

# INCLUSIVE INTERCULTURALITY: EPISTEMIC JUSTICE IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE NEW MEXICAN SCHOOL

## INCLUSIVE INTERCULTURALITY: EPISTEMIC JUSTICE IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE NEW MEXICAN SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** This research conceptualizes inclusive interculturality as epistemic justice in preschool education practice from the perspective of the New Mexican School. The intervention was carried out with students and teachers from the Pablo Latapí Kindergarten, afternoon shift, in the city of Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico. The participating preschool students from the three grades were selected using the simple random statistical method for convenience, based on their attendance and willingness to apply the research instruments; with regard to the teaching staff, the entire universe participated. A qualitative methodological approach was selected, and the sociocritical paradigm was chosen. To address and achieve the objectives set, two instruments were designed and applied: a semi-structured interview for students and a structured guide for a series of five focus groups with the teaching staff. The results of the interviews and the triangulation of the information were systematized using data analysis. In addition, a conceptual theoretical framework was constructed through a systematic literature review, generating dialogical and discussion practices based on critical thinking, specifying hermeneutic injustice as a form of epistemic injustice in discursive exchanges. Finally, a contribution is made to the conceptualization of inclusive interculturality as a proposal based on personal experience, decolonial pedagogy, and epistemic justice, finding that it constitutes a dynamic repertoire, a question of autonomy, an enriching process that reads times and spaces and that re-signifies and unites for social transformation, for the foundation of vibrant communities. This can be initiated through the deployment of educational practices that challenge the very structures and power relations that have been built at the educational level that receives early childhood.

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**Abstract:** This research conceptualizes inclusive interculturality as epistemic justice in preschool education practices within the framework of the New Mexican School model. The intervention was conducted with students and teachers at the Pablo Latapí Kindergarten, afternoon shift, in the city of Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico. Participating preschool students from all three grades were selected using simple random convenience sampling based on their attendance and willingness to participate in the research. All teaching staff participated. A qualitative methodological approach was selected, specifically the socio-critical paradigm. To address and achieve the stated objectives, two instruments

were designed and applied: a semi-structured interview for students and a structured guide for a series of five focus groups with the teaching staff. The results of the interviews and the triangulation of information were systematized using data analysis. Furthermore, a theoretical and conceptual framework was constructed through a systematic literature review, generating dialogical and discussion practices based on critical thinking, and identifying hermeneutical injustice as a form of epistemic injustice in discursive exchanges. Finally, a contribution is formulated regarding the conceptualization of inclusive interculturality, as a proposal from personal experience, from a decolonial pedagogy and from epistemic justice, finding that this constitutes a dynamic repertoire, a matter of autonomy, an enriching process, that reads times and spaces and that redefines and unites for social transformation, for the foundation of vibrant communities; being able to begin in the deployment of educational practices that challenge the very structures and power relations that have been built at the educational level that receives early childhood.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the multiple realities of growing cultural diversity, education plays a crucial role in promoting interculturality and inclusion in classrooms and schools; however, at the preschool level and within the context of Mexican education, there is a significant gap in the understanding and application of these concepts. The central problem of this research lies in the significant lack of knowledge about interculturality, as well as in the repercussions that this gap has in terms of a hermeneutic void that fuels epistemic injustice. This injustice manifests itself in discourse exchanges and in practice, as multiple cultures coexist in the educational environment but are neither visible nor valued. This situation not only hinders the comprehensive development of children, but also has an impact on the exercise of educational practices with poor or no intercultural and inclusive characteristics.

The absence of experiencing the combination of interculturality and inclusion on a daily and simultaneous basis in early education and at all educational levels is initially evident in the failure to interpret it collectively

collectively in order to conceptualize it and, with that, to understand the social experiences that surround and permeate it; because, in fact, there is a scarcity in terms of the interrelation of both concepts as a whole and, moreover, upon investigation, no conceptualization of inclusive interculturality as such was found, thus making this study an epistemic contribution that seeks to do justice from the very juncture of the aforementioned duality.

In preschool classrooms, children's ability to interact and learn in a diverse environment can be limited and negatively affected in how they conceive of themselves in relation to the culture to which they belong and how they develop that culture, perpetuating practices of invisibility and exclusion. This shows that, beyond the efforts made so far and the existing literature, there is a need to explore concrete proposals to promote inclusive interculturality from a sociocritical perspective in preschool students, whose ages range from 2 to 6 years old.

Therefore, this research is justified by its relevance in the current context, where the promotion of interculturality and inclusion have become fundamental pillars of a New Mexican School [NEM] and points of intersection in education, where the interests of children are paramount and where the aim is to contribute to the creation of fairer, more equitable, and enriching educational environments for every educational agent.

With this in mind, the study's overall objective is to construct a relevant and appropriate conceptualization of inclusive interculturality, based on educational practice for intervention with preschool students at the Pablo Latapí Kindergarten. Consequently, the specific objectives were:

- To explore preschool students' knowledge of interculturality.
- Review literature on the binomial interculturality and inclusion.
- To characterize the definitions expressed by teachers and preschool students.
- To construct a concept that allows for the understanding of inclusive interculturality, integrating relevant perspectives and an approach based on epistemic justice.

The work was structured in several stages using two instruments for gathering information and achieving the specific objectives set. First, preschool students' knowledge of the subject in question was explored. To this end, an interview was designed and administered to the population of the three school grades (64 students) at the Pablo Latapí Kindergarten, during the morning shift.

located in the Aramara II neighborhood, on the outskirts of the city of Tepic, Nayarit. Next, a review of the literature on interculturality and inclusion was conducted, which established a solid theoretical and conceptual framework. Next, hermeneutic gaps were identified around the two conceptualizations addressed, as well as the dynamics of interaction that arise, with the support of a series of five focus groups and their structured guides applied to the entire teaching staff (11 professionals), including music, physical education, and special education staff belonging to the Regular Education Support Services Unit [USAER] 51. Finally, a concept of inclusive interculturality was constructed from educational practice and as a contribution to enriching the field of study.

In this way, this research contributes by attempting to generate a positive and significant transformation in the dynamics of the educational community, promoting a more equitable education and preparing preschool students to coexist and thrive through inclusive interculturalism in diverse realities and societies. And thus, inspire educational practices committed to visibility and appreciation, which actively dismantle practices of marginalization of knowledge in early childhood. Because preschoolers are capable of learning about and experiencing inclusive interculturalism if they have teachers who practice and uphold an educational approach that is willing to repair itself through epistemic justice, with the aim of understanding each other collectively and understanding their own social experiences.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

For the research, a qualitative methodological approach was selected, since talking about inclusive interculturality from this perspective implies its ability to flexibly capture the complexity, richness, and subjectivity of diverse experiences in educational and social contexts, where the primary task of the researcher "is to understand and interpret the world of the participants," relying on "naturalistic observations... with a perspective... that transforms social reality" (Corona Lisboa, 2018, p. 73). The qualitative methodological approach allowed us to understand the social life of preschool-aged children and those who work in education in this context, through the meanings they themselves construct and by guiding them through the process.

In turn, the sociocritical paradigm was chosen because, as Walker Janzen (2022) argues, "it has an ideological component that seeks to transform reality as well as describe and understand it" (p.

22). In other words, "The sociocritical paradigm is in turn constituted by a group of research approaches that arise in response to the positivist and interpretive paradigms, admitting the possibility of a social science that is neither purely empirical nor solely interpretive" (p. 24), unfolding as a dialectical relationship between theory and practice (Ramírez, 2009, as cited in Walker Janzen, 2022, p. 24).

To address and achieve the first specific objective, a semi-structured interview tool was designed and applied to each of the preschoolers and first, second, and third graders, considering that this type of interview "is based on a guide of topics or questions, and the interviewer is free to introduce additional questions to clarify concepts or obtain more information on the desired topics" (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2010, p. 418), with the understanding that, when working with young children, it is essential to provide clear and accurate information in order to understand and advance in the construction of meaning.

To achieve the second objective, a conceptual theoretical framework on interculturality and inclusion was constructed, generating a dialogue and, at the same time, a discussion from the different perspectives analyzed, including those of Walsh (2007), Dietz (2017), and Rebolledo (2020), as well as those of the Ministry of Public Education [SEP] (2019, 2022, 2024) within the framework of the NEM and other perspectives that have emerged with it, such as those of Tirzo Gómez (2023), Mendieta Ramírez and Alejandro García (2023), and Sucupira Da Costa Lins (2025); specifying hermeneutic injustice as a form of epistemic injustice in discursive exchanges, from the perspective of Fricker (2017). With regard to the fulfillment of the third specific objective, a structured guide was designed and implemented for a series of five focus groups with the teaching staff, in order to characterize their manifest definitions of interculturality and inclusion, as well as those of the student community. According to Hernández Sampieri et al. (2010), when data is collected through focus groups, "there is an interest on the part of the researcher in how individuals form a framework or perspective of a problem through interaction" (p. 425) among themselves.

Some authors consider them to be a type of group interview, consisting of small or medium-sized group meetings (three to ten people) in which participants discuss one or more topics in a relaxed and informal setting, led by a specialist in group dynamics. (p. 425)

The fourth specific objective is achieved by formulating a contribution to the conceptualization of inclusive interculturality, as a proposal based on personal experience and epistemic justice.

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

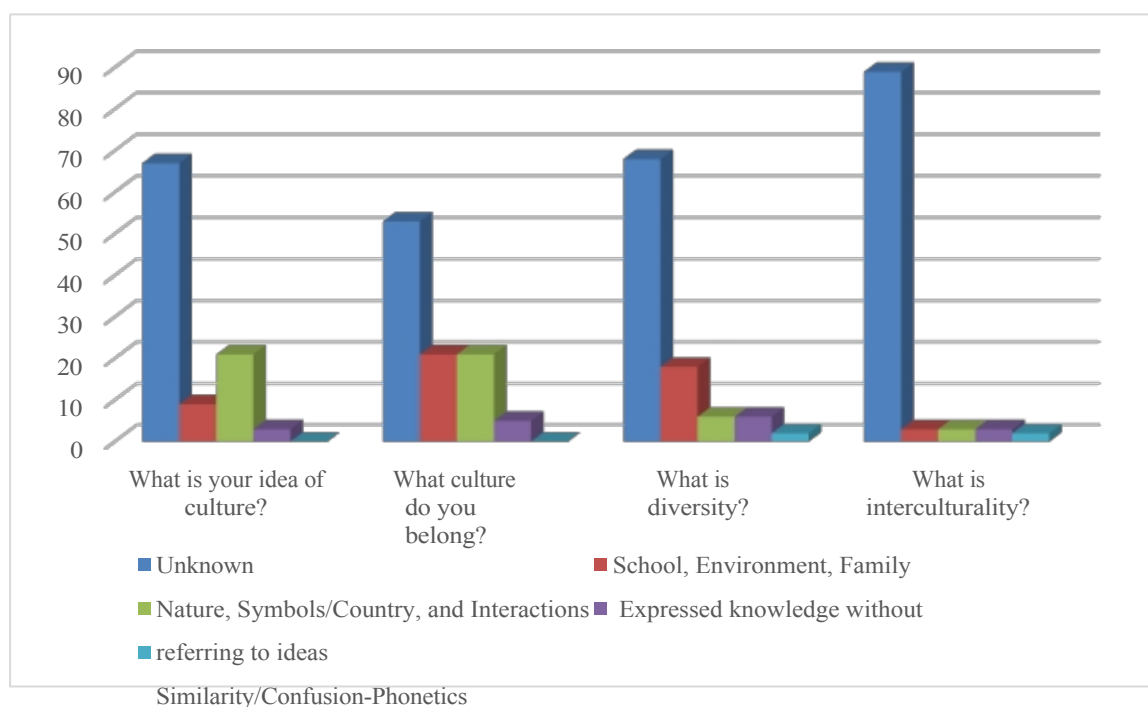
Intercultural and inclusive educational practice in the NEM has its roots in a historical and social context that highlights the need to transform the National Education System [SEN] to respond to the country's cultural diversity. Over the decades, Mexican education has faced the challenge of serving a population characterized by its cultural and social plurality, in addition to the multiple cultural expressions derived from historical processes such as colonization, migration, and globalization. The SEN has faced difficulties in ensuring inclusive education that values these intercultural differences.

In this vein, and within the semi-structured interview applied as the first tool to preschool children in question, some key questions are highlighted, including "What is your idea of culture?", "What culture do you belong to?", "What is diversity?" and "What is interculturality?" In response to the first question, 67% said they did not know; 3% said they knew but did not give any ideas; 9% related their answer to where they live, their homes, and families; 9% related it to nature (plants, animals, insects, rainbows); 3% related it to sadness due to celebrations such as the Day of the Dead; and 9% related it to the country, places within it, and the flag.

In the second question, 53% said they did not know; 5% said they knew without commenting further; 21% said they belonged to the culture of their families (mother, father, home, siblings, and grandparents); 15% said they belonged to the culture of the country or Mexico; and 6% focused on some element representative of nature. The third question resulted in 68% saying they did not know; 6% said they knew, but did not mention any ideas on the subject; 6% pointed to the flag and the country; 18% talked about their school, some activities they did, as well as the games and fun they experience there, and 2% related the term "diversity" to the phonetic similarity of the word "university." In the fourth question, 89% directly stated that they did not know what interculturality was; 3% said they knew, but did not express any ideas; 3% talked about family; another 3% talked about food and dealing with other people; and 2% associated the term "interculturality" with "darkness," also in the phonetic sense of the word.

It can be observed that, in the four questions selected from the first instrument, the responses given as "I don't know/no" and those related to not knowing exceeded 53% of the total. In the question about what culture is, 67% did not define it or did not provide clear ideas, while a small percentage related culture to their immediate environment, nature, or national symbols. Regarding cultural belonging, more than half, or 53%, also responded that they did not know, and a smaller percentage linked their culture mainly to their family or country. Regarding diversity, 68% showed ignorance, and a smaller percentage associated it with school, recreational activities, or representations of the country, showing confusion with the sound of the word. Finally, on interculturality, an overwhelming 89% said they did not know what it meant, and a tiny percentage related the term to family, food, or social interaction, also expressing confusion about the term due to its phonetics (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** *Exploration of knowledge about interculturality in preschool students.*



**Source:** *Own work* (2025).

In constructing a theoretical and conceptual framework that embraces interculturality and inclusion, it was necessary to consider and interweave the knowledge that the student population expressed about interculturality with the knowledge and lack of knowledge on the subject on the part of the teaching community

through the systematization of the results of the interviews and the triangulation of information using data analysis.

In the series of five focus groups implemented using the structured guide as a second tool, it was found that, for some members of the group, talking about inclusion was clearly associated with "students who face barriers to learning and participation [BAP] and need greater support from the Special Education Service"; for others, inclusion is also about addressing the specific cultural needs of each child. Interculturality focused mainly on aspects of indigenous peoples, although there were also those who linked it to aspects of gender and the environment. When discussing the construction of the concept of inclusive interculturality, it was talked about in terms of "the urgency and need for initial and continuing training" to help "avoid injustices in the classroom." Epistemic injustice was referred to as something unknown and new, but also as something meaningful, "as real feelings and thoughts oppressed in action," "as a reproduction of segregating and exclusionary practices that do not delve into the ways of thinking and living of preschool children"; because it allowed for their own autonomous visibility as education professionals who often lack the tools "to work with interculturality in a real way" and who, in many other cases, "fail to listen to what families and the community have to offer."

An analysis of the series of focus groups implemented in the context of preschool education reveals interesting aspects that deserve to be highlighted. The teaching community shows a dual vision of inclusion: on the one hand, it reflects a traditional approach focused on specific disabilities or conditions, and on the other, it broadens this vision to include cultural needs, indicating an openness to a more culturally sensitive inclusion. Relating interculturality to indigenous peoples is a common but also necessary approach to making historically marginalized cultures visible in educational contexts. However, linking it to gender and environmental issues in the discussion shows progress toward an expanded interculturality that recognizes multiple dimensions of diversity as well as some of their intersections, which is an innovative and enriching perspective for early childhood education.

The diversity of perspectives highlights the complexity of both concepts, and mentioning the latent need for training reflects a critical awareness of the current limitations in preparation.

teaching, which is key to promoting changes that enable injustices in the classroom to be identified and confronted, based on theory and practice. Although talking about epistemic injustice was new, the interpretations show a deep ethical reflection. Giving an emerging and collective meaning to inclusive interculturality reflects a dialogical dynamic that intertwines training needs, recognition of injustices, and practical challenges, which can enrich preschool education and the different educational modalities that converge in it.

Indeed, implementing the intercultural approach from the NEM implies specific training for teachers on issues related to cultural diversity, since, even though there are educational policies that promote interculturality, not all of the multiple contexts have the necessary tools to apply them in everyday practice. At the same time, there is resistance to change and structural differences in marginalized and indigenous communities that perpetuate inequalities.

The lack of adequate intercultural and inclusive teaching practices has profound consequences for the student community; because when their identities—cultural, social, linguistic, and others—are not recognized or valued in the classroom, there is a risk of creating alienating educational experiences that negatively affect self-esteem, motivation, and, of course, participation. Velázquez Urióstegui (2016) addresses a pedagogy of interculturality, where he refers precisely to "the practice of values to create cordial environments in the teaching-learning exchange" where "cooperative work is encouraged to involve its participants" (p. 36). In addition to this, and in the words of Louzao Suárez et al. (2020), it is necessary to do so from an anti-racist perspective based on coexistence that leads to transformation, "making visible the barriers that perpetuate inequality and social injustice" (p. 435, as cited in Louzao Suárez, 2019, p. 47).

The existence and manifestations of diversity are a reality, as are structural and power differences, which, even in urban contexts, reveal privileged places that obstruct the minimal description and transformation of this reality in students, teachers, families, and communities. In this regard, Dietz (2017) points out that,

The emphasis placed on interculturality as a descriptive tool is not based so much on the internally diverse composition of society, nor on its segmentation into different groups, as the multicultural approach would suggest; the intercultural perspective emphasizes not the composition

of the groups, but rather on the type and quality of intergroup relations within a society. Therefore, here the minority is not distinguished from the majority in demographic or quantitative terms, but in terms of power—the power to define who belongs to a majority and who is stigmatized as a minority. (p. 193)

With this understanding, he clarifies the tension between understanding interculturality as a political strategy "to polish, soften, or mitigate relations between groups" and as a transformative strategy that leads to "unveiling, questioning, and transforming historically rooted inequalities within society" (p. 194). From this perspective, explanations and definitions of interculturality have been mechanized and somewhat static, assimilated without the great complexity they represent.

Therefore, in the Mexican educational context, it is no longer sustainable to continue conceiving of interculturality solely from stereotypical perspectives directed toward cultural and ethnic minorities, nor is it sustainable to continue conceiving of inclusion as a macro phenomenon that is also reduced to stereotypical perspectives toward social groups that experience disability on a daily basis. Those who experience interculturality need to delve deeper into the nature of these inequalities, these clearly asymmetrical relationships, and the marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion that exist.

It is at this point that critical interculturality takes on meaning, since, according to Walsh, delves into the historical and structural nature of inequalities (imperial, colonial, etc.) that shape current cultural diversity and identifies the collective actors that can transform asymmetrical relationships, not individually but systemically, through the development of new channels of participation and new legal frameworks for the recognition of new postcolonial institutions and/or identifications.

(2003, as cited in Dietz, 2017, p. 194)

Certainly, there are conflicts that need to be identified, starting with the insistent problematization of educational practice in the face of trite conceptualizations of what interculturality and inclusion are, in the face of diversity of any form and type. Walsh (2007) mentions that "interculturality represents a logic, not simply a discourse, constructed from the particularity of difference... the logic of interculturality compromises knowledge and thinking that is not isolated from dominant paradigms or structures" (p. 51), that is, interculturality can be constructed from the places of difference in which it is pronounced, because these

differences arise from reinterpreting inequalities "as supposed cultural differences" (Dietz, 2017, p. 202) and should not cause otherness to be seen as a problem.

Based on the fact that "The NEM promotes understanding and appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as dialogue and intercultural exchange on a basis of equity and mutual respect" (Undersecretary of Higher Secondary Education [SEMS], 2019, p. 8), it is possible to see that what is sought at the preschool level, which is often underestimated, is that at this early stage, the recognition and appreciation of cultures and the multiple ways in which it is possible to conceive of the country and the world are promoted, with the aim that children, from their earliest years, live together and continue to learn to live together in environments where differences are respected, equality is promoted, and dialogue and openness between different ways of thinking, feeling, and living are encouraged.

The SEP's National Strategy for Inclusive Education [ENEI] (2019), in line with current Mexican education policy, points out that diversity is the "multiplicity of ways of thinking, feeling, and culture. It is inherent in any human community, whether small or large... Diversity is an expression of freedom and is legally embodied in the right to difference" (SEP, 2019, p. 110); which, according to Dietz (2017), marks a watershed between "an ideology that, politically and legally, promotes the perception of certain traits and characteristics—gender, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, for example—to the detriment of others" (p. 205), a watershed that is consolidated as a response to this exacerbated epistemic injustice in Mexican classrooms.

Because from the perspective of epistemic justice, diversity should no longer be discussed in terms of a mechanical sum of differences, but rather as a multidimensional and multi-perspective approach to the study of identities, identity markers, and discriminatory practices... by focusing on the often intersecting and reinforcing discriminatory attitudes and activities, and their impact on the formation of complex individual identities in their continuous processes of transformation. (Dietz, 2017, p. 205)

It is not, therefore, a matter of simply listing different characteristics in isolation and adding them up, but rather of understanding how these differences interact and intertwine across multiple dimensions that exist simultaneously, from complex and dynamic factors that influence each other, from discriminatory actions that reinforce each other, affecting the construction of individual identity and collective diversity, oppressing cultural diversity through the combination of identities.

By saying that diversity is a matter of ways of thinking, feeling, and culture, we highlight the prior existence of epistemic injustice, which has been fueled, perpetrated, and perpetuated by interpretations and exchanges of discourse and, therefore, manifested in educational practice. It is true that, in many contexts and schools, the student population has not felt heard or respected in their thoughts, feelings, and cultures; this is also true for the preschool population and, even more so, for those with disabilities and neurodiversities. Based on Fricker (2017), one form of epistemic injustice is hermeneutic injustice, in which "a gap in collective interpretive resources places someone at an unfair disadvantage in understanding their social experiences" (p. 17); analytically lacking this concept, creating distortions and structural biases in these resources. However, to determine whether this is "epistemic injustice, we must focus on the underlying social conditions that led to the relevant hermeneutic gap" (p. 245). This hermeneutic gap is notable in the simplistic and fragmented view of what diversity represents, a view that must transcend educational practice to a deep and comprehensive understanding of social and human complexity.

Furthermore, reducing diversity to an isolated set of differences reduces complexity, resulting in a lack of adequate conceptual resources to express one's own reality in a complete and coherent manner. This, in turn, limits participation in the production and sharing of knowledge, in communication, and in resistance to social injustices that may be faced. Epistemic justice around diversity and any related or derived construct denounces unequal social relationships that privilege certain discourses and knowledge while rendering others invisible and delegitimizing them. Epistemic justice destabilizes power structures that exclude and silence voices, breaks down walls of discrimination, and promotes a more just understanding among teachers that does not discredit their students.

Seen in this light, epistemic injustice affects adults and/or professionals who delve into and become aware of it and, of course, it also affects preschool children, as it is linked to social injustice, thus harming their development, participation, and recognition as whole persons within the educational community. Therefore, talking about thoughts, feelings, and cultures makes sense, because we are talking about functional diversity that in itself combats exclusion.

And it is precisely inclusion, which "is at once a value, an attitude, and a practice of appreciation and respect for diversity, actively promoting the construction of communities in which, together with solidarity, full respect for the right to difference prevails" (SEP, 2019, p. 112), is what frames policies and practices to advance this appreciation, consideration, and good treatment of the thoughts, feelings, and cultures of otherness.

In the direction of inclusion and from the SEP (2019), it is important to distinguish, on the one hand, inclusive education as the

set of values, principles, and practices that seek to achieve a comprehensive, effective, and quality education for all students, which does justice to the diversity of learning conditions and the needs not only of children with disabilities, but of all students. (p. 111)

And, on the other hand, educational inclusion, as the "set of reasonable measures and adjustments within the various levels of education, aimed at integrating people who, for reasons of identity, disability, socioeconomic conditions, or other conditions, have not been able to be included or remain in the education system" (p. 112). And it is precisely in each identity where students' senses of belonging interact and are required of each other in order to express different realities, confirming that the "construction of equitable relationships between people, communities, countries, and cultures" (p. 112) is interculturality, which "requires a systemic approach with a perspective that includes historical, social, cultural, political, economic, educational, anthropological, and environmental elements, among others" (p. 112).

Undoubtedly, there are many and varied conceptions of interculturality. When exploring its epistemologies, it is possible to find differences in the academic discourses of the North and the South, the latter being where the political educational transformation of the NEM is sought, which promotes collective reconstruction.

Rebolledo (2020) notes that, in Mexico, definitions of interculturality have sought and continue to seek "consensus among various academic sectors and institutional actors" (p. 165), encountering criticism along the way for linking it to public policy and losing ties to social movements. Rebolledo also points out that teachers talk about interculturalism to

refer to children from indigenous backgrounds who are present in schools and continue to use the concept of culture as if it referred only to indigenous culture.

In this sense, teachers are more culturalists than interculturalists; that is, although they embrace interculturalism and diversity, their concepts are more akin to cultural differentialism. References to diversity and cultural pluralism are almost always accompanied by demonstrative arguments about the existence of particular indigenous cultures and the autonomous presence of culture, thus becoming a way of talking about indigenous traditions where it is difficult to question their existence. Even though teachers have tried to orient their activities toward interculturalism and even attempt to take some of the recommendations provided by the institutions responsible for promoting it at face value, they have not been able to escape the old conceptualizations and evolutionary molds coined by Mexican anthropology since well into the 20th century. We could also say that these are signs of resistance to innovation or rejection of institutional policies. (2020, pp. 169 and 170)

Or even, there is the possibility that another hermeneutic injustice is at play; as it is said that the interculturality that is induced in schools is equivalent to cultural differentialism, which tends to segregate and segment, when intercultural education works to the contrary: to "promote the transformation of unequal relations between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures" (p. 171). Therefore, a conceptualization that does epistemic justice would undoubtedly have to distance itself from the aforementioned differentialism and assume that interculturality is a matter of compensation and not of autonomy.

In light of this, it is worth going back a couple of decades, when Chapela "conceives the arena of interculturality as a space of silence where many diverse people come with their own things to express themselves, to expose themselves, to enter into others and allow others to enter, to exchange, to enrich themselves, and to recreate themselves" (Weller, 2006, as cited in Rebolledo, 2020, pp. 171 and 172). Observing and experiencing interculturality as a process in motion that develops in diverse contexts of space and time balances the transition from the individual to coexistence, from coexistence to interaction, from interaction to solidarity-based coexistence, and from the articulation of power relations and

cultural meanings, and from solidarity-based coexistence to the construction of identities that challenge, enrich, and take ethical responsibility for diversity.

Epistemic justice in the face of interculturality is also about challenging structural inequalities, transcending the minimum of tolerating differences to transforming inherited and discovered power relations; because "Interculturality is not a discourse" (Montaluisa 2009, p. 99), "it is emerging as the guiding thread of a practice of true humanizing universalization" (Vázquez, 2009, p. 75), where "Committing to living in a human society is very different from subordinating oneself to the State" and to anyone else (Almeida, 2009, p. 94).

In 2022, Antileo, in a document commissioned by the Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean [OREALC] and from the perspective of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], established that,

Interculturality is a concept... that defines a transition "towards an appreciation of difference, recognizing it as a source of learning and enrichment. The intercultural approach highlights the need to build bridges between different cultures and to ensure that relationships are based on mutual respect and appreciation." (p. 4, as cited in UNESCO/OREALC, 2017, p. 31)

From Antileo's (2022) perspective, interculturality is fully related to the educational and political agenda of indigenous peoples; however, in the practice of the NEM, this is not the only factor. Thus, from the new 2022 Curriculum for Preschool, Primary, and Secondary Education,

Thinking about preschool, primary, and secondary education from an intercultural perspective means that it is possible for everyone to teach and learn knowledge and skills from diverse conceptual foundations that allow students to think about themselves and thus [*sic*] themselves, in coexistence with others and the environment. (SEP, 2022, p. 99)

During and after the implementation process of the new Curriculum, as well as its respective Programs, indicated in Agreement number 08/08/23 of the Official Gazette of the Federation [DOF] (2023) as "mandatory in the United Mexican States for all public and private schools incorporated into the National Education System" (second article) and as applicable from the "start of the 2023-2024 school year" (second transitional provision), other conceptualizations were generated from the theoretical thinking of the NEM.

Tirzo Gómez (2023), from the National Commission for the Continuous Improvement of Education [MEJOREDU], reflects on "reviewing interculturality as a perspective for building new relationships between individuals, groups, and the nation-state, but without neglecting the discussions it has generated"; discussions that range from theoretical and political terms to the debate that "for a sector of society, interculturality is the exclusive domain of indigenous peoples" (p. 6). However, when trying to determine the place of interculturality in the curriculum and education, one must "consider that the emergence of the ideal of inclusion adds a new perspective. Today, it seems that in curricular terms it is more important to be inclusive than intercultural" (p. 10). Even so, interculturality is present in the current curriculum proposal as one of the seven articulating axes that run through Basic Education, which ranges from early childhood to secondary school.

Mendieta Ramírez and Alejandro García (2023) propose a critical approach to interculturality, bringing Walsh and Viaña's perspectives to the table. They emphasize that "critical interculturality conceives of school as a privileged place for transformative and emancipatory education," where "it is not only a matter of valuing diversity, but also of emphasizing the power structures that maintain relations of subordination between cultures and territories" (p. 43). Thus, "critical interculturality constitutes the pedagogy through which an alternative model can be established" (p. 50). For this reason,

Critical interculturality among educators involves opening new paths for reflection, but also for action based on a humanizing encounter with "the other," which responds to the disadvantages and subjugation historically rooted in organizational and productive systems that function as an immense machine that produces inequality. (pp. 53 and 54)

As for the articulating axis, based on the SEP (2024), this is the meeting point "between the teaching of the teacher and the knowledge of the daily lives of the students" (p. 102); specifically, the articulating axis of critical interculturality,

based on the idea that cultures are dynamic and complex matrices of imagination, belief, understanding, interpretation, and action that individuals and groups construct and internalize to give meaning and reason to their lives, their communities, and the geographical and social contexts in which they live...

Interculturality refers to subjects, communities, and linguistic, cultural, social, and territorial identities in their diversity, which interact, dialogue, challenge each other, and produce different realities among themselves within a framework of asymmetrical relationships" (p. 111). According to the SEP (2024), training in critical interculturality is achieved by fostering sensitive and conscious subjectivities that feel outraged by human rights violations and any manifestation of violence or discrimination, and that also promote concrete actions to combat all forms of exclusion. At the same time, inclusion also stands as a coordinating axis, which is not limited to the incorporation of social groups into schools.

Thinking about inclusion from a decolonial perspective implies that children and adolescents are educated in spaces where they are aware that if one is missing for reasons of class, sex, gender, ethnicity, language, culture, ability, immigration status, or religion, then not everyone is included. (p. 106)

Reflecting on education from the perspective of inclusion and decolonial pedagogy implies learning to value ancestral knowledge and wisdom as much as universal culture, recognizing them as integral components of a heritage that is intangible and at the same time common to all humanity. It also generates "pedagogical relationships that link the reality of students with disabilities or outstanding abilities" (SEP, 2024, p. 108).

In this reality, interculturality goes beyond coexistence; it is a commitment to social justice and the construction of a more inclusive society. it is a philosophy that recognizes and celebrates diversity as a fundamental asset for the formation of global citizens, capable of facing the challenges of the present and future centuries with an open and understanding mind; representing an investment in building bridges between cultures, in the formation of critical minds, and in the creation of a future where difference is seen as a source of strength and not of fragmentation. Inclusion goes beyond simply recognizing the existence of a multitude of cultural forms, ways of thinking, and feelings; it is a commitment that involves creating environments where each person, with all their baggage, feels valued and an integral part of the time and space of societies.

Sucupira Da Costa Lins (2025) assumes that interculturality and inclusion depend on and are supported by ethical philosophy and, therefore, this becomes the basis for the ideas and practices that emerge from both.

terms, constituting themselves as instances derived from an ethical framework present in the social environment; that is, both inclusion and interculturality need ethics in order to become a reality. In this conceptualization, ethics distinguishes, empathizes, and dialogues with both parties, teaching through experience. On the one hand, inclusion is related to culture by understanding the values necessary for ethics, in order to provide conditions that enable true citizenship from an ethical standpoint. On the other hand, in interculturality, it is not enough to show indignation at daily discriminatory practices; it is necessary to cultivate a vision that does not reduce people to stratified groups, but rather continues the proposal of cultural integration, reducing all forms of violence, which in this study has been addressed from the perspective of epistemic justice as diversity. Sucupira Da Costa Lins (2025) continues, pointing out that, regardless of which term is coined among the variety preceding interculturality, what is important is to bear in mind the uniqueness of each person to be respected through values and particularly empathy as an ethical act; hence, both interculturality and inclusion cannot be understood outside the ethics applied in thought and action.

Interculturality teaches us to appreciate differences as opportunities for learning and growth, while inclusion ensures that these differences do not become obstacles, but rather incentives that enrich each context and environment. Both concepts are intertwined in inclusive interculturality to form the foundation of vibrant communities that transcend into increasingly resilient social fabrics and weave us together as a human family that is transformed through education. Undoubtedly, inclusive interculturality has key elements that characterize it (Figure 2), thereby determining what distinguishes it from other related concepts; allowing multiple perspectives as well as its application to understand and communicate its meaning in context, in reality, and in the NEM, from where, based on decolonial pedagogy, it becomes possible to review, deepen, re-signify, and refine conceptualizations; no longer betting on more concepts and manuals that exclude realities, but rather identifying injustices, living the experience, and doing epistemic justice in one's own space, time, and territory.

**Figure 2.** *Conceptualization of inclusive interculturality from the perspective of educational practice and epistemic justice.*



**Source:** *Own elaboration (2025).*

So, taking stock conceptually, rethinking and reframing the contributions that have emerged from the use of different tools; through the construction of relationships based on interculturality, from a complex and non-fragmented view of diversity and, for inclusive educational practices that dignify epistemic justice and social justice, we contribute the conceptualization of inclusive interculturality as:

A non-static process that redefines and justly unites interculturality and inclusion, that reads times and spaces; an encounter and disagreement between discourse and practice, which are neither a mechanized nor routine sum, nor a total rupture; it is an arsenal that has attributes of power because it does not validate where others accommodate others, but where self-perception begins, implying a reflective, self-reflective dialogue and social awareness. It is a collection of epistemic, methodological, and ethical resources that allow cultural and social diversity to be addressed in education.

and other spheres; it is a political act as an educational strategy, whose feelings and thoughts interrelate, intersect, and overlap with ethical maturity, in order to dismantle hegemonic perspectives on diversity—cultural or otherwise—and its representations, thereby dignifying identity from both an individual and collective standpoint; with the present and prospective vision of detecting and eliminating all discriminatory and exclusionary attitudes and activities that do not contribute to personal and community development, experiencing full diversity.

This concept thus constitutes a repertoire for social transformation, which can be initiated through the deployment of educational practices that challenge the very structures and power relations that have been built even at the educational level that receives early childhood: the youngest children in societies.

## CONCLUSIONS

Upon achieving the first specific objective, regarding exploring preschool students' knowledge of interculturality, it was concluded that they conceive of it through interactions with their environment and the playful activities proposed to them. Such experiences allow them to understand, value, and construct meanings from their realities, attending an educational level that is key to building an identity and an ethic of life.

In relation to the second specific objective, to review literature on interculturality and inclusion, the conclusion is that there is a wealth of information and definitions, but no link was found as a conceptual pairing of inclusive interculturality, making this a fertile field for further development. Furthermore, the review of interculturality and inclusion reveals a necessary break with hegemonic perspectives that reduce them to mere coexistence and superficial recognition without questioning colonial epistemic structures of power.

The third specific objective allowed us to characterize the definitions expressed by preschool teachers and students and, in turn, to assess how what teachers working at this educational level know and do not know about the binomial of interculturality and inclusion impacts the manifestation of epistemic injustice, because it can lead to neutrality, passive tolerance, and inclusion as assimilation into the system—not as autonomy—when a commitment to social justice and decolonial pedagogy is essential for transformation. If educational agents at this level do not deepen their knowledge and practice of inclusive interculturality, there is a risk of not

hearing the demands of the student population that challenge their own conceptualizations; of not making visible the manifestation of an underlying systemic injustice that renders invisible the meanings that preschool children have constructed and continue to construct.

For the fourth specific objective, to construct a concept that allows for the understanding of inclusive interculturality, integrating relevant perspectives and with an approach based on epistemic justice, the conclusion is that, even when a conceptualization has been achieved, it is not fixed, but must continue to advance in the fight against epistemic injustices and structural exclusions, implying a continuous redefinition of the relationships and meanings between knowledge, cultures, and people.

Based on the achievement of the four specific objectives of the research and, therefore, the achievement of the general objective, which is to conceptualize inclusive interculturality from the perspective of educational practice for intervention with preschool students, it is recognized that preschool education can reproduce not only material but also symbolic and cognitive inequalities by making invisible or devaluing the knowledge and ways of life of children and their communities. This finding underscores the ethical responsibility of teachers to promote an education that respects and values all forms of knowledge.

The teaching collective participating in the research demonstrates a self-perception as education professionals who are willing to question their own practices and to make limitations visible. This self-criticism is a fundamental ethical act that can open spaces for educational transformation from preschool children who, without a doubt, are experiencing and giving meaning to the rich knowledge that inclusive interculturality brings in their daily lives. This suggests that this pairing is not just an academic term with social connotations, but a living, interdependent construct that arises from experience and reflection and continues to be built upon in multiple contexts, territories, and by multiple agents, with the potential to transform educational practices, classroom relationships, and life outside the classroom from preschool age onwards.

The conceptual framework developed invites us to rethink inclusive interculturality as a space for dialogue on multiple forms of diversity, epistemic justice, and social justice, which is also an original contribution to curriculum design and teacher training within a decolonial pedagogy that allows us to be agents of genuine and lasting transformation in the realities of each territory. The

Dichotomy in inclusive interculturality should generate tensions that lead to ethical confrontation, reconciliation with one's own educational practice, and the overcoming of hegemonic knowledge and wisdom that reduce the manifest gap in the understanding and application of these concepts.

The greatest contribution of this study to the field of theory and practice in Mexican education, and indeed to any education system that experiences, understands, recognizes, and embraces inclusive interculturality, is to highlight preschool students as individuals who, despite their young age, construct meaning as part of the human fabric, and their educators as individuals who question their own place in systems that oppress children and who ensure the dismantling of structures that cause hermeneutic injustices. is the greatest contribution that this study makes to the theoretical and practical fields of Mexican education, and to any education and level that experiences, understands, recognizes, and embraces inclusive interculturality not as a single definition, nor as a single interculturality, but as epistemic justice.

## **FUTURE WORK**

Considering that, during this study, hermeneutic gaps identified as epistemic injustice were identified and that, based on this, a conceptual contribution regarding inclusive interculturality was constructed, it would be worthwhile to make a proposal for the characterization of interculturally inclusive educational practice in preschool education. At the same time, it would be important to address this practice from the initial teacher training stage.

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