



Ch'ampas in the pedagogical imaginary of teacher-training students in Cochabamba

Ch'ampas en el imaginario pedagógico de estudiantes de formación docente en Cochabamba

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Incorporating Indigenous cultural practices into teacher education can strengthen intercultural education, but it may also produce decontextualized representations when practices are separated from their meanings, language, and territory. **Objective:** To analyze how the pedagogical imaginary of teacher-training students is configured in relation to the Ch'ampas. **Methods:** A qualitative study with a participatory orientation was conducted at a teacher-training Academic Unit in Cochabamba during 2025. Participants were 26 second-year Natural Sciences: Biology-Geography students. Data were produced through an open-ended survey with one closed item, eight semi-structured interviews, five group problematization sessions, and portfolio records. **Results:** A total of 76.9% considered learning about the Ch'ampas quite or very useful for their future teaching. This favorable appraisal coexisted with fragmented knowledge of origin, meaning, clothing, language, and territory. Risks of folklorization, concern about intergenerational transmission, and proposals for linking community knowledge with Biology-Geography emerged. **Conclusions:** The pedagogical imaginary combines strong cultural valuation with insufficient understanding; educational use therefore requires contextualization, community participation, and situated curricular articulation.

Keywords: teacher education; intercultural education; Indigenous knowledge; cultural identity; intangible cultural heritage.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La incorporación de prácticas culturales indígenas a la formación docente puede favorecer la educación intercultural, pero también producir representaciones descontextualizadas cuando se separan de sus significados, lengua y territorio. **Objetivo:** Analizar cómo se configura el imaginario pedagógico de estudiantes de formación docente frente a los Ch'ampas. **Metodología:** Se desarrolló un estudio cualitativo con orientación participativa en una Unidad Académica de Cochabamba durante 2025. Participaron 26 estudiantes de segundo año de Ciencias Naturales: Biología-Geografía. Se aplicó una encuesta con preguntas abiertas y un ítem cerrado, ocho entrevistas semiestructuradas y cinco sesiones grupales de problematización; el corpus se complementó con registros de portafolio. **Resultados:** El 76,9% consideró que el aprendizaje de los Ch'ampas sería bastante o muy útil para su futura docencia. Esta valoración coexistió con conocimientos fragmentarios sobre origen, significado, vestimenta, lengua y territorio. Emergieron riesgos de folclorización, preocupación por la transmisión intergeneracional y propuestas para articular saberes comunitarios con Biología-Geografía. **Conclusiones:** El imaginario pedagógico combina alta valoración cultural y comprensión insuficiente; su aprovechamiento formativo requiere contextualización, participación comunitaria y articulación curricular situada.

Palabras clave: formación docente; educación intercultural; saberes indígenas; identidad cultural; patrimonio cultural inmaterial.

INTRODUCTION

Initial teacher education in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts faces a challenge that cannot be resolved simply by incorporating Indigenous content into the curriculum. A recent review of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in teacher education programs found that the curricular presence of this content does not guarantee that future teachers feel prepared to integrate it respectfully and contextually; the quality of preparation depends, among other factors, on the pedagogy used and on the relationship built with knowledge-holding communities¹. Similarly, a study with Indigenous educators from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States emphasizes that the ethical integration of Indigenous content requires listening to community voices, recognizing power relations, and preventing knowledge from being transferred to the classroom as a cultural repertoire detached from those who produce and transmit it².

In the Andes, this issue is linked to debates focused more specifically on interculturality, language, and the decolonization of teacher education. A recent ethnographic study of an intercultural education program in southern Peru shows that decolonial aspirations are negotiated within institutions marked by linguistic hierarchies, different bilingual trajectories, and tensions between the recognition of cultures and inherited academic educational practices [3]. In Bolivia, research on teacher education reforms has shown that the transition from assimilationist teacher education models toward intracultural, intercultural, and multilingual education involved significant changes, although contradictions between policy and practice were evident^{4,5}. In this sense, if recognition of Indigenous knowledge is important within the institutional sphere, it must be reexamined not only at the normative level but also through everyday practice.

A particularly significant tension arises when a cultural practice is valued positively without an equivalent understanding of its meanings, history, or territory. In an institution that trains teachers for bilingual intercultural education, Chávez-Gonzales and Sánchez-Aguirre observed that cultural affirmation and appreciation of Quechua could coexist with an insufficiently critical interculturality and a risk of folklorization⁶. Analysis of the official curriculum for bilingual intercultural teacher education in Peru also shows the coexistence of functional orientations with emerging positions that seek a more transformative dialogue of knowledge systems⁷. This tension requires distinguishing between cultural visibility and pedagogical understanding: representing a practice does not necessarily mean understanding the community, symbolic, and territorial relationships that give it meaning.

Intercultural education also requires revisiting the categories used to interpret cultural difference. Among Ecuadorian teachers in postgraduate training, it has been documented that questioning superficial interculturality may coexist with essentialist conceptions of identity, confirming the need to foster reflexivity about one's own cultural categories⁸. Drawing on the voices of Mapuche and Aymara people, Ibáñez-Salgado and colleagues likewise argue that teacher preparation for diversity should incorporate Indigenous peoples' perspectives rather than merely speaking about them from external frameworks⁹. In this sense, situated education requires the community to cease being only an object of reference and to participate as an interlocutor in the construction of pedagogical knowledge.

Collaboration with community knowledge holders provides a way to reduce this distance. An initial teacher education experience co-constructed with a Māori community showed that learning based on local cultural knowledge and community experiences supports the development of culturally responsive teaching practices¹⁰. This relationship between meanings and pedagogical action can be analyzed through the notion of the social imaginary, understood as a configuration of shared meanings that guides appraisals and practices. In initial teacher education, imaginaries make it possible to examine how students assign meaning to educational phenomena and project those representations onto their future professional practice¹¹. In the present study, the pedagogical imaginary is operationally defined as the network of representations, appraisals, and meanings through which students understand the Ch'ampas and anticipate their possible incorporation into teaching.

Another fundamental element in this configuration is language. The study of Indigenous languages in teacher education programs can broaden multilingual awareness and strengthen connections with students, communities, and historically invisibilized identities¹². However, institutional processes of language revitalization are not free from tension: the case of Kichwa in Ecuador shows that greater state visibility may coexist with processes of standardization and transformation of language use¹³. Thus, recognizing Quechua as a language associated with a cultural practice is not necessarily equivalent to incorporating it meaningfully during the representation or teaching of that practice.

Dance is a particularly sensitive arena for these tensions because it brings together embodiment, memory, clothing, music, territory, and identity. In schools, folk dance can become an opportunity for historical and territorial learning, although predominantly technical approaches tend to reduce the cultural depth of the experience [14]. A review of traditional dance pedagogy likewise concludes that school teaching should move beyond models centered exclusively on reproducing steps and advance toward approaches that explain context, meanings, and community participation [15]. The issue is not to exclude the performative dimension, but to integrate it into an educational experience capable of answering what is being represented, why it is represented, and from within which cultural relationships.

This issue takes on an additional dimension when students belong to the Natural Sciences: Biology-Geography specialization. In this field, a practice such as the Ch'ampas can raise questions about territory, natural resources linked to clothing, embodiment, ecological relationships, language, and community-based forms of knowledge production. However, the existence of possible curricular connections does not justify merging scientific and ancestral knowledge without mediation. The challenge is to recognize their specificities, build appropriate pedagogical bridges, and prevent community knowledge from being instrumentalized merely to illustrate school content.

Despite the growth of research on Indigenous knowledge, intercultural education, Indigenous languages, and teacher education, there is less evidence on how students who participate in a specific cultural manifestation simultaneously develop appraisals, knowledge gaps, and professional projections regarding it. The Ch'ampas provide a relevant case for examining this relationship because records of the experience show non-uniform territorial associations and different levels of knowledge about its meaning. The purpose is not to establish a definitive ethnographic reconstruction of the practice, but to understand how it is signified within a teacher education institution. Accordingly, the research question was: how is the pedagogical imaginary of teacher education students configured in relation to the practice of the Ch'ampas? The objective was to analyze this configuration through their representations, appraisals, and meanings, considering its relationship with teacher education, interculturality, language, territory, and future professional practice.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study with an interpretive scope and participatory orientation was conducted. This formulation was adopted because the process involved students in identifying problems, conducting interviews, sharing findings, and reflecting on the practice, although it did not document a prolonged cycle of community action and transformation. Participatory research positions local knowledge and participants' reflection as components of the research process¹⁶. The study was carried out during 2025 at a teacher education Academic Unit in Cochabamba, based on the preparation and institutional performance of the Ch'ampas.

Participants were 26 second-year students in the Natural Sciences: Biology-Geography specialization. Data production combined a survey with open-ended questions and one closed item on perceived usefulness for future teaching practice, eight semi-structured interviews, and five group sessions for problematization and sharing. The interviews were conducted by groups of students with participants purposively selected because of their involvement in or knowledge of the experience: two teachers, one administrator in a leadership role, one administrative staff member, and four community knowledge holders who were also members of the student group. Available records place the interviews in August and the survey on September 16, 2025. The corpus was supplemented with response tables and excerpts preserved in student portfolios; when a fragment appeared repeatedly in more than one portfolio, it was treated as a single documentary record.

The analysis followed a thematic strategy aimed at identifying patterns of meaning within and across sources¹⁷. The corpus was read repeatedly, followed by initial coding, grouping of codes, and constant comparison of recurring patterns and discrepancies. The analytical themes were: pedagogical appraisal; origin and meaning; intergenerational transmission; clothing and identity; articulation between ancestral knowledge and scientific knowledge; Quechua language; territory; and projection toward teaching practice. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of the survey, interviews, group sessions, and portfolio records, considering both convergences and contradictory cases, in accordance with rigor criteria for thematic analysis¹⁸. The closed item was used only for descriptive purposes, through frequencies and percentages, without statistical inference.

Qualitative quotations used record codes (RE = interview record; SP = problematization

session) and year, omitting individual names and roles. Before participating, individuals were verbally informed of the academic and research purposes of the study and expressed their agreement. Interviews were recorded with verbal authorization. No written consent forms were signed and no prior review by an ethics committee was obtained; therefore, the manuscript does not attribute a formal ethical approval that did not exist. Audio files and records remained under the researcher's custody and were used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

Table 1. Sources of information and corpus composition

Source	Participants/records	Analytical purpose
Survey	26 students; open-ended questions and 1 closed item	Representations and perceived usefulness
Interviews	8: 2 teachers, 1 administrator in a leadership role, 1 administrative staff member, and 4 community knowledge holders who were also students	Meanings, language, territory, and transmission
Group sessions	5 problematization and sharing sessions	Contrasts, discrepancies, and proposals
Portfolios	Preserved tables, records, and excerpts	Triangulation and documentary recovery

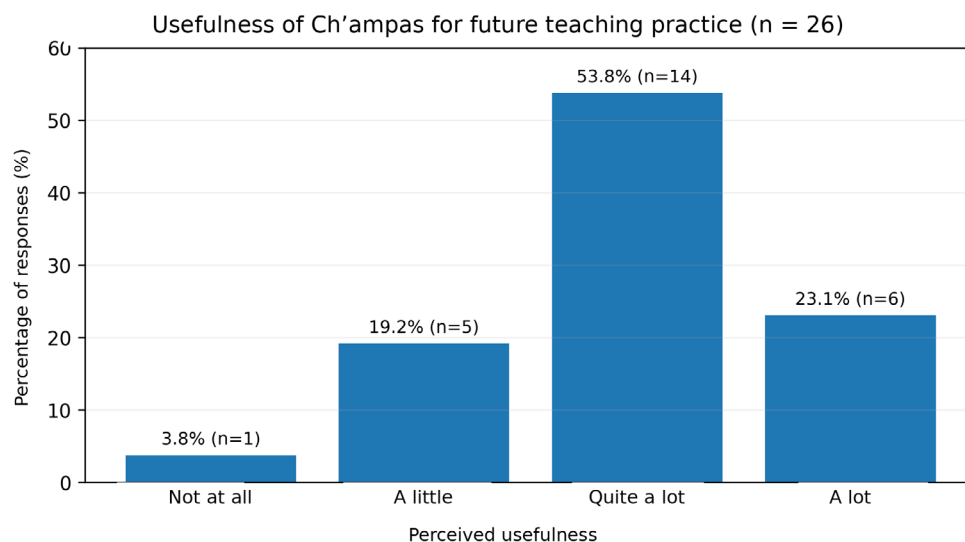
Note. Summary of the analyzed corpus. Authors' own elaboration.

RESULTS

Pedagogical appraisal and fragmented knowledge

The first recurring pattern in the corpus was a favorable pedagogical appraisal of the Ch'ampas. Of the 26 students, 14 (53.8%) responded that learning about them would be "quite useful" in their future teaching practice and six (23.1%) indicated "very useful"; altogether, 20 participants (76.9%) expressed a high appraisal. Five (19.2%) chose "slightly useful" and one (3.8%) "not useful at all." The open-ended records expanded on this appraisal by associating the experience with joy, pride, coexistence, identity, and cultural revalorization. However, the finding also showed that affective appreciation did not by itself imply mastery of the cultural meaning of the practice.

Figure 1. Appraisal of the usefulness of the Ch'ampas for future teaching practice



Note. Survey of 16/09/2025 (n = 26). Authors' own elaboration.

The second pattern was the coexistence of cultural recognition and fragmented knowledge. The records revealed doubts about origin, meaning, and territorial belonging. One participant stated directly: "I do not really know its origin" (RE3, 2025). Other responses linked the Ch'ampas with Raqaypampa, Aiquile, or Mizque, without the corpus allowing those associations to be resolved into a single historical version. The discrepancy was interpreted as evidence of the pedagogical imaginary itself: different representations of what was being performed circulated within the educational setting.

Table 2. Thematic configuration of the pedagogical imaginary concerning the Ch'ampas

Dimension	Empirical pattern	Evidence from the corpus	Main tension
Appraisal-affective	Predominance of favorable appraisal	Pride, joy, coexistence, and identity; 76.9% high usefulness	Valuing does not equal understanding
Cognitive-cultural	Fragmented and contradictory information	Doubts about origin, meaning, clothing, and belonging	Cultural visibility vs. contextual knowledge
Curricular-research	Search for connections with Biology-Geography	Materials, locomotor system, territory, and natural resources	Articulation without forced equivalences
Territorial-linguistic	Recognition of Quechua and territory with heterogeneous use	Quechua associated with the practice; proposals for community engagement	Identity reference vs. situated practice

Note. Categories derived from qualitative triangulation. Authors' own elaboration.

Folklorization, intergenerational transmission, and cultural change

The tension between stage representation and contextual understanding appeared clearly in the interviews and problematization sessions. One participant summarized the concern by stating that dances are “not about dancing just for the sake of dancing”(RE3, 2025), while a group session noted that, although the practice is performed, “the reason why or its true meaning is unknown”(SP2, 2025). These statements revealed a risk of folklorization, understood here as the possibility of maintaining aesthetic or institutional visibility while knowledge of the meanings, temporalities, and community relationships that sustain the practice weakens.

Intergenerational transmission was identified as a relevant condition for cultural continuity. One interviewee stated that the practice “would have to be transmitted from generation to generation”(RE2, 2025). In the collective sessions, part of the lack of knowledge was linked to interruption or weakening of oral and practical transmission by older people. Changes in clothing, colors, and materials also emerged as a topic of debate. The corpus does not allow these changes to be automatically classified as a loss of authenticity; it does, however, show the need to document how they are explained by those who make, wear, and assign meaning to the clothing.

Language and territory

The Quechua language showed a similar configuration. In several interviews it was recognized as a language associated with the Ch'ampas, and shouts or expressions in Quechua during some rehearsals were even mentioned. Other responses indicated that, in the urban context of the Academic Unit, the representation focused mainly on clothing and movements, without consistent language use. The difference between cultural reference and actual practice reveals that language operates in the imaginary as an identity marker, but its presence in the institutional performance is heterogeneous.

Territory progressively acquired a pedagogical meaning. Rather than functioning only as an answer to the question of origin, it was proposed as a necessary space for contrasting what had been learned in the institution. Several records proposed visiting Raqaypampa, speaking with community members, and learning in situ about forms of teaching, music, clothing, and meanings. Because the corpus contains divergent territorial associations, this proposal does not confirm the historical origin of the Ch'ampas; instead, it is a strategy for contrasting institutional representations with community knowledge holders and situated sources.

Table 3. Convergences and discrepancies in cultural representations

Axis	Convergences	Discrepancies or gaps	Analytical interpretation
Origin/belonging	Recognition of links with communities in Cochabamba	Raqaypampa, Aiquile, Mizque, and explicit lack of knowledge	There is no uniform version within the educational setting
Language	Quechua as a recurring cultural reference	It is not always used during the urban representation	Difference between symbolic association and linguistic practice
Clothing	Recognized as an identity component	Changes in colors, materials, and forms	Requires documentation with community knowledge holders
Transmission	Importance of elders and generational learning	Perceived interruption of oral/practical transmission	Continuity depends on intergenerational ties
Meaning	Interest in understanding what is represented	Lack of knowledge of the “why” of the dance	Stage performance may precede understanding

Note. Summary of interviews, sessions, and portfolios. Authors' own elaboration.

Curricular articulation and research participation

Articulation with the Biology-Geography specialization constituted another core theme. In a problematization session, participants acknowledged that scientific knowledge and traditional ancestral knowledge “are not articulated smoothly” (SP5, 2025). In response to this difficulty, students proposed studying materials and natural resources linked to clothing, relating dance movements to content on the locomotor system, documenting craft production processes, and analyzing ecological and territorial relationships. The absence of immediate articulation did not produce rejection of the practice; rather, it raised questions about how to build curricular connections without erasing differences between forms of knowledge.

Finally, the participatory orientation changed the students' role within the experience. They moved from performing a dance in an institutional activity to formulating questions, conducting interviews, organizing problem trees, comparing responses, and sharing findings. Initial lack of knowledge thus became an object of inquiry. This shift does not demonstrate long-term community transformation, but it does constitute an educational outcome: students began to distinguish among cultural appraisal, personal perception, and historical claims that require sources and verification.

Table 4. Curricular projection derived from students' proposals

Area	Proposal emerging from the corpus	Pedagogical potential	Condition for application
Biology	Analyze natural materials and clothing	Relationship among resources, uses, and local knowledge	Avoid reducing community knowledge to a scientific example
Biology	Relate movements to the locomotor system	Integration of embodiment and disciplinary learning	Maintain the cultural meaning of the practice
Geography	Address territory and context of origin	Situated spatial and sociocultural interpretation	Contrast associations with community sources
Interculturality/ language	Incorporate Quechua and dialogue with community members	Linguistic and identity understanding	Participation of competent speakers and knowledge holders
Research training	Interview, problematize, and share findings	Development of inquiry and reflexivity	Differentiate perception from historical claim

Note. Proposals recovered from the participatory process. Authors' own elaboration.

DISCUSSION

The central finding shows a pedagogical imaginary structured by a tension between high cultural appraisal and incomplete understanding. Most students attributed professional usefulness to the Ch'ampas, but the interviews revealed gaps concerning origin, meaning, language, and territory. This pattern is consistent with intercultural teacher education studies in which the affirmation of Indigenous practices and languages is not always accompanied by sufficient critical problematization [6,8]. The specific contribution of the present study is to show this tension while future teachers participate directly in a cultural practice: favorable disposition serves as a pedagogical resource, but it cannot be used as an indicator of cultural understanding.

The risk of folklorization identified in the corpus should be interpreted cautiously. It does not arise from dance itself or from its presence in institutional events, but from the possibility of separating performance from the networks of meaning that sustain it. Literature on school dance warns that approaches centered on technique and reproduction can limit historical and territorial treatment^{14,15}. A comparable difficulty has been observed in arts teacher education: future teachers consider it important to integrate Indigenous perspectives, but express uncertainty because of limited preparation, knowledge, and clarity regarding cultural permissions¹⁹. This reinforces the need for the pedagogical incorporation of the Ch'ampas to include contextual research rather than only choreographic mastery.

Community participation emerges as a condition for deepening learning. Students proposed speaking with community members and visiting the territory to contrast their own representations. This orientation is consistent with experiences showing that collaboration with communities improves the relevance of culturally responsive education^{2,10}. It also responds to a broader institutional warning: when responsibility for integrating Indigenous knowledge remains diffuse,

teacher education programs may keep that knowledge at the margins²⁰. In the case studied, involving community knowledge holders would make it possible to address discrepancies regarding origin, clothing, language, and meaning without turning the institution into an arbiter of a cultural version that the corpus itself cannot demonstrate.

The Quechua language showed a difference between symbolic association and actual use. This distinction is relevant because a language may be recognized as a sign of identity without necessarily becoming a communicative practice. Studies of bilingual teacher education have shown that learning an Indigenous language can change linguistic awareness and relationships with communities¹², while recent research on revitalization shows that recovering a language also involves rebuilding speaker identities and trajectories of belonging²¹. At the same time, institutional processes can transform the uses of the languages they seek to promote¹³. For the Ch'ampas, this suggests that any linguistic incorporation should begin with context and competent actors, avoiding the use of isolated expressions as decorative markers of authenticity.

The difficulty of linking ancestral knowledge and science was one of the most productive findings because it made a real pedagogical problem visible. Among future science teachers, it has been documented that integrating Indigenous peoples' knowledge requires specific preparation to recognize different ways of knowing and avoid curricular silencing²². In Latin American contexts, dialogue among knowledge systems has been framed as a process that connects person, family, community, and territory, rather than as a simple juxtaposition of content²³. Therefore, the students' proposals concerning clothing materials, the locomotor system, natural resources, and territory are pedagogically valuable if presented as interdisciplinary questions rather than as automatic equivalences between scientific and community knowledge.

The intergenerational transmission observed in the interviews broadens the issue toward cultural continuity. Analysis of good practices in intangible cultural heritage shows that education plays an important role in safeguarding, but weaknesses persist when participation by educational institutions, families, and communities is limited²⁴. In experiences with Indigenous peoples, encounters between older and younger generations foster the transmission of stories, language, place, and local knowledge, especially when elders are recognized as knowledge holders²⁵. Thus, teacher education could contribute to the continuity of the Ch'ampas not by appropriating the practice, but by creating conditions to document, listen, and learn with those who know and transmit it.

The study has limitations that delimit its conclusions. It was conducted mainly within a teacher education institution and did not include prolonged in situ fieldwork; part of the qualitative material was preserved as excerpts and tables in portfolios, and the quantitative component was restricted to a single descriptive item with 26 responses. In addition, territorial discrepancies cannot be resolved with the available corpus. Triangulation made it possible to identify consistent patterns, but it does not replace specific ethnographic research on the historical origin of the practice. Future studies should involve community knowledge holders, authorities, women and men recognized for their knowledge, linguistic records, and historical sources, as well as document a longer participatory cycle.

CONCLUSIONS

The students' pedagogical imaginary regarding the Ch'ampas resulted from a dual condition: the high value assigned to their educational potential and fragmented knowledge of their cultural meanings. In the survey, 76.9% stated that learning this practice would be quite or very useful for their future teaching, although the qualitative sources revealed uncertainty and contradictions when addressing origin, meaning, language, clothing, and territorial belonging. The tension in the students' position was not between accepting or rejecting the practice, but between making the practice their own and establishing contextualized relationships with it.

The experience gained greater educational value when students ceased acting only as dancers and became co-inquirers: they formulated questions, interviewed participants, compared responses, and proposed possible connections with Biology-Geography. This shift makes it possible to view the Ch'ampas as a catalyst for pedagogical and interdisciplinary inquiry, provided that the relationships between scientific knowledge and community knowledge are addressed without simplifications or forced equivalences.

Language, territory, and intergenerational transmission should occupy a central position in any curricular continuation of the experience. Quechua should not be reduced to a symbolic marker, nor territory to a geographic reference used without verification. The participation of community

knowledge holders is necessary to contextualize meanings, understand transformations in clothing, and document forms of transmission.

The results do not allow a definitive history of the Ch'ampas to be established or generalized to all teacher education in Cochabamba. They do, however, identify a specific educational problem: a cultural practice may be widely valued and remain partially unknown. The most relevant line of research is to deepen in situ work, expand community participation, and develop curricular experiences in which cultural representation is accompanied by research, linguistic-territorial dialogue, and pedagogical reflexivity.

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