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Higher education and indigenous and afro-descendant peoples as a field of study and intervention in Latin America

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Higher education and indigenous and afro-descendant peoples as a field of study and intervention in Latin America

Abstract

Since 2008, there has been a notable increase in studies on processes of inclusion, retention and graduation of indigenous students in higher education in Latin America; a growing interest in research and university extension activities in collaboration with indigenous and Afro-descendant communities; and the establishment of intercultural academic spaces in the region. This article offers a literature review analysis of this field of study and intervention, elaborated in Spanish and Portuguese in the framework of Latin American institutions. This analysis identifies the various voices, analytical perspectives, lines of research, conceptual debates and contributions that enrich the understanding of some types of experiences in this field, often described as 'intercultural', and others usually considered as educational inclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations in the field of Higher Education in Latin America. The literature review reveals that much of this research is the result of collaborative work between diverse actors committed to promoting intercultural perspectives at the higher education level, and reflects the historical struggles sustained by these peoples as the fundamental structuring component of these experiences. It is concluded that the increase in research and interventions makes it plausible to postulate and describe the consolidation of a specific field of study and intervention for Latin America, which can be defined as 'Higher Education, Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples' and that the experiences analysed

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reflect a particular and historical link between university systems and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America.

Key Words: Latin America, Higher Education, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples; Inclusion

Introduction

Since 2008, coinciding with the presentation of the book "Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Higher Education. Experiences in Latin America" by the International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) during the Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES 2008; Mato 2008b), there has been a notable increase in studies on processes of inclusion, retention and graduation of indigenous and Afro-descendant students in higher education in Latin America. In addition, there is a growing interest in research and university extension activities in collaboration with communities of these peoples, as well as in the establishment of intercultural academic spaces in the region. This increase in research and interventions makes it plausible to postulate and describe the consolidation of a specific field of study and intervention for Latin America, which can be defined as 'Higher Education, Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples'.

This article presents an analysis of the academic literature in Spanish and Portuguese in the field of Higher Education institutions in Latin America, covering research produced up to 2023 from various disciplines. The main ones include Anthropology, Sociology, Educational Sciences and Social Work². In addition, they incorporate documents, reports and studies carried out between 2018 and 2024, with the purpose of contextualising the CRES 2018+5 held in Brasilia in March 2024.

The analysis of the literature review reveals that much of this research is the result of sustained collaborative work between diverse actors committed to promoting intercultural perspectives at the higher education level in Latin America. These studies involve diverse actors, such as indigenous elders and intellectuals,

² Although the literature review for this article has focused mainly on studies from the aforementioned disciplines, it is important to note that there have also been analyses of experiences of intercultural collaboration in the field of higher education from disciplines such as engineering, agronomy, environmental sciences and various health disciplines, among others.

anthropologists, educators, social workers, sociologists and indigenous and Afro-descendant university students, many of whom are also involved in the design and implementation of institutional and state programmes and policies. In other words, a wide variety of voices, analytical perspectives, lines of research, conceptual debates and contributions can be identified in these studies, covering diverse types of experiences in the field of Higher Education in Latin America, including those frequently qualified as 'intercultural' and those considered as educational inclusion.

Primarily, the studies analysed reflect the historical struggles sustained by these peoples as the fundamental structuring component of these experiences. These struggles question the monocultural and homogenising character of contemporary nation states and their institutions as a whole, and demand a shift towards an intercultural approach that respects, recognises, values and gives participation to the different worldviews, knowledge, practices, languages, historical experiences and territorialities that make up the socio-political map of the countries that make up Latin America.

Taken together, this research delves into the dynamics and specific challenges faced by indigenous and Afro-descendant students in higher education in relation to their access, retention and graduation; it produces information that allows us to identify and understand the impact of programmes and institutional policies on the academic development of indigenous and Afro-descendant students and also on the development of their communities and territories. They contribute to the production of knowledge and know-how to advance intercultural education in higher education. They also highlight the importance of having the participation and perspectives of indigenous managers, advisors and elders in the implementation of intercultural educational strategies and in the design of policies and programmes aimed at advancing the inter-culturalisation of their academic spaces.

The following section presents and describes the studies and reports analysed, which are mainly grouped in dossiers and compilations, as well as including graduate and postgraduate theses. It provides an overview of the multiplicity of experiences that contribute to the construction of an intercultural higher education system at the regional level. In the following sections we present an analysis of the main theoretical and methodological perspectives and findings present in these articles, theses and reports. Most of them are qualitative studies, in some of them quantitative information is retrieved and/or produced.

As a whole, these studies contribute to enriching knowledge and understanding of the problems and challenges that arise in higher education in relation to indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, providing valuable ideas for improving educational practices and policies. In this way they promote inclusion, respect and

appreciation of cultural diversity in higher education academic spaces. They recognise the importance and resources offered by diverse worldviews, knowledge systems and knowledge to meet the challenges presented by the current historical circumstances in which we find ourselves, such as: food production, the recovery of environments degraded by extractivism; the implementation of health interventions in populations affected by socio-environmental degradation, among many other problems that can be mentioned.

Studies on higher education, Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants in Latin America: context and background

Between 2007 and 2011, the UNESCO-IESALC-sponsored project "Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Higher Education in Latin America" played a leading role in identifying and documenting a wide variety of initiatives designed to address the specific needs of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. The contributions of this project are significant not only for its ability to retrieve a wealth of information in the field of pedagogical innovation, but also for its capacity to analyse these experiences and shed light on how diverse socio-territorial contexts and a multiplicity of actors, both indigenous and non-indigenous, shaped a variety of collaborative programmes, policies and projects. During the development of the project, four books were published (Mato 2008a, 2008b; 2009b; 2010) compiling works by indigenous and Afro-descendant researchers from different Latin American countries. In the introduction to the printed version of the book originally published in digital format in 2010, Mato (2012) analyses the evolution and status of higher education policies for indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in several Latin American countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru. It examines legislative advances since 1980 for the recognition and inclusion of these groups in higher education. It highlights programmes such as scholarships and special quotas in universities. It also highlights the importance of international instruments such as ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, although it recognises a legislative vacuum with regard to Afro-descendants. It is essential to highlight that, in addition to the publications produced during the project's development, previous studies and works describe relevant experiences in higher education for Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America. This background can be traced in the bibliographical references Mato (2012) used, which date back to 1998. Thus, this article offers a broader perspective on the subject and complements the knowledge generated by the 'Proyecto Diversidad Cultural e Interculturalidad en la Educación Superior en

América Latina' (Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Higher Education in Latin America Project).

Another study we have taken as a reference is the compilation led by Souza Lima and Paladino (2012), entitled "Pathways to Higher Education", which addresses the inclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant people at this academic level. This work compiles research conducted between 2002 and 2008 in Peru, Mexico, Brazil and Chile, in the context of the Ford Foundation's 'Pathways to Higher Education' programme. This programme, carried out at the regional level, had as its main objective to support and encourage access to higher education for indigenous and Afro-descendant people. The research compiled in this book analyses the policies at regional, national and local levels that, in collaboration with the Ford Foundation's programme, promoted processes of educational inclusion of these groups in Higher Education Institutions.

In addition to the previously mentioned compilations, an additional set of works that address the subject have been considered, namely the compilations by Gunther Dietz and Martí i Puig (2014), Di Caudo, Llanos Erazo and Ospina (2016). While the former offers reflections that explore the complex relationship between higher education and the empowerment of indigenous communities in Mexico, providing an overview of the challenges and advances made at the Intercultural University of Veracruz and the Ayuuk Intercultural Higher Institute, the latter compiles experiences at the regional level.

The progress of this field of study is also reflected in the colloquiums, workshops and symposia held at various national and regional congresses and scientific meetings, as well as in the construction of inter-institutional networks.

As a continuation of the EISALC Project, the Programme 'Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America' was established in 2012 at the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero³. The Inter-University Network on Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America (ESIAL Network)⁴ was also established, conceived as a space for inter-institutional collaboration. Its main objective is to foster cooperation and facilitate exchange between various higher education institutions (HEIs) and universities, some of which are run by indigenous and intercultural organisations, while others are considered 'conventional'. Specific objectives include strengthening links between HEIs, facilitating exchanges and collaboration between team members from different Latin American countries, producing

³ <https://ciea.untref.edu.ar/programa-educacion-superior-y-pueblos-indigenas-y-afrodescendientes-en-america-latina>

⁴ <https://ciea.untref.edu.ar/red-esial-educacion-superior-y-pueblos-indigenas-y-afrodescendientes-en-america-latina>

studies documenting experiences in the field of Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples, and maintaining a specialised library and video library on the Internet. The creation of the ESIAL Network was made possible thanks to the support of the Secretariat of University Policies of the Argentine Republic. Since then, it has expanded its scope with the participation of other universities in several countries Latin American countries and remains open to the incorporation of new institutions. Currently, 60 universities and other HEIs from 11 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean participate in the programme has been part of the Thematic Networks of the Union of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean (UDUALC) since 2020.

In 2014, the first International Colloquium on Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples was held in Buenos Aires, organised by the ESIAL Programme and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Studies (CIEA) of the UNTREF. Since then, this event has been held annually until the pandemic in 2020, with a total of six colloquia. After the pandemic, the seventh edition was held in 2023 in Mexico, in collaboration with the University Programme for the Study of Cultural Diversity and Interculturality (PUIC) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. This initiative has contributed significantly to fostering the production of academic works at national and regional level. These works were published annually in digital and printed format, enriching knowledge and reflection on the subject (Mato, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018a; 2019; 2020). In 2018, as part of its activities, the UNESCO Chair "generated the Initiative for the Eradication of Racism in Higher Education. This initiative arises in collaboration with universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Latin America with the purpose of combating all forms of racial discrimination, with an emphasis on those affecting indigenous and Afro-descendant people and communities. This initiative carried out a total of three campaigns between 2019 and 2022, which generated spaces for reflection in various academic environments and allowed for the production of valuable records of experiences and learning⁵.

Another event that can be mentioned is the working group entitled "Indigenous people and Higher Education: policies, experiences and collaborative production of knowledge" that took place at the XI Meeting of Anthropology of Mercosur in 2015, co-organised by teams from Argentina and Brazil working on the subject. As a result of this meeting, two publications were produced that compile numerous works with ethnographic approaches on experiences developed in different Latin American countries. One of these publications is the Dossier

⁵ <https://unesco.untref.edu.ar/campanas>

presented in the Digital Journal Tramas/Maepova of CISEN (Centro de Investigaciones Sociales y Educativas del Norte Argentino) of the National University of Salta (UNSa). The other publication is by the Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones en Educación (RIIE) of the Facultad de Humanidades of the Universidad Nacional del Noreste (UNNE).

The impulse and reflection generated in these events and studies have been coherent with the proposals that emerged from the II Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES) held in 2008 in Cartagena de Indias. This conference can be considered a milestone, as it highlighted in its guidelines for action the importance of transforming educational institutions so that they reflect and respect the cultural diversity that characterises Latin American countries. The pluricultural character of the region is recognised and valued, and it is pointed out that the challenge goes beyond the mere inclusion of indigenous people, Afro-descendants and other culturally differentiated groups in existing institutions. It highlights the need to modify educational structures to accommodate this diversity, incorporating the dialogue of knowledge and recognising the variety of values and learning methods in educational policies, focusing innovation on this adaptation. The challenge, the conference report states, is to interculturalise higher education.

The inclusion of the topic Higher Education, Cultural Diversity and Interculturality as one of the main thematic axes in the III Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES 2018) represented a significant advance with respect to the previous conference (CRES 2008). This incorporation deepened the need to transform educational institutions to make them more relevant to cultural diversity. Furthermore, the preparatory process of the event allowed for a wide dissemination and collection of suggestions, which contributed to making visible the experiences developed in Latin America in this field during the last two decades. CRES 2018 issued a final declaration that included several recommendations aimed at eradicating racism and interculturalisation in Higher Education. These recommendations include: guaranteeing the educational rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, as well as other historically discriminated groups; incorporating their worldviews, languages, values and knowledge systems, as well as recognising their own higher education institutions. This declaration marks a milestone in the history of higher education, posing a significant challenge to put these recommendations into practice (Mato, 2021). The report produced by the team in charge of axis 2 "Higher Education, Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Latin America" for CRES 2018+5, held in March 2024 in Brasilia, presents priorities and recommendations for the next five years. These proposals are based on a wide range of sources, including the presentations of the participants in the session dedicated to the thematic axis during the preparatory meeting towards CRES+5, as well as the virtual consultation meetings

coordinated by the team. In addition, responses from specialists, documents and declarations from various organisations and institutions related to higher education and cultural diversity have been taken into account. This diversity of sources has allowed for a comprehensive and holistic analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing the region in this field, fostering an inclusive and participatory approach in the formulation of future policies and strategies.

In 2021, the UDUAL journal *Universidades* published the dossier "Racism and Higher Education" dedicated to examining the ways in which, at regional level, racism is present in higher education and in what ways it contributes to its reproduction and naturalisation. In the same year (2021), the journal *Integración y Conocimiento* publishes the Dossier entitled "Towards the eradication of racism in higher education. In 2023, also focusing on racism, the compilation work by Czarny, Navia, Velazco and Salinas entitled *Racism and Indo-Afro-Latin American higher education* was published. This collection of works reflects the experiences and trajectories of researchers, teachers and students (Czarny et. al. 2023).

This line of research on the visibilisation of racism in higher education can be considered in part as a derivation of the research on the experiences of indigenous and Afro-descendant students in higher education based on the study of educational trajectories and professional experiences.

Analytical contributions, theoretical and methodological perspectives present in studies on higher education, indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples

Within these studies, we find a group that is characterised by its ethnographic approach to intercultural processes in Latin American higher education and focuses on the indigenous and Afro-descendant population; They analyse particular cases, exploring ethnic, identity, linguistic, age and gender dimensions through the theoretical and methodological frameworks provided by contemporary anthropology (Dietz and Mateos Cortes, 2009; Czarny, 2010; Paladino, 2011; Nuñez, 2013; Di Caudo, 2015; Ossola, 2015; Mancinelli, 2019). These studies take up the contributions made from the field of Anthropology and Sociology of Education, based on previous research focused on educational equity programmes, especially in the context of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE). In this sense, they build on the work of researchers such as (Novaro, 2008; Dietz, 2002; Rockwell, 1996; Hecht, 2013; among others).

When we refer to contemporary ethnography, we are referring to that which integrates the historical dimension in its analysis from the perspective of political economy, thus recognising that the problems investigated are the result of complex processes of socio-historical configurations (Balazote et al., 2006). The emphasis on the historical dimension has been strategic in transcending ethnocentric categories (Rockwell, 2009) and confronting essentialist and culturalist perspectives on ethnic groups - indigenous and Afro-descendant - and, allowing reflection on processes of stabilisation, processes of change and processes of production, making it possible to understand mechanisms of functioning and transformation (Comas d'Angemir, 2001:29). It is necessary to add that the idea of culture within this approach does not have an explanatory character and results from the process and dynamics of social formation. That is to say that, within these productions, it is not culture that is at the centre of the analysis, but the processes of configuration - transformation, appropriation, production, reproduction - ethnic, identity, age, gender and sociolinguistic processes that are expressed in the experiences analysed. This analytical approach is also reflected in studies from Sociology (Ocoro Loango, 2021; Euclides and da Silva, 2016) and Educational Sciences (Granada, 2020; Guaymas, 2016).

In the aforementioned works, the ethnic dimension in higher education academic spaces is understood in relational terms, as the result of a complex interaction of asymmetrical inter-ethnic relations and power (Bari, 2002; Díaz Polanco, 2007; Regalsky, 2003). In this way, "ethnic identity" is approached, in a processual way, from a historical approach that recovers unequal and asymmetrical social relations, involving inter- and intra-ethnic dynamics (Ossola, 2015:25, Ocoró Loango, 2018). This relationship between "ethnic identity" and social, economic and cultural inequality leads to a constant debate in the academic field about "the limits of the ethnic variable and other variables of subalternity, such as social class" (Ossola, 2016:25).

These studies also describe the interactions and tensions between indigenous and Afro-descendant students and non-indigenous students, as well as between indigenous and Afro-descendant teachers and non-indigenous teachers, where stereotypes and prejudices are expressed that affect coexistence and academic exchange. They also examine policies and practices that promote equity and recognition of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. As a result, this research has been able to identify and understand how a set of stereotypes give rise to mechanisms of discrimination in higher education settings, either through positive or negative forms, and how they affect the experiences and opportunities of indigenous students and professionals.

Ossola (2016) describes how teachers at the National University of Salta (Argentina) project different expectations for the academic and professional trajectories of indigenous and non-indigenous students. In the interviews these

teachers express the need for indigenous students to return to their communities as human resources to contribute to local development. In other words, they do not consider the possibility that indigenous students can or wish to develop their professional careers outside this mandate, outside the community and, for example, migrate to other cities or countries in search of new experiences or in search of remittances that these professionals could also provide as support to their communities and/or families. They also expressed concern about how the university experience can negatively impact and alienate indigenous students from their cultural values and connection to nature. This concern reflects an essentialist view that limits the perception of indigenouness to rural settings, and a close relationship of harmony with nature.

In interviews with teachers from the University of Mar del Plata (Argentina), in charge of a course with Wichí students from the province of Salta, concerns are expressed about the change in the "environmental setting" that affects Wichí students. They point out that the city of Mar del Plata is a cold and humid region for "the Wichí" who are used to warm and dry temperatures. However, the concern stems from the permanent health problems that some of these students have. These health problems stem from endemic diseases related to living conditions, which are the result of economic inequality and the advance of the agricultural frontier that took off at the end of the 1990s (food insecurity, Chagas disease due to precarious housing, etc.). As in the case of Ossola, we see that the representation of the indigenous is anchored in the idea of beings that belong autochthonously to certain "natural" spaces, while the processes of inequality and territorial, political and economic vulnerability are ignored (Mancinelli, 2016).

Euclides and Da Silva (2016), recover narratives of Afro-descendant female professors in Brazilian universities. These narratives show professional trajectories marked by challenges, ruptures and learning. Although they occupy professional positions, they continue to experience racism and sexism in their daily lives in the academy, highlighting the importance of creating spaces where these experiences can be shared and discussed. Studies by Ocoró Loango and Da Silva (2018), Ocoró Loango (2019) address the issue of racism faced by indigenous and Afro-descendant students in higher education in Colombia, with special emphasis on the analysis of policies and affirmative actions.

In this way, indigenous and Afro-descendant students face particular challenges in their interaction with teachers, managers and non-teaching staff, which are often marked by the reproduction of these stereotypes, as well as by the lack of recognition and appreciation of their knowledge, languages and worldviews. Thus, in the works of Ossola (2016), Mancinelli (2016) and Ocoró Loango, the voices and reflections of indigenous and Afro-descendant students are recovered

in response to the teachers' questions, highlighting the students' experiences and the way in which they confront these questions in the classroom. These ethnographic studies highlight the teachers' lack of training resources to establish a pedagogical subject capable of giving rise to and bringing into dialogue the students' knowledge and experiences.

These studies, which adopt an ethnographic and historical approach, also offer an overview of the diversity and heterogeneity of the experiences of inclusion, retention and graduation that take place in different university spaces and higher education institutes in Latin America. They allow us to observe how this diversity is configured in relation to the historical trajectories of the different higher education institutions, as well as the diversity of educational policies at regional, national, provincial or state level (Ossola, 2016, Mato; 2008a). Also, within these studies, the complex political, economic, social and cultural scenarios in which these programmes and policies seek to intervene are analysed. In view of this heterogeneity, contemporary ethnography has become a valuable theoretical and methodological tool for researching this issue. Its value lies in its ability to document everyday aspects of human experience occurring in local socio-historical contexts and to make connections with processes of change at broader scales (Rockwell, 2009), such as national, regional or global. In this way, it seeks to understand the particular historical structures that influence these experiences.

In research focused on "indigenous youth", ethnographies highlight the capacity for agency and cultural production of different age groups, as well as their social relationship with other groups in Higher Education Institutions. These studies emphasise the life and educational projects of indigenous and Afro-descendant youth, recognising that age should not be understood as a static variable, but as a dynamic and interrelated construction that emerges from specific social and historical configurations (Ossola, 2016:25, Czarny, 2016).

Czarny (2016) introduces relevant theoretical and methodological aspects that opened up lines of enquiry. The author questions the category of "indigenous university youth" used in many of these studies. She points out that, as a category, it tends to homogenise a process whose experiences are expressed in a markedly heterogeneous manner. Migration studies carried out since the 1990s, the author points out, have made it possible to produce more specific research on indigenous schooling in migratory contexts. Although schooling always has an impact on the identity trajectory, the latter is not reformulated in the same way, since, within these experiences, ethnic, identity, age and university student status variables are intertwined in a complex way, adding to the different dynamics of migration (Czarny, 2016: 139).

Other relevant aspects provided by these studies on migration are related to the importance of the fabric of social networks. These social networks have proven to

be one of the main strategies used to achieve minimum conditions for entry and permanence in higher education (Fernández, 2017; Mancinelli, 2016; Olvera, 2017; Di Caudo, 2016; Seizer da Silva and Nacsimierto, 2017). These networks make it possible to address the migratory context, overcoming the difficulties related to the geographical distances these institutions are located in relation to their communities. In addition, they facilitate access to information and contacts to process applications for scholarships and other social assistance (Mancinelli, 2016). In line with this approach, Ossola (2016) proposes the concept of "mediated entry" to explain the role of social networks as the mechanism that facilitates indigenous students' access to higher education. Importantly, this research also reveals that, in many cases, these mediations include university extension and research teams that closely accompany improvement processes in indigenous communities.

The study of training trajectories, according to Bourdieu, involves the recognition of the positionings that a person adopts over time and space during their professional training process. These positionings are configured, negotiated and transformed through social interactions in communities of practice, where members share a disciplinary communicative repertoire and social norms. The construction of professional identity is understood through the narratives and discourses of social actors, which reveal their interests, experiences, meanings and intentions that shape their professional identity and practice.

Life trajectories are based on the biographical method. It is used to explore people's lives and has been applied in historical and sociological studies. This approach distinguishes between life story and life history. The life story refers to a person's account of his or her own lived experience, while the life history involves a broader analysis that includes other documents related to the person being interviewed. The study of trajectories focuses on identifying the specific transitions that have occurred in an individual's life in relation to the research problem in question. It focuses on the changes and displacements that occur when a person moves from one sphere of socialisation to another, and allows for understanding different types of displacements, such as geographical, professional, scholastic and political (Huchim Aguilar and Reyes Chávez, 2015).

The analysis of trajectories provides a deeper understanding of an individual's life and its relationship to various contexts and situations. This research has been fundamental in recovering the reflections of indigenous students themselves on their process of adaptation to university spaces. Among the most outstanding difficulties identified by them are: adapting to the university school culture, following the rhythms and level of the classes and reflections in relation to the "knowledge not acquired" in their school trajectories and linguistic aspects linked

to the competence of Spanish as a second language. These reflections provide significant insights into the challenges faced by indigenous students and how higher education can respond to their needs in a more inclusive and equitable way. Taken together, these studies contribute to recovering "the deep and ambivalent meanings that the university experience represents in the life and schooling trajectories of indigenous youth" (Paladino and Ossola, 2016: 47).

The aforementioned studies agree that in the last decade there has been a significant process of visibilisation of "indigenous students" in the university system at the regional level. This visibilisation of indigenous students can be understood in relation to a set of processes that have gained momentum in the last decades of the last century and that have led to an expansion of educational coverage for the indigenous population. Firstly, mention should be made of the struggles that indigenous peoples have been developing at the regional level, in which demands for more and better education are central (Mancinelli, 2021). Next, we must consider the extension of primary and secondary education to rural areas, areas that the first stage of development of the Argentine education system, until the middle of the last century, did not manage to reach. Finally, this process has also been boosted by the massification and expansion of the education system. *Educación Superior desde la década de los años 70 hasta la actualidad* (Ossola, 2015; Paladino, 2011; Di Caudo, 2015; Czarny, 2010).

Some historiographical studies address the relationship between processes of dispossession and territorial disputes and the historical shaping of the educational demands established by these Latin American peoples. Quispe (2015; 2016) offers an account that connects us with the resistance and struggle of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia in the field of education, which was taken up as a battle space as early as the mid-19th century in the context of the formation of Latin American nation states and in relation to the advance over indigenous territories that this process implied (Mancinelli, 2017). The author recovers experiences that these peoples have developed in the field of education with the clear purpose of confronting the conditions of economic, political and cultural inequality that were configured with the definition of the Bolivian national state at the beginning of the 20th century.

Furthermore, she explains the shaping of a process that from a distance can and tends to be perceived as paradoxical: if, on the one hand, formal education has historically been represented and understood as a space of acculturation and loss of ancestral knowledge, languages and their transmission mechanisms, the present of the indigenous struggles understands it as a space of battle for the recovery of mechanisms for the transmission of this knowledge. In this way, the author manages to show how, in the Bolivian context, higher education is linked to the possibility, the need and the right to develop their own institutions that allow them to advance with the autonomy and self-determination of the peoples, two concepts

that strongly mark the work carried out by indigenous actors in the field (Mancinelli, 2016). Similarly, Palechor Arévalo (2016), as an indigenous actor, reflects on "ancestral knowledge", understanding it in relation to the historical resistance of the indigenous peoples of Latin America to the processes of conquest, domination, territorial usurpation and genocide. These approaches allow us to understand how this "ancestral knowledge", which is conceived as immersed in epistemological structures, "must be recovered and situated as the cultural heritage of these peoples", where it is hoped that it will operate concretely in the process of training indigenous professionals in order to advance the development of their "territorialities", the recovery of their "autonomies" and "good living" based on the conditions imposed by the present.

To summarise, historical ethnographic research has provided important contributions and findings in relation to various issues. One of the most important aspects is the experience of discrimination and racism faced by indigenous students in their transit through higher education and how it affects their formative and professional trajectories.

Numerous studies (Novaro, 2006; Mato 2008; Paladino, 2009; Ossola, 2014; Núñez, 2018; Tuaza Castro, 2021; Czarny et al., 2023) describe how racism and discrimination particularly affect these populations and how this problem is intertwined with other structural problems, such as poverty and social inequality. These studies show that racial and identity stigmatisation - which affects people from indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, communities and collectives in various social and institutional spaces - profoundly affects the educational and academic trajectories and employment opportunities of indigenous and Afro-descendant workers, students and professionals. In addition, it has been identified that economic inequality conditions access to housing close to academic institutions, as well as the availability of basic resources such as food, travel expenses, clothing, teaching materials, and access to technologies such as telephones, computers and the internet, and the strategies generated by indigenous students and families to cope with these limitations. At the socio-affective level, in addition to experiences of racism and discrimination, situations related to migration and the feeling of estrangement experienced by indigenous youth and adults have been observed, especially those who move through their life and educational trajectories in communities located in rural and peri-urban areas. This research has contributed to making these problems visible and raising awareness of the importance of addressing them in a comprehensive manner. That is to say, using a historical ethnographic approach to articulate various dimensions of analysis - age, identity, gender and class.

In addition, this approach motivates us to investigate the historical and spatial structures that determine these perspectives and to engage in a dialogue with the different historiographical currents present in various studies that address educational issues in the indigenous population.

Studies on intercultural programmes and policies in higher education

In this section, we refer concisely to a set of studies that focus on the analysis of institutional programmes and policies - provincial and national - that seek to promote the inclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant young people and adults in higher education. Numerous university projects and/or policies arise in response to demands channelled through university extension experiences, established in collaboration with indigenous and Afro-descendant communities or social groups.

These initiatives, in which university extension actors, communities and indigenous and Afro-descendant social groups play a fundamental role, highlight the lack of educational policies at the national level that guarantee effective conditions for entry, retention and graduation from higher education, as well as education with an intercultural approach at this academic level for young people and adults belonging to these peoples. Collaboration between university actors and indigenous communities has been key to identifying the specific needs and challenges faced by these groups in their access and educational trajectory. Furthermore, it has been fundamental to promote policies and programmes that address the demands related not only to access to education, but also to the field of knowledge production and technologies that accompany the specific processes of these populations. This includes, for example, addressing the environmental effects derived from extractivist economic policies that may affect indigenous communities and their environment.

The main purpose of these studies is to analyse the concreteness and scope of the objectives set out in the design and development of policies and programmes focused on the access, permanence and graduation of indigenous students. They also seek to evaluate the experiences of collaborative work with indigenous communities and to make the necessary adjustments to the objectives in order to improve their effectiveness and relevance. It is important to highlight how these studies recognise and value the participation of diverse actors and perspectives, such as indigenous and Afro-descendant elders and intellectuals, anthropologists, educators, social workers, sociologists and university students, who contribute in different ways to the design and development of the programmes. The research highlights the unequal relationships in the processes of recognition and valuation of scientific and technological production.

The analysis of educational programmes and policies that have contributed and continue to contribute to the professionalisation of indigenous and Afro-descendant people in Latin America shows that this process has been consolidated in two significant moments. The first moment took place at the beginning of the 1970s, when the training of indigenous and Afro-descendant teachers began and the first intercultural teacher training colleges were created in Mexico and Brazil. These initiatives were later extended to other Latin American countries, marking a milestone in the process of educational inclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant people in higher education at the regional level. The second moment, from the 1990s onwards, saw a more concrete stage of inclusion of students from these populations in the university system, especially in careers related to areas of importance for the development of their communities (Ossola, 2016:30).

Mato (2008b, 2015a) and Ossola (2016) have systematised and analysed trends and characteristics observed in different types of institutions at the regional level in Latin America. They have shown that the programmes and policies implemented focus mainly on addressing economic aspects through scholarships, tutoring for academic support, and the creation of spaces for reflection and dialogue between intercultural knowledge.

Mato (2008b, 2015a) identifies five trends that are manifested at the institutional level: 1) programmes for the educational inclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant people in conventional universities through quotas, scholarships and academic and psychosocial support; 2) programmes that grant degrees and certifications by conventional universities and institutes of higher education; 3) projects for teaching, research and linkages between institutions 4) co-executions between higher education institutions and indigenous and afro-descendant organisations; 5) creation of universities and other "own" (indigenous) and intercultural institutions.

For her part, Ossola (2016) points out that the higher education offer for indigenous people is made up of three types: initiatives for teacher training, programmes arising from international cooperation and tutorial support measures, and scholarships for the incorporation of students. This author takes up the scheme proposed by Dietz and Mateos Cortes (2011) to classify experiences, identifying three trends: 1) indigenous universities that are located in or near communities; 2) intercultural universities that do not restrict their enrolment to indigenous people; and 3) conventional universities that implement policies and initiatives with an ethnic focus (cited in Ossola, 2016: 61). Overall, however, these trends show that interventions are mainly focused on addressing entry deficiencies and improving school performance, with financial and pedagogical support as areas of focus (Ossola, 2016).

It is important to highlight that studies on the various programmes and policies show the constant back-and-forth between "cultural diversity" and "socio-economic inequality". In this sense, the debates that have taken place, especially in conventional educational spheres, focus on the criteria for classifying the "cultural other" for the allocation of economic scholarships, as well as on specific actions aimed at the pedagogical accompaniment of indigenous youth. These actions include tutoring programmes, spaces for reflection and intercultural dialogue, personalised academic support and other strategies designed to address the particular educational needs of indigenous students and foster their academic success in the university system. These actions seek to address inequalities in access to adequate basic training that will allow them to enter and advance in the university system.

In the regional context, neoliberal policies pose challenges to higher education and to the formulation of education policies targeting indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. The significant expansion of higher education, driven by various factors, such as the demand for labour transformation in a constantly evolving labour market. On the other hand, there are migration processes as a result of the expansion of extractivist economies, affecting diverse populations, both urban and rural, and crossing national borders. Didou Aupetit and Chiroleau (2021) stress that intercultural education policies have failed to reverse structural inequalities and have sometimes led to new mechanisms of discrimination, as a result of their targeted and compensatory nature.

One aspect to consider in the scenarios that give rise to intercultural policies in education at all levels of education is the influence of compensatory and targeting policies, in relation to state decentralisation of education systems in Latin America, especially at the initial and primary levels. This trend was consolidated between the 1970s and 1990s also in the context of neoliberal policies (Serrudo, 2006; Hirsch, 2010; Hecht, 2011; Corbetta, 2016). These studies show how these policies, which focus on the indigenous and Afro-descendant population, are caught up in welfarist logics that influence projects and concepts of interculturality. They also question the orientation of intercultural public policies, as they concentrate mainly on initial and primary education levels (Novaro, 2006; Rezaval, 2008; Paladino, 2009; Hecht, 2011), with a constant emphasis on the issue of "literacy".

These policies leave educational opportunities for young people and adults at the higher education level unaddressed. The orientation of intercultural education policies towards the initial levels, their limitation to the problems of literacy, rurality and their focus on the "indigenous population" with the expectation of "compensating for deficiencies" raise questions about the current and past goals of the state in relation to these populations.

In examining the diversity of policies and programmes, one can also appreciate the diversity of approaches that are being shaped around interculturality and/or multiculturalism in higher education. Part of this diversity can be understood by considering the trajectories followed by education systems at regional, national, provincial levels, as well as the autonomous status of university systems, and the pedagogical traditions rooted in university institutions, which were influenced by the historical context in which they were established (Ossola, 2016: 37). In this way, we can observe that the configuration of "intercultural" programmes and policies in higher education attempts to develop in very diverse conditions, while seeking to address issues related to different socio-territorial spaces.

Hooker Blandford (2015) addresses one of the most complex aspects related to interculturality at all educational levels: the evaluation of the quality and relevance of training proposals. This work provides an interesting systematisation of the main legal instruments that enable the emergence of intercultural university institutions in different Latin American countries and guide quality assessments. In examining these normative frameworks, it is possible to appreciate both the progress made in this area and the inconsistencies that often arise in evaluation processes. Hooker Blandford refers specifically to the evaluation carried out in one of the intercultural universities that form part of RUIICAY (University Network of Intercultural Institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean): the Amawtay Wasi in Ecuador, which was finally closed under the presidency of Rafael Correa because of the results obtained in that study⁶. This paper also presents the evaluation experience carried out by the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN), where evaluation was approached from a reflexive perspective.

In fact, this approach generated an intense and committed debate within URACCAN on how to understand and define "educational quality" and "relevance" in these educational projects. The Hooker Blandford study problematises the concept of educational quality in a scenario where intercultural experiences become a cultural battlefield. In this context, policy projects must face profound debates and reflections, as the concept of educational quality is rooted in educational paradigms that see it as a consumer good or a market product. This reflects the influence of neoliberal policies in the field of education.

Santamaría (2015) denounces that the contexts of educational reforms that recognise the rights to diversity often conceal a process of commodification of education, treating it simply as a service. This approach highlights the importance of critically questioning and analysing education policies that may promote

⁶ The Amawtay Wasi University has been opened again in 2018 and is now functioning.

commodification and their impact on the quality and relevance of intercultural education. Hooker-Blandford's work and Santamaria's reflections highlight the need to examine dominant educational paradigms and neoliberal policies in relation to educational quality in intercultural contexts. These studies invite us to reflect on how educational approaches can be influenced by market logics and how this can affect the implementation of inclusive and relevant policies in education.

Final considerations

The presence of indigenous and Afro-descendant people in higher education in Latin America should not be seen as a completely new phenomenon. On the contrary, this "presence" and the process of "visibilisation" should primarily be understood in terms of how indigenous organisations and students are currently forging their presence in these academic environments and how educational institutions address this presence (Ossola, 2015). Ethnographic studies analyse how indigenous and Afro-descendant students "inhabit" higher education institutions and how they construct their daily lives in these spaces through complex dynamics of "cultural appropriation". Within these studies, the question of identity has been one of the main variables of analysis, making it possible to observe how the university experience influences the reconfiguration of ethnic identity (Czarny, 2010, 2016) and how it impacts on communities of origin (Ossola, 2015).

Institutional programmes and policies, both at provincial and national level, that seek to promote the inclusion of indigenous youth and adults in higher education have emerged in response to demands channelled through university outreach and research experiences, working closely with indigenous communities or social groups. The research highlights the lack of centralised educational policies at state level that guarantee effective conditions for the access, permanence and graduation of indigenous youth and adults in higher education, as well as the need for education with an intercultural approach at this academic level.

The quantitative studies carried out to date are still relatively scarce and present important limitations in relation to the conceptual and methodological criteria for defining the indigenous and Afro-descendant population and in relation to the information systems used. They mainly show the need to adjust instruments and methodologies to construct indigenous population indicators (Schkolnik and Del Popolo, 2005; Ossola, 2016). Maidana et al. (2007) point out that statistical studies express important limitations in relation to the ethnic variable. Firstly, because an individual's recognition of belonging to a particular people can vary throughout his or her career, concealing or making his or her identification visible depending on the current situation and the concomitant needs and interests of all kinds. On

the other hand, the indigenous populations are approached in a homogenous manner, and do not allow us to see variations in rates that are expressed at the territorial and intra-ethnic levels, making the results obtained opaque for the purposes of this research.

Statistics at regional, national, provincial, state or departmental level highlight marked disparities in the field of higher education when comparing entry and graduation rates between the indigenous population and the general population. These highly relevant statistical analyses have been developed mainly by agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO. On the basis of these data, ethnic-based initiatives to improve outcomes have emerged, supported by more precise indices and indicators of socio-educational inequality derived from these studies.

This involvement between Latin American university systems and Indigenous Peoples reflects a particular and historical link. On the one hand, it represents the struggle that indigenous peoples have sustained in pursuit of their rights as peoples, and their efforts to preserve their cultures and contribute to the well-being of their communities deeply affected by extractivist economies. On the other hand, this link is also driven by actors who seek not only to address the demands of indigenous peoples, but also to advance the production of knowledge to address socio-environmental and epidemiological issues that affect the population as a whole. This highlights the importance of promoting inclusive and intercultural education in the region, in line with the objectives of sustainable development and the principles of equal opportunities in education.

Finally, during the Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES 2018+5), it is worth mentioning the relevance of the CRES 2018+5 to address the issue of racism in higher education and the urgent need to move towards an intercultural higher education system.

Mato (2018) points out that in order to take these recommendations forward, specific research is needed to identify the various forms of racism that affect Higher Education, which are often referred to generically by the term "structural racism" (Almeida, 2019; ECLAC and IFCLAC, 2020). It argues that, although the concept of "structural racism" makes it possible to emphasise the historical density of this ideology and how it affects the very foundations of our societies, it is problematic to make visible the multiple concrete ways in which racism affects Higher Education. To overcome this limitation, specific studies on the incidence of structural (e.g. historically accumulated economic disadvantages), systemic (e.g. the norms, policies and practices of each Higher Education system), and institutional (norms, policies and practices of each HEI) factors are needed (Mato, 2020).

Mato (2020) points out that in order to effectively address these recommendations, detailed research is needed to identify the various forms of racism affecting Higher Education. Often, general reference is made to "structural racism" (Almeida, 2019; ECLAC and FILAC, 2020) to highlight this issue. However, Mato argues that this term, while highlighting the historical depth of this ideology and its impact on the foundations of our societies, may be insufficient to visualise the multiple concrete manifestations of racism in Higher Education. To address this complexity, it is essential to conduct specific research that analyses the influence of structural factors (such as historically accumulated economic disadvantage), systemic factors (such as the norms, policies and practices inherent in each Higher Education system) and institutional factors (the regulations, policies and practices of each Higher Education institution).

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