



The Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies: A Pedagogical Tool for Cultural Reclamation and Educational Inclusion in the Colombian Caribbean

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Abstract: This article arises from a documentary research focused on the implementation of the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA) in the Colombian educational system, with emphasis on its development in institutions in Córdoba, Colombia. The research is structured as a critical systematization that highlights the tensions, challenges and advances around the incorporation of ethnic-cultural content in school curricula. Normative references such as Law 70 of 1993 and Decree 1122 of 1998 are analyzed, as well as concrete pedagogical experiences, interviews with teachers and institutional diagnoses that reveal the current state of the CEA in the local context. The research allows us to reflect on the historical invisibilization of Afro-Colombian communities in educational processes, as well as on the role of teachers as agents of transformation that require training in ethnoeducation. It is concluded that the CEA is not only a legal mandate, but also an ethical and pedagogical imperative that invites the construction of more just, intercultural and inclusive schools. The article is based on a critical intercultural perspective and considers the theoretical contributions of ethnoeducation and Afro-Colombian studies as guiding frameworks for the analysis.

Keywords: Ethnoeducation, Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies, inclusion, Afro-Colombianness, intercultural education, discrimination, curriculum.

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Introduction

The implementation of the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA) in the Colombian educational system constitutes one of the most significant commitments of the State for the recognition of the ethnic and

cultural diversity of the country. Established by Law 70 of 1993 and subsequently regulated by Decree 1122 of 1998, the CEA seeks to promote the strengthening of Afro-Colombian identity in the school environment and guarantee access to an education that reflects the cultural, historical and epistemological richness of the black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities. Despite the legal mandate, multiple studies have shown a scarce real and effective implementation of this chair in educational institutions, especially in areas where there is a historical and significant presence of the Afro-descendant population, as is the case of Córdoba, Colombia.

This article arises as a result of a documentary and reflective research, aimed at understanding the current state of the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies in secondary education institutions in this region, making visible the advances and limitations that arise in the process of incorporating Afro-Colombian content in institutional pedagogical projects. Based on the analysis of normative sources, interviews with teachers, bibliographic review and contrast with pedagogical experiences, it is intended to offer a critical reading on how CEA is experienced in everyday school life, what are the discourses and practices that sustain or hinder it, and what paths are glimpsed for its strengthening from a transformative intercultural perspective.

The need to incorporate the CEA into the school curriculum does not respond solely to a normative provision. It is an exercise in historical and pedagogical justice, in which the structural debt that the country has with Afro-Colombian communities is recognized, whose presence has been systematically excluded from official narratives and training spaces. The school, as a social and cultural institution, has historically reproduced racist imaginaries and cultural hierarchies that have contributed to the invisibilization of the trajectories, knowledge and struggles of the Afro-descendant people. In this sense, the CEA represents an opportunity to dismantle these structures of exclusion, promoting teaching and learning processes that value difference, question racial discrimination and build a sense of belonging based on plurality.

In the Colombian context, the theoretical foundations that support the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA) are linked to various critical currents of pedagogy, ethno-education, Afro-descendant studies and interculturality. These perspectives allow us to understand that the CEA should not be approached as a simple curricular component, but as a field of epistemic, historical and political dispute in which power relations, identities and senses of belonging are configured. From this perspective, the school becomes a space where access to knowledge is permanently negotiated, and where the knowledge of ethnic groups, particularly Afro-Colombian communities, has historically been excluded, made invisible or folklorized. Authors such as Apple (2000) and Freire (1997) have warned that school content is not neutral, but is crossed by dominant ideologies that determine what knowledge is considered legitimate. The inclusion of the CEA, then, represents an opportunity to dispute this hegemony of knowledge and open the way to a pedagogy that recognizes the contributions, memories and worldviews of Afro-descendants as an integral part of the educational process.

Ethno-education, defined by Law 70 of 1993 as the right of Afro-Colombian peoples to a culturally and linguistically relevant education, constitutes one of the conceptual pillars of the CEA. From this perspective, knowledge is not universal or homogeneous, but is constructed from particular contexts and responds to the historical experiences of collective subjects. Restrepo (2004) argues that ethno-education cannot be limited to a technical or instrumental approach, but must be understood as a political commitment that claims the right to think, teach and learn from other cultural matrices. In this sense, the CEA cannot be exhausted in occasional celebrations or aesthetic activities devoid of reflection, but must promote the critical analysis of structural racism, slavery as a historical process, Afro-descendant struggles for freedom, and the role of these communities in the construction of the country. This implies reconfiguring the curriculum so that the Afro is not a footnote, but a transversal narrative that dialogues with the social sciences, literature, history, ethics and philosophy.

Another relevant theoretical framework is that of critical intercultural education, which, in contrast to liberal multiculturalism, is aimed at denaturalizing inequalities and questioning the colonial logics that sustain the school structure. Walsh (2009) distinguishes between a functional interculturality—which recognizes diversity without altering hierarchies of knowledge—and a critical interculturality, which seeks

to dismantle the mechanisms of power that exclude subaltern peoples. Applied to the case of the CEA, this approach makes it possible to show that the non-implementation or symbolic application of the chair does not respond to administrative failures, but to the persistence of a Eurocentric epistemic matrix that devalues Afro-Colombian ancestral knowledge. Therefore, implementing the CEA with a transformative sense also implies reviewing textbooks, institutional imaginaries and teaching practices that perpetuate forms of subtle and structural racism.

Afro-Colombian studies also provide fundamental elements to support the need for a Chair that dialogues with the identity, cultural and political processes of Afro-descendant communities. Researchers such as Grueso and Restrepo (2007) have shown how Afro-Colombianness has been relegated in official historiography, appearing only in contexts of slavery or marginalization, without recognizing its intellectual, linguistic, territorial, and spiritual contributions. The CEA, therefore, should be an opportunity to resignify that collective memory, recognize invisible Afro-Colombian leaderships and strengthen the cultural self-esteem of Afro-Colombian students, while promoting a critical awareness in the educational community as a whole about the colonial legacies that continue to operate in society.

From a curricular point of view, it is important to consider that the CEA should not be conceived as an isolated subject, but as a transversal axis that crosses all areas of knowledge. According to López and Mosquera (2019), this requires a reconfiguration of the curriculum that articulates the cultural dimension with the political dimension of knowledge, incorporating participatory methodologies, intercultural dialogues, and collective creation scenarios that allow students to construct meaning from their situated experience. In addition, decolonial approaches, such as those proposed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010), invite us to recognize that there is no single valid way of knowing, and that ancestral knowledge, oral traditions, and Afro-Colombian community practices must occupy a legitimate place in school, not as decorative elements, but as valid sources of knowledge.

In this theoretical framework, it is understood that the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies represents much more than a public policy: it is a pedagogical tool for symbolic reparation, the strengthening of ethnic identity, the restitution of the voice to historically silenced communities, and the construction of an educational project that is recognized as multi-ethnic, inclusive and transformative. This approach involves training teachers capable of critically reflecting on their practice, of dialoguing with the contexts of their students and of assuming the classroom as a space for the struggle for cultural dignity and plural thinking.

In the particular case of Córdoba, where the Afro-Colombian heritage is a constituent part of the social and cultural fabric, the implementation of the CEA takes on special relevance. However, the findings of this research show that its application has been partial, fragmented or symbolic, due to factors such as the lack of teacher training in ethnoeducation, the scarce institutional appropriation of the differential approach, and the absence of didactic materials that allow the teaching to be approached from a critical, situated and meaningful perspective for students. In addition, ideological and political resistance persists that hinders the recognition of the Afro as a constituent part of the national identity, relegating its teaching to commemorative dates or extracurricular activities unrelated to the formal curriculum.

From a theoretical perspective, this research is based on the approaches of critical intercultural education, ethnoeducation, and Afro-Colombian studies, which allow analyzing the role of the school in the reproduction or transformation of racialized power relations. Critical intercultural education, in particular, proposes to go beyond the superficial recognition of diversity to promote a deep reflection on the structures of inequality and the relations of domination present in educational processes. In this framework, the CEA cannot be reduced to an isolated subject or a set of folklorized contents, but must be conceived as a transversal, interdisciplinary and political commitment that transforms pedagogical practices and the very meaning of the curriculum.

Therefore, this article aims to systematize this experience of analysis and reflection around the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies in Córdoba, Colombia, in order to provide elements that serve as inputs for its strengthening from a situated, critical and coherent perspective with the educational rights of Afro-descendant communities. This systematization also seeks to make visible the voices of those who resist

epistemic exclusion from the classroom and promote pedagogical practices in which Afro-Colombianness is not an exception, but a constituent part of school knowledge.

Methodology

This study was developed under a qualitative approach of documentary research with elements of critical systematization, aimed at understanding the way in which the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA) has been approached in secondary education institutions in Córdoba, Colombia. The choice of this approach responds to the need to interpret the meanings acquired by the implementation (or absence) of the chair in specific contexts, and to identify the pedagogical, institutional and sociocultural factors that affect its development. The documentary methodology allowed the exploration of normative, conceptual and pedagogical sources, while the systematization incorporated the reflexive analysis of experiences and discourses collected in the field.

The target population of the study was made up of secondary school teachers who have had some relationship with the implementation of the CEA in their institutions, either through curricular planning, the coordination of cross-cutting projects, or participation in commemorative events related to Afro-Colombianness. The selection of participants was carried out through intentional sampling, prioritizing those educators who expressed interest and trajectory in issues of ethnic diversity, inclusion and ethnoeducation. In total, five teachers from areas such as social sciences, ethics and language were consulted, whose voices served to contextualize the documentary findings with real situations in the school environment.

Regarding the techniques for collecting information, the following were used:

- Documentary review of educational regulations (Law 70 of 1993, Decree 1122 of 1998, Law 115 of 1994), curricular guidelines, area plans, pedagogical projects and specialized texts on ethnoeducation and Afro-Colombian studies.
- Semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers, in order to identify their perceptions of the implementation of the CEA, the resources they have, the difficulties faced, and the strategies they have developed to include Afro-Colombian content in their classes.
- Analysis of institutional documents, such as Institutional Educational Projects (IEPs), improvement plans and evidence of pedagogical activities related to the Chair, in order to establish whether there is a real, symbolic or absent incorporation of it in the institutional discourse.

The analysis of the information was carried out through a thematic coding process, taking as a reference the methodology proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The units of analysis were organized around three axes: (1) normative and discursive presence of the CEA in official documents, (2) teachers' perception of the viability and relevance of the chair, and (3) pedagogical strategies used to address Afro-Colombianness in the classroom. From these axes, a matrix of emerging categories was developed that guided the interpretation of the findings.

In ethical terms, the confidentiality of the participants was guaranteed, their informed consent was obtained for the use of their contributions in the analysis, and the identification of specific institutions or individuals was avoided. The processing of the data was carried out responsibly, ensuring respect for the diversity of opinions and fidelity in the representation of the voices consulted.

This methodology made it possible not only to recover the regulations and theoretical frameworks that support the CEA, but also to confront them with the daily practices of the classroom, providing a critical look at the gap between what should be legal and institutional realities. From this contrast, the results presented below were constructed.

Results

The findings of this documentary and testimonial research allow us to affirm that, despite the normative advances around the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA), its implementation in educational institutions in Córdoba, Colombia, continues to be partial, symbolic and deeply conditioned by the individual will of some teachers rather than by a coherent institutional policy. The analysis of official documents, together with the interviews conducted, reveals a significant gap between the legal mandate and real pedagogical practices, a situation that reproduces the structural invisibilization of Afro-Colombian communities in the educational system.

One of the main categories that emerged from the analysis was the formal but absent presence of the CEA in the Institutional Educational Projects (IEPs) and in the area plans. In most of the documents reviewed, the chair is mentioned in general terms, often as compliance with the legal framework, but without evidence of concrete planning, clear objectives or achievement indicators associated with its development. This substantive absence reinforces the idea that the CEA has been integrated as a bureaucratic requirement and not as a transversal axis of the curriculum with transformative potential.

The interviews conducted with teachers show that there is a lack of knowledge or conceptual confusion about the nature, objectives and pedagogical approach of the CEA. Some educators associate it only with the commemoration of May 21 or with folkloric artistic activities that, although they may have cultural value, do not manage to develop processes of critical reflection or to question the structures of exclusion present in society. Others recognize the importance of the chair, but express that they do not have sufficient training or appropriate teaching materials to address it from an ethno-educational perspective. These limitations account for the urgent need for teacher training processes in ethnic diversity and Afro-Colombianness, as a basic condition for the effective implementation of the chair.

Despite this panorama, isolated but valuable pedagogical experiences were identified, driven by teachers committed to social transformation. These include the development of classroom projects focused on Afro-Colombian cultures, school research on Afro-descendant historical figures, dramatized readings of Afro-Colombian oral narratives, and reflection processes on structural racism and discrimination in the school environment. These initiatives, although not systematic, demonstrate that it is possible to incorporate Afro-Colombian content in different areas of knowledge when there is pedagogical interest, curricular autonomy and institutional accompaniment.

Another relevant category was institutional resistance, expressed both in the devaluation of Afro-Colombian issues by some directors, as well as in the lack of time allocated in school hours or in the overload of curricular content that prevents pedagogical innovation. This context reproduces logics of epistemic exclusion, in which the knowledge, histories and languages of Afro communities are relegated to the margins of valid knowledge, reaffirming the hegemony of a monocultural and Eurocentric curriculum.

Finally, the results show that the absence of the CEA in the classroom is not simply a problem of administrative execution, but a manifestation of racialized power relations that cross the education system. The underrepresentation of Afro-Colombian teachers, the naturalization of everyday racism and the lack of institutional appreciation of diversity are factors that must be addressed in a comprehensive manner if a real and coherent implementation of the CEA is to be sought.

These findings, read in the light of critical education theory and intercultural approaches, allow us to understand that the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies cannot be conceived as a marginal thematic unit, but as a political-pedagogical project that questions the very structure of the curriculum and the hegemonic school model. Hence, its effective implementation does not depend exclusively on its formal inclusion, but on processes of profound transformation in institutional culture, teacher training and daily pedagogical practices.

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Discussion

The results of this research allow us to open a critical reflection on the role that the Colombian education system has played in the reproduction of structures of exclusion and cultural silencing in the face of Afro-Colombian communities. The Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA), conceived from its origin as a tool for the recognition and appreciation of ethnic diversity, continues to be relegated to a peripheral place within the school curriculum. This symbolic and practical exclusion not only ignores the current regulations, but

also reflects the persistence of a monocultural school model, far from the principles of social justice, equity and cultural representation.

From the perspective of critical intercultural education, the mere formal presence of the chair in institutional documents does not guarantee its meaningful appropriation. As Walsh (2009) and Tubino (2005) argue, intercultural approaches must go beyond the superficial recognition of diversity, and question the systems of knowledge that hierarchize and exclude. In this case, the partial implementation of the CEA reproduces the logic of "celebratory multiculturalism", focused on dates and symbols, but absent of a curricular transformation that integrates Afro-descendant knowledge, languages, aesthetics and experiences as a constituent part of school knowledge.

The testimony of the teachers interviewed shows that, despite institutional ignorance, there are educational actors committed to the Afro-descendant claim, who develop creative, albeit fragmented, proposals to incorporate these contents. This situation coincides with what Freire (1997) proposes, when he points out that any authentically transformative educational process is built from the critical praxis of the subject who acts and reflects on his or her context. In this sense, the role of the teacher as a cultural and political mediator is fundamental so that the CEA is not reduced to a normative imposition, but becomes a liberating pedagogical experience.

On the other hand, the scarce teacher training in ethno-education issues shows a structural gap in initial and continuing education programs. Ethnoeducation, as Restrepo (2004) puts it, should not be understood as a field exclusive to ethnic populations, but as an approach that enriches the training of all educators in the country. Its absence limits the possibilities for teachers to understand the political, historical and epistemic foundations of the CEA, which prevents its conscious and critical appropriation. Thus, pedagogical practices that fragment ethnic-racial contents and treat them as peripheral or anecdotal issues are reinforced.

The review of institutional documents also reflects a bureaucratic vision of the CEA, where its presence is justified more by the fulfillment of indicators than by the conviction of its educational value. This attitude, common in educational systems that prioritize standardization and quantifiable results, prevents the development of curricular practices that respond to the sociocultural realities of the territory. As Apple (2000) points out, curricular politics is always an arena of dispute, and in it the power relations that determine which knowledge is legitimized and which are excluded are made visible.

In the context of Córdoba, a region historically influenced by Afro-descendant heritage, the effective implementation of the CEA could be a way to resignify regional identity, strengthen the self-esteem of Afro-Colombian students, and build more plural and democratic educational narratives. However, this requires not only individual will, but also an institutional and political commitment that articulates teacher training, production of teaching materials, community participation and impact evaluation.

In short, the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies should not be seen as a complementary content or a symbolic act of inclusion. It must be assumed as a fundamental political and pedagogical tool for the transformation of the curriculum, the critical training of students and the recognition of the cultural plurality that constitutes the nation. Its effective implementation requires a profound revision of the educational model, as well as the opening of spaces for dialogue between school, community and ancestral knowledge. Only in this way will it be possible to build a truly intercultural school, where all subjects, their memories and their territories have a legitimate place from which to teach and learn.

Results

The findings of this documentary and testimonial research allow us to affirm that, despite the normative advances around the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA), its implementation in educational institutions in Córdoba, Colombia, continues to be partial, symbolic and deeply conditioned by the individual will of some teachers rather than by a coherent institutional policy. The analysis of official documents, together with the interviews conducted, reveals a significant gap between the legal mandate and real pedagogical

practices, a situation that reproduces the structural invisibilization of Afro-Colombian communities in the educational system.

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Despite this panorama, isolated but valuable pedagogical experiences were identified, driven by teachers committed to social transformation. These include the development of classroom projects focused on Afro-Colombian cultures, school research on Afro-descendant historical figures, dramatized readings of Afro-Colombian oral narratives, and reflection processes on structural racism and discrimination in the school environment. These initiatives, although not systematic, demonstrate that it is possible to incorporate Afro-Colombian content in different areas of knowledge when there is pedagogical interest, curricular autonomy and institutional accompaniment.

Another relevant category was institutional resistance, expressed both in the devaluation of Afro-Colombian issues by some directors, as well as in the lack of time allocated in school hours or in the overload of curricular content that prevents pedagogical innovation. This context reproduces logics of epistemic exclusion, in which the knowledge, histories and languages of Afro communities are relegated to the margins of valid knowledge, reaffirming the hegemony of a monocultural and Eurocentric curriculum.

Finally, the results show that the absence of the CEA in the classroom is not simply a problem of administrative execution, but a manifestation of racialized power relations that cross the education system. The underrepresentation of Afro-Colombian teachers, the naturalization of everyday racism and the lack of institutional appreciation of diversity are factors that must be addressed in a comprehensive manner if a real and coherent implementation of the CEA is to be sought.

These findings, read in the light of critical education theory and intercultural approaches, allow us to understand that the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies cannot be conceived as a marginal thematic unit, but as a political-pedagogical project that questions the very structure of the curriculum and the hegemonic school model. Hence, its effective implementation does not depend exclusively on its formal inclusion, but on processes of profound transformation in institutional culture, teacher training and daily pedagogical practices.

Do you want me to continue with the Discussion section?

Discussion

The results of this research allow us to open a critical reflection on the role that the Colombian education system has played in the reproduction of structures of exclusion and cultural silencing in the face of Afro-Colombian communities. The Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA), conceived from its origin as a tool for the recognition and appreciation of ethnic diversity, continues to be relegated to a peripheral place within the school curriculum. This symbolic and practical exclusion not only ignores the current regulations, but

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Conclusions

The present research identified that, despite its normative support and its sociocultural relevance, the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies (CEA) continues to be substantially absent in many educational institutions in Córdoba, Colombia. Although institutional documents mention the chair as part of the legal framework that guides the curriculum, this inclusion is, in most cases, superficial, disjointed and detached from a transformative pedagogical practice. This reality highlights the persistence of a gap between normative discourse and everyday school practices, a situation that directly affects the right of Afro-

Colombian communities to an education that recognizes and values their history, culture, and contributions to the country.

One of the most revealing findings of the study was to verify that the effective implementation of the CEA does not depend only on the existence of a public policy, but on an institutional will that translates into concrete actions for teacher training, curriculum development and generation of adequate pedagogical resources. In the documented experiences, when teachers have conceptual and methodological tools, and when the institution supports their initiative, the Chair acquires meaning and becomes a way to resignify the educational process from plurality, recognition and inclusion.

However, when this support does not exist, the CEA is reduced to commemorative dates, folkloric activities or marginal units within areas such as social or ethics. This situation reiterates what has been raised by various authors regarding the risks of superficial multiculturalism, which makes difference visible only in a decorative way, without questioning the racial and epistemic structures that continue to operate in the school. In this sense, the study reaffirms the need to move towards a critical interculturality, which is not limited to celebrating diversity, but also transforms pedagogical, curricular and institutional relationships.

It is also concluded that teacher training on issues of Afro-Colombianness, ethno-education and structural racism should occupy a priority place in educational policies. The testimonies collected show that many educators want to work on these issues, but do not feel prepared to do so rigorously and sensitively. This training gap hinders the development of coherent pedagogical proposals and limits the transformative scope of the Chair.

For all of the above, it is urgent to rethink the place of the CEA in the educational system, not as an additional subject or another legal obligation, but as a possibility of reconstructing the very meaning of public education in a multi-ethnic and multicultural country. This implies opening the doors of the curriculum to historically silenced voices, reconfiguring the narratives that have sustained structural racism, and building with Afro-Colombian communities new ways of teaching and learning from memory, dignity, and social justice.

Consequently, it is recommended that educational institutions develop collective and participatory processes to integrate the CEA in a transversal way, that the Ministry of Education design clear implementation routes with technical and pedagogical support, and that the faculties of education incorporate this content in initial training. Only in this way will it be possible to move towards a school that not only recognizes diversity, but embraces it as a fundamental principle of its daily practice.

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