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Transforming regional higher education: the decolonising role of Indigenous-inspired universities in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the transformative role of Indigenous-inspired universities in Latin America within the broader context of higher education and decolonial thinking. This term encompasses a variety of institutions, including both state-recognised and grassroots, autonomous ones. Despite their differences in origin and structure, these institutions are united by their commitment to Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and community-centred governance. Using the modernity/coloniality framework, the paper explores how 35 such institutions navigate epistemic tensions between Indigenous worldviews and dominant academic norms. Drawing on cross-country mapping of such universities, document reviews and in-depth interviews with representatives from the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural in Mexico and the Universidad Ixil in Guatemala, the analysis reveals the strategies these institutions use to address these tensions. It examines their missions, governance models and operational challenges, focusing on how they create hybrid and contested spaces that both accommodate and resist hegemonic epistemic and academic frameworks. The findings demonstrate that these spaces encourage epistemic insurgencies and disrupt hierarchical knowledge systems, providing opportunities for alternative approaches to knowledge and existence. The study highlights the diversity of Indigenous-inspired universities. While state-recognised institutions often face tensions between cosmetic reforms and systemic transformation, grassroots initiatives pursue radical autonomy, though they also confront challenges such as financial fragility and limited recognition. Walsh's concept of 'cracks' frames these universities as sites of resistance within dominant systems, where decolonial struggles unfold at multiple levels, revealing the complexity and plurality of epistemic re-existence.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the role of Indigenous-inspired universities within the wider context of higher education in Latin America. By this term, we refer to institutions that, regardless of their origins or degree of autonomy, are rooted in Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultural frameworks. This category encompasses fully autonomous universities, which are established and governed by Indigenous communities, as well as state-founded intercultural institutions that engage with Indigenous epistemologies. This conceptualisation recognises Indigenous-inspired universities as an umbrella category capturing a diverse sector committed to challenging

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dominant Western epistemologies.

In particular, we examine how these universities fulfil their institutional mission when navigating the local, national and international higher education systems that are shaped by modernity and coloniality. This framework reveals the interdependence between the promises of modernity, which are often presented as progressive and beneficial (Connell, 2014), and the systemic violence, marginalisation, and exploitation of those deemed 'others' (de Oliveira, 2021).

To explain the intrinsic relationship between modernity and coloniality, Quijano (2000, 2007) coined the term 'colonial matrix of power'. This matrix represents the entanglements between the capitalist system, the exploitation of nature, the military power of a few Anglo-European countries, and the racial, ethnic and class hierarchies that began with colonisation and continue to (re)produce themselves in contemporary societies. Lugones (2016) later expanded this framework to include gender and sexual hierarchies as constitutive dimensions of the colonial matrix. At the heart of the colonial power matrix is the maintenance of a hierarchical order that privileges Western ways of knowing, being and structuring society, often to the detriment of non-Western epistemologies and ontologies (Grosfoguel, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007, 2020; Paradies, 2020), which are often exoticised, commodified or denigrated.

Indigenous peoples around the world have historically been forced to engage with the dominant structures and logics of modernity and coloniality. At the same time, however, they have also continuously resisted these impositions, defending their sovereignty, reclaiming ancestral lands, and asserting the value of their languages, knowledge systems, and collective identities (Moreton-Robinson, 2020).

Universities are key sites for the reproduction and reinforcement of the colonial matrix of power. As primary producers and transmitters of scientific and technological knowledge, they are often considered neutral drivers of development and progress (Connell, 2020). However, these institutions have historically played a central role in the exclusion of Indigenous peoples, knowledge systems and cultural practices (Knopf, 2015; Woldegiorgis & Turner, 2023).

In Latin America, despite higher education reforms over the past two decades, some of which have modestly increased indigenous student enrolment (UNESCO, 2022), the logics of modernity/coloniality continue to operate in new forms. These include policies that symbolically acknowledge Indigenous presence while leaving deep structural inequalities intact (de Oliveira et al., 2015). Consequently, official discourses of diversity and inclusion often mask entrenched power hierarchies within higher education rather than addressing them (Chiappa & Finardi, 2021; Guzmán Valenzuela, 2021; Stein, 2022; Walsh, 2010).

1.1. Argument and positionality

As Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) explains, there are no pure Indigenous identities or knowledge systems untouched by colonial and postcolonial realities. Building on this, and in line with Restrepo (2007, 2018), we recognise the complexity of cultural identities in postcolonial contexts and how cultural hybridity, the blending of diverse influences, configures what Bhabha (2015) has called a *third space*. This space enables acts of resistance, complicity, or rearticulation of colonial legacies. Such hybridity can generate new, dynamic identities and projects that produce 'ruptures' (de Sousa Menezes, 2019), 'decolonial cracks' (Walsh, 2022), or epistemic insurgencies. However, it may also reinforce existing power structures when it obscures inequalities or leaves dominant hierarchies intact.

In this paper, we argue that while Latin American higher education remains embedded in the power structures of modernity/coloniality, some Indigenous-inspired universities are actively carving out third spaces. These are marked by hybridity, contradiction, and resistance, offering cracks (Walsh, 2022) in dominant logics through epistemic insurgencies and collective Indigenous projects. To support this argument, we map the landscape of Indigenous-inspired universities in Latin America, highlighting their varied origins and missions, as well as key tensions around autonomy, governance, funding, recognition in the face of national and global pressures and curriculum.

As Chilean scholars who are not Indigenous but racially mixed, we recognise that our positionality is shaped by the complex histories of colonialism, racialisation, social class inequality and cultural hybridity that define much of the Latin American experience. Although we received our academic training within Western-oriented institutions, our ontological and epistemological positions place us within and outside the systems of privilege that we seek to examine. Likewise, our position is informed by decolonial thought and a genuine intention to interrogate the mechanisms through which coloniality is reproduced, including our own blind spots, contradictions and complicities. This complex, contradictory and racially, culturally and epistemologically in-between position shapes how we engage with Indigenous peoples and their struggles. We do not claim to represent Indigenous voices. Rather, we approach this work as allies committed to epistemic justice. We are aware of the tensions and responsibilities that arise from writing about Indigenous educational projects while being implicated and privileged.

2. Framework

2.1. Key debates on decolonising epistemologies and universities

The decolonisation of knowledge and universities has become a key issue in critical scholarship around the world. In settler colonial contexts such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, scholars have highlighted the ongoing presence of colonial structures within academic institutions and the limitations of symbolic reforms. A key distinction in this literature is that between traditional colonialism, characterised by economic extraction and a maintained separation between colony and metropole, and settler colonialism, which entails the permanent occupation of Indigenous land and the attempted erasure or assimilation of Indigenous populations to legitimise settler claims to sovereignty (Veracini, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

For example, Tuck and Yang (2012) caution against the metaphorisation of decolonisation, arguing that reducing it to curricular or institutional change without addressing material dispossession can reinforce settler privilege. Building on this critique, Coulthard (2014) warns that state-led forms of recognition often reproduce colonial power structures. Meanwhile, Regan (2010) calls for reconciliation processes that address land, governance and settler complicity, rather than relying on symbolic gestures.

While these debates have often focused on material dispossession and land, decolonisation also has epistemic and ontological dimensions. This involves contesting dominant knowledge systems and affirming alternative ways of knowing, being and relating (Maddonado-Torres, 2007).

Connell (2014, 2020) critiques the global hierarchies that marginalise theories from the Global South. Consistent with these perspectives, de Sousa Santos (2015) proposes an ecology of knowledges, valuing diverse epistemic traditions on their own terms rather than subsuming them under a universalising Western canon. Furthermore, some authors critique dominant knowledge systems and propose alternative ways of producing and relating to knowledge. Mignolo (2011), for instance, introduces the concept of epistemic disobedience, calling for a delinking from Western epistemologies and affirming subaltern knowledge traditions.

In New Zealand, Tuhiwai Smith (2021) advocates Indigenous research methodologies based on principles such as relationality, reciprocity, and accountability to communities. Her work has been instrumental in advancing knowledge production practices that centre Indigenous worldviews and disrupt colonial paradigms in education and research. Building on Tuhiwai Smith, Kovach (2021) extends the discourse on decolonising research methodologies within the Canadian context. She provides detailed examples of how Indigenous methodologies can be used to honour Indigenous worldviews and ensure that research is conducted in ways that are culturally relevant and beneficial to Indigenous communities. Also in Canada, Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) emphasise the ways in which Indigenous scholars are reshaping academic institutions that have been influenced by Western epistemologies. They emphasise the importance of prioritising Indigenous ways of knowing by conducting Indigenous-led research, integrating Indigenous languages and traditions into curricula, and implementing institutional reforms that support Indigenous students and faculty.

In the African context, there has been an important movement to decolonise universities through the recognition and recovery of indigenous knowledge systems and resistance to the dominance of Western epistemologies (Dawnson, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Dawson (2020), for example, calls for a rehumanisation of African universities by reconfiguring their intellectual and structural foundations, proposing the development of a 'counter-university'.

A more radical departure from traditional educational practices is essential for the true decolonisation of higher education. Harney and Moten (2013) example, argue for the creation of alternative spaces of learning and community that exist outside and in direct opposition to conventional academic structures. These authors introduce the concept of the 'undercommons', a space where marginalised students and faculty engage in radical, subversive intellectual practices that challenge the fundamental assumptions of the university.

In discussing the decolonisation of educational practices and institutions, de Oliveira et. al. (2015) identified three levels of engagement with decolonising educational practices: a) *soft reform*, which integrates indigenous knowledge into existing frameworks without challenging power structures, risking tokenism and perpetuating systemic inequalities; b) *critical reform*, which seeks to deconstruct colonial power dynamics and emphasises epistemic justice and indigenous participation, but remains constrained by existing frameworks that may limit its potential for radical change; c) *beyond reform*, the most radical approach, which advocates new educational paradigms that break with colonial legacies, but is often seen as idealistic and difficult to implement.

In the Latin American context, there is a growing body of research which emphasises epistemic and political transformation. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) conceptualises coloniality as operating through three interrelated spheres: the coloniality of power, knowledge and being. Expanding upon Aníbal Quijano's concept of coloniality of power (2000), Maldonado-Torres asserts that colonialism devalues non-Western modes of knowledge and invalidates alternative ways of living. The coloniality of knowledge emphasises the continued dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies in determining what constitutes valid knowledge, thereby marginalising Indigenous, Black, and other subaltern epistemic traditions. The coloniality of being, in turn, reveals the ontological violence perpetrated by colonial systems which have historically denied colonised peoples full human status, erasing their ways of relating to, feeling, and imagining the world.

As a response, Restrepo (2007, 2018) argues for a decolonised anthropology that centres the voices of marginalised communities, proposing interculturality as a space of epistemic confrontation rather than mere coexistence. He suggests that genuine dialogue requires addressing entrenched power asymmetries and respecting different epistemologies on equal terms. Escobar (2013) builds on this idea with his concept of a pluriversal world, where various knowledge systems can coexist without subordination.

Drawing on these critiques, Tubino (2019) and Walsh (2022, 2023) propose more radical conceptions of interculturality, moving beyond dialogue and mutual recognition. They both view intercultural education as a transformative, decolonial praxis, not just a space for epistemic exchange. Tubino (2019) conceptualises intercultural education as a political and ethical project aimed at dismantling structural racism and colonial hierarchies. In turn Walsh (2022, 2023) emphasises the importance of critical intercultural education as a pedagogical and epistemological strategy for actively disrupting processes of racialisation, exclusion and epistemic violence against Indigenous peoples, Black peoples and others marginalised by dominant systems. According to this more radical perspective, interculturality is not merely about the coexistence of different voices, forms of knowledge, and ways of being. Rather, it is about resistance and creating ruptures within the structures of modernity and coloniality, which allow alternative epistemologies, ontologies, and relational modes to emerge and take root.

2.2. Indigenous and intercultural universities in Latin America

During the 20th century, most Latin American countries, often in alliance with the Catholic Church, sought to consolidate modern

nation-states by promoting a unified national identity (Ferrão, 2010). In this context, educational initiatives targeting Indigenous peoples adopted an assimilationist logic, which in some cases included limited forms of bilingual education aimed not at preserving Indigenous languages, but at facilitating their gradual substitution by the dominant national language.

In the middle of the century, progressive movements in universities initiated a series of intercultural education projects. These initiatives still focused on teaching indigenous communities in order to integrate them into society, but these projects also recognised the right of indigenous peoples to preserve and strengthen their own cultures. Ferrão (2010) goes on to explain that it was in the 1970s that indigenous peoples, despite their various struggles and ethnic differences, adopted a collective indigenous identity.

This collective identity materialised in the creation of indigenous organisations, which became the main driving force behind the establishment of both intercultural and indigenous universities in the region. Although both intercultural and indigenous universities aim to challenge the dominance of Western knowledge systems and promote cultural diversity, they differ significantly in terms of their origins, governance structures and epistemic commitments.

Intercultural universities have largely emerged through state-led initiatives aimed at increasing access for Indigenous students and fostering dialogue between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (Dietz, 2019). They typically operate within conventional academic frameworks and are subject to national regulations and quality standards. Some scholars, including Walsh (2010), have argued that intercultural universities often risk reproducing functional interculturality, an approach that recognises cultural diversity, promotes inclusion and dialogue, and yet leaves structural inequalities and dominant epistemologies intact. According to Walsh, this form of interculturality was institutionalised during the constitutional and educational reforms of the 1990s in different countries through a top-down, state-driven model that acknowledged diversity. According to Walsh (2010), this model does not challenge existing power hierarchies. Instead, it often aligns with neoliberal agendas, using the language of inclusion and multiculturalism to manage dissent and reinforce control.

By contrast, Indigenous universities are usually the result of political struggles led by Indigenous organisations seeking educational autonomy. Grounded in Indigenous worldviews, languages and territorial relations, these institutions' governance structures often reflect collective decision-making practices (Mato, 2016). Indigenous universities often prioritise their own knowledge traditions and resist being evaluated by external academic criteria (Krainer et al., 2017; Mato, 2016). They represent a more radical form of epistemic decolonisation, rooted in political projects of self-determination and cultural survival.

3. Methodology

This study uses a combination of documentary analysis, website reviews and semi-structured interviews to explore the landscape of Indigenous-inspired universities in Latin America. The research aimed to map institutional diversity and analyse how these universities offer alternatives to mainstream higher education in terms of both epistemology and politics.

Firstly, we conducted a thorough review of documents to gather key facts about Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations in each Latin American country. This initial mapping exercise provided the demographic and policy context necessary for identifying relevant higher education institutions and understanding their social foundations. It is worthwhile mentioning that the availability and quality of data on Indigenous and Afro-descendant student participation in higher education varied considerably from country to country. In several cases, the statistical data was either outdated or unavailable or not disaggregated in a meaningful way.

We then mapped all institutions that explicitly define themselves, or are defined by policy frameworks, as intercultural or Indigenous universities. The mapping included: National policy documents; institutional websites and mission statements; official government lists (e.g. from Mexico); and academic literature (e.g. Mato, 2009, 2016; Antileo, 2022) and regional databases such as the Red ESIAL (n.d.). The data analysis of these documents enabled us to identify the key features and discourses of the institutions regarding autonomy, governance, the curriculum and community engagement.

We then selected two contrasting cases for closer examination: the Universidad Intercultural Veracruzana (UIV) in Mexico, which is a state-created, publicly funded institution, and the Universidad Ixil in Guatemala, which is an autonomous university operating without formal state recognition or financial support. To complement our documentary analysis, we conducted three interviews: two with UIV delegates and one with an Ixil leader. These were not intended to be representative, but rather to deepen our understanding of institutional trajectories, clarify ambiguities in official materials and highlight everyday practices and challenges that are not captured in documents. Rather than applying a formal thematic analysis, we used the interviews to demonstrate the variety of meanings and practices associated with Indigenous-inspired higher education.

4. Results

4.1. Context and key facts

Latin America is the ancestral home of some 800 diverse indigenous groups (World Bank, 2015). This vast region includes all countries from modern-day Mexico to the southern tip of the American continent, including the independent Caribbean islands. The Commission for the Economic Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAC) lists 33 countries in the region whose history is marked by the violence of European colonisation, mainly by the Spanish and Portuguese, but also by the French (Haiti), Dutch (Suriname) and British (Guyana) empires (CELAC, n.d.). The transatlantic slave trade, which operated between Africa and the Americas for three centuries, explains the important influence of the African diaspora in the region.

The most recent country-level statistics available indicate that there are approximately over 136 million Afro-descendants and 54 million indigenous people living in the region. Self-identification is a critical methodology in most national censuses in the region (see

Annex 1 for details). Fig. 1 shows that the proportion of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations varies considerably from country to country, a reality that is deeply intertwined with the history of these lands prior to Columbus' arrival in the Americas, the consequences of colonial projects, and the current struggles of these groups for their rights and recognition.

Guatemala has the highest proportion of indigenous people in its population in Latin America. It is home to the ancient Mayan civilisation and 22 different Indigenous groups, where more than 24 languages are spoken (World Bank, 2015). Bolivia follows closely behind, with 41.52 % of its population identifying as indigenous, comprising approximately 114 distinct groups (World Bank, 2015). Bolivia was the first country in Latin America to democratically elect an indigenous president, Evo Morales, in 2006. Mexico also has a significant indigenous population, representing 18.4 % of the total population. The country recognises 68 indigenous groups, each with its own language. As we will discuss later, the Zapatista movement and its demands for justice and the revitalisation of indigenous rights served as a catalyst for the establishment of intercultural universities in Mexico.

The representation of Afro-descendant populations also reveals significant disparities. Census methodologies often classify Afro-descendants under different terms such as 'parda', 'preta', 'mulato' or 'zambo'. Haiti has the largest percentage of people of African descent, with 95.5 % of the population identifying as Afro-Haitian. It has the highest poverty rate in the region. Brazil concentrates the largest number of Afro-descendants in LAT - 112.7 million, representing 55.5 % of its population. Panama, Cuba and Colombia also have significant Afro-descendant populations, accounting for 30.6 %, 9.3 % and 6.1 % of their populations respectively.

The linguistic landscape of Latin America reflects the region's rich cultural and historical diversity, shaped by the coexistence of European colonial languages (Spanish, Portuguese, French and English) and indigenous linguistic traditions. Spanish is the dominant language in most countries, but many states have taken significant steps to recognise indigenous languages, either officially or through constitutional frameworks. For example, Bolivia is exemplary in its recognition of 36 official languages. Similarly, Ecuador designates Kichwa and Shuar as official languages of intercultural relations, and other indigenous languages are recognised for official use in local communities while Mexico recognises 68 native languages. Paraguay presents a compelling case, having incorporated the teaching of Guaraní into the official school curriculum. Today, around 2.29 % of the population self-identified as members of one of the 19 Indigenous groups in the country, and 80 % of the population speaks Guaraní.

In other countries, indigenous languages are given de facto recognition rather than constitutional status. For example, Chile's Indigenous Law 19.253 (1993) promotes the use and preservation of Indigenous languages, such as Mapuche, Aymara and Rapa Nui, exclusively in areas of high indigenous density. However, Spanish remains the only constitutionally recognised official language, reflecting a pattern where indigenous languages are protected but lack full institutional recognition.

Despite this progress, linguistic inequalities persist. Although Argentina has Law 23.302 (1985) in place to protect indigenous languages, these are often overshadowed by Spanish or Portuguese. A similar situation exists in Brazil, where Portuguese is the only official language. Similarly, in countries such as Uruguay, indigenous languages receive minimal recognition.

4.2. *Indigenous and African descendant students in higher education*

Data on indigenous and Afro-descendant populations remain scarce and often inconsistent in the tertiary education sector. However, the limited information available shows that both groups are underrepresented in the higher education systems of most of the countries where data was found (see Table 1).

For example, indigenous students are significantly underrepresented in Guatemala, accounting for only 7 % of higher education enrolments, which is significantly lower than the total indigenous population in the country (43.4 %). The Afro-descendant population in Guatemala represents less than one per cent of the total population, but no data are available on those in higher education. Similarly, in Mexico, indigenous students account for only 1–3 % of total higher education enrolments, in stark contrast to the 18 % of the country's population that identifies as indigenous. This country reports that 2 % of its population identifies as Afro-descendant. However, there is no data available regarding the participation of these students in higher education. In Colombia, indigenous students account for just 1.4 % of higher education enrolments each, which is significantly lower than its respective proportion in the country as a whole (3.9 %).

With a smaller gap, Chile's indigenous population represents 10.4 % of higher education enrolments, compared to 12.4 % of the

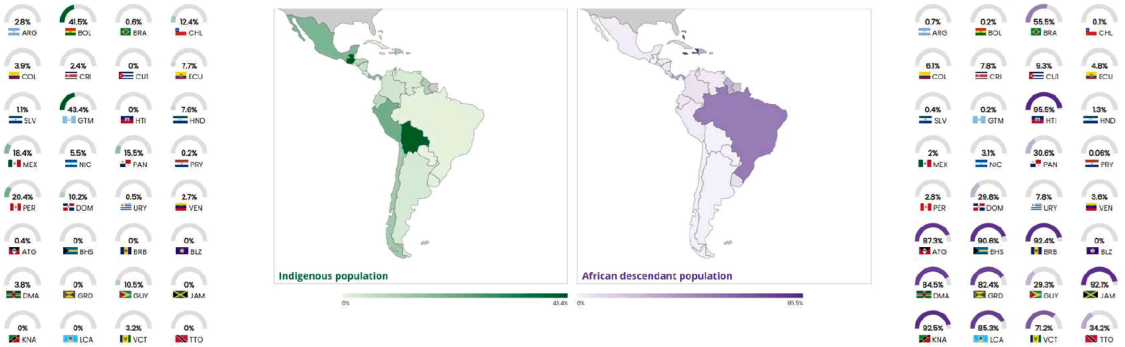

Fig. 1. Percentage of Indigenous and African descendant population in Latin America.

Table 1
Own elaboration based on the latest census available, Higher Education Information Service in Chile for indigenous population in HE) and secondary sources for indigenous population in HE in Guatemala (Us, Mendoza & Guzmán, 2021) and Mexico (Sartorello et al., 2024). Number and percentage of indigenous and Afro-descendant students in higher education institutions in Latin America.

Country	Total HE Students	Indigenous students (%)	Afro-descendant students (%)
Argentina	3685,447	2.75 % (101,443)	1.03 % (38,023)
Chile	1341,439	10.39 % (139,380)	No data
Colombia	8846,860	1.44 % (127,422)	4.93 % (436,545)
Ecuador	775,033	8.62 % (66,838)	No data
Guatemala	388,828	7 % (27,218)	No data
Mexico	4030,616	1–3 % (approx. 40,306 -120,918)	No data

population that identifies as indigenous in the country. Afro-descendants in Chile are concentrated in the north of the country (0.06 % of the population), but there is no information on their participation in higher education. In Argentina, the representation of indigenous students in higher education (2.75 %) is similar to their representation in the indigenous population of the country (2.85 %). Afro-descendant students, on the other hand, appear to be slightly over-represented in higher education (1.03 %) compared with their share of the total population (0.7 %).

Ecuador stands out as an exception, being the only country where indigenous students are slightly over-represented in higher education. They account for 8.6 % of enrolments, exceeding the 7.7 % of the total population that identifies as indigenous.

Overall, the available data is often not specific enough to show how access for indigenous and Afro-descendant populations has changed over the years in different higher education institutions and disciplines. Technical and vocational education, for example, is often grouped together with traditional higher education.

4.3. Mapping indigenous-inspired universities

Our search identified a total of 42 indigenous or intercultural higher education institutions, 35 of which are universities, spread over 11 countries (see Annex 2 for the main characteristics of these universities). Mexico has the most institutions, with nineteen universities. Peru has four, and Bolivia has three. Guatemala and Nicaragua have two each while Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama and Venezuela each have one institution. Most of these universities were founded in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, reflecting the growing recognition of indigenous rights and cultural heritage during this period. Based on the available data, the following countries do not have intercultural universities: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay.

Broadly, Indigenous-inspired universities in Latin America are diverse, but their commitment to serving indigenous communities and preserving cultural heritage. Central to their mission is the integration of Indigenous worldviews into curricula and governance, embedding traditional knowledge, values and practices within their academic frameworks. Usually, pedagogical practices are participatory and community-based, involving students and faculty in collective projects, practical fieldwork and collaborative learning. For example, Bolivia's Universidad Quechua Casimiro Huanca combines indigenous wisdom with technological advances to address socio-economic challenges relevant to indigenous populations (Paco, 2020).

Furthermore, Indigenous-inspired universities prioritise language preservation by integrating indigenous languages into their curricula. For example, the Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo in Mexico uses a system called Iknal, which involves community elders as tutors who share their knowledge of Mayan language and culture, thereby integrating indigenous perspectives into the educational experience (Rosado-May 2020; Rosado-May et al., 2017).

Indigenous-inspired universities also prioritise reciprocal relationships with local communities, with care, respect and solidarity as core principles (Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2021). These institutions integrate community engagement into their pedagogical practices and missions, treating communities as essential partners. Relational values such as interdependence and collective well-being are consistent with Indigenous worldviews and promote collaborative approaches to education (Dietz and Mateos Cortés, 2020). Programmes tailored to regional needs, such as territorial management and cultural preservation, have a profound impact on local identities. For example, the Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi works with communities on research projects that address land conservation and economic development (https://uaw.edu.ec/ceaa/). This emphasis on community relations ensures that institutional goals remain grounded in local realities (Vargas-Moreno, 2014).

5. Discussion

5.1. Tensions faced by indigenous-inspired universities

We identified five interrelated tensions that influence their development and reflect the broader struggle to uphold community-centred missions in the face of institutional and systemic pressures. These tensions are related: an ambivalent relationship with the state; forms of institutional governance; financial sustainability; legitimacy and recognition; and epistemic tensions.

a) Trajectories of origin and state recognition

Indigenous-inspired universities in Latin America share a common foundation in indigenous movements but follow three distinct trajectories that reflect their struggles and their ambivalent relationships with the state.

The *first group* includes universities that have achieved state recognition, after years of seeking it. Colombia's Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural, for example, emerged from the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council in 1971. It operated under its own indigenous education system for more than two decades and received formal recognition from the Ministry of Education in 2018 (https://www.unescosost.org/post/linking-the-unesco-chair-with-the-autonomous-indigenous-intercultural-university-uaiin). Similarly, Ecuador's Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi, founded by indigenous groups in 2004, initially lacked state recognition. Its closure in 2013 and reopening as a public university in 2018 illustrates the fragility of state-recognised autonomy, as tensions between government frameworks and Indigenous priorities persist (Martín-Díaz, 2017; Minoia and Tapia, 2024). On Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, the Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense and the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University, both founded in 1992, exemplify the ongoing struggle of Nicaragua's coastal communities for autonomy and recognition of their rights. State recognition of these institutions facilitated the expansion of access to higher education in the region, which had previously been hindered by a lack of funding. This highlights the critical dependence of such institutions on state support and resources (Valiente & Cid de Lucero, 2012).

The *second group* includes universities set up directly by the state, such as Mexico's 19 intercultural universities. Fourteen of them were created after the Zapatista uprising in the 1990s. These institutions emerged from a political agreement with then President Vicente Fox in early 2000 and received state funding and oversight (Marcelín-Alvarado et al., 2021). In recent years, another seven institutions have been created as part of a presidential plan to develop 100 new universities in four years under López Obrador's administration. However, these latter universities have faced significant problems in becoming operational due to a lack of funding, staff and infrastructure. Peru's subsystem of intercultural universities, including three founded in 2010 and the Intercultural University of Amazonia (founded in 2005), are also examples of state-mandated institutions. While these universities respond to educational needs in the Andes and Amazon, they have faced significant delays in the state approval process (Espinosa, 2017).

Finally, the *third group* of universities encompasses several indigenous universities that operate without formal recognition. These include the Universidad Maya Kaqchikel and Universidad Ixil in Guatemala, Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur (UNISUR) and Universidad Intercultural del Pueblo, both in Mexico and, Universidad Indígena y de los Pueblos in Honduras.

b) Institutional governance: autonomy versus government framework

Institutional governance structures in Indigenous-inspired universities prioritise Indigenous representation and decision-making, embedding local cosmovisions and cultural values in institutional operations. However, the forms and mechanisms of governance vary widely, reflecting different approaches to Indigenous representation.

Some universities have adopted consultative governance, where indigenous representation is structured through councils or committees. For example, the Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas in Mexico includes an Indigenous advisory council that influences academic planning and ensures that projects are aligned with the needs of Indigenous communities. This model maintains a formalised structure while preserving a degree of community influence over institutional priorities (Mato, 2011).

Hybrid governance models, such as those implemented by Nicaragua's URACCAN, combine indigenous and Afro-descendant traditions with national higher education standards. In this approach, community assemblies and regional councils play a key role in guiding institutional priorities and promoting inclusivity and cultural relevance. At the same time, these institutions navigate state-imposed requirements for accreditation and oversight, creating a delicate balance between cultural integrity and systemic constraints (Hooker, 2009).

A smaller number of universities operate through community-driven governance, the most horizontal and grassroots model. These institutions rely on direct participation and consensus-building within indigenous communities. Guatemala's Universidad Ixil, for example, works closely with Mayan communities to shape governance and curricula, despite lacking the formalised structures and recognition of state-sponsored institutions. This approach emphasises a deep connection to local traditions and collective decision-making, ensuring that the university reflects the needs and priorities of the communities it serves (Batz, 2018; Delgadillo Cely, 2023).

These different types of governance reflect a spectrum of approaches, ranging from formal models based on state frameworks to those deeply rooted in indigenous communities and their worldviews. Consultative governance provides more limited opportunities for Indigenous participation within state-driven institutional structures, while hybrid models seek to balance state requirements with local cultural traditions. At the other end of the spectrum, community-driven governance represents the most radical form of autonomy, emphasising direct participation, consensus and the preservation of cultural values, even without formal state recognition.

c) *Funding, resources and sustainability: dependency* versus *alternative support systems*

Indigenous-inspired universities use different funding models, reflecting varying degrees of dependence on state and external sources. At the more state-dependent end of the spectrum, Bolivia's Universidad Guaraní de Tierras Bajas Apiaguaiki Túpa secures resources from national and regional funds to support the inclusion of indigenous students (UNIBOL, 2011). Similarly, Mexico's Universidad del Pueblo Yaqui recently received substantial federal investment to establish and expand its operations (https://centrourbano.com/actualidad/invierte-gobierno-federal-56–5-mdp-en-universidad-para-el-pueblo-yaqui/?utm). However, these institutions face considerable uncertainty about their long-term financial sustainability, making them vulnerable to shifting national priorities and centralised funding mechanisms that often favour traditional academic institutions.

At the more autonomous end, some universities are adopting innovative strategies to reduce their dependence on external funding.

Venezuela's Universidad Nacional Experimental Indígena del Tauca, for example, capitalises on its rich biodiversity by integrating fieldwork and natural resource studies into its educational model. This approach not only addresses infrastructural limitations but also promotes environmental stewardship and hands-on engagement among students (Mustonen et al., 2021; Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2021).

These diverse funding strategies highlight a critical tension: while external support is essential for many Indigenous-inspired universities, it often comes with strings attached that can undermine their autonomy (Mendoza, 2020).

d) National and international recognition: local values and global legitimacy

National recognition of Indigenous-inspired universities reflects ongoing tensions between locally grounded educational needs and policy frameworks shaped by Western models of higher education. While some institutions (such as Mexico's Universidad Intercultural Veracruzana), are fully integrated into national systems, at least seven others operate without formal recognition as higher education institutions.

Recognition on the international stage is shaped through participation in networks, global conferences and strategic partnerships. For example, Nicaragua's Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense engages in international dialogues on interculturality and epistemic justice (Calderón, n.d.). Similarly, Mexico's Universidad Intercultural Maya has collaborated with UNESCO and the International Organisation for Cultural Diversity to promote initiatives that preserve indigenous languages and cultural traditions (https://www.icdo.at/icdo-and-uimqroo-sign-memorandum-of-cooperation-on-kalan-je-laan-following-the-maya-voice/).

Global metrics of recognition, such as international rankings and publication impact, are deeply rooted in Western epistemologies (Shahjahan et al., 2017). For Indigenous-inspired universities, conforming to these systems is not only challenging, but often incompatible with their founding principles. As a result, while these institutions are aware of global trends, their inability - or unwillingness - to fully integrate into the prestige economy of higher education helps them maintain their uniqueness but also marginalises them within global academic networks. Institutions such as Colombia's Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural illustrate this tension, embodying the struggle to gain international recognition while remaining true to their values (Pinto Niño and Garcés Amaya, 2022).

e) *Epistemic* tensions *and dialogue among knowledges*

One of the key challenges for Indigenous-inspired universities is reconciling ancestral knowledge systems with the modern university's curricular and epistemic standards. Community-based epistemologies typically depend on oral transmission, ritual practice and collective memory, whereas mainstream academic frameworks demand written outputs and formal methodologies that are grounded in epistemologies and metho. This tension is particularly evident in curricular design, where institutional recognition may necessitate alignment with national standards that marginalise Indigenous ways of knowing. One compelling example is the Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi in Ecuador, which seeks to harmonise Indigenous and Western knowledge traditions through an innovative curricular design. Rather than separating these epistemic traditions, the university integrates them progressively across its programmes. Students begin with a foundational semester exploring the institution's philosophical and political commitments, before engaging in cycles dedicated to ancestral knowledge, disciplinary training from a Western perspective, and finally, intercultural integration (Krainer et al. 2017).

A key epistemic tension emerges from contrasting the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) with the Universidad Ixil. As the next section will demonstrate, the UVI navigates these tensions as part of a state university (the Universidad Veracruzana), whereas the Universidad Ixil rejects external validation altogether in favour of epistemic sovereignty.

5.2. *Two contrasting cases*

The UVI is unique in that, unlike other intercultural universities which were established as independent institutions, it was set up as a branch of the state-run Universidad Veracruzana (UV). A group of academics with long-standing expertise in indigenous and intercultural education proposed this model when the Mexican government launched its policy to expand intercultural universities, driving its creation. Interviews with two former authorities and current academics illustrate how, although established by the state in response to indigenous demands, the institution emerged through a combination of policy frameworks and personal commitment.

As one academic reflects: *'On the one hand, it was part of a movement for collective rights, but it wasn't yet seen as decolonisation; more like something the state had to do*.' Another interviewee recalls the institutional struggle: *'One of the main challenges was convincing the university authorities […] of the relevance of this project*.' While UVI enjoys full legal recognition and public funding, these accounts reveal that its implementation required navigating university hierarchies and securing internal legitimacy, a process that highlights the limitations of state-driven initiatives in effecting genuine transformation within academic institutions.

In contrast, the Universidad Ixil in Guatemala is a radically autonomous, community-driven model. Established without state recognition or support, it demonstrates a strong dedication to epistemic sovereignty and local governance, rooted in Mayan worldview and collective decision-making. One of its leaders explains: '*We are in the process of rebuilding the social fabric torn apart by the genocide carried out by the Guatemalan army'* a reference to the 114 massacres in the Ixil region during the internal armed conflict, recognised in national and international legal processes as acts of genocide. He critiques the way in which indigenous youth have been incorporated into the national education system, not through the recognition of their cultures or languages, but rather through a state-driven logic of integration. He describes this as part of a broader pattern of integrationism: '*Over time, these promoters were recognised, helped, and*

incorporated into the education system. Of course, they were integrated rather than having their culture or language taken into account, within that mentality of integrationism experienced by all states (in Latin America)'.

In this context, the Universidad Ixil was established by the communities after the Guatemalan state failed to fulfil its commitment to supporting a Maya university: *'The State of Guatemala committed to supporting the creation of a Maya university. But that effort did not succeed because of a lack of political will and organisational capacity at the time.'.* He further explains that the defence of land and water against extractive megaprojects was a key driving force behind the creation of the university, shaping its core educational mission: *'We said, we must train young people to protect the territory and its natural resources. That became our first core theme.'* The Universidad Ixil provides community-based education in the Ixil language. Elders and local leaders teach the language in spaces such as schools, homes and forests. Courses follow the Maya sacred calendar and focus on local priorities, such as territorial defence, traditional farming methods, and Indigenous rights. The university is governed by assemblies and a council of elders, rather than by rectors or deans, and it operates outside the national legal framework. Its legitimacy lies in collective recognition and cultural rootedness, rather than external validation.

This contrast becomes more evident when governance and funding are examined. Although UVI functions within the structure of a conventional public university and benefits from state resources, it is also subject to vertical decision-making and bureaucratic constraints. Over time, its original participatory ethos seems to have decreased over time. Meanwhile, the Universidad Ixil operates without public funding, relying instead on community support and modest external contributions.

Finally, the issue of recognition exposes deeper epistemic tensions. Although UVI is formally recognised, this often requires it to align with the Universidad Veracruzana's institutional procedures, which conflict with its intercultural mission. As one interviewee noted, although staff try to include criteria such as proficiency in Indigenous languages or experience in intercultural higher education, *'the process is basically UV'*. Consequently, the academic profiles prioritised by the university often do not align with UVI's requirements. *'People who just want to sit in their office and write don't work here. What matters is being out there and working with communities. And if you write, hopefully it's for them.'* Global academic norms are also being questioned. '*What's the point of writing in English for what we do? So that others can read us in the US? That's not our interest.'* In contrast, the Universidad Ixil embraces epistemic sovereignty, rejecting rankings and accreditation systems altogether: '*We are convinced that academia exists in Maya languages. It is a mistake to think that it only exists in Spanish, English or French, or, as in the Middle Ages, only in Latin or Greek'*.

Together, these two contrasting cases illustrate two divergent approaches to Indigenous-inspired higher education. One that seeks legitimacy within the state and another that asserts independence from it. Both approaches face critical tensions, between visibility and fidelity, and between institutional sustainability and epistemic independence, raising the question of how Indigenous- inspired universities can thrive without sacrificing their foundational principles.

6. Navigating hybridity and epistemic disruption in indigenous-inspired universities

Our mapping reveals that Indigenous-inspired universities are not a homogeneous group. Rather, they are diverse projects situated at the intersection of Indigenous struggles and state-driven educational frameworks. This hybridity (epistemic, cultural, and institutional) creates spaces of negotiation, tension, and potential transformation. Building on Bhabha's (2015) concept of the third space, we view these institutions as more than just reforms of existing higher education. Instead, we see them as contested spaces where colonial legacies are rearticulated, challenged or, at times, reproduced. This diversity defies simplistic categorisation into a single decolonial paradigm, instead highlighting the plurality of approaches to undoing colonial legacies in education.

Drawing on Rivera Cusicanqui's (2012) assertion that there are no Indigenous knowledge systems that are completely free from the influence of colonialism, we contend that these institutions exist in hybrid, negotiated spaces that are shaped by both epistemic resistance and systemic limitations. These engagements do not take place in idealised spaces but rather emerge as what Walsh calls "cracks" within the very structures they seek to transform (Walsh, 2022, 2023) (Walsh, 2022, 2023).

These cracks are not sweeping structural ruptures, but rather localised openings, moments of dissonance, experimentation and subversion. These cracks may emerge in a single course, in the use of ancestral languages, in the implementation of parallel curricula, or in the governance structures of autonomous universities. Importantly, these cracks are neither uniform nor totalising. They can even appear within institutions that were not originally conceived as decolonial, thus highlighting the plurality of insurgent acts and the layered complexity of decolonial resistance.

The cases of UVI and Universidad Ixil demonstrate how these tensions play out in practice. Although the UVI is state-recognised and funded, it emerged through a combination of policy frameworks, personal commitment and collective action. It employs a dual strategy of operating within state structures while establishing spaces for community engagement and knowledge. This approach represents a form of epistemic insurgency, subverting dominant structures from within while remaining faithful to community knowledge systems and satisfying bureaucratic demands. In contrast, Universidad Ixil offers a radically autonomous model, grounded in Mayan cosmovision and self-governance. Without state recognition or funding, it provides an alternative vision of higher education centred on epistemic sovereignty and local validation.

These two cases illustrate two distinct yet interconnected approaches. One is state-founded and operates within official frameworks, while the other asserts epistemic and institutional autonomy that goes beyond state recognition. Yet both confront the ongoing legacy of coloniality in higher education, embodying the tensions between visibility and fidelity, and between institutional sustainability and epistemic autonomy.

State-recognised universities often find themselves torn between implementing cosmetic reforms and pursuing deeper systemic change (de Oliveira et al., 2015). Their alignment with national accreditation systems and funding mechanisms often reproduces colonial logics, such as standardised curricula, hierarchical governance and performance metrics, which constrain more radical forms

of transformation. This critique is particularly evident in contexts such as Mexico, where some intercultural universities were established through top-down state initiatives focused on inclusion rather than structural change. As Walsh (2010) cautions, this can result in functional interculturality, the instrumental use of diversity to contain conflict and sustain extractive policies.

Conversely, community-led institutions such as Universidad Ixil are more closely aligned with Harney and Moten's (2013) concept of the undercommons, spaces of radical refusal that challenge dominant academic models and envision alternative futures. Despite their fragility and lack of official recognition, these institutions nurture pedagogical approaches and organisational structures that are grounded in collective memory, cultural revival, and epistemic disobedience.

To make sense of this diverse landscape, we draw on the concept of 'cracks' (Walsh, 2022, 2023), localised sites of resistance where meaningful disruption can emerge. We propose that such cracks can manifest in varied forms, within institutions, at their margins, or entirely outside them. This approach enables us to move beyond hierarchical comparisons and recognise that decolonial practices take many different forms, shaped by their specific contexts. These forms of resistance unfold at different scales (micro and macro) and reflect the interplay of history, power and relationships. While some universities seek to subvert colonial legacies from within, others operate entirely outside of state systems. Yet each confronts the enduring legacy of coloniality in higher education in its own way.

To conclude, we contend that epistemic hybridity comes at a cost. In many cases, it results in epistemic translation, whereby Indigenous knowledge is reformulated to fit mainstream academic formats. Ironically, this very paper, written in English and submitted to a high-impact academic journal, cannot escape the constraints of the epistemic regime it seeks to critique. These tensions highlight the structural limitations that scholars and institutions committed to decoloniality face within dominant academic circuits.

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During the preparation of this work the authors used the tool 'DeepL' to improve the grammar of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Roxana Chiappa:** Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Carolina Gómez-González:** Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests

Annex 1. Demographics of Indigenous and Africa-descendant peoples in Latin America

Country	Total population	Indigenous population	Afro descendent population	Census	Official languages	Are indigenous languages recognised by the Constitution?
Argentina	45.892.285	1.306.730	302.936	2022	Spanish. Pre-Hispanic languages in the territory of the Nation are considered pre-existing regional languages.	Argentina's 1994 constitutional reform recognised its indigenous peoples and guaranteed their right to bilingual and multicultural education. However, indigenous languages are not officially recognised at national level. Recognition is limited to two provinces, Chaco and Corrientes. The National Education Law reinforces the constitutional provision by establishing guidelines for the implementation of bilingual and multicultural education.

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Country	Total population	Indigenous population	Afro descendent population	Census	Official languages	Are indigenous languages recognised by the Constitution?
Bolivia	10.059.856	4.176.647	23.330	2012	Spanish; Aymara; Araona; Baure; Bésiro; Canichana; Cavineño; Cayubaba; Chácobo; Chimán; Ese Ejja; Guaraní; Guarasugwe; Guarayu; Itonama; Leco; Machajuyaikallawaya; Machineri; Maropa; Mojeño-Trinitario; Mojeño-Ignaciano; Moré; Mosetén; Movima; Pacawara; Puquina; Quechua; Sirionó; Tacana; Tapiete; Toromona; Uru-Chipaya; Weenhayek; Yaminawa; Yuki; Yuracaré and Zamuco.	Yes.
Brazil	203.080.756	1.227.642	112.739.744	2022	Portuguese.	Yes.
Chile	17.574.003	2.185.792	9.919	2017	Spanish. Chile's Law 19.253 does not formally declare Indigenous languages as official, but it does provide certain recognitions and protections. Specifically, the law emphasizes the preservation and promotion of Indigenous languages, especially in regions with a high density of Indigenous populations.	No, de facto.
Colombia	48.258.494	1.905.617	2.950.072	1971	Spanish. Languages and dialects of ethnic groups are also official in their territories-	Yes.
Costa Rica	4.301.712	104.143	334.437	2011	Spanish.	
Cuba	11.163.934	N/D	1.034.044	2012	Spanish.	Yes.
El Salvador	6.029.976	68.148	25.690	2024	Spanish.	Yes.
Ecuador	16.938.986	1.302.057	814.495	2022	Spanish, Kichwa and Shuar are official intercultural relation languages. Other ancestral languages are official in Indigenous areas as defined by law.	Yes.
Guatemala	14.901.286	6.471.670	27.647	2018	Spanish. Vernacular languages are part of the cultural heritage of the Nation.	Yes.
Haiti	8.812.245	N/D	8.415.694	2003	Creole; French.	Yes.
Honduras	7.657.684	582.119	102.821	2013	Spanish.	Yes.
Mexico	126.014.024	23.229.089	2.576.213	2020	Spanish. 68 native languages are recognised and can be used where they predominate.	No, de facto.
Nicaragua	5.142.098	285.230	158.617	2005	Spanish. The languages of the Communities of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua also have official use in cases established by law.	Yes.
Panama	4.202.572	651.641	1.285.881	2023	Spanish.	Yes.
Paraguay	6.109.903	140.049	3.867	2022	Spanish; Guaraní.	Yes.
Perú	29.381.884	5.985.551	828.841	2017	Spanish; Quechua; Aymara (in areas where they are predominant)	Yes.
República Dominicana	10.773.983	3.611.764	3.209.595	2022	Spanish.	Yes.
Uruguay	3.286.314	159.319	255.074	2011	Spanish	No, de facto.
Venezuela	27.227.930	724.592	980.205	2011	Spanish. Indigenous languages are also officially used by Indigenous peoples and must be respected throughout the territory of the Republic, as they constitute the cultural heritage of the Nation and humanity.	Yes.

Annex 2. List of Indigenous universities in Latin America

Country	Number of HEI	Indigenous Higher Education Institution	Foundation Year	Recognised by the government	Funding
Argentina	1	Instituto de Educación Superior CIFMA*	1995	Yes	Public
Bolivia	3	Universidad Quechua Casimiro Huanca	2008	Yes	Public
		Universidad Indígena Aymara Tupac Katari	2008	Yes	Public
		Universidad Guaraní de Tierra Bajas "Apiaguaiki Tüpa"	2008	Yes	Public
Colombia	1	Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural	1971	Yes	Public
Ecuador	5	Instituto Superior Pedagógico Intercultural Bilingüe Jaime Roldós Aguilera*	1980	Yes	Public
		Instituto Superior Pedagógico Intercultural Bilingüe Quilloac*	1980	Yes	Public
		Instituto Superior Pedagógico Bilingüe Intercultural Martha Bucaram de Roldós*	1980	Yes	Public
		Instituto Superior Pedagógico Intercultural Bilingüe "Canelos"*	1991	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas "Amawtay Wasi"	2004	Yes	Public
Guatemala	2	Universidad Ixil	2011	No	Community**
		Universidad Maya Kaqchikel	2014	No	Community**
Honduras	1	Universidad Indígena y de los Pueblos	2017	No	Public
Mexico	21	Escuela Normal Indígena Intercultural Bilingüe Jacinto Canek*	2000	Yes	Public
		Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México	2001	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural del Estado de México	2003	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas	2004	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco	2005	Yes	Public
		Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural	2005	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo	2006	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero	2006	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Puebla	2006	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán	2006	Yes	Public
		Universidad intercultural de los pueblos del Sur (UNISUR)	2007	No	Community**
		Instituto Intercultural Ñöñho*	2009	No	Community**
		Universidad Intercultural de San Luis de Potosí	2011	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Hidalgo	2012	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural del Pueblo	2019	No	Public
		Universidad Intercultural de Baja California	2021	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural de Campeche	2022	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural de Colima	2022	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guanajuato	2022	Yes	Public
		Universidad del Pueblo Yaqui	2022	Yes	Public
		Universidad Intercultural de Tlaxcala	2023	Yes	Public
Nicaragua	2	Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University	1991	Yes	Public
		Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense (URACCAN).	1992	Yes	Public
Panamá	1	Universidad Autónoma de los Pueblos Indígenas	2022	Yes	Public
Perú	4	Universidad Nacional Intercultural de la Amazonía	1999	Yes	Public
		Universidad Nacional Intercultural de la Selva Central "Juan Santos Atahualpa"	2010	Yes	Public
		Universidad Nacional Intercultural de Quillabamba	2010	Yes	Public
		Universidad Nacional Intercultural Fabiola Salazar Leguía de Bagua	2010	Yes	Public
Venezuela	1	Universidad Nacional Experimental Indígena del Tauca	1999	Yes	Public

*Professional institutes, usually devoted to teacher training.

**Managed by their own communities, teachers donate their time and associations loan their space.

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