Higher Intercultural Education in Tabasco. A history in construction

La educación superior intercultural en Tabasco. Una historia en construcción

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Abstract

This paper presents the educative experience called: Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco (UIET) and data comprehends a period of ten years (2005 to 2015). Text shows, from a critical view, the University's historical development and the diverse kinds in which intercultural education is conceived in this Higher Education Institution (IES for its Spanish acronym). The process of UIET's formation is analyzed here as well as the actors who have been involved, the different building steps in the process, complications and challenges faced. Selection of sources was addressed to two kinds of data, one referred to official documents in this university and another related to the use of searching methodology and techniques to identify, through the teachers and students experience, the position of these actors about development and future at UIET.

Resumen

En el escrito se expone la experiencia educativa denominada: Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco (UIET) y los datos referidos abarcan un periodo de diez años (2005-2015).[1] El texto refleja, desde una mirada crítica, el devenir histórico de la Universidad y las diversas maneras en la que se entiende a la educación intercultural en esta Institución de Educación Superior (IES). Se analiza el proceso de formación de la uiet y los actores que en ella se han involucrado, las diferentes etapas de construcción por las que ha atravesado, los obstáculos y retos a los que se ha enfrentado. La selección de fuentes se orientó bajo la búsqueda de dos tipos de insumos: documentos oficiales de la Universidad y mediante el uso de diversos métodos

y técnicas de investigación en las que se reconoció, a partir de experiencias de profesores y estudiantes, la visión de los actores al respecto del devenir de la UIET.

1. Introduction

Intercultural discourse cannot and must not be disproved from the cultural diversity that sustains it, detached from the inequalities and social inequities that are reproduced within it, or from the political and economic structures that condition it. A study of this nature requires evidence of the conflicts that arise in this context (acculturation, social marginalization, power relations, social crises, among others) and, therefore, analyze the historical process of theoretical reflection around the concept and the real of concrete actions around it (Navarro and Rojas, 2015, Navarro, 2016).

For example, Intercultural Universities (UI) have been created in Latin America and, in the case that concerns us, in Mexico, based on numerous political-pedagogical reflections that have arisen in recent times and because of socio-cultural processes that distinguish this region. Among these reflections are the international declarations that favored the institutionalization of intercultural policies in higher education -between which is Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization- (Bello, 2011, Bermúdez, 2015, Rojas-Cortés and González- Apodaca, 2016).

In the Latin American case, two types of intercultural education are presented: one, "from below" conformed by the work and effort of the Indigenous peoples and social organizations that have surpassed the classic schools and faculties of anthropology (Jablonska, 2015; Velasco, 2015; Baronnet, 2012, 2013; Mato, 2008, 2009a and 2009b, Sandoval, 2004); and, the second, institutions of education for indigenous peoples created by the States in a forced manner in response to pressures and social mobilizations; unlike the former, the latter are controlled and administered by mestizos (Sandoval, 2004, Dietz and Mateos, 2011).

Particularly in Latin American countries, examples of UIs created by the efforts of indigenous communities that respond to their needs and knowledge stand out. In Mexico, the origin of the UI responds in the same way to mobilizations of historically marginalized social groups (Rojas-Cortés and González-Apodaca, 2016, Navarro, 2016). And on the other, there are the most institutional projects that were born of specific public initiatives, whose social function is to represent "a proposal that offers alternative training spaces to minority cultures, with the purpose of providing its members with the appropriate tools to face the onslaught of the globalizing project that tends to privilege the consolidation of a monocultural society "(Casillas and Santini, 2007, pp. 39-40).

For Casillas and Santini (2007), it is as a consequence of social and political movements that institutional spaces with intercultural relevance are opened, in which the local environment of the students is taken up again, and integrates multicultural contents. In Mexico, together with the constitutional recognition of the pluricultural nature of the country and international agreements, as of 2003, different UIs were created throughout the Republic, adding, up to 2015, eleven Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with an intercultural focus.

The discourse inherent to this political action resumed the academic reflections on the matter, pointing to the intercultural paradigm as another contribution to the inclusion of historically marginalized sectors and, consequently, to the democratization of the Nation. However, HEIs are managed by the western education model, which responds more to a proposal for institutionalized intercultural education (Dietz and Mateos, 2011).

In this context, the majority of the UIs in Mexico do not arise as a result of a genuine orga-

nizational effort "from below" coming from the rural indigenous communities of the region. The main direction of the course of this educational model falls on non-indigenous subjects trained in traditional classical universities. These actors, for the most part, ignore the epistemological nature of the ancestral knowledge of regional cultures, causing them to be relegated to the background (Sandoval, 2004, Navarro, 2016, Galán and Navarro, 2016, Rojas, Navarro and Escobar, 2016).[2]

The mission of the UI has been since then: "To train professionals-intellectuals that contribute to raising the level of human development in their region through the generation and management of self-management projects that promote the conservation and dissemination of their cultural and natural heritage, respecting cultural diversity and its environment "(Feasibility Study, 2004). Mission that has to do with achieving the geographical balance of development and responding to the historical demands of populations in situations of vulnerability through community and regional development. The objective of this text is to characterize the intercultural process that the University is going through, making some notes on its current state, challenges and obstacles.

In the case that concerns us, there were previous experiences of Intercultural Higher Education "instituting" before the creation of the UIET, as it is the case of the Indigenous Latin American University in Tabasco (UIL),

> which was denied validation during two government periods, and was forced to close. A few months later, according to the newspaper reports, the UIET was inaugurated, and in March 2015 the governor announced the reopening of UIL, now as a UIET headquarters (Rojas-Cortes and González-Apodaca, 2016, p. 84) .

Another case is the one quoted by Galán (2016), where besides the UIL, it points out the creation and support of the Popular University of Chontalpa (UPCH), which was given by the

movements in favor of a popular education in the nineties and the beginning of 2000, the author points out that in the UPCH they were trained

> Some of the leaders who participated in the creation of the UIET in Oxolotán, such as the one who was Academic Director between 2005 and 2012 and later the second rector, the teacher Hugo Martín Cabrera Hernández, besides some of the founding professors they came from the UPCH (page 296).

Under this background, the UIET began operations in August 2005 in the Oxolotán Village, Tacotalpa, a mountain municipality that borders the neighboring state of Chiapas.[3] And by creation agreement, which is signed on April 5, 2006, it is conceived as decentralized public body, of a state nature, with legal personality and own patrimony.

2. Methodology

The methodology that guides the present investigation was carried out from an intercultural perspective, which implies reflecting what it means to do research on, for and from that approach (see Navarro and Rojas, 2015). This article was generated from the Research Line: "Education for Interculturality", whose purpose was to deepen on the meaning and influence of the intercultural paradigm in the students of the UIET, and with regard to this writing (which is part of this research) takes up two fundamental variables: genesis and intercultural processes that allowed us to account for the challenges and obstacles that the UIET faces in its ten years of creation. The approaches of social constructionism (Guba and Lincoln, 2000), and critical theory (Wiesenfeld, 2001), are taken up again to address the proposed problem.

Methodologically, from the perspective of critical theory, dialogue is favored -as well as social constructionism- in which the researcher tries to change the possible discourses from

the socially constructed experiences of social actors who do not have access to the structures of the dominant power (Guba, 1990, Guba and Lincoln, 2000). The criterion that deprives for the construction of knowledge is not that of the specialist, but that of the informants among whom the researcher is (Wiesenfeld, 2001).

The construction of the data was oriented under a sample of type-cases, in which students, professors and administrative staff of the University participated in different moments. We worked with two types of inputs, first, from official documents of the University: Rectory Management reports, historical database of enrollment and teachers of the Institution; and second, by sampling using the following research techniques:

a) Forums. Two forums were held (each lasting three days) to reflect on and analyze the various interpretations that exist on interculturality and the implementation of the educational project in Tabasco. The first was in November 2010, 44 papers were received, of which 9 were from teachers and 35 from students. The second was in November 2011, a total of 69 papers were accepted, 9 lectures by teachers, 50 by students; and 10 audiovisual materials.

b) Semi-structured interviews. 42 interviews were applied to students, teachers and managers to know the experiences and knowledge about interculturality in their daily lives and in the same way to know the process of creation of the UIET.

c) Surveys. 126 surveys were applied, with the Likert scale to know the influence and implementation of intercultural education in the UIET.

d) Discussion groups. Five discussion groups were made (of approximately 10 participants each, in which students, professors and administrative staff participated), with which they sought to promote the collective construc-

tion of knowledge when discussing the results of the survey.

e) Participant observation. It was carried out in different stages during three years that the project lasted, this one was mainly done by the members of the research team in the classrooms. We sought to observe attitudes and practices that are relevant in the contrast between discourses and realities.

Regarding the integration and analysis of qualitative data, the proposal of Strauss, Corbin and Zimmmerman (2002) was basically followed for qualitative research as well as using the constant comparison method. What is presented below are the results concerning only the implementation and consolidation of the UIET's educational project during its first years.

3. Results

The UIET was born, according to the Feasibility Study carried out in 2004, in response to

> a real and legitimate demand of the young inhabitants of rural and indigenous areas who have been subjected to a homogenizing preparation, without conditions of equity with an imposed educational model, to which only groups with better rates of development gain access (Feasibility Study, 2004, p.1).

Se argumentó legalmente la apertura de la UIET, primero, mediante leyes, estatutos y reglamentos,[4] segundo, a partir de la demanda potencial de aspirantes a la educación superior; tercero, a través de la oferta educativa de la región Chol. En cuarto lugar, para justificar la puesta en marcha de la UIET se tomó en cuenta las necesidades del mercado laboral en municipios con presencia indígena. Finalmente, la specific location of the University was analyzed through a SWOT matrix that evidenced the municipality of Tacotalpa as an ideal place. The latter due to the fact that it holds a significant percentage of Choles, since 40% of the communities of the

municipality have at least 10% of the Indigenous Language Speaker Population (INEGI, 2010).

The state and federal agreements from which the University was created, were in charge of the General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual Education (CGEIB), since this unit, as normative and operative instance of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), had the obligation to fulfill the goals indicated in the National Education Program.

Initially the UIET activities were developed in the Technical Secondary School Number 13, where they operated three bachelor's degrees in the evening shift (Language and Culture, Sustainable Rural Development and Tourism Development). It currently has four plots located in Oxolotán (3.99 ha, and 14.56 ha respectively), one in Centla (5 ha) and the last in Tamulté de las Sabanas. Of which there is only infrastructure belonging to the isntitution in the Academic Unit of Oxolotán and a building under construction in Villa Vicente Guerrero, Centla. With these three spaces, attention is paid to the two important ethnic regions of Tabasco: the Chontalpa, where the Yokot'an village is located, and the Sierra, where the Chol migrant people of Northern Chiapas are located.

The educational programs of the UIET were organized to be completed over a period of five years, that is, ten semesters that were constituted by three areas: Basic Training Area, Technical Training Area and the Professional Training Area. As of 2014, the curricular maps and the study programs were modified in order to reduce the years of training. With a new flexible study model, it is expected that the student will complete his degree in up to three and a half years.

According to the Feasibility Study (2004), the innovative and traditional careers proposed for the opening of the University were: Health care and promotion (Health Medicine), Intercultural educational care at all levels (Escuela Normal Intercultural Bilingüe) and Sustainable regional and community development (Agribusiness). Finally, Sustainable Rural Development, Tourism Development and Language and Culture (which are also offered in other IES with an intercultural approach in Mexico) were offered.

The Institution has expanded its educational offer by offering four more degrees: Intercultural Communication (2008), Intercultural Health (2011), Intercultural Nursing (2012) and Intercultural Law (2014). As a strategy to increase university enrollment, the semi-schooling modality was opened in 2012 with a degree in Sustainable Rural Development. For 2013, the degree in Intercultural Communication is added in the same modality (these are the only two generations under that circumstance).

According to data obtained from the Department of Information, Statistics and Evaluation of the UIET, in 2005 the student enrollment was 217 students, an increase was obtained to 971 in 2014 divided into 476 for the Oxolotán headquarters, 323 for Villa Vicente Guerrero and 173 for Tamulté de las Sabanas. The annual average of growth, up to 2014, was 90 students, which represents a low figure. In that year, the headquarters of Tamulté was opened and the period of greatest increase was recorded with 78.79%. The most alarming period that the UIET faced was in 2012 when the enrollment fell by 17.75%.

In relation to gender, there has been an equitable percentage of men and women entering the University. From 2009 to 2013 there was a slightly larger number of women providing an encouraging figure on the increasing incursion of rural and indigenous women into higher education. In the 2014-2015 school year, the figure reached its maximum rank with 73% of the total enrollment, that is, there was an enrollment of 596 women and 376 men.

With regard to the linguistic variable, throughout the start-up of the University there had always been a majority of Chol-speaking students.[5] For the 2014-2015 cycle, 127 choles, 62 yokotanes, 26 zoques were registered, 10 tsotsiles, 5 tseltales and one maya totaling 231 speakers, 23% of Indigenous Language

Speakers (HLI) with respect to the total student enrollment. In these last figures a significant difference was observed because in 2005 the HLI represented 55.7% of the total enrollment, decreasing in 2006 to 48.3%, in 2007 to 42.9%, in 2008 to 40.7%, in 2009 to 41.4%, in 2010 to 42.9%, in 2011 to 37%, in 2012 38%, and in the last period (2014) a drastic decrease was seen, with only 23% of the total students.

This does not mean that these Universities only give room to the indigenous and the fact that they now represent a minority is a setback. Rather, what we must question is, what is happening with the educational expectations of this population? which will surely lead us to reflect on the genesis of these universities.

As mentioned, the University offers seven degrees. During the first six years, the career with the highest demand was Tourism Development (DT). However, after the creation of the Intercultural Nursing Degree, this was the most demanded among the population, displacing DT to a fourth level. The second place was held by the degree in Intercultural Health followed by Language and Culture. In the consecutive positions were found Sustainable Rural Development, Intercultural Communication and Intercultural Law.

Of these seven, in their majority, the speakers of native language are enrolled to the career of Language and Culture. For 2014, they constituted 47.5% of the total HLI of the University. The degrees that since its opening have had little demand for indigenous population were Intercultural Communication and Intercultural Health.

The places of origin of the students have been varied. In 2005, most of the young people from Tacotalpa (from different localities) enrolled, although there were also young people from Chiapas, Nacajuca, Villahermosa, Teapa, Jalapa, Centla, Balancán and Huimangillo.

With regard to the human resources of the University, the first recruitment of personnel was made in September 2005 through the Teacher Selection Process (PSPD), [6] where there were only ten non-HLI teachers (six full-time, two of part time and two of hour-week-month) and two professors who speak Chol, who speak, translate and write this language. Then, two more hour-week-month teachers were added in the first semester of 2006. With that in the first year of work at the University were a total of fourteen teachers who served seven existing groups at that time (Database of teaching staff of the UIET, 2011a).

A little over ten years from the University, the teaching staff consists of 79 teachers grouped under the following categories:

Chart 1. Teaching staff working in the UIET in 2015

Academic level	Full-time professor (PTC)	Part time teacher (PMT)	Professor of hours, week, month (HSM)	TOTAL
Technical	4	0	1	
Undergraduate Intern	0	2	0	
Bachelor's degree	33	10	7	22
Specialization	1	0	0	
Master	18	2	0	19
PHd	1	0	0	
Total	57	14	8	79

Source: own elaboration from the database of the UIET Human Resources Department

Those who have stopped working in the UIET have expressed that their departure has been determined among other things by: the lack of optimal educational services for their children in the town of Oxolotán, the lack of adaptability to the place or the University, and/or having other labor commitments.

In the beginnings of the University, one of the main problems faced was the design of the Study Programs given that there was no previous material to draw on. This, more than simple design, required the understanding of the intercultural model in a unique and unprecedented context in the country. But what was and continues to be pressing has to do with one's understanding of what the teacher understands and exercises as an intercultural model. None had been related to this model, nor educated nor worked on it (Galán and Navarro, 2016).

A first solution was found with the external advice of Etel Garrido Cruz, who accompanied the construction of the Study Plans of the first five bachelor's degrees and the Teacher Training Program (PFD) in which the training needs were formulated in relation to the approach intercultural: the development of competences, evaluation of learning, constructivist tools and tutoring. (Management Report of the UIET, 2005).

There was a rush to find a new way of generating knowledge and, therefore, also to build a different way of handling culturally diverse groups. It is here, where the educational needs of teachers demanded immediate academic attention (Galán and Navarro, 2016).

4. Discussion

The main challenge that the intercultural model has, and that is exogenous to it, is its segregationist burden. Given the implications of interculturality, this approach should be more inclusive and extensive, a situation that is not only the responsibility of the indigenous populations of the country. One of the challenges that exist and that correspond not only to the UIET, is to expand the project of interculturality beyond the UI, work that is incumbent on other institutions, other actors and the same State (Aguilar, 2011; Bertely, 2011; Navarro and Saldívar, 2011, Navarro, 2016).

Endogenously, the challenges that the University has faced over these ten years have been varied and start with constant work on the stigmatization that these universities have at the national level of authorities, government institutions including SEP itself, as mentioned by Schmelkes (2008, p.230); even what was produced and transmitted by word of mouth in the places where the UIET has an influence. And if one adds to this that the number of students that are currently counted are not as expected, the University faces the greatest challenge of all, adquiring young people who want to study the Higher Level.

In addition to the problem that the UI have about the application of the model of interculturality as a segregationist policy, there is a reproduction within the UIET in which it is urgent to work, since it seems that it is only during the year of Basic Training (when it existed) and in the degrees of Language and Culture and Sustainable Rural Development, where there is a greater emphasis on the strengthening of competences for interculturality and community work.

In the student sector, the constant challenge has been to motivate some young people, who due to their limited resources have presented intentions to abandon their studies. Dropping out of school is a constant problem among young people due to financial difficulties, lack of interest and lack of knowledge about attending any of the courses offered by the UIET. In the first semester of 2005, only 18 desertions were registered, with a non-existent failure rate the failure rate was zero, and in the last analyzed school period for this research (2014-2015) the desertions totaled f 144 out of 971 students. Of these, 93 were women and 51 men.

As for the sites, Oxolotán presented 66 desertions, Villa Vicente Guerrero faced 48 and Tamulté de las Sabanas only 30. It should be considered that the last two sites are of recent creation (2013 and 2014) so there is absence of the last semesters and this influences the number of desertions that it presents. It is natural, therefore, that the dropout rate is higher with respect to their counterparts.

Among the causes that influenced students to abandon their studies, we found that 112 of them presented problems of an academic nature. This data evokes the presence of an alarming indicator regarding desertions since one of the objectives of the Institutional Tutoring Program is, precisely, to avoid this phenomenon. Therefore, although there are other aspects beyond the control of the Institution, the academic type should not be so frequent among the causes of school dropout. Other reasons found were: 31 students who presented economic problems and only one regarding family matters.

The highest incidence of dropout occurred in students who came from places close to the corresponding sites(Tacotalpa, Teapa, Centla and Center respectively to each location). The school years in which there was a higher dropout rate were between 2007 and 2008 where they amounted to 48 and 42 respectively. These school dropouts were mostly given by non-indigenous students, it was only in the 2010-2011 period that the largest dropouts of HLI occurred.

Another problem faced by the students is their low degree levels, since until June 2015 there were 171 graduates out of a total of 445 students graduated from the five generations. Of them, 45 of 105 students from the degree in Sustainable Rural Development, 64 of 150 young people of Tourism Development, 49 of 135 graduates of Language and Culture and 13 of 55 of Intercultural Communication. This indicates that only 38% have completed their certification

process (Database of the teaching staff that has worked in the UIET, 2011b).

In addition to students, "from its beginnings, the University faced the obstacles that the human resources of the administrative area expected to enter under traditional schemes of governmental structures, that is, to enter by recommendations or by leverage" (Management Report of the UIET, 2005). So it is imperative the need for this staff to receive adequate instruction in the intercultural model, remember that the work of this, not only is in the classroom of the University.

Following what was expressed by Vivar (2014), it is necessary to stop considering these universities as political capital for governments. The direction of these institutions should fall on people who possess the skills and attitudes necessary for administration and management, so the appointment of rectors should not be left at the mercy of the political interests of the government.

One of the main difficulties facing the University, has to do with the hiring of teachers, since the calls to participate in the process of teacher selection have not had the expected response. Situation that has made it difficult for them to have a higher level than graduate. The location of the facilities, the characteristics of the same space and the work in the Institution make the stay of the teachers so uncertain and mobile.

5. Conclusions

The current situation of the University continues to demand greater transformations, and one of the most pressing is to bring intercultural discourse to practice. It is necessary to reach more spaces and more population to raise awareness not only about the cultural diversity existing in the country, but to seek the dialogues that allow the construction of a true democratic country, thus eliminating the stratified relationships by power.

It is necessary to transcend in the sense of understanding and social transformation, otherwise the UI will only be a policy directed at the differentiated population. And those who work in them, as in the time of Gamio and Vasconcelos, will end up being agents of a neo-indigenism condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past for having emptied of its historical content a process that in Mexico is already stale.

There is a prevailing need to have the ability to work in both spaces, internally and externally. Inside, preparing human resources with necessary tools for their work. Outside, to meet the demands of a complex society in constant mutation, in this case, in the context of the Sierra de Tabasco region, avoiding falling into a cultural simplicity or folklore.

The presented, gives us elements to read the blurring of the local, incorporating the indigenous culture only as an essentialist element and not as a fundamental part of the cognitive and economic-social development of the subjects. From the above it is derived that students are subject to other priorities and that the teaching staff is not a true investment vein for the Institution - hence the lack of training and training around interculturalism - which fails to consolidate the model intercultural education

Notes

1. The text is part of the project "Significance and influence of intercultural education in the daily life of UIET students", carried out between 2009 and 2011.

2. Sandoval (2004) points out that in intercultural HEIs, indigenous peoples will be accepted as long as they reconfigure their practices and adapt to the institution whose goal is miscegenation (see Llanes, 2008, Dietz and Mateos, 2011, Águilar, 2011, Hernández, 2012, Rojas-Cortés and González-Apodaca, 2016). The lack of managerial power of the beneficiaries and the implementation of predominantly Western knowledge allow us to reproduce the dominant-dominated logic that, paradoxically, the intercultural paradigm seeks to eradicate (Navarro, 2016); that is to say, that the binomial "domination / submission", in the words of Gasché (2008), is not retaken as part of the reflection and analysis that undoubtedly limits the consolidation of "interculturality for all" (López, 2001; Schmelkes, 2003).

3. The town of Oxolotán, where the university headquarters are located, is located 103 kilometers from Villahermosa, Tabasco and is located in the Sierra region.

4. The most solid and fundamental argument of the creation of the UIET, is found in the 4th article. of the Magna Carta that states "the Mexican Nation has a multicultural composition based on the existence of its indigenous peoples", in the General Law of Education, in force since 1993, the requirement to achieve the requirements of equity in the current education system is made explicit, and finally, in the National Education Program 2001-2006 which states that "coverage will be expanded with equity through the diversification of the supply of the higher education system and creating new services and public institutions" (Feasibility Study, 2004).

5. The Department of Statistics of the UIET takes up the linguistic criterion to find out how many indigenous students are enrolled in the school, but does not consider the criterion of self-ascription to an indigenous group.

6. From the beginning, four phases were proposed to be developed in the PSPD, the first concerning the curriculum vitae of the aspirants, the letter of explanatory statement and an essay on the importance of intercultural education for human development. The second phase refers to the psychological evaluation, the third the evaluation of the design of a teaching unit and the exhibition in the classroom and finally the interview phase (Management Report of the UIET, 2006).

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