

The Impact of Intercultural Universities

After 20 Years in Mexican Indigenous Communities

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In México, language and cultural diversity have been on the eye of society in the last 20 years. Indigenous social movements, such as the Zapatistas in 1994, were the turning point that directed the government's attention towards Indigenous communities. In this chapter, I cover the road that Indigenous education took to gain a place of its own in the national education system and describe the impact that Universidades Interculturales (UIs) on Indigenous communities. Back in the 2000s Indigenous movements became active in different areas of the government that promoted university level intercultural education. A national secretariat was created to implement a new curriculum focusing on reinforcing Indigenous cultures through their perspectives. In 2001 the Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México (UIEM) was created under the supervision of the General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (CGEIB acronym in Spanish). Academically, the UIEM began its duties in 2004 in the community of San Felipe del Progreso. Today there are ten Intercultural Universities with 35 locations, counting their main campuses and extensions. These institutions are nested in Indigenous communities in the southern, southwestern, and northwestern México.¹ Up to 2021, their combined enrollment was 17,275 students with 35 majors and 13 MA and 6 Ph. D. programs. From the 68 recognized national languages in México, these institutions cover only 20 languages as part of their curricula. This chapter describes and analyzes whether Indigenous languages and cultures have been adequately promoted within the UIs. Data collection was gathered from archival documents in a variety of institutional websites. Based on a quantitative analysis, the UIs goals, regarding language and culture have demonstrated an unbalanced parameter regarding communities' priorities and the decree of creation of these institutions. UIs do reach to Indigenous people, however students prioritize academic areas other than Indigenous languages and culture that they see as more economically advantageous.

Cultural diversity has long been seen by the dominant society as a disadvantage in terms of economic growth, technological innovation, and education. Minorities fight to gain a place of equity in terms of value and respect. Historically, Indigenous communities and minorities have been classified by the dominant society as savage people who were not considered to be human or have a soul. Conquest brought bloodshed and white supremacy.

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The main source of conquest and submission used in history was based on aristocratic and economic strata, religion, and education. The way of resistance has been through an intertwined conception of beliefs and practices of what makes each community unique. Nowadays, a constant discussion on cultural and language diversity has arisen in regard to respect, coexistence, egalitarian rights, and equal opportunities. This chapter describes and analyzes the process by which the education sector has integrated interculturality, in regards with Indigenous communities in México, starting from the arrival of the Spaniards to the most recent efforts at intercultural education.

Methodology

The present research is a collateral work of a thesis investigation that I carried out as part of my masters' program. During the consultation process of online data collection, it came to my attention the current situation of these universities. It became apparent their mission and vision was not being fulfilled. Thus, I began research to understand the response Indigenous communities are giving to the government's educational initiative.

My study covers those aspects of education that are directly related to Indigenous education, and then narrows it down to higher education. The analysis is based on a quantitative method, however the results allow for a qualitative depiction of the development and reach of UIs in Indigenous communities since their establishment. Data was collected from ten higher education institutions, which operate under the model of Intercultural Universities. The main source for this research are archival documents in the public domain and data collected from institutional websites and intertwined with previous research.

Background

The Spaniards' Arrival and Indigenous Education

Since their arrival in the 1500s, Spaniards positioned themselves as the dominant group. They saw Natives as inferior people who needed to be saved and assimilated, destroying in the process linguistic families and cultural practices in Native communities. They defeated the Native communities and began a conquest based on acculturation, which sought conversion to the dominant's group religion and ideologies. Education was one of the strongest means they relied on, with responsibility given to friars and religious men who learned vernacular languages as the first approach to mutual understanding. These religious men learned the phonological structure of Indigenous languages to communicate effectively, and at the same time taught Spanish to some community members. This teaching-learning practice was the first encounter in linguistic displacement faced by Indigenous communities. The long-term purpose underlying this instruction was to promote Indigenous language obsolescence. According to García (1896, 1966) in Jiménez, "The fathers were not vulgar men but rather had sufficient cul-

ture and education, several had distinguished themselves in university chairs and prelaties: some were even of noble birth” (1990, p. 4). The first formal encounter with the target language (Spanish) was through singing, then, learners were presented with the written form of these songs. Friars relied on memorization and assimilation techniques for the learners to learn their language (Jiménez, 1990).

During this period, institutional education fell under the authority of the Catholic church. Spanish religious men devoted themselves to the instruction of the Natives, nonetheless there was one who stood out, Pedro de Gante, a Flemish fray. He “needed to know the Indian’s language, and he appeared to have mastered Nahuatl, the language of central Mexico” (Jimenez, 1990, p. 5). His teaching was noted because it was based on teaching them according to the learners’ age range, thus his method contributed to the acculturation process. During the colonial period, education remained under a classist method, thus peons and mestizos were excluded.

Under Spanish rule Mexican education remained under the Catholic church’s authority. Numerous schools were built, among them the first school for native peoples under the oversight of Bishop Vasco de Quiroga in 1531 (Armand & Manzanares, 2002). Associated with the economic and social systems, it was precisely this practice of educating Natives that caused a stir in the higher political spheres because educated Indians could rebel if they were able to understand and communicate in Spanish language.

Mexico’s Independence

A large group of Mexican people of mixed ancestry who were unhappy with the Spanish crown and the Clergy began a revolutionary movement in 1810, and eleven years later México declared its independence. Deriving from this national movement, the first constitutional recognition, in the matter of education, was established in 1857, secularizing instruction and establishing the right to an education (Guerrero, 2018). From then on, particular attention was given to the rural and some Indigenous sectors, especially during the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas del Río from 1934 to 1940.

The political upheaval in post-revolutionary times had significance, particularly in Indigenous education. “The constitution of 1917 left to the states the work of establishing and maintaining schools. The state governments neglected this function.... In view of this condition, the Constitution was amended in 1921 to permit the Federal government to establish schools wherever they were needed” (Benjamin, 1935, p. 187). That same year, the nation was on its way to unify the country’s national identity, thus in regard to Indigenous education there was a need to acculturate them to fit this purpose. As the Federal government took this sector into its own administration, it began by implementing programs that would counteract illiteracy nationwide. The project *Internados indígenas* (1926) “*preveía la formación de jóvenes representantes de diferentes grupos indígenas del país que, al terminar sus estudios, tenían que volver a sus comunidades de origen con el objeto de ‘integrarlas en la cultural nacional’*” [The Indigenous

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Boarding Schools project (1926) envisioned the training of young representatives from different Indigenous groups in the country, who, upon completing their studies, were required to return to their home communities with the purpose of ‘integrating them into the national culture’ —author’s translation] (Giraud, 2010, p. 522). The priority, at this point, was for Indigenous peoples to integrate and assimilate their community members into the dominant culture.

The *Internados Indígenas* however did not have the impact that was projected, and the program was canceled because Indigenous students did not return to their home communities. A change in strategy led to the development of *misiones culturales* (cultural missionaries) with the objective of training those possible candidates in an intensive workshop of a month for new teachers. This training process was done in different Indigenous communities throughout the country. The interesting dichotomy in this second project, is the permanency of objectives from the *Internados Indígenas* combined with the praxis of intercultural model, a rudimentary methodology in México at that point. The results for those trainees were their recognition as bilingual teachers in their communities.

During Cardenas del Rio’s presidency, he promoted two projects to enhance Indigenous education; the Proyecto Carapan, implemented from June 1932 to January 1933 (also known as Estación Experimental), and the Proyecto Tarasco² in 1940. Both projects were carried out in the state of Michoacán in the Indigenous P’urhepecha region. Proyecto Carapan was aimed at literate adults belonging to this community and covered the principles of promoting data collection of Indigenous reality, comprehensive development of Indigenous communities, and the Proyecto Tarasco was implemented in the community of Paracho to provide training for 20 young men who spoke Tarasco (P’urhepecha as it is known in this region). The project sought cultural development through literacy teaching in Native tongue, and to accomplish it the means of instruction was under the use of local dialect and standard P’urhepecha language, as well as the Spanish as a teaching subject once the instruction in native language ended (Swadesh, 1939). With the success of the Tarascan Project, it was contemplated to replicate it in the Indigenous communities throughout the country. The main difference between these two, is that the first project held a Castellanization — or Mexicanize— ideology, whereas the second focused on teaching community members to read and write in their mother tongue.

The project of Internados Indígenas was readapted by the 1970s with the support of the INI (National Indigenist Institute at that time). The restructured project was known as hostel schools or ‘escuelas albergues,’ which were “developed initially by parents and promoters in the Sierra Tarahumara of Chihuahua during the 1960s, the hostel schools allowed parents in outlying communities to send their children to school” (Dawson, 2012, pp. 86-87). These schools involved the cooperation of the parents and the institution; parents providing food and schools housing. The purpose of cultural assimilation was strongly reflected in this educational model, and instruction was given in dominate language. The institutions’ objectives were to counteract the inequality gap children from rural or Indigenous backgrounds faced in contrast to those from urban contexts. It is

worth noting that, with some changes, these institutions are in operation up to this day and are now federally funded.

The Zapatistas Movement and Indigenous Recognition

Mexico's journey to recognize cultural and linguistic diversity has not been an easy one. Derived from the continuing practices of discrimination, assimilation, and strata superiority towards the Indigenous communities, aiming the consolidation of a standard national identity and culture, Indigenous leaders began to motivate their people to demand of equality. Thus, Indigenous peoples began demanding their rights in matters of language, education, and health resources, rebelling against the intentions of the Federal government to seek international political agreements (such as the North American Free Trade Agreement). In 1992, one of the greatest achievements was the reform to the Article 4 of the National Political Constitution of México, which established the acknowledgement of the Nation as a Multicultural country.

Then, in 1994, the strongest Indigenous movement in México manifested itself. The Zapatistas National Liberation Army (EZLN for its Spanish acronym) took over five state government offices in the state of Chiapas. The army sought the recognition of Indigenous culture in opposition to the globalization ideology that the federal government was supporting in regard to economic, political, education, and social contexts. According to Vargas-Cetina:

Education for all Indigenous children was one of the Zapatistas' demands. However, bilingual elementary school teachers were expelled from schools and barred entry to the villages where they had been teaching ... the Ministry of Education had to face a situation where children in large areas of the state of Chiapas would either remain away from school or be taught by the newly appointed teachers, who had been selected by the sole criterion of being more educated than their fellow villagers. (1998, pp. 147-148)

The changes had a distressing result for the communities. On one hand, their voices and demands were being heard, making a strong statement on behalf of the Indigenous people nationwide. However, on the other hand children were assigned these new groups of teachers with little training, risking the children's educational progress.

The first acknowledgement of Indigenous rights was in 1992, however this was on paper and not implemented until new reforms. These reforms to the National Constitution benefited cultural and egalitarian rights for the Indigenous groups and acted as an opening towards linguistic diversity recognition. Thus, under the presidency of Vicente Fox Quezada (2000-2006), the Federal government contributed to the recognition of linguistic rights in the country. Keen Indigenous activists, along with State representatives designed the proposal for the authorization of the Ley General de los Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueb-

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los Indígenas (General Act on the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples). In 2003, the State Congress published this Act, validating native languages (68 languages, and 364 linguistic variants) as national languages along with Spanish. Additionally, Article IV declared the creation of the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (National Institute of Indigenous Languages—INALI Spanish acronym). In such way, linguistic and cultural diversity were recognized as part of the Nations' identity. The integration of this institution became an encouragement for communities nationwide to demand attainable educational programs. The recognition of these Indigenous languages as national languages promoted the establishment of México's Linguistic Rights.

The Intercultural Educational Model

Society is in constant movement, thus the necessity to introduce interculturality in our systems (from government, to social, to educational, etc.). Contact between two ideologies puts education at the center of interculturalism. As defined by Jackson “intercultural communication generally refers to interpersonal communication between individuals (or groups) who have been socialized in different cultural (and, in most cases, linguistic) environments. Cultural differences may include such aspects as age, class, gender, ethnicity, language, race, nationality, and physical/mental ability” (2019, p. 3). Interculturality is a term that has been formally applied to educational models in México for the last 30 years. To understand such a complex approach to education, it is imperative to reflect on our past in order to understand what is happening today. In the matter of education, the purpose of this model is pivotal to the transformation of the education system for Indigenous peoples.

Education is needed to promote unity and relation among different cultures, thus multicultural and multilingual approaches engendered the principles of interculturality. The Multicultural Educational model tends to hinder interaction among different groups, promoting a non-dynamic relationship and setting it as tolerance between groups (Schmelkes in Velasco & Rentería, 2018). Whereas, “The implementation of intercultural education aims at cultivating tolerance, acceptance, and appreciation between people from different cultures, understanding of each others' problems regardless of their cultural background; and empathy and respect through being open to other cultures” (Tsaliki, nd, p. 45). These descriptions of the elements of interculturality are present in the innovative educational system the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) implemented in higher education through the Universidades Interculturales.

As the Indigenous groups embraced the accomplishments derived from the upheaval of social movements and the State's posture in equity, another significant battle was gained. The creation of the Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe (General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education)-CGEIB acronym in Spanish. This institution became an active unit under the responsibility of the SEP in 2001. The objectives as describe by the SEP are:

Impulsa, coordina, asesora y evalúa que el respeto a la diversidad cultural y lingüística esté presente en las políticas y propuestas educativas para todos los tipos, niveles, servicios y modalidades educativos. Su labor implica diseñar, acompañar y evaluar la instrumentación de políticas y prácticas educativas conducentes al conocimiento y reconocimiento de los aportes de los distintos pueblos y culturas que han contribuido a la formación de la nación mexicana, comenzando por los pueblos indígenas que la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos reconoce como su sustento original. [To promote, coordinate, advise, and evaluate that respect for cultural and linguistic diversity is present in educational policies and proposals for all types, levels, services and educational modalities their work involves designing supporting and evaluating the implementation of educational policies and practices conducive to the knowledge and recognition of the contributions of the different peoples and cultures that have contributed to the formation of the Mexican Nation, starting with the Indigenous peoples that the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States recognizes as its original foundation—author’s translation]. (2015, p. 9)

In accordance with the previous stated, the CGEIB has the responsibility to incorporate ideology, culture, and Indigenous languages in the different levels of education. This process is carried out by guaranteeing curriculum design that covers realistic objectives that promote intercultural competencies among communities and institutions, administrative personnel, and learners.

Intercultural Universities (UIs)

Higher education in México has responded to Indigenous and rural populations by restructuring its system in accordance to these communities’ needs. The objective has been to develop and implement intercultural competence into the curricula. Thus, the CGEIB began developing an innovative program that intertwines cultural and linguistic aspects along with scientific knowledge. The program began its research and design in 2001 under the name of Universidades Interculturales (UIs). Mateos and Dietz state:

Through the creation of these new institutions the professional development of young people from Indigenous or marginalized areas, but also the recognition and development of their own towns are possible. From an official point of view these institutions turn into spaces aiming to provide quality and culturally relevant education. (2015, p. 128)

Erroneously, native people were considered illiterate hence the idea that formal education in these Indigenous areas did not comply with the nation’s identity. UIs came to work with community members to design and implement a model that embraced Indigenous identity.

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As stated in the guidelines of the *Educational Model Book*, “Three educational axes were taken into consideration to support the new institution’s actions: mother tongue, culture and strong connection with the community” (SEP, 2009, p. 22). These guidelines advocated the creation of academic programs aiming at strengthening identity, promoting cultural values, and contributing to linguistic revitalization. Some of the first BA programs that were designed and developed were: a) Sustainable Development; b) Art and Cultural Heritage; c) Language and Culture, and d) Intercultural Health. Thus, the establishment of such programs connected academic development with Indigenous communities’ lore. The underpin objective is for Indigenous students to connect their professional careers with the members of the communities they come from, hence a key factor is the ‘*vinculación comunitaria*’ (community bonding). There has been a considerable increase in the educational proposals, this will be covered further on.

In 2001, by government decree, the first Intercultural university was established under the name of Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México (UIEM) and was created under the supervision the CGEIB in collaboration with the SEP. Table 1 on the following page presents the list of UIs that up until 2003 were part of these Red de Universidades Interculturales (Intercultural Universities Network). These ten universities were recognized by the CGEIB and the SEP as part of the Intercultural Universities Network, however there are other institutions that share this intercultural model.⁶ Because of the principles that hold the philosophy of the UIs, these institutions are nested in Indigenous territories. The location of these universities underlies the necessity to take education to the learner and the communities. One of the reasons behind higher education dissertation, regarding Indigenous students, is the economic solvency of these Indigenous families. In contrast to conventional state or federal universities, these institutions do not request examination scores prior to student acceptance, and some—as in the case of the Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán (UIIM) do not have registration fees. According to datamexico.org, these universities have increased their enrollment in the last three years from 2019 an average of 9,088 to 17,275 in 2021. As it can be seen in Table 2, the demand has grown in all the UIs. It is worth mentioning that in these specific years, the education system worldwide was tested owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, thus virtual classes took over in-person sessions. This did not have a negative impact on the UIs presence, even though the challenge on matters of internet access in the communities did impact the students and teachers. The platforms and digital teaching-learning allowed for the community to learn and interact in a wider range, applying the principle of interculturalism even more (Schedule and flexibility were strategies that the UIIM implemented to counteract dropping out, thus students from different extensions were able to collaborate with each other).

Table 3 shows the number of extensions each UI has in their state of origin. These extensions are focus on the Indigenous regions that have survived historical cultural genocide. As it can be noticed, there are a combined 35 campuses, which means that only 35 Indigenous communities are being taught under this educational model. This number is only half of the 68 Indigenous

Intercultural University	Decree Creation	Opening Date	Location
Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México ⁴ (UAIM)	Dec. 2001	2004	Mochichahui, Sinaloa
Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México (UIEM)	Dec. 2003	Sept. 2004	San Felipe del progreso, Estado de México
Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas (UNICH)	Dec. 2004	2005	San Cristóbal de la Casas, Chiapas
Universidad del Estado de Puebla (UIEP)	Mar. 2006	Aug. 2006	Huehuetla, Puebla
Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco ⁵ (UIET)	April 2006	Aug. 2006	Oxolotán, Tabasco
Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán (UIIM)	April 2006	2007	Pátzcuaro, Michoacán
Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo (UIMQROO)	Oct. 2006	Aug. 2007	José María Morelos, Quintana Roo
Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero (UIEG)	Nov. 2006	2006	La Ciénega, Guerrero
Universidad Intercultural de San Luis Potosí (UICSLP)	Jan. 2011	Aug. 2011	San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí
Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Hidalgo (UICEH)	2012	Sept. 2012	Tenango de Doria, Hidalgo

Table 1: Intercultural Universities

communities that have been recognized by INALI. It is imperative to mention that, in recent years, the UIs are also accepting students with non-Indigenous backgrounds as these universities are considered a second option to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

As it is expected the objectives of an institution are to grow, to set new goals, to meet these challenges and have a strong presence nationally and internationally. Thus, UIs have targeted the development of graduate programs, to guarantee that students from these communities can continue their academic studies. Six of these UIs have designed at least one master’s program, and two have even launched a PhD program. This model is a spiral teaching approach that expands its horizons toward interculturality by promoting higher curricular standards,.

Intercultural universities have been changing their academic offerings through the years. Table 4 shows the number of programs the institutions offer, and Table 5 gives their names. The courses that include ‘intercultural’ as part of their administrative name are the pioneer ones in the UI model. As the UIs have expanded, they have maintained the essence and philosophy that advocates this educational model.

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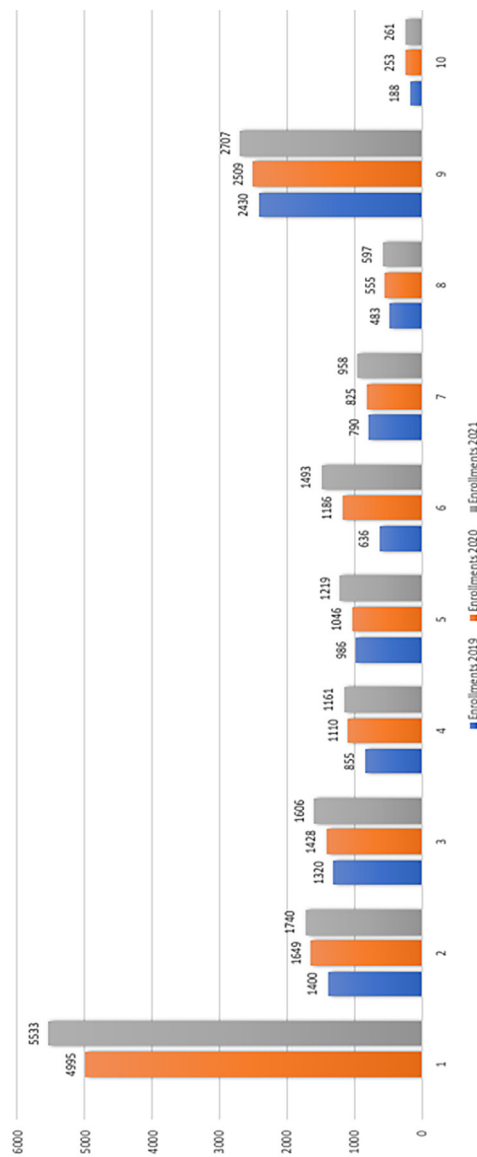


Table 2: UI Enrollments (2019-2021): 1) UAIM; 2) UIEM; 3) UNICH; 4) UIEP; 5) UIET; 6) UIIM; 7) UIMQROO; 8) UIEG; 9) UICSLP; 10) UICE

The State is still in debt toward the Indigenous communities, particularly in regards to linguistic genocide. One of the main axes, expressed by the CGEIB, is the encouragement of these institutions to work on linguistic revitalization, thus the BA in Language and Culture was designed to cope with linguistic displacel

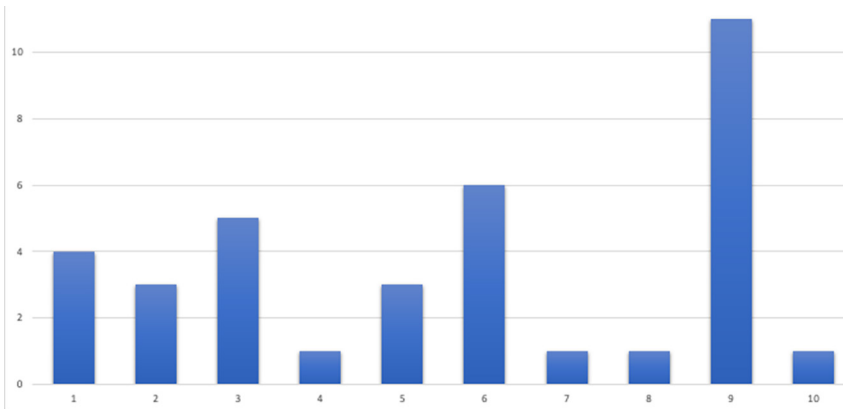


Table 3: UI Campus Extensions: 1) UAIM; 2) UIEM; 3) UNICH; 4) UIEP; 5) UIET; 6) UIIM; 7) UIMQROO; 8) UIEG; 9) UICSLP; 10) UICE

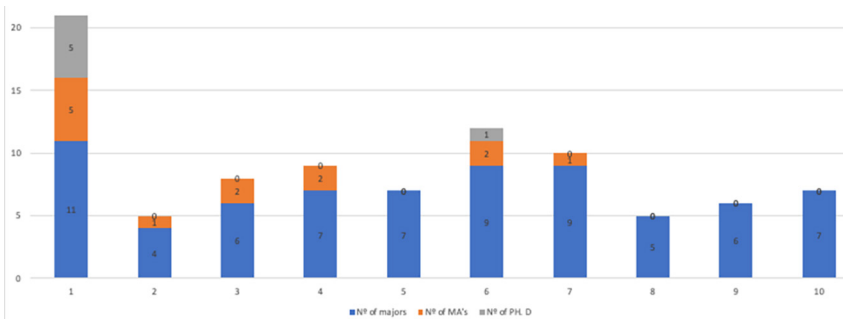


Table 4: Number of Academic Undergraduate, Graduate and Postgraduate Programs. 1) UAIM; 2) UIEM; 3) UNICH; 4) UIEP; 5) UIET; 6) UIIM; 7) UIMQROO; 8) UIEG; 9) UICSLP; 10) UICE

ment. This seems to be a priority due to the guidelines that govern this intercultural educational model, but it might not be achieving its purpose just yet. Table 6 a depiction of the languages that are taught in each of the UIs along with the number of semesters of instruction each university dedicates to them.

The 20 languages taught are part of the 68 national languages, as we can see some of them are repeated but it does not mean they belong to the same variant. As aforementioned, there are 68 Indigenous systems nationally recognized, but at the same time there are 364 dialectal variants acknowledged as well. Thus, the Maya that is taught in UNICH is not the same as that in UIMQROO. The teaching of these Indigenous languages is not restricted to the Language and Culture program; it is taught to all students, regardless of their academic enrollment. The performance of language teaching, Indigenous language in this case, relies on the institution’s guidelines. For instance, UIEG, UIET, and the UIIM implement a program that intertwines language skills and regional Indigenous’ lore.

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BAs programs	Licenciaturas e Ingenierías
Language and Culture	Lengua y cultura
Sustainable Development	Desarrollo sustentable
Intercultural Communication	Comunicación Intercultural
Intercultural Health	Salud Intercultural
Art and Intercultural Design	Arte y Diseño Intercultural
Nursing	Enfermería
Community Administration and Local governance	Gestión Comunitaria y Gobiernos Locales
Political Science and Public Adm.	Ciencias Políticas y Adm. Pública
Intercultural Nursing	Enfermería Intercultural
Community Forestry	Ingeniería Forestal comunitaria
Forestry	Ingeniería Forestal
Community Psychology	Psicología Comunitaria
Community Social Psychology	Psicología Social Comunitaria
Computer Systems	Sistemas computacionales
Rural Sociology	Sociología Rural
Alternative tourism	Turismo Alternativo
Medical Surgeon	Medico cirujano
Agronomy and Zootechnics	Agronomía y Zootecnia
Law with an Intercultural Focus	Derecho con enfoque Inter
Sustainable Agriculture Production	Producción agropecuaria sustentable
Agroecological Production systems	Sistemas de Producción Agroecológicos
Industrial Engineering	Ingeniería Industrial

Table 5: Degrees and Engineering Programs at UIs

The Language and Culture academic program was designed to contribute to linguistic awareness of these national languages. Therefore, the curriculum, at the UIIM, covers three main research lines: applied linguistics, language teaching, and translation, all aimed at Indigenous languages. Nowadays, there

UAIM	UIEM	UNICH	UIEP	UIET
Yolem'me	Mazahua, Otomí, Náhuatl, Tlahuica, and Matlatzinca	Maya Zoque	Totonaco, Náhuatl, Ngigua (Mixteco), Popoloca	Ch'ol, Yokot'an, Zoque, and Tsotsil
Six semesters of instruction	Eight semesters of instruction	Six semesters of instruction	Three semesters of instruction	Five semesters of instruction
UIIM	UIMQROO	UIEG	UICSLP	UICEH
P'urhépecha, Mazahua, Otomí	Maya	Tu'un Savi, Mè'phàà, Náhuatl, Ñomndaa	Tének, Pame, and Náhuatl	Náhuatl, Otomí
Six semesters of instruction	Six semesters of instruction	Four semesters of instruction	Two semesters of instruction	Six semesters of instruction

Table 6: Indigenous Languages Taught at Intercultural Universities

are languages such as the P'urhepecha, taught at the UIIM, that do not have an official writing system.⁸ For this language there are at least six alphabet systems released by different institutions, however the community has not accepted any of them as their official writing system.⁹ Table 7 below shows the response that these communities have given to the acceptance of this program in the past three years.

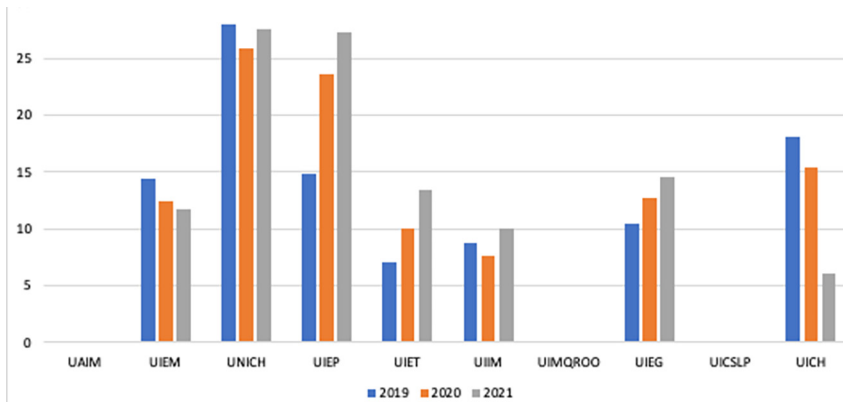


Table 7: Number of Students Getting Language and Culture BA Degrees (2019-21)

These percentages demonstrate a constant demand toward the Language and Culture program, withal these numbers are low in contrast to those from other academic programs. It is important to note that the UICSLP, despite having presence in three Indigenous communities, does not promote the Language and

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Culture academic program in any of its eleven campus extensions. The closest program they offer is a BA in Intercultural Communication, which includes two semesters of linguistic diversity. In regard to UAIM and UIMQROO, the data collected was as general enrollment, thus the specific percentages per program were not shown. Language and Culture graduates from the UIEM in Santana, manifested their worries and difficulties when it came to their fieldwork, “Al inicio se contrataban a los egresados que tienen como primer lengua el idioma indígena, los contrataban para dar clases... muchos de ellos son pasantes, pero tienen el dominio de la lengua... son nativo-hablantes... pero no puedes dar clases de lingüística, de pedagogía, tienes que tener una maestría” [At the beginning, graduates whose first language is an Indigenous language were hired to teach. Many of them were interns, but they have mastery of the language.... They are Native speakers.... However, you need to have a master’s degree —author’s translation] (2017, p. 126). A similar case has arisen at the UIIM, from personal experience, those graduate students from the BA in Language and Culture were hired to teach the language as a second language owing to their ‘proficiency’ and academic achievements. However, for compulsory subjects related to theory, they were not given an opportunity, these subjects were assigned to those with an MA degree or for non-Indigenous professors.

What Programs Are Students Attending UIs Favoring?

After nearly two decades, the most popular programs in UIs are related to health. The second most popular programs relate to sustainable development and language and culture, followed by the law with an intercultural approach (see Table 9). The program choices of young Indigenous students reflect their interests motivated on their communities’ needs and national and international demands.

Santanas’ (2017) research also alluded to the BA in Sustainable Development as one with more demand at the UIEM, still the last three years their enrollments have dropped a 10%. Based on the following graph, this program has significantly declined in the cases of the UIEP, UIIM, and UICH:

Discussion and Conclusion

Education is an outstanding resource to achieve wellness, to promote egalitarian rights and values, and above all, to become critical peoples in the acquisition of knowledge. Prior to social movements, education was a luxury for those who belonged to high-leveled societies. These favored sectors were educated under the premises of superiority, thus their academic development covered fine arts and dominating languages. This ideology of privilege has permeated the system for hundreds of years, leaving those from Indigenous backgrounds in a forsake place. Indigenous communities have faced an immense number of battles to preserve their lives, land, language, and culture.

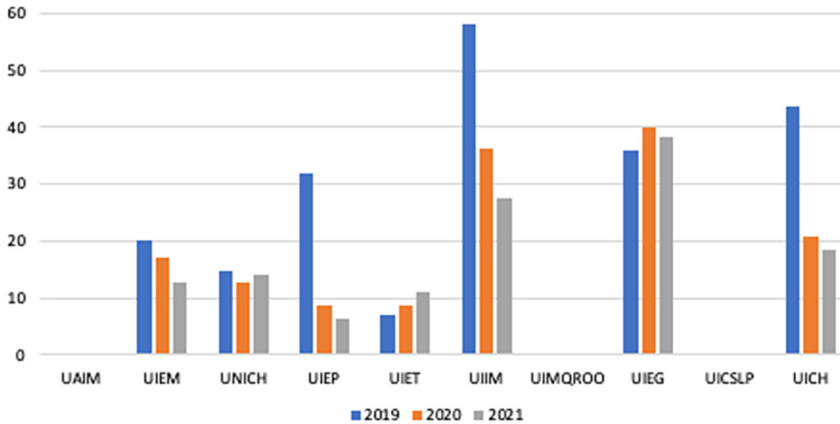


Table 8: Number of Students Getting BA Degrees in Sustainable Development

UAIM	UIEM	UNICH	UIEP	UIET
Engineering in Quality Systems	Degree in Nursing	BA of Sustainable Agricultural Production	BA of Language and Culture	BA of Intercultural Nursing
	32.50%	24.90%	27.30%	31.60%
BA of Community Social Psychology	BA of Intercultural Health	BA of Digital Art and Digital Design	Degree in Nursing	BA of Intercultural Health
	28.30%	22.20%	26.40%	18.70%
Accounting Degree	Sustainable Development BA	BA of Intercultural Law	BA of Law with Intercultural Approach	BA of Language and Culture
	12.70%	19.20%	12.10%	13.4
UIIM	UIMQROO	UIEG	UICSLP	UICH
Law Degree with Legal Pluralism Approach	BA of physiotherapy	Sustainable Development	Law Degree	BA of Intercultural Medicine
		38.40%	32.50%	32.20%
Sustainable Development BA	Gerontology	Forest Engineering	BA of Administrative informatics	BA of Language and Culture
		20.60%	30%	27.60%
BA of Language and Culture	Occupational Therapy	BA of Language and Culture	Degree in Nursing	BA of Alternative Tourism
		14.60%	11.60%	14.5

Table 9: Top Demand Degrees 2021

Equal access to education is a long-term goal that minorities have demanded since revolutionary times. Today, higher education in México has opened its access to Indigenous communities, a minor but significant achievement, however since there are 68 national languages recognized as official languages, this has been the challenge that the education system is facing. The importance of this type of research is relevant to the contribution of needs that Indigenous people are constantly demanding educational institutions and government secretariats. The findings on regards to the top three academic programs of each UIs, contrast the initiative of the CGEIB and the SEP’s stated purpose. After nearly 20 years of the intercultural educational

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model, it is imperative to turn back and analyze its guidelines to enhance this approach based on the communities' current necessities. These particular necessities are being implicitly demanded and reflected through the enrollment.

Based on the data collected and depicted, the UIs initial objectives have been to promote intercultural understanding by providing Indigenous communities scientific knowledge to their territories. However, this project still has a trace of Indigenous assimilation purpose, as well as a sense of academic bias towards these graduates. Upon graduation, students face the challenge of incorporating themselves in the employment sector. The fact that most of the BAs are attached to the term 'intercultural' limits the possibilities for graduate students to compete with those from conventional BAs. Thus, the pioneer programs are slowly being replaced with those promoted in conventional institutions, implying degree superiority over the ones UIs initially presented.

Another downside is the community bond that the UIs intend to create in favor of community members and graduate students. Santana, in her research at the UIEM exposed that the students' observations strongly disagree with the institution's mission, "la universidad no ha tenido impacto en las comunidades, al menos en mi licenciatura (Lengua y Cultura) no, no he visto nada de eso" [The university has not had an impact on the communities, at least not in my bachelor's degree (Language and Culture), I haven't seen anything like that—author's translation] (2017, p. 130). On personal experience, students are taken to a variety of communities to work with artisans, teachers, or farmers (depending on their academic programs) to learn from these community members, and to share their knowledge to improve their labor performance. Particularly, a similar situation has been observed at the UIIM, where graduate students have not been able to have a strong voice in regard to the P'urhepecha language systematization.

Positive aspects of these institutions are the encouragement and revalorization of their enrolled Indigenous identity. Perhaps the results have not been the desirable ones, but today these students are impacting in their family's context. Most graduate students belong to agricultural, or artisan families, thus even if they do not work for bigger companies their acquired knowledge is applied in their family's local workplace.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is a complex world, throughout history societies have been taught to degrade and reject everything and everyone that does not resemble ourselves or our context. This dominating ideology of social strata promoted by capitalism has left minorities in a vulnerable position. In Mexican society, Indigenous groups have been confronting domination for the past 500 years. The bias underlying social and cultural awareness must be defeated, to achieve real intercultural communication, education, and social interaction.

For the past 20 years Intercultural Universities have concentrated on Indigenous areas, rather than on urban areas, and major challenges have been conquered in the establishment of ten UIs. These institutions are not always the first option for students, but they are the ones in which they can rely on to continue their academic studies. The impact of the graduate students in their communities depends on different factors. For instance, in the field of law and politics there is

a lack of certified Indigenous translators, hence those who do not speak Spanish have been ignored by the government for years.

The real impact of this innovative UI model is yet to be discovered, for now the success of these institutions is in need of learners' critical learning. Strong and real intercultural and Indigenous egalitarian recognition can only be achieved and retained by education.

Notes

¹For specific location visit <https://idegeo.centrogeo.org.mx/ms/mujeresindigenas/narrative/12>

²Tarascos is the name that Spaniards gave this Indigenous group during the colonial period, nonetheless, they identified themselves as P^ourhepecha.

³Vinculación Comunitaria is a formative axis that allows students to design and implement community projects that benefit both, locals and the students.

⁴The Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México was known as the Universidad de Occidente from 2001 to 2004, when it was recognized as part of the UIs <https://www.ses.unam.mx/publicaciones/articulos.php?proceso=visualiza&idart=2194#:~:text=La%20instituci%C3%B3n%20pionera%20en%20M%C3%A9xico,Estado%20de%20M%C3%A9xico%2C%20en%202004.>

⁵The UIET began its academic duties prior to the federal recognition as an Intercultural University, this driven from a local movement demanding egalitarian education. <https://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/74534?lang=pt>

⁶The Universidad Intercultural Veracruzana; “Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur (UNISUR), El Instituto Superior Intercultural Ayuuk (ISIA), La Universidad Comunal Intercultural del Cempoaltépetl (UNICEM), El Instituto Intercultural Ñoñho (IÑ), La Universidad Campesina Indígena en Red (UCI-Red), El Instituto Intercultural Maya, la Universidad de la Tierra (UNITIERRA)” (Santana, 2017: 120).

⁷The data corresponding to the Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México in regards to 2019 was not available at the time of study.

⁸P^ourhepecha language has multiple variation in phonological, morphological, and lexical levels, thus community members have not been able to reach uniformity regarding a standard system.

⁹Friar Maturino Gilberti 1558; Fray Manuel de San Juan Crisóstomo Najera 1870; Tarascan Project 1939; Literacy period 1944-1963; National Indigenous Institute 1964; and 1976 Project developed by CREFAL. Pátzcuaro. http://www.idiomas.umich.mx/cadi/talleres/docs/alfabeto_purepecha.pdf

Acronyms

EZLN: Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional

CGEIB: Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural y Bilingüe

INALI: Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas

SEP: Secretaría de Educación Pública

UAIM: Universidad Autónoma Intercultural de México

UIEM: Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México

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UNICH: Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas

UIEP: Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Puebla

UIET: Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco

UIIM: Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán

UIMQROO: Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo

UIEG: Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero

UICSLP: Universidad Intercultural de San Luis Potosí

UICEH: Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Hidalgo

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