness became apparent during data collection, as several teachers found it challenging to provide clear responses to questions on the subject (Arcos, Garrido, & Balladares, 2023).

Educators emphasised that "Ecuador is Pluricultural and Multiethnic, with a diversity of cultures within our communities and peoples" (E1 CH, 22 March 2024). Another teacher stated, "The political Constitution, I believe in Article One, recognises Ecuador as an intercultural country" (E4 CH, 22 March 2024). They also observed that since the adoption of the 2008 Constitution, "interculturality has already been highlighted" (E3 CH, 22 March 2024).

The findings highlight the necessity of advancing public policy on interculturality, as insufficient awareness constrains meaningful engagement in shaping a fairer and more inclusive society. It is crucial for educators to comprehend and participate in decision-making processes that enable the practical implementation of interculturality within the educational domain. Ensuring that these policies do not merely function as instruments of the State is of utmost importance. As Walsh

(2013) argues, such measures can serve to legitimise the coexistence of a dominant culture alongside others without fostering authentic integration. Rather than fostering inclusion, they may reinforce cultural distinctions that sustain exclusion.

To tackle educators' limited understanding of interculturality within public policy, we propose connecting intercultural education to a critical interculturality perspective (Tello, 2019). This approach is intricate, as in numerous countries, including Ecuador, interculturality in public policies—particularly in education—frequently adopts a functionalist perspective and an additive approach, thereby restricting its transformative potential. As Vera (2013) observes, the functionalist stance satisfies the expectations of specific groups without embedding interculturality as a foundational social principle. Meanwhile, the additive approach integrates cultural elements into the curriculum without fundamentally modifying its structure or content.

Quichimbo *et al.* (2022) contend that another crucial challenge is to transcend a folklorised perception of interculturality. This necessitates shifting the focus away from superficial elements such as dance or traditional attire and instead fostering mechanisms that dismantle exoticised and ornamental perspectives, which sustain social inequality and racism.

3.3 Interculturality from Experience and Practice: Limitations and Possibilities

Experiences of interculturality centre on revitalising Indigenous knowledge and reinforcing cultural identity (Aceldo & Quito, 2021). One educator highlights that Intercultural Bilingual Education seeks to “value the knowledge and wisdom of our communities and peoples” (E1 CH, 22 March 2024), while others underscore the importance of respect and appreciation for each culture (E4 AÑ, 17 May 2024). The educational community actively engages in cultural practices, such as employing living calendars that integrate each community's festivals and traditions (E3 CH, 22 March 2024), as well as practical activities, including translating key terms into three languages, such as the days of the week and common greetings (E2 CH, 22 March 2024).

Chango-Cañaverl *et al.* (2024) highlight knowledge rooted in specific territories, such as the *wayusa upina* practice (*wayusa* drinking), which encompasses traditional cuisine, dances, and cultural attire, forming an integral part of the community's daily life (E2 AÑ, 16 May 2024). Identity is further reinforced through self-identification, as educators foster a sense of belonging by encouraging students to acknowledge their heritage and nationality (Martínez, 2023). Through this approach, children connect with and deepen their understanding of their origins by researching their family histories and ancestral records (E4 AÑ, 17 May 2024).

Nevertheless, the study highlights constraints such as limited familiarity with community knowledge and inadequate proficiency in Kichwa, which pose challenges to intercultural education: “A teacher must be fluent in both Spanish and Kichwa... that's the limitation” (E5 CH, 22 March 2024). Educators assert that interculturality should not be confined to a single language or culture, cautioning against folklorised perspectives that restrict its scope. Instead, they argue that it should encompass society as a whole, rather than being exclusive to Indigenous communities: “I don't think it's just a sentiment of Indigenous peoples, but of everyone” (E3 CH, 22 March 2024).

Moreover, they contend that the separation between bilingual and intercultural educational systems reinforces exclusion and advocate for a unified system where the mother tongue serves as a complementary element without generating further divisions⁵⁹. Arteño *et al.* (2023) assert that within educational institutions, interculturality is fostered through curricula and activities that encourage cultural diversity and mutual respect, with the objective of reinforcing the use of *Kichwa*. However, substantial obstacles remain, including educators' insufficient contextual knowledge, a shortage of bilingual teachers, limited resources, bureaucratic constraints, and difficulties in implementing intercultural policies at a national level.

Krainer *et al.* (2021) propose that, to tackle these challenges, universities should strengthen intercultural training for prospective educators, encouraging engagement with local knowledge and creating educational resources in *Kichwa*. Additionally, they emphasise the importance of adapting

curricula to reflect the national context.

The findings presented here highlight the necessity of reinforcing and rethinking educational policies that go beyond normative approaches, fostering a more inclusive and critical interculturality. It is acknowledged that current public policies often categorise and define interculturality as a broad principle, yet they lack effective mechanisms for its implementation within educational settings.

It is essential that public and educational policies in Ecuador ensure the preservation and integration of Indigenous knowledge and languages within curricular processes in a structural manner, preventing their reduction to mere folkloric or decorative practices. Therefore, curricular transformation must serve as the foundation for planning that incorporates methodologies rooted in oral traditions, Indigenous worldviews, and community-based pedagogical practices, guaranteeing a contextualised and meaningful learning experience.

The findings also indicate that, from a teaching practice perspective, it is essential to enhance the training and professional development of EIB educators, as many are unaware of existing regulations, including the *Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural* (LOEI), and lack intercultural methodological preparation, which undermines cultural relevance within the classroom. Hence, the significance of developing teacher training programmes that integrate ancestral knowledge with contemporary pedagogical approaches, expanding strategies that acknowledge community perspectives and foster the use of indigenous languages. Furthermore, investment in the production of educational materials in *Kichwa* and other Indigenous languages becomes imperative, as the scarcity of pedagogical resources has hindered the development of both effective and meaningful education.

Finally, the institutionalisation of interculturality within the educational system should not be confined to Indigenous communities but must evolve into a state policy that benefits the entire Ecuadorian population. To achieve this, it is essential to establish spaces for dialogue between the state, Indigenous communities, and educational institutions to design participatory policies that address the sociocultural realities of each region. Likewise, the structure of the educational system must be reconsidered to prevent EIB from being perceived as an exclusive model for certain sectors, instead fostering the genuine integration of the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. In this regard, it is essential for intercultural education not only to serve as a cross-cutting element within the curriculum but also to be reflected in institutional practices, educational administration, and the recognition of ancestral knowledge as a fundamental component of learning.

4. Conclusions

Interculturality exposes both social and educational challenges, where discrimination and exclusion continue to prevail. This is not intended as a direct critique of teachers' efforts in the classroom but rather an analysis of how educational structures perpetuate negative perceptions of interculturality. The "Hispanic" system frequently regards interculturality as confined to the Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) model, disregarding the fact that, according to public policy, it should function as a cross-cutting principle across all social spheres in Ecuador.

The perspectives of stakeholders reveal a tension between the theoretical framework of interculturality and its practical implementation, emphasising the necessity of reassessing its application in real contexts. Initial definitions served to highlight distinctions between communities; however, comprehensive strategies to cultivate a societal awareness that these differences contribute to shaping a more just and equitable state were not fully developed.

Moreover, a rigid interpretation of interculturality within IBE has contributed to the reinforcement of stereotypes. Rather than incorporating the languages of various peoples and nationalities, the emphasis has predominantly been on *Kichwa*, thereby overlooking the wider spectrum of cultural diversity. This limited engagement with traditions is not confined to "Hispanic" white-mestizo educational structures but rather reflects a broader tendency within societal discourse.

It is crucial to reconceptualise interculturality beyond theoretical frameworks and prioritise direct engagement among social actors. Through such interactions, an intercultural practice could develop

that fosters equality and ensures fair participation across the nation's social and political domains.

Given the above, it is essential to emphasise that the study of interculturality in Ecuador requires a broader geographical scope to grasp the variations across the country's different regions, as the concept does not manifest uniformly in all sociocultural practices. This diversity of contexts necessitates research that goes beyond the confines of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) and examines how interculturality can be incorporated into the broader educational curriculum. Such an approach would foster a more inclusive and equitable perspective, preventing its restriction to an aspect solely associated with Indigenous peoples. In this regard, it is essential to analyse how curricula acknowledge (or overlook) the nation's cultural and linguistic diversity and how this representation influences societal perceptions of interculturality across different segments of the population.

On the other hand, teacher training in intercultural approaches remains a challenge due to the lack of professional development and context-specific methodologies, which hinders cultural relevance in the classroom. Moreover, public policies have prioritised *Kichwa* over other Indigenous languages, constraining the development of a truly multilingual education. It is essential to investigate how these policies have influenced the teaching of ancestral languages and to identify strategies that can support their equitable revitalisation.

Beyond the educational sphere, interculturality must be examined in relation to political participation and urban social dynamics. Intercultural education can play a crucial role in shaping community leaders who advocate for inclusion and the representation of Indigenous peoples in decision-making spaces. However, narratives on interculturality in the media and social networks continue to perpetuate discourses that reinforce stereotypes and constrain the recognition of cultural diversity. Therefore, it is essential to examine how these narratives shape the construction of interculturality within the social imagination and to explore communicative strategies that could foster a more just and equitable representation. Similarly, the integration of technologies and transmedia tools in intercultural education offers new opportunities for the transmission of languages and ancestral knowledge, fostering innovative approaches to collaborative learning that transcend the traditional limitations of the educational system. Research in these areas will not only provide a deeper understanding of contemporary challenges but also contribute to the development of effective strategies for strengthening a critical and inclusive interculturality in Ecuador.

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