



Dialogue of knowledge as an approach to intercultural educational management

Diálogo de saberes como enfoque para una gestión educativa intercultural

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The dialogue of knowledge is constituted as a way of connecting school, community and ancestral knowledge in an educational context in which sensitivity and approach to cultural diversity is demonstrated. **Objective:** The objective of this work is to analyze the dialogue of knowledge as an educational approach that strengthens intercultural educational management in educational units in Cochabamba, Bolivia. **Method:** To respond to this objective, a qualitative, descriptive-interpretive research was carried out, with a multi-case design. 85 educational and community actors participated, including teachers, directors, student and family representatives, community authorities, knowledge bearers and representatives of social and cultural organizations. 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted, in addition to 8 focus groups and document analysis. The information obtained was analyzed from an inductive-deductive thematic analysis. **Results:** The recognition of knowledge related to language, memory, productive practices, traditional medicine and orality was valued; however, curricular incorporation was uneven and the space for community participation was predominantly concentrated in organizational and cultural activities. **Conclusion:** The dialogue of knowledge to intercultural educational management strengthens when there is institutional leadership, space for real participation, school-community coordination and contextualization.

Keywords: interculturality; educational management; ancestral knowledge; community participation; intercultural education.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El diálogo de saberes se constituye como una forma de conectar los conocimientos escolares, comunitarios y ancestrales en un contexto educativo en el cual se demuestra una sensibilidad y acercamiento a la diversidad cultural. **Objetivo:** El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar el diálogo de saberes como un enfoque educativo que fortalezca la gestión educativa intercultural en unidades educativas de Cochabamba, Bolivia. **Método:** Para responder a este objetivo se llevó a cabo una investigación cualitativa, descriptiva-interpretativa, con un diseño de casos múltiples. Participaron 85 actores educativos y comunitarios, entre ellos docentes, directivos, representantes estudiantiles y familiares, autoridades comunitarias, portadores de saberes y representantes de organizaciones sociales y culturales. Se realizaron 25 entrevistas semiestructuradas, además de realizarse 8 grupos focales y análisis de documentos. La información obtenida se analizó a partir de un análisis temático inductivo-deductivo. **Resultados:** Se valoró el reconocimiento de saberes relacionados con la lengua, la memoria, prácticas productivas, medicina tradicional y oralidad; sin embargo, la incorporación curricular fue de forma desigual y el espacio de participación comunitaria se concentró predominantemente en actividades organizativas y culturales. **Conclusión:** El diálogo de saberes a la gestión educativa intercultural fortalece cuando existe liderazgo institucional, espacio de participación real, coordinación escuela-comunidad y contextualización.

Palabras clave: interculturalidad; gestión educativa; saberes ancestrales; participación comunitaria; educación intercultural.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural diversity of ways of educating in Latin America gives rise to interests in and demands for approaches that recognize the multiple ways of producing and transmitting knowledge. Underpinned by academic, community, and ancestral knowledge, intercultural education practices involve educational relationships based on trust, reciprocity, or participation. The dialogue of knowledge fosters encounters between different epistemological perspectives without reducing non-academic knowledge to complementary content in formal teaching [1].

In Latin America, the proposal for intercultural education seeks to move away from the homogeneous model of education toward building an educational system that recognizes languages, identities, and subaltern knowledge. However, its translation into practice becomes complicated when cultural diversity is introduced only through activities embedded in the curriculum or through specific knowledge disconnected from decision-making in educational institutions. The consulted literature affirms that an intercultural perspective requires strengthening the relationship between education, culture, and community, and creating conditions for local agents to intervene in educational processes [2,3]. This proposal gives preeminence to territorial knowledge.

The dialogue of knowledges involves recognizing that educational knowledge is not generated only within the school. Families, community authorities, students, social organizations, and knowledge bearers have experiences that constitute an opportunity to contextualize teaching and enrich curricular decisions. Community involvement in teaching enables the incorporation of local needs, practices, and perspectives into the educational microproject [4]. The school-community relationship thus becomes collaborative, and the spaces in which it is determined which knowledges count as significant in student training are expanded.

Moreover, incorporating such local knowledge requires institutional conditions that guarantee its continuity and prevent it from being treated superficially. Experiences of culturally relevant schooling demonstrate that the relationship between identity, territory, and learning can foster educational processes closer to community realities [5]. However, to institutionalize such knowledge, it is necessary to recognize its bearers as legitimate actors in educational processes and to create mechanisms for their presence in planning, curriculum, and school activities [6]. From a decolonizing perspective, this recognition helps reduce hierarchical relationships between academic knowledge and community knowledge [7].

Educational management is also essential for implementing these principles. The decisions of administrators and teachers can favor or restrict the participation of different actors and the introduction of different cultural perspectives into institutional practices. To this end, teachers must develop competencies that allow them to work ethically with Indigenous knowledge, understand the contexts from which this knowledge comes, and establish collaborative relationships with communities [8,9]. Relational approaches to the curriculum simultaneously emphasize the need to connect knowledge, people, and territory in educational planning [10]. Thus, intercultural management implies not only leadership, community participation, and curricular contextualization, but also the creation of spaces for knowledge exchange.

Institutional change also depends on ongoing processes of reflection on educational practices. Teacher training and professional learning can help revise conceptions about diversity and create new ways of relating to communities [11]. This topic is particularly important in Bolivia, where intercultural education and the inclusion of knowledge from Indigenous original peoples have had significant weight in the educational debate. Even with such recognition, challenges persist regarding the articulation between intercultural approaches and the concrete experiences developed in educational institutions [12].

Recent evidence shows that practices aimed at addressing cultural diversity can remain fragmented when there are insufficient mechanisms for participation, training, and institutional coordination [13]. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the dialogue of knowledge from the experiences of those who intervene directly in school and community life. Although there is a growing body of academic literature on intercultural education and Indigenous knowledge, further research is needed on how teachers, administrators, students, families, community authorities, and knowledge bearers interpret and construct these relationships within Bolivian educational management. Therefore, the present study aims to analyze the dialogue of knowledge as an approach to intercultural educational management in educational units in Bolivia, considering the experiences and perceptions of educational and community actors.

METHODS

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with a descriptive-interpretive scope and a multiple case study design. This approach enabled an understanding of how school and community actors interpret, experience, and construct the dialogue of knowledge within intercultural educational management processes. The study was carried out in 5 public educational units in the department of Cochabamba, Bolivia, selected for their connection to communities with Quechua cultural presence and for their development of community participation and interculturality activities.

The study involved 85 participants selected through purposive sampling based on criteria and maximum variation. The sample comprised 25 teachers, 10 directors or members of management teams, 15 student representatives, 15 mothers, fathers, or family representatives, 8 community authorities, 7 bearers of ancestral knowledge and local knowledge, and 5 representatives of social or cultural organizations.

The inclusion criteria were maintaining a minimum affiliation of 2 years with the institution or community, participating in educational, cultural, or community activities, and having knowledge of the relationships between school and community. For community authorities and knowledge bearers, recognition by the community of their trajectory was also considered. Those who did not maintain active participation in the analyzed educational processes were excluded.

Information was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis. A total of 25 individual interviews were conducted: 10 with members of management teams, 8 with community authorities, and 7 with knowledge holders. The interviews addressed the recognition of local knowledge, spaces for participation, the incorporation of community knowledge into school activities, relationships among actors, and difficulties in consolidating intercultural management.

The other 60 participants were organized into 8 focus groups: 3 groups with teachers, 2 with student representatives, 2 with mothers, fathers, or family representatives, and a group with members of social or cultural organizations. Each session was guided by a common thematic guide and allowed the identification of similarities, differences, and tensions among the participants' experiences.

Additionally, documents from the five educational units were reviewed, including curricular plans, socio-community projects, institutional management documents, and records of cultural or community activities. The documentary review allowed the participants' declared practices to be contrasted with their presence in institutional planning.

The fieldwork was organized progressively across the 5 institutions. Initially, access was coordinated with educational and community leaders; subsequently, participants were selected according to the established criteria. The interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded after obtaining prior authorization and were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Each participant was assigned a code to protect their identity: DOC for teachers, DIR for directors, EST for student representatives, FAM for family representatives, AUT for community authorities, SAB for knowledge bearers, and OSC for representatives of social or cultural organizations.

The data were examined using thematic analysis with an inductive-deductive strategy. In the first stage, a complete reading of the transcripts was carried out; subsequently, meaning units were identified and initial codes were generated. These codes were grouped according to conceptual similarities to build categories and subcategories.

The analysis was based on four guiding categories: recognition of local and ancestral knowledge, dialogue and exchange of knowledge, community participation, and intercultural educational management. At the same time, the analysis remained open to incorporating emerging categories derived from the testimonies. The organization and comparison of qualitative material were supported by ATLAS.ti.

Finally, triangulation was performed among interviews, focus groups, and institutional documents, as well as among the different types of participants. This procedure made it possible to identify convergences, divergences, and particularities related to the way in which the dialogue of knowledge is integrated into educational management.

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. In the case of underage student representatives, the consent of their legal guardians and the assent of the students were considered. The records were anonymized and used exclusively for academic purposes.

The credibility of the study was strengthened through triangulation of techniques, sources, and actors; the traceability of the coding process; constant comparison between categories; and the preservation of textual evidence that supported the interpretations. The diversity of participants allowed contrasting institutional, student, family, and community perspectives on the studied phenomenon.

RESULTS

Based on the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and institutional documents, the findings were organized into four categories: recognition of local and ancestral knowledge, dialogue and exchange of knowledge, community participation, and intercultural educational management. The cross-referencing of the different sources allowed the identification of similarities, differences, and aspects that are still poorly consolidated in the five educational units studied. Community and educational actors acknowledged the existence of knowledge associated with the Quechua language, agricultural practices, traditional medicine, gastronomy, orality, crafts, community memory, and local forms of organization. This knowledge was more prominent in community-based projects, cultural activities, and experiences developed with the participation of families and community members.

However, differences were found in their participation in pedagogical activities, according to the results of the analysis. While some experiences linked school content with knowledge of the territory, others maintained an occasional presence of community knowledge. The knowledge bearers and community authorities especially highlighted the need to participate from the planning of activities and not only as guests to transmit certain knowledge.

Table 1. Categories and main findings identified in the thematic analysis

Category	Identified subcategories	Main finding
Recognition of local and ancestral knowledge	Language, memory, productive practices, traditional medicine, orality	Community knowledges are recognized, but their curricular incorporation presents different levels of continuity.
Dialogue and knowledge exchange	Listening, reciprocity, exchange, complementarity	The dialogue acquires greater depth when school and community participate jointly in the construction of activities.
Community participation	Consultation, collaboration, planning, decision-making	The community frequently participates in institutional activities, although its influence on pedagogical decisions is less.
Intercultural educational management	Leadership, contextualized curriculum, coordination, teacher training	The continuity of intercultural practices depends on institutional leadership and ongoing coordination with the community.

Note. Own elaboration based on thematic analysis of interviews, focus groups, and institutional documents.

The interviews and focus groups showed that the most frequent interaction spaces were developed through community meetings, socio-community projects, cultural activities, productive practices, and encounters between school and community. These spaces allowed linking local experiences with educational content, although not all reached the same level of dialogue.

Teachers and management teams indicated the existence of mechanisms to incorporate families and community authorities. However, family, student, and community representatives distinguished between participating in an activity and having the capacity to intervene in its planning. Participation was broader in organizational and cultural aspects than in curricular decisions.

Student representatives were present mainly in cultural activities, projects, and school representation actions. In contrast, community authorities and knowledge bearers played a relevant role when the activities required knowledge linked to the territory, cultural practices, or community memory.

Triangulation made it possible to verify that several of the identified themes appeared in more than a single source. The interviews provided greater depth regarding institutional decisions and the relationships between school and community; the focus groups allowed for the identification of shared perceptions and differences among actors; while the documentary analysis made it possible to contrast the formal presence of interculturality and local knowledge within educational planning.

Table 2. Triangulation of findings according to information sources

Analyzed finding	Interviews	Focus groups	Institutional documents	Interpretation
Recognition of local knowledge	Present in managers, authorities, and knowledge bearers	Present in teachers, students, and families	Present in projects and plans	There is widespread recognition of its educational value.
Curricular incorporation	Concrete, but not permanent, experiences are identified.	The participants perceive differences between teachers and institutions.	Unequal presence in the plans	Curricular integration is not yet systematic.
Community participation	Directors recognize institutional spaces for participation.	Families and students perceive greater organizational participation than pedagogical participation.	Meetings and community projects are recorded.	Participation exists, but has limited curricular impact.
Dialogue of knowledges	It is related to exchange and mutual recognition.	Joint work with the community is especially valued.	It is not always formalized.	Experiences largely depend on institutional and teaching initiatives.
Intercultural management	Associated with leadership and coordination	Greater openness to community voices is demanded.	Intercultural guidelines are identified	There is partial correspondence between planning and practice

Note. Own elaboration based on the triangulation of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis.

The results allow us to affirm that the dialogue of knowledges is present and established in the different educational contexts, although with different levels of consolidation. Local knowledges are recognized, but their inclusion in planning and pedagogical decisions is still limited. Community participation is greater in those situations where authorities, families, students, and knowledge bearers coordinate and work at the time of planning, and not only at the time of execution.

The comparison of the five educational units showed that intercultural practices were more consolidated and more intense in those educational units in which there was also a coordination of planning among the management team, teachers, and community actors, and where the dialogue of knowledge was connected with the curriculum, socio-community projects, and territorial experiences. In other educational units where the articulation was very limited, local knowledge was reduced to cultural activities. These findings allow us to affirm that educational management is the means by which the recognition of cultural diversity can be transformed into intercultural practices.

DISCUSSION

The results showed that the dialogue of knowledge is present in the educational units studied, although with different levels of incorporation in institutional management. The main finding indicates that community knowledge is recognized by teachers, students, families, and authorities, but this appreciation does not always translate into a permanent integration in curricular planning. This coincides with research indicating that the recognition of indigenous perspectives may remain at a discursive level when there are no institutional mechanisms to ensure their effective participation in educational processes [14].

The presence of knowledge related to language, community memory, productive practices, traditional medicine, and orality confirms that the territory is a relevant source of contextualization of learning. However, its use mostly in isolated projects or cultural activities shows a still fragmented incorporation. Culturally relevant schooling models affirm that the inclusion of indigenous knowledge should not be an isolated action, but part of the daily relationships between curriculum, identity, and community [15]. In this sense, the findings indicate that the problem is not only integrating cultural content, but creating institutional conditions for such content to endure.

Another significant result was the difference identified between transmission and joint construction of knowledge. Participants considered that dialogue acquires greater value when community actors intervene from the planning stage and not only when they are convened to share information previously defined by the school. This result is related to studies that highlight the importance of institutionalizing indigenous knowledge through participatory processes and engagement that recognize communities as knowledge producers [16]. From this perspective, horizontality constitutes an essential condition for the dialogue of knowledges not to reproduce hierarchical relationships between school and community knowledge.

The participation of authorities and knowledge bearers was also relevant for maintaining the cultural contextualization of knowledge incorporated into teaching. Their intervention helps preserve meanings, practices, and forms of transmission that can be lost when local knowledge is transferred to the curriculum without community participation. This interpretation coincides with approaches that highlight cultural accompaniment as a mechanism to promote the reproduction and continuity of Indigenous knowledge within educational spaces [17].

Regarding the teaching staff, the results showed that the willingness to work with local knowledge was not always accompanied by sufficient preparation to incorporate it systematically. This difficulty is consistent with research identifying teacher training as a determining factor in developing ethical and contextualized intercultural practices [18,19]. Training should not be limited to knowledge of cultural manifestations, but should include capacities to work collaboratively with the community, recognize different epistemological perspectives, and avoid the decontextualized appropriation of knowledge.

The findings related to curricular management also showed that intercultural practices achieved greater continuity when content was linked to territorial experiences and community projects. This relationship aligns with curricular approaches that conceive knowledge as the result of links between people, territory, and sociocultural context [20]. Therefore, intercultural educational management requires a degree of flexibility to articulate school content with knowledge constructed outside the institution, without losing the established formative objectives.

Community participation represented another central dimension. Although the 5 educational units had spaces for relationships with families and authorities, these were concentrated mainly in organizational and cultural activities, while participation in pedagogical decisions was less frequent. This result makes it possible to distinguish between participation based on collaboration and participation characterized by a real capacity for influence. Studies on the integration of Indigenous knowledge have pointed out that the presence of communal knowledge in the school requires modifying both the content and the relationships through which it is decided which knowledge acquires educational legitimacy [21,22].

The perspective of student representatives furthers this interpretation. Students recognized the value of activities related to culture and community, but participated less in decisions about the planning of these experiences. This finding indicates that intercultural management should not restrict dialogue to the relationship between teachers and community adults, but should also incorporate the voice of students as subjects who interpret and reconstruct cultural knowledge from their own experiences. Intercultural training acquires greater depth when participants can actively intervene in the processes through which knowledge is selected and contextualized [23].

Finally, the analysis showed that institutional leadership is a cross-cutting condition for the continuity of these practices. The units with greater coordination among administrators, teachers, and community showed a more consistent integration of the dialogue of knowledge, unlike those where this articulation depended mainly on individual initiatives, which experienced more discontinuity. This finding aligns with studies indicating that the development of educational practices linked to Indigenous knowledge requires support structures, coordination, and professional reflection to sustain changes beyond individual efforts [24].

The findings as a whole allow the dialogue of knowledge to be interpreted as an approach that can strengthen intercultural educational management when articulated with planning, curriculum, community participation, and institutional leadership. In the units studied, a favorable foundation was observed in the recognition of local knowledge and the existence of links between school and community; however, limitations persist in the formalization and continuity of these links.

CONCLUSIONS

From this analysis, it was concluded that the dialogue of knowledge, as an intrinsic aspect of teaching and learning, represents an important component in shaping the intercultural educational management that the aforementioned educational units must develop. The dialogue of knowledge was particularly evident in the incorporation of knowledge about language, community memory, productive practices, traditional medicine, and other cultural expressions of the context into the school environment. However, when analyzing this incorporation, we observed that it received varying levels of attention and, on various occasions, was linked more to specific activities than to generating permanent institutional processes in school educational management.

The participation of teachers, administrators, students, families, community authorities, and knowledge bearers showed that interculturality generates greater depth when community actors participate from the planning stage and not only during the course of activities. The dialogue of knowledge implies relationships marked by horizontality, mutual recognition, and shared responsibility for defining contextualized educational experiences.

The importance of institutional management for the consolidation of these practices stood out. Educational units with greater coordination among management teams, teachers, and community presented more favorable conditions to include local knowledge as part of the curriculum and in socio-community projects. In contrast, when these actions originated in isolation, their development was more discontinuous and had less effect on pedagogical decisions.

Therefore, the dialogue of knowledge seeks to establish itself as a form of educational management from an intercultural perspective if it is connected with institutional leadership, community participation, curriculum contextualization, and teacher training. The main challenge that defines the process lies between the symbolic recognition of diversity and the implementation of stable mechanisms that allow the inclusion of community voices, knowledge, and experiences in educational decisions and planning.

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