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degree

Intercultural Bilingual Education: the role of participation in
improving the quality of education among indigenous communities in
Chiapas, Mexico

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Abstract

Intercultural bilingual education promises to provide culturally and linguistically pertinent education to marginalised indigenous communities in Mexico. However, legislative advances have not improved academic outcomes among indigenous students. This dissertation goes beyond proximate causes of academic failure to investigate the link between participation and educational quality. It finds that despite the official rhetoric, indigenous communities remain excluded from the design and delivery of education, resulting in a decontextualised learning process where schools reproduce the coercive power relations present in the wider society. It argues that improving educational quality requires transforming those power asymmetries by increasing community participation at all levels.

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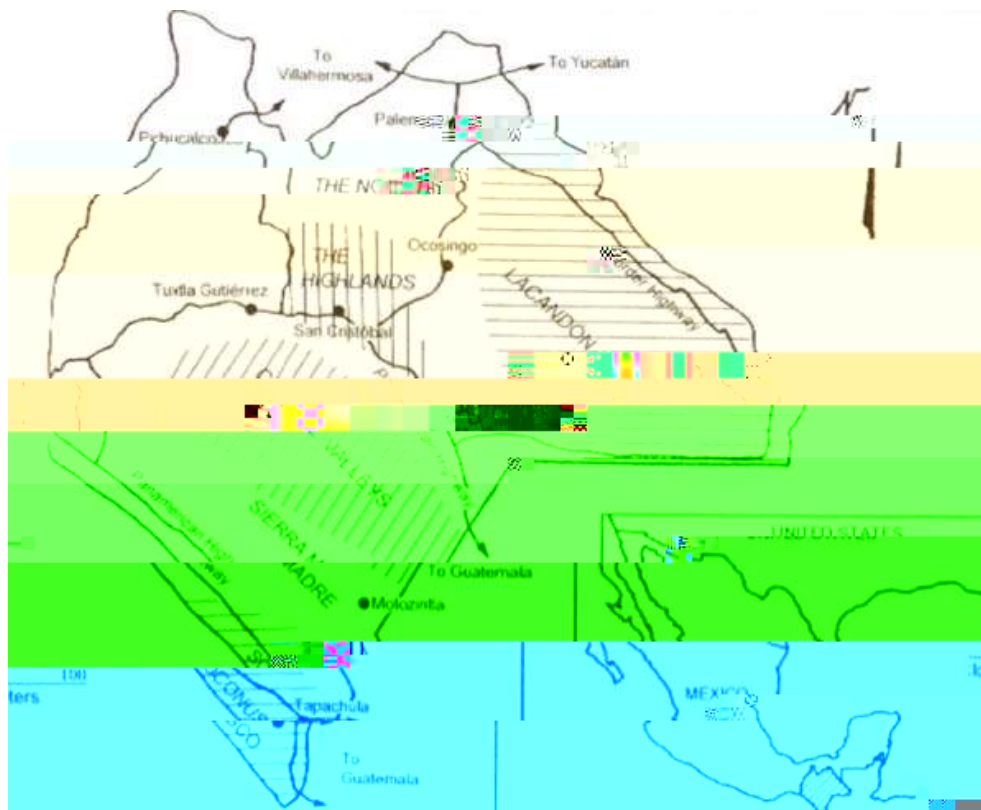
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Acronyms

CGEIB	General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual Education
DGEI	General Direction of Indigenous Education
Ecidea	Indigenous Community Education for Autonomous Development
EZLN	Zapatista National Liberation Army
IBE	Intercultural Bilingual Education
INEE	National Institute of Educational Evaluation
INEGI	National Institute of Statistics and Geography
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEP	Secretary of Public Education
SNTE	Mexican National Educational Workers Union
UNEM	Teachers' Union of the New Education for Mexico

“No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed”

Figure 1: Map of Chiapas



Source: Rus, Hernández and Mattiace (2003:5)

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achievement gap between indigenous and non indigenous students is 30 percentage points (Ibid).

This study goes beyond standardised test results to analyse the failure of IBE to deliver quality education from a participatory angle. Citizen participation in decision making processes is intended to lead to improved public service delivery and the empowerment of poor people through the creation of voice and agency, yet empirical evidence is mixed (Mansuri and Rao 2004; Banerjee et al. 2006). In this paper, participation is only assumed to lead to citizen empowerment if it is true collaboration rather than tokenistic consultation (Burford et al. 2012). At its best, participation will result in equal representation of indigenous communities and their worldview in the design and delivery of IBE, or the perpetuation of asymmetric power relations at the other extreme.

Using a novel conceptual framework, the extent of participation is measured with regards to indigenous involvement in decision making and the inclusion of their culture and language in the curriculum, classroom language, pedagogy and educational materials. Subsequently, a conceptual link between participation and educational quality is established and analysed. Quality of education is understood to encompass both academic and affective outcomes, i.e. the affirmation of one's cultural identity and attitude towards schooling (Cummins 1979; Leonard et al. 2004). The inferences are drawn from a literature review of the topic, which is further supported by data from a series of semi structured interviews conducted with a range of stakeholders in Chiapas and Mexico City in July and August 2014.

1.2 Research Questions

This dissertation is guided by two questions:

- 1. To*

EIB is community engagement, the possibility that the community will

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter analyses key academic literature to review main concepts, and subsequently introduces a conceptual framework within which the findings of the study shall be analysed.

2.1 Conceptual underpinnings

This section provides a conceptual grounding for analysing IBE. It is divided into four parts: section 2.1.1 explains the theoretical underpinnings, 2.1.2 introduces the concept of interculturalism, 2.1.3 links the concepts of participation and IBE, and finally section 2.1.4 discusses the quality of education as a concept.

2.1.1 Theoretical grounding

This study is informed by a critical view of interculturalism (Gasché 2008), taking the recognition of asymmetric power relations in post colonial societies as a necessary starting point for analysis. Conceptually, critical IBE is grounded in postcolonial theory, which departs from the premise that colonial dominance was not based merely on power but also on knowledge (Said 1978). The many debates within postcolonial theory shall

the research also draws on critical pedagogy (Giroux 1997), viewing the school as a political construct rather than a neutral site for instruction.

2.1.2 Interculturalism

Interculturalism as a concept is contested and does not have one universally agreed upon definition. According to the General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual Education (CGEIB 2004:42), interculturalism refers to a relationship between cultures, which is *'constructed from a level playing field and on equal terms between the interacting cultures. Conceptually, it denies the existence of asymmetries deriving from power relations; instead, it admits that diversity is a potential richness'*⁶. Aikman

2.1.4 Defining Quality

As Edwards (1991) states, the quality of education cannot be neutrally defined but is always a context specific and relative concept, which carries a political, social and cultural positioning. Hamel (2009) distinguishes

participation occurs (scope) is difficult when analysing the design and implementation of state and federal level policies that are characterised by multiple actors collaborating in various fora simultaneously.

Due to these theoretical and practical limitations, the main analytical tool that will be used here is the 'ladder of participation'. It has been defined and expanded by adding the linguistic cultural aims and the role of the

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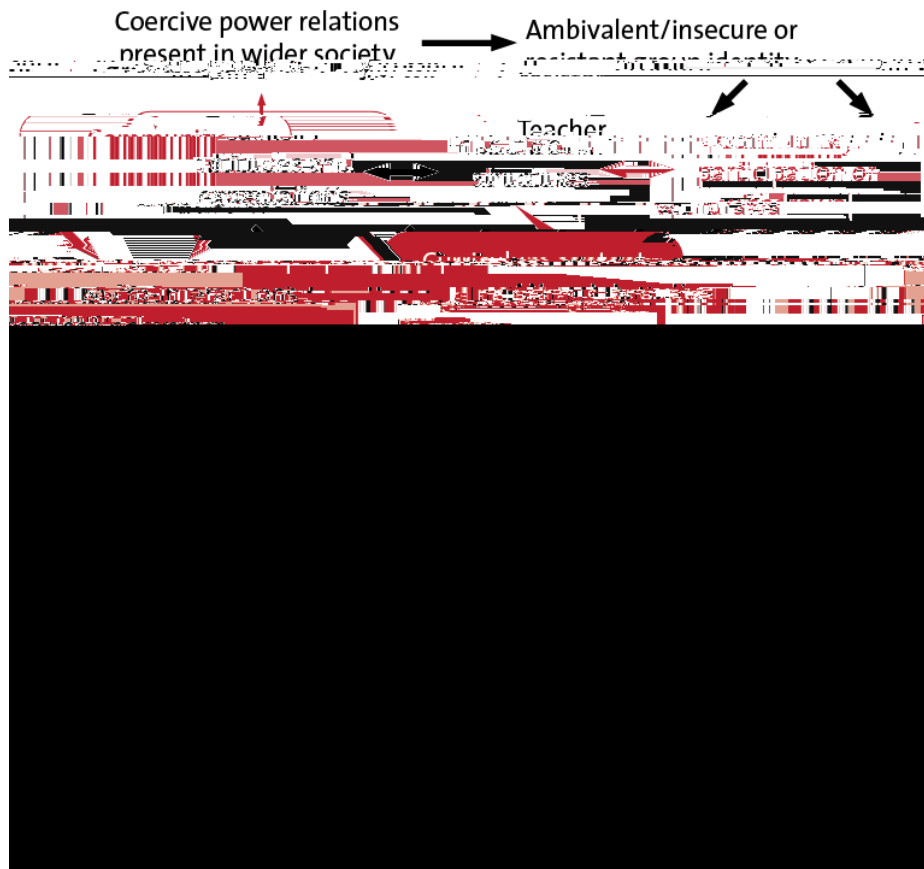
2.2.2 The missing link between participation and quality

Although participation can be considered to have intrinsic value, this study focuses on whether increased community involvement has the potential to result in better quality basic education for indigenous children. Recent research is beginning to address this issue, yet few theoretical explanations exist regarding the mechanisms through which participation may affect students' academic and affective outcomes. Calls for increasing school level accountability and giving parents a greater role in school management (Bruns et al. 2011) are narrowly focused on the efficiency and effectiveness variables; treating the problems of poor quality schooling as technical rather than political. Therefore, they critically ignore the need to pay attention to unequal power relations and the potential of community empowerment to affect students' learning.

Cummins (2000) establishes a link between asymmetric power relations in the wider society and bilingual students' educational outcomes. He argues that coercive power relations between the state and subaltern communities influence both teacher attitudes and expectations and the type of educational structures that are established, and that these in turn condition the relationships between educators, students and communities. These micro interactions determine students' academic success or failure, either reinforcing or challenging the societal status quo, and thus empower or

Figure 3 presents an adapted framework which considers the community as a key factor influencing educational quality. Following the original framework, participation depends on the extent to which established structures and teacher attitudes allow for community involvement – yet in the new version the interaction between community participation and educational structures is seen as bidirectional. This idea draws on earlier

Figure 3: Framework for 'empowering IBE'



Adapted from Cummins (2000:46). The added contributions are marked in red. For the original, see Appendix 6.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design used in the study and discusses the limitations and ethical issues involved.

3.1 Methodology and research design

Qualitative methodology was adopted for the study as it is deemed to be particularly appropriate for researching vulnerable populations such as indigenous people (Daly 1992). According to Hesse Biber and Leavy (2005:28), qualitative research allows hearing the voices of those who are 'silenced, othered, and marginalized by the dominant social order'.

The research design involved a review of the academic literature on IBE, followed by 15 semi structured interviews with indigenous and government representatives (see Appendix 1 for a full list). Two sets of questionnaires were designed for the different groups of respondents (see Appendix 2). These were applied over a period of two weeks in three locations in Chiapas and a further two weeks in Mexico City. Semi structured interviews were chosen due q 4 4 1 1

2007), which limits the robustness of the findings. Access to these groups is challenging to arrange and thus the sample of respondents is too small to infer statistically significant results. However, the answers obtained provide some support for the conclusions drawn from literature and seek to illustrate similarities and differences between the views of indigenous and government representatives.

A significant challenge was posed by the timing of the research during the summer holiday period; although officially the school year does not end until 15 July, in practice all the schools in the area had finished teaching by the time the research commenced on 1 July. This meant that classroom observations were not possible. Methodological triangulation or employing more methods for data collection could have resulted in more reliable results (Golafshani 2003).

Another limitation was presented by the fact that despite several attempts, interviews with students' parents could not be arranged. Anders

4. IBE IN MEXICO

This section gives a brief overview of the development of indigenous education in Mexico and sets the policy context.

4.1 Indigenous education in Mexico

Early nation building ideologies in Mexico sought to affirm the monolingual monocultural character of the nation state, first through the exclusion of indigenous people from state education and later through assimilation (López 2009). Despite the project of *mestizaje*, aimed at virtually forced cultural integration (Castro and Smith 2011), Mexico today has the largest indigenous population in Latin America, comprising 68 linguistic groups which can be further subdivided into 364 linguistic dialects and varieties (SEP 2009).

Assimilatory education with Spanish only instruction led indigenous children to continuously repeat grades or fail completely (López 2009). As a response to these challenges, Mexico introduced bilingual education in the 1940s, one of the first countries in Latin America to do so. The official aim of the new paradigm was the Spanishization, evangelisation and civilisation of indigenous peoples (López 2014). In the 1970s, the bilingual bicultural approach was adopted with an emphasis also on indigenous culture (Schmelkes 2006a).

These paradigmatic changes in education must be seen within the broader context of indigenous state relations. The 1970s marked the 'return of the Indian' (Albó 1991) with indigenous movements beginning to recall their rights throughout Latin America. In Mexico, this culminated in the 1994 rebellion of Mayan Zapatista rebels in Chiapas, calling for rights and recognition for the indigenous people (EZLN 1993). Since the early 1990s, several legislative reforms have been passed to officially endorse

interculturalism. Mexico reformed its constitution in 1992 to acknowledge the multicultural nature of the state, guaranteeing the right of indigenous

design of national or state level plans, programs or educational policies. This argument is supported by López (2009), who concludes that the IBE model in implementation still reflects the transitional approach, which has the aim of assimilating the indigenous into the mainstream. Indeed, Rockwell and Gomes (2009:104) maintain that 'schools, even bilingual and

are usually politically aligned with the state or the powerful Teachers' Union SNTE (Rockwell and Gomes 2009; López and Sichra 2007).

By contrast, literature demonstrates that bottom up IBE projects led by indigenous people themselves are highly participatory in nature and treat education as a political rights challenge rather than a mere technicality (López and Sichra 2007). The literature on the topic is mainly limited to evaluating two of the most prominent alternative educational projects in Chiapas, Teachers' Union of the New Education for Mexico (UNEM) and Ecidea (Indigenous Community Education for Autonomous Development), which are characterised by a high level of community participation. In Ecidea, for example, educators discuss and define educational policies together, with any decisions requiring the participating communities' seal of approval (CGEIB 2006; see Appendix 4 for the organisational structure of Ecidea). Both organisations elect their educators democratically within each community (Bertely 2006). This is a clear difference from the SEP model in which indigenous teachers are regularly sent to communities whose language they do not speak (Schmelkes in: Fierro Evans and Rojo Pons 2012).

4.2.2 Curriculum content

The literature conclusively demonstrates that indigenous content is not included in the national curriculum, which is competency based and applied both in indigenous and mainstream schools. Even if the curriculum is sufficiently ambiguous to allow individual states to accommodate local content in theory (Pérez Pérez 2012), López (2009) argues that its density and absence make the inclusion of indigenous knowledge¹⁰ practically

mainstream schools may contribute to reproducing inequality between the indigenous and non indigenous populations (Del Popolo and Oyarce 2005).

By contrast, curriculums designed by grassroots IBE initiatives are constructed from the sociocultural context of the indigenous villages,

4.2.4 Pedagogy

Although there is evidence to show that indigenous ways of lear

invariably recommend involving indigenous communities to a greater extent (Cortina 2014; Zavala 2007). One of the few exceptions is provided by Hamel (2009), whose research in Michoacán shows that students attending schools employing their own, context specific and appropriate curriculum taught in their native language, P'urhepecha, obtain significantly better results in reading and writing in both Spa

4.3 Findings II: Interviews

This section details the findings of the semi structured interviews. It is organised similarly to the previous chapter: subsection 4.3.1 discusses decision making; 4.3.2 curriculum content; 4.3.3 the role of indigenous language; 4.3.4 pedagogy; 4.3.5 materials and 4.3.6 educational quality. For a description of the interviewees' organisations, see Appendix 1.

4.3.1 Decision making

All of the indigenous teachers were strongly of the opinion that education was delivered from the top down without real participation of the indigenous communities, save some superficial consultations. A professor from Jacinto Canek teacher training college said: *'everything comes from above, sometimes they'll call one or another bilingual teacher but it is the high up people in SEP who make the plans.'*

At the local level, community involvement was seen to be limited to parent committees that concern themselves with purely administrative matters. Moreover, in many respondents' experience, rather than willing participants, parents were often against teaching their children in their native language. This was put down to a fear of discrimination or because they thought indigenous language and knowledge was going to be useless when the children would invariably leave for the city. To illustrate parents' attitudes, another Jacinto Canek professor said: *'parents would ask: why are you*

and consultations. A National Institute of Educational Evaluation (INEE) representative cited an on going free prior informed consultation on the organisation of education and evaluation in 50 communities. However, she also contended indigenous people had no real role in any stage of the design of IBE education, with the only form of national level involvement being independent grassroots organisations or NGOs communicating the results of their projects to the wider public.

Indeed, Ecidea stood out as having a much higher level of community involvement in education. Although their initial experience with parents was similar to the one reported by SEP teachers, an Ecidea representative told parents' resistance had been overcome by raising awareness on the importance of culturally relevant education. He highlighted that Ecidea is not fully recognised by the SEP, with teachers receiving rather than a salary, a meagre monthly grant varying from MXN 853.00 to 2390.50 (65 181 USD) designated for continuing their own education. During the interview and visit to the office, it became evident that Ecidea educators are highly motivated, having worked for free prior to the agreement with SEP which set up the grant system in 2001. According to the representative, *'the government doesn't want to recognise [Ecidea]'* ¥

being a mere add on. Another official from CGEIB's area of Intercultural Curriculum Development stated: *'the fact that national and autonomous projects are seen as separate is a more sophisticated way to continue the dichotomy. We continue playing with that separation which won't let us enter into an intercultural relationship.'*

However, government representatives were in general of the opinion that there should be more participation. One asserted: *'personally, I believe the system should be decentralised and leave much more freedom to make decisions if not by school, by region or state because they vary. The general guidelines would need to be very precise and clear in what needs to be achieved, but how to achieve it should be down to the school. They should be seen as a minimum,'*

curriculum. He highlighted the fact that community members are seen as important contributors to the learning process.

Both indigenous and government representatives invariably considered it

an attempt to address the problem. All respondents considered it fundamental to reinforce the teaching of indigenous languages and foster pride in speaking them, whilst ensuring an adequate level of Spanish.

4.3.4 Pedagogy

It was evident from the responses that the current pedagogy, both in teacher training and its practical implementation in the classroom, reflects the standard Westernised model. With regards to state led IBE, the responses highlighted complete lack of dialogue and participation in pedagogy development except for occasional courses delivered by CGEIB.

4.3.5 Materials

The respondents said that textbooks and other materials were produced in indigenous languages, but several issues were mentioned with regards to their content and availability.

Both government and indigenous representatives acknowledged that materials often did not arrive at schools in remote locations. It was also mentioned that the materials did not reflect different linguistic varieties; sometimes the materials would be sent on a USB memory drive when the teachers didn't have access to a computer or didn't know how to use one; and in general, the content translated directly from Spanish was considered inappropriate and contextually irrelevant. One of the teacher trainee students said:

'An indigenous child doesn't know what a supermarket is, nor has he been to a theme park. He has only been to a local shop. It's not that he doesn't have the capacity to

4.3.6 Quality of education

Overall, the lack of relevance of the curriculum was considered to be the key issue behind poor outcomes and high drop out rates. The INEE representative explained: *'the homogenous curriculum is one of the most important*

educational quality, conceived by the indigenous communities to depart from local needs. The Ecidea representative added: *'they' [SEP] 'did' evaluations for 'six' years 'to find 'the 'quality' of 'education. 'But 'we 'have 'seen 'that you don't achieve quality education by'*

capture those. The students really want to be at school for what they are learning. The school is much closer to the community. However, she also highlighted the need for indigenous communities to organise themselves: *if you want to give them the responsibility to design a curriculum, who is going to take charge? There are two tasks: the state needs to open up, decentralise, give more autonomy to communities and schools. But the indigenous communities also need to strengthen their organisations.*

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter analyses the findings of the literature review and interviews within the conceptual framework outlined in chapter 2.

More participation, better quality education?

The findings of the literature review are clearly confirmed by

literature review and interviews show that legislative advances have not translated into a culturally and linguistically pertinent education for Mexico's most marginalised citizens.

By contrast, the bottom up IBE initiatives Ecidea and UNEM are characterised by high levels of participation in all areas studied. For a point of comparison, these projects reach a level 3 in the ladder of participation overall: decision making involves local communities; the equality of different knowledge systems is acknowledged by integrating Indigenous and Western content in the curriculum; children are taught in their native language and the pedagogy reflects indigenous ways of learning. However, although these projects are arguably delivering a much more culturally and linguistically relevant education than what SEP is currently offering, they are small scale and thus have a limited impact. Achieving true intercultural education – represented by levels 3 and 4 of the ladder – must encompass the education system as a whole and be aimed at transforming the deeply rooted attitudes which foster the continuation of asymmetric power relations. Educational projects that leave out the mestizo population cannot thus be considered intercultural in the full sense.

The interviews also highlighted the challenge of overcoming the internalised discrimination among parents and entire communities in order to truly decolonise education (Gustafson 2014). However, the experience of Ecidea demonstrates that these engrained attitudes can be overcome by a conscious effort to strengthen the school community relationship and by creating a school which does not only contribute to students' academic learning but fosters the cultural identity of the entire community. This supports Cummins' (1979) suggestion that the establishment of a particular educational program can influence a community's attitudes in relation to first language maintenance, not just vice versa.

Although literature offers little clue as to whether community involvement can improve the quality of education, the interviews highlighted that stakeholders across the board are convinced of the need for increased participation to reverse poor academic outcomes. What is clear is that limiting our understanding of educational quality to standardised test

Although offering policy recommendations was not the purpose of this study, some suggestions are however put forward. The antagonism between the state and indigenous communities in Chiapas can only be overcome through the real inclusion of indigenous people in the design and delivery of national education. Consultations and occasional pilot projects in marginalised communities do little to change the exclusion, discrimination and perception of being treated as second class citizens. True interculturalism can only surge when indigenous communities feel their input is required and valued. Decentralising education, with substantial room for adaptation at the state and local levels, is the only way for the Mexican Government to deliver linguistically and culturally relevant

government and indigenous stakeholders have revealed that actors across the board view increased community involvement as key to reversing

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Interviewees

1.1

1.2 Description of interviewees' organisations

1. Indigenous Intercultural Bilingual Teacher Training School Jacinto Canek, Zinacantán, Chiapas

Jacinto Canek is the first Normal School in Mexico which exclusively trains indigenous education professionals for the preschool and primary levels. It is located in the village of Zinacantán, Chiapas.

2. 'School and Community' Diploma in Education Methodology for Primary and Secondary Teachers in Indigenous Communities

The Diploma is a participatory project for indigenous teachers focused on developing the pedagogy, cultural relevance and revaluation of traditional knowledge in education. It is led by Sylvia Schmelkes in her position as the Director of the Research Institute for the Development of Education at the Universidad Iberoamericana (INIDE, online resource).

3. Ecidea

Ecidea, which stands for Community Indigenous Education for Autonomous Development, is a grass%

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5. CGEIB

The General Coordination of Intercultural Bilingual Education is the entity which coordinates, promotes, evaluates and assesses material related to equity, intercultural development and social participation within the Secretary of Public Education. Its activities include investigation, design of educational materials and programs, delivery of teacher training courses, and promotion of culturally and linguistically pertinent education to indigenous students (CGEIB 2013).

6. INEE

Founded in 2002, the National Institute of Educational Evaluation is responsible for the evaluation of the quality, performance and results of education in Mexico. It designs and carries out evaluations and issues

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APPENDIX 2

Interview questions

Question set 1: indigenous teachers, professors and teacher trainees

The same set of questions was used for all indigenous interviewees in Chiapas.

The teacher trainees were asked to answer the questions based on their experience of teacher training and professional practice in indigenous pre and primary schools.

1. What do you understand by the term interculturalism, both in theory and practice?
2. How is interculturalism reflected in the:
 - a. Curriculum – i.e. does it contain indigenous content/knowledge?
 - b. Materials – i.e. what language are they written in and do they include indigenous content?
 - c. Pedagogy – i.e. are indigenous modes of teaching and learning included in the methodology, both during teacher training and implementation in the classroom?
3. How does the indigenous community you come from participate in the provision of formal education (*sabios*, parents or other)?
4. How is indigenous knowledge included in intercultural bilingual education?
5. Should indigenous knowledge be taught in the formal school system or left to the community? If so, what should this include?
6. There is a lot of evidence indicating that indigenous students perform poorly compared to non indigenous students in terms of educational outcomes. In your opinion, why is this so?
7. Should the model of intercultural bilingual education continue as it is, or should it be changed somehow?
8. Can more participation of the indigenous communities result in better quality basic education? If so, how?

APPENDIX 3

Informed consent

3.1 Participant consent form

Participant consent form

Title of Project: Intercultural Bilingual Education and Traditional Knowledge: How Does the Indigenous Community Participate? Evidence from Chiapas, Mexico.

Researcher: Anni Kasari, MSc Dissertation Student, Department of International Development, LSE.

Email: a.p.kasari@lse.ac.uk

- I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet. I understand what my role in the investigation will be and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I agree to participate in the research.
- I have been told how the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
- I understand I have the freedom to withdraw from the investigation for any reason and without prejudice by informing the above named researcher within two weeks (14 days) of my interview.
- I have been given a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP.

3.2 Participant information sheet

All participants were informed they had the option of remaining anonymous, but that their organisation and position could be referred to if this did not compromise their anonymity. Any participants who wished to remain anonymous have had their names changed in the interviewee list.

Participant information sheet

You are invited to take part in a research study which forms part of the assessment for my MSc degree. Before you decide whether you wish to take part, please read the information below so that you have a better understanding of the research, how it will be conducted and the likely outputs. Please feel free to ask if you require any further information.

Title: Intercultural Bilingual Education and Traditional Knowledge: How Does the Indigenous Community Participate? Evidence from Chiapas, Mexico.

Purpose of the study:

The study is focused on analysing how the Intercultural Bilingual Education model involves indigenous knowledge and enables the participation of indigenous communities in the planning and implementation stages of primary education in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. The analysis will be based on interviews of government representatives, teachers and representatives of indigenous communities (including parents).

The findings will be used to examine the extent to which the inclusion of indigenous knowledge can have implications for the quality of primary education.

Who is undertaking the research?

A 1

- knowledge on Intercultural Bilingual Education;
- b) A parent with children who attend an indigenous primary school.
 - c) A representative of an indigenous community with knowledge on education; or
 - d) A teacher in an indigenous primary school.

Do I have to participate?

It is your choice whether or not to participate in this study. If you do take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet, and I will ask you to sign a consent form. Please note that even if you do decide to take part, you are free to withdraw within 14 days of the interview without giving a reason.

What happens if I decide to take part?

If you decide to take part, I will ask you a series of semi structured questions. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

Will my responses be anonymised?

All information you provide will be kept anonymous at your request, and will be securely stored. Your name will never be associated with any of your answers. Some comments may be attributed to describe your organization or the community you represent.

What will happen to the findings of the study?

Selected quotes from your interview may be used in my MSc dissertation. The information generated by the study may be published, but no details from which you could be identified will be divulged.

Will I be notified of the findings of the study?

I will offer you a short summary of the research findings should you request it at the time of the research.

Thank you for reading the Participant information sheet.

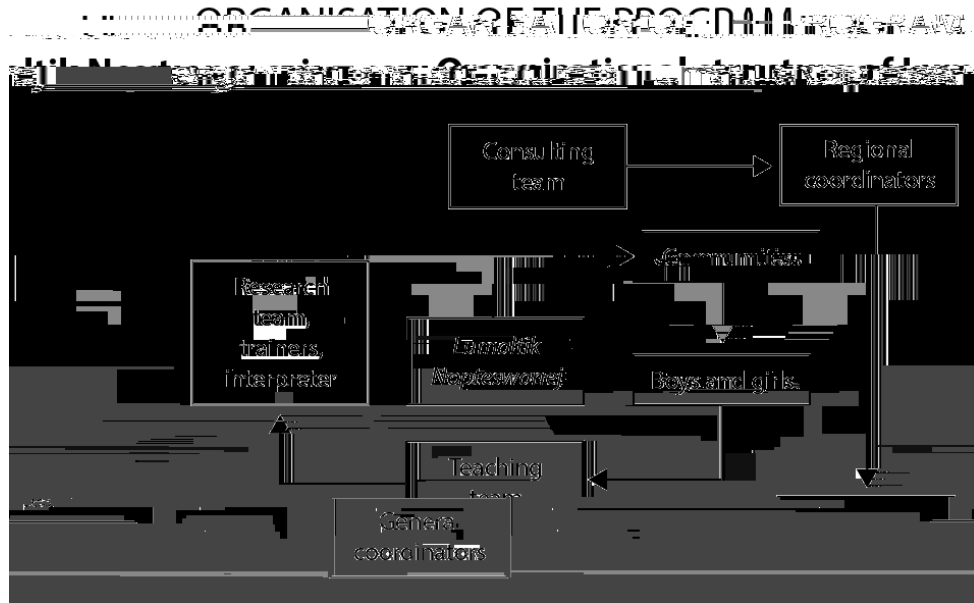
30 June 2014

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP.

APPENDIX 4

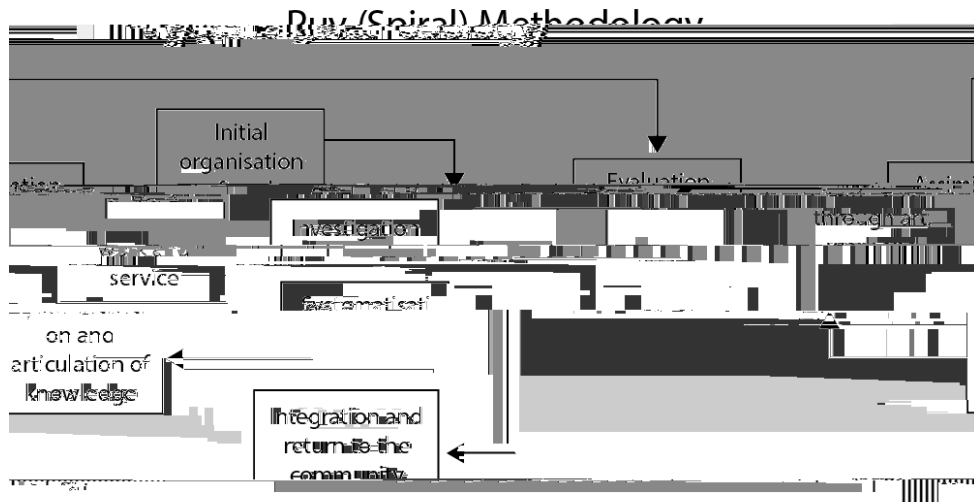
Ecidea

4.1 Ecidea 'organisational structure'



Source: Bertely 2009b: 51

4.2 Ecidea methodology

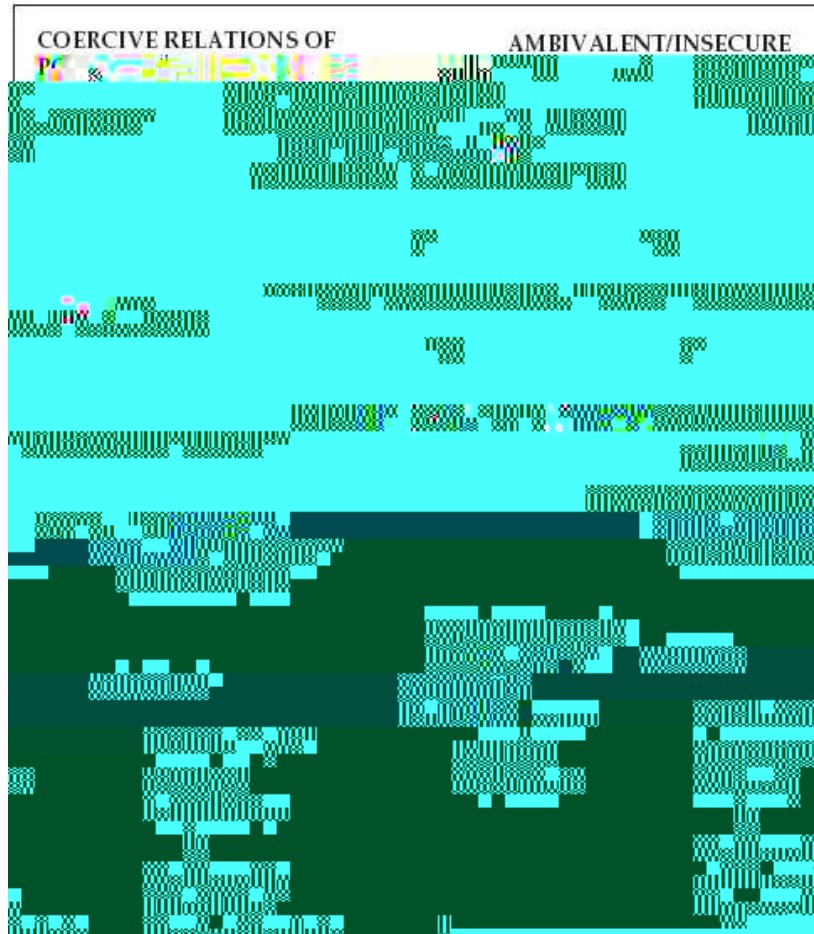


Source: Bertely 2009b: 13

APPENDIX 6

Cummins' original framework

Intervention for collaborative empowerment



Source: Cummins 2000: 46

APPENDIX 7

López's models of IBE

Bilingual education models under implementation in Latin America

Transitional	Indigenous languages and cultures	Indigenous assimilation into the mainstream	Indigenous communities	Spanishization or Portugueseization. Subtracting bilingualism	Spanish curriculum implementation for the majority
of the area or language.	are a threat	Consolidation of	individuals in	rural areas.	languages.
to bridge to European	Indigenous languages.	unity.	homogenous	of national culture.	Indigenous languages
cultural language learning more efficient.	It makes hegemonic				A monolingual and mo

Source: López 2009: 11