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EPISTEME & PRAXIS | Revista Científica Multidisciplinaria | 2960-8341

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## EDUCATIONAL

### AND CURRICULAR MODEL IN THE INTERCULTURAL UNIVERSITIES OF MEXICO: THE CASE OF THE DEGREE IN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

#### MODELO EDUCATIVO Y CURRICULAR EN LAS UNIVERSIDADES INTERCULTURALES DE MÉXICO: EL CASO DE LA LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA Y CULTURA

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#### Suggested Citation (APA, Seventh Edition)

Islas-Enciso, A., & Raesfeld, L. (2024). Educational and curricular model in the intercultural universities of Mexico: the case of the Degree in Language and Culture. *Revista Episteme & Praxis*, 2(2), 68-72.

**Fecha de presentación:** enero, 2024

**Fecha de aceptación:** marzo, 2024

**Fecha de publicación:** mayo, 2024

## ABSTRACT

The intercultural university model in Mexico was born as a political response that guaranteed access to higher education for young people who live in predominantly indigenous areas, under the tutelage of a curricular, linguistic and culturally relevant model, removed from Western and hegemonic conceptions. of the urban university. The premise of relevance within intercultural universities is currently widely debated. In this sense, this document aims to analyze how the intercultural educational model and the curricular proposal contribute (or not) to the construction of indigenous student identities and development. of intercultural competencies of students who do not classify themselves as indigenous but who attend these higher education schools, for which the degree in language and culture is taken as a reference.

### Keywords:

Intercultural university, curricular relevance, educational model.

## RESUMEN

El modelo de universidad intercultural en México, nació como una respuesta política que garantizara el acceso a la educación superior de jóvenes que habitan en zonas preponderantemente indígenas, bajo la tutela de un modelo curricular, lingüístico y culturalmente pertinente, apartado de las concepciones occidentales y hegemónicas de la universidad urbana. La premisa de pertinencia dentro de las universidades interculturales se debate ampliamente en la actualidad, en este sentido, este documento se propone analizar como el modelo educativo intercultural y la propuesta curricular tributan (o no) a la construcción de identidades del estudiante indígena y al desarrollo de competencias interculturales de alumnos que no se adscriben como indígenas pero que asisten a estas escuelas de educación superior, para ello se toma como referencia la licenciatura de lengua y cultura.

### Palabras clave:

Universidad intercultural, pertinencia curricular, modelo educativo.

## INTRODUCTION

The political debate triggered by social struggles such as the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas in 1994 and the growing demand for a new post-indigenist relationship between the Mexican nation-state and indigenous peoples opened the conversation about inclusion in the political agenda, to address the demand for educational institutions and the recognition of indigenous autonomy at the local and regional level (Dietz, 2009).

As a result of these struggles, in 2000 “intercultural and bilingual education” was officially recognized as a political priority, despite the fact that at that time, the right to indigenous autonomy was not recognized.

As part of the education policies for the indigenous population, intercultural universities were created in 2003 in Mexico, public institutions of higher education located in various indigenous regions of the country. Many of these universities have been sponsored by non-governmental actors and state governments through a federal program of the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (CGEIB), which is responsible for promoting, coordinating, advising and evaluating that respect for cultural and linguistic diversity is present in educational policies and practices for all types, levels, services and educational modalities (Dietz, Universidades Interculturales en México, 2014).

The UIs are institutions that contribute to the search for greater equity in the distribution of educational development opportunities in Mexico, they are characterized by quality and cultural and linguistic relevance. Among their primary objectives is to offer “culturally relevant academic training to students defined as diverse and differentiated in ethnic, linguistic or cultural terms” (Mateos & Dietz, 2015, p. 13), in addition to opening greater opportunities for academic, professional and research development to rural populations.

According to the official website of the Mexican government, the educational offer is made up of thirty-six bachelor's degrees, six master's degrees and four doctorates, with four work axes: Language and Culture, Disciplinary, Community and Sociocultural and Axiological.

The purpose of this document is to analyze the impact and coherence of the educational model and the curricular structure of the intercultural universities in Mexico, specifically within the bachelor's degree in language and culture, and how, under this relationship, attention is given to cultural and ethnic diversity, from the beginnings of interculturality as a model and curricular structure.

## DEVELOPMENT

For a long time, diversity was seen as a threat, used as an argument for intolerance and discrimination (UNESCO,

2003) without seeing the richness and opportunities it offers for the development of all individuals, an approach that today is promoted from politics, culture, and education, it is worth mentioning that for the purposes of this document, emphasis is placed on the latter field.

In this regard, Besalú (2002) states that *“educating from the other is the new educational paradigm and that openness to the other is a fundamental dimension of every free and healthy person”* (p. 145). However, we know that this position implies several challenges, above all, that of *“praxis”* in its broadest sense, that is, to move from *“what”* to *“how”*; proposals abound, especially taking up the intercultural approach to educate in and for diversity.

The terms pluri, multi and interculturality are forms or levels of relationship and recognition of cultural diversity, culture understood as a dynamic and multidimensional concept that in its most essential elements imply *“a way of being”* (Besalú, 2002, p. 145) or a *“group of features and characteristics of a community”* (UNESCO, 2017) through which meaning is given to their realities; we said that both pluri, multi and intercultural are forms or levels of interaction with the diverse.

Interculturality is a level of relationships, negotiations and complex exchanges, it is a dynamic and permanent process of interaction, communication and learning between cultures under the attributes of respect, equality and legitimacy; through these exchanges, it seeks to develop a new sense of coexistence, which should be conceived as a goal to be achieved (Walsh, 2005).

These conceptual notions are transferred to an educational model, understood as the “concretion, in pedagogical terms, of the educational paradigms that an institution professes and that serves as a reference for all the functions it fulfills, in order to make its educational project a reality” (Tünnermann, 2008, p. 15).

In the case of intercultural universities in Mexico, they take interculturality as the axis of their educational model, based on a series of philosophical principles that propose to modify the ways of approaching and attending to diversity, conceiving education from the culture and immediate context of the students, the intercultural model takes advantage of the differences to complement the constructed knowledge and incorporate new elements that strengthen their identity and their link with the community.

According to Casillas and Santini, (2006) the intercultural model seeks to promote the following principles:

- To recognize ancestral knowledge as a collective expression of identity.
- To transform the vision of hegemonic culture and recognize other ways of constructing knowledge.

- To recognize the diversity of indigenous traditions in order to consolidate their right to build a world according to their needs, which allows, among other things, to build bridges for communication between cultures.
- To promote an intercultural dialogue.

Interculturality as an educational model, seeks to prepare students to live in a society where cultural diversity is recognized as a common wealth, where the compass points to the construction of a society with equal rights and harmonious relations, for this, it will be necessary for nation states to design policies that favor inclusion and citizen participation. (UNESCO, 2003).

Every educational model is materialized in the curriculum, which is, according to Zabalza, (1987) the set of starting assumptions, goals to be achieved and the steps taken to reach them; it is the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes that are considered important to work on at school, in its most specific task is the selection, organization and distribution of contents according to the classroom reality (Diaz-Barriga, 2003).

The curriculum from the complex point of view, allows us to observe that there are different theoretical perspectives of approach, which have responded to social, economic, political, and educational needs within a given context. Thus, scholars of the subject reveal traditionalist theories, of a technical and prescriptive nature (Tyler, 1973), the empico-conceptual line, of a deliberative and practical nature (Johanson, 1997) and the reconceptualist line (Apple, 2016), the latter is where the efforts of intercultural universities are framed in terms of curriculum orientation.

The curriculum from the reconceptualist perspective seeks to transform itself into a critical instrument, capable of creating new meanings about the school reality and has an ideological and cultural orientation that is linked to much more than economic objectives. (Apple, 2016).

The principles of interculturality as an educational approach are implicit in this line of curricular research, both for its emancipatory character and from where it is possible to work with diversity.

The educational offer of intercultural universities in Mexico includes a degree in language and culture, which, among its objectives, includes the training of professionals who are involved in and research sociocultural and linguistic processes that strengthen, revitalize and document the life of indigenous peoples, their language and culture, which in turn, contribute to the empowerment of their identity and their link with the community, through methodologies based on interculturality (Intercultural University of the State of Mexico, 2022).

It arises from the need to create a relevant educational offer, which allows the development of communicative

competencies for native languages, incorporating scientific and ancestral knowledge, allowing the individual to value the diversity of culture. (University of Guadalajara, 2022).

In order to analyze the components of the curriculum of this educational program, the axes of analysis proposed by Coll (1991) will be taken as the following: objectives, content, methodology and evaluation.

When we speak of the objectives as a substantial element of the curriculum, we are referring to what is going to be taught, in this sense, it is possible to say that the language and culture degree program seeks to train professionals who research and document sociocultural and linguistic processes that contribute to the strengthening of their identity and community ties.

The second component of analysis is that of the contents, in this sense, we seek to answer two questions, the first one aimed at when to teach, and the second one that questions the purpose of teaching.

To answer the question of when to teach, we have only the theoretical element, i.e., so far we know that there are 8 semesters and 52 subjects, however, it would be necessary to deepen the information and complement it with findings from observation.

In the case of what it is taught for, we find within the curricular structure that for the degree in language and culture there are four lines of specialization: translation and interpretation in native languages, teaching of native languages, management of cultural projects and linguistics.

The methodology as one of the components of the curriculum, questions us about how to teach, in this regard, it is possible to say that within the intercultural universities there is a transversal axis of work that is the link with the community, product of this effort is that the methodologies used are mainly: problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning, action research, conflict mediation through dialogue and debate. (Intercultural University of the State of Mexico, 2022).

Finally, evaluation as a component of the curriculum leads us to ask ourselves: What, how and when to evaluate? For this element two considerations are identified, one is that some teaching methodologies have their own forms of evaluation, such is the case of problem-based learning or the project method, the second consideration refers to the fact that being a curriculum theoretically based on the reconceptualist line and using flexible methodologies for learning, likewise happens with the evaluation, this finds multiple ways to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, abilities, skills, attitudes and values acquired during the pedagogical effort.

## CONCLUSIONS

Expanding coverage and creating a new educational model that would break with the western model of university was what moved public policy in higher education to create the intercultural university model, where access to education implies, among other things, leaving their places of origin to migrate to the cities where an industrial education has been conceived, urbanized and hegemonically Castilianized, where cultural and linguistic diversity has not taken place, this philosophy justifies that Intercultural Universities are located in rural and not urban areas of the country, with an educational offer that positively impacts the local and regional level, which privileges and maintains a strong link with the needs of the community. (Dietz, 2014).

When speaking of intercultural universities, as institutions designed to meet the educational, linguistic, and cultural needs in predominantly indigenous regions, it does not exclude the population that does not identify itself as such, but seeks to accommodate historically excluded school populations, then interculturality as an educational approach and appreciation for diversity is what justifies its name: Intercultural University. Thus, intercultural universities do not resort to indigenism as an access criterion (Schmelkes, 2011).

Rather than offering conclusions in this paper, the intention is to formulate questions and reflections that guide the construction of an object of study, aimed at analyzing how the educational model and the curricular proposal contribute to the construction of indigenous student identities and the development of intercultural competencies of students who do not ascribe themselves as indigenous but who attend these schools of higher education.

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