Approaches to interculturality and their implementation in chilean universities: between rhetoric and organizational innovations amid managerialism

Aproximaciones a la interculturalidad y su implementación en las universidades chilenas: entre la retórica y las innovaciones organizacionales en medio del gerencialismo

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Resumen: Este capítulo examina cómo se conceptualiza e implementa la interculturalidad en universidades privadas y públicas en Chile. Sostiene que abordar los desafíos que la interculturalidad plantea a la educación superior requiere superar los modelos convencionales. Aunque las universidades reconocen su importancia política y jurídica, el enfoque predominante en métricas cuantitativas limita la integración de perspectivas interculturales en las prácticas institucionales. Basándose en un marco teórico centrado en la tensión entre gerencialismo e interculturalidad y utilizando una metodología cualitativa, el estudio revela una brecha persistente entre el discurso aspiracional y las realidades operativas. La investigación concluye destacando la necesidad de una reflexión crítica continua y de una adaptación institucional para fortalecer la integración intercultural en un contexto de presiones externas cambiantes.

Palabras clave: interculturalidad, universidades chilenas, gerencialismo.

Abstract: This chapter examines how interculturality is conceptualized and implemented in private and public universities in Chile. It argues that addressing the challenges interculturality poses to higher education requires moving beyond conventional models. Although universities recognize its political and legal significance, the prevailing focus on quantitative metrics limits the integration of intercultural perspectives into institutional practices. Drawing on a theoretical framework centered on the tension between managerialism and interculturality, and using a qualitative methodology, the study reveals a persistent gap between aspirational discourse and operational realities.

It concludes by highlighting the need for ongoing critical reflection and institutional adaptation to strengthen intercultural integration amid shifting external pressures.

Keywords: interculturality, chilean universities, managerialism.

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Introduction

Historically, universities have functioned primarily as national institutions, deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and political landscapes of their respective countries. Inspired by the Humboldtian model of higher education, which emphasizes the unity of teaching and research within the framework of academic freedom, universities have traditionally focused on cultivating a national identity and serving the developmental needs of their nation-states (Readings, 1996; Buckner, 2016). Even within other paradigms, such as those represented by the French, English, or Latin American models of the university, a national orientation has played a pivotal role (Kwiek, 2000; Musselin, 2018; Labraña, Brunner & Álvarez, 2019). As a result, universities have been frequently instrumentalized to reinforce the sovereignty and cultural integrity of each nation-state, acting as a mechanism for developing a cohesive national identity through the promulgation of the values, narratives, and linguistic traditions underpinning national unity.

This national orientation influenced not only the curricular content but also the pedagogical approaches, research priorities, and organizational cultures of universities. However, the one self-evident nexus between national identity and university has become less convincing during the last decades. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, globalization has weakened the isolation of national borders, leading to an unparalleled exchange of ideas, cultures, and people worldwide. This widespread connectivity has pressed universities to broaden their perspectives and operations beyond national boundaries, weakening the exclusive emphasis on national identity within their missions (Kwiek, 2001; Enders, 2004). Furthermore, the advent of digital technology and the internet has made knowledge more accessible to all, reducing the universities' role as exclusive guardians of national culture and intellectual traditions (Bunz, 2014; Labraña, Brunner & Puyol, 2023). Additionally, the increasing societal diversity and recognition of multicultural realities within nations have prompted a reassessment of national identity definitions, encouraging universities to adopt more inclusive organizational practices while acknowledging their limitations in this regard. (Tanaka, 2002; Lasonen, 2005).

Not surprisingly, interculturality has become an important challenge for contemporary universities. Interculturality extends beyond the mere acknowledgment of cultural diversity. It involves a proactive institutional engagement in understanding, integrating, and valuing different cultural perspectives, which is essential for the development of professionals who are not only skilled but also culturally sensitive and socially responsible (Otten, 2003; Aguado & Malik, 2009; Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). In this context, universities are forced to implement substantial changes to incorporate these values into their core operations. At the organizational level, this necessitates a transformative approach to strategic planning, curriculum design, pedagogy, and research policy, that fosters an environment of mutual respect and open dialogue among

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all faculty populations, while at the cultural level, it entails the cultivation of a campus ethos that encourages empathy, cross-cultural understanding, collaboration and the recognition of the importance of global interdependencies (Crichton & Scarino, 2007; Leask, 2015; Reid & Garson, 2017).

This concept holds global relevance yet manifests with distinct nuances in Latin America, especially in Chile, where it intertwines with the rapid modernization and privatization of higher education. Since the 1980s, Chile has undergone a series of neoliberal reforms designed to diminish the state's influence and foster competition among institutions, leading to a highly competitive higher education system. Despite recent efforts to counteract this trend through enhanced state oversight, the outcome has been the consolidation of a highly regulated system that operates alongside market-driven principles established by earlier reforms.

Within this context, Chilean universities, particularly the 18 public institutions, are assigned a pivotal role in responding to the specific needs of their respective communities. This mandate is explicitly outlined in Chilean Law No. 21.094, which obliges all state universities to assist the state and contribute to the satisfaction of societal needs. Particularly, these institutions are required to implement plans, programs, and policies aimed at fostering cultural, social, territorial, artistic, scientific, technological, economic, and sustainable development across the entire nation.

Specifically, regarding interculturality, Chilean state universities are tasked with ensuring their contributions toward the formation of professionals who are not only critically and thoughtfully minded but also advocates of rational dialogue and tolerance. Consequently, these institutions are called upon to play a crucial role in shaping citizenship grounded in ethical, democratic, and civic values, alongside social solidarity. This includes an acknowledgment of the various cultures of indigenous peoples residing within the country, as well as a commitment to environmental stewardships. Such efforts underscore the principles of the expected intercultural ethos to be developed within Chilean state universities.

Interculturality in higher education amid managerialism

Interculturality has consolidated during the last decades as a new demand for higher education institutions. Since the turn of the century, the global landscape of higher education has been increasingly characterized by a push toward embracing diversity and fostering cross-cultural understanding. This shift is driven by the recognition that in a globalized world, professionals must be equipped with the ability to navigate and contribute to diverse cultural settings. Consequently, universities should integrate intercultural competencies into their curricula, promoting an academic environment that values diverse perspectives and explicitly encourages intercultural dialogue (Welikala & Watkins, 2008; Sommier, Roiha & Lahti, 2022).

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Nevertheless, interculturality is by no means a straightforward concept (Aguado & Malik, 2009). Some authors highlight its dimension of deep, mutual engagement and learning, emphasizing the need for an active and respectful exchange of cultural perspectives (Ippolito, 2007; Gube 2023). In contrast, others focus on the challenges of power imbalances and the critical interrogation of cultural norms and assumptions that interculturality must address to foster genuine understanding and equity (Ghazarian & Youhne, 2015; Dietz, 2017). All in all, these definitions point out the complexity of interculturality, underlining that it is not merely about the coexistence of diverse cultures but involves a dynamic process of deep interaction, negotiation, and transformation.

This complexity means that interculturality is not an easy task for universities. It encompasses far more than incorporating international elements into the curriculum or facilitating student exchanges. Instead, it requires a profound institutional transformation toward creating a culture that not only acknowledges but actively engages with and values diversity in all its forms. Such transformation necessitates profound changes at the strategic planning level, permeating every facet of the institution, from governance structures and policy formulations to resource allocation and community engagement policies, ensuring that they are integrated into the core mission and vision of the university. Thus, for interculturality to work, so the consensus of the specialized literature, it should include developing policies that support the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty and student body, revising curriculum and teaching methods to reflect intercultural competencies, and creating spaces that intentionally foster meaningful cross-cultural interactions (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; López-Rocha, 2021).

This process of transformation is not without its inconveniences. As different studies have pointed out, efforts to implement interculturality within universities often encounter various challenges. These include resistance to change among faculty and administration, the challenges of modifying entrenched curricular and pedagogical practices, and the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of intercultural initiatives (Jokikokko, 2021).

Additionally, achieving a genuine representation and inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives can be hampered by structural inequalities within the institution. The financial implications of such comprehensive changes also pose a significant challenge, particularly for institutions with limited resources. Furthermore, there is the critical issue of ensuring that intercultural engagements go beyond superficial interactions to foster meaningful and transformative experiences for all university members, especially among all students (Schmelkes, 2009; Aba, 2016).

Externally, the political economy significantly impacts higher education institutions' capacity to embrace and implement intercultural principles. Academic capitalism, with its emphasis on quantification and metrics, poses a significant threat to the depth and authenticity of interculturality within higher education (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997;

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Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The pressure to quantify achievements and outcomes easily leads to a narrowing of the concept of interculturality, reducing it to mere numerical indicators or benchmarks that fail to capture the essence of true cultural engagement and understanding. This reductionist approach overlooks the nuanced, transformative experiences that intercultural learning should foster, instead prioritizing easily measurable outcomes over cultural exchange (Jiang, 2011; Collins, 2017; Killick, 2018). As a result, the association between managerialism and interculturality often results in a reductionist understanding of the latter. Managerialism, understood in the educational context as the adoption of management practices and values from the corporate sector into the governance of universities—emphasizing efficiency, accountability, and performance measurement—tends to prioritize quantifiable indicators of intercultural engagement, such as international student numbers or participation in exchange programs, over the substantive and transformative aspects of intercultural learning (Deem, 1998, 2001; Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Chakravarty, Good & Gasser, 2020). This alignment creates tensions between the need for meaningful intercultural dialogue and the managerial imperative to produce measurable outcomes, which risks turning interculturality into a performative exercise rather than a genuine process of mutual understanding and respect. The growing emphasis on accountability and competition within higher education systems further exacerbates this issue, as universities are increasingly driven to demonstrate their success in fostering diversity through simplistic, data-driven frameworks that fail to address the deeper cultural dimensions involved.

These tensions underscore the inherent contradictions in attempting to reconcile interculturality with the managerial ethos that dominates contemporary higher education. While managerialism pushes for standardized models of success and performance, interculturality, in its true sense, requires flexibility, openness, and a critical interrogation of existing power structures (Shore & Wright, 2015; Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). Universities, therefore, face the challenge of navigating these conflicting demands, as the pressure to conform to managerial metrics often undermines efforts to cultivate a truly inclusive and interculturally competent academic environment. This dilemma highlights a broader issue for universities, particularly those operating within a regime of academic capitalism: how to balance the market-driven, managerial demands with the imperative to cultivate deep, meaningful intercultural engagements that transcend superficial tokenism.

Interculturality in chilean universities

Chilean universities exemplify the risks associated with academic capitalism, where market-driven imperatives often clash with educational missions. The commodification of higher education in Chile has led to a system increasingly focused on profitability, efficiency, and measurable outcomes. This focus has pressured universities to adopt managerial practices emphasizing financial sustainability and competitiveness,

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frequently marginalizing less commercially viable academic areas (Brunner, 2015; Brunner et al., 2021; Labraña et al., 2023; Labraña, Matus & Puyol, 2024).

The transition to democracy in Chile did not immediately reverse the neoliberal reforms instituted during the dictatorship (Labraña & Vanderstraeten, 2020). Although there were efforts to increase state support and oversight, the core principles of the market-driven model largely persisted. This has resulted in a higher education landscape where both public and private universities operate under a system prioritizing competition and financial autonomy over values such as interculturality. Consequently, efficiency, profitability, student choice, and competitiveness have become central tenets of Chilean higher education.

These developments sparked significant criticism, notably through the extensive student-led movements of 2011 advocating for comprehensive educational reforms. These protests led to a series of sectoral reforms in 2018, addressing issues of access, funding, and quality in Chilean higher education (Bellei, Cabalin & Orellana, 2014). The 2018 reforms included increased state funding for public universities, enhanced financial support for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and strengthened state oversight and regulation of both public and private institutions. Despite these efforts to address systemic inequalities, the reforms have inadvertently led to a highly regulated system that coexists with the market-driven principles established by previous reforms. This complex interplay between regulatory measures and market mechanisms has created an intricate educational landscape where Chilean universities must deal with tensions between stringent regulatory frameworks, metric-oriented policies, a competitive environment and the need to thoughtfully address intercultural principles.

In this context, integrating interculturality presents a significant challenge. The literature on interculturality in Chilean universities has primarily focused on student experiences (Durán Pérez, Catriquir Colipan & Berho Castillo, 2011; Abarzúa, Barró & Blanco, 2011; Williamson & Navarrete, 2014; Villarroel et al., 2014). While these insights are crucial for understanding the impact of intercultural initiatives, there is a notable gap in examining how systemic changes are being implemented within these organizations (Sommier, Roiha & Lahti, 2022).

Addressing this gap is particularly relevant. Effective approaches to interculturality in universities should encompass comprehensive strategies, including curriculum development, faculty training, and the creation of inclusive spaces, alongside mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress. For instance, initiatives such as incorporating intercultural competencies into graduation profiles, establishing specialized support units for Indigenous or migrant students, and developing collaborative research projects with local communities, as highlighted by previous studies (Rhoads & Szelényi, 2011; Aman, 2017), represent concrete organizational

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practices that move beyond rhetorical commitments. By broadening research and implementation strategies to include these organizational dimensions amid managerialism, Chilean universities can better address the complexities of integrating interculturality into their core operations, ensuring that these efforts reflect a genuine institutional commitment to diversity rather than superficial adjustments.

Methodology

To examine how chilean universities incorporate interculturality, we analyzed publicly available institutional documents from 45 universities, including both traditional public universities and private institutions of varying sizes, located across different regions of the country. The selection aimed to ensure institutional and regional representativeness, capturing a broad spectrum of approaches to intercultural integration. Inclusion criteria required that institutions had recognized admission processes and made available key documents relevant to strategic planning and self-assessment, such as strategic plans, development policies, and accreditation self-studies. The availability of such documents was essential to ensure a consistent basis for comparative analysis. This sampling strategy allowed for a comprehensive view of how different types of universities integrate interculturality into their organizational frameworks (table 1).

Table 1: Characterization of chilean universities

Universities	Region	Size	Complexity
6	North	11.700-7.100 students	Advanced- excellence
25	Centre	64.000-4.000 students	Basic-excellence
14	South	600-28.000 students	Basic- excellence

Note: Own elaboration based on official statistics. Region describes the geographical location of each university according to the administrative divisions of Chile. Size considers the total student enrollment reported by each institution. Complexity refers to the institutional classification based on the accreditation level, including undergraduate and postgraduate programs, and research activities. Basic level of accreditation equals 3 years, advanced 4-5 years, excellence 6-7.

The selection criterion emphasized the importance of including documents crucial for strategic planning and institutional self-assessment (Ramirez & Latorre, 2022; Labraña, Matus & Puyol, 2024). The documents reviewed, which included mission and vision statements, institutional values and principles, educational models, intercultural programs, strategic plans and intercultural policies, were selected for their relevance within chilean universities, as strategic planning is a critical tool for institutional evaluation and accountability in Chile (Ramirez & Latorre, 2022; Labraña, Matus & Puyol, 2024).

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We employed discourse analysis as our primary method for analyzing these documents. This approach is particularly effective for understanding how language constructs institutional identities and social realities, making it ideal for analyzing how interculturality is framed within the context of Chilean state universities (Gee, 2014). Discourse analysis enables us to uncover the underlying values and power dynamics reflected in institutional documents and communications. Specifically, our analysis addressed the following questions: What elements of interculturality are present in Chilean universities? What are the goals of interculturality in these institutions? How is interculturality implemented within them? To mitigate potential researcher bias inherent in interpretative approaches, the analysis incorporated systematic coding procedures and peer debriefing, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the data and enhancing the credibility of the findings.

The coding process followed an inductive approach. Initially, we conducted preliminary coding to identify and highlight key themes and concepts related to interculturality, such as connections with indigenous studies, multicultural relations, and diversity policies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was followed by focused coding, where we refined these themes into specific categories to reveal core areas of intercultural integration. Thematic analysis was then used to assess how these themes align with institutional pressures and market-oriented imperatives prevalent in Chilean higher education and managerial governance (Saldaña, 2016). To enhance the reliability of the coding process, categories were reviewed through peer debriefing and cross-validation among the research team, ensuring consistency in thematic interpretations and minimizing individual biases. Patterns were identified based on the recurrence of intercultural references across strategic documents, their positioning within institutional priorities, and their articulation with performance indicators and funding mechanisms, which served as proxies for the influence of managerial imperatives. This inductive approach ensures a comprehensive and unbiased examination of the data.

Findings

Mission and vision statements
In recent years, universities in Chile have gradually started to incorporate intercultural elements into their operations, though this incorporation often remains largely declarative. An examination of 45 Chilean universities reveals that while a substantial portion of these institutions have adopted intercultural themes, the extent and depth of their integration vary significantly. Specifically, 64% (29) of these universities do not include intercultural elements in their mission or vision statements. In contrast, 36% (16) of the universities have made some effort to incorporate intercultural considerations into their foundational documents.

In the cases where interculturality is explicitly recognized, the commitment can range from broad acknowledgments to specific, targeted initiatives. For instance, a leading

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state university located in northern Chile explicitly integrates interculturality into its mission statement by acknowledging the "cosmovision of its original peoples" and supporting the "conservation of Chinchorro Culture." This explicit recognition signifies a deliberate effort to embed intercultural values into the institutional ethos. Similarly, a private university in the southern region of Chile articulates its intercultural commitment by emphasizing its dialogue with "the diversity of knowledge and cultures, from the same territory of rich ancestral sap that saw its birth." This statement reflects a deep-rooted acknowledgment of local cultural heritage and diversity.

However, in most cases interculturality may be inferred from the broader goals articulated in mission and vision statements, even when it is not explicitly mentioned. For example, a state university situated in the central region of Chile describes its role in "contributing to the development of cultural patrimony and national identity," which implicitly suggests an engagement with intercultural values. Likewise, another state university in the northern region emphasizes its commitment to training professionals capable of contributing to their regions from a "transdisciplinary, plurinational, inclusive, non-sexist, sustainable, and innovative perspective." Although the term "interculturality" is not used directly in these mission and vision statements, the inclusive language reflects an underlying commitment to intercultural principles.

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of how interculturality is reflected in the mission and vision statements across different regions of Chile:

Table 2: Interculturality in mission and vision statements of chilean universities

Region	Key elements and approaches
North	Cross-border integration; commitment to indigenous peoples; recognition and preservation of cultural heritage; policies promoting cultural, social, and territorial development with an intercultural perspective.
Centre	Contribution to national cultural heritage and identity; plurinational perspective; diversity and social inclusion; respect for pluralism; promoting social integration.
South	Sense of social equity; recognition and promotion of indigenous worldviews; intercultural relationships with the Mapuche people; dialogue with diverse knowledge and cultures.

Institutional values and principles

The institutional values and principles most frequently emphasized include pluralism, respect for diversity, inclusion, and equity. For instance, a state university in the central region of Chile articulates its principles as follows: "Diversity and pluralism: ...we value different personal and cultural identities as part of a plural and diverse society." Similarly, several state universities in the northern part of the country highlight "pluralism" as a core principle or institutional value.

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Additionally, we identified various principles and values explicitly associated with a commitment to interculturality. These include personal and cultural identities, intercultural relations, cultural diversity, plurality of cultures, social justice (particularly concerning indigenous peoples), non-discrimination, and the valuing of diversity.

Table 3. Interculturality in institutional values and principles

Type of university		Frequency	Percentage
State	No	4	22,2
	Yes	14	77,8
	Total	18	100,0
Private	No	19	73,1
	Yes	7	26,9
	Total	26	100,0

As illustrated in the preceding table, most universities incorporating interculturality into their institutional values and principles are state universities. For example, a state institution in the north of Chile states: "The University is situated in regions with high cultural diversity and valuable tangible and intangible heritage." Similarly, a state university in the south notes: "Given its location in a region where various cultures converge, the university will foster intercultural relations with the Mapuche population and other indigenous peoples." Values associated with interculturality include diversity, pluralism, democracy, equity, empathy, and respect.

Intercultural elements are also present in private universities, though to a lesser extent. For instance, a private institution in the central region of Chile declares in its values: "Respect: The respect for and active defense and promotion of human rights, interculturality, and social justice as fundamental imperatives for democratic coexistence." Another private institution in the south emphasizes: "Respect for Diversity: This involves recognizing and promoting diversity and pluralism as values that encourage fraternal coexistence, equity in its various forms, and inclusion." Common values related to interculturality across both public and private institutions include respect, appreciation for diversity, human dignity, liberty, equity, inclusion, and social responsibility.

Educational models

Regarding educational models, the evidence reveals that few universities incorporate interculturality into their educational model. The formative content related to

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interculturality is diverse, encompassing indigenous studies, multicultural studies, and global citizenship. Indigenous studies and territorial connections include topics such as indigenous heritage, indigenous peoples and quality of life, environmental studies, indigenous perspectives on nature and society, education and indigenous peoples, religiosity and rituality, Aymara language, and territorial commitment from an intercultural perspective.

Among those institutions that acknowledge the importance of interculturality in their educational models, they primarily adopt a multicultural focus addressing recognition, understanding, and appreciation of diversity. They also emphasize both theoretical and practical knowledge in intercultural dialogue and justice. Additionally, some models include courses on migration studies and Afro-descendent cultures. Intercultural communication, learning a second language, and effective intercultural communication skills are integral to these models.

Our analysis also identified educational models that align closely with the concept of Global Citizenship, particularly in the centre region. These models aim to enhance individuals' understanding of their own cultural identities as well as those of others. They promote active participation in the global society, encouraging collaborative approaches to generating knowledge and addressing global challenges.

Table 4. Intercultural elements frequent in chilean universities' educational models

Region		Frequency	Percentage
North	No	5	83,3
	Yes	1	16,7
	Total	6	100,0
Centre	No	16	72,7
	Yes	6	27,3
	Total	22	100,0
South	No	10	62,5
	Yes	6	37,5
	Total	16	100,0

As shown in Table 4, the incorporation of intercultural elements into educational models varies significantly across regions. In the northern region, only a small fraction of universities (16.7%) integrates interculturality into their educational models, while in the central region, 27.3% of universities include such elements. The southern region exhibits a similar trend to the central region, with 37.5% of universities incorporating interculturality. This variability reflects the diverse ways in which universities engage with

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interculturality in their educational approaches. The northern region's limited integration may be attributed to a narrower focus on specific local issues or other institutional priorities. In contrast, the central and southern regions demonstrate a greater inclination towards including intercultural perspectives, possibly due to a stronger emphasis on broader social and global contexts.

Strategic plans

Strategic planning is an essential assessment tool for Chilean universities, as higher education institutions are required to show proof of the establishment and compliance of strategic objectives and priorities stated in their institutional plans. Only a small percentage of universities incorporate interculturality in their strategic plans, hence demonstrating that few universities project interculturality in the short, medium, and long term.

Even among the institutions that include interculturality in their strategic plans, only a few articulate specific and strategic objectives related to what they aim to achieve. For instance, a state university in the central region outlines a comprehensive plan to enhance internationalization by integrating an intercultural dimension across various sectors: undergraduate and postgraduate programs, outreach initiatives, and research activities. This plan also emphasizes strengthening the specialization and interculturality of students and staff through enhanced international mobility. Conversely, another state university in the southern region sets a medium-term goal to establish a dedicated unit responsible for promoting and leading effective and respectful intercultural relations within the institution.

Table 5. Interculturality in strategic plans

Region		Frequency	Percentage
Centre	No	18	81,8
	Yes	4	18,2
	Total	22	100,0
North	No	4	66,7
	Yes	2	33,3
	Total	6	100,0
South	No	11	68,8
	Yes	5	31,3
	Total	16	100,0

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Table 5 shows that the incorporation of interculturality into strategic plans varies across different regions in Chile. In the central region, only 18.2% of universities include interculturality in their strategic plans, indicating a relatively low level of commitment to integrating these principles into long-term strategic objectives. Similarly, in the northern and southern regions, the inclusion rates are 33.3% and 31.3%, respectively, which are somewhat higher but still reveal that a significant number of institutions do not prioritize interculturality in their strategic planning. The lack of comprehensive integration of interculturality in strategic plans underscores a broader issue of limited long-term commitment to this dimension within Chilean universities. While some institutions have made notable efforts to incorporate intercultural objectives, these cases remain exceptions rather than the norm.

Intercultural policies

In relation to the integration of intercultural policies, only four state universities explicitly include this dimension in their regulations. Among these, only two directly address it as a policy for indigenous or native peoples, while the others integrate interculturality indirectly through gender and inclusion policies. A similar pattern is observed in private universities, where intercultural considerations are evident in eight regulatory instruments, typically intertwined with policies on inclusion, environmental engagement, and internationalization.

Similarly, the organizational structures through which universities have chosen to implement intercultural actions and/or programs exhibit significant heterogeneity. We identified 11 initiatives: two within state universities and nine in private institutions. These initiatives vary widely, encompassing areas such as intercultural programs, support programs, laboratories, specialized centers, research centers, and thematic institutes. Notably, some of these initiatives are beginning to address the realities of migration.

Table 6. Intercultural policies in chilean universities

Type of University		Frequency	Percentage
State	No	14	77,8
	Yes	4	22,2
	Total	18	100,0
Private	No	19	70,4
	Yes	8	29,6
	Total	27	100,0

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As may be seen in table 6, the integration of intercultural policies into Chilean universities remains limited, particularly within state universities, where only 22.2% (four out of 18) have explicitly included intercultural policies in their regulatory frameworks. Even among these universities, only two have developed policies specifically targeting indigenous or native peoples, while the others approach interculturality more indirectly, often through gender and inclusion frameworks. This suggests that while there is some recognition of the importance of interculturality, its direct institutionalization remains insufficient. Private universities demonstrate a slightly higher inclusion rate, with 29.6% (eight out of 27) incorporating intercultural elements into their regulations. However, similar to state institutions, these policies are typically embedded within broader frameworks of inclusion, environmental sustainability, or internationalization, rather than standing as independent intercultural policies.

Intercultural programs

The best practices identified primarily involve training programs conducted in native languages, which serve as platforms for cultural revitalization, often integrated into extracurricular activities. Notably, state and public universities in Chile provide exemplary models in this area, offering training plans and linguistic certification. These programs excel in integrating indigenous worldviews through initiatives such as dialogues and multicultural gatherings, which facilitate reflection, experience exchange, and coexistence. Additionally, these institutions engage in international student exchanges that significantly enhance intercultural competencies.

Several state universities host intercultural programs designed as forums for the exchange of knowledge and life experiences among diverse native cultures. They also establish Equity and Inclusion offices to support and guide indigenous and migrant students in their identity development. Furthermore, at least one institution has created a commission dedicated to ensuring respect for diverse identities and cultures.

Table 7. Interculturality in programs

Region		Frequency	Percentage
Centre	No	12	54,5
	Yes	10	45,5
	Total	22	100,0
North	No	5	83,3
	Yes	1	16,7
	Total	6	100,0
South	No	8	50,0
	Yes	8	50,0
	Total	16	100,0

Two state universities, one in the central region and the other in the southern part of Chile, have developed internationalization offices focusing on intercultural programs with a global perspective. These programs aim to promote sustainable

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development goals and intercultural education in alignment with UNESCO's policies. These universities also house centers dedicated to developing intercultural competencies, with a focus on communication skills and language proficiency. Despite these advancements, a significant percentage of institutions across the country lack any intercultural programs.

As seen in table 7, the integration of interculturality into university programs varies significantly across regions. In the central region, 45.5% of universities incorporate intercultural elements into their programs, while the northern region lags considerably, with only 16.7% of institutions doing so. The southern region shows a more balanced distribution, with half of the universities including intercultural programs. These regional disparities highlight the uneven development of intercultural initiatives across Chilean universities. The relatively high presence of intercultural programs in the central and southern regions can be attributed to their more diverse populations and stronger institutional commitments to inclusion and equity. In contrast, the northern region's low representation in these efforts may reflect a narrower focus on local development issues or a slower institutional response to global pressures for intercultural integration.

Discussion

How can we explain the predominantly declarative adoption of interculturality by Chilean universities? Our analysis suggests that this outcome is driven by two interrelated factors. Firstly, the Chilean regime of academic capitalism and the extended adoption of managerialism at the organizational level employs extensive measurement tools linked to state funding allocations. These tools prioritize quantitative metrics, which universities must meet to secure financial support. Consequently, institutions are incentivized to include intercultural themes in their strategic plans primarily to achieve favorable external assessments and obtain funding. This focus on managerial metrics encourages universities to superficially acknowledge interculturality, often relegating it to a nominal role without substantial integration into their core activities (Brunner et al., 2021; Labraña, Vanderstraeten & Puyol, 2025).

Secondly, these measurement instruments apply uniformly to both public and private institutions. Facing similar financial and regulatory pressures, both types of institutions tend to adopt intercultural policies that may be superficial and fail to drive significant structural changes within the organizations. This issue is particularly pronounced in state universities, which face stronger expectations to lead in societal integration and cultural representation. However, the managerial focus on standardized assessment criteria means that state universities may miss opportunities to deeply embed intercultural values in alignment with their public service mandates, thereby undermining the effectiveness of intercultural initiatives in the public higher education sector.

This situation underscores a crucial development: while the formal recognition of interculturality within Chilean universities represents a significant policy shift and

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aligns with broader societal acknowledgments of multicultural realities, it is insufficient if not translated into concrete policies, programs, and practices. The prevailing managerialism in higher education often prioritizes measurable outcomes over meaningful engagement, which risks reducing interculturality to a superficial gesture rather than a transformative force.

Our analysis reveals a clear paradox: although institutionalization is necessary for interculturality, it should not be its sole focus. True interculturality extends beyond formal declarations and policies; it requires thorough integration of intercultural perspectives across all aspects of university life. The managerial emphasis on metrics and efficiency must be balanced with a genuine commitment to intercultural values. For Chilean universities, this dynamic aspect of interculturality demands not only the implementation of policies but also a continuous reassessment of these policies in response to evolving cultural contexts and community needs. This approach ensures that interculturality is not merely a compliance measure but a substantive element of institutional transformation.

Conclusions

Interculturality remains a significant challenge for Chilean universities, often implemented more as a declarative process rather than an integrated practice. The concept of interculturality lacks national conceptual clarity, though our study identified its connections with indigenous studies, multicultural relations, language studies, migration, and territorial contexts. In the northern and southern regions, the term is more strongly associated with native peoples and cultural heritage, reflecting the institutions' geographical and cultural ties. In contrast, central universities align interculturality with pluralism, respect, and social integration.

Our findings highlight a strong correlation between intercultural initiatives and legal mandates imposed on public universities. While these mandates have increased the visibility of interculturality, the progress remains initial. To ensure interculturality permeates all institutional activities, a deeper integration into teaching, research, and community engagement is essential.

A notable trend is the concentration of intercultural guidelines on students, with less focus on faculty and administrators, except in institutions where intercultural training is a central feature. This highlights a gap in engaging the broader university community, including administrative staff, in intercultural policies. Addressing this gap is critical for developing comprehensive actions that reflect diverse perspectives within university life. Moreover, the rise of managerialism in Chilean universities—emphasizing market-driven imperatives such as efficiency, profitability, and competitiveness—poses a significant tension with the goals of interculturality. Managerialism often prioritizes quantifiable outcomes and financial sustainability, potentially marginalizing less commercially viable aspects like intercultural initiatives. This tension is evident as

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chilean universities strive to integrate intercultural practices within a framework that predominantly prioritizes market-oriented outcomes.

Despite advancements in integrating intercultural elements into admission processes, training plans, and student coexistence initiatives, there is a need for these efforts to be more strategically aligned with institutional goals. The managerial focus on efficiency and profitability often conflicts with the broader, more holistic objectives of intercultural engagement.

In research, specialized centers focusing on native languages, cultural practices, and sustainability represent progress, yet the design of intercultural policies often continues to reflect historical inequities. This includes a persistent modern colonial mindset that fails to fully engage with alternative knowledge systems and ancestral perspectives. As Sartorello (2024) notes, a critical approach to multiculturalism is necessary to address welfare-based and paternalistic measures.

Ultimately, interculturality offers an opportunity for situated learning through cultural exchange and interaction, fostering the development of intercultural competencies. However, universities must navigate the tension between managerialism and intercultural goals, ensuring that their commitment to diversity is not merely symbolic but integral to their institutional practices and strategic planning. At the bare minimum, future developments should include the incorporation of interculturality indicators into institutional evaluation and accreditation systems, allowing Chilean universities to measure not only participation rates but also the substantive integration of intercultural principles into curricula, governance structures, and community engagement activities.

Examples of such indicators could include the proportion of academic programs that integrate intercultural content across the curriculum; the percentage of faculty and administrative staff participating in intercultural training; the number and quality of community engagement projects developed in collaboration with Indigenous or migrant communities; the existence of governance units dedicated to intercultural affairs; student perceptions of intercultural inclusion; the promotion of research incorporating non-hegemonic knowledge systems; the degree of implementation of institutional intercultural policies; and the availability of multilingual communication services, particularly in Indigenous languages. Such indicators could provide a concrete mechanism to strengthen the institutionalization of interculturality beyond declarative commitments. Advancing in this direction would contribute to embedding interculturality as a constitutive dimension of university development in Chilean higher education, rather than treating it as an ancillary or peripheral concern.

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