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Interculturality In Universities: Identity, Experiences And The Impact of Beca 18 on Bilingual Students

Yuri Reina Marín[1] iD, **Einstein Sánchez Bardales**[2] iD, **Omer Cruz Caro**[3] iD, **Angelica María Carrasco Rituay**[4] iD, **Milena Torres Fernández**[5] iD, **River Chávez Santos**[6] iD

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Corresponding Author(s):

Omer Cruz Caro
Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, Peru. Emial: omer.cruz@untrm.edu.pe

Abstract: Financial incentives play a crucial role in the bilingual intercultural education of university students; therefore, this study aims to analyze the impact that Beca 18 has on bilingual university students from an intercultural approach. The study uses a qualitative approach, employing the interview technique, conducted with students from the Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza National University of Amazonas and the Fabiola Salazar Leguía National Intercultural University of Bagua. The results show a positive impact of the scholarship on the students, highlighting its importance in their academic training, mainly due to the financial support that allows them to cover study and living expenses. Many point out that without this assistance, they would not be able to continue their higher education. The main challenges faced by students from native cultures include adapting to Spanish, understanding technical terms, and transitioning to university life. The study concludes that while financial support is essential, additional resources and strategies are needed to address these linguistic and cultural challenges, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of intercultural bilingual education.

1. Introduction

Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) for university students can offer economic incentives by uniting local knowledge with scientific expertise (Chen & Han, 2011; Oberemko, 2022). This integration can improve students' access to the labour market, potentially increasing their income and benefiting their families (Barrera et al., 2017). Furthermore, the economic analysis of foreign language teaching in universities reveals the need for cost-benefit evaluations to improve the value and effectiveness of such programs (Jiang, 2020).

In addition, fostering intercultural effectiveness among university students through multicultural personality development can contribute to the internationalization of education (Gonzales, 2017; Preece, 2019). By strengthening intercultural communication skills and promoting a multicultural perspective (Madrid, 2017), universities can become international centers for teaching and learning (Zhao et al., 2021), providing students with valuable economic opportunities in an increasingly interconnected world (Básilio et al., 2019).

Economic incentives are vital in the bilingual and intercultural education of university students, particularly in nations where globalization and cultural diversity are key factors (Valeeva et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2021). Studies have shown that financial incentives, such as merit-based pay systems, can affect student productivity, motivation, and satisfaction (Podgorbunskikh, 2017). Furthermore, in bilingual contexts such as Catalonia and Wales, where minority languages face challenges due to internationalization efforts, the implications of internationalization on minority languages are evident (Garrett & Gallego, 2014); the intercultural effectiveness of university students is influenced by factors such as gender, bicultural status, and level of study, which emphasize the need for curriculum changes to improve it (Bonifaz, 2018). These indicators highlight the importance of considering economic incentives in intercultural bilingual education to promote interdisciplinary talents and international human resources (Jiang, 2020).

The impact of scholarships on intercultural bilingual education for university students is significant (Benahnia, 2014; Prasad, 2022). Scholarships such as the "Beca

[1] Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, Peru. Emial: yuri.reina@untrm.edu.pe
[2] Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, Peru. Emial: einstein.sanchez@untrm.edu.pe
[3] Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, Peru. Emial: omer.cruz@untrm.edu.pe
[4] Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, Peru. Emial: angelica.carrasco@untrm.edu.pe
[5] Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, Peru. Emial: milena.torres@untrm.edu.pe
[6] Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, Peru. Emial: river.chavez@untrm.edu.pe

18" program in Peru have positively affected academic performance, with many scholarship recipients passing their semesters and achieving higher grades than non-scholarship recipients (Anaya & León, 2015; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2022). However, scholars studying abroad present challenges due to linguistic, social, cultural, and religious barriers, which affect their pace of language learning and intercultural competence (Dietz, 2018; Olivencia, 2019). To address these challenges, it is crucial to provide intercultural competence awareness programs to students before they embark on their university studies, emphasizing the importance of understanding and accepting other cultures (Salinas et al., 2018; Sierra-Huedo & Nevado-Llopis, 2022). Incorporating an intercultural approach in higher education institutions is essential to foster inclusive societies and prepare students to engage positively with diverse communities (Kvietok et al., 2022).

Research indicates that scholarship recipients earn higher grades and have a higher pass rate compared to non-scholarship recipients (Kirby et al., 2020; Waddington & Berends, 2018). In addition, scholarship students show positive perceptions of the classroom environment, particularly regarding teacher-student interactions and cooperation, although they express concern about the lack of solidarity, possibly due to differences in collectivist cultures (Román, 2016). Despite the benefits of the program, indigenous Peruvian university students face challenges in completing their studies, highlighting the need for more support and resources to ensure their academic success and social integration (Castro et al., 2016; Muhammed & Abdul-Rahman, 2019).

Beca 18 is a government program aimed at students and high school graduates with high academic performance, who will have access to full scholarships to study a career in the best universities and institutions in the country. Only students with high academic performance and low economic resources or in vulnerable situations may participate. The Beca 18 contest considers 8 modalities for specific audiences: Beca 18 Ordinary Scholarship, Intercultural Bilingual Education Scholarship, Protection Scholarship, REPARED Scholarship, Amazonian Native Community Scholarship, Afro-Peruvian Population Scholarship, Armed Forces Scholarship, VRAEM Scholarship, and Huallaga Scholarship (Programa Nacional de Becas y Crédito Educativo, 2024).

Since 2012, when the National Scholarship and Educational Credit Program (PRONABEC) was created, more than 17 thousand poor and extremely poor young people have not finished their studies because they stopped receiving the subsidy granted to them by the State. Of the eight modalities of Beca 18, the highest number of dropouts corresponds to the category of Amazonian indigenous communities. Of the 2,824 students who obtained a scholarship between 2014 and 2020, 43% did not complete their professional careers. Various specialists point out that it is necessary to reform this program with an intercultural approach since universities do not recognize their indigenous language as a second language (Tovar & Huamán, 2020).

Therefore, the research questions are: What is the cultural and linguistic identity of students in the universities of the Amazon region? What is the intercultural and bilingual educational experience of students in the universities of the Amazon region? What is the influence of Beca 18 on bilingual students in the universities of the Amazon region?

The objective is to analyze the impact of Beca 18 on bilingual university students from an intercultural approach, addressing their experiences and their cultural identity in the universities. Focusing on university students from two universities in the Amazon region as a unit of analysis: the Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza National University of Amazonas (UNTRM) and the Fabiola Salazar Leguía National Intercultural University of Bagua (UNIFSLB).

2. Theoretical framework

Interculturality in universities plays a crucial role in preserving the culture of students from indigenous communities by fostering understanding and respect for diverse cultural backgrounds (Ames, 2024; Molina-Bulla & Muelas-Trochez, 2023; Thi & Trung, 2023). Research highlights the challenges faced by Indigenous students in higher education, including the lack of support programs and cultural integration activities, leading to higher dropout rates (Ames, 2024). Furthermore, the establishment of intercultural universities in Latin America has aimed to address the historical neglect of indigenous knowledge and languages in academic settings, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural identities within educational institutions (Cortés & Dietz, 2022). Efforts to support indigenous student success in higher education, as advocated by the Indigenous Wholistic Framework, call for systemic transformation, decolonization, and indigenization to address persistent educational disparities and promote cultural diversity within university settings (Pidgeon, 2023).

In the United States, Native American students encounter barriers such as insufficient access to mentors with expertise in tribal communities and a lack of interdisciplinary courses that integrate traditional ecological knowledge (Gervais et al., 2017). Similarly, Indigenous students in Australia struggle with the transition from secondary to tertiary education and academic preparation, often leading to the discontinuation of studies (Lydster & Murray, 2019). Mentorship programs are crucial in addressing these challenges, as they can provide personalized support to navigate the complexities of higher education and promote success among Indigenous students (Straits et al., 2020). Furthermore, in Finland, international students may face communication difficulties and limited interaction with local communities, stressing the importance of structured support systems, such as volunteer family programs, to improve their adjustment and well-being (Granö et al., 2023).

In Peru, students from native communities face challenges when pursuing a college degree, particularly with scholarship support (Johnson & Levitan, 2022; Lydster & Murray, 2019). Research points out that the dynamics of economic, social, and cultural capital within the educational space prevent many youths from low-income households from entering and remaining in higher education (Román, 2016). Moreover, the relationship between college enrollment and household income in urban Peru is influenced not only by short-term financial constraints but also by poor cognitive skills and family educational background (Castro et al., 2016). Also, studies emphasize the importance of community support for students to access and remain in college, indicating that while scholarship programs such as Beca 18 provide opportunities, they do not always offer the necessary support and attention during professional development (Kirby et al., 2020).

Offering financial incentives to university students has shown positive results in various studies (Ozuna et al., 2020). For example, studies conducted at a Malaysian university found that providing monetary rewards for weight reduction significantly impacted both groups of students (Khan et al., 2020), indicating the effectiveness of incentives in promoting desired behaviors (Katare et al., 2019). Additionally, research on American Indian postsecondary access highlighted the importance of collaboration between sovereign nations and postsecondary institutions to increase college student success and preparation for tribal employment, emphasizing the critical role of higher education in tribal economic development (Affsprung, 2009). Also, tribal colleges and universities have been instrumental in providing transformative postsecondary experiences for indigenous populations (Christine & Joanna, 2016), contributing to capacity development and enrollment growth in rural communities (Dulleck et al., 2016). These findings collectively suggest that financial incentives may be a valuable strategy to support Native college students in achieving academic and career goals.

Studies carried out on scholarships in Peru are few. However, such studies have shown that scholarship recipients tend to perform well academically, with a high percentage passing their semesters and achieving higher grades compared to non-scholarship recipients (Kirby et al., 2020). However, challenges remain for indigenous Peruvian university students, including difficulties in completing their studies because of various social and economic factors (Salinas et al., 2018).

Furthermore, academics from Amazonian indigenous communities, despite their efforts, exhibit longer reading times, potential comprehension problems, and longer fixation durations compared to students from Lima, indicating challenges in reading skills and reading comprehension (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2022). It has been demonstrated that San Ignacio de Loyola University - USIL Beca 18 students have shown positive perceptions of classroom environments but have expressed concern about the lack of support from other students, possibly due to differences in cultural backgrounds (Levrini, 2020). Research shows that scholarship recipients from indigenous communities achieve higher grades and have a higher pass rate compared to non-scholarship recipients (Kirby et al., 2020). Additionally, the scholarship program allows students from low-income households to enter and remain in prestigious universities, with the informal support of their communities, families, and personal characteristics playing a crucial role in their academic path (Johnson & Levitan, 2022).

The scholarship program in Peru has demonstrated a positive impact on the academic performance of students; however, challenges remain for indigenous Peruvian university students, including issues related to social structures, support systems, and conflictive relationships with the state and the scholarship program (Waddington & Berends, 2018). Additionally, the academic adjustment and performance of Beca 18 students in Lima universities have been studied, revealing positive perceptions about the classroom climate, with slight differences in perceptions compared to regular students, particularly in terms of teacher-student interactions and adaptation to different cultural norms (Anaya & León, 2015; Sierra-Huedo & Foucart, 2022). Additionally, indigenous communities in the Loreto region experience food insecurity due to environmental challenges, contaminated water and food, and deficiencies in Peru's food and nutrition security policies (Román, 2016). These factors contribute to the overall difficulties faced by indigenous students despite the support provided by the Beca 18 program.

The cultural roots and traditional practices of indigenous communities in Peru play a significant role in shaping their identity and sense of belonging (Bunce & Revilla-Minaya, 2023; Mamani et al., 2022; Narayanan, 2022). Studies underline the importance of Andean ancestral practices (Zeballos-Velarde et al., 2023). In addition, research on multilingual education in Amazonian indigenous communities underscores the challenges faced in preserving languages and integrating traditional knowledge, advocating community-centered approaches and curricular integration to address historical marginalization and promote cultural relevance (Morales-Lopez et al., 2024). Likewise, the revalorization of the Quechua language through the presentation of oral myths aims to reinforce cultural identity and vindicate elements that are an integral part of students' identity, showing the importance of cultural heritage to foster a sense of belonging (Marino-Jiménez et al., 2023).

The integration of indigenous knowledge and practices is crucial for the preservation of cultural identity and the well-being of indigenous communities in Peru (Morales-Lopez et al., 2024; Righi & Ríos, 2019). Studies emphasize the importance of recognizing and integrating indigenous culture and beliefs within the education system (Bussalleu et al., 2021; Merino, 2021). Efforts to implement sustainable management in the Amazon region highlight the importance of incorporating traditional ecological knowledge to shape land policies and practices sustainably and equitably, aligning with indigenous values and methods for land management (Huambachano & Cooper, 2021).

The scholarship program plays a crucial role in supporting and empowering students from indigenous communities. However, there are no in-depth studies that analyze its impact on indigenous students, particularly in the Amazon region. There is a lack of analysis to determine whether this state's support for students from extremely poor native communities is meeting its objectives and allowing them to pursue professional careers, given that they lack the resources to do so on their own.

3. Methodology

According to the objective of the study, a qualitative methodology was chosen, with a multiple case study design focusing on ethnic communities in different universities: UNTRM (conventional) and UNIFSLB (intercultural), each representing a case study comprised of students who share similar characteristics. According to Viera (2023), the multiple case study allows for a deeper understanding of complex phenomena in different contexts, serving as a valuable tool for researchers to delve into complex phenomena within specific contexts, allowing in-depth analysis of individual units such as people, groups, or events.

Qualitative case study research has been applied in various fields, as demonstrated by the research papers provided. Miksza et al. (2023) analyzed case studies, evaluating their alignment with research questions, methodology, data collection, interpretation of results, and connection to theories. Additionally, Hwang & Seo (2022) conducted a qualitative case study. Similarly, Ibrahim & Door (2022) focused on qualitative case study research on educational policies in Ghana. These studies underline the versatility and effectiveness of qualitative case study research in exploring diverse phenomena and contexts.

The study population consists of bilingual university students from native communities in the Amazon region, including communities such as Awajun, Wampis, and Quechua, who have obtained a scholarship funded by the Peruvian State, making a total of 33 students beneficiaries of the two public universities in the region.

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling was conducted on students who obtained the scholarship to pursue their university studies. Out of these, only 11 students who gave their informed consent participated, and they were coded as follows: Awajún student number one (EA1.), Awajún student number two (EA2.), Awajún student number three (EA3.), Awajún student number four (EA4.), Awajún student number five (EA5.), Awajún student number six (EA6.), Awajún student number seven (EA7.), Wampis student number eight (EW8.), Quechua student number nine (EQ9.), Awajún student number ten (EA10.), and Awajún student number eleven (EA11.). Participating were 8 male students and 3 female students. Of these, 10 students are from the Amazonas region, and 1 student is from the Junín region.

The technique used was the semi-structured interview, divided into 3 parts: Cultural and Linguistic Identity; Intercultural and Bilingual Educational Experience; and Impact of the Scholarship. The interview was validated by the judgment of three experts (Sociologist, Anthropologist, and Pedagogue); once validated, it was conducted in person in an optimal and closed environment, as well as virtually through the Google Meet platform. Prior to this, coordination with the students was made via email invitation to obtain their consent and schedule the interview date.

Before conducting the interview, informed consent was signed to allow recording and to ensure the confidentiality of their data. The interview lasted an average of one hour, which allowed for detailed data collection.

The results were systematized using Atlas. Ti software for the design of semantic networks according to the coding of the interviews, which was carried out using the thematic analysis method, involving a process of abstraction and progressive interpretation. According to Farias et al. (2021), thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data, enabling the organization and description of the data set according to the topic of analysis within the research.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method widely used by researchers, offering a systematic approach to analyzing data by identifying patterns and themes (Cernasev & Axon, 2023; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Majumdar, 2019, 2022; Squires, 2023). By providing a detailed yet flexible analytical description, thematic analysis allows researchers to gain valuable insights from qualitative data rigorously and thoughtfully.

To create the semantic network, coding was carried out according to the responses of the interviewees, which are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Interview coding for semantic network

Categories	Guiding questions	Codes
Cultural and linguistic identity	Cultural expressions	Music and dance
		Outfit
		Language, typical dishes, and clothing
		hunting and fishing
Categories	**Guiding questions**	**Codes**
	Activities to keep cultural identity alive	Language practice with the family
		Linguistic interaction with countrymen
		Community customs practice
		Language promotion.

Intercultural and bilingual educational experience	Situations of native language use	Practice and teaching of traditional dances. Songs in native Language Stories in the native language Home Community Cultural events At the request of classmates and teachers In academic activities at the University
	Importance of transmitting language and culture	Keep culture alive Strengthens community identity Learning from other cultures Continuity and cultural legacy Recognition and appreciation
	Interculturality and bilingualism at the university	Culture and language exchange in the classroom Awajún course at the Language Center Native language interventions Intercultural teaching Cultural activities
	Intercultural and bilingual activities	Awajun Dance and Language Practice No cultural or bilingual activities
	Aspects of culture and language in the classroom	Courses related to culture Some Teachers Native languages are not considered in classes. There are no teachers specializing in interculturality.
	Changes, difficulties, and challenges as an Original student	No change Inequality in evaluations Material deficiency Family separation Environmental adaptation Linguistic adaptation Racism and exclusión Spanish language predominance
	Resources and materials relationship to native languages	Books, stories, and information sheets There is nothing about native languages
Intercultural Approach of Scholarship 18	Influence of scholarship 18 on the continuity of academic training	Financial support Sense of responsibility Opportunity to study Comprehensive support Inclusion of young people from native communities Academic Sustainability Dedication to studies
	Promotion of intercultural bilingual education	They do not promote bilingual intercultural education. Sport activities Conferences and talks Meetings with native and Hispanic students Cultural assessment Comprehensive support Guiding talents
	Positive aspects	Financial support for students from native communities Motivational messages by WhatsApp Platform Learn more
	Aspects to strengthen the EIB	Motivational speeches Activities with interns Cultural events
Guiding questions		**Codes**
		Offer guides for mastering Spanish Support in understanding administrative procedures and documents Courses in native Language

	Translation of the material in the original language
Guidance and special support	Guidance for application.
	None about the original culture.
	Personalized Support

Source: Authors' elaboration.

4. Results

4.1. Cultural identity

University students from native communities, beneficiaries of a scholarship, express a strong connection and identity with their cultural and linguistic roots. Several participants reveal a strong identity with their mother tongue, as well as with the cultural expressions of their communities of origin, such as music, dance, clothing, traditional dishes, and ancestral customs.
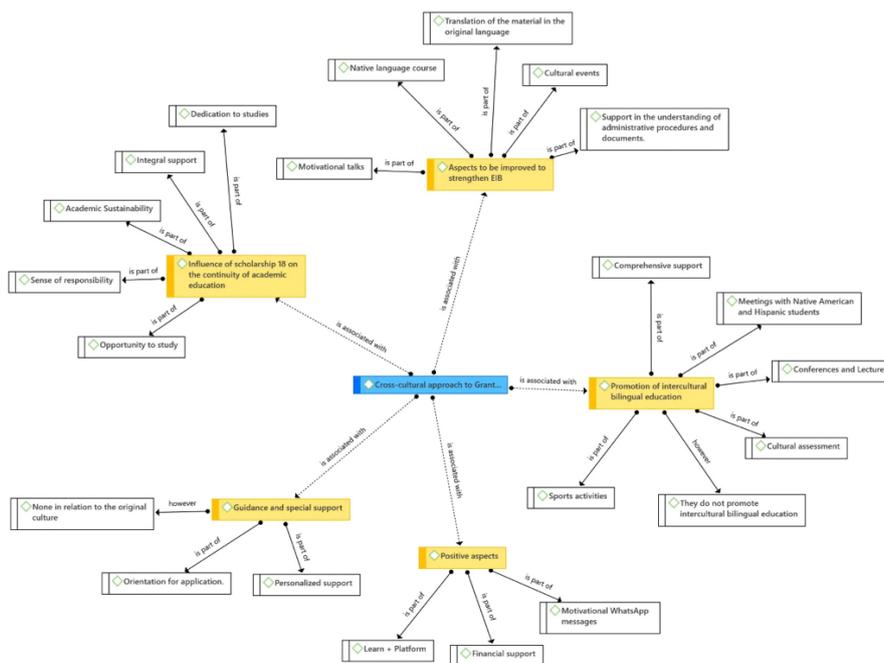
Figure 1: Semantic network of cultural and linguistic identity.

Source: Authors' elaboration, in software Atlas. ti

The interviewees expressed a strong identification with their cultural roots, primarily highlighting their mother tongue as a central element of their identity. In addition to language, traditional customs were highly valued, including practices such as house-building and fishing. Typical gastronomy, clothing, music, and ancestral dances were also pointed out as important cultural manifestations with which they feel connected. One interviewee emphasized the importance of maintaining their culture even outside their community of origin, while another mentioned learning Spanish for educational reasons, without abandoning their native language.

"...with my mother tongue, my customs" (EA1,2,3,4,5,7; EW8)

"...I identify with the Machiguenga culture because I have grown up in a community of that culture with its customs... building a house, fishing..." (EQ9)

To keep their cultural identity alive, the students reveal that they communicate only in their native language with family and fellow countrymen; however, few engage in other cultural activities due to a lack of time. Some mentioned that when they visit their communities, they practice their customs to preserve them.

"...On a personal basis, communicating with my countrymen in my language..." (EA1,2,3,4)

"...Always when I go, I practice those customs, and I speak in the language with the people of my community..." (EQ9)

Regarding the use of their native language, the students state that they use it mainly with their community, fellow countrymen, and their families because they feel more comfortable and connected with those who understand their culture. They express feelings of joy and pride when communicating in their native language, especially when their fellow students ask them to teach them words in their native tongue.

"...With my community, with my classmates and countrymen... here at the university, the majority speak Spanish..." (EA2,4,8,10; EQ9)

"...I feel happy and delighted that at least they are interested in my language and how I speak; they are surprised every time I speak... for example, at the university, there are my countrymen, and sometimes we meet and speak in the Awajun language... My classmates get curious; they ask me to teach them..." (EA7)

The preservation of native languages is perceived as a challenge to ensure the continuity of these identities. The students state that transmitting their language and culture to new generations is necessary since it is their identity and sense of belonging to their communities. Some reveal concerns about the decline in the use of native languages, which could lead to the disappearance of these identities in future generations.

"...It is important to transmit to future generations, so that they learn from other cultures... when you go to another place, you can teach other people about the culture of our community..." (EW8)

"...Yes, because the new generations are greatly influenced by Western culture that is foreign to ours in a negative way, and as a result of that, some cultures and languages are disappearing since they do not practice them..." (EA6)

4.2. Intercultural and Bilingual Educational Experience

Regarding the promotion of interculturality and bilingualism in university higher education, students express differences between conventional and intercultural institutions. Students at conventional universities point out that there are no actions taken due to the lack of educational policies and the curricular frameworks of each academic program; however, they reveal that they try to adapt by learning new cultures and the Spanish language. On the other hand, students at the intercultural university make an effort to ensure that they do not feel distant or excluded from their culture, through activities like dance and language. They also indicate that their universities lack resources related to native languages, mentioning that they have not seen books or other materials in their native languages in university libraries.

Figure 2: Semantic network of intercultural and bilingual educational experience

Source: Authors' elaboration, in software Atlas. ti

"I have not seen activities here at the university…" (EW8; EQ9; EA7,2,3)

"So far, I have not seen… only in the language they teach in the courses…" (EA3)

Students at the intercultural university mention that efforts are made to help them feel connected to their culture, such as offering courses in their native language, like Awajun, and organizing events that allow students to express themselves in their languages. Some mention that the university provides opportunities and facilities to students from Indigenous communities, such as scholarships and dining services. However, some difficulties and challenges are also evident, particularly due to the lack of sufficient resources and educational materials available in their native languages, which limits the development of true intercultural and bilingual education.

"The university is interested; now they have put in place the requirement to study English to obtain the degree, and they have also included my language" (EA5)

"There is a course called Native Language that is taught in Awajun, and there are also activities such as dance and others…" (EA7)

Concerning the incorporation of their culture by teachers, students feel it is largely absent. They mention that some teachers have asked them about their culture, showing interest, but it does not go beyond that because the teachers are Spanish speakers. They reveal that their teachers focus only on curricular content without addressing intercultural issues.

"Some teachers ask us where we come from, and it is important to recognize our culture" (EW8; EA1)

"Not really, because the teachers are Spanish speakers and teach courses related to different university careers" (EA6)

Students from native cultures state that the biggest challenge they have faced at university was adapting to the Spanish language, particularly due to the complexity of the technical terms in their professional careers. Some report having initial difficulties with university life, which differs greatly from their previous experiences in their communities. They mention feeling that their previous education did not adequately prepare them for the demands of university. However, they managed to overcome these challenges thanks to the support of their classmates and their personal efforts to learn and integrate.

"The main challenge would be Spanish since it is more fluent, and at the university, it is more advanced" (EQ9)

"The life I had in my town was different, and since classes were also held in high school, almost nothing I learned helped me at university. I had to make an effort" (EA2)

4.3. About the Scholarship

The students state that the Beca18 program has generated a positive impact on the continuity of their university studies. Most of them indicate that the financial support provided by the program has allowed them to cover their basic expenses, such as accommodation, food, study materials, and even the possibility of taking additional courses, such as languages. They indicate that, without this support, it would not be possible to continue with their academic training, as they come from families with limited economic resources that could not afford their university studies. Some mention that receiving the scholarship has generated a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to their studies, prompting them to strive to maintain good academic performance.

Figure 3: Semantic network of the intercultural approach of the Scholarship.

Source: Authors' elaboration, in software Atlas. ti

"It is a very important benefit; on my part, it gives me support for all my expenses, and with it, I can study…" (EA1)

"Without the scholarship, I would not be able to continue my studies… it is supporting me to pay for my room, pay for my food, buy materials, my books, do homework…" (EA7)

In terms of interculturalism and the scholarship program, students state that they have not perceived an effective promotion of interculturality and bilingualism. They indicate that the program focuses only on financial support and does not go beyond generating inclusion activities of a cultural nature. Accordingly, they express the need to provide more guidance and specialized support to students from native cultures, organize more cultural exchange activities among scholarship recipients, and adapt educational materials and teaching methodologies according to the linguistic needs and cultural backgrounds of the beneficiaries.

"It is not promoted; it is only financial support" (EW8; EA2,4,7; EQ9)

5. Discussions

The studies reviewed highlight the importance of cultural roots and traditional practices among diverse communities. Research on the indigenous people of Limbungan Perigi village in Lombok Timur emphasizes the close relationship between Islam, traditional house construction, and cultural tourism, showing how cultural values are integrated into architectural elements (Baharudin et al., 2023). Similarly, the study on the Bateq Orang Asli group in Malaysia demonstrates the preservation of language and cultural heritage through participation in ethnic tourism, indicating a strong preference for their language and a commitment to maintaining cultural practices (Che, 2014). Additionally, the ethnographic encounter in Gwadar, Pakistan, reveals the challenges faced by health personnel, emphasizing the importance of preserving culturally specific health practices within marginalized populations (Ullah et al., 2020). These findings collectively underscore the deeply rooted connection that individuals have to their cultural traditions, which encompass language, customs, and practices such as house building and fishing.

The study reveals a strong connection between students from indigenous communities and their cultural backgrounds, particularly their native languages. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of preserving indigenous languages and customs for maintaining cultural identity (Chauhan, 2010; Nawaf & Alzayed, 2015). Students' efforts to maintain their languages by speaking with family and community members, and their pride in sharing their culture with classmates, reflect the vital role of language in cultural preservation discussed in the literature (Ancelet, 2009; Bellón & Nieva, 2024).

The strong connection to cultural heritage and native languages expressed by the interviewed students aligns with research by Ames (2024) and Molina-Bulla & Muelas-Trochez (2023), who emphasize the crucial role of interculturality in preserving indigenous students' culture. The students' efforts to maintain their languages and customs, even in a university setting, reflect the importance of cultural preservation highlighted by Zeballos-Velarde et al. (2023) in their study of Andean ancestral practices. The pride and joy students feel when sharing their language with peers echoes findings by Marino-Jiménez et al. (2023) on the revaluation of Quechua through oral myths, reinforcing cultural identity.

Preservation and transmission of a community's language and culture are essential to maintaining its cultural identity and preventing the loss of traditions. The interviewees point out the importance of teaching future generations about their heritage and values, considering cultural transmission a crucial duty for community cohesion and pride. This approach is supported by authors such as Gupta (2018), who stresses the importance of maintaining cultural diversity in a multicultural society. Concern about the growing influence of Western culture, which could threaten the survival of local languages and customs, is a recurring theme. Ancelet (2009) emphasizes that languages are not only means of communication but also carriers of culture and human diversity, essential to our global heritage. Proposed strategies, such as the documentation of cultural practices and education in native languages, are fundamental to counteract these challenges (Reyes-García et al., 2021). In an increasingly globalized world, the preservation of cultural diversity is vital to avoid cultural homogenization and ensure that all cultures are recognized and respected, thus enriching the global patrimony (Chauhan, 2010; Nawaf & Alzayed, 2015; Ghafoor & Ashraf, 2023).

The interviewees reported difficulties adapting to university life, particularly in mastering Spanish and technical terminology. This resembles findings from studies of indigenous students' experiences in higher education, which identify challenges in linguistic and cultural adaptation (Chichekian & Bragoli-Barzan, 2021; Lydster & Murray, 2019b). The students' experiences align with research on Native American students' transitions to predominantly White institutions (Rodriguez & Mallinckrodt, 2021), underscoring the need for targeted support systems.

The difficulties reported by students in adapting to university life, particularly in mastering Spanish and technical terminology, are consistent with findings by Gervais et al. (2017) and Lydster & Murray (2019) on the challenges faced by Native American and Australian indigenous students. These experiences underscore the need for structured support systems, as emphasized by Granö et al. (2023) in their study of international students in Finland. The students' struggles with academic preparation and transition mirror the issues pointed out by Castro et al. (2016) regarding the impact of cognitive skills and family educational background on university enrollment in Peru.

The mixed experiences regarding the promotion of interculturality and bilingualism in universities reflect the ongoing challenges in integrating indigenous knowledge into academic settings, as discussed by Cortés & Dietz (2022). The lack of comprehensive intercultural initiatives reported by some students aligns with concerns raised by Kirby et al. (2020) about the need for more support and attention during professional development for scholarship recipients. The positive experiences with native language courses and cultural activities in some institutions demonstrate progress towards the kind of systemic transformation and indigenization advocated by Pidgeon (2023).

The scholarship program emerges as a crucial factor in enabling indigenous students to pursue higher education, primarily through financial support. This aligns with research on the positive impacts of financial incentives on university students (Ozuna et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020). However, the students' feedback suggests that the program could do more to promote interculturality beyond financial assistance, reflecting the need for a more holistic approach to supporting indigenous students.

The crucial role of the scholarship program in enabling indigenous students to pursue higher education aligns with findings by Johnson & Levitan (2022) on the importance of scholarship support for students from low-income backgrounds. The positive impact on academic performance reported by some students is consistent with the findings of Kirby et al. (2020) on the higher pass rates and grades of scholarship recipients. However, the students' feedback suggesting that the program could do more to promote interculturality reflects current challenges in addressing social structures and support systems noted by Waddington & Berends (2018).

Interviewees' suggestions for improvement, such as more cross-cultural activities and specific guidance for indigenous students, support findings from studies that emphasize the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and support systems (Straits et al., 2020; Tachine, 2017; Walton et al., 2020). The need for more targeted strategies aligns with Anaya & León's (2015) findings on the importance of addressing cultural norms and teacher-student interactions for Beca 18 students at universities in Lima. This underscores the need for universities and scholarship programs to develop more targeted strategies to support the academic success and cultural preservation of indigenous students.

The study shows the delicate balance indigenous students must strike between adapting to university life and maintaining their cultural identities. This tension reflects broader discussions in the literature about the challenges of integrating indigenous knowledge and practices into mainstream educational systems (Morales-Lopez et al., 2024; Righi & Ríos, 2019). The students' experiences highlight the importance of integrating traditional knowledge and practices into higher education, as advocated by Huambachano & Cooper (2021) in their study on sustainable management in the Amazon region.

The difficulties reported by students in mastering Spanish and technical terminology align with findings from the OECD (2022) study, which noted longer reading times and potential comprehension problems among Amazonian indigenous academics compared to students from Lima. This underlines the need for targeted linguistic support and adapted teaching methodologies, as suggested by Levrini (2020) in their study of USIL Scholarship 18 students.

The results of this study highlight the crucial role of the scholarship program in enabling native students to pursue higher education, primarily through financial aid. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of financial aid in promoting academic success among underrepresented groups (Cheng et al., 2004; Ci-Ping et al., 2010). However, divided opinions on the effectiveness of programs in promoting intercultural bilingual education reveal a gap between financial aid and cultural integration. This dichotomy reflects the broader challenges of implementing truly inclusive education policies, as discussed by Tachine (2017) and Walton et al. (2020). Positive aspects mentioned by students, such as ethnic diversity and access to quality education, demonstrate the program's potential to foster an inclusive academic environment. However, suggestions for improvement, including more cross-cultural activities and native language courses, indicate the need for a more holistic approach to supporting indigenous students, echoing the recommendations of Bazemore-James & Dunn (2020) and Wambua et al. (2020) for personalized services and culturally relevant pedagogy.

The study's findings point out the importance of integrating intercultural learning into higher education, as advocated by Alexander et al. (2014) and Torezani (2012). This approach not only enhances students' academic experiences but also promotes intercultural competence, a crucial skill in today's globalized world (Orbe, 2018; Silva-Enos et al., 2022). The emphasis on experiential learning and deeper investigation of subjective-objective processes, as stressed by Beatriz & López (2012) and Dervin & R'boul (2022), suggests a pathway for enriching the scholarship program beyond financial support. By embracing intercultural citizenship and humility in education, as proposed by Genesee (2024), Jurgen (2015), and Velasco (2023), universities can create more inclusive and globally aware academic communities. This holistic approach to scholarships, which incorporates cross-cultural issues, has the potential to not only support Indigenous students' academic success but also to foster a more interconnected and culturally sensitive educational environment for all students.

This study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Indigenous scholarship recipients in Peruvian universities, reflecting many of the challenges and opportunities identified in the broader literature on Indigenous education. It highlights the crucial role of financial support in enabling access to higher education. However, it also underscores the ongoing challenges in creating truly inclusive, intercultural educational environments that support both academic success and cultural preservation. The findings suggest a need for more comprehensive approaches that not only provide financial assistance but also actively promote cultural preservation, linguistic diversity, and academic support tailored to the unique needs of Indigenous students, as advocated by researchers such as Pidgeon (2023), Morales-Lopez et al. (2024), and Huambachano & Cooper (2021).

6.   Conclusions

College students from Native communities demonstrate a strong connection to their cultural and linguistic roots. They maintain their identity mainly through communication in their native language with relatives and fellow countrymen, and fellow students express pride in sharing their culture with fellow students. However, there is a latent concern for preserving native languages and cultural transmission to future generations, reflecting the importance of keeping these traditions alive in a higher education context.

There are significant differences between conventional and intercultural universities in terms of promoting interculturality. While traditional universities lack policies and resources to support interculturality, intercultural universities try to include cultural and linguistic elements of native students. However, in both types of institutions, professors generally do not incorporate intercultural elements into their teaching.

Students from native communities face significant challenges in adapting to the university environment, with academic Spanish being one of the most pronounced obstacles. This difficulty manifests itself in the understanding and use of technical terminology specific to their careers, as well as in academic writing and participation in high-level discussions. The gap between their previous education and university requirements is evident, affecting not only their academic performance but also their confidence and sense of belonging.

This situation underscores the urgent need to implement more robust and specialized support systems, such as remedial courses in academic Spanish, personalized tutoring, study groups, training for teachers to adapt their methodologies, and bilingual resources. Effectively addressing this challenge would not only improve the academic performance of these students but also contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable university environment where linguistic and cultural diversity is recognized as a strength.

Scholarship 18 has a significant positive impact on the continuity of university studies for native students. It provides essential financial support to cover basic expenses and study materials, enabling these students to access and remain in higher education. In addition, the scholarship generates a greater sense of responsibility and academic commitment in the scholarship recipients. However, the program lacks an effective intercultural approach beyond financial support, which represents an opportunity for improvement in the future.

To improve the educational experience of students from native communities, it is necessary to implement more activities and resources that promote interculturality in universities. More specialized support is needed for these students to address their specific cultural and linguistic needs. It is crucial to adapt educational materials and teaching methodologies to the needs of native students, thus fostering a more inclusive learning environment that respects cultural diversity. These improvements could contribute significantly to a more equitable and culturally sensitive higher education.

7.   Future Research

For future research on Beca 18 and university scholarship support in general, it is recommended to focus on the long-term impact of the program, evaluating job placement and professional development of graduates. It is crucial to analyze the effectiveness of the program by comparing attrition and graduation rates between scholarship recipients and non-scholarship recipients, as well as to study the socioeconomic impact on beneficiary families and communities. It is suggested to investigate psychological aspects such as the mental well-being of the scholarship recipients and their adaptation to new environments. In addition, it is important to conduct international comparative studies, evaluate the return on government investment, analyze the inclusion of underrepresented groups, and examine the role of technology in educational support. Finally, the role of Beca 18 in the broader framework of Peru's education and development policies should be considered, evaluating its sustainability and proposing continuous improvements.

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About the Author(s)

Yuri Reina Marin, an Industrial Engineer, with a Master's Degree in Supply Chain Management, graduated from Universidad Federico Villareal. Professor appointed as a full-time associate professor on May 15, 2015 and currently appointed as assistant professor, at the National University Toribio Rodriguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, with experience of over 11 years in higher education, in universities such as ESAN and the National University of Cajamarca.

Einstein Sánchez Bardales, Degree in Tourism and Administration from the Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, with work experience in academic quality in universities, accreditation processes, licensing, investment project management and market research.

Omer Cruz Caro, Agroindustrial Engineer from the Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, with a Master's degree in Engineering with mention in Project Management, with experience in public and private projects and research.

Angelica María Carrasco Rituay is a graduate of Business Administration from the Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, with work experience in public investment projects and research.

Milena Torres Fernández, a Graduate of Business Administration from the Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas, currently works at the university as a Technical Assistant for Academic Quality Improvement processes.

River Chávez Santos, Administrator, with a Post-doctorate in Ethics and Social Responsibility and Human Rights, Doctor in Education Administration and Master in Education Sciences with a mention in research and Teaching, graduated from Alas Peruanas University. He is a full-time professor in the Faculty of Education and Communication Sciences at the Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza de Amazonas.