Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Pedagogies of Plurality: Education, Cultural Resilience, and Well-Being in Indigenous Chiapas

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of International Development

School of People, Environment and Planning
Massey University

Joseph TJ Brockliss

2025

Abstract

Indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico, have faced centuries of exclusion through colonialism, state assimilation policies, and global economic inequalities. Education has often served as a tool of this exclusion, undermining Indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and communal ways of life. In 1994, the Zapatista movement declared autonomy and began establishing its own schools as part of a broader struggle for dignity, self-determination, and justice for the Indigenous communities of Chiapas. This inspired other Indigenous communities in Chiapas to establish their own schools with a similar focus on autonomy and cultural preservation. These autonomous schools reject the logic of Western development, re-centring education within Indigenous knowledge, communal decision-making, and traditional cultural practices.

This thesis explores how the Indigenous autonomous education movement of Chiapas contributes to social well-being when understood through the lens of *buen vivir*, a framework that recognises the interdependence of social, cultural, ecological, and spiritual life. Drawing on desk-based research and semi-structured interviews with individuals associated with the Zapatista movement and connected Indigenous communities, this study examines how education in Chiapas fosters five key areas: language, identity, and cultural resilience; environmental awareness, agriculture, and food sovereignty; social and physical infrastructure; educational sovereignty and intellectual liberation; and collective ethics. The findings reveal that well-being does not arise from isolated schooling initiatives but from embedding education into the social fabric of the community and resisting external models that compartmentalise daily life.

While challenges remain, such as funding shortages, cultural tensions, and ongoing pressures from State aggression, organised crime, and globalisation, the Zapatistas and other Indigenous communities of Chiapas exemplify how Indigenous-led education can generate resilience, cultural strength, and collective dignity. This study demonstrates that education, when reimagined from below, can become a practice of

resistance and renewal, contributing to a broader vision of post-development grounded in Indigenous autonomy and hope.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the educators of Chiapas who participated in this research and generously shared their experiences. I learnt much from the interviews that were held. I am deeply grateful to my supervisors, Prof. Regina Scheyvens and Dr. Peter Howland, for their guidance, thoughtful feedback, encouragement, and genuine interest in my research. Their patience throughout this period could not be overstated. I would also like to acknowledge Bernard Waters for his invaluable assistance throughout this thesis; his unending support with spelling, grammar, and formatting meant the world to me.

To my wife, Eli, and my daughter Emilia, we did it. I don't know how, as there were so many challenges, and only we will ever truly know their extent. I also extend my gratitude to John, Kathleen, Glenda, and Joel for their unwavering support and belief in me. I also wish to thank my cultural advisor, Dr. Gabriel Cué, for the support he provided me, and Dr. Levi Gahman for his time and insights.

I am thankful for the financial support provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Aotearoa New Zealand International Development Studies Network (DevNet), which awarded me the Field Research Award. I am also very thankful for the Massey University Sir Alan Stewart Postgraduate Scholarship and the broader support Massey University has given me throughout my academic journey. The interpretations and conclusions presented in this thesis are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of DevNet, the New Zealand Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, or any other body.

Finally, I wish to honour every Indigenous academic whose published work I have drawn upon, particularly those from the Global South who have courageously exposed the unspoken truths about power and the ideological forces shaping institutional practices that have deeply affected the lives of their communities. I can only hope to contribute, in some small way, to the body of knowledge their bravery has built. Thank God for them, and thank God I was able to complete this thesis.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

1.1 Setting the Scene 1

1.2 Personal Positionality and Motivation 2

1.3 Research Context 4

1.4 Research Aim, Questions, and Objectives 5

1.5 Organisation of Thesis 5

Chapter 2. Blueprints and Broken Promises: Latin America and the Post-Development Turn 7

2.1 Introduction 7

2.2 Post-Development Theory 7

2.3 Once Bitten, Twice Shy. Development, Post-Development and Latin America 13

2.4 Buen Vivir. A New Hope 18

2.5 Conclusion 21

Chapter 3. The Myth of Meritocracy: Education, Equity, and Development 23

3.1 Setting the Scene 23

3.2 Barriers to Educational Equality in the Global South 24

3.3 Barriers to Educational Equality for Lower Socioeconomic Groups in Latin America 31

3.4 Barriers to Educational Equality for Indigenous Communities in Latin America 35

3.5 Repercussions of Being on the Wrong Side of Educational Inequality 39

3.6 Conclusion 42

Chapter 4: Repression to Rebellion: A Brief History of Government, People, and Education in Chiapas 43

4.1 Introduction 43

4.2 Post-Independence Liberalism and the Foundations of Assimilation (1821–1900) 43

4.3 Revolutionary Promises and Rural Disillusionment (1910–1980) 44

4.4 Neoliberal Reform and the Deepening of Inequality (1980–1994) 47

4.5 "¡Ya basta!" The Rise of the Zapatistas (1994-) 49

4.6 Blackboards and Balaclavas: The Zapatista Education Model 52

4.7 Zapatista Influence on Broader Indigenous Schooling in Chiapas 57

4.8 Challenges and Triumphs in the Autonomous Indigenous Schools of Chiapas 58

4.9 Conclusion 60

Chapter 5: Plan A. Plan B. Plan C. Methodology 62

5.1 Introduction 62

5.2 Qualitative Methodology 63

5.3 Methods 65

5.3.1 Literature Review 65

5.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews 65

5.3.3 Document Analysis 67

5.4. Positionality and Reflexivity. Outside In 68

5.5 Ethical Considerations 69

5.5.1 Recruitment and Access to Participants 70

5.5.2 Obtaining Informed Consent 70

5.5.3 Privacy and confidentiality 71

5.5.4 Potential harm to participants/researcher/university 71

5.5.5 Promising access to information 71

5.5.6 Concerns of Sensitivity 72

5.6 Data Generation/Fieldwork 74

5.6.1 Addition of Cultural Advisor 74

5.6.2 The Unexpected Evolution of the Research Design 74

5.7 Data Analysis 77

5.8 Conclusion 78

Chapter 6: Education, Identity, and the Interconnected Life of Indigenous Communities in Chiapas **79**

6.1 Introduction 79

6.2 Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience 80

6.3 Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty 84

6.4 Social and Physical Infrastructure 88

6.5 Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation 90

6.6 Internal and External Challenges 94

6.7 Collective Ethics 99

6.8 Conclusion 103

Chapter 7. A Pluriversal Approach to Understanding the Findings **104**

7.1 Introduction 104

7.2 Analysis of Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience Findings 104

7.3 Analysis of Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty 107

7.3.1 Connections to the Land 107

7.3.2 Analysis of Food Security and Sovereignty 110

7.4 Analysis of Social and Physical Infrastructure 111

7.5. Analysis of Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation 113

7.5.1 Educational Sovereignty 113

7.5.2 Intellectual Liberation 114

7.6 Analysis of Internal and External Challenges 116

7.6.1 Internal Challenges 116

7.6.2 External Challenges 119

7.7 Analysis of Collective Ethics 122

7.8 Conclusion 124

Chapter 8: Conclusion **126**

8.1 Introduction 126

8.2 Summary of Main Findings 127

8.3 Significance of the Research 131

8.4 Reflecting on Limitations 132

8.5 Future Research and Action Recommendations 133

8.6 Closing Statement 135

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Setting the Scene

In the farthest southern State of Mexico, the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas have been in a centuries-old battle to reclaim autonomy and instil a model of development that reflects their culture. A succession of Governments employed numerous national policies that promised modernity and progress to the people of Chiapas in the name of development. However, for many of the Indigenous communities, the reality was a persistent existence of exclusion, assimilation[1], and loss. This was not by chance; it was structural, with education playing a pivotal role (Sanchez, 2024). From the early decades of independence to the neoliberal age ushered in by NAFTA, State-controlled education systems were key instruments of 'progression'. They were set up to 'civilise' the rural poor, assimilate Indigenous cultures, and prepare students for insertion into an economy that took from their communities with very little given back (García & Velasco, 2012). On January 1, 1994, an Indigenous-led rebel group called the Zapatistas rose up and took control of specific regions of Chiapas. One aspect of this uprising was the development of independent models of education. This was a revolutionary shift beyond a simple reform of education. It was a statement of self-determination and a rejection of external definitions of development, success, and progress (Barmeyer, 2008).

The Zapatistas building their own curriculum was a response to centuries of betrayal and marginalisation. By placing Indigenous knowledge, language, and practice at the centre, they constructed schools that preserved cultural identity while still having the ability to evolve and meet the ever-changing needs of the people (Stahler-Sholk, 2014). Schools became spaces of resistance and dignity, where children could honour their heritage. Education was reimagined within the context of their culture, restoring the

[1] In the context of Chiapas, assimilation refers to the historical and ongoing processes, often driven by state institutions, religious missions, and formal education systems, aimed at absorbing Indigenous peoples into dominant *mestizaje* and Western cultural norms. This has typically involved the suppression of Indigenous languages, traditions, governance structures, and worldviews in favour of national identity and economic conformity.

agency and autonomy of Indigenous communities so they could reclaim the direction of their futures. In contrast to State systems, which had seen rural Indigenous communities as backward and in need of modernising, the Zapatista strategy respected their principles and values, using them to form the foundation of their curricula, where learning was for life, not for labour markets. This system has been applauded by proponents of this theory, such as Zibechi (2013, para. 1), who described it as "selecting the best seeds and scattering them on fertile ground".

This thesis explores these autonomous systems of education as living, responsive processes to centuries of cultural, economic, and political imposition. It examines how the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum alters the collective and individual well-being within the community, and what this could say about alternative forms of development. As rising inequality, ecological collapse, and cultural homogenisation intensify around the globe, the examples from Chiapas offer a grounded, tangible pluriverse of possibilities.

1.2 Personal Positionality and Motivation

The topic of Indigenous education and the autonomous movements in Mexico resonates deeply with me. Who is taught what, and why, reflects deeper questions of power. Both my wife and I come from Indigenous backgrounds. I am Māori[2] from Aotearoa[3], and she is Indigenous from Oaxaca, Mexico. Our daughter carries both of these heritages, making these questions profoundly personal as I strive to guide her towards a life of dignity and freedom. I first encountered the Zapatista movement while living in Mexico City. I found a copy of their self-published magazine from 2003 celebrating a decade of resistance, seen in Figure 1.1. It was of particular interest to me how they maintained control of a country within a country, if you will. I was inspired by how alternative ways of being and knowing challenge the assumptions embedded in conventional development models. Choosing to focus on education was both a

---

[2] Māori – The Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, with a distinct language, culture, and ancestral connection to the land.

[3] Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand, commonly translated as "Land of the Long White Cloud."

personal and professional decision. Personally, I see education as central to my role as a parent, shaping the world my daughter will inherit and the knowledge she will carry, especially as a child of both Māori and Oaxacan Indigenous descent. Professionally, my background in international development and psychology has led me to view education as a powerful site where questions of power, identity, and social well-being intersect.

Figure 1.1 *Photo of the cover of the 2003 magazine* Zapatistas: Chronicle of a rebellion *(Source: Joseph Brockliss, 2025).*

During this thesis, I became a father to a daughter born with Down syndrome. This experience opened my eyes to how many institutions, including education systems, often fail to embrace difference and instead impose limiting frameworks. Navigating these systems as an advocate for my child deepened my awareness of the harm caused when institutions neglect the needs, knowledge, and dignity of people who fall outside the 'ideal citizen' model.

While I feel certain personal connections to this research, I also recognise my position as an outsider to the Indigenous communities of Chiapas and their principles and values. I am not Indigenous to Chiapas, and I don't pretend to speak for them. While much development research focuses on offering recommendations for Indigenous or Global South communities, this thesis aspires to provide critical insights and suggestions for the field of Development itself, as well as for State and international actors. My role has been to listen, reflect, and share what I've heard with respect and humility. This thesis is not an attempt to claim the 'truth' of Indigenous education in Chiapas. Rather, it is a struggle to honour and expand the voices which are so readily silenced, and to pay attention to what such voices might be communicating about how we might think about education, development, and general well-being.

1.3 Research Context

Historically, Mexican educational policy positioned Indigenous peoples as problems to be solved, promoting their assimilation into a homogenised national identity framed around capitalist economic development (Harazduk, 2014, p. 28). This vision of progress, frequently reinforced by international development institutions, was presented as a pathway to improved quality of life. However, in practice it often accompanied extractive practices and the erosion of Indigenous autonomy, leaving many communities experiencing subjugation and exploitation rather than the promised benefits (Harvey, 1998). Schools became sites of erasure, where Indigenous languages were banned, customs mocked, and State ideologies enforced (Levinson, 2001). In response, communities resisted not only through protest, but also by creating alternatives.

The Zapatista autonomous schooling system is one such alternative. Emerging in the wake of armed conflict yet rooted in extensive community consultation, it centres collective values, agricultural science, health, local languages, and cultural sovereignty (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019). The curriculum is decided not by ministry officials but by the people themselves. Beyond being seen as a ladder out of poverty, education is reframed as a vehicle for building communal relationships, cultural resilience, and dignity. This thesis explores these models not as utopian ideals, but as effective, lived systems that foster community well-being and sustainability.

1.4 Research Aim, Questions, and Objectives

This research aims to examine how the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in Zapatista and other autonomous Indigenous schools in Chiapas intersects with the well-being of the Indigenous communities. This aim is framed by three guiding questions:

- First, why did the Zapatistas choose to create their own curriculum post the signing of NAFTA?
- Second, what challenges have Zapatista and other autonomous Indigenous communities in Chiapas faced in moving away from the national education system and developing their own education models?
- And lastly, how has the development of autonomous education structures by the Zapatistas and other Indigenous communities in Chiapas influenced the well-being of Indigenous peoples in the region?

1.5 Organisation of Thesis

The thesis is structured across eight chapters. Chapter 1 has outlined the background and context of this study, along with the researcher's motivation and positionality. It has also presented the guiding aims, research questions, and objectives that shape the direction of this thesis. Chapter 2 continues to detail the theoretical foundations for the research, namely post-development theory and *buen vivir*. Chapter 3 provides a brief historical overview of the relationship between development, education, and countries of the Global South. Chapter 4 provides context through history, tracing the evolution of

Indigenous education in Chiapas and the political and economic climate that resulted in the Zapatista uprising. Chapter 5 outlines the research methodology, which includes document analysis and semi-structured interviews. It also discusses the ethical and positional challenges faced when conducting research as a non-Indigenous outsider. Chapter 6 examines the thematic findings of the study, focusing on the most significant topics of: *Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience*; *Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty*; *Social and Physical Infrastructure*; *Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation: Internal and External Challenges*; and *Collective Ethics*. Chapter 7 provides a critical analysis of the findings under the theoretical paradigms given above. Finally, Chapter 8 finishes the thesis, summarising primary findings, talking about limitations, suggesting future directions for research, and assuring the relevance of Chiapas as a site of educational resistance and innovation.

Chapter 2. Blueprints and Broken Promises: Latin America and the Post-Development Turn

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines how global power relations have shaped the ways mainstream development has been implemented and perceived in Global South nations. It also considers some of the social and ecological impacts these approaches have had on communities. The discussion then turns to the critiques that surfaced from these experiences, which contributed to the emergence of post-development theory, along with an overview of its guiding principles and values. Following this, the discussion will consider the specific impacts of mainstream development on Latin American countries, examining how these initiatives shaped different communities and exploring which local and global actors were positioned to benefit, and which may have been disadvantaged. The discussion will then turn to how post-development ideas have shaped responses in Latin America to the social and environmental challenges associated with mainstream development, with particular attention to the Indigenous concept of *buen vivir*. Finally, the chapter will consider the challenges and possibilities when measuring the well-being of communities operating under the *buen vivir* framework, addressing the difficulties in quantifying the success of an Indigenous movement using external theories.

2.2 Post-Development Theory

"Another world(s) is (are) possible." (Escobar, 2017a, p. 289).

Although the true origins of development[4] are rooted deeply in the history of modernity and capitalism, the contemporary view places its beginning in the post-World War II

---

[4] See Unger, (2018), Chapter 1, for a more detailed account of a definition of development theory and its timeline.

(WWII) era, where many see the emergence of development as a stand-alone discourse (Escobar, 2005, p. 210)[5]. During this period, development practitioners from the Global North began to influence the social, political, and economic landscape of Global South regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the name of economic advancement (Rist, 2014). The development field legitimised its position by imposing Western perceived 'abnormalities'[6] such as 'the hungry,' 'the unjustifiably pregnant,' and 'the objectively illiterate' onto Global South communities, all of which it could treat or reform using Western technology and theory (Escobar, 2005, pp. 207-208). The establishment of the United Nations (1945) and global economic organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (1944) and the World Bank (1944) played a fundamental role in exporting and entrenching development ideologies (Escobar, 2005, p. 218). These institutions promoted a specific vision of progress that was based on modernisation theory, often conflicting with the needs and wants of Global South communities, jeopardising their cultural sustainability. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, the ideals of mainstream development often conflicted with the values and realities of Global South communities. Escobar's reminder that "another world(s) is (are) possible" (2017, p. 289) captures the central spirit of post-development thought: a call to imagine alternatives beyond the narrow pathways imposed by mainstream development.

---

[5] Several of Escobar's works feature prominently in this literature review because of his foundational role in post-development theory, his detailed critique of Western-led development paradigms, and his specific engagement with Latin American contexts. His analysis provides crucial insight into how development operates as a discourse of power, making his contributions essential for understanding the historical and epistemological dynamics at play in regions like Chiapas.

[6] See Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1988), where she critiques how Western feminist and development discourses often construct women and communities in the Global South as inherently deficient or lacking, thereby reinforcing colonial power dynamics through the representation of cultural difference as evidence of inferiority.

Figure 2.1 *Capitalism encounters cooperation (Source: Grain, 2024).*

Post-development emerged in the 1990s as a radical critique of mainstream and alternative development policies (Ziai, 2007, p. 4). While sharing some frustrations with top-down, technocratic models, post-development goes further by rejecting the concept of development entirely. Rather than proposing new solutions within the development paradigm, post-development writers critique it as Eurocentric, ethnocentric, and grounded in colonial rationalities that pathologise difference (Escobar, 1997; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997; Sachs, 2019). The rapid spread of this development model and its social and psychological impacts on Global South communities is captured by Ivan Illich, an early influence on post-development thought, who observed, “It took twenty years for two billion people to define themselves as underdeveloped” (Illich, as quoted in Escobar, 1991, p. 675). Unlike alternative development approaches, which often aim to help communities ‘catch up’ with the West using participatory or sustainable methods, post-development seeks to break free from development entirely, favouring non-Western, plural, and locally centred pathways to well-being (Sutoris & Pradhan, 2025, p. 24).

Post-development responded to the frustrations of academics and citizens in Global South regions, particularly in Latin America, who had become increasingly critical of development initiatives that often fell short of their intended goals. Examples include large-scale infrastructure projects that displaced local communities, Green Revolution programs that prioritised export crops over local food security, and structural adjustment policies that sometimes worsened poverty and inequality. Many of these initiatives were influenced or guided by actors from the Global North in the post–WWII period (Escobar, 2007). Post-development theorists suggested that, in some cases, countries in the Global South had been treated as political and economic test subjects by development practitioners and theorists (Kothari & Klein, 2023).

Mainstream development practices post-WWII period in Latin America saw countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina experience significant economic losses as they became increasingly dependent on foreign capital and export-oriented industries (Cardoso & Faletto, 2024, p. 35). This dependency exacerbated social inequality, as Brazil's reliance on coffee exports and Argentina's dependence on beef and wheat left these nations vulnerable to global market fluctuations, deepening poverty and unemployment during economic downturns (Richardson, 2009, p. 229; Bizberg, 2021, p. 131). Conversely, multinational corporations and foreign investors benefited substantially, capitalising on the region's natural resources and inexpensive labour, thereby reinforcing Latin America's economic dependency on external markets and capital (Cardoso & Faletto, 2024, p. xxi). These patterns of dependency and inequality not only shaped economic outcomes but also reinforced the use of Western-imposed labels that framed Global South countries as 'underdeveloped,' prompting scholars to critically examine the assumptions behind mainstream development approaches.

Post-development theory critically examines the foundational assumptions of mainstream development discourse, particularly how it can inadvertently disempower Global South countries through categories such as 'First World' and 'Third World,' and the tendency to universalise 'Western progress' as a model applicable to all contexts (Escobar, 2007, p. 19; Wallerstein, 2005, p. 1264). The label of the 'underdeveloped third world' often led to the professionalisation of challenges identified from a Western

perspective (Escobar, 2005). Economists, health consultants, education specialists, and others sought to address these challenges, frequently operating under the authority of being development 'experts' (Illich, 1978, p. 27). Proponents of post-development questioned the 'helpless' identity assigned to Global South communities, suggesting that these labels sometimes limited the ability of communities to articulate their own priorities and exercise agency in key areas of life. Importantly, the post-development perspective does not reject the idea of societal improvement. Rather, it raises questions about the extent to which mainstream development frameworks can effectively support locally defined goals (Matthews, 2004).

Post-development theorists also criticised mainstream development approaches for prioritising Western concepts of capital, technology, and education when attempting to facilitate economic and social progress in Global South countries (Ziai, 2007, p. 10). The theory behind this was that mainstream development could be used to create the social and economic conditions that were present in 'rich' societies, such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and agricultural modernisation, if they adopted Western values and ways of life (Escobar, 2005).

In the post-WWII period, development in Latin America tended to benefit foreign interests and the pro-Western wealthy ruling class, including large landowners, industrialists, and urban elites who were able to capitalise on opportunities created by industrialisation and urbanisation (Hoffman & Centeno, 2003, p. 365). By contrast, lower-income groups, such as rural peasants, Indigenous communities, and the urban poor, often saw a relative decline in their share of national consumption and income (Hoffman & Centeno, 2003, p. 369). These dynamics sometimes limited the ability of marginalised communities to influence development processes, particularly as policy and planning mechanisms were largely designed and controlled by Western institutions (Galeano, 1997, p. 315). Post-development theorists have suggested that mainstream development can function in ways that prioritise external interests, reshaping knowledge production, political relations, social structures, and practices in ways that may marginalise local cultural foundations (Escobar, 2007). This approach often overlooks or undervalues local knowledge and practices, and in some cases, may have

exacerbated the very issues it intended to address. From a post-development perspective, these outcomes are not simply accidental by-products, but are closely linked to the assumptions and frameworks underpinning conventional development approaches (Matthews, 2004).

Post-development theorists emphasise the importance of reclaiming agency within Global South countries, enabling communities to define their own priorities and guide interventions in culturally relevant and equitable ways (Nourani Rinaldi, 2022, p. 237). Participatory development programmes often operationalise this approach, engaging communities to identify challenges and co-create solutions that empower them (Schöneberg et al., 2022). This includes acknowledging the perspectives of those traditionally viewed as the 'objects' of development and supporting local adaptations, resistances, and alternative strategies that emerge in response to interventions. An example can be seen in the Andean region, where communities have reclaimed traditional agricultural practices and integrated them with modern techniques, preserving cultural heritage while improving food security and economic resilience (Sietz & Feola, 2016).

As mentioned above, post-development theorists contest the Western-imposed labels of 'poor' and 'rich,' 'developed' and 'under-developed,' as well as the hierarchy of 'superior' and 'inferior' knowledge (Escobar, 2011, p.10). These binaries, they argue, reveal the underlying biases of mainstream development. Central to post-development thinking is the insistence that communities define themselves and direct their own development, drawing on systems grounded in local knowledge. This emphasis is significant in determining which forms of knowledge are valued, shared, and passed on within a community. As Escobar (2011, pp. 8–9) and Esteva and Prakash (2014, pp. 11–13) note, harmful narratives, when adopted and internalised, can undermine well-being and stifle potential. For this reason, a culture must retain control over how it operates and how it wishes to be understood (Illich, 1997, pp. 100–101; Escobar, 2010, p. 10). To address the entrenched inequalities experienced by many Global South communities under mainstream development paradigms, post-development scholars call for alternatives that go beyond conventional practice (Escobar, 2010, p. 27). Ultimately,

post-development challenges the power of Global North actors to define Global South ways of life as inferior and to maintain unequal global hierarchies.

2.3 Once Bitten, Twice Shy. Development, Post-Development and Latin America

“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help” (Reagan, as cited in Cubillo, 2011, p. 137).

Latin America’s development history can be directly attributed to both its colonial roots and the subsequent economic and social policies that have been imposed on the region by global powers (Coatsworth, 2008). The economic patterns of dependency and resource exploitation, along with the power imbalances between colonisers and the colonised, began in the 16th century when European nations like Spain and Portugal arrived in the 'New World' in search of wealth. These dynamics were solidified through centuries of colonial rule, during which racialised caste systems, land dispossession, and labour exploitation were institutionalised (Quijano, 2002, pp. 95-103). Even after independence movements swept the region in the 19th century, many newly formed republics maintained the extractive economic models and social hierarchies inherited from colonialism (Galeano, 1997, p. 302). Foreign powers, particularly Britain and later the United States, continued to exert influence through investments, debt structures, and trade dependencies (Taylor, 2003, p. 18). As a result, a system of structural dualism was created whereby privileged demographics of Latin American countries (often from colonising countries and occupying urban areas) enjoy political power and economic growth, while simultaneously the others (often Indigenous and from rural areas) suffer inequality, neglect, and discrimination (Escobar, 2010). This social schema, developed through unequal colonial relationships, shaped contemporary social attitudes to those deemed ‘underdeveloped’ and how the region responded to the global economic changes experienced during and after WWII (Klor de Alva, 1995). Reagan’s remark illustrates the widespread scepticism toward externally imposed interventions, a sentiment that resonates in Latin America’s long history of foreign influence and development agendas.

Throughout the duration of WWII, Latin America's reliance on industrialised imported goods, such as machinery and equipment, chemical products, textiles, clothing, consumer electronics, and vehicles or transportation equipment, created issues due to scarce international export capacities (De la Cuadra, 2015). To address the shortage of essentials and combat these issues of dependency for the future, policymakers and economists in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Chile explored alternative systems of production and trade (De la Cuadra, 2015). The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA, later ECLAC), led by Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, was tasked with developing such alternative systems (Dosman, 2008, p. 228). During Prebisch's tenure, Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) was a primary approach (Dosman, 2008, p. 92). This focused on developing domestic industries and investing in infrastructure to support local production. The ISI approach was based on the principles of modernisation theory, which states that a successful society follows a path of evolution that begins at a traditional agrarian state and then develops into a modern industrialised one (López-Alves, 2011). This approach further cemented the outside Western economic principles' influence over Latin America's social and economic development policies.

The influence of external actors, including multinational corporations and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, shaped Latin American economies through mechanisms such as structural adjustment programs, debt conditionalities, and trade liberalisation policies that often prioritised foreign capital over local development (Bulmer-Thomas, 2003, pp. 391–435). Economic powers from the United States and Europe contributed to these dynamics. Consequently, ECLAC's modernisation policies were only partially effective, and many countries in the region continued to face economic and social challenges, prompting the adoption of new economic theories (Svampa, 2019).

During the post-WWII period, an economic approach developed by Milton Friedman began to gain influence in political and academic circles in the United States. This approach, later termed neoliberalism, emphasised reduced State intervention, deregulation, privatisation of State-owned assets such as transport and power, and

free-market policies (Weiss, 2020). It was promoted as a means to encourage economic growth by opening markets. In Latin America, aspects of neoliberal policy were implemented through a combination of political pressures and, in some cases, military interventions, as seen in Chile and Argentina during the 1970s, and in Mexico following the 1982 debt crisis, before spreading more widely across the region (Kerner et al., 2001). The adoption of neoliberalism in Latin America was often supported by international financial institutions and global powers (Grugel, 2009, p. 12). During the Cold War, it was also presented as an alternative to counter the influence of socialist and communist movements in the region (Escobar, 2010). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the implementation of neoliberalism across Latin America produced uneven outcomes, generating some economic growth while also giving rise to notable social and political challenges (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2012).

The social and economic benefits attributed to the rollout of neoliberal reforms in Latin America throughout the 1990s included reduced government corruption, stabilised inflation, and greater consumer access to imports, competition, and new technologies (Gwynne & Kay, 2000). These reforms additionally stimulated growth in certain economic sectors such as finance, telecommunications, and export-oriented agriculture, attracting higher levels of foreign investment (Walton, 2004, pp. 165–184). However, the process of economic restructuring also led to rising unemployment, at times surpassing the levels experienced during the so-called ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s[7] (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2012). In Argentina, for example, joblessness increased sharply from 8.8% in 1990 to 19.7% by 2002. As illustrated in Table 2.1, the total number of people living in poverty across Latin America was greater by the late 1990s than in 1980, with poverty rates remaining alarmingly high throughout the region (United Nations, 2007, p. 11).

Table 2.1 Poverty and Extreme Poverty in Latin America, 1980–1999

[7] The "lost decade" refers to the 1980s in Latin America, a period marked by severe economic crisis, hyperinflation, soaring external debt, and stagnating growth. Many countries in the region experienced declining living standards, rising poverty, and political instability as they struggled to manage the consequences of structural adjustment and debt repayment policies imposed by international financial institutions.

	Poverty		Extreme Poverty	
	Millions of People	Percentage of Population	Millions of People	Percentage of Population
1980	135.9	40.5	62.4	18.6
1990	200.2	48.3	93.4	22.5
1997	203.8	45.7	88.8	19.0
1999	211.4	43.8	89.4	18.5

Note. Adapted from *Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: Rebuilding and Reclaiming the State after Crisis*, by J. Grugel & P. Riggirozzi, 2012, *Development and Change, 43*(1), p. 5. Data originally from ECLAC (2004, p. 35).

As noted earlier, Mexico began implementing neoliberal reforms in the early 1980s (Otero, 2018, p. 7), a process that gained momentum with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which further promoted neoliberal trade policies in the country (Hirschkorn & Boris, 1996, pp. 9–14). These policies influenced local economies, labour markets, and social structures, including education. In many cases, the top-down approach overlooked longstanding contextual relationships that had historically shaped Mexico's economy and society, such as communal land ownership (*ejidos*), local agricultural cycles, and Indigenous governance systems (Escobar, 2010, p. 41; Lawrence et al., 2019).

This process also reinforced long-standing structural dualities that date back to the colonial era. The deregulation and privatisation associated with neoliberal policies tended to benefit political elites, large landowners, and transnational corporations, while many marginalised communities, historically excluded from economic decision-making, faced growing challenges, including unemployment and increased inequality (Harvey, 2007, pp. 64–86). Agricultural liberalisation under NAFTA, for example, made it difficult for many small-scale Mexican farmers to compete with the low prices of highly industrialised and subsidised U.S. imports (Wise, 2009). As a result, rural poverty

increased, and many farmers and families moved to urban areas in search of paid work (Escobar, 2010).

The effects of neoliberal reforms in Latin America were met with varying degrees of social and political resistance across the region. In response, post-development and Indigenous movements emerged as important actors in critiquing and challenging these policies, advocating for alternative approaches that prioritised local autonomy and community well-being (Postero, 2018, p. 48; Cerdán, 2013, pp. 15–16). The Zapatista movement, which will be explained in depth in Chapter Four, symbolises a broader struggle against the neoliberal model and advocates for Indigenous rights, land reform, and a more inclusive form of democracy (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019).

Post-development thinking in Latin America has been shaped in part by the region's engagement with movements that question the historical dominance of capitalist economic power and explore alternatives to it (Hollender, 2015). The region's diverse Indigenous populations, along with their distinctive knowledge systems, have offered alternative frameworks and worldviews that challenge Western-centric assumptions of a singular path to modernity, instead highlighting the potential for multiple, coexisting ways of living and organising society (Escobar, 2010). Within this context, post-development approaches have gained traction, providing spaces for marginalised voices and narratives that diverge from mainstream development discourse (Escobar, 2010). Its focus on local knowledge, ecological sustainability, and a critical perspective on economic determinism resonates with the priorities of several Latin American social movements, including the Zapatistas. Many Indigenous communities in the region continue to advocate for understandings of progress that are holistic and inclusive, aligning more closely with their cultural beliefs, knowledge systems, social structures, and practices (Postero, 2018).

In essence, the unique historical, cultural, and political experiences of exploitation in Latin America have made the region particularly receptive to post-development thinking. One might describe this response using the phrase 'Once bitten, twice shy': having experienced the negative impacts of externally imposed development, many communities became cautious of Western capitalist models. Through post-

development approaches, numerous Latin American communities have sought to resist these external ideologies and cultivate frameworks more aligned with their own values. These approaches echo principles similar to Abraham Lincoln's vision of a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln, 1863, as cited in Mieder, 2005, p. 2), in that they prioritise participatory governance, local knowledge, and community well-being. In practice, this has given rise to movements that integrate Indigenous knowledge systems centred on concepts such as *buen vivir*, which emphasises living well in harmony with both community and environment.

2.4 Buen Vivir. A New Hope

"The best things can't be told because they transcend thought. The second best are misunderstood, because those are the thoughts that are supposed to refer to that which can't be thought about. The third best are what we talk about." (Zimmer, as quoted in Campbell & Moyers, 1988, 0:07:10).

The post-development concept of *buen vivir* is deeply rooted in the Indigenous philosophies of the Andean and Amazonian regions and has gained prominence in Latin American political and social discourse since the late 20th century (Peredo, 2019). *Buen vivir* is commonly translated to 'living well' or 'good living' in English; however, there are numerous Indigenous terms that are also used to describe the concept (Acosta, 2020). In the Kichwa[8] language, *Sumak Kawsay* translates to 'good living' or 'living well'; this describes the experience of living a harmonious and fulfilling life (Radcliffe, 2012, p. 240). Similarly, *Suma Qamaña* in Aymara[9] conveys the idea of 'living well' or 'the good life', emphasising a balanced and respectful relationship with the world. In Chiapas, Mexico, a similar concept is found in the expression *Lekil kuxlejal*, which comes from the Mayan Tsotsil and Tseltal languages (Prage, 2015). In a simplified

---

[8] Kichwa refers to the northern dialects of the Quechua language family spoken primarily by Indigenous communities in Ecuador. It is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of cultural knowledge, worldview, and identity.

[9] Aymara is an Indigenous language spoken predominantly in the Andean regions of Bolivia, Peru, and northern Chile. It is one of the oldest surviving languages in the Americas and remains central to the cultural and political life of Aymara peoples.

sense, *Lekil* means 'good,' and *kuxlejal* means 'life.' As the cultural variations are still highly connected to *buen vivir, buen vivir* will be used as an umbrella term to encompass the different Indigenous variations.

Buen vivir represents a holistic approach to life that seeks to decolonise Indigenous Latin American communities from mainstream Western notions of development, focusing on harmony with nature, community well-being, and sustainable living over individualistic and materialistic pursuits (Acosta, 2020; Acosta & Abarca, 2018). A direct translation of the various interpretations of *buen vivir* by Latin American Indigenous groups into English can be problematic, as the English lexicon lacks terms that fully capture its Indigenous origins. Thus, while we can discuss *buen vivir* in theoretical terms, its true essence is something that is lived and felt, making it one of those "best things" that Heinrich Zimmer (Campbell & Moyers, 1988) suggests cannot be fully told. Despite this, the general principles will be explained in this paper to give the reader a broad understanding of *buen vivir's* importance in the Latin American region.

Buen vivir is not bound by a rigid set of policies or practices but instead integrates social, spiritual, and ecological dimensions into a complete worldview (Peredo, 2019). *Buen vivir* encompasses a flexible and evolving philosophy built through diverse contributions from multiple Indigenous knowledge systems found in Latin America. It applies to numerous contemporary global movements such as degrowth, environmentalism, and feminism (Acosta, 2020). In contrast to Western development paradigms, *buen vivir* champions the implementation of a new ethical approach to development (Peredo, 2019). It envisions a non-sectarian model that focuses on the reproduction of life instead of capital. *Buen vivir* advocates for the removal of centralised power and top-down initiatives, instead calling for local communities to be given greater autonomy and agency over their social, and economic environments, and for everything encompassing the eco-system to be treated with the respect of a living entity (Chuji et al., 2019). *Buen vivir* rejects the commodification of nature and advocates for human dignity to guide ethical development principles (Acosta & Abarca, 2018). The dual solidarity it promotes between humans and nature moves beyond an

anthropocentric worldview that places humans over nature and expands the scope of who or what is entitled to protection through the possession of rights (Gudynas, 2011).

"Buen vivir speaks of balance, of development on a smaller scale, sustainable, in harmony with Mother Earth. The principal concern is not to accumulate; on the contrary, it points toward an ethic of sufficiency for the whole community, not only for the individual." (Chato, 2011, as cited in Ruttenberg, 2013).

Chato's reflection on *buen vivir* provides a framework for understanding alternative approaches to development that prioritise community well-being and ecological balance over individual accumulation. *Buen vivir* refutes the notion that humankind is inherently a brutal, competitive, and aggressive species (Acosta & Abarca, 2018). It points to capitalist values such as individualism, mass consumption, and the desire for the unrestricted accumulation of goods when explaining the prevalence of economic aggression and the lack of solidarity experienced in many Western nations. *Buen vivir* can be connected to the numerous pieces of scientific evidence collected through disciplines such as evolutionary psychology, which show that humans' natural tendency is to assist and cooperate (Fehr et al., 2002, pp. 1-25). Through the embrace of *buen vivir*, Indigenous communities can experience the reinstatement of cultural norms and social structures that foster solidarity and reciprocity practices. *Buen vivir* principles align with broader post-development critiques, which argue that mainstream development paradigms are inadequate and call for a fundamental rethinking of progress and well-being (Acosta & Abarca, 2018, pp. 131-147).

While *buen vivir* has been a desirable alternative to Western models of development for Latin American Indigenous communities, it is not free from critique. Scholars have raised concerns about the concept's vagueness and the wide range of interpretations, values, and practices it can encompass, as the meaning of *buen vivir* has varied significantly across different Indigenous communities and national contexts (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Critics also point to the cynical appropriation of *buen vivir* by State actors in nations like Ecuador and Bolivia, where its radical, anti-extractivist roots have often been diluted in national development plans (Gudynas, 2011). Moreover, the challenge of operationalising its principles within global capitalist systems has led

some to question its feasibility and effectiveness at levels beyond the local (Escobar, 2015).

Building on this critique, it is important to recognise that the Indigenous knowledge systems and principles at the core of the *buen vivir* framework differ fundamentally from those of Global North capitalist societies, especially in their environmental, social, and economic approaches (Gudynas, 2011). *Buen vivir* incorporates Indigenous knowledge into policies and social services that align with widespread Latin American community values, such as solidarity and respect for nature (Ordóñez et al., 2022). Under *buen vivir*, social services like health and education can be guided by practices that reflect the people's belief systems, needs, and desires (Godden, 2021). *Buen vivir* allows Indigenous communities to discard imposed labels and assumptions, enabling them to be understood on their own terms.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored how the Global North's imposition of a universal knowledge system significantly influenced the development of Global South communities. In addition to reinforcing unequal global relationships, this approach also frequently overlooks the unique cultural, historical, and social contexts of these communities. By imposing a one-size-fits-all model, the Global North often failed to account for local practices and values, leading to challenges in integrating these foreign theories into diverse environments. This disregard for context not only affected the efficacy of development initiatives but also marginalised Indigenous knowledge and practices.

This chapter uses the *buen vivir* movement to illustrate how Indigenous Latin American communities employed post-development thinking to resist the erasure of local knowledge and autonomy. Their experiences of subjugation and the annihilation of their knowledge systems during early to late colonisation were not to be repeated in the post-WWII age of development. Through the *buen vivir* framework, they used Indigenous knowledge and values to create a version of development that was culturally applicable. This chapter highlighted that the effectiveness of development initiatives

often depends on a community's capacity to exercise agency, especially in shaping, implementing, and reflecting on solutions tailored to their own needs. Viewed through this lens, post-development thinking, alongside *buen vivir* offers a complementary framework for supporting the well-being of Global South communities, sustaining Indigenous knowledge systems, and addressing some of the ecological and social impacts associated with mainstream development approaches.

Chapter 3. The Myth of Meritocracy: Education, Equity, and Development

3.1 Setting the Scene

The power imbalances discussed in Chapter 2, which shape the global economic order, extend beyond trade relations and into the realm of education. The global exportation of Western education systems has, in some contexts, reinforced social hierarchies in the Global South, particularly in Latin America (La Belle & White, 1978, pp. 244-255). As a result, many citizens navigate complex challenges in pursuit of the Western ideal of liberation through education. This chapter examines the difficulties faced by Latin American citizens who engage with educational models designed by foreign cultures, with particular attention to the compounded barriers experienced by those facing economic hardship, Indigenous communities, or marginalised regions.

As with other systems that shape development, the lingering effects of colonialism continue to influence who succeeds and who struggles in education (Kazembe, 2021). Those with power often determine both the content and the methods of teaching, which can inadvertently perpetuate existing social inequalities. This chapter explores the extent to which the education system available to many Latin American citizens supports personal fulfilment and opportunities for empowerment. In doing so, it considers how educational experiences intersect with broader social and cultural factors, including race, socio-economic status, and geopolitical context, while engaging with the wider research questions concerning education and well-being in Indigenous and marginalised communities.

In this chapter, references to 'Western education' do not critique the entirety of knowledge contained within Western curricula, nor do they dismiss the act of learning itself. Rather, the term 'Western education' refers to the institutions that create systems for Global South communities that embody foreign economic and cultural values, and questions the ability of such institutions to assume responsibility for educating another culture. Examining these dynamics highlights the persistent inequities faced by

Indigenous peoples and interrogates the myth of meritocracy embedded in Western education ideologies. In doing so, the chapter foregrounds the central research concerns of educational equity and Indigenous well-being, showing how systems that claim to promote fairness may, in practice, reproduce disadvantage.

3.2 Barriers to Educational Equality in the Global South

"When the settlers came, we had the land and they had the Bible. They told us to close our eyes and pray, and when we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible" (Tutu, as cited in von Kuhn, 2020).

The quote above encapsulates the enduring dynamics of power and dispossession that continue to shape the relationship between education, development, and authority. Education's role in development has traditionally been framed as a positive force for progress by international development actors such as the United Nations and the World Bank, particularly in relation to Global South nations (World Bank, 2023). Following WW II, education was central to broader development plans designed by Global North powers, aimed at fostering international cooperation and reducing the likelihood of future conflict through strengthened trade and diplomatic ties (Mingst & Karns, 2019). While some educational initiatives achieved tangible benefits, much like other Global North–led development programs, these efforts often disproportionately advantaged those already in positions of power (Walker et al., 2019).

For example, curricula frequently expanded the reach of Western economic, political, and social principles, embedding capitalist worldviews within educational systems (Breidlid, 2013, pp. 6-10). In many Global South communities, development through education promised benefits such as economic growth, social mobility, and political participation, but also reinforced existing structures of cultural and social inequality (Kazembe, 2021; Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2015). The tactics used to integrate mainstream education models into Global South communities involved efforts to position it as a vehicle for cultural and economic progression. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe alongside a young Mexican family shows how the ideal of development was interwoven with familiar cultural symbols to enhance its

appeal. Education was central to this process, as schools and curricula became vehicles for transmitting both Global North economic strategies, such as agricultural industrialisation, and the accompanying social and moral values framed within local cultural and religious contexts (Smith & Sargent, 2022).

Figure 3.1 *Photo of a Painting depicting industrial modernity merging with traditional Mexican values, including a family, a factory, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. (Source: Photograph taken by Joseph Brockliss at the art gallery, Basílica de Guadalupe, Mexico City, 2024).*

The United Nations (UN) played a significant role in furthering the relationship between development and education during the 1960s. In 1961, the UN declared the 1960s "the decade for development," encouraging member States to work together so that economic growth and social advancement could be accelerated globally (Linnemann, 1967, p. 2). A target was set to increase national income growth rates, and UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO sought to include education as a key element in achieving these goals. UNESCO, in particular, positioned education as a pathway to modernisation and economic progress, often linked to human capital theory (Ross & Genevois, 2006, pp. 39-50).

The human capital theory, initially formulated by Becker (1962) and Rosen (1976), proposes that investing in education improves human skills and boosts workforce productivity, resulting in individual advantages like higher income and social status, as well as broader societal benefits such as economic growth, technological progress, and overall well-being. The assumption relies on a meritocratic ideal grounded in the universality of knowledge, values, and beliefs, where everyone is expected to have equal opportunities to develop their innate talents and invest in education, with social status determined solely by individual talent, effort, and motivation (Bonal, 2007). Politically, this means that societies must (at least, appear to) create conditions where educational achievements and the social positions they lead to are apparently based predominantly on individual abilities or merit. However, the theory overlooks the implications and existence of structurally foundational discrimination at the student level (Bourdieu et al., 1977, pp. 72-78). Several factors that will be spoken about in this chapter point to the reality that in so-called meritocracies, not all children will experience education on equal social or economic levels. Furthermore, the initiatives born from this school of thinking predominantly focus on system efficiency, aligning education with market needs, which critics argued prioritised economic outcomes over broader social goals or community values (Verger et al., 2017).

Development's relationship with education continued through the 1960s, with increasing emphasis placed on education's potential to promote political stability and modernisation (Peppin-Vaughan, 2010). Development practitioners believed that education could foster democratic values and practices, particularly in the Global South, with newly independent nations emerging from colonial rule (Peppin-Vaughan, 2010). The implementation of an education system that championed Western ideals in Global South nations was also justified by the belief in the superiority of Western child-rearing practices (Imoh, 2024). These practices, tied to notions of individualism and progress, were thought to produce individuals with a high need for achievement, thereby supporting the development of modern and economically productive societies (McClelland, 1961).

Throughout the 1970s, development initiatives aimed at expanding access to education successfully increased the number of children attending school, particularly in Global South regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and parts of Latin America (Snilstveitet et al., 2016). In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, countries like Ghana and Kenya made significant strides in improving access to primary education, resulting in a rise in enrolment rates (Gyimah-Brempong, 2017). In South Asia, countries such as Bangladesh implemented education reforms that focused on increasing school attendance, especially among girls, leading to higher literacy rates (Hossain, 2004). Similarly, in Latin America, nations like Bolivia and Peru expanded rural education programmes, reducing the educational gap between urban and rural areas (Contreras, 2003). Although these achievements might seem like victories on paper, the broader social consequences of introducing the Western education system to a larger audience in the Global South began to emerge.

In the 1980s, the dominant development model and the role of education within it started to face growing criticism. Scholars and activists from both the Global North and the Global South questioned development's narrow focus on economic growth and education's role in reinforcing existing local and global power structures (Hand et al., 2013). Critical theorists claimed that the ways of thinking, speaking, and interacting in most educational settings reflected those of the dominant culture, with the West undoubtedly holding that position of power globally[10] (Darder, 1991; Gee & Gee, 1997; Giroux et al., 1989). Education in the context of development was also criticised for not delivering on its promise of widespread economic and social transformation (Carnoy & Samoff, 2014). In Latin America post-WWII, countries like Brazil expanded education, expecting it to drive industrial growth and reduce inequality. Despite these reforms, unemployment and poverty persisted, as education often failed to align with local job markets (Cardoso & Urani, 1995). The anticipated economic and social transformation

[10] It is worth noting that the act of a dominant culture injecting its principles and beliefs into an education system is not always a practice done out of malice, or to intentionally subjugate another culture, but often the natural inclination of an 'in-group' replicating its civilisation to ensure survival (Collins, 2009).

did not materialise, highlighting the gap between education policies and actual outcomes.

Research into Western education's role in stimulating economic development in Global South countries suggests that increasing the number of individuals exposed to such education does not automatically translate into the creation of more productive or higher-quality jobs (Collins, 2019). Some evidence indicates that Western-style schooling has, at times, functioned less as a direct engine of development and more as a mechanism for sorting and allocating individuals within existing labour markets. In this sense, schools often became institutions where those with higher credentials were positioned to outcompete others for better-paying roles (Spring, 1972).

In contexts marked by structural dualism and longstanding social stratification, this dynamic risks reinforcing rather than dismantling pre-existing hierarchies, with elites more readily able to secure educational advantages for their children (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Olneck & Bills, 1980). At the same time, research highlights the complexity of linking education with economic growth. While Western education may improve individual productivity or expand personal economic opportunities, these gains do not always translate into broader or more equitable patterns of national development (Chabbott & Ramirez, 2000).

Nevertheless, influential global institutions such as the World Bank and UNESCO have continued to promote and disseminate their visions of education as a universal pathway to progress, reflecting both the enduring appeal and contested outcomes of this model (World Bank, 2023).

In the 1990s, the global development agenda continued with initiatives that reinforced the importance of State-sponsored, curricula-based, individually orientated education as a fundamental human right. The 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, marked a significant turning point, with governments and international organisations committing to achieving universal primary education (Mundy, 2007). Although called a ‘world conference,’ the proposed initiatives were primarily aimed at Global South countries, focusing on implementing changes in the

South based on Northern research and advice (Nes, 2003). The conference promoted several Global North educational ideals, such as standardised learning outcomes and the view of education as a tool for human capital development (Tikly, 2016). These approaches favoured centralised, formal schooling models that reflected Western approaches to education and development. The content of the universal education curricula being proposed caused concern amongst many Global South members, specifically the African participants attending the conference (Nes, 2003). Areas such as preserving culture, values, and historical identities were largely ignored and excluded in the proposed educational framework.

Development's influence on education continued into the new millennium. In September 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched, which included a commitment to achieve universal primary education by 2015 (Sadruddin, 2013). Initially, the results of the programme appeared promising: during the MDG period, the number of out-of-school children was nearly halved, and primary completion rates in many Global South countries rose to 89% (Bruns et al., 2019, p. 27). Gains were particularly significant for girls in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, representing important steps toward gender parity in access. At the same time, however, increased enrolment did not necessarily translate into improved learning outcomes. Research has shown that in countries such as Mexico, many children were able to complete primary schooling without acquiring basic literacy or numeracy skills (Ball et al., 2014, pp. 26–41).

Moreover, while education initiatives were frequently presented as universal tools for economic growth and empowerment, their outcomes were mediated by broader contexts (Westhorp et al., 2014, p. 109). In many Global South settings, access to education and the types of knowledge that were legitimised within schools were shaped by enduring global inequalities and geopolitical positioning (Mundy, 2007). Thus, while the MDGs helped expand access, the experience of education was neither uniform nor straightforward; it was conditioned by geography, power relations, and historical legacies, which in turn influenced how education contributed to development and well-being.

The focus on education as a functional human right continues into the 21st century through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which came into effect in January 2016 (UNESCO, 2016). SDG 4 focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, promoting lifelong learning opportunities. This marked a shift towards a more holistic positioning of global education goals and a pivoting in outcome focuses to include issues of equity, quality, and sustainability (Franco & Derbyshire, 2019). However, significant challenges remain, with deeply entrenched structural forces often hindering progress. These include global power hierarchies, as well as patriarchal, racist, and neoliberal capitalist systems that continue to exacerbate poverty and inequality (Winkler & Satterthwaite, 2018).

Mexico's progress toward achieving SDG 4 has been constrained by persistent structural and quality-related challenges in its education system. National and international assessments consistently show difficulties in supporting effective student learning in key areas such as language, mathematics, and science, with only a small proportion of students achieving satisfactory or high performance levels, particularly in mathematics (Romero-Contreras & García-Cedillo, 2023; OECD, 2018). In contrast, Brazil's pursuit of SDG 4 has been undermined by economic austerity, neoliberal reforms, and chronic underfunding, with only five of the 20 National Education Plan targets partially met (Pellanda, 2024). Since the adoption of the SDGs, Brazil's education policy has shifted away from a rights-based approach toward a human capital–driven model emphasising standardised testing and productivity over inclusive, equitable learning. Consequently, dropout rates remain high, learning outcomes are weak, and most educational goals are unlikely to be achieved by 2030 (Pellanda, 2024).

Education initiatives have often been presented as pathways to social mobility and economic prosperity for Global South nations, yet the benefits have been unevenly distributed (Kazembe, 2021). Scholars argue that Global North countries tend to capture a disproportionate share of economic and knowledge-based gains, while many Global South communities remain burdened by debt, extractive practices, and structural inequalities embedded in global trade and finance systems (Lahiri & Darity Jr., 2024, p. 673; Hickel et al., 2022).

Even when individuals in the Global South earn educational credentials comparable to those of their Global North peers, their access to equitable employment, capital investment, and meaningful inclusion in global value chains often remains constrained (Brown, 2022, pp. 10-19). For instance, despite widespread expansion of higher education, many developing nations experience high graduate unemployment rates, over 20% in some cases, underscoring a disconnect between qualifications and opportunity (Emont, 2024). These disparities are deeply rooted in historical structural disadvantages and colonial legacies that concentrate power, shape uneven trade terms, and continue to influence who benefits from global economic systems (Epo et al., 2024). Education has certainly provided Global South citizens with valuable knowledge and skills, but these are too often constrained by systemic barriers that limit their translation into equitable opportunities.

It is also important to note that the Global South experiences in education are not universal. National and regional experiences with education and development vary significantly depending on local histories, political economies, and sociocultural contexts (Wolhuter, 2022). The following section examines Latin America's continued struggles with development-driven education initiatives, showing how economic disparities and contemporary power dynamics continue to shape educational outcomes.

3.3 Barriers to Educational Equality for Lower Socioeconomic Groups in Latin America

Latin America continues to face significant challenges related to poverty, inequality, and education throughout the 21st century (Bogliacino & Rojas Lozano, 2017). Much like other Global South regions, Latin America has struggled to utilise education as a vehicle for reducing poverty and inequality (Bonal, 2007). This can be attributed to the complex social and political environments that shape Latin American culture. Issues including economic disparity, social inequality, globalisation, the effects of colonisation, and top-down Western-styled curricula have made it difficult for education to fulfil its assigned role of lifting the poor out of poverty (Duryea, 2002). It may appear that this research unfairly overlooks or dismisses the successes of educational development initiatives

implemented in Latin America. However, attention is drawn to the negatives because persistent poverty continues to affect the region despite repeated attempts to 'Westernise' these communities out of poverty through mainstream education. These initiatives have also often caused additional harm, such as the erosion of Indigenous languages, the marginalisation of local knowledge systems, and the deepening of dependency on external models of development, which will be examined in more depth in later sections. It is important to recognise that not all communities in Latin America experience education's challenges in the same way. Nonetheless, the region's common historical and social patterns mean that externally imported teaching methods, particularly from the Global North, can impose hegemonic or neo-colonial norms (Echenique, 2023).

In Latin America, top-down development education initiatives have been predominantly guided by international governing bodies. The influence of organisations such as the World Bank has grown to the extent that they are often found dictating educational policies in many Latin American countries, reducing the sovereignty of national governments (Mundy & Verger, 2016). For this reason, Paulo Freire[11] famously pushed back on the World Bank's efforts to involve itself in Brazil's 1990s education curricula reform and teachers training program by suggesting the organisation go back to the USA and fix its education system before attempting to meddle in Brazil's (Torres, 2002). As Bonal (2002) notes, the conditions attached to loans provided by the World Bank in Latin American countries often enabled it to exert control over education systems, positioning itself as a key player in shaping public policy. The publicly declared aim of the initiatives, influenced and implemented by the World Bank in Latin America over the past fifty years, has been to combat poverty by providing access to education for the poorest segments of society (Bonal, 2004). Targeting programs, through offering educational opportunities to underprivileged children, were designed to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, while also improving the quality of schools in

[11] Paulo Freire (1921–1997) was a Brazilian educator and philosopher best known for his influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He advocated for critical pedagogy that empowers marginalised communities by linking education with social justice and liberation from oppressive systems (Roberts, 2017).

disadvantaged areas (Vakis et al., 2016). By the late 1990s, many countries in the region had made significant progress in terms of increasing access to primary and secondary education (Cruces et al., 2014). In Mexico, primary education became almost universally available (Puryear et al., 2012). During the turn of the century, the majority of countries in Latin America saw the number of children attending secondary school substantially rise, and the average number of years each student spent in school increased (Cruces et al., 2014, p. 324). These initiatives led to some improvements in educational attainment for selected disadvantaged individuals.

However, despite these achievements, education has not succeeded in significantly reducing poverty or inequality in Latin America (Cruces et al., 2014). This paradox of greater access to education alongside persistent poverty can be explained by factors beyond the education system. Latin American countries encounter multifaceted challenges that are context-specific, hindering the potential of education as a transformative tool. These include labour market saturation, stagnant economic growth, structural inequalities, and the enduring influence of neoliberal economic policies that weaken social protections and job security (Laurell, 2000).

A key challenge for Latin American students is the uneven value of educational qualifications in a globalised economy (Emont, 2024). As demand for specialised skills has grown, the benefits of education, particularly for upward mobility, have not always kept pace, partly due to the massification of schooling (Messina & Silva, 2021). In countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica, and Ecuador, increased access to education has not consistently translated into high-paying employment, leaving many graduates underemployed (Messina & Silva, 2021). For students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, pursuing education can be a significant investment, and when domestic economies stagnate, widespread qualification attainment can reduce the relative value of credentials in the labour market (Carnoy et al., 1999).

To combat the diminishing value of education, the middle classes in Latin America have employed strategies to maintain their social and economic status. One of the most common strategies is to invest in private education, which is perceived as providing better quality and more prestigious qualifications (Mundial, 2003). By paying for private

schooling, the middle classes seek to distinguish themselves from the masses who rely on public education, thereby maintaining their social and cultural capital. Additionally, they may convert their educational capital into other forms of capital, such as symbolic[12] or social capital to secure their elevated places in society (Bonal, 2007). Individuals from higher socioeconomic strata have accordingly benefited much more than those in lower strata. This resulted in a widening education gap between the top and bottom quintiles in almost all Latin American countries, except for Venezuela (Gasparini et al., 2011). Such practices have led to an educational divide where elite institutions thrive while public schools for poorer communities deteriorate (Bonal, 2007).

The World Bank's promotion of laissez-faire economics, including the privatisation of education, has created a dual system: those who can afford private schooling benefit, while the needs of working- and middle-class students are comparatively under-resourced (Boron, 2003; Domenech & Mora-Ninci, 2012). This suggests that societal structures such as class hierarchies, labour markets, and funding allocations often reproduce inequality more effectively than education can mitigate it for marginalised groups. Therefore, educational initiatives implemented without addressing significant social/economic disparities can serve merely as symbolic gestures of equality towards the poor, rather than as viable solutions. More than this, such initiatives risk entrenching and exacerbating existing hierarchies, as those already privileged continue to benefit disproportionately from the system while marginalised groups fall further behind.

The World Bank's strategies often reflect a technocratic and pragmatic approach to educational reform, underpinned by a broadly conservative vision of society (Jones, 2006; Kamat, 2012). This perspective aligns with the principles of conservative modernisation, where cultural diversity may be acknowledged but is often subordinated to broader neoliberal agendas (Spring, 2008). In practice, World Bank policies have sometimes prioritised standardised solutions over the specific cultural contexts of Latin American nations (Domenech & Mora-Ninci, 2012, pp. 151–152;

---

[12] Symbolic capital refers to the reputation and prestige an individual or organisation holds, rooted in other forms of capital, such as social, economic, and cultural capital (Ihlen, 2018).

Kazembe, 2021). The emphasis on universal best practices can risk overlooking local knowledge systems and the rich cultural landscapes of diverse populations (Smith & Sargent, 2022).

Indigenous populations exemplify the challenges posed by top-down education initiatives (Spring, 2008). Although they represent a substantial portion of Latin America's population and are frequent targets of development-focused education programmes, literacy and numeracy rates in many Indigenous communities remain low. This indicates that, while poverty can limit social mobility and educational attainment, Indigenous identity can pose additional barriers (D'Andrea, 2007). The following section examines these dynamics in greater detail, exploring the complex interactions between Indigenous communities and development-driven education initiatives.

3.4 Barriers to Educational Equality for Indigenous Communities in Latin America

"Formal education has often been associated with language death and those forces undermining Indigenous people's distinctive identities, worldviews, forms of social organisation, and cultural practices. Configured by an urban, monolingual-based model of pedagogy, formal schooling tends to be deeply authoritarian in practice and hierarchical in its organisation. Moreover, the imposition of dominant national languages through State-sponsored literacy programs has separated Indigenous peoples from their traditional means of socialisation and customary forms of expression." (Dean, 2004, p. 14).

As Dean (2004, p. 14) observes, formal education has often been associated with language loss and pressures that can undermine Indigenous peoples' identities, worldviews, social organisation, and cultural practices. Urban, monolingual schooling models, typically hierarchical and authoritarian, have historically imposed dominant national languages through State literacy programs, separating Indigenous communities from their traditional socialisation processes and customary forms of expression. This perspective provides an important lens for understanding the educational experiences of Indigenous peoples across Latin America.

As highlighted in earlier sections, access to and success within education have long been shaped by poverty and entrenched power structures, with outcomes closely linked to social standing. However, Indigenous identity itself often introduces additional barriers to equitable educational achievement (D'Andrea, 2007). The relationship between Latin American States and Indigenous communities has frequently been characterised by exclusion, racism, and policies aimed at assimilating Indigenous peoples into dominant cultural frameworks (Beghin, 2022; López, 2008). Even after independence, governments have promoted European languages such as Spanish and Portuguese, alongside associated cultural norms and political structures, as markers of national identity, often framing Indigenous diversity as an obstacle to social cohesion.

These domestic challenges are compounded by international influences. Top-down development and education initiatives from global powers, including the United Nations, often overlook the particular needs, values, and knowledge systems of Indigenous communities (Barsh, 1993). Many of these programmes emphasise standardised curricula that reflect Western pedagogical assumptions rather than Indigenous ways of knowing. For example, the World Bank's community-based management model often treats communities as 'clients' responsible for hiring, funding, and monitoring teachers, prioritising efficiency and standardised outcomes over local values (Edwards, 2023). Similarly, some United Nations-sponsored schooling programmes in Latin America prioritised literacy, numeracy, and technical skills aimed at global labour markets, while disregarding local languages, traditional agricultural knowledge, and community governance practices (Godenzzi & Sichra, 2014). In doing so, these initiatives can marginalise Indigenous knowledge systems and inadvertently reinforce both local and global hierarchies, a dynamic particularly harmful to Indigenous groups, who have historically been positioned at the margins of societal and international recognition (Lopez, 2008).

Power imbalances in Latin America have caused significant gaps in education access and results between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reports that Indigenous

students fall behind their non-Indigenous counterparts in time spent in school and graduation rates (Cortina, 2017). Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru have over 18 million Indigenous people combined. In these countries, Indigenous youth finish about two years less schooling than their non-Indigenous peers. While primary school attendance records are similar between the two demographics, Indigenous students are much less likely to go on to high school or university. In Ecuador, for instance, only 13% of Indigenous youth finish thirteen or more years of school, while over a third of non-Indigenous youth do (Cortina, 2017, p. vxi). The gap in tertiary education attendance is even bigger. In Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Venezuela, the share of non-Indigenous people with a college education is more than twice that of Indigenous people. In Belize, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Nicaragua, this gap exceeds 50 percent (Näslund-Hadley, 2022).

The disparities also extend to academic performance. In the Latin American region, 37% of Indigenous primary school students did not reach proficiency standards in reading, and 58% fell short in science and mathematics. This is in comparison to 17% of non-Indigenous students failing to reach reading standards and 42% scoring below proficiency in science and math (Näslund-Hadley, 2022). In Guatemala, Paraguay, and Peru Indigenous sixth graders scored much lower in mathematics than their non-Indigenous classmates even after adjusting for socioeconomic factors (Cortina 2017). These widespread inequalities highlight the need to overhaul the system to close the ongoing gaps in educational access and achievement for Indigenous groups.

To address this problem, many Latin American governments have put into action intercultural and bilingual education (IBE) policies over the last twenty years to support Indigenous communities in education (López, 2010). These programs aim to encourage mutual respect between cultures (interculturality) and offer education in both Indigenous languages and the main national language (bilingual). The goal is to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students while also preserving and incorporating Indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural practices (López, 2010). Ecuador and Colombia have developed IBE programs in close collaboration with Indigenous organisations, integrating local knowledge, languages, and cultural practices into the

curriculum (Aikman, 2012, p. 86). In contrast, Guatemala and Venezuela have implemented more top-down approaches, where the government primarily controls the design of IBE, with less input from Indigenous communities (Aikman, 2012, p. 86). This has resulted in differing experiences in the effectiveness of the program depending on where one resides.

The Qom community in Argentina provides a clear example of challenges in IBE initiatives. Historically displaced and marginalised, the Qom were resettled in urban areas like Rosario, where IBE programs were introduced (Chaney et al., 2024; Garcia-Arias et al., 2023). Although these programs aimed to incorporate Qom language and culture, they were largely designed without consulting the community. Local Qom teachers were underrepresented, and non-Indigenous administrators or Indigenous teachers from other regions were often employed, resulting in segregated, under-resourced schools.

Rather than fostering an exchange between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, these schools reinforced existing power imbalances, marginalising Qom knowledge. The curriculum frequently overlooked the community's ecological and cultural practices, perpetuating what Garcia-Arias et al. (2023, p. 1402) describe as "epistemic and ontological violence," where Indigenous ways of knowing are ignored or treated superficially. This case underscores the importance of meaningful Indigenous participation in the design and implementation of education programs to ensure they are culturally responsive and equitable.

The Qom example highlights that despite the targeted efforts of IBE to address the educational disparities experienced by Indigenous communities, systemic barriers continue to uphold significant inequalities in certain areas of the region (Stromquist, 2004). While policies are intended to promote interculturality and value Indigenous perspectives, they frequently operate through national curricula and structures that generalise Indigenous knowledge and practices (Aikman & King, 2012). Teachers in Indigenous schools, many of whom are non-Indigenous and lack training in Indigenous contexts, are expected to make local adaptations without adequate understanding of the cultural nuances they are tasked with teaching (Porter & Morrison, 2024).

The reliance on centralised decision-making in policy and curriculum design ultimately hampers the intended goals of IBE. For IBE to align more closely with Indigenous aims, there would need to be a shift toward granting Indigenous communities decision-making control over the design and implementation of these programs (López, 2014). However, it is not only domestic influences that can inhibit Indigenous citizens' education opportunities. Foreign initiatives developed by international development actors, such as the UN, can also stifle Indigenous citizens' education journey.

The previous sections have highlighted various factors that shape educational experiences, contributing to unequal opportunities for many Latin American citizens. For Indigenous communities, such as those in Chiapas, these challenges are often compounded by multiple layers of disadvantage. They may be marginalised due to cultural, geographic, and economic factors, which can limit their access to and success within mainstream education. This situation raises important questions about the extent to which top-down educational systems can meet the needs of Indigenous students when their cultural knowledge and practices are undervalued. It also invites reflection on why Indigenous communities might continue to engage with a system that frequently overlooks their distinct identities and contributions. The following section explores the consequences for Indigenous citizens who are positioned outside the groups favoured by conventional educational policies.

3.5 Repercussions of Being on the Wrong Side of Educational Inequality

Being on the disadvantaged side of educational inequality has profound consequences for Indigenous students, affecting not only their academic outcomes but also their cultural identity, social connections, and overall well-being (Wexler, 2009). The gap between Indigenous cultural values and the expectations of Western-oriented schools can foster social isolation, psychological distress, and a weakened sense of belonging (Snowshoe, 2015). These pressures ultimately threaten both the mental and social well-being of students, highlighting the broader impact of a community losing control over its educational practices. While access to supportive resources is critical, especially in challenging contexts (Ungar, 2008), many educational programs emphasise assimilation into dominant national cultures rather than the preservation of Indigenous

identities. This emphasis undermines the well-being of students and communities alike (McCalman & Bainbridge, 2021), eroding the cultural knowledge systems that sustain identity, resilience, and intergenerational knowledge (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998).

Indigenous students encounter challenges when their education is conducted in a dominant language that differs from their natal language(s) and is without sufficient cultural adaptation. According to Schimmel (2007), these programs often disregard the cultural nuances and linguistic needs of Indigenous children, which can render school environments psychologically overwhelming and socio-culturally alienating. Schools that align with a dominant culture that is foreign to Indigenous students may introduce teaching methods and subject matter that conflict with the experiential, ethically grounded, and community-oriented education to which Indigenous children are accustomed. For example, the San people of South Africa's collaborative, problem-solving approach to learning contrasts sharply with the individualistic and theory-focused methods common in Western schools (Schimmel, 2007). The implementation of a Western education system in the San community was reported to have left San children feeling inadequate and marginalised.

In numerous cases, such as those of the San people, educational policies have actively disrupted Indigenous communities, stripping children of the cultural knowledge and values that have historically been integral to their upbringing (McCaffery, 2016). The Western education system, with its formal schooling conducted in authoritative settings removed from community and daily life, has often separated Indigenous children from their families and communities, weakening intergenerational ties and disrupting cultural transmission (Illich, 1973; McCaffery, 2016). In Australia and North America, Indigenous populations, including Aboriginal Australians and American Indians, have endured the long-lasting effects of neocolonialism and cultural dissonance (Mihesuah, 2010). The legacy of colonial policies has often seeped into schools and perpetuated stereotypes that depict Indigenous students as lazy, dependent, and resistant to integration (Mihesuah, 2010). Such prejudiced views not only hinder the academic success of these communities but also contribute to profound societal issues like poverty and marginalisation (McCaffery, 2016).

The challenges faced by Indigenous communities in education are particularly striking given that one of education's central aims is to cultivate capacities that support well-being across economic, social, and personal domains (Desjardins, 2008; Witter et al., 1984). Yet Indigenous peoples frequently encounter structural barriers that limit the extent to which educational frameworks can fulfil these dimensions (McCalman & Bainbridge, 2021). Even within Western contexts, education often prioritises measurable, skill-based outcomes over a more holistic understanding of learning and development (Biesta, 2015). The emphasis on accountability and narrowly defined outcomes, frequently driven by State or international institutions, has tended to constrain policy debates, reducing educational goals to technical skill acquisition at the expense of broader aims such as cultural development, social cohesion, and individual well-being (Desjardins, 2008).

This focus on specific, market-oriented skills can narrow discussions about what education should achieve, often overlooking important areas of human development. Evidence supporting the prioritisation of certain skills over others, whether derived from Western or Indigenous perspectives, is not robust enough to justify rigid hierarchies of knowledge (Desjardins, 2008). In practice, the Western education model rarely aligns with community-defined priorities, tending instead to reflect State or corporate interests and privileging skills tied to labour market demands over cultural relevance or collective well-being (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019). Indigenous students, whose learning values often emphasise community, interconnectedness, and holistic development, thus encounter a system that is ill-equipped to accommodate or respect these principles (Brown, 2019). The lack of a coherent theoretical foundation in Western educational research to support diverse approaches further highlights the limitations of the system in effectively serving Indigenous populations (Desjardins, 2008).

It is perhaps unsurprising that Indigenous communities experience challenges to well-being when engaging with an education system primarily shaped to serve the interests of a dominant, foreign culture. What is surprising, however, is the continued optimism among development practitioners and State bodies in implementing these models,

despite limited evidence of their effectiveness in Indigenous communities whose values and worldviews differ substantially (Bishop, 2024). Much like other entrenched Western institutions, the persistence of this system, coupled with the absence of widely accepted alternatives, has often been treated as justification for its continuation, even when it does little to mitigate structural inequities. If Indigenous communities are to achieve equity, well-being, and meaningful educational fulfilment, a top-down, Western-imposed approach alone appears insufficient.

3.6 Conclusion

While Western education is often presented as universally beneficial, it originates within a broader context where global power imbalances have historically disadvantaged Indigenous communities and Global South nations. Educational attainment can enhance opportunities for Global South citizens, but these opportunities are often constrained compared with those available to Global North counterparts. In countries with pronounced social stratification, common across much of Latin America, the effects of poverty further compound these challenges. Indigenous identity adds an additional layer of difficulty, meaning that even those who successfully navigate a Western-oriented education system often face structural barriers to achieving comparable economic or social outcomes.

It is important to recognise that Western education represents only one approach to learning, a particular method and philosophy rather than the essence of education itself. This chapter does not seek to diminish the value of education broadly, but rather to question the suitability of imposing a Western model in Indigenous contexts. Education, in its truest sense, is a universal human experience, expressed in diverse forms across cultures and histories. Reflecting on this diversity, the West might consider whose authority underpins the promotion of its educational model internationally, and the assumptions or motivations that sustain this approach. The following chapter explores the historical factors that shaped education in Chiapas and how these conditions prompted Indigenous communities to develop autonomous, culturally grounded schooling in response to the limitations of Western models.

Chapter 4: Repression to Rebellion: A Brief History of Government, People, and Education in Chiapas

4.1 Introduction

While the systemic discrimination and inequality in education discussed in Chapter 3 share commonalities across Global South countries, Indigenous experiences with national institutions and broader society on a domestic level are further shaped by historical events that influence social relations and practices. This section examines the educational policies that affected Indigenous communities in Chiapas, providing context for the political and social conditions that ultimately led the region to a boiling point and declaring 'Ya Basta! (enough). It may appear that this section repeats itself, and in ways, it does. However, this repetition of discrimination and forced assimilation efforts under different names and regimes was exactly what the Indigenous people of Chiapas endured for centuries. For this reason, the patterns of neglect and subjugation throughout the period post-independence are described in each era to enforce the point of this unchanging relationship dynamic between the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas and the Mexican State.

4.2 Post-Independence Liberalism and the Foundations of Assimilation (1821–1900)

Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821 marked the beginning of a new era, as the nation worked to establish a cohesive identity and modernise its institutions (Harazduk, 2014). In the aftermath of independence, Mexico's elites embraced the concept of *mestizaje*, a cultural ideal focused on integrating Indigenous populations and those with Spanish heritage into a unified Mexican identity. This approach aimed to resolve the racial tensions of the colonial period by envisioning a harmonious "cosmic" race (Fuentes-Morales, 2009, p.91). While this vision purported to unify the nation, its underlying goal was to erase Indigenous distinctions, positioning their traditions as obstacles to modernisation. Assimilation efforts drew heavily on Western liberal ideologies, emphasising 'equality' under the law, the privatisation of communal lands, and the establishment of a secular education system (Olivera, 2012).

These changes disrupted Indigenous social organisation and communal living, which had persisted through the colonial era. The Constitution of 1824 abolished communal rights previously afforded to Indigenous groups under Spanish colonial rule, reinforcing a narrative that portrayed Indigenous ways of life as 'backward' and necessitating integration into the nation's liberal, universalising project (Purnell, 2002). Education became a central tool for this project, promoting elite cultural values through secular schooling (Dawson, 1998). Policies sought to replace Indigenous knowledge with behaviours deemed rational and economically productive (Erickson, 2002; Hillel, 2009; Pérez-Aguilera & Figueroa-Helland, 2011; Schell, 2012).

The Mexican government continued to enforce educational changes that prioritised modernity and resource privatisation between 1850 and 1900. Once more, these changes undermined Indigenous customs as 'superstitions' that should be eradicated while elevating Eurocentric knowledge and rationality (Lewis, 2005). The purpose of schools in rural regions such as Chiapas was to 'liberate' Indigenous people from their customs (Levinson, 2001). However, the education system's individualistic teachings contributed to the loss of community lands under the pretence of growth. Displaced Indigenous populations were compelled to work on private estates controlled by Chiapas elites. This dispossession, intensified by education reforms, undermined traditional livelihoods such as communal subsistence farming, local barter economies, and reciprocal labour systems, while entrenching economic exploitation (Rus et al., 2001). As Indigenous communities engaged in mixed economic activities, including seasonal labour for elites, the shift toward forced dependence on wage labour under elite landowners dismantled more autonomous, self-sustaining practices and reinforced existing class hierarchies (Harvey, 1998). Despite promises of improved living standards, the economic reforms introduced during 1850 and 1900 by the Mexican Government ultimately marginalised Indigenous communities further, depriving them of autonomy and exposing them to exploitation.

4.3 Revolutionary Promises and Rural Disillusionment (1910–1980)

During and after the Mexican Revolution of the early 20th century, the State intensified its efforts to 'modernise' Indigenous communities (Harazduk, 2014). Rather than

addressing systemic inequalities, initiatives such as cultural missions and 'Schools of Action'[13] served to entrench State control over rural populations by aligning education with nationalist ideals (Levinson, 2001; Loyo Brambila, 2008). Curricula taught exclusively in Spanish excluded Indigenous languages and knowledge, perpetuating cultural alienation (Anthony-Stevens & Gallegos Buitron, 2023; Lewis, 2005). The tension between national unity and Indigenous autonomy became increasingly evident as educational reforms clashed with local traditions, knowledge, and values. In Chiapas, teachers who disregarded Indigenous traditions often clashed with locals, highlighting the communities' unwillingness to accept top-down impositions (Wasserman, 2008; Harazduk, 2014).

By the 1940s, policy shifts reflected a broader ideological pivot toward industrialisation and urbanisation (Nigh & Bertely, 2018). Education reforms prioritised preparing children in lower socio-economic strata for industrial roles over preserving Indigenous knowledge and dismantling earlier rural development initiatives (Harazduk, 2014). The nominal gains made during the revolution, which included some agrarian reforms (Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution and Cárdenas-era ejido land redistribution[14]), along with support for Indigenous schools, were dismantled in favour of policies aligning with foreign investment and industrial growth (Loyo Brambila, 2008). Local officials in regions like Chiapas compounded these challenges by refusing to allocate State funding to Indigenous schools, justifying their decisions with claims that Indigenous cultures impeded progress (Rus, 1994).

The establishment of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in 1948 further institutionalised assimilation efforts, laying the groundwork for later bilingual and bicultural education initiatives introduced during the 1960s. While these programmes

---

[13] Cultural missions and "Schools of Action" were initiatives implemented in Mexico during the 20th century as part of the country's efforts to integrate Indigenous and rural populations into the national project of modernisation and cultural unification. See Schoenhals (1964) for more information.

[14] Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution allowed the Mexican government to redistribute land to peasants and Indigenous communities. During Cárdenas's presidency, this led to the creation of ejidos—communal landholdings aimed at promoting rural self-sufficiency and reducing large landowner control (Knight, 1986).

were framed as supportive of Indigenous communities, they primarily served as mechanisms to transition them into Spanish-speaking, *mestizaje*-oriented national subjects (Fuentes-Morales, 2009). Evaluations from the period indicate that curricular content prioritised economic integration and "modernisation" rather than cultural preservation. By the 1960s, over 30% of Indigenous children in Chiapas attended schools that initially presented themselves as bicultural, but gradually shifted to Spanish-only instruction, eroding native languages and promoting assimilation into the dominant *mestizaje* culture (Bazak, 2013). This period saw education used as a tool for economic integration rather than cultural preservation, reinforcing the marginalisation of Indigenous communities in Chiapas (Stahler-Sholk, 2001). Policies framed under the paternalistic ideology of *Indigenismo*[15] claimed to uplift Indigenous people but operated through frameworks that devalued their autonomy and traditions, perpetuating systemic inequalities (Olivera, 2012; Lewis, 2018). In essence, it replaced Indigenous self-governance with development initiatives directed by the State.

By the 1970s, the Indigenous population in Chiapas had been marginalised and subjugated for nearly five centuries by colonial authorities, post-independence elites, and successive Mexican State governments (Harazduk, 2014). During the 1970s, Modernisation policies such as increased oil production, logging, and dam construction further entrenched the dominance of Influential landowners. At the same time, Indigenous ways of life were continually suppressed in favour of the State's push for economic development (Harvey, 1998). Throughout this period, the government attempted to appease discontent by redistributing land, primarily from underutilised private estates and federal reserves to Indigenous/peasant communities and engaging with Indigenous leaders (Harvey, 1998). However, these reforms often failed to loosen the grip of local elites (Harvey, 1998). Frustrated by years of oppression, Indigenous communities began to politically organise with the help of local church groups and other allies, particularly progressive sectors of the Catholic Church (e.g., the Diocese of

---

[15] Indigenismo was a multifaceted and often contradictory political and cultural movement. While it typically idealised an abstract concept of Indigenous people and cultures rooted in the past, it also promoted the modernisation, assimilation, and "improvement" of contemporary Indigenous individuals. Those who championed this movement were usually non-Indigenous (Lewis, 2018).

San Cristóbal de las Casas under Bishop Samuel Ruiz) (Burbach, 1994). A pivotal moment came in 1974 with the Indigenous Congress in Chiapas. This event saw various Indigenous groups united in demanding land rights, wage increases, education in Indigenous languages, and respect for their cultures (Harvey, 1998). Although these demands were met with limited government support, they marked a resurgence of Indigenous resistance that mixed traditional peasant grievances with bold claims for cultural rights (Dawson, 2005).

4.4 Neoliberal Reform and the Deepening of Inequality (1980–1994)

During the 1980s, tensions in Chiapas continued to escalate as Indigenous communities faced deepening marginalisation driven by systemic inequalities and the imposition of neoliberal reforms. The Mexican State education model during this period once again perpetuated inequalities by aligning educational content with the cultural and economic capital of the dominant *mestizaje* population, leaving Indigenous students to either assimilate or remain excluded from social and economic opportunities (Harazduk, 2014). This educational marginalisation mirrored and generated broader structural inequalities in Chiapas, where fifty percent of the population suffered from malnutrition, combined illiteracy rates were three times the national average, and infrastructure such as roads, water, and electricity were largely absent in rural areas (Harvey, 1998). Meanwhile, the spread of neoliberalism and entrenched political corruption in Chiapas allowed local elites to exploit structural reforms, divert public resources, and deepen inequalities in Indigenous communities (Nash, 2002). The 1982 debt crisis led to State-initiated neoliberal economic reforms, slashing the previously minimal government support for Indigenous education, healthcare, and self-sustaining agriculture, further impoverishing these communities (Gallegos & Quinn, 2017).

As these inequalities deepened, popular movements in Chiapas intensified their activism. The emerging Zapatistas (see section 4.5) pressed for justice, autonomy, and the recognition of Indigenous rights. The government attempted to symbolically address these grievances by ratifying the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169 in 1989, and later by decentralising education under President Carlos Salinas de

Gortari's[16] administration between 1988 and 1994 (Ornelas, 2004; Tomaselli, 2020). These reforms allowed for Indigenous-language textbooks to be taught in schools and made lower secondary education compulsory, but they were largely framed around neoliberal objectives that prioritised economic competitiveness over socio-cultural preservation (Stahler-Sholk, 2001; Harvey, 1998). It became evident that the government's approach reflected what Hale (2002, p. 522) describes as "neoliberal multiculturalism", a superficial recognition of ethnic diversity that stopped short of granting Indigenous communities' genuine authority over decisions affecting their territories (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019, p. 66). Salinas's broader anti-poverty initiatives, such as the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONASOL) and the Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo (PROCAMPO)[17], failed to address the root causes of discontent (Gates, 2018). PRONASOL aimed to reduce poverty through infrastructure projects and targeted welfare spending, while PROCAMPO provided direct subsidies to farmers to ease the transition to free-market agriculture following NAFTA. However, both programmes sought to integrate Indigenous communities into the neoliberal market economy without granting meaningful autonomy or addressing historical injustices (Harvey, 1998).

The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 became a flashpoint, forcing local farmers to compete with international agribusinesses and permitting the sale of communal lands to both overseas investors and domestic elites, deepening poverty and intensifying land disputes in Indigenous communities (Perez, 2022). For Indigenous communities in Chiapas, NAFTA was perceived as a "death certificate," symbolising the culmination of decades of exclusion and exploitation (Stahler-Sholk, 2001, p. 74). These economic and political pressures, coupled with persistent repression, left the Indigenous communities of Chiapas in a state of

---

[16] Carlos Salinas de Gortari served as President of Mexico from 1988 to 1994. A member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), his administration is known for implementing sweeping neoliberal reforms, including the privatisation of state industries, cuts to social programmes, and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). His presidency is also associated with growing inequality, social unrest, and allegations of corruption and electoral fraud (Morris, 2018).

[17] For a full overview of PRONASOL and PROCAMPO's failures, see Gates 2018

seething. For centuries, the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas endured the burden of navigating multiple layers of oppression created by colonisation. The first challenge arose from Eurocentric perceptions of wealth, which devalued Indigenous knowledge and capital in favour of those aligned with modernisation. The second was the enduring legacy of colonisation itself, which entrenched systemic discrimination against Indigenous citizens for generations. The signing of NAFTA represented yet another threat, as global and domestic power imbalances sought to further marginalise Indigenous communities, capturing their resources and exploiting their labour. This culminated in Chiapas reaching a 'boiling point' on January 1, 1994, when the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) emerged from the jungles and highlands, wearing the balaclavas depicted in the mural shown in Figure 4.1, and descended into San Cristóbal de las Casas, declaring *"¡Ya basta!"* ("Enough!"). This was a direct rejection of the ongoing cycle of colonialism, neglect, exploitation, genocide, and oppression that Indigenous peoples in Chiapas had endured for over 500 years (Khasnabish, 2010).

4.5 "¡Ya basta!" The Rise of the Zapatistas (1994-)

Figure 4.1 *photo of Ya Basta (Enough!) mural (Source: Carrier, n.d.)*

The estimated 10,000-strong Zapatista army that marched into San Cristóbal on January 1st, 1994, was comprised of Indigenous peoples from the Tzotzil-, Tzeltal-, and Tojolabal-speaking communities (Bodley, 2014). They captured San Cristóbal along with seven other district capitals. The date of the uprising, coinciding with the implementation of NAFTA, was deliberately chosen as a bold rejection of both local and global economic practices that disadvantaged and exploited Indigenous communities (Barmeyer, 2008). The Indigenous people of Chiapas were no longer interested in engaging in policy talks or hearing promises. The centuries of unmet promises and policies that perpetuated poverty and marginalisation had led to negotiation fatigue and a state of disillusionment with government initiatives (Ruiz & Menocal, 1998). NAFTA's threats to communal land rights and local livelihoods were seen as the final provocation. The Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican government and its ruling party, demanding an end to centuries of oppression. The First Declaration[18] from the Lacandon Jungle outlined their demands (Stahler-Sholk, 2019). The Indigenous people demanded the removal of the obstacles that prevented them from experiencing basic rights such as access to land, housing, food, healthcare, education, and self-determination.

Although the Zapatistas were poorly armed and lacked resources, they employed innovative strategies to spread their message of resistance. By combining grassroots organising, internet use, and strategic engagement with media channels, they successfully drew global attention to the struggles of the Indigenous people in Chiapas, presenting their fight as part of a larger 500-year resistance against colonisation and systemic marginalisation (Gelsomino, 2010). The Zapatistas entered into an armed conflict with the Mexican army lasting twelve days, in which they were ultimately

[18] The Zapatista Declarations are a series of communiqués issued by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) beginning with the *First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* in 1993. These texts articulate the political vision, demands, and evolving philosophy of the Zapatista movement, covering themes such as Indigenous autonomy, anti-neoliberalism, participatory democracy, and resistance to state violence. Each declaration reflects a moment in the Zapatistas' ongoing dialogue with civil society and their critique of global capitalism (Grover, 2002).

outgunned and outnumbered, wounding and losing hundreds of insurgents on the battlefield, as can be seen in Figure 4.2 (Knoll & Reyes, 2014). This loss, coupled with their newfound ability to frame their cause to a wider audience, saw the Zapatistas change tactics. Shifting from military confrontation to strategic communication, the Zapatistas launched public relations and media campaigns to build national and international support (Gelsomino, 2010). This shift placed political pressure on the Mexican government, ultimately leading to a suspension of military operations against the Zapatistas and sparking wider conversations about Indigenous rights and autonomy.

Figure 4.2 *A resident of Ocosingo assists an EZLN guerrilla wounded during the clashes, January 4, 1994. (Source: Dovarganes, 1994).*

Domestic and international outrage regarding the Mexican military's initial response to the uprising pressured the government into declaring a ceasefire. In February 1994, negotiations began at the Dialogue for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas, held at the Cathedral of San Cristóbal (Inclán, 2018). While these talks initially offered hope, the Zapatista communities rejected the government's peace proposal, citing its failure to address their core demands. Despite this, the Zapatistas were able to retain thousands

of hectares of land seized during the rebellion, primarily large private ranches and commercial farmland (Collier & Quaratiello, 2005). By late 1996, numerous failed negotiations between Indigenous communities and the Mexican State led to many Zapatista communities declaring their autonomy (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). Operating independently, they established their own governance structures, education systems, and healthcare programs.

4.6 Blackboards and Balaclavas: The Zapatista Education Model

"At that time, before '94, already we had the idea of taking education of the people, for the people and by the people. They are ideas that have been emerging since before, but could not materialise in any way because there were official schools of the "bad government," and that idea was gradually nourished and for several years was kept in reserve. Then in 1994 our public demands came out, one is education, but only in words, there was only our demand for education but there was no recipe for how to start, how we will build that education of the people" (Escuelita Zapatista, 2013, p. 16).

The Zapatistas have a saying that can be translated as "they learn through the soles of their feet," a philosophy that closely guided the development of their school system (Belausteguigoitia, 2016). The Escuelita Zapatista quote above highlights a community-driven vision for education that existed even before the formal uprising, reflecting a long-standing desire to reclaim learning as a tool for autonomy rather than assimilation. Central to this approach was the rejection of the State-run education system and the establishment of community-led schools, alongside independent systems for healthcare, justice, governance, and cooperative, sustainable forms of production (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019). This work is guided by the Zapatista philosophy of *"para todos todo, nada para nosotros"* ("for everyone, everything; for us, nothing"), demonstrating a commitment to collective well-being and mutual support across the community (Marcos, 2002, p. 237).

As part of this initiative, the Zapatistas developed the *Sistema Educativo Rebelde Autónomo Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Educational System of National Liberation, SERAZ-LN) (Zaldívar et al., 2023). This autonomous

system was a bold effort to establish what they call *educación verdadera* ("true education"), rooted in the knowledge, values, and lived experiences of the people themselves (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2025, para. 24). A key early step was removing "official teachers" and replacing them with young community members who became "education promoters" (Stahler-Sholk, 2017, p.18). Between 1995 and 2001, these promoters began teaching literacy to children aged five to twelve and were trained as multilingual educators at municipal centres within the autonomous regions (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019). As illustrated in the mural in Figure 4.3, the Zapatistas viewed education as a fundamental pillar of their movement.

Figure 4.3 *Mural of a girl reading a book, promoting literacy and education in Chiapas. (Source: Schools for Chiapas, n.d.)*

The subsequent years saw small autonomous schools rapidly emerge across all Zapatista-influenced areas. The schools were created through autonomous municipalities and relied on internal processes where young teachers were trained by

non-professional educators and experienced Mayan campesinos[19] in the various Caracoles[20]. Pedagogical teams within Zapatista communities collaborated to develop innovative approaches that integrated cultural knowledge in ways that were politically meaningful and personally relevant to Indigenous families and peasants. Parents and grandparents valued that children became more confident and learned about the history of colonisation in the Jungle and the collective rights of their peoples. Families considered learning to defend themselves essential, recognising that building self-esteem helps children interpret and engage with the customs and worldview of the kaxlán (white) world through intercultural collaboration and mutual learning (Rico Montoya, 2013; Arcos, 2013).

Zapatista schools are explicitly anti-capitalist and non-commercial. They embrace a political pedagogy for peace, civic education for community power, and a structure that centres the people, not the market. Education is understood as a tool to overcome what Zapatismo calls the four wheels of capitalism: exploitation, dispossession, repression, and contempt (Silva Montes, 2019). It seeks to build not obedient workers, but liberated communities, reversing the centuries of epistemicide[21] experienced through colonisation and assimilation efforts (Silva Montes, 2019). Unlike State education systems, it refuses the commodification of learning and the reduction of students to human capital. In Zapatista schools, no one pays to learn and no one is paid to teach. This approach however, relies heavily on both international and local aid, an issue that will be explored in the analysis chapter. Education is neither a product nor a service; it is a communal right and responsibility. Education serves as a political strategy to cultivate public awareness around self-governance, cultural identity, gender

[19] *Campesino* is a Spanish term referring to small-scale farmers or rural peasants, often used to describe Indigenous agricultural workers in Latin America who are closely tied to the land and traditional forms of subsistence farming.

[20] *Caracol*, meaning “snail” in Spanish, is a metaphor adopted by the Zapatistas to describe their regional centres of self-governance. The spiral of the snail symbolises the slow, deliberate, and reflective nature of building autonomy, as well as the interconnectedness of all aspects of community life.

[21] Epistemicide describes the deliberate erasure or marginalisation of entire knowledge systems, especially those belonging to colonised or oppressed communities (Zaldívar et al., 2023).

equity, environmental stewardship, economic autonomy, and local food sovereignty (Silva Montes, 2019).

Each community defines its own curriculum according to its specific needs and aspirations. Communities have also created their own educational documents, such as the “True Education Document” in the municipality of Ricardo Flores Magón. This is done to reclaim Indigenous knowledge, celebrate local history, and strengthen political consciousness (Sáenz, 2023). The goal is not to accumulate individual success or credentials, but to contribute meaningfully to collective life. This means rejecting the bureaucratic standardisation of State systems in favour of grassroots decision-making about what is taught, how, and why (Maldonado-Villalpando et al., 2022). Importantly, this pedagogical approach avoids exams, report cards, or graduation certificates. These markers of hierarchy and external validation are incompatible with Zapatista values. Instead, learning is evaluated in practice by assessing how children contribute to their community and participate in collective life. The aim is not to prepare students for a job market but to deepen their understanding of their culture, history, territory, and self-governance.

In terms of workforce preparation, Zapatista education does not follow the standard professional pathways of the West. Rather than solely requiring formal qualifications to become a health worker, it values community involvement and shared knowledge (Silva Montes, 2019). Health careers such as herbalists, bonesetters, and midwives come from within the communities, and learning is conducted by ‘promoters’ rather than trained teachers (Silva Montes, 2019). These practices operate in conjunction with modern medicine, where biomedical treatments and clinical expertise are incorporated without displacing traditional healing. For instance, Zapatista clinics may provide herbal remedies for common illnesses while also administering antibiotics or vaccination programmes when necessary (Aloisio, 2009). Zapatista education is not viewed as a universal solution to social issues; rather, it is understood as one component of a broader political, cultural, and economic movement for self-determination. Education maintains self-governance, locally managed production, cultural identity, and alternative media. Operating in defiance of material limitations,

these societies use education as a tool of ideological freedom and radical democracy (Silva Montes, 2019).

This entire educational system operates independently from the Mexican government ideologically, materially, and politically. It is, in every sense, autonomous. It exists in stark contrast to the Mexican government's own recent Sectorial Education Program (2013–2018), which sought to 'democratise productivity' by promoting entrepreneurship, certifying labour skills, and forming human capital (Silva Montes, 2019). To the Zapatistas, the priorities of the recent Sectorial Education Program confirm the function of public schools as what Althusser (2014, p. xxii) referred to as "ideological State apparatuses," institutions that reproduce dominant social relations.

While subjects like mathematics, reading, and writing were retained for their universal relevance, others were radically reimagined. History was reframed to foreground the EZLN's struggle and other social movements. 'Natural Sciences' was reframed as *Life and Environment* (*Vida y Medio Ambiente*), emphasising ecological knowledge, Indigenous agricultural practices, and the community's interdependence with the land. Similarly, the subject 'Spanish' became *Languages* (*Lenguas*), acknowledging the multilingual reality of Indigenous communities and giving equal importance to native languages like Tsotsil and Tseltal alongside Spanish (Silva Montes, 2019). Entirely new areas have been introduced, such as 'Integration,' which encompasses the eleven demands[22] of the Zapatista uprising. Education promoters focus their teaching on these core demands, using them as central themes that inspire knowledge creation in the Freirean tradition[23] (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019). The curriculum is inseparable from the spirit of the movement itself. The Zapatista demands for health, land, autonomy, and justice form the foundational pillars that shape the knowledge valued, created, and shared (EZLN, 1994). This radical transformation of education

---

[22] The Zapatistas' eleven demands were: *work, land, housing, food, healthcare, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice,* and *peace*. These demands summarise their call for dignity, Indigenous autonomy, and basic rights denied under the neoliberal Mexican state.

[23] For more on Paulo Freire's educational philosophy, see *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), where he outlines his model of dialogical, critical, and liberatory education.

subsequently prompted other Indigenous communities across Chiapas to re-evaluate their own relationships with schooling and the State.

4.7 Zapatista Influence on Broader Indigenous Schooling in Chiapas

The revolutionary reshaping of education carried out by the Zapatistas in caracoles (Zapatista regional centres of self-government) such as Oventic, Roberto Barrios, and Morelia, catalysed a broader wave of autonomous Indigenous schooling across Chiapas in the decades following their uprising (Sanchez, 2012; Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2025). The rebellion in 1994 was a fundamental rejection of ongoing colonisation and neoliberalism in the particular and sparked a region-wide assertion of Indigenous self-determination through political and educational autonomy (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2025). This porous movement saw other Indigenous groups, even those not formally identified with the Zapatistas such as the Universidad de la Tierra (University of the Earth) (Unitierra) and the Universidad Intercultural (Intercultural University), begin to establish their own systems of education centred around cultural resonance, territorial sovereignty, and defiance of State-mandated curricula (Zaldívar et al, 2023).

Communities in Chiapas, such as the Tzotzil organisation *Las Abejas* in Acteal and the community of San Isidro in Zinacantán, are examples of Indigenous groups included in this larger context of educational self-determination. While these movements operate independently from the Zapatista program, they share common educational values such as recovering local knowledge systems and advancing schooling on cultural, ecological, and social justice terms (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2025). Pedagogic encounters are common between Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities where young Indigenous educators learn together with veteran *campesinos*, elderly individuals, and sometimes even sympathetic *kaxlanes* (non-Indigenous Others), under principles of respect and shared anti-capitalist values (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2025). These horizontal encounters challenge the top-down nature of colonial State education by fostering grassroots collaboration and mutual learning.

The open and often collaborative relationships between such autonomous systems of education reflect a dynamic and evolving decolonial learning model. As one example,

during the *Otra Campaña* (Other Campaign), an itinerant education caravan travelled through Mexico and into Chiapas, offering space for the sharing of pedagogical experiments in autonomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors (Mora, 2007). These efforts even extended across borders, with Sixth Declaration Adherents[24] in the world being inspired to establish their own autonomous education efforts, emulating the Zapatista vision under their own circumstances (Zugman, 2008; Dellacioppa, 2009).

But these movements are not identical. Some of the Indigenous schools in Chiapas influenced by Zapatismo still accept limited State funding and operate through hybrid models of critical intercultural education that blend resistance with strategic negotiation (Medina Melgarejo, 2015). While the Zapatistas reject all forms of State support, other Indigenous communities develop alternative schools within a more conflicted relationship with the State, sometimes engaging in political struggles for recognition and access to resources (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019). It is not uniformity of practice that unites them, but a shared refusal to allow Indigenous education to be defined by national neoliberal projects or hijacked by cultural assimilation efforts that underlie colonial hierarchies (Walsh, 2009; Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019). While the Indigenous schools have provided positive social benefits for their communities, their development has not progressed free from challenges.

4.8 Challenges and Triumphs in the Autonomous Indigenous Schools of Chiapas

Zapatista autonomous education has made huge strides in connecting curricula to Indigenous values, improving autonomy at the community level, and maintaining cultural identity for the people of Chiapas. As early as 1996, Zapatista schools in Morelia have embedded Tojolabal values like reciprocity and collaborative work into the curriculum and school governance (Shenker, 2012). The promoters (educators) are locally elected and require only literacy in Spanish and their Indigenous language,

[24] The *Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* (2005) is a Zapatista manifesto that expanded the movement's focus beyond Chiapas to national and international struggles against neoliberalism and capitalism. Those who publicly aligned with its principles became known as "adherents to the Sixth," forming a global network committed to grassroots organising, autonomy, and solidarity with marginalised communities (EZLN, 2005; Dellacioppa, 2009).

making the role accessible and allowing the curriculum to be written around locally relevant material experienced in everyday life, such as agricultural seasons and students' social and cultural practices. This has rendered education more relevant, practical, and founded upon the conservation of culture through the operation of language and observation of local customs (Shenker, 2012). Advancement towards gender equality has also seen successes. Increased numbers of girls are coming to school, and remaining in schools for longer, leading to increased community participation by women and increased advocacy for structural change (Shenker, 2012).

Despite all these developments, the Zapatista education project continues to face serious challenges. External political pressure remains strong, with the Mexican State employing welfare programs, land grants, and military presence to disempower the Zapatista presence and cause defection (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019). It is also challenged by higher levels of exposure to television and electronic technology that can break down Tojolabal practice and language through modern foreign influences (Shenker, 2012). Although educational access for girls and women has improved in Zapatista communities, traditional gender roles, such as domestic labour and male authority, continue to limit women's leadership. While the Revolutionary Law for Women[25] signals a commitment to equality, critics argue this is not fully realised in practice. Cappelli (2001) notes that the movement often blames capitalism over patriarchy, and Forbis (2016) highlights the continued burden of domestic responsibilities that restrict women's political participation.

In their fight for autonomy, Zapatista communities reject all government aid, a strategy that buffers political independence at the expense of constraining funding access and materials. They must rely on Indigenous volunteer labour and civil society networks, and the absence of material resources is a chronic issue (Baronnet & Stahler-Sholk, 2019; EZLN, 2005). This lack of funding has led to continued budget and scholarly

---

[25] The *Revolutionary Law for Women* was issued by the EZLN in 1993, prior to the 1994 uprising. It outlines ten demands for gender equality within Indigenous communities, including rights to education, healthcare, political participation, freedom from violence, and the ability to choose if and whom to marry. While groundbreaking in its vision, its implementation has varied and remains subject to cultural and structural limitations (Ramirez, 2025).

restrictions that hinder the teaching of complicated political or legal content, harming the system's capability to effectively ready students for self-governance (Shenker, 2012).

Military pressure has also been a constant thorn for Zapatista autonomous education since the uprising. Following the initial conflict, the Mexican State deployed huge amounts of federal forces and police patrols throughout Zapatista territories, establishing a thick and permanent military presence, particularly in zones like Las Cañadas and the Selva Lacandona (Barmeyer, 2008). This militarisation was part of a broader effort at counterinsurgency to undermine the EZLN's authority and autonomy through fear, mobility restriction, and intimidation of populations. In broken-apart villages, the existence of both Zapatista soldiers and government soldiers created a tense dual regime of domination that infused public spaces such as education, law enforcement, and healthcare. Roadblocks, surveillance, and PRI-oriented police patrols also disrupted daily life and prevented Zapatista schools from functioning independently (Leyva Solano, 2001). The militarised environment not only limited the operational modalities of autonomous schooling but also produced psychological pressure on students, promoters, and families committed to the Zapatista model. In the face of these pressures, the movement's insistence on standing firm against military intimidation is still a core statement of its overall strategy of *resistencia*, defying State aggression and insisting on autonomy (Barmeyer, 2008).

4.9 Conclusion

Decades of neglect and abuse of the Indigenous people of Chiapas by the Mexican State, coupled with their inability to build more equal institutions that genuinely represented their interests, compelled the Zapatistas to reclaim control over their development through education. The ratification of NAFTA, which posed threats to ancestral lands and Indigenous ways of life, was the last offence that underscored the imperative of an independent system of education that is based on Indigenous knowledge, values, and political will. As Chapter 3 examined, hegemonic models of development imposed by national and global powers prioritise economic growth and market integration at the expense of excluding Indigenous peoples and their worldviews

and cultural/local practices, often wreaking social and ecological destruction. Post-development theory's emergence is a critique of these models on the grounds of promoting community autonomy and culture-specific alternatives, principles seen in the Zapatistas' education programs. By developing their own curriculum, the Zapatistas rejected the neoliberal and colonial State education models, which they viewed as tools of capitalist commodification and cultural assimilation. In their place, they established schools that foster critical consciousness, self-determination, and collective solidarity. This innovative development of an autonomous, culture-centred curriculum by the Zapatistas spurred other Indigenous Chiapas groups to establish their own schools, reaffirming education as a method of protecting their identities, achieving self-determination, and resisting State-imposed assimilation efforts. This educational system, though beset by internal and external challenges, holds its shape by continuing to remain committed to the ideal of freeing the Indigenous Chiapas people. Zapatista education is not about placing individuals to be fitted into a ruling market economy, but about empowering communities to struggle against oppression and build a future on the foundations of dignity and autonomy.

Chapter 5: Plan A. Plan B. Plan C. Methodology

5.1 Introduction

Selecting a methodology that respected the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas, honoured and foregrounded the contributions of research participants and the cultural advisor[26], and remained grounded in the discipline of development required careful and evolving consideration throughout the research process. While initial research planning was guided by frameworks rooted in Western academic principles, it soon became clear that these would need to be reshaped to remain faithful to the values and context of the Zapatista and Indigenous groups of Chiapas that the research focused on. Rather than imposing a prescribed approach, the research went towards a reflexive, responsive, and ethically reflective methodology. This approach valued relational responsibility, cultural self-determination, and epistemological humility SooHoo, 2013, p. 201).

Travel restrictions (see 'Plan C' below) and consequent fluctuating access to participants presented some practical issues. However, the research was guided by a responsibility to listen, adjust, and not impose externally constructed ideals of progress. There were moments when my responsibilities to the participants and their communities came into tension with my academic aspirations. As this chapter will outline, these tensions were addressed through critical reflection and a willingness to ensure the centring of Indigenous perspectives, particularly those that challenge extractive or individualistic approaches to knowledge production.

This chapter outlines the methodological evolution of the research, explaining how a relational and ethical approach was developed to remain as faithful as possible to the spirit of the Zapatista education movement, without claiming to speak on its behalf. What was produced was not necessarily a deconstruction of Western university

---

[26] Dr. Gabriel Cué, Assistant Professor of Environmental Ethics at Tecnológico de Monterrey's School of Education, with significant experience in environmental ethics, political ecology, and long-standing collaboration with Indigenous organisations in Chiapas, served as this research's cultural advisor. His contribution and inclusion will be described in Section 5.4 of this chapter.

assumptions, but an increased sensitivity to the pluriversal potential that can be unleashed when research is based on trust, humility, and dialogue.

5.2 Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed for this research as it best facilitated answering how the Indigenous groups in Chiapas viewed education and its role in sustaining well-being in their communities. Numerous personal narratives, values, beliefs, and motivations can be captured through qualitative methods to identify patterns, themes, and arguments across scholarly work (O'Leary, 2017). Mexico's history and cultural identities are shaped by diverse interpretations, some of which may appear contradictory yet remain valid within their respective contexts. Historical narratives and lived experiences are multifaceted, meaning that what holds true for one community may differ for another, yet both perspectives are authentic within their own frameworks.

While a quantitative approach is valuable for measuring broad trends in research, it lacks the capacity to capture the nuance and depth of the relationship between Indigenous well-being and education. Focusing on personal narratives and lived experiences requires an approach that accommodates complex, context-dependent understandings of knowledge transmission, autonomy, and cultural resilience (Clifford et al., 2010). Using a qualitative approach allowed for a multifaceted and holistic understanding of the different views Chiapas Indigenous educators held in regard to community well-being and Indigenous-run schools (Hennink et al., 2011; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). Using qualitative methods, the experiences shared by the Indigenous Chiapas educators, as well as their allies, were connected to the literature review (Chapters 2–4), providing context for answering the research aim and questions.

Table 5.1: *Research Aims and Questions*

Research aim: To examine how the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in Zapatista and other autonomous Indigenous schools in Chiapas intersects with the well-being of the Indigenous communities.
Research questions:
1. Why did the Zapatistas choose to create their own curriculum post the signing of NAFTA?
2. What challenges have Zapatista and other autonomous Indigenous communities in Chiapas faced in moving away from the national education system and developing their own education models?
3. How has the development of autonomous education structures by the Zapatistas and other Indigenous communities in Chiapas influenced the well-being of Indigenous peoples in the region?

The literature review section is a key component of the research's qualitative approach, as it gave context to the struggles Indigenous communities of Chiapas encountered for centuries post-colonisation and helped shape the semi-structured interview questions[27]. Analysis of Zapatista material gave insights into the functional reasoning behind curriculum design concerning community well-being. In addition to these qualitative methods, four semi-structured interviews were conducted to generate the data necessary to gain an understanding of Indigenous education values and structures in Chiapas, their operational models, and their reported effect on well-being. The insights gained from this process led to a more thorough comprehension of the plurality of ways that education affects Indigenous peoples' well-being in the region. The techniques employed from this approach are described in depth in the subsequent sections.

[27] A more detailed explanation of the semi-structured interviews will be provided later in the chapter.

5.3 Methods

This section describes the methods used to collect and analyse data in response to the research questions.

5.3.1 Literature Review

The literature review undertaken for this thesis falls under the umbrella of qualitative desk-based research. This approach involves gathering, synthesising, and analysing existing research and other apposite information (e.g., academic journal articles, books, government reports, policy documents) rather than producing new primary data (Guerin et al., 2018). It allows researchers to conduct in-depth qualitative studies without the need for direct, research-based data generation, often saving time and resources (Bassot, 2022).

The literature review was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical and contemporary factors that influence how education and well-being are experienced within the Indigenous communities of Chiapas. This process involved examining academic sources, online materials, publicly available statistics, and published documents such as an interview with a Zapatista educational promoter that offers first-hand insights into the movement's educational philosophy and practices, along with published Zapatista documents such as the official Declarations (EZLN, 2005; O'Leary, 2017; Workers Solidarity Movement, 2008). It played a crucial role in this research by ensuring that existing knowledge was not replicated, by helping to shape the direction of the study through the identification of gaps and patterns in the existing literature on Indigenous education and community well-being in Chiapas (Guerin et al., 2018).

5.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews involve generating targeted data by engaging with participants in conversation to investigate further selected research topics (O'Leary, 2017). Although the semi-structured interviews involve utilising an established set of questions, the process allows for flexibility during the interview by granting the

interviewer freedom to explore other lines of interest and mould the interview to fit with the contextual flow of the conversation (O'Leary, 2017). The conversation style encourages research participants to express their understandings, experiences, and perceptions in relation to the researched topics (Brinkmann, 2013). This opens the possibility of not only generating expected data, but also for interesting and unexpected data to be introduced by research participants and explored dialogically with the interviewer. The semi-structured interview approach was chosen in this research to foreground participant concerns and narratives, as well as minimise the risk of overlooking unknown perspectives of the participants, instead encouraging them to share personal views and beliefs that may not have come through from a structured interview approach.

It was agreed with my supervisors and cultural advisor that the semi-structured interview format was the most appropriate approach due to the format's ability to hold space for Indigenous voices by prompting dialogue rather than confining it to a researcher-led question-and-answer approach (Tecun et al., 2018). This space opened the possibility for the participants to express different perspectives and understandings about Indigenous well-being and education (Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). By allowing Indigenous voices to lead the conversation, the semi-structured interviews particularly reduced the risk of preconceived Global North and Western understandings of education and well-being dictating the direction of the conversation through unknown biases, thereby preserving the integrity of the data (Simpson Steele, 2012). To further enhance the possibility of prompting dialogue, it was agreed that the cultural advisor would lead the interviews using my questions as a starting point, as he had established relationships with research participants in Chiapas.

The research's key themes were used to formulate questions that addressed the main aims and objectives. The questions were drawn up and then sent to the cultural advisor for feedback. Minor adjustments were made to the original questions for cultural contexts, such as those that addressed Indigenous education structures. The question themes were as follows:

- Challenges faced by Zapatista educators in implementing and sustaining Indigenous-led education.
- The role of Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and language in shaping educational models and well-being.
- Contrasts between Zapatista education and Western-style education in meeting Indigenous community needs.
- The relationship between education, community autonomy, and social well-being in Zapatista communities.
- Barriers to resource access and strategies for sustaining Indigenous education over generations.

Initially, eight to twelve interviews were planned. We were able to confirm nine interviews, although five participants ceased communication before the interview stage for reasons unknown. This withdrawal was not unexpected, as the cultural advisor explained that the Zapatistas and Indigenous people of Chiapas are often highly cautious about engaging with outside academics. Ultimately, four interviews were completed, and all participants made themselves available for follow-up questions. Dr. Gabriel conducted three of the interviews in Chiapas, while I conducted one remotely via Zoom. To protect their identities, interviewees were given the option of anonymity. Those operating in Chiapas choose to have their name disguised to some degree in light of the current international and national political climate.

5.3.3 Document Analysis

Content analysis was completed utilising one available transcript of an interview with a Zapatista teacher. This transcript, titled *The Zapatistas and Education* (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2008), was sourced from *The Anarchist Library* (https://theanarchistlibrary.org) and originally conducted in the autonomous Zapatista community of Morelia, Chiapas. The document provided valuable insights into Indigenous education practices, particularly around the role of education promoters, community involvement, and the contrast with State-led schooling. I used this transcript to supplement and contextualise the knowledge obtained through my own semi-structured interviews during fieldwork. Its analysis helped identify recurring

themes and viewpoints that supported and enriched my findings, allowing for a more comprehensive view of Indigenous and Zapatista approaches to education.

5.4. Positionality and Reflexivity. Outside In

The ability to exercise reflexivity and establish one's positionality when conducting research is imperative for the researcher as it affects participant interactions, data generation, data interpretation and critical analysis(Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). Throughout the research process, it is the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to continuously critically reflect on the relationships, power dynamics, and politics that exist between the research participants and themselves (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Scheyvens and McLennan (2014) state that the research process involves the researcher transitioning between an 'insider/outsider' continuum depending on the research context and the individual. At the outset of this research, I categorised my positionality as that of an insider/outsider. I believed this to be true because of my Indigenous identity as Māori and my values, which aligned with the Zapatista resistance to neoliberal development that undermines Indigenous autonomy. However, this self-perception was quickly challenged when I considered how the participants themselves would view me. While I am Māori, I am also Pākehā[28]. Though I am committed to furthering Indigenous causes globally, I have simultaneously benefited from the exploitation of Global South countries through my economic and educational practices. My beliefs and ideological stance may have aligned with Zapatista values, but my lived experience and actions do not. In reality, my position was that of an outsider who might be privileged enough to be invited in. Ultimately, while I may self-identify as Māori, Indigenous, and an ally, these labels held little weight with the Zapatistas, who primarily viewed me as a representative of Global North academia. This underscored the necessity of involving a cultural advisor, someone with long-standing relationships and

[28] Pākehā – A common term in New Zealand for people of European descent who are not Māori.

trust within the community who could vouch for the integrity of the research and facilitate the interviews with cultural competency.

One of the key issues with my neoliberal identity is the cultural traits that accompany it, particularly the tendency to claim knowledge and wield power, a practice deeply embedded in neoliberal academic structures (Gahman, 2016). The Zapatistas are all too familiar with this dynamic. Through conversations with Mexican University staff and researchers, I was made aware that Global North academics have historically conducted research, extracted knowledge for personal and professional gain, and failed to credit the Indigenous communities in Chiapas from whom they obtained it. Given this history, it is no surprise that the Zapatista and Indigenous communities of Chiapas approach Global North researchers with scepticism and cynicism. Full transparency regarding the research's aims and objectives was therefore essential. While ethical guidelines should, in theory, ensure equitable and respectful research practices, this has not always been the Zapatistas' lived experience. Recognising this pushed me to critically acknowledge my position as an outsider representing a neoliberal institution, challenging me to ensure I was not only being honest with the research participants but also with myself.

Reflecting on the reality of my outsider position and the possible complications this could bring made it apparent that I would need to acquire an appropriate cultural advisor to ensure the integrity of the research. I approached Dr Gabriel Cué Guerrero, a lecturer from Tec de Monterrey (a university in Mexico City), who had undertaken substantial research in Chiapas, inquiring if this was something he would consider.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

When undertaking research involving individuals or communities, ethical considerations must be central to all decision-making. The researcher bears responsibility for participants' physical and mental well-being, ensuring their dignity, safety, and privacy are always protected (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014; O'Leary, 2017). An in-house ethics approval process was completed through Massey University's Development Studies programme, which involved submitting a document to two faculty

members, Professor Glenn Banks and Professor Regina Scheyvens, outlining participant recruitment methods, informed consent procedures, privacy and confidentiality measures, and cultural considerations, followed by a discussion meeting. The in-house process enabled me to submit a low-risk application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC), which granted formal ethical approval on 14 November 2024, thereby confirming the in-house approval.

5.5.1 Recruitment and Access to Participants

My participants consisted of Zapatista affiliates, individuals working within the Zapatista and autonomous Indigenous education system of Chiapas, and those who had conducted research in Zapatista zones. Due to the scepticism that Indigenous peoples and the Zapatistas often hold toward Western academics, I initially recruited participants through the cultural advisor, Dr Gabriel. I also approached Dr Levi Gahman, an academic who has worked extensively with the Zapatistas, and conducted an interview with him. Participation was always voluntary, with a koha[29] provided to all who consented to be interviewed.

5.5.2 Obtaining Informed Consent

Obtaining participant consent adhered to the MUHEC code of ethics. I provided Dr Gabriel with a 1-page sheet to present to all research participants in Spanish, Tzeltal or Tzotzil. This sheet explained the research questions, the process of data generation, and its intended use. Consent was obtained either verbally or in writing with the guidance of Dr Gabriel to educate me on cultural norms. The 1-page sheet also informed participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage prior to data analysis.

---

[29] Koha is a Māori term referring to a gift, donation, or contribution, often given as a gesture of respect, reciprocity, or support. It is not merely transactional but carries cultural significance, reflecting relationships, gratitude, and collective responsibility.

5.5.3 Privacy and confidentiality

Due to the sensitivity of the research topic, privacy and confidentiality measures were of utmost importance. The Zapatista community have been targeted by the Mexican Army and other State actors over the past three decades, and carelessness around privacy and confidentiality has the potential to result in unfavourable outcomes. Privacy and confidentiality of both people and place names were protected by using pseudonyms and securely storing identifiable information in the password-protected OneDrive supplied by Massey University. Access to participant data was restricted to myself, Dr Gabriel, and my supervisors only, with information kept in a password-protected folder.

5.5.4 Potential harm to participants/researcher/university

To prevent any possible harm to everyone involved, I implemented risk mitigation strategies, such as receiving direction from University staff in Mexico regarding local research protocols, adhering to cultural guidance, and engaging in regular check-ins with supervisors and advisors. Any data generated that could potentially harm either the participants or the wider community from publication was excluded. The decisions around what could result in harm were guided by the cultural advisor and my supervisors.

5.5.5 Promising access to information

Throughout this research, I was reminded of the inherent limitations of external studies in assisting Indigenous Zapatista communities. While they permitted this research, it was clear that my findings would likely be of little benefit to them, as their own research capabilities far surpass those of an outsider examining their community. Nonetheless, following the research protocols of MUHEC, I ensured that participants were directly or indirectly informed that the findings would be made available to the wider community. I also agreed to provide copies of the transcripts and the completed thesis translated into the relevant languages to any participant upon request.

5.5.6 Concerns of Sensitivity

As a Global North citizen and active participant in the neoliberal economy, I approached fieldwork in the Zapatista autonomous zone with caution. Transparency was a central concern to avoid misrepresenting the research or its purpose. It was essential to disclose my background and funding sources to participants before interviews, ensuring their participation aligned with their morals and political views. I was made aware of a researcher who upset the Zapatista community by failing to disclose that their funding came from the Ford Foundation, something a participant discovered mid-interview, leading to the termination of the fieldwork. Given the historical challenges created by people who share my background, I remained hypervigilant to practising full transparency and being mindful of behaviours that could trigger sensitivities.

Although the knowledge gained from my literature review, together with my position as the husband of an Indigenous Mexican psychologist, provided some insight into Indigenous perspectives on my research and positionality, I chose not to proceed with any fieldwork without first discussing the specifics of my intended conduct with my cultural advisor. It was also agreed that a one-page document outlining my background would be provided to all prospective participants as seen in Figure 5.1.

About the researcher:

My name is Joseph Brockliss, and I am a 40-year-old from the Māori tribe Ngā Ruahine. I am married to a wonderful woman from Oaxaca, Mexico, and together we are raising a beautiful child, blending the richness of our Indigenous cultures into our family life.

As someone with a Māori heritage, I have witnessed the damaging effects of systems that prioritise neoliberalism, government overreach, and the devaluation of Indigenous knowledge. These frameworks often silence the voices of Indigenous communities, exploit their resources, undermine their autonomy, and perpetuate inequities that disadvantage our people and erode our cultures.

My passion for researching the Zapatista education system is deeply rooted in a shared struggle for justice, agency, and well-being. The Zapatistas have demonstrated the transformative power of grassroots, community-led education systems that honour Indigenous traditions and empower local populations to determine their futures. This resonates profoundly with my aspirations for Māori communities and other Indigenous groups worldwide.

By exploring how the Zapatistas design and implement their education systems and how this contributes to indigenous well-being, I hope to foster dialogue between them and Māori communities. My goal is to create opportunities for mutual learning—sharing strategies for preserving Indigenous culture, achieving autonomy, and improving collective well-being.

This research has received funding from DevNet, an organisation supported by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. No funding has been accepted from multinational corporations, neoliberal organisations, or entities whose interests conflict with the values of the Zapatistas. The funding from DevNet supports the principles of Indigenous autonomy and self-determination central to this work

Figure 5.1 *Screenshot of the one-page document made to introduce the researcher.*

(Source: J Brockliss, 2025).

5.6 Data Generation/Fieldwork

This section outlines the processes involved in generating data during the remote fieldwork.

5.6.1 Addition of Cultural Advisor

The decision to approach Dr Gabriel to act as a cultural advisor was made to enhance the study's cultural authenticity and ethical integrity, addressing the shortcomings that my position posed in the data generation. As a Mexican national with existing constructive relationships within the Indigenous communities of Chiapas, his role helped bridge cultural and linguistic gaps while mitigating potential power imbalances that could arise from my position as an external researcher from a Global North institution (Nguyen et al., 2022). As described in more depth below, documents were drawn up to ensure clear expectations and responsibilities were established, with adequate remuneration agreed upon by both Dr Gabriel and my supervisors.

5.6.2 The Unexpected Evolution of the Research Design

Since research is an ongoing and adaptive process that requires continuous review and adjustment throughout data generation and analysis (Bryman, 2012; O'Leary, 2017; Yin, 2018), the research design outlined below was refined as data generation progressed. Precautions were taken to safeguard the research from travel disruptions caused by issues such as COVID-19. To ensure fieldwork stayed viable if travel was unfeasible, two fieldwork research designs were developed. The two fieldwork options were as follows:

PLAN A

Fieldwork: In-depth interviews with community members, educators, and local leaders to be conducted in person to gather qualitative insights into Indigenous knowledge inclusion and well-being. Additionally, participant observation during visits to autonomous Indigenous schools and community gatherings in Chiapas will provide contextual insights into how Indigenous knowledge is practised and how it contributes

to collective well-being. Participant selection and the structure of the interviews will be guided by Dr Gabriel.

PLAN B

Fieldwork: Interviews with community members, educators, and local leaders would be conducted online from Mexico City via Zoom. This version will also be guided by Dr. Gabriel.

While these two plans provided fieldwork options for both travel and no-travel scenarios, a third plan was proposed once fieldwork was ruled out due to safety concerns. On the 4th of November 2024, supervisor Dr Peter Howland advised me about reports of unrest in the Chiapas region, particularly in San Cristóbal, where the fieldwork was planned to be based. I then contacted employees from the Australian and New Zealand embassies, who informed me of travel risk developments in the area due to increased cartel activity. The cartels had taken control of the area to maintain routes from the Guatemalan border for drug and human trafficking purposes. The two embassies increased their travel advisory levels from 'exercise caution' to 'reconsider your need to travel' as seen in Figure 5.2.

smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/americas/mexico

Advice levels | Overview | Safety | Health | Local laws | Travel | Local contacts

Advice levels What does this mean? EXPAND ALL

Exercise a high degree of caution in Mexico overall.

Reconsider your need to travel to Chiapas State (except Palenque, if accessed by highway from Villahermosa, Tuxtla-Gutierrez, or by air, and San Cristobal de las Casas, if accessed by highway from Tuxtla-Gutierrez), Chihuahua State (except Chihuahua City and the Copper Canyon rail route), Colima State (except Manzanillo if accessed by air), Guanajuato State (except Federal Highway 45D, and areas of the State to the North-East of Federal Highway 45D), Guerrero State (except Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo if accessed by air), Michoacán (except Federal Highway 15D if transiting the state, Morelia by land if accessed from Federal Highway 15D via Federal Highways 43 or 48D, and Lazaro Cardenas by air only), North-western Durango, Sinaloa State (except Mazatlan and Los Mochis if accessed by air, and the Copper Canyon rail route), Sonora State (except Hermosillo, Guaymas/San Carlos and Puerto Penasco, if accessed by air), Tamaulipas State (except Tampico if accessed by air), and Zacatecas.

Overview

Safety

- Mexico has a high risk of violent crime, including murder, armed robbery, sexual assault, and kidnapping. Carjackers and armed robbers may target people travelling at traffic lights. Don't travel at night outside major cities. Drug-related violence is widespread.
- Plan your travel carefully. Don't travel at night outside major cities. Use major toll roads wherever possible or access cities directly by air travel. Other travel options and routes may have higher security risks.
- Be alert to the potential risks around drink spiking and methanol poisoning through consuming alcoholic drinks. See our advice on partying safely while overseas.
- Kidnapping and extortion are serious risks. Don't draw attention to your money or business affairs.

Figure 5.2 *Screenshot of the Smart Traveller webpage indicating increased travel risk to Chiapas, Mexico. (Source: The Australian Government's Smart Traveller website, 2024).*

Both supervisors and I agreed that this had rendered Plan A unfeasible. Upon meeting with Dr Gabriel and informing him of the need to implement Plan B, he offered a third option. As discussed in Section 5.4.1, positionality was a key consideration throughout this research. There were significant differences between my position as a researcher and the risks I faced compared to Dr. Gabriel, and he explained that the unrest in the area posed no real risk to him as a Mexican national. Because of this, he would be travelling to Chiapas for independent research regardless, and was open to the possibility of conducting the interviews in person. This became Plan C.

Plan C was relayed to my supervision team to confirm its viability. Both supervisors agreed this third option could be developed under the condition that sufficient precautions were taken to ensure the research's ethical principles were not compromised. Supervisor Professor Regina Scheyvens directed me to the innovative work of Nguyen et al. (2022) for direction when engaging in remote fieldwork. Inspiration drawn from the Nguyen et al. (2022) article led to a preparation plan that revised his role and responsibilities. Over the course of a month, we met in person, where I re-confirmed the research design, data handling procedures, interview methodology, and ethical considerations, reemphasising the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and culturally sensitive questioning. Towards the end of our meetings, we worked through a revised approach that became Plan C.

PLAN C

Dr. Gabriel conducted semi-structured interviews with community members, educators, and local leaders, following the interview guide we developed collaboratively. Throughout the data generation process, regular communication was maintained via Zoom, during which Dr. Gabriel provided updates and discussed any challenges encountered. Transcripts and recordings were uploaded to a secure, password-protected OneDrive folder for storage and later analysis.

Following the initial round of analysis, I sought clarification from several participants regarding Indigenous terminology and the spelling of specific Tsotsil and Tseltal phrases. Although follow-up was sometimes difficult due to the challenge of locating participants, those who were reached responded positively and were happy to answer the questions. Although full re-interviews were not conducted, these follow-ups added important linguistic and contextual accuracy to the data.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish. I translated the transcripts myself using the speech to text software available on the website PDF2GO.COM, and using ChatGPT to translate the Spanish text to English. I would then send it to Dr Gabriel to read and validate it. Although this allowed for careful, reflective engagement with the data, it also introduced interpretive challenges. Subtleties in phrasing, humour, and culturally embedded meanings occasionally required further clarification from Dr. Gabriel or participants.

5.7 Data Analysis

The data generated from the document analysis and semi-structured interviews were examined using a qualitative thematic approach. This method involves identifying recurring patterns, meanings, and concepts within the data, which were then organised into key themes for interpretation (Bowen, 2009). Initial themes were informed by the literature review and aligned closely with the research aims and questions. As analysis progressed, these themes were refined to better reflect the data emerging from participant responses and documents.

A colour-coded system was developed to organise and visually track the data according to thematic categories. The final coding themes were: *Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience*; *Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty*; *Social and Physical Infrastructure*; *Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation: Internal and External Challenges*; and *Collective Ethics*. These categories provided the framework for interpreting how Zapatista education initiatives relate to broader questions of Indigenous well-being and autonomy. The colour-coded thematic

approach ensured consistency across interview transcripts and documents and allowed for a layered analysis of how themes intersected in practice.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the intersecting methodological and ethical frameworks used to guide data generation and analysis within this research. The chosen approach of combining semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and thematic coding was selected as the most suitable means of investigating Indigenous voices regarding education and well-being in Zapatista and Indigenous communities of Chiapas. This methodology enabled open, in-depth exploration of participants' reported lived realities and cultural values, while upholding the ethical and cultural sensitivity required when researching among Indigenous peoples. Although field access was limited due to security threats and the sensitivities surrounding external research in Chiapas, complementary strategies such as working with a trusted cultural advisor and drawing on existing interview transcripts made a respectful and meaningful research process possible. The findings generated through these methods are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 6: Education, Identity, and the Interconnected Life of Indigenous Communities in Chiapas

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the main themes that I identified in the data generated through interviews and document analysis on Indigenous education practices in Chiapas. Rather than treating education as a separate, institutional process, participants repeatedly emphasised its integration with everyday life, cultural continuity, and community responsibility. The findings revealed that education was not confined to the classroom, nor defined by standardised measures of success. Instead, it was grounded in lived experiences, shared histories, and the needs and values of the community.

The themes explored in this chapter, Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience; Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty; Social and Physical Infrastructure; Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation; Internal and External Challenges; and Collective Ethics, reflect the areas participants most frequently returned to when discussing education. These areas were not experienced in isolation, but were interconnected, co-generative, and mutually reinforcing. Each section of this chapter delves into one of these themes, showing how participants understand and practise education as something deeply tied to land, culture, and relationships.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Zapatistas inspired other Indigenous movements in Chiapas to take control of their education systems, and the participants in this research included members of both. While these groups predominantly share similarities, there are some differences due to relationships and contextual circumstances. Throughout the following chapters, when referring to the broader Indigenous education movement in Chiapas, I will use the term 'autonomous Indigenous schools'. However, when the findings or analysis specifically relate to Zapatista schools, I will refer to them by that name. As explained in the methodology section, due to the sensitive nature of the research and the ongoing political context in Chiapas, the identities of most

participants have been protected through the use of pseudonyms. The exception is Dr Levi Gahman, who has published extensively on the Zapatistas and related issues and provided consent to be identified in this research. The table below provides a brief overview of the participants and their respective cultural or regional affiliations.

Table 6.1 Research participant descriptions

Pseudonym / Identifier	Cultural or Regional Affiliation	Location / Context	Notes
The Tseltal Compañero	Tseltal Maya (Indigenous)	Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico	Indigenous educator and community member involved in autonomous schooling
The Tsotsil Compañero	Tsotsil Maya (Indigenous)	Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico	Indigenous community member contributing to education and agroecology
The Lacandon Compañero	Lacandon Maya (Indigenous)	Selva Lacandona (Lacandon Jungle), Chiapas	Represents perspectives from jungle-based communities with distinct traditions
The Morelia Compañero	Zapatista Civilian (Non-specified ethnicity)	Caracol IV: Morelia, Chiapas	Long-standing Zapatista educator from an autonomous municipality
Dr Levi [30](Levi Gahman)	Non-Indigenous researcher and activist	University of Liverpool, UK	Collaborator with Zapatista communities; expertise in radical education and well-being

6.2 Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience

The efforts to preserve local languages within Chiapas Indigenous education organisations are intrinsically tied to the core values for which they fight to preserve. The Tseltal Compañero explained the functional importance of Indigenous language preservation in Indigenous school models, commenting:

[30] Note. All participant descriptions are based on interview data, except for the Morelia compañero, whose description was drawn from a document analysis source (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2008).

"The curriculum focused on strengthening local culture and reviving the community's knowledge systems. A key part was valuing the students' native language, making sure students felt welcomed and understood in the way knowledge was conveyed."

In contrast to mainstream models where Indigenous languages are often sidelined or tokenised, this approach puts language at the forefront of knowledge transmission, ensuring students feel valued. To preserve these languages, educators integrate them into both everyday classroom instruction and the curriculum itself.

At the same time, Indigenous educators acknowledge their sociopolitical reality. The Tsotsil Compañero described this when explaining: "the State around us is speaking Castellano[31]... the language of colonisers and conquistadors." For this reason, they promote bilingualism, not as assimilation, but as strategic resistance. They went on to explain, "We need to be proficient in speaking the colonial languages... but what is going to sustain us as a people... is speaking our language." For instance, in Oventik and other autonomous Indigenous schools, both Spanish and local Indigenous languages such as Tzotzil are used side by side, allowing students to engage with content in their mother tongue.

Using a bilingual approach affirms cultural identity while enabling more nuanced learning. It encourages students to discuss, question, and reflect using the conceptual frameworks embedded in their local languages. Storytelling, regional history, and oral traditions are deliberately incorporated into teaching to maintain the linguistic and cultural continuity between generations. The Lacandon Compañero described the practice of including elders in classrooms, presenting subjects in their Indigenous language. Inviting elders into these settings bridged generations and strengthened Indigenous language use by sharing community-specific histories. This created space for expressions absent from formal textbooks, further validating local knowledge. These

[31] *Castellano* is the term commonly used in Mexico to refer to the Spanish language, distinguishing it from Indigenous languages such as Nahuatl, Maya, or Zapotec (García, 2019).

practices ensure Indigenous languages remain living, evolving tools of knowledge transmission and community stability.

The preservation of Indigenous language is not limited to storytelling and cultural knowledge transmission. It actively informs the teaching of core academic subjects. The Tseltal Compañero described how core subjects like mathematics and science are taught using the local Indigenous languages to give the students a strong, familiar foundation to attach more complex concepts with as the education progresses. The Tseltal Compañero explained that "starting from their own language and experiences before moving to abstract concepts" made it possible for students to understand learning concepts on their own terms. This process reverses the colonial learning model by prioritising what is known as *primary discourse* (the everyday language, cultural practices, and knowledge systems of the community) (Andersen, 2012). These are then used to introduce *secondary discourse* (more abstract or external knowledge, such as formal academic subjects), but only after this learning is grounded in local realities (Andersen, 2012). In this way, the Zapatista curriculum challenges traditional pedagogies by reconnecting subjects like mathematics and science with lived experience, including culture, history, land, and labour. Instead, it insists that all knowledge must first be anchored in the language, environments (social, cultural, physical), and perspectives of the learner.

Dr. Levi reiterated the importance of Indigenous language preservation in Chiapas, quoting:

> *"Any education system engages in violence when it takes language away from Indigenous youth. For the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas, such a loss is not only a loss of identity but also an egregious violation, one that can inflict profound harm on the youth themselves, their communities, and their broader movements if they are denied the right to speak their Indigenous language."*

The Indigenous communities of Chiapas resist being domesticated and refabricated into different subjects through State schooling, which often alienates Indigenous youth by denying their language, dismissing their culture as 'backwards' and 'out of date,' and

imposing Spanish as the default. Dr. Levi connected this to Fanon's concept of internalised oppression[32], warning that "You can teach youth that they're worthless" if authority figures invalidate their cultural roots. In contrast, as Dr. Levi explained, the Zapatistas insist that "The youth need to be speaking their language" to sustain "their life, their identity, their heritage, their cosmovision, as well as who they are as a people."

The prioritisation of Indigenous language also forms part of the Zapatistas' broader mental health strategy. Dr. Levi explained that "they are deeply concerned and committed to the mental health of Zapatista students," and one way this is addressed is by shielding them from State systems where students "weren't speaking their language," and faced "a variety of different forms of racism." Language preservation is tied to cultural pride and emotional resilience, preventing youth from internalising the sense of worthlessness that comes from having their identity ridiculed or erased. Dr. Levi explained that to the Zapatistas, language is not just a skill to be learned, but "what will cultivate mental health" and protect their movement's soul across generations.

Beyond academic framing, language is also a vehicle for transmitting cultural values, ethics, and ways of being. As the Tsotsil Compañero described, "Language carries a lot of meaning, including values and ways of caring for the world." They went on to explain that in mainstream schools, Indigenous languages are often lost "because of multiculturalism and the dominance of Spanish," stripping young people of key cultural reference points. However, as the Tsotsil Compañero explained, in the Indigenous education frameworks of Chiapas, words are seen as instructions for living. They explained that a phrase like *"Paso tras uno la montón"* (to act with full sincerity) must not only be spoken but "practised fully, from the heart." Language is a fundamental pillar in Indigenous life for many communities as it sustains cultural traditions and guides meaningful and positively valued behaviour. State schooling tends to exclusively

[32] See Fanon's 2023 "Black skin, white masks" for insights into his theory.

prioritise intellectual learning, but the Tsotsil Compañero emphasised the importance of "feeling, acting, and living with sincerity and care," a worldview encapsulated in the community concept of *ch'ulel* (life, spirit, language, thought, feeling, learning or wisdom, consciousness and essence). Educators are not just teaching literacy, they are nurturing ethical citizens who live in harmony with each other, with the land, and with ancestral wisdom. This reflects an education system that seeks not to compete with mainstream models, but to transform what education can mean when it is built upon community-rooted language and values. This fosters a sense of pride within the communities, as illustrated in Figure 6.1, where their Indigenous identities are openly celebrated.

Figure 6.1 *Image of Zapatista children performing a solidarity gesture (Source: The Roar Mag, n.d.).*

6.3 Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty

The inclusion of Indigenous agricultural practices in school curricula was identified as a recurring theme in both interviews conducted throughout this research and in other Zapatista literature sources. The passing down of agricultural knowledge was an essential and fundamental aspect of all school life. However, exactly what, and in which way, this was taught varied. As Dr. Levi explained, this was a "decolonial land-based or place-based education" system. Each curriculum was different, as they needed to be specific to the practices of the community and the environments in which they resided. As the Tseltal Compañero stated:

"Its strength is in being grounded in local reality. When we designed our curriculum, we based it on local conditions, how people live, what they grow, and the language they speak. If a community grows coffee, then coffee should be part of the curriculum. If they grow corn or other crops, then those should be included too."

To put it differently, if the cultivation of a particular plant plays a central role in local life, then it becomes a learning tool within the classroom.

Once again, community participation is central to teaching agricultural approaches in the Indigenous schools of Chiapas. Due to the intimate nature of Indigenous knowledge transmission, agricultural techniques are not presented solely in textbook form but also transferred orally by community elders and local farmers experienced in the practical application of the methods. The lessons are taken using hands-on techniques that bring students into direct contact with the earth, using community knowledge to guide the curriculum. By doing this, lived experiences, stories, and environment-specific knowledge that have been obtained through experience can be passed down directly by the people who know it best. As described by the Tsotsil Compañero:

"They are the ones who teach how to plant corn, coffee, and harvest crops. I see them as the true teachers of life. Even if they don't know how to read or write, they have survived wars, droughts, and hunger."

By including different areas of society in the teaching process, the school acts less like an institution and more like an extension of the community itself. This is extremely important as the concept of a cooperative community is a central component of the Indigenous communities and Zapatista ethos.

Participants described how educators used agricultural lessons for students to make sense of other subjects by strengthening their connection with the land. Mathematics and science, for example, were often linked to the practical agricultural lessons being learnt in the field. The Tseltal Compañero explained, "When students were learning organic farming or coffee production, the curriculum would adapt to those processes".

The agricultural field work doubled as a laboratory that provided physical examples of the scientific theories being learnt in the classroom. The Tseltal Compañero recalled:

> *"In gardening classes, they learned what each crop (radishes, mustard greens, etc.) required. With coffee, they studied its effects on the body and its local relevance, starting from their own language and experiences before moving to abstract concepts."*

These weren't just names on a worksheet. Each plant became a lesson in observation, care, and timing. Students paid attention to the specific needs of different vegetables, learning directly from the soil, under the guidance of those who had worked it for generations. Students extended their learning beyond textbooks by gaining hands-on experience during harvest time, observing plant development, and understanding each plant's connection to the land and local economy. In doing so, they also deepened their connection with the environment, all while using the Indigenous agricultural techniques unique to their community. As seen in Figure 6.2, this relationship with the earth through agricultural practices becomes a source of celebration.

Figure 6.2 *Photo of Members of a Zapatista community enact a performance representing life after 1994. (Source: Briy, A, 1994).*

The incorporation of Indigenous agricultural knowledge into the curricula was not designed to prepare students for the possibility of commercial agricultural careers but rather to prepare them for life itself. As the Tsotsil Compañero described:

> *"If someone does not become a professional, they still need to know how to grow their own food to survive. Therefore, we combine academic learning with survival skills and knowledge that help people live a meaningful life."*

By empowering students through agricultural practices, they were able to achieve food autonomy and security. These self-sufficiency methods doubled as acts of social and political rebellion as they showcased the ability of communities to reclaim control over their food production and consumption traditions and not succumb to market reliance. Indigenous knowledge also extended beyond food to include traditional medicine. The Lacandon Compañero described how more familiar practices, such as developing traditional herbal medicines, were also common practices alongside growing fruit and vegetables. The importance of these areas to the community can be seen in Figure 6.3. They expressed that their goals for including subsistence agriculture in schooling curricula were to strengthen their autonomy while preserving Indigenous knowledge practices to secure their communities against threats of exploitation, food insecurity, and ill health.

6.4 Social and Physical Infrastructure

Figure 6.3 *Photo of a sign showing the importance of social infrastructure such as health clinics and schools. (Source: Radnovich, n.d.).*

The relationship between education, shelter, and community infrastructure in Chiapas' Indigenous schooling systems continues to reflect the holistic worldview in which their learning framework is based. Knowledge is constructed alongside physical structures, both literally and figuratively. Within this context, building and maintaining housing and communal infrastructure (e.g., classrooms, community meeting halls, water systems, and pathways) are more than basic needs; they are vessels for intergenerational learning, participation, and dignity.

As seen in the agriculture section above, education is embedded in everyday tasks that support community survival and cohesion. The Tsotsil Compañero explained how mathematics, for example, was not taught abstractly but emerged organically from the act of building. "Maths was taught by building real structures. Students would build a house and then learn about shapes like squares, cubes, and diagonals." In this way, education served as a living practice, reinforcing local relevance and practical value while grounding formal academic concepts in everyday Indigenous realities. Again, this

contrasts sharply with conventional Western schooling models, which often emphasise the acquisition of abstract knowledge (particularly at primary, secondary, and some tertiary levels) before students apply it in specialised occupations or practical contexts (Biggs et al., 2022). In contrast, Zapatista education consistently foregrounds the integration of abstract and everyday-practical knowledge, embedding learning in lived experience, local labour, and community life.

This relationship between infrastructure and learning was embedded in the rhythm of daily life. As Dr. Levi recounted:

> *" It was interesting to see the day-to-day school routine, maybe paused because there's a waterline that's broken. And the education promoter needs to go help, repair an irrigation system that's providing water to a field."*

In such moments, education was not suspended but redirected. Older youth would often accompany the promoter, engaging in hands-on repair work, while younger students remained behind to continue their learning through peer-facilitated discussions. These moments revealed a dynamic in which "school" could shift locations and formats depending on community needs, embodying an education system that was responsive, adaptive, and grounded in collective life.

Rather than viewing school in the Western context as a separate institution with a rigid timetable and definite walls, the Indigenous and Zapatista model of education is fluid and holistic, reflecting the lived needs of the community. Learning did not stop when physical labour began, but was instead activated by it. Dr. Levi shared that during one visit, he found himself drawn into unexpected "DIY work on an irrigation system," underscoring how involvement in maintenance tasks was not only educational for youth but for anyone involved in the education process. This fluid boundary between school and community reveals a pedagogical approach where responding to infrastructural needs is not an interruption to education, but an opportunity for it.

This deep integration of civic participation into educational experience underscores the idea that students are not just recipients of knowledge but future stewards of

community infrastructure. The Tsotsil Compañero explained that young people were "expected to use their learning to support local governance or productive projects," affirming education as a tool for community empowerment. Such practices reflect the ethical and political core of Indigenous peoples and the Zapatista ethos, where communities are sustained by active participation and shared responsibility rather than individualistic and capitalist-driven behaviours.

In sum, the infrastructure and shelter components of education in Chiapas are not isolated from learning; they are learning. As can be seen in Figure 6.4, they build the schools that build the community. They function as both a method and an outcome of culturally grounded education, where building a house is also building knowledge, and where contributing to communal infrastructure is an expression of interdependence and agency. This model resists the fragmentation of education from everyday life, reimagining it as a process of building futures, both theoretically and practically, from the ground up.

6.5 Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation

"Mainstream education is designed to create employees for capitalism. In contrast, this system teaches children to be aware that education is meant to serve life, not just to secure a job." Tsotsil Compañero.

Figure 6.4 *Photo depicting Zapatista students wearing bandanas in a community-built classroom. (Source: The Roar Mag, n.d.).*

Chiapas' history of marginalisation and neoliberal encroachment has resulted in autonomy being embedded into daily life, governance, and education. Within this context, Indigenous education frameworks in Chiapas seek to preserve the right to define what knowledge is, what value it holds, how it is transmitted, and for what purpose. As the Tseltal Compañero stated:

> *"Always consider that education models must be grounded in the lived experiences of the people. It's not enough to listen only to teachers or principals following State or UNESCO guidelines. Any education project must account for local plurality and include diverse voices. Only then can we build something truly transformative."*

By resisting imposed Western capitalist ideologies, the Indigenous education approach in Chiapas asserts self-determination by designing systems that reflect local priorities.

Education serves not as a means to meet State benchmarks or produce compliant workers, but to foster emancipation, identity preservation, and self-governance.

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned the importance of freedom being a core concept in the education system and curriculum. The Tsotsil Compañero described their role not simply as a teacher but as a catalyst for consciousness. In their words:

"It (education) focuses on the need to raise awareness in the children and not only teach them the facts... What is most important to us as promoters of education is that the children are conscious of their situation and free."

This approach to education, as a tool for socio-psychological freedom, contrasts with mainstream models that prioritise skill acquisition for the labour market.

This educational liberation is not freedom from any external epistemology, but the freedom to decide how their communities engage with different knowledge systems, and that it is exercised on their terms. Several interviewees described the concept of *liberation* through education as a fundamental component of a free society. It signalled the tangible progress made toward community-defined autonomous goals through collective agency. Indigenous education narratives in Chiapas empower students to critically examine their social and historical context while equipping them to engage with the dominant systems around them, without being subsumed by them. As quoted in Figure 6.5, "To build a world where many worlds fit". The Tsotsil Compañero described this strategic blending as an intentional, pluriversal act. The Lacandon Compañero admitted, "Yes, we use State-edited books, but only for reference, not as textbooks." This careful curation of knowledge reflects a pedagogy of discernment, where outside materials are not rejected outright, but are stripped of their authority and recontextualised on the community's own terms. It is not anti-education, but counter-education, a deliberate act of reclaiming learning as a communal and political process. The Tseltal Compañero similarly reflected:

“To really educate, we need to integrate Spanish with local models so that students understand both. This creates a different kind of learner, one who is free, who has autonomy and critical thinking.”

Figure 6.5 *Photograph of a mural showing the importance the Zapatistas place on education and the liberation of their children. The text translates to: “To build a world where many worlds fit. Command by obeying.” (Source: Servindi, n.d.).*

Social autonomy is not a fixed state. It remains a dynamic and contested process, shaped by ongoing tensions between tradition and change, community and State, social determination and systemic constraint. The key point in the Zapatistas and Chiapas Indigenous education systems is that they maintain their autonomy through the process. Zapatista education embraces plurality while rejecting imposed binaries between tradition and modernity. “Oftentimes there is a misconception that Indigenous education is outmoded ... that they need to get with the modern times,” Dr. Levi said. Yet, Zapatista communities “are incorporating tech as well as preparing youth for the

digital world ... They know what's up with respect to the online world." At the same time, Dr. Levi affirmed that education was deeply rooted in local rhythms: "Learning by the soles of their feet." This pluriversal model filters external knowledge through a culturally grounded lens, creating a hybrid form of learning that honours local epistemologies while engaging critically with mainstream educational content. The result is an education that equips learners to navigate multiple worlds, but submit to none.

Dr. Levi used the bell hooks' quote "Education is a practice of freedom"[33] to describe the Indigenous communities in Chiapas' approach to learning, while several other participants referenced Paulo Freire's famous book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1970) to describe their methods. Whatever the theory they referenced, all participants in some form addressed how the education systems push back against centuries of exclusion and marginalisation by reasserting the right of communities to define their own futures. It reorients learning away from the labour market and toward life, community, and freedom. In doing so, it reflects *the Zapatistas'* core principles, that societies and their institutions must be shaped by the people they affect. Indigenous communities in Chiapas are not waiting for permission or recognition; they are already enacting the future they envision, one lesson, one conversation, and one liberated mind at a time.

6.6 Internal and External Challenges

The Indigenous education institutes in Chiapas do not exist within a vacuum. They exist in constant tension with the broader Mexican national identity and perceptions of success influenced by globalisation. Internal debates about fully localised control continue to surface. The Lacandon Compañero spoke candidly about this:

> *"I think the educational institution still struggles with the concept of autonomy. There is always some level of hesitation about fully embracing a localised perspective."*

---

[33] Further information about hooks' theory can be found in her 2014 book 'Teaching to Transgress.'

The pursuit of social autonomy is layered and fraught with contradiction. Many families still feel the temptation to send their children to Spanish-language schools, which are often perceived as pathways to better employment or broader social recognition.

These internal conflicts are often validated through real-world experiences that privilege Western ways of knowing and being, undermining and belittling the value of Indigenous knowledge and undoing any work of community empowerment achieved. The Tsotsil Compañero illustrated this vividly, saying:

> *"One of the biggest pressures is documentation. If you don't attend an official school and don't have a certificate, it is as if you never studied at all. Even if you have deep community knowledge, how to lead, build, or cultivate, you are seen as uneducated if you lack a diploma. A campesino (farmer) may know how to measure land and build a house, but without an architect's degree, their skills are not valued. There was once a case where an architect couldn't measure land properly, but a campesino did it effortlessly because of his experience. However, only the architect's credentials were recognised."*

This anecdote distils the essence of the challenges those who possess Indigenous knowledge face. Practical, context-specific knowledge is rendered invisible unless it passes through the filter of institutional validation. Expertise in this system is measured by the paper that certifies it, not by real-world experience or capability. This devaluation of Indigenous knowledge causes conflicting narratives for the communities of Chiapas.

Such experiences illuminate a tension at the heart of many rural education systems. Young people are shown through mainstream sources that success lies elsewhere. "Many aspire to have a job and earn money because they are taught that education leads to employment," said the Tsotsil Compañero. The equation is simple: more certificates equal more status, more pay, and more mobility. Yet the cost of this mobility is often the loss of rootedness. The Tsotsil Compañero went on to say:

> *"Unfortunately, this often means they don't return to their communities. Some do, but they no longer contribute because they feel superior. They even stop using their given*

names and prefer to be called by their titles, "Licenciado" (graduate), "Doctor" (Doctor). This creates a divide between those with degrees and those without."

This adds more complexity to the relationship between Indigenous communities and education, as well as how Indigenous knowledge is positioned against mainstream education. The internalisation of capitalist logics of productivity and hierarchy fragments communal solidarity and undermines reciprocal relationships. Rather than enhancing local life, it can become a tool of alienation, removing students from their roots rather than deepening their capacity to serve their communities.

This divergence of values creates friction between generations. Elders watching the internalisation of consumerist ideals express concern. "They worry that young people will lose their sense of care for Mother Earth, focusing instead on materialism and personal gain," said the Tsotsil Compañero. Here, the tension is created from a range of cultural, moral, spiritual, and ecological conflicts. As young people begin to idealise city life, seeing it as synonymous with progress, they may begin to devalue the practices and principles of their own communities. Farming becomes a symbol of poverty, not sustainability, Indigenous languages become an embarrassment rather than a lifeline to ancestral memory.

Paramilitary violence further intensifies these challenges, remaining a constant threat. Figure 6.6 shows an Indigenous woman opposing the installation of a military camp in X'oyep in 1998, indicating that tensions between factions have persisted since the Zapatistas' initial uprising. As the Morelia compañero explained:

"The paramilitary sometimes threaten us, mainly when the weather is unsettled, when it rains for example. They use it as an advantage to turn up because it ensures that everyone is grouped together in the same place. What the people do, if they have to, is leave the caracol and take refuge in specific places that exist in the mountains for this purpose … Insecurity and distrust provoke fear." (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2008).

In this context, education is not simply a matter of pedagogy, but an act of defiance and a commitment to cultural survival in the face of systemic hostility. Dr. Levi recalled that

“When I was there, a Zapatista primary school teacher was assassinated by paramilitaries.” He added, “It was sobering. But Indigenous schools are seen as a threat to normative Western, capitalist-centric forms of education.” In the context of Chiapas, education is an act of defiance. Teaching Indigenous knowledge outside of State control, using community-defined curricula, and doing so in autonomous territories makes educators political targets. Paramilitaries, federales, and increasingly, *Narco’s* represent constant dangers, and these forces often see autonomous education as a threat to the hegemonic order. “They’re on a day-to-day basis concerned with that,” Dr. Levi said. The stakes of education in this environment are survival and resistance, not merely literacy and numeracy.

Figure 6.6 *Women of X´oyep, Chenalhó, Chiapas (Source: Valtierra,1998).*

Indigenous education institutions can also be challenged internally by external influences. The Tseltal Compañero spoke of difficulties experienced when outside educators taught or consulted in the Indigenous communities, “Many teachers who arrive… only speak Spanish and don’t understand the conceptual frameworks of

Indigenous knowledge." This is not just a linguistic barrier, it is an moral and epistemological one. The arrival of monolingual Spanish-speaking teachers into Tsotsil- or Tseltal-speaking communities introduces not only a new language but also a different way of seeing the world. The cosmovision that shapes Indigenous life, one that centres reciprocity, collective responsibility, and respect for the land, is often unintelligible within State-sanctioned educational frameworks. The Lacandon Compañero echoed this, explaining how these external teachers, unfamiliar with local rhythms and relational customs, often created more "dissonance than dialogue."

Dr. Levi expanded on this, explaining that outsiders sometimes bring assumptions that education must look a certain way, and become uncomfortable when Zapatista schools do not conform: "There has been no shortage of folks from international contexts who would come in and be like, oh, I didn't know that about the Zapatistas, and that's kind of rubbing me the wrong way." For instance, some visitors critique the Zapatista approach to labour within educational settings. "There are some people who are like, oh, it is a bit more rigid concerning gender divisions of labour than I was anticipating," Dr. Levi noted. These critiques reflect a clash of values. While Zapatista communities are continually negotiating and evolving their approach to gender and education, these changes are shaped by the community's own cycles of work, ceremony, and decision-making, where gendered divisions of labour are acknowledged, debated, and adapted according to Indigenous praxis rather than imposed Western liberal timelines.

This becomes a key site of cultural tension. Even leftist international visitors, who come in solidarity, can carry implicit expectations about what 'liberatory education' should look like. "Sometimes the international left can be very impatient," Dr. Levi said. "It's just basically like, I thought this was a revolutionary utopia." But in Zapatista communities, education is not a utopian import. It is deeply rooted in local language, farming cycles, historical memory, resistance to neoliberal intrusion, and the interwoven roles of gender, age, family, and community. It cannot be fast-tracked or standardised. "It wouldn't be a Zapatista community," Dr. Levi added, "If you imposed

a foreign model of education … even if it was the international left being like, here's the direction you need to be."

Ultimately, education in Zapatista territory is about political, epistemic, and pedagogical autonomy. It represents a refusal to adopt external models, even those that are well-meaning, and a steadfast commitment to building from within. As Dr. Levi reflects, "What's in your heart? If your 'no' is to colonial capitalist modernity and the havoc it's wreaking on the world, then we'll lock arms." In this context, as Dr. Levi explains, "education becomes an act of constructing alternatives, collective *yeses*, by embracing community-defined ways of living and learning that resist homogenisation." By doing this, Chiapas education institutes attempt to mitigate these challenges by inviting allies not to lead or redesign, but to listen, respect, and accompany, without interfering with the community's right to determine what, how, and why their children learn.

6.7 Collective Ethics

"According to us Zapatistas, the place of teaching and learning, the school, is the collective. That is, the community. And the teachers and the students form the collective. All and all. So that there is no teacher or teacher, but there is a collective that teaches, that shows, that forms, and in it and with it the person learns and, in turn, teaches." (EZLN, 2013)[34]

As seen in the quote above, the Zapatistas frame education as a collective endeavour, where the community itself teaches and learns together. All interviewees identified collective ethics as an essential element of the Indigenous education frameworks in Chiapas. This shared ethos actively contradicts the individualism that exists within prevailing Western education. Dr. Levi explained, "Western education wants to teach you to climb the ladder, get to the top, and earn more than the rest of your community.

[34] EZLN stands for *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation).

It teaches you to compete. Here, the Zapatistas do the opposite. They learn together, work together, and grow together."

Zapatista education is not competition but a collaborative and social practice aimed at reinforcing social ties rather than individual achievement. This was reiterated by the Lacandon Compañero, who described why competition is avoided intentionally in the classroom:

"We don't make distinctions between pupils who know more and those who know less, nor between the clever and those less so. Neither does there exist individualism, it is a collective education. We don't look for personal triumph as individuals but as a team. The children are therefore better at their studies as they must share these skills with everyone else. There aren't any quizzes or competitions to see who can do a specific task better. That doesn't exist here."

There are no tests, grades, or competing ranks that allow for a redefinition of success, one that does not rely on individual achievement but on what each learner contributes. This dynamic is also reflected in school terminology, as traditional hierarchical designations like "teacher" and "student" are overturned with the more egalitarian *compañero*. Figure 6.7 shows this cooperative environment in action. When asked about his experience, the Morelia Compañero said: "When I arrived here, I had a bourgeois idea ... that I would come to teach. It has turned out to be the opposite, I have learnt the most. Not just at an educational level but also about life, collective living, and their organisation" (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2008).

Figure 6.7 *Photo of children in the classroom. (Source: The Lacandon Compañero, 2024).*

Dr. Levi mentioned this as well when describing how problem-solving within Zapatista education structures is addressed:

"We could probably find a far more accurate answer if we worked collectively rather than individually. In Zapatista education, it's never about one great man who's going to save us. That logic doesn't belong here."

This is a tactic of resisting the 'great man' language that underlies Western epistemology, and instead employing a relational epistemology by which truth is negotiated in conversation and by consensus. Authority, too, is redefined in the Zapatista schools. The Morelia Compañero described how *"they help teach respect, especially for those who don't hold formal titles"* (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2008). A child may be recognised as an authority based on the way they speak or what they know. In this case, authority is acquired not through institutional credentials but

through demonstrated ethical practice and reputation from society, regardless of age or formal position.

The ethical nature of Zapatista education also manifests itself in how it engages with more universal societal responsibilities. One practice outlined by the Morelia Compañero demonstrates this integration:

"Upon turning 18, youth are expected to serve the community unless they continue studying. This way, they remain engaged in community life rather than just focusing on personal success" (Workers Solidarity Movement, 2008).

This system reverses the prevalent conception of education as a means of social mobility or individual 'escape' by basing it on the obligations of society. Speaking, listening, and relational responsibility are not considered soft skills but as fundamental modes of engagement. As described by Dr. Levi:

"If you don't speak up and try to help the group, your ideas are not useful. We teach kids to speak, but not just for themselves, to speak on behalf of the group, to listen, and to make others feel heard too."

The importance of participation was further emphasised by Dr. Levi when he explained: "Rather than youth being seen and not heard, our youth need their voices to be heard. We provide them with the skills to tell stories from their own vantage point ... to the wider world." Education, in this respect, is not only about sharing knowledge but also about building ethical relationships, self-expression, and community duty. Education is a place where young people learn to strive for the common good, know collective struggles, and carry stories that preserve cultural identity but provide dialogue with the rest of the world.

Ultimately, the data generated points to the Zapatista and Indigenous education institutes in Chiapas being grounded in a set of ethical commitments that break from extractive, competitive, and hierarchical patterns of development. Instead, education is a practice of learning to live together in dignity, care, and responsibility for each other. By putting collective ethics at its core, Zapatista education not only reconstructs

what is known but also offers a radical challenge to neoliberal education and its value and success models.

6.8 Conclusion

Numerous sections from within this findings chapter included instances where key themes identified interwove within themselves. Collective ethics took the shape of community participation in examples where older generations contributed to lessons by sharing language through both storytelling and agricultural classes. However, environmental awareness was present not only in the agricultural section, but also in community infrastructure and educational autonomy. The traditional lines that define where education begins and life ends were repeatedly shown to be largely absent in the Indigenous education models, as the comprehension of their universe was an education in its own right. Indigenous universes and their institutions are not static. They are not exclusively bound to tradition, and they continuously transform as they navigate their path through engagements with foreign cultures and resources. They do this, however, with great caution, and on their terms, taking care to give space for other worlds, as they protect their own. Like any culture, there are discussions and tensions related to new directions, but ultimately, the way forward is guided by a unifying belief in collective autonomy. The Zapatista and autonomous Indigenous schooling model resists the compartmentalisation and competitive logic of neoliberal education, instead offering a living pedagogy rooted in collective care, ethical responsibility, and epistemic plurality. In doing so, it challenges dominant development paradigms and affirms that another form of education, and another world, is not only possible but already in motion.

Chapter 7. A Pluriversal Approach to Understanding the Findings

7.1 Introduction

Buen vivir offers a holistic framework for understanding well-being as it is experienced and enacted by communities, emphasising balance, reciprocity, and collective flourishing rather than individual achievement. In this chapter, the term 'well-being' is used in the sense of *buen vivir* well-being, which encompasses social, personal, and environmental dimensions of life, reflecting the interconnectedness of people, communities, and the natural world (Mero-Figueroa et al., 2020). This chapter will analyse the extent to which the Indigenous education programs in Chiapas support people's well-being by embodying principles of *buen vivir*, while also recognising that such frameworks are not applied here to impose external definitions or universal standards. Rather, they are used as a lens for engaging with Indigenous knowledge, values, and practices as part of a broader pluriverse in which many worlds of meaning coexist. While academic literature may suggest that the curriculum designs and schooling structures of autonomous Indigenous communities foster well-being within their populations, it is essential to reiterate that the Zapatistas themselves have made it clear that such external observations do not define them. My approach, therefore, is pluriversal: I use references and theoretical frameworks as tools for analytical comprehension, while recognising that they are not representations of how communities necessarily understand or articulate their own realities. The section below describes how I, as the author, have interpreted the findings.

7.2 Analysis of Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience Findings

Section 6.2 of the findings highlighted the significance attributed to the preservation of Indigenous language within the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas. Active efforts are made to ensure that Indigenous language is situated as a central component of curriculum design. By doing this, they are grounding the education of future generations in a foundational aspect of their Indigenous identity. Current literature on

language preservation highlights that retaining Indigenous languages is closely linked to community well-being, functioning not only as a form of cultural expression but also as a means of resistance and resilience (Olko et al., 2022). *Buen vivir* literature also points to the importance of language preservation (Flood & Rohloff, 2018). Arcila Calderón et al. (2018) note that well-being is fostered through collective and relational practices grounded in cultural continuity, making language an essential pillar of a dignified life. The links between language preservation and well-being are particularly evident among communities heavily impacted by assimilation and marginalisation efforts (Olko et al., 2022). The reality of cultural assaults remains deeply familiar to the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas, who have experienced numerous attempts to destroy their language and culture over the past 500 years. Due to this, the importance placed on language preservation is consistently repeated by all participants in Section 6.2, who emphasised how crucial the use of Indigenous languages was for maintaining both student well-being and a strong sense of Indigenous identity.

The preservation of Indigenous languages restores intergenerational connection, reasserting cultural identity while nurturing the bonds between individuals and their communities (Henze & Davis, 1999). This was evident in the findings of Section 6.2, which highlighted how autonomous Indigenous schools in Chiapas valued the inclusion of community elders in classroom activities, particularly through practices such as storytelling. Empirical research further supports the idea that Indigenous language use is positively associated with both community-based and psychological well-being. Olko et al. (2022) found that Indigenous language preservation in Nahua[35] communities in Mexico was strongly linked with greater scores on the widely used Satisfaction with Life Scale. This highlights the connection between ancestral language use and social well-being, even in contexts of advanced language erosion (Swee & Biddle, 2012; Paredo,

---

[35] The Nahua people are an Indigenous group native to central Mexico, known historically as the descendants of the Aztecs (or Mexica). They speak various dialects of Nahuatl, having maintained many cultural and linguistic traditions despite centuries of colonisation, marginalisation, and assimilation pressures (Lockhart, 1994).

2019). Indigenous language preservation efforts within the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas, viewed alongside literature linking language maintenance to well-being, illustrate how the region's Indigenous curriculum not only strengthens individual and collective well-being but also aligns with *buen vivir* principles by fostering communal harmony, cultural continuity, and sustainable social relationships (Chassagne, 2019).

However, language is just one component that links cultural preservation to well-being in Indigenous communities. Localised cultural engagement has been shown to play a significant role in both individual and social dimensions of well-being (Reyes-Martínez, 2022). At the individual level, participation in cultural activities has been linked to enhanced general well-being, improved quality of life, and better physical and mental health outcomes (Clift, 2012; Reyes-Martínez, 2022). On a broader social scale, such engagement contributes to stronger social inclusion and community integration, increased civic participation, and reduced social isolation and loneliness (Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010; Toepoel, 2011). Research also suggests that cultural participation plays an active role in supporting the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, as well as enhancing social inclusion and community cohesion (Reyes-Martínez, 2022; Rojas & Chávez, 2019). Furthermore, evidence shows that increased opportunities to engage in valued cultural practices contribute to growth in meaning-making processes, crime reduction, and socio-economic development (Reyes-Martínez, 2022).

Cultural participation is not something that occurs in isolation from the 'real world' in the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas, as the schools themselves serve as a vehicle for cultural engagement. Within the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas, no foreign institutions control the learning environment. Indigenous children do not need reprieve from external influences in order to recentre themselves, as these schools reflect the cultural identity present in their homes and broader communities. The school design ensures that students' education aligns with their culture. Students' worlds are not compartmentalised, and cultural engagement is an act of life itself. The literature on language and cultural preservation, along with findings from the

autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas, suggests that embedding these practices within the curriculum is critical to supporting well-being among Indigenous groups, particularly in Latin American contexts (Swee & Biddle, 2012).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the inclusion of Indigenous languages within the mainstream curriculum of Chiapas was often superficial or motivated by assimilationist goals aimed at integrating Indigenous peoples into the dominant Spanish-speaking *mestizaje* culture. Indigenous communities recognised that such approaches would not meaningfully support the preservation of their languages or cultural heritage. It became clear that if education was to serve as a vehicle for cultural empowerment and linguistic preservation, it would need to be self-organised and autonomous. The examples of Indigenous language preservation and cultural participation explored in Section 6.2 of the findings illustrate how the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas have reclaimed education as a space for cultural continuity and resilience. These educational practices are not merely symbolic; they are closely linked to improved well-being, as evidenced by both participant insights and existing research. By centring Indigenous languages, identities, and visions for the future, these schools exemplify the principles of *buen vivir*, fostering collective well-being, social cohesion, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Chassagne, 2019).

7.3 Analysis of Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty

The following section explores the connections between Indigenous relationships to land, food security, well-being, and curriculum design.

7.3.1 Connections to the Land

The relationship between humans and the natural spaces they inhabit exists on multifaceted and variably interdependent levels, providing and generating both material benefits and well-being advantages (Bryce et al., 2016).
Ecosystems offer valuable resources such as shelter and energy, whilst influencing environmental factors that are vital for survival, such as temperature and water quality,

which make life possible (Russell et al., 2013). The ecosystems that operate in people's environments shape the spaces where people live, work, and relax. These connections are integral to human well-being, imparting valuable social and psychological benefits that influence identity, values, and social cohesion (Wilson, 1993). The connections that exist between humans and environments highlight how these relationships can enhance human well-being by fostering a sense of place or place identity (Bryce et al., 2016; Satz et al., 2013). However, whilst this well-being and positive human–environment relationship is experienced variably across all societies, it is especially pronounced within Indigenous communities (Escobar, 2017b; Russell et al., 2013).

Indigenous conceptualisations of well-being are typically based on a relational worldview, in which people, communities, nature, and the Earth are not distinct but rather interlinked and interconnected (Escobar, 2017b; Durie, 2012). This worldview broadens well-being from the individual to include the collective, including the land and all living and non-living things in it (Cajete, 2000). As explained by Kimmerer (2011, p. 258), the Indigenous precept "What we do to the land, we do to ourselves" captures the interdependent relationship between the well-being of the Earth and the well-being of Indigenous people. Health resides in respecting mutual, sustaining relationships with the land, which is regarded as living and spiritual, consisting of soil, plants, animals, rocks, water, and people (Lertzman, 2002; Lovern, 2017). These bodily and spiritual connections are often the prominent basis of Indigenous cultural identities and social belonging, supporting community well-being (De Leeuw, 2015). Further, there is an ethic of responsibility and reciprocity grounding these relations: caring for the land ensures its reciprocation in support of the people's sustenance and well-being (Acosta, 2017; Kimmerer, 2011).

For Indigenous peoples, the land often serves as a vital link to their ancestors, who are believed to reside within it (Yadeun-Antuñano, 2019). Upon death, many Indigenous communities believe the individuals return to the land. This process reinforces the land's spiritual and cultural significance. It is not only a site of learning but also a sacred inheritance. It is a place defended by ancestors, entrusted to present generations, and promised to future ones. The deep relationship between land and ancestors is the

foundation of many Indigenous origin mythologies, other stories, knowledge systems, and languages. This connection fosters a strong sense of belonging and instils a collective responsibility to care for and protect the land (De Leeuw, 2015; Cajete, 1994). The breakdown of this relationship threatens not just environmental well-being, but also the group and cultural well-being of Indigenous individuals. This integrated understanding of well-being prioritises harmony with nature and collective flourishing. As discussed in Chapter 2, the unrestricted ability to engage with the environment in traditional ways fosters Indigenous populations' well-being using *buen vivir* principles (Acosta, 2017).

As Dr. Levi explained, the Zapatistas' curricula are designed through a place-based approach, tailored to the specific environmental contexts of the Indigenous communities in Chiapas. This emphasis on the local distinctiveness of place reflects the value these communities place on their relationship with the land. Importantly, there are no barriers between students and nature; children have direct daily contact with the earth, as described in Chapter 6.3. In this way, the environment acts as an educator itself, offering first-hand experiential learning and relationships. This seamless extension of the classroom into the natural world stands in stark contrast to typical mainstream schooling, where learning is confined to enclosed spaces. The absence of a compartmentalised existence reproduces the Indigenous communities' holistic worldview, in which education is embedded within the evolving ecological, social and cultural realities of everyday life. Beyond supporting cultural identity and well-being, this integration of environment into education facilitates the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous agricultural knowledge and aligns with *buen vivir* principles by fostering sustainable relationships with the land, community cohesion, and collective flourishing.

This relationship between people and the land is fostered in the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas because the Indigenous people understand the value it provides, not only concerning traditional matters, but also as a preventive measure to stop powerful actors from infiltrating and exploiting their land for profit. The Indigenous communities of Chiapas have long suffered cultural and environmental exploitation,

and their connection to the land is viewed as a way to prevent this for future generations. Strengthening the bond between people and the land through teaching youth about its true value is central to this approach. Education that focuses on reinforcing the relationship between people and their environment through Indigenous knowledge relevant to the various communities of Chiapas is absent from much of mainstream curricula; hence, the need for the Indigenous communities to design their own. The environmental experiences woven into Indigenous curricula in Chiapas were intentionally designed to enrich both the environmental and cultural dimensions of Indigenous life in ways consistent with *buen vivir*. This has been shown to increase well-being, although whether or not this was the intention of the curriculum designers lies outside the scope of this study.

7.3.2 Analysis of Food Security and Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is crucial for the well-being of Indigenous individuals and communities, as it affirms autonomy, identity, and relational belonging (Wolff, 2021). Burnette et al. (2018) note that acts of food sovereignty through subsistence activities and engagement in traditional foodways are deeply grounded in Indigenous health knowledge that promotes resilience, pride, and cultural continuity. Such activities exhibit an attachment to land, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and participation in culture-based rituals and responsibilities (Wolff, 2021). Research suggests that traditional food access is affirming of mental health and constructs a sense of Indigenous identity and purposefulness (Jonasson et al., 2019; Ruelle & Kassam, 2013). Planting, harvesting, and preparing culturally important foods for consumption fosters autonomy and care for family and community and provides an essential place and tradition-based benefits for well-being. The food security tied to these tried and true traditional Indigenous farming practices also brings benefits to well-being.

Well-being is significantly influenced by the sense of security and resilience that derives from having the ability to absorb shocks and stressors, remaining free from fear and want (Chakma, 2024; United Nations Development Programme, 1994). Food security as part of human security encompasses more than calorie consumption. It is part of a wider picture that involves cultural relevance, environmental sustainability,

and self-determination. Literature supports that engagement with traditional Indigenous farming systems and Indigenous food systems strengthens well-being overall by reinforcing relational values, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion (Wolff, 2021; Hoover, 2017). Indigenous food processing and crop knowledge strengthen SBW by reducing dependency on external systems that are more likely to marginalise Indigenous priorities (Isakson, 2009; Kamal et al., 2017). As described above, food security and sovereignty enable communities to reclaim control over what is produced and distributed. By ensuring these practices are transmitted to future generations, the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas strengthen their communities and nurture a foundational element of well-being, embodying *buen vivir* through sustainable, culturally grounded, and community-centred practices.

7.4 Analysis of Social and Physical Infrastructure

Housing quality and associated infrastructure, such as sanitation, water, and energy services, have a significant influence on well-being. Well-being improvements have been shown to take place through infrastructure strengthening. Even slight improvements in quality from insecure shelters to more secure housing, like conventional huts or block houses, can directly increase well-being (Bookwalter & Dalenberg, 2004). These gains support conditions for improved sanitation and access to utilities, which further enhance broader health and social gains. While significant effort has been invested in research on the contribution of strong infrastructure systems like sanitation for the prevention of infectious disease, emerging evidence identifies its strong impact on well-being through elements of dignity, privacy, safety, and freedom from fear or assault (Sclar et al., 2018). It underlines the necessity for comprehensive housing and infrastructure practices that promote well-being within communities.

Beyond these physical basic needs, quality of life in neighbourhoods is also determined by social infrastructure. Social infrastructure refers to the physical and communal array of spaces through which residents can access services and engage with one another (Latham & Layton, 2019). Social infrastructure comprises places like parks, community halls, stores, and religious and spiritual establishments and is a key setting in which to facilitate traditional social interaction and build trust, cohesion, and feelings of

belonging (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019). If they are well-designed and accessible, such spaces foster community cohesion and collectively contribute to well-being (Davern et al., 2017; Lund, 2003). Evidence indicates that strong social infrastructure is linked with improved health outcomes (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Barton et al., 2021), increased public safety, and increased satisfaction with life (Montgomery, 2013; Mouratidis & Poortinga, 2020). Above all, it is not the specific nature of such places but their capacity to facilitate real social relationships that lends support to these benefits (Zahnow, 2024).

These relationships help fulfil fundamental needs such as safety, belonging, and a sense of place (Davern et al., 2017; Lakey & Orehek, 2011). Of particular interest is that recent empirical studies have supported that exposure to social infrastructure, i.e., schools and health centres, significantly helps produce well-being in both men and women (Alarcón-García et al., 2022). Research into infrastructure's role in well-being highlights how both social and physical infrastructure function as core components of individual and collective thriving, validating development models that position community cohesion and relational environments at the centre stage.

The experiences shared by the participants regarding the Zapatistas and the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas' relationship with both social and physical infrastructure paint a picture of communities that reproduce well-being through the building and maintenance of important community systems and structures. The schools themselves operate as both a social and physical mechanism of infrastructure, providing safety and shelter for children to learn, while acting as a stable community meeting point. The upkeep of these mechanisms is ingrained in everyday learning for the students while offering the possibility for future practitioner roles within the community, as Indigenous Educator A explained in section 6.4.

Dr. Levi described how the maintenance of irrigation systems takes place, transforming community infrastructure into a place of learning, thus fostering the well-being of the community by securing clean water and sanitation systems. As the research described in the section above explains, there are direct links between well-being and efficient social and physical infrastructure systems. By embedding infrastructure within

communal life, Zapatista schools demonstrate that well-being arises from interdependence and Indigenous knowledge, not individual achievement, values at the heart of *buen vivir*.

7.5. Analysis of Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation

Although a substantial body of research directly linking Indigenous well-being to educational sovereignty or intellectual liberation is still emerging, this absence should not be mistaken for a lack of connection. The following section explores the potential relationship between the achievement of educational sovereignty in Chiapas and other autonomous Indigenous schools, as well as the broader impacts this has had on Indigenous well-being through intellectual liberation.

7.5.1 Educational Sovereignty

Indigenous communities, such as those in Chiapas, are continually enacting and theorising educational sovereignty through everyday practices that are not always formally documented, peer-reviewed, or widely cited in academic literature. Nevertheless, these practices, and the broader social and cultural impacts they generate, remain active and significant (Bishop, 2024). Demands for educational sovereignty are gaining momentum as Indigenous communities assert their right to self-determined learning (Bishop, 2024). As Morgan (2019) contends, a genuinely effective foundation for Indigenous education must be grounded in a model of sovereignty. This model encompasses the political and social freedoms, decision-making power, and access to resources necessary for communities to shape their own development and social transformation, while also safeguarding and celebrating cultural identity.

The findings in section 6.5 leave no doubt that educational sovereignty lies at the heart of both past and present curriculum and institutional design in the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas. The schools are of, for, and by the people. To paraphrase Dr. Levi, Indigenous knowledge in Chiapas is not a tokenistic or romanticised addition that can be inserted into State-run curricula to appease communities. Rather, it is the applied expression of an entire cultural ethos, one that

positions schooling as essential to the sustainability and self-determination of the community itself. Proper engagement with Indigenous educational sovereignty requires transformative, systemic change, and that is exactly what we have seen applied in Chiapas (Bishop, 2024).

Proving whether educational sovereignty directly increases well-being within Indigenous communities is beyond the scope of this research, and as mentioned, the current published literature offers limited evidence explicitly linking the two. Murphy (2014) attributes this lack of research to the numerous challenges involved, such as the complex web of social, economic, and political factors. While empirical research directly connecting educational sovereignty to well-being remains scarce, the Indigenous education initiatives in Chiapas clearly demonstrate broader social benefits, such as intellectual liberation, that suggest such a link is plausible.

7.5.2 Intellectual Liberation

One significant outcome that arises from educational sovereignty in Indigenous communities is the space it opens for intellectual and philosophical liberation. For Indigenous communities, this manifests through the recovery of a people's autonomy to think, know, and imagine from within their own frameworks. For Murphy (2023), liberation through self-determination is not only a human right but also a basic human need, one that holds particular weight for Indigenous communities whose development has long been shaped by imposed systems of control. As can be seen through Chapter 3, colonial, capitalist, and State-building regimes have not only restricted material freedoms but have also confined Indigenous intellectual life within narrow, external definitions of knowledge and legitimacy. Educational sovereignty functions as a powerful means of intellectual liberation by reclaiming the space to think, speak, and imagine beyond colonial frameworks (McCarty & Lee, 2014). It allows communities to break free from imposed cages of thought, reassert their own epistemologies, and restore collective authorship over the knowledge that sustains life, purpose, and well-being.

The benefits of educational liberation have been documented in various autonomous Indigenous schools throughout the world. In Australia, schools such as Yipirinya and the Black Community School emerged from grassroots resistance to exclusionary systems, offering bilingual and culturally grounded curricula that reflected Indigenous pedagogies (Hand & Thomas, 2024). These initiatives not only improved student engagement but also fostered learning environments rooted in Indigenous identity and belonging. Similarly, when the Mi'kmaq Nation in Canada took control of its education system in 1998, graduation rates for Indigenous students rose dramatically, from 30% to 89.6% under the Indigenous led design (Bennett, 2019, para. 2). These examples affirm that educational liberation is not simply about content, but about restoring the conditions under which Indigenous students can learn with dignity, in their own languages, and on their own terms. While empirical data on the broader well-being benefits of Indigenous education institutions achieving liberation remains limited, existing examples suggest that this form of educational freedom is closely linked to well-being.

Any discussion of the autonomous Indigenous education movement in Chiapas and intellectual liberation would be incomplete without reference to one of the most influential figures in Latin American educational philosophy: Paulo Freire. His seminal work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), emerged repeatedly throughout both the interview process and the literature review. Freire's theory argued that education should be a dialogical process in which learners are active participants in naming and transforming their world. This is precisely the model applied in the autonomous Indigenous education institutes of Chiapas, where children are not treated as passive recipients of State knowledge but as critical thinkers embedded in the struggles, histories, and future of their communities. As Dr. Levi described, Zapatista curricula are not top-down impositions, but co-constructed practices rooted in Indigenous knowledge and political consciousness. In this way, educational sovereignty in Chiapas is a form of intellectual liberation that mirrors Freire's vision of learning as a practice of freedom. By refusing colonial epistemologies and building education systems from within their own cultural and political frameworks, it could be argued that the Zapatistas

and the Indigenous communities of Chiapas cultivate dignity, autonomy, and well-being.

While conclusively linking educational sovereignty, intellectual liberation, and well-being falls outside the scope of this thesis, the harmful impact of colonial-style educational oppression is well established. As outlined in Chapter 4, the literature identifies strong associations between social distress in Indigenous communities of Chiapas and the Mexican State's education policies. Even if direct empirical links between Indigenous educational control and well-being remain limited, the evidence suggests that the removal of externally imposed colonial frameworks has, in itself, yielded meaningful social, cultural, and psychological benefits.

7.6 Analysis of Internal and External Challenges

The autonomous Indigenous education institutes of Chiapas have made significant strides in breaking the psychological chains of historic colonisation and resisting the ongoing physical oppression of the Mexican State. Nonetheless, challenges remain, and the ongoing effort to fully realise *buen vivir* continues. The section below does not encompass every challenge that the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas encounter, of which there are many. It instead focuses on two internal challenges (gender equality and financial sustainability) and one external challenge (the persistent threat of militarisation and violence).

7.6.1 Internal Challenges

As discussed in section 6.6, questions surrounding the academic legitimacy of the autonomous Indigenous schools continue to concern many parents in Chiapas. Some expressed hesitation about enrolling their children in locally run institutions, fearing that such an education might be perceived as inferior to that offered by the State, ultimately limiting future employment prospects. One possible explanation for this hesitation lies

in the influence of upward social comparison[36], shaped by the enduring impacts of colonialism and the pervasive ideals of capitalist and consumerist models of success.

Colonisation has not only triggered structural disparities for Indigenous peoples but has also left a legacy of unfavourable social comparisons that continue to impact well-being (Smallwood et al., 2021). Historical trauma, rooted in subjugation, systemic racism, and sociopolitical exclusion, has created environments in which Indigenous individuals are continually positioned at the lower end of social hierarchies (Livingston et al., 2022). This marginalisation fosters upward social comparisons, where individuals and communities measure their lives against dominant, often Westernised, standards of success and legitimacy. When locally grounded and culturally embedded education systems or ways of life are perceived as less valuable than those of the dominant culture, such comparisons can result in dissatisfaction, anxiety, and diminished well-being (Diener & Fujita, 2013). Colonisation, therefore, not only undermined collective self-determination but also internalised value systems that continue to shape how Indigenous peoples perceive and assess their quality of life.

This internalised inferiority remains a challenge not only for the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas sustainability, but also for the well-being of the Indigenous communities. While the Indigenous communities acknowledge that participation in the dominant economic system has led to exploitation, and curricula designed by the Mexican State have centred around assimilation efforts and cultural erasure[37], the lure of Western ideals of progress, hope, and perceived gender equality remains strong, especially for young girls.

How gender roles play out in the Zapatista zones and Indigenous communities of Chiapas could arguably reproduce social gender inequalities. The Zapatistas have faced scrutiny and critique for their views and actions regarding women's rights and

---

[36] Upward social comparison refers to the psychological process in which individuals evaluate themselves against others who are perceived to be better off, often leading to feelings of inadequacy, envy, or diminished well-being when one's own circumstances appear less favourable (Festinger, 1954).

[37] Refer to Chapter 3 for details regarding State efforts to subjugate the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas through politically motivated curriculums.

have at times been accused of promoting pacifist ideals of feminism, which emphasise negotiation, non-violence, and community consensus (de Oliveira Nascimento, 2025; Bedregal, 1995; Belausteguigoitia, 2000). These ideals intersect with traditional Zapatista gender roles, where men and women have historically held complementary responsibilities within family, work, and community life. As a result, implementing gender equality initiatives requires balancing the transformative goals of women's empowerment with the preservation of culturally grounded practices, illustrating the nuanced and context-specific nature of feminist action within the Zapatista movement. One area where these gender dynamics emerge is in the division of access to certain forms of knowledge or education (Cappelli, 2018). As students progress through their education, girls may not have access to certain subjects or practical training opportunities available to boys, such as advanced mathematics, agricultural techniques, or leadership and technical skills (Sáenz, 2023). From an outsider's perspective, these divisions might appear too rigid, restricting the educational opportunities of female students and potentially undermining their well-being, as Dr Levi observed. From a young female student's point of view, these limitations could inhibit their ability to reach their full potential, a concern supported by considerable academic literature (Stromquist, 1990; Rao & Sweetman, 2014).

At the same time, while gender equality remains an ongoing challenge, there is also clear evidence of significant change (Kuokkanen, 2019; Rodas, 2022). For example, the Zapatistas' *Revolutionary Law of Women* has been central to this progress, advancing women's participation in leadership, education, and decision-making, and confronting patriarchal norms through grassroots organising and community-led practices that centre women's rights and dignity (Marcos, 2014).

It would be inaccurate to describe the Zapatista zones as a feminist utopia where gender equality has been fully achieved. At the same time, it would also be misleading to characterise their culture as deliberately resistant or stagnant in advancing women's rights. The Indigenous peoples of Chiapas place women's empowerment at the core of their broader social and political aspirations. While progress on gender equality may not unfold at the pace some Indigenous women or international sympathisers might hope

for, it is advancing in a way that respects the community's culturally grounded practices, ensuring that both the autonomy and cultural values of Indigenous women are upheld. Gender equality remains an internal challenge for the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas, but it is not one they are ignoring or avoiding.

Building on these internal challenges, the structure of the Zapatista schools in Chiapas adds another layer of complexity. As described in Chapter 4, the schools operate on a model that does not require teachers to be paid, instead relying on volunteers from within the community and external volunteers. Community members are selected to serve as education promoters, receiving training through workshops and classes facilitated by other Zapatista educators or occasionally by external trainers. Schools for Chiapas supports this process by covering the costs of transportation, teaching materials, and food during these training sessions, ensuring that the education system remains functional without salaried teachers (Schools for Chiapas, 2024).

While this volunteer-based model exemplifies collective responsibility and solidarity, it also highlights a potential limitation: households under economic strain may be unable to spare members to serve as teachers. This constraint can affect the continuity and reach of educational provision, further complicating the sustainability of autonomous Indigenous schooling in communities already negotiating the legacies of colonisation, gendered access to knowledge, and the internalised pressures of upward social comparison. In this sense, the volunteer system both strengthens and tests the resilience of Indigenous education, reflecting the broader tensions inherent in sustaining culturally embedded, community-led initiatives. While it embodies collective responsibility, a principle of *buen vivir*, it also exposes communities to risks when economic precarity limits participation.

7.6.2 External Challenges

The persistent military presence and threat of violence in the autonomous Indigenous zones of Chiapas pose an ongoing challenge to the survival of Indigenous schools, as well as to the safety of both students and compañeros involved in the educational process. Zapatista children walking to school are confronted by scenes of highly armed

military personnel whose intention is to break down, often through violent tactics, the very social fabric that their families fight to preserve through violent tactics (Johnston, 2000). In Chiapas, this persistent threat of violence exists in close proximity to everyday life in the classroom. Events like the shooting of the teacher that Dr. Levi described in section 6.6 serve as a constant reminder of the precarious situation they are in. As shown in Figures 7.1 and 7.2, preparations against military hostilities have become an additional component of Zapatista children's education.

Figure 7.1 *Photo of Tzeltal women and children blocking a dirt road to protest against military occupation, January 2, 1998. (Source: Pedro Valtierra, 1998).*

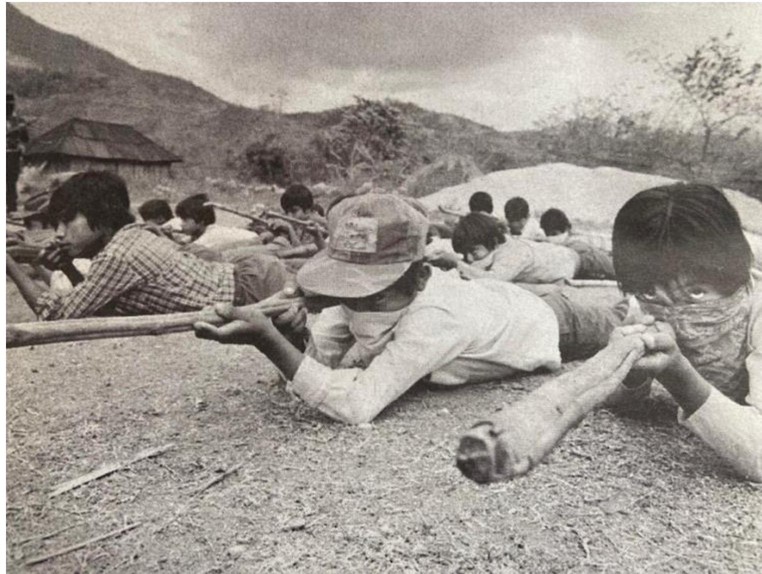

Figure 7.2 *Photo of Zapatista children receiving military training in the woods, 1994. (Source: Raúl Ortega, 1994).*

Numerous studies have identified the negative effects war has on students' well-being. Research carried out in the Gulf War in Israel showed that students who were under what was perceived to be war risk reported heightened negative emotions, even while their overall life satisfaction remained unchanged (Ronen & Seeman, 2007). This shows that exposure to militarisation, even without exposure to direct violence, can undermine well-being among young people. Such trends in recent work in Ukraine show that students' psychological state worsens the closer they are to combat zones (Pypenko et al., 2023). The recent rise of *Narco* activity in the State of Chiapas has meant that students in the autonomous Indigenous schools are never far from conflict and violence, even if they are not directly involved.

As discussed in the Methodology Chapter, Chiapas has seen a recent surge in cartel activity and presence, a trend also confirmed by Dr Levi. Intimidation and violence at the hands of organised crime groups, as well as ongoing conflict between these groups and law enforcement authorities, pose direct threats to both the education and well-being of students, and to the integrity of the education institutions themselves. This risk is even more pronounced in areas where communities are in active conflict with the State. Their political stance leaves them vulnerable to violence not only from cartels but

also from the Mexican army and local police, often with little to no protection or external support. Chiapas is a State rich in natural resources and occupies a strategic corridor for trafficking humans and illicit drugs from neighbouring Central American countries to the United States. The Indigenous peoples of Chiapas understand the value of their land, and it is precisely this value that places them in danger every day.

Consequently, research consistently shows that war and violence have a detrimental impact on students' well-being. Both the historical mistreatment and the ongoing violence inflicted on the Indigenous schools of Chiapas by the State are well documented. As long as powerful actors such as the Mexican Army are permitted to disrupt the Indigenous communities of Chiapas without accountability, external violence will remain a persistent threat to their well-being and access to education. These conditions will continue to undermine both the Zapatista movement and broader Indigenous education initiatives for as long as the relationship between Indigenous communities, criminal organisations, and the Mexican State is characterised by tension, mistrust, and systemic neglect.

7.7 Analysis of Collective Ethics

The concept of collective ethics was continually referenced by the interviewees as they provided descriptions of the autonomous Indigenous education curriculum models of Chiapas. These collective practices identified in the findings have been shown in studies to play significant roles in promoting well-being among Indigenous peoples (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Research conducted among Mexican Nahua communities found that *buen vivir* and happiness were described by participants as being collectively determined, dependent on group well-being and grounded in family and social connections rather than material wealth (Olko et al., 20212). Olko et al. (2022) demonstrated that feelings of safety, belonging, and emotional fulfilment arose from mutual support and trust, rather than from external success or individual achievement. These findings support the view that Indigenous well-being is often inherently collective, sustained through daily practices of solidarity and reciprocity (Sachs, 2014). These concepts are fundamental to the Zapatista movement. As Dr Levi explained in

section 6.7, these values shape the entire structure and philosophy of autonomous Indigenous educational institutions.

Growing scholarship is highlighting how collective responsibility enhances the emotional and psychological well-being of Indigenous peoples. Yadeun-Antuñano (2019) highlights that for many Indigenous groups, honour and dignity are constitutive patterns of living that operate both at the individual and collective levels, generating well-being for the person as well as for the wider community (Baskin, 2016). Such an ethic of mutual care not only provides material sustenance but also enhances cultural identity and emotional resilience. The respected members of such societies are not accumulators of wealth, but are the servants, the protectors of the vulnerable, and the guardians of intergenerational values of mutuality (Cajete, 1994). These activities reinforce the support structures that protect the community from stressors, such as those outlined in section 6.6, while fostering a sense of purpose and belonging, both of which are key components of well-being.

In broader Latin American settings, the literature has established that the strength of family and social networks is a key driver of well-being in the absence of State-provided welfare (Yap & Yu, 2016). Pontarollo et al. (2020) argue that in Ecuador and similar regions, collectivist social structures fill in for low State capacity, with families and communities stepping in to provide emotional, financial, and logistical support. This collectivist orientation is strongly positively correlated with well-being (Rojas, 2018). As discussed in Chapter Four, the State support traditionally provided to the Indigenous people of Chiapas has historically been insufficient, even maladaptive and oppressive, hence the need for them to create their own systems. The collective approach to ensuring these support systems remain operational serves as a fundamental component in the curriculum of the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas. These Indigenous knowledge-based practices of *buen vivir* challenge the dominant Western narrative that asserts well-being as an individualised and private endeavour. Indigenous frameworks illustrate that group well-being generates individual well-being, a notion that also boasts quantifiable emotional and psychological advantages (Grieves, 2006).

The findings demonstrate that the Zapatista philosophy of *“para todos todo, nada para nosotros”* (“for everyone, everything; for us, nothing”) is deeply embedded in the autonomous Indigenous schools of Chiapas (Marcos, 2002, p. 237). Knowledge is not pursued as an individual endeavour or a competition, but as a collective right and social responsibility. This collective orientation is evident in school governance, knowledge transmission, and the division of social duties among *compañeros*, families, and students. Collective morality functions both as a practical necessity and an ideological choice in contexts where State support is unavailable, withheld, or openly hostile. In this way, communal ethics not only reject neoliberal individualism but also actively promote well-being by fostering connection, mutual respect, and a shared sense of purpose among the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas. These collective ethics exemplify the principles of *buen vivir*, demonstrating how Indigenous communities in Chiapas prioritise relational well-being, reciprocity, and communal flourishing as the foundation of both education and everyday life.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the multifaceted ways in which autonomous Indigenous education in Chiapas contributes to well-being, particularly through culturally grounded curriculum design that draws upon the concepts and practices embedded in the everyday lives of Indigenous communities. Central to this analysis is the framework of *buen vivir*, which emphasises balance, reciprocity, and collective flourishing, providing a lens to understand how education supports social, cultural, and environmental well-being. Viewed through a post-development perspective, these schools challenge dominant Western development paradigms by rejecting externally imposed measures of success and instead foregrounding local knowledge, autonomy, and culturally defined notions of flourishing. While these analyses highlight significant strengths and transformative potential, they also reveal persistent internal and external challenges that complicate the operation and performance of the autonomous Indigenous schools. The nuanced interplay between cultural resilience, political struggle, and lived experience underscores that well-being in these communities is neither static nor easily quantified but is deeply embedded in relational and place-based realities. These

insights form the basis for the concluding chapter, which will synthesise the key findings and reflect on their broader implications for Indigenous education, autonomy, and well-being through a *buen vivir* and post-development lens.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

I will open this conclusion chapter by reminding the reader that the intention of this thesis was not to write the 'truth' about the Indigenous communities of Chiapas, but to further dialogue between two universes with pedagogical humility. My hope is that this will increase 'global neural pathways,' as any quality research grounded in post-development theory and *buen vivir* should. This thesis aimed to examine how the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in Zapatista and other autonomous Indigenous schools in Chiapas intersected with the well-being of the Indigenous communities. In doing so, it explored three guiding questions.

- Firstly, why the Zapatistas chose to create their own curriculum following the signing of NAFTA?
- Secondly, what challenges have these communities faced in developing and sustaining autonomous education systems?
- Finally, how did these grassroots initiatives shape broader understandings of social and communal well-being?

This research used the following categories to examine the social effects of establishing education institutes rooted in Indigenous worldviews: Language, Identity, and Cultural Resilience; Environmental Awareness, Agriculture, and Food Sovereignty; Social and Physical Infrastructure; Educational Sovereignty and Intellectual Liberation; and Collective Ethics. It explored whether the inclusion of these concepts potentially fostered well-being, serving as a promising alternative to Western State models of schooling. The section below will summarise the main findings, highlight the significance of the research, reflect on limitations, offer suggestions for future research and action, before ending with a closing statement.

8.2 Summary of Main Findings

The findings of this research suggest that the integration of Indigenous knowledge into Zapatista and other autonomous Indigenous education models in Chiapas contributes meaningfully to the collective well-being of Indigenous communities, as well as to improved academic outcomes grounded in cultural relevance. These successes far surpass the limited and often harmful educational initiatives that were imposed following Mexico's independence, as outlined in Chapter 4. These communities are no longer willing for their children to be educated into believing they are poor, marginal, or lacking. Past assimilation efforts by the Mexican State, particularly through the promotion of a homogenised *mestizaje* identity, failed to bring meaningful improvement to the lives of Chiapas' Indigenous peoples. Instead, they contributed to systemic displacement, disempowerment, and intergenerational anger.

For Chiapas, education is being reclaimed as a source of strength, cultural continuity, and dignity. Traditionally, the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas have not been the beneficiaries of mainstream development, nor of the institutions created through the system that operate under its influence, such as mainstream education. There is little reason to assume this would be different today. Their resistance to capitalist-driven development is understandable due to the destruction it has caused not only to them but to the numerous other Indigenous communities around the globe (Bodley, 2014). As explored in Chapter 2, post-development models such as *buen vivir* prioritise grassroots educational initiatives in which communities play an active and participatory role. These approaches foster greater autonomy and agency over both the content and delivery of education. These systems, when applied in an educational setting, ensure that curricula are not an external imposition, but something *for the people, by the people*. This model of schooling reflects a deep-rooted understanding that education, when embedded in local values and knowledge systems, serves the broader goals of communal well-being, rather than external metrics or State priorities.

As outlined in Chapters 4 and 6, education in these communities is not defined by outcomes such as test scores or graduation rates. Instead, it is guided by values such as the preservation and revival of Indigenous language, the passing down of agricultural

knowledge, and the maintenance of social relationships. Language, in particular, was identified as a determining element in cultural resilience and collective dignity. As discussed in the findings, the use of Tsotsil and Tseltal languages in classrooms counters centuries of cultural erasure and returns the classroom as a space of Indigenous epistemology. When children hear their mother language spoken by teachers, and when curricula are crafted using their ancestral concepts, then they are no longer shut out by the institution that is meant to facilitate their growth. Instead, they are affirmed.

The integration of sustainable living practices rooted in *buen vivir* principles, particularly ones involving agriculture, infrastructure, and environmental stewardship, played a big role in fostering well-being. In the autonomous Indigenous schools, students are not only learning to farm, build, and care for their communities, but they are also learning to understand these practices as part of a broader ethical and ecological system that nourishes the individual, collective, and the environment they occupy. Chapter 7, which linked these findings to increased well-being in other studies, indicates that the continued inclusion of such practices in Chiapas' autonomous Indigenous curricula may be, in part, because of the holistic well-being benefits they provide. As shown in Chapters 3 and 4, this approach to education functions in opposition to State models of schooling that prepare students for insertion into labour markets, migration, or assimilation into non-Indigenous lifestyles. Education in Chiapas' autonomous regions is relationally centred, intergenerational, and place-based and reflects the principles of *buen vivir*.

Another key finding is the importance of exercising autonomy itself, not only as a political goal but as a psychological and social condition. Intellectual liberation was seen to empower the wider community as it freed them from the shackles of colonial and capitalist psychological oppression. The process of building and maintaining an education system independent of the Mexican State has given rise to a sense of self-determination over generations. As exemplified in the thematic codes and interview information, this autonomy brings the potential to make decisions based on one's own beliefs and values, not to adapt to systems imposed upon one from the outside. The

well-being that results is about having the right and ability to live according to one's own vision of a good life, a core concept of *buen vivir*.

Notably, the study also indicates that embracing Indigenous knowledge into curricula does not necessarily mean the rejection of outside resources or instruments. Rather, these elements can be reimagined and repurposed to align with the cultural and epistemological frameworks of the communities themselves. This gives the communities the ability to not only control how the world understands them, but also how they interpret the world. Through this process, autonomous Indigenous education in Chiapas is not isolated nor nostalgic: it is dynamic, evolving, and firmly rooted in the present realities of resistance, survival, and hope.

Equally significant are the challenges faced by these communities. The research found that the journey towards autonomous Indigenous education has neither been linear nor without opposition. Internally, limited finances, the pace of change in areas such as gender equality, and clashes between capitalist measures of success and indigenous values create obstacles for the educational institutes. Outside, intimidation by paramilitary groups, the new rise of Cartel presence, as well as the general power of the capitalist State, still throw long shadows. There remains a justified fear that foreign education influences could act as a vehicle for neoliberal values to enter under the guise of reform or aid if welcomed into the Indigenous communities of Chiapas. Despite these challenges, the communities show incredible resilience, adapting their models to suit shifting conditions but remaining true to the ideals that form their cause.

This thesis also found that education in the Zapatista and Indigenous territories of Chiapas cannot be divorced from broader historical and geopolitical trends. Refusal of State schooling is a response to centuries of colonisation, dispossession, and cultural degradation. Chapters 3 and 4's historical overview, coupled with Chapter 2's development discourse analysis, confirm that the current educational autonomy is a continuation of a long resistance. A refusal to be remade into subjects of the State or global capital. It is because of this that Indigenous knowledge integration is not only an issue of curricular decisions; it is an act of epistemic sovereignty.

When combined, the data generated indicates a central finding: well-being doesn't result from fragmented interventions, but rather by relinking education to the broader social fabric that sustains the culture. This challenges dominant development logics that compartmentalise sectors and prioritise external expertise over community agency. What the Zapatistas and other Indigenous educators in Chiapas have constructed is a system where education, health, community, and culture support each other. It is a holistic system that resists atomisation of life, a system that can learn as much from the world as it can teach its own children.

The Zapatista education program and other Indigenous-led schools in Chiapas exemplify post-development in practice. By framing education as a tool for empowerment rather than assimilation, these initiatives foster young people's agency, encouraging them to speak out, make decisions, and engage critically with their communities. This demonstrates how positive change can emerge from communities themselves, reflecting post-development scholars' vision of locally defined, culturally grounded initiatives. In Chiapas, education becomes a lived expression of autonomy and cultural continuity, producing learners who are not only knowledgeable but also socially and politically conscious, reinforcing the collective well-being of their communities.

Ultimately, this thesis finds that education grounded in Indigenous knowledge and governed by community autonomy offers not only an alternative model of schooling but also a fundamentally different approach to the relationship between institutions and the communities they are meant to serve. It calls into question what development means, what education is for, and what well-being should be. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing global conversations about post-development, decolonisation, and the ethics of knowledge production. I offer these findings not just as academic insights, but as an invitation to listen more deeply to those who have never stopped resisting, and never stopped teaching.

8.3 Significance of the Research

For theory, this thesis presents a grounded application of post-development theory and *buen vivir* practice, lending weight to the resistance of Western development dogmas that remain hegemonic in international education and policy circles. It contributes to scholarship challenging the presumption that development has to operate through a universal model outlined by economic expansion, State strength, or Western definitions of success. By exploring Indigenous voices and practices, this study provides a concrete, community-grounded picture of what post-development alternatives look like in practice: dynamic, evolving, and materially located.

At the policy level, this study challenges dominant assumptions about the purpose and function of education, questioning how it is measured and delivered to Indigenous individuals and their wider communities. The findings are not only relevant in Mexico but also resonate across other contexts where Indigenous peoples continue to raise concerns about marginalisation and enduring disparities in education and well-being. In Chiapas, assimilation into a homogenised national culture has been firmly rejected by Indigenous communities, and they are not alone. Cultural identities and practices matter; across the globe, acts of Indigenous resistance have demonstrated that these values are worth defending (Walker et al., 2021). Resistance to the structural inequalities perpetuated by colonial legacies is evident in many parts of the world, including Aotearoa. While the creation of a hybrid national identity under a homogenised system may appeal to some sectors of society, it often fails to resonate with Indigenous populations. When a community clearly expresses its desire for autonomy, agency, and recognition of its distinct identity, those voices must be acknowledged and respected.

It challenges policymakers to reconsider top-down tendencies that frame Indigenous individuals as passive recipients rather than active co-authors of their own futures. The evidence suggests that meaningful educational outcomes are not achieved through standardisation or assimilation, but through flexibility, cultural relevance, and participatory governance. If policymakers are serious about decolonisation, the insights from Chiapas show that more than tokenistic gestures are needed; the research calls

for a fundamental rethinking of power, ownership, and the purpose of education itself. If '*¡Ya Basta!*' moments can be addressed before they erupt, lives may be spared, military expenditure reduced, and domestic unrest avoided. Importantly, schools like those in the autonomous zones of Chiapas do not necessarily need to exist in opposition to the State. Countries still working to close education gaps have time and opportunity to shift course, if they are willing to listen, learn, and act with humility.

In practice, this study offers a helpful resource for teachers, curriculum developers, and community organisers interested in developing educational models that respond to and honour Indigenous ways of knowing. It suggests that Indigenous-led education, even when under-resourced and politically vulnerable, has the potential to foster well-being by reinforcing cultural identities and fostering collective cohesion. The thematic findings and examples drawn from Chiapas may offer inspiration or practical guidance to other Indigenous and marginalised communities seeking to reclaim education as a communal and cultural process.

8.4 Reflecting on Limitations

This research encountered several practical and methodological limitations. First, the volatile political climate in Chiapas, coupled with an increased cartel presence, made travel unsafe and rendered in-person fieldwork (Plan A) unfeasible. The research, therefore, relied on Plan B (remote interviews) and ultimately Plan C (interviews conducted by the cultural advisor). While these adaptations made the project viable, they restricted my direct engagement with participants and removed the possibility of participant observation, which would have enriched the data through lived immersion in community life.

Secondly, the number of interviews conducted was smaller than initially anticipated. While 8–12 were planned, only four interviews were completed after several participants withdrew or ceased communication. This inevitably limited the breadth of primary data. Although every effort was made to honour the perspectives shared, the accounts presented here are situated narratives, not exhaustive or universally representative truths.

Thirdly, language and translation presented challenges. While the interviews were primarily conducted in Spanish, participants often drew on Tsotsil and Tseltal to explain certain concepts. I translated the interviews into English, with validation from the cultural advisor to ensure accuracy and cultural integrity. While this process allowed for careful engagement with the data, subtleties of humour, phrasing, and culturally embedded meaning were at risk of being lost in translation. Follow-up clarifications helped mitigate this, but a deeper linguistic immersion in Tsotsil or Tseltal may have captured additional layers of Indigenous world views and epistemologies.

Positionality also influenced the research process. Although I identify as Māori and align with Indigenous struggles against neoliberalism, participants primarily viewed me as a representative of Global North academia. This outsider status shaped how the research was received and highlighted the limitations of external studies for communities such as the Zapatistas, who have a long history of scepticism toward extractive research practices. Constant reflexivity and transparency were required to ensure that ethical responsibilities to participants took precedence over academic aspiration. Even so, there remained the possibility that participants withheld perspectives due to scepticism or sensitivity.

These limitations do not diminish the value of the findings, but they do underscore the need for further research, particularly studies led by Indigenous researchers and grounded in community partnerships. Such work would be best positioned to deepen, challenge, and expand upon the themes presented here.

8.5 Future Research and Action Recommendations

There is an opportunity for future studies to focus on the interpretations of what an educational institute should provide through an Indigenous lens at both the individual and community levels. As each culture will be different, there are numerous opportunities to ask different Indigenous communities what they expect from education. This could prevent top-down assumptions regarding the role education is expected to play in different societies. Furthermore, these could be linked to well-being

outcomes to ascertain whether Indigenous run institutions universally improve standards through their operations.

There is also potential for research into how autonomous Indigenous models of education might be translated to other global contexts, for instance, Māori communities in Aotearoa or First Nation's settings in Canada and Australia. Comparative studies examining outcomes in schools controlled by Indigenous communities that resist capitalist or State systems by centring Indigenous knowledge have the potential to foster global appreciation of education as a site of decolonisation and Indigenous well-being promotion. Future research could also investigate sustainability and credibility issues within these education systems, ensuring that such models remain resilient and recognised both locally and globally.

Due to the centrality of language to cultural health and survival, future research might also focus on the linguistic outcomes of Indigenous-language education. Does the phrase "kill the language, kill the culture" hold true in reverse when it comes to revitalisation efforts? In what ways does language revitalisation contribute to the development of identity, confidence, and community strength? In Chiapas, as well as countries such as Aotearoa, this is a question worthy of both further ethnographic investigation and qualitative data collection.

There is also a need for research by Indigenous scholars, conducted in Indigenous languages and grounded in the ontologies of the communities themselves. This thesis has been written from the perspective of an outsider, one guided by solidarity, care, and reflexivity, but the future of this debate must give ever-greater precedence to Indigenous voices, not only as participants but as authors, theorists, and examiners. Both the academic field and State institutions must make room for these different universes within our own to foster understandings that enhance cultural competency and cooperative capacity.

At a policy level, further research is needed into State system and autonomous Indigenous institution partnership models that do not compromise Indigenous values. Investigating coexistence frameworks, where autonomy is maintained free from duress,

offers a potential way forward for other regions grappling with conflict between national education policy and Indigenous rights.

Finally, action research drawing on community partnerships could examine how to increase or improve the material resources for autonomous Indigenous schools, without undermining their ideological autonomy. Chiapas shows what can be accomplished with limited resources; future research could address how more support, financial, infrastructural, and political, can be offered ethically, in accordance with Indigenous self-determination.

8.6 Closing Statement

This thesis has not attempted to provide definitive answers, for it is not my place as an outsider to do so. Instead, I have offered this paper as a contribution to a conversation, one that must centre Indigenous voices, challenge development orthodoxy, and remain grounded in humility. The Zapatistas and the wider Indigenous communities of Chiapas have not created a utopia. Nor have they proposed a universally replicable blueprint for educational reform. What they have done, however, is show the world that there are other ways to live, to learn, and to thrive. These ways of life resonate strongly with the theoretical conversations around post-development and *buen vivir* explored earlier in this thesis.

The data this research generated and analysed suggest that the curricula taught in Zapatista and other autonomous Indigenous schools in Chiapas contribute to enhanced well-being at a broader communal level. While this conclusion has not been explicitly confirmed by the Indigenous communities themselves, it offers compelling evidence in support of protecting these education systems from external interference. Their continued operation and evolution should be safeguarded, not disrupted. These lived practices reflect post-development's central assertion that communities can generate their own paths to well-being outside the logics of growth, and that *buen vivir*, as a philosophy of collective flourishing, can be enacted in ways that are concrete, imperfect, yet deeply real.

As Dr Levi stated, the Indigenous communities of Chiapas are not ignorant of their wealth. To quote him directly, "they know what's up." They know what they have, and we know what they have, and I think it's important to acknowledge that. Both the Mexican government and multinational corporations, along with other powerful domestic and foreign actors, seek control of the territory occupied by Indigenous communities and Zapatistas, due to the immense value that land holds. It is one of the richest States for natural resources in Mexico, and capitalists see opportunity for economic gains (Giovannini, 2016). This is the underlying reason for the tension in Chiapas.

The Zapatistas understand that mainstream ideals of development will destroy theirs. They know first-hand, as well as learning through the international examples provided in Chapters 2 and 3. They know what this will mean for them and every other generation after them if it is allowed to take place. The four wheels of capitalism spoken about in Chapter 4, exploitation, dispossession, repression, and contempt, will most likely result in a further 400 years of subjugation and exploitation. They are also aware that education has been, and most likely will continue to be, a mechanism used by the State to infiltrate capitalist ideals that will break down their communities and solidarity. This is why they fight to keep their schools autonomous.

By reclaiming education as a collective, cultural, and political act, the people of Chiapas remind us that schools can do far more than produce economic subjects in the form of human capital. They can cultivate citizens who are rooted in their history, connected to their land, fluent in their own languages, and confident in their right to shape the future. The hope that threads through these educational projects is not naive, but built on generations of struggle and sustained by deep communal commitment. It is a hope grounded in reality, in resistance, and in the belief that another world is possible, and necessary. This is precisely what post-development insists: that alternatives to development exist not as abstract theories, but as lived practices of survival, creativity, and dignity.

For those in academia, policy, and practice, the challenge now is to listen, not with the intent to extract or replicate, but to support, to respect, and to reflect. In relation to

other formal governments that share territory with Indigenous communities, proactive negotiations grounded in culturally competent engagement could be undertaken before those communities feel compelled to assert autonomous control over their futures, as was the case in Chiapas. The lessons offered here require an unsettling of assumptions, a redistribution of epistemological power, and a willingness to embrace the discomfort of change while there is still time to do so.

As the world continues to grapple with widening inequality, ecological collapse, and cultural homogenisation, the experiences of Chiapas offer more than critique; they offer alternatives. These alternatives are not perfect, but they are workable. They are examples of cultures taking control of their development to restore dignity, autonomy, and well-being on their own terms. They embody the imperfect but powerful realities of post-development and *buen vivir*, frameworks that reject the universality of growth-oriented development and instead prioritise life, land, and collective flourishing. And they are worth learning from. Not every culture's well-being frameworks will align with the principles of mainstream development and its institutions. For some, there are more important values than economic growth. Nor do many seek to claim an inferior position within a global hierarchy imposed from the outside. To requote the Tsotsil Compañero:

"Mainstream education is designed to create employees for capitalism. In contrast, this system teaches children to be aware that education is meant to serve life, not just to secure a job."

References:

Acosta, A. (2017). Buen Vivir: A proposal with global potential. In H. Rosa & C. Henning (Eds.), *The Good Life Beyond Growth* (pp. 29-38). Routledge.

Acosta, A. (2020). Buen Vivir: a perspective for rethinking the world. In C. Burkhart., M. Schmelzer & N. Treu (Eds.), *Degrowth in Movements: Exploring Pathways for Transformation* (pp. 87-99). John Hunt Publishing, Winchester.

Acosta, A., & Abarca, M. M. (2018). Buen Vivir: An alternative perspective from the peoples of the global south to the crisis of capitalist modernity. In V. Satgar (Ed.), *Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives* (pp. 131-147). Wits University Press.

Aikman, S. (2012). Intercultural Education in Latin America. In J. Gundara (Ed.), *World Yearbook of Education 1997* (pp. 79-89). Routledge.

Aikman, S., & King, L. (2012). Indigenous knowledges and education. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *42*(5), 673-681.

Alarcón-García, G., Buendía-Azorín, J. D., & Sánchez-de-la-Vega, M. D. M. (2022). Infrastructure and subjective well-being from a gender perspective. *Administrative Sciences*, *12*(1), 32.

Albrecht, G., Sartore, G.-M., Connor, L., Higginbotham, N., Freeman, S., Kelly, B., Stain, H., Tonna, A., & Pollard, G. (2007). Solastalgia: the distress caused by environmental change. *Australasian Psychiatry: Bulletin of Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists*, *15 Suppl 1*, S95–S98. https://doi.org/10.1080/10398560701701288

Aloisio, G. (2009). *Join the revolution just for the health of it: A comparison of indigenous health in and outside of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico* (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).

Althusser, L. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*. Verso Books.

Andersen, C. (2012). Critical Indigenous studies in the classroom: Exploring'the local'using primary evidence. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, *5*(1), 67-78.

Anthony-Stevens, V., & Gallegos Buitron, E. (2023). Indigenous Mexican Teachers and Decolonial Thinking: Enacting Pedagogies of Reclamation. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *54*(2), 144-164.

Arcila Calderón, C., Barranquero, A., & González Tanco, E. (2018). From Media to Buen Vivir: Latin American Approaches to Indigenous Communication: De los medios al Buen Vivir: enfoques latinoamericanos de la comunicación indígena Das Mídias ao Buen Vivir: Abordagens Latino-Americanas para a Comunicação Indígena. *Communication Theory*, *28*(2), 180-201.

Ball, J., Paris, S. G., & Govinda, R. (2014). Literacy and numeracy skills among children in developing countries. In *Learning and education in developing countries: Research and policy for the post-2015 UN development goals* (pp. 26-41). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Banks, G., & Scheyvens, R. (2014). Ethical issues. In *Development field work: A practical guide* (pp. 160-187). SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Barmeyer, N. (2008). Taking on the state: Resistance, education, and other challenges facing the Zapatista autonomy project. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, *15*(5), 506-527. https://doi.org/10.1080/10702890802333769

Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A. O. (1998). *Culture, Chaos and Complexity: Catalysts for Change in Indigenous Education.* Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, University of Alaska Fairbanks. http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Articles/BarnhardtKawagley/ccc.html

Baronnet, B., & Stahler-Sholk, R. (2019). “Never again a México without us”: education and indigenous autonomy struggles in México. In R. Aman & T Ireland (Eds.), *Educational Alternatives in Latin America: New Modes of Counter-Hegemonic Learning*, 63-87. Palgrave Macmillan Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53450-3

Baronnet, B., & Stahler-Sholk, R. (2025). Indigenous struggles for a self-determined education: Rebel practices in Chiapas. *Indigenous Knowledge and Education in the Americas*, (25). https://doi.org/10.4000/13g1k

Barsh, R. L. (1993). A" New Partnership" for Indigenous Peoples: Can the United Nations Make a Difference? *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *17*(1) 197-227. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0gb5h4n6

Barton, H., Grant, M., & Guise, R. (2021). *Shaping neighbourhoods: for local health and global sustainability*. Routledge.

Baskin, C. (2016). Spirituality: The core of healing and social justice from an Indigenous perspective. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, *2016*(152), 51-60. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20212

Bassot, B. (2022). *Doing qualitative desk-based research: A practical guide to writing an excellent dissertation*. Policy Press.

Bazak, J. (2013). The Last of the Mayans: Preserving Chiapas’ Indigenous Languages in the 21st Century. *Council on Hemispheric Affairs, October*, *7*.

Becker, G. S. (1962). Investment in human capital: A theoretical analysis. *Journal of political economy*, *70*(5, Part 2), 9-49.

Bedregal, X. (1995). Chiapas: Reflexiones desde nuestro feminismo. In R. Rojas (Ed.), *En Chiapas, ¿y las mujeres, qué?* (Vol. 1). Ediciones La Correa Feminista.

Beghin, N. (2022). Decoloniality as the Only Pathway to the Right to Development in Latin America. *Development*, *65*(2), 178-185.

Belausteguigoitia, M. (2000). The right to rest: Women's struggle to be heard in the Zapatista movement. *Development*, *43*(3), 81–87. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.development.1110199

Belausteguigoitia, M. (2016). From Indigenismo to Zapatismo: Scenarios of construction of the Indigenous subject. In Y. Martínez-San Miguel., B. Sifuentes-Jáuregui & M. Belausteguigoitia (Eds.), *Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought: Historical and Institutional Trajectories* (pp. 23-36). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137547903_2

Bennett, C. (2019). *Road to academic success: Canada supports Mi'kmaq Nova Scotia First Nations*. Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs/news/2019/03/road-to-academic-success-canada-supports-mikmaq-nova-scotia-first-nations.html

Biesta, G. J. (2015). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Routledge.

Biggs, J., Tang, C., & Kennedy, G. (2022). *Teaching for quality learning at university 5e*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Bishop, M. (2024). Indigenous education sovereignty: Another way of 'doing' education. In *Critical Studies and the International Field of Indigenous Education Research* (pp. 131-146). Routledge.

Bizberg, I. (2021). The political economy of the post commodity boom crises in Latin America. In *Dependent Capitalisms in Contemporary Latin America and Europe* (pp. 131-156). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Bodley, J. H. (2014). *Victims of progress*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Bogliacino, F., & Rojas Lozano, D. (2017). *The evolution of inequality in Latin America in the 21st century: What are the patterns, drivers and causes?* (No. 57). GLO Discussion Paper.

Bonal, X. (2002). Globalización y política educativa: un análisis crítico de la agenda del Banco Mundial para América Latina (Globalization and Education Policy: A Critical Analysis of the World Bank's Agenda for Latin America). *Revista mexicana de sociología*, 3-35.

Bonal, X. (2004). Is the World Bank education policy adequate for fighting poverty? Some evidence from Latin America. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *24*(6), 649-666.

Bonal, X. (2007). On global absences: Reflections on the failings in the education and poverty relationship in Latin America. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *27*(1), 86-100.

Bookwalter, J. T., & Dalenberg, D. (2004). Subjective well-being and household factors in South Africa. *Social indicators research*, *65*, 333-353.

Boron, A. (2003). Prefacio a la segunda edición en lengua castellana. In E. Sader & P. Gentili (Eds.), *La trama del neoliberalismo: Mercado, crisis y exclusión social,* 7-16. Clacso. Buenos Aires.

Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J. C., & Nice, R. (1977). Education, society and culture. *Trans. Richard Nice. London: SAGE Publications*, *1*(1), 15-29.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative research journal*, *9*(2), 27-40.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Breidlid, A. (2013). *Education, indigenous knowledges, and development in the global South: Contesting knowledges for a sustainable future*. Routledge.

Brinkmann, S. (2013). *Qualitative interviewing: Conversational Knowledge Through Research Interviews* Oxford University Press.

Briy, A. (n.d.). *Members of a Zapatista community enact a performance representing life after 1994.* [Digital visualisation of the internet]. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organizaci%C3%B3n-comunitaria-en/

Brown, L. (2019). Indigenous young people, disadvantage and the violence of settler colonial education policy and curriculum. *Journal of Sociology*, *55*(1), 54-71.

Brown, T. (2022). Skill ecosystems in the global South: Informality, inequality, and community setting. *Geoforum*, *132*, 10-19.

Bruns, B., Macdonald, I. H., & Schneider, B. R. (2019). The politics of quality reforms and the challenges for SDGs in education. *World Development*, *118*, 27-38.

Bryce, R., Irvine, K. N., Church, A., Fish, R., Ranger, S., & Kenter, J. O. (2016). Subjective well-being indicators for large-scale assessment of cultural ecosystem services. *Ecosystem Services*, *21*, 258-269.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Bulmer-Thomas, V. (2003). *The economic history of Latin America since independence*. Cambridge University Press.

Burbach, R. (1994). Roots of the postmodern rebellion in Chiapas. *New Left Review*, *205,*113.

Burnette, C. E., Clark, C. B., & Rodning, C. B. (2018). "Living off the land": How subsistence promotes well-being and resilience among indigenous peoples of the Southeastern United States. *Social Service Review*, *92*(3), 369-400.

Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of indigenous education*. Kivaki Press, 585 E. 31st St., Durango, CO 81301.

Cajete, G. (2000). *Native science: natural laws of interdependence / Gregory Cajete ; foreword by Leroy Little Bear; Photographs by Marcia Keegan (1st ed).* Clear Light Publishers.

Campbell, J., & Moyers, B. (1988, June 22). *The message of the myth* (Season 1, Episode 2) [TV series episode]. In *The power of myth*. Public Broadcasting Service. https://archive.org/details/power_of_myth/02_the_message_of_the_myth.mp4

Cappelli, M. L. (2018). Toward enacting a Zapatista feminist agenda somewhere in La Selva Lacandona: We are all Marias? *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 5*(1), Article 1453313. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2018.1453313

Cardoso, E., & Urani, A. (1995). Inflation and unemployment as determinants of inequality in Brazil: the 1980s. In R. Dornbusch & S. Edwards (Eds.), *Reform, recovery, and growth: Latin America and the Middle East* (pp. 151-176). University of Chicago Press.

Cardoso, F. H., & Faletto, E. (2024). *Dependency and development in Latin America*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.13083432

Carnoy, M. (1999). Globalization and Educational Reform: What Planners Need To Know. Fundamentals of Educational Planning Series, Number 63.

Carnoy, M., & Samoff, J. (2014). *Education and social transition in the Third World* (Vol. 1044). Princeton University Press.

Carrier, S. (n.d.). *Ya Basta mural* [Photograph]. Home of the Brave. https://homebrave.com/postcards

Cerdán, P. (2013). Post-development and BuenVivir: An approach to development from Latin-America. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences,* (10), 15-24.

Chabbott, C., & Ramirez, F. O. (2000). Development and education. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 163-187). Boston, MA: Springer US.

Chakma, A. (2024). Freedom from fear and subjective well-being: Does personal security affect life satisfaction? *International Social Science Journal*, *74*(254), 1357-1373.

Chaney, C., Kubica, M., Mansilla, L., & Valeggia, C. R. (2024). Infrastructural violence and resistance in Namqom: Navigating environmental injustice in Formosa, Argentina. *Geoforum*, *157*, 104142.

Chassagne, N. (2019). Sustaining the 'Good Life': Buen Vivir as an alternative to sustainable development. *Community Development Journal*, *54*(3), 482-500.

Chuji, M., Rengifo, G., & Gudynas, E. (2019). Buen Vivir. In A. Kothari., A. Salleh., A. Escobar., F. Demaria & A. Acosta (Eds.), *Pluriverse, a post-development dictionary.* (pp. 111-114). Tulika Books.

Clifford, N., French, S., & Valentine, G. (2010). Getting started in geographical research: how this book can help. *Key methods in geography*, *2*(2), 3-15.

Clift, S. (2012). Creative arts as a public health resource: moving from practice-based research to evidence-based practice. *Perspectives in public health*, *132*(3), 120-127.

Coatsworth, J. H. (2008). Inequality, institutions and economic growth in Latin America. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *40*(3), 545-569.

Collier, G. A., & Quaratiello, E. L. (2005). *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas*. Food First Books.

Collins, J. (2009). Social reproduction in classrooms and schools. *Annual review of Anthropology*, *38*(1), 33-48.

Collins, R. (2019). *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification*. Columbia University Press.

Contreras, M. E. (2003). A comparative perspective of education reforms in Bolivia: 1950-2000. *Proclaiming revolution: Bolivia in comparative perspective*, *10*, 259-286.

Cortina, R. (Ed.). (2017). *Indigenous education policy, equity, and intercultural understanding in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

Cruces, G., García Domench, C., & Gasparini, L. (2014). Inequality in education: evidence for Latin America. *Falling inequality in Latin America. Policy changes and lessons*, 318-339.

Cubillo, E. (2011). 'The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help''. *Flinders Law Journal*, *13*(1), 137-163.

D'Andrea, M. (2007). Peru: Inequality of education for indigenous groups, the neglected class. *The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)*.

Darder, A. (1991). *Culture and power in the classroom: A critical foundation for bicultural education*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Davern, M., Gunn, L., Whitzman, C., Higgs, C., Giles-Corti, B., Simons, K., ... & Badland, H. (2017). Using spatial measures to test a conceptual model of social infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing. *Cities & health*, *1*(2), 194-209.

Dawson, A. (1998). From models for the nation to model citizens: indigenismo and the 'revindication' of the Mexican Indian, 1920-1940. *Journal of Latin American Studies 30*(2), 279-308.

Dawson, A. (2005). Aboriginal People and Policy (Mexico). *In J. Herrick & P.H. Stuart (Eds.)Encyclopedia of Social Welfare History in North America*, 7-10. SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952521.n4

Dean, B. (2004). Indigenous education and the prospects for cultural survival. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, *27*(4), 14-18.

De la Cuadra, F. (2015). Indigenous people, socio-environmental conflict and post-development in Latin America. *Ambiente & Sociedade*, *18*(2), 23-40.

De Leeuw, S. (2018). Activating place: geography as a determinant of Indigenous peoples' health and well-being. In M. Greenwood., S. De Leeuw & N.M. Lindsay (Eds.), *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' health: Beyond the Social*, (pp.187-203). Canadian Scholars.

de Oliveira Nascimento, A. (2025). On Political Imperfection: The Duty of Feminist Characters in Zapatista Fiction. *Latin American Research Review*, 1-24. doi:10.1017/lar.2025.12

Dellacioppa, K. Z. (2009). *This bridge called Zapatismo*. Lexington Books.

Desjardins, R. (2008). Researching the links between education and well-being. *European journal of education*, *43*(1), 23-35.

Diener, E., & Fujita, F. (2013). Social Comparisons and Subjective Weil-Being. In B.P. Buunk., F.X. Gibbons & A. Buunk (Eds.), *Health, coping, and well-being* (pp. 329-357). Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203774106

Domenech, E., & Mora-Ninci, C. (2012). World Bank discourse and policy on education and cultural diversity for Latin America. In D. Hill & R. Kumar (Eds.), *Global neoliberalism and education and its consequences* (pp. 171-190). Routledge.

Dosman, E. J. (2008). *The life and times of Raúl Prebisch, 1901-1986*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.

Dovarganes, D. (1994, January 4). *A resident of Ocosingo assists an EZLN guerrilla wounded during the clashes* [Photograph]. *El País*. https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-01-01/and-they-shouted-enough-the-30-year-long-indigenous-uprising-that-rewrote-mexican-history.html

Durie, M. (2011). *Nga tini whetu: Navigating Maori futures*. Huia Publishers.

Duryea, S. & C. Pagés (2002). Human capital policies: What they can and cannot do for productivity and poverty reduction in Latin. Inter-American Development Bank. America.https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.308868

Echenique, C. R. (2023). Education in Latin America, what could we do?. *Revista Boletín Redipe*, *12*(4), 37-60. http://dx.doi.org/10.36260/rbr.v12i4.1951

Edwards, D. B. (2023). Participation in Development and Education Governance: World Bank Thinking, Frameworks, and Results. In *Rethinking World Bank Influence* (pp. 50-72). Routledge.

Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional. (1994). *Primera declaración de la Selva Lacandona*. https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1994/01/01/primera-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/

Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional. (2005). *Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona* [The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle]. http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/2005/2005_06_SEXTA.htm

Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). (2013). *Gobierno Autónomo I: Cuaderno de texto de primer grado del curso de "La libertad según l@s Zapatistas"* (Vol. 1). Escuelita Zapatista.

Emont, J. (2024). Big Dreams Built on Higher Education Sour Worldwide for Jobless Graduates. *Wall Street Journal*.

Epo, B. N., Mvomo, F., Tabi, H. N., & Ondoa, H. A. (2024). Colonial status and income inequality in developing countries. *World Development Perspectives*, *36*, 100634.

Erickson, R. J. (2002). Foundations of the Mexican federal educational system. *The Clearing House*, *75*(3), 146-150.

Escobar, A. (1991). Anthropology and the Development Encounter: The Making and Marketing of Development Anthropology. *American Ethnologist*, 658-682.

Escobar, A. (1997). 'The Making and Unmaking of the Third World through Development'. In M. Rahnema and V. Bawtree (Eds.), *The Post-Development Reader*. (pp. 85-93). Zed, London.

Escobar, A. (2005). Imagining a post-development era. In J. Crush (Ed.), *Power of development* (pp. 205-221). London. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203975985

Escobar, A. (2007). 'Post-development' as concept and social practice. In A. Ziai (Ed.), *Exploring post-development* (pp. 18-31). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203962091

Escobar, A. (2010). Latin America at a crossroads: Alternative modernizations, post-liberalism, or post-development? *Cultural studies*, *24*(1), 1-65. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380903424208

Escobar, A. (2011). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.

Escobar, A. (2017a). Other worlds are (already) possible: Self-organization, complexity and post-capitalist cultures. In Savyasaachi & R. Kumar (Eds.), *Social movements* (pp. 289-303). Routledge India. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315662084

Escobar, A. (2017b). Sustaining the Pluriverse: the political ontology of territorial struggles in Latin America. In M. Brightman & J. Lewis (Eds.), *The Anthropology of Sustainability: beyond development and progress* (pp. 237-256). Palgrave Macmillan. New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56636-2_14

Escuelita Zapatista. (2013). *Cuaderno de texto de primer grado del curso de "La libertad según las Zapatistas."* EZLN.

Esteva, G., & Prakash, M. S. (2014). *Grassroots postmodernism: Remaking the soil of cultures*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Fanon, F. (2023). Black skin, white masks. In W. Longhofer & D. Winchester (Eds.), *Social Theory re-wired* (pp. 355-361). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003320609

Fehr, E., Fischbacher, U., & Gächter, S. (2002). Strong reciprocity, human cooperation, and the enforcement of social norms. *Human nature*, *13*, 1-25.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human relations*, *7*(2), 117-140. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/001872675400700202

Flood, D., & Rohloff, P. (2018). Indigenous languages and global health. *The Lancet Global Health*, *6*(2), e134-e135.

Forbis, M. M. (2016). After autonomy: the zapatistas, insurgent indigeneity, and decolonization. *Settler Colonial Studies* , *6* (4), 365-384.

Franco, I. B., & Derbyshire, E. (2019). SDG 4: quality education: governing education for sustainable development: towards inclusive and equitable quality education. In *Actioning the global goals for local impact: towards sustainability science, policy, education and practice* (pp. 57-68). Singapore: Springer Singapore.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Seabury Press.

Fuentes-Morales, R. (2009). *The discursive construction of intercultural education in the Mexican Indigenous context* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh]. Unpublished. https://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/9924/

Gahman, L. (2016). Zapatismo versus the neoliberal university. In S. Springer., M. Lopes de Souza & R. White (Eds.), *The radicalization of pedagogy*, (pp. 73-199). London, England. Rowman & Littlefield.

Galeano, E. (1997). *Open veins of Latin America: Five centuries of the pillage of a continent*. nyu Press.

Gallegos, S., & Quinn, C. (2017). Epistemic injustice and resistance in the Chiapas Highlands: The Zapatista case. *Hypatia*, *32*(2), 247-262. doi:10.1111/hypa.12315

Garcia-Arias, J., Corbetta, S., & Baronnet, B. (2023). Decolonizing education in Latin America: critical environmental and intercultural education as an Indigenous pluriversal alternative. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *44*(8), 1394-1412. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2023.2234088

García, M. (2019). INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN MEXICO AND SPAIN: INSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY. *The University of North Carolina at Charlotte*.

García, O., & Velasco, P. (2012). Insufficient language education policy: Intercultural bilingual education in Chiapas. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, *6*(1), 1-18. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2011.633129

Gasparini, L., Galiani, S., Cruces, G., & Acosta, P. (2011). Educational upgrading and returns to skills in Latin America: evidence from a supply-demand framework, 1990-2010. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, (5921). https://web.archive.org/web/20180725004635id_/https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/58454/1/699908396.pdf

Gates, M. (2018). The debt crisis and economic restructuring: prospects for Mexican agriculture. In G. Otero (Ed.), *Neoliberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future* (pp. 43-62). Routledge.

Gee, J., & Gee, J. P. (2007). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203944806

Gelsomino, M. (2010). The Zapatista effect: Information communication technology activism and marginalized communities. *Faculty of Information Quarterly, 2*(2), 1-9. http://hdl.handle.net/1807/80216

Giovannini, M. (2016). Alternatives to development: The contribution of Indigenous community enterprises in Chiapas. *Journal of International Development*, *28*(7), 1138-1154. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3141

Giroux, H. A., McLaren, P. L., McLaren, P., & Peter, M. (Eds.). (1989). *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle*. Suny Press.

Godden, N. J. (2021). Community work, love and the indigenous worldview of buen vivir in Peru. *International Social Work*, *64*(3), 354-370.

Godenzzi, J. C., & Sichra, I. (2014). Language policy and planning: Latin America. In *The Routledge Handbook of Hispanic Applied Linguistics* (pp. 606-623). Routledge.

Gonzalez, M. B., Herman, K. A., & Walls, M. L. (2020). Culture, social support, and diabetes empowerment among American Indian adults living with type 2 diabetes. *Diabetes spectrum*, *33*(2), 156-164. https://doi.org/10.2337/ds19-0036

Grain. (2024, May). Whipping up disaster: how Brazil became a lab for financial agro-investments. *CADTM*. https://www.cadtm.org/Whipping-up-disaster-how-Brazil-became-a-lab-for-financial-agro-investments

Grieves, V. (2006). What is Indigenous wellbeing. In *Proceedings of the Matauranga Taketake: Traditional Knowledge Conference* (pp. 105-114). https://www.maramatanga.ac.nz/media/184/download?attachment#page=118

Grover, M. L. (2002). The Zapatista Reader (Book). *Library Journal*, *127*(5), 96.

Grugel, J. (2009). *Governance after neoliberalism in Latin America*. Springer.

Grugel, J., & Riggirozzi, P. (2012). Post-neoliberalism in Latin America: Rebuilding and reclaiming the State after crisis. *Development and change, 43*(1), 1-21.

Gudynas, E. (2011). Buen Vivir: today's tomorrow. *development*, *54*(4), 441-447. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2011.86

Guerin, B., Janta, B., & van Gorp, A. (2018). Desk-based research and literature review. *Evaluating interventions that prevent or counter violent extremism*, *63*, RR-2094. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alvar-Gilgutierre/publication/375717685_00000051-RAND_RR2094/links/6557c4303fa26f66f40d4a40/00000051-RAND-RR2094.pdf#page=71

Gwynne, R. N., & Kay, C. (2000). Views from the periphery: futures of neoliberalism in Latin America. *Third World Quarterly, 21*(1), 141-156.

Gyimah-Brempong, K. (2017). Education in Ghana. *The economy of Ghana sixty years after independence*, *11*(22.8), 349. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198753438.003.0021

Hale, C. R. (2002). Does multiculturalism menace? Governance, cultural rights and the politics of identity in Guatemala. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *34*(3), 485-524. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3875459

Hampshire, K. R., & Matthijsse, M. (2010). Can arts projects improve young people's wellbeing? A social capital approach. *Social science & medicine*, *71*(4), 708-716. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.05.015

Hand, S., & Thomas, A. (2024). *Community-controlled schools create better education outcomes for First Nations students*. UNSW Newsroom. https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/01/community-controlled-schools-create-better-education-outcomes-fo

Hand, V., Penuel, W. R., & Gutiérrez, K. D. (2013). (Re) framing educational possibility: Attending to power and equity in shaping access to and within learning opportunities. *Human Development*, *55*(5-6), 250-268. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26764629

Harazduk, I. (2014). Zapatistas and the Mexican educational system: a critical analysis of curriculum [Dissertation]. American University. https://doi.org/10.57912/23868528.v1

Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Harvey, N. (1998). *The Chiapas rebellion: The struggle for land and democracy*. Duke University Press.

Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications.

Henze, R., & Davis, K. A. (1999). Authenticity and identity: Lessons from indigenous language education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *30*(1), 3-21.

Hickel, J., Dorninger, C., Wieland, H., & Suwandi, I. (2022). Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: Drain from the global South through unequal exchange, 1990–2015. *Global environmental change*, *73*.

Hillel, P. T. (2009). Contesting Zapata: Differing meanings of the Mexican national idea. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, *1*(2), 269-291. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26610121_Contesting_Zapata_Differing_Meanings_of_the_Mexican_National_Idea

Hirschkorn, K., & Boris, D. (1996). The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA): consequences of neoliberal market strategies for Mexico and Canada.

Hoffman, K., & Centeno, M. A. (2003). The lopsided continent: inequality in Latin America. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *29*(1), 363-390. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100141

Hollender, R. (2015). Post-growth in the global south: The emergence of alternatives to development in Latin America. *Socialism and Democracy*, *29*(1), 73-101. https://sdonline.org/issue/67-march-2015

Hooks, B. (2014). *Teaching to Transgress*. Routledge.

Hoover, E. (2017). "You can't say you're sovereign if you can't feed yourself": defining and enacting food sovereignty in American Indian community gardening. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *41*(3), 31-70. https://doi.org/10.17953/AICRJ.41.3.HOOVER

Hossain, N. (2004). *Access to education for the poor and girls: educational achievements in Bangladesh.* Washington DC: World Bank. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/382041468743378634

Ihlen, Ø. (2018). Symbolic capital. *The international encyclopedia of strategic communication*, 1-4. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119010722.iesc0190

Illich, I. (1973). *Deschooling society*. Penguin.

Illich, I. (1978). Disabling professions. *India International Centre Quarterly*, *5*(1), 23-32.

Illich, I. (1997). Development as planned poverty. In M. Rahnema & V. Bawtree (Eds.), *The post-development reader* (pp. 94–102). Zed Books.

Inclán, M. (2018). *The Zapatista Movement and Mexico's Democratic Transition: Mobilization, Success, and Survival*. Oxford University Press.

Imoh, A. T. D. (2024). Global Children's Rights Discourses: Imperialistic, Irrelevant and Inapplicable to Southern Contexts?. In *Turning Global Rights into Local Realities* (pp. 56-74). Bristol University Press.

Isakson, S. R. (2009). No hay ganancia en la milpa: the agrarian question, food sovereignty, and the on-farm conservation of agrobiodiversity in the Guatemalan highlands. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *36*(4), 725-759. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150903353876

Johnston, J. (2000). Pedagogical guerrillas, armed democrats, and revolutionary counterpublics: Examining paradox in the Zapatista unprising in Chiapas Mexico. *Theory and Society*, *29*(4), 463-505. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3108584

Jonasson, M. E., Spiegel, S. J., Thomas, S., Yassi, A., Wittman, H., Takaro, T., ... & Spiegel, J. M. (2019). Oil pipelines and food sovereignty: Threat to health equity for Indigenous communities. *Journal of public health policy*, *40*(4), 504-517. doi: 10.1057/s41271-019-00186-1

Jones, P. W. (2006). *Education, poverty and the World Bank*. Sense Publishers.

Kamal, A. G., Linklater, R., Thompson, S., & Dipple, J. (2017). A recipe for change: Reclamation of Indigenous food sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation for decolonization, resource sharing, and cultural restoration. In A. Shattuck, C.

Schiavoni, & Z. VanGelder (Eds.), *The Politics of Food Sovereignty: Concept, Practice and Social Movements* (pp. 137–154). Routledge.

Kamat, S. (2012). The poverty of theory: The World Bank's system approach to education policy. In S.J. Klees., J. Samoff & N.P. Stromquist (Eds.), *The World Bank and Education: Critiques and Alternatives* (pp. 33-47). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Kawachi, I., & Berkman, L. (2000). Social cohesion, social capital, and health. *Social epidemiology*, *174*(7), 290-319.

Kazembe, L. D. (2021). Curriculum studies and indigenous global contexts of culture, power, and equity.

Kerner, D., Love, J. L., & Pollock, D. H. (2001, December 28). Raúl Prebisch on ECLAC's achievements and deficiencies: an unpublished interview. UN-iLibrary.

Kimmerer, R. (2011). Restoration and reciprocity: the contributions of traditional ecological knowledge. In D. Egan., E.E. Hjerpe & J. Abrams (Eds.), *Human dimensions of ecological restoration: Integrating science, nature, and culture*, 257-276. https://doi.org/10.5822/978-1-61091-039-2_18

Khasnabish, D. A. (2010). *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the Grassroots to the Global*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarisation, and the decline of civic life*. Crown.

Klor de Alva, J. (1995). The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of "Colonialism," "Postcolonialism," and "Mestizaje". In G. Prakash (Ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (pp. 241-276). Princeton: Princeton University Press. https://doi-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/10.1515/9781400821440.241

Knight, A. (1986). *The Mexican Revolution / Alan Knight*. Cambridge University Press.

Knoll, A., & Reyes, I. (2014, January 25). From Fire to Autonomy: Zapatistas, 20 Years of Walking Slowly. *Truthout*. https://truthout.org/articles/from-fire-to-autonomy-zapatistas-20-years-of-walking-slowly/

Kothari, U., & Klein, E. (2023). Towards solidarity, decoloniality, and building the pluriverse. In *Advanced introduction to critical global development* (pp. 101–108). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Kuokkanen, R. (2019). *Restructuring relations: Indigenous self-determination, governance, and gender*. Oxford University Press.

La Belle, T. J., & White, P. S. (1978). Education and colonial language policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. *International Review of Education*, *24*(3), 243-261.

Lahiri, B., & Darity Jr, W. A. (2024). Global North–South Reparations: Demand-side and Supply-side Policies with a Dynamic View of International Trade and Finance. *Development and Change*, *55*(4), 672-699.

Lakey, B., & Orehek, E. (2011). Relational regulation theory: a new approach to explain the link between perceived social support and mental health. *Psychological review*, *118*(3), 482. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0023477

Latham, A., & Layton, J. (2019). Social infrastructure and the public life of cities: Studying urban sociality and public spaces. *Geography Compass*, *13*(7), e12444. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12444

Laurell, A. C. (2000). Structural Adjustment and the Globalization of Social Policy in Latin America. *International Sociology*, *15*(2), 306-325. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002010 (Original work published 2000)

Lawrence, T. J., Stedman, R. C., Morreale, S. J., & Taylor, S. R. (2019). Rethinking landscape conservation: linking globalized agriculture to changes to Indigenous

community-managed landscapes. *Tropical Conservation Science*, *12*, 1940082919889503.

Lertzman, D. A. (2002). Rediscovering rites of passage: Education, transformation, and the transition to sustainability. *Conservation Ecology*, *5*(2). https://www.jstor.org/stable/26271823

Levinson, B. A. (2001). *We are all equal: student culture and identity at a Mexican secondary school, 1988-1998.* Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822381075

Lewis, S. E. (2018). *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo: The INI's Coordinating Center in Highland Chiapas and the Fate of a Utopian Project*. University of New Mexico Press.

Lewis, S. E. (2005). Rural education (Mexico). In P.H. Stuart & J. Herrick, *Encyclopedia of Social Welfare History in North America* (pp. 314-317). Thousand Oaks, Cali: Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952521.n125

Leyva Solano, X. (2001). Regional, communal, and organizational transformations in Las Cañadas. *Latin American Perspectives*, *28*(2), 20-44. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3184984

Linnemann, H. (1967). The plan that failed: the United Nations development decade, and beyond. https://repub.eur.nl/pub/30866/

Livingston, V., Jackson-Nevels, B., & Reddy, V. V. (2022). Social, cultural, and economic determinants of well-being. *Encyclopedia*, *2*(3), 1183-1199. https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia2030079

Lockhart, J. (1994). *The Nahuas after the conquest: A social and cultural history of the Indians of Central Mexico, sixteenth through eighteenth centuries*. Stanford University Press.

López-Alves, F. (2011). Modernization theory revisited: Latin America, Europe, and the US in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, *38*(1), 243-279. http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/achsc/v38n1/v38n1a09.pdf

López, L. E. (2008). Top-down and bottom-up: Counterpoised visions of bilingual intercultural education in Latin America. In N.H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Can schools save Indigenous languages? Policy and practice on four continents* (pp. 42-65). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

López, L. E. (2010). *Reaching the unreached: Indigenous intercultural bilingual education in Latin America.* Background paper for the Education for all global monitoring report 2010: Reaching the marginalized. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186620

López, L. E. (2014). Indigenous intercultural bilingual education in Latin America: Widening gaps between policy and practice. In R. Cortina (Ed.), *The education of Indigenous citizens in Latin America* (pp.19-49). Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783090969-004

Lovern, L. L. (2017). Indigenous perspectives on difference: A case for inclusion. *Journal of literary & cultural disability studies*, *11*(3), 303-320. https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2017.24

Loyo Brambila A. (2008). Schooling in Mexico. In S. Gvirtz & J. Beech (Eds.), *Going to school in Latin America* (pp. 203-228). Westport: Greenwood Press.

Lund, H. (2003). Testing the claims of new urbanism: Local access, pedestrian travel, and neighbouring behaviours. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *69*(4), 414-429. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360308976328

McCaffery, J. (2016). Western education: Suitable for everyone? Education for travelling, marginalized, and Indigenous communities in the West. *Prospects*, *46*(3), 491-505. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-017-9413-x

McCalman, J., & Bainbridge, R. (2021). Indigenous education, well-being, and resilience—A systemic approach. In M. Ungar (Ed.), *Multisystemic resilience: Adaptation and transformation in contexts of change*, (pp. 199-219). Oxford University Press. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1093/oso/9780190095888.003.0012

McCarty, T., & Lee, T. (2014). Critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy and Indigenous education sovereignty. *Harvard educational review*, *84*(1), 101-124. https://nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/49/2018/04/McCarty-Lee-Critical-Culturally-Sustaining-Pedagogy.pdf

McClelland, D. C. (1961). The achieving society. *Van Nostrand Company Inc*.

Maldonado-Villalpando, E., Paneque-Gálvez, J., Demaria, F., & Napoletano, B. M. (2022). Grassroots innovation for the pluriverse: Evidence from Zapatismo and autonomous Zapatista education. *Sustainability Science*, *17*(4), 1301-1316.

Marcos, S. (2002). *Our word is our weapon: Selected writings*. Seven Stories Press.

Marcos, S. (2014, July 22). The Zapatista women's revolutionary law as it is lived today. *Open Democracy*. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/zapatista-womens-revolutionary-law-as-it-is-lived-today/

Matthews, S. (2004). Post-development theory and the question of alternatives: a view from Africa. *Third world quarterly*, *25*(2), 373-384. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3993687

Medina Melgarejo, P. (2015). *Pedagogías insumisas. Movimientos político-pedagógicos y memorias colectivas de educaciones otras en América Latina*. Universidad de

Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica/Educación para las Ciencias en Chiapas AC/Juan Pablos Editor.

Mero-Figueroa, M., Galdeano-Gómez, E., Piedra-Muñoz, L., & Obaco, M. (2020). Measuring well-being: A buen vivir (living well) indicator for Ecuador. *Social Indicators Research*, *152*, 265-287. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02434-4

Messina, J., & Silva, J. (2021). Twenty years of wage inequality in Latin America. *The World Bank Economic Review*, *35*(1), 117-147. https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhz029

Mieder, W. (2005). *Proverbs are the best policy: Folk wisdom and American politics* (1st ed.). Utah State University Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9278

Mihesuah, D. (2010). Overcoming hegemony in native studies programs. In *Unlearning the Language of Conquest* (pp. 190-206). University of Texas Press.

Mingst, K., & Karns, M. P. (2019). *The United Nations in the post-cold war era*. Routledge.

Mohanty, C. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist review*, *30*(1), 61-88. https://doi.org/10.2307/1395054

Montgomery, C. (2013). *Happy city: Transforming our lives through urban design*. Penguin UK.

Morgan, B. (2019). Beyond the guest paradigm: Eurocentric education and Aboriginal peoples in NSW. In E.A. McKinley & L. Tuhiwai Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous education* (pp. 111-128). Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3899-0_60

Mora, M. (2007). Zapatista anticapitalist politics and the “other campaign” learning from the struggle for Indigenous rights and autonomy. *Latin American Perspectives*, *34*(2), 64-77. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X06299086

Morris, S. D. (2018, January 24). Carlos Salinas de Gortari and His Legacy. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.491

Mouratidis, K., & Poortinga, W. (2020). Built environment, urban vitality and social cohesion: Do vibrant neighbourhoods foster strong communities?. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, *204*, 103951. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2020.103951

Mundial, B. (2003). Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: breaking with History. In *Advanced Conference Edition, Banco Mundial, Washington DC*.

Mundy, K. (2007). Education for all: Paradoxes and prospects of a global promise. In D.P. Baker & A.W. Wiseman, *Education for All* (International Perspectives on Education and Society, Vol. 8, pp. 1-30). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1479-3679(06)08001-7

Murphy, M. (2014). Self-determination as a collective capability: The case of Indigenous peoples. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, *15*(4), 320-334. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2013.878320

Murphy, M. (2023). Freedom, Self-Determination, and Indigenous Well-Being. In D. Karmis & J. Maclure (Eds.), *Civic Freedom in an Age of Diversity: The Public Philosophy of James Tully*, *10*, (pp. 256-278). https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.2990337

Nash, J. C. (2002). *Mayan visions: The quest for autonomy in an age of globalization*. Routledge.

Näslund-Hadley, E. (2022). *Skills development of Indigenous children, youth, and adults in Latin America and the Caribbean*. In S. Kennedy (Ed.), (Technical Note No. IDB-TN-02410). Inter-American Development Bank. https://doi.org/10.18235/0003954

Nes, K. (2003). Why does Education for all Have to be Inclusive Education?. In J. Allan (Ed.), *Inclusion, Participation and Democracy: What is the Purpose? 2*. (pp. 67-80). Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-48078-6_5

Nguyen, P., Scheyvens, R., Beban, A., & Gardyne, S. (2022). From a distance: The 'new normal' for researchers and research assistants engaged in remote fieldwork. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *21*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221089108

Nigh, R., & Bertely, M. (2018). Indigenous knowledge and education in Chiapas, Mexico: An intercultural method. *Diálogos sobre Educación. Temas actuales en investigación educativa*, *9*(16). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325502617_Indigenous_Knowledge_and_Education_in_Chiapas_Mexico_An_Intercultural_Method

Nirmal, P., & Rocheleau, D. (2019). Decolonizing degrowth in the post-development convergence: Questions, experiences, and proposals from two Indigenous territories. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, *2*(3), 465-492. https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618819478

Nourani Rinaldi, P. (2022). The age of transition: Postdevelopment and North-South synergies. *Latin American Perspectives*, *49*(1), 237-256.

OECD. (2018). *Programa para la Evaluación Internacional de Alumnos PISA 2018: Resultados* [Program for International Student Assessment PISA 2018. Results]. https://www-oecd-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_MEX_Spanish.pdf

O'Leary, Z. (2017). *The essential guide to doing your research project / Zina O'Leary (3rd edition)*. SAGE.

Olivera, M. (2012). From integrationist indigenismo to neoliberal de-ethnification in Chiapas: reminiscences. *Latin American Perspectives, 39*(5) 100-110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X12447278

Olko, J., Lubiewska, K., Maryniak, J., Haimovich, G., de la Cruz, E., Cuahutle Bautista, B., ... & Iglesias Tepec, H. (2022). The positive relationship between Indigenous language use and community-based well-being in four Nahua ethnic groups in Mexico. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *28*(1), 132-143. https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000479

Olneck, M. R., & Bills, D. B. (1980). What makes Sammy run? An empirical assessment of the Bowles-Gintis correspondence theory. *American Journal of Education*, *89*(1), 27-61. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1085399

Ordóñez, M. F., Shannon, K., & d'Auria, V. (2022). The materialization of the Buen Vivir and the Rights of Nature: Rhetoric and Realities of Guayaquil Ecológico urban regeneration project. *City, Territory and Architecture*, *9*(1), 1.

Ornelas, C. (2004). The politics of privatisation, decentralisation and education reform in Mexico. *International Review of Education*, *50*(3), 397-418. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-004-2831-z

Ortega, R. (2003). *Photo of Zapatista children receiving military training in the woods, 1994* [Photograph]. In *Zapatistas: Chronicle of a rebellion*.

Otero, G. (2018). Neoliberal reform and politics in Mexico: An overview. *Neoliberalism Revisited*, 1-25.

Pellanda, A. C. (2024). SDG 4 in Dispute: Between the Right to Education and the Human Capital Agenda. In T.G. Galvao & H.Z. de Menezes (Eds.), *The Quest for the Sustainable Development Goals: Living experiences in territorializing the 2030 Agenda in Brazil* (pp. 125-137). Sustainable Development Goals Series. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-59279-9_10

Peppin-Vaughan, R. (2010). Girls' and women's education within Unesco and the World Bank, 1945–2000. *Compare*, *40*(4), 405-423. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2010.490360

Peredo, A. M. (2019). El buen vivir: Notions of wellbeing among Indigenous peoples of South America. In C. Flemming & M. Manning (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of Indigenous wellbeing* (pp. 156-169). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351051262

Perez, C. (2022). *Dejando la Tierra con Dolor: The Consequences of NAFTA on the People of Chiapas* [Master's thesis], Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Graduate School-Newark).

Pérez-Aguilera, D. A., & Figueroa-Helland, L. E. (2011). Beyond Acculturation: Political" Change", Indigenous Knowledges, and Intercultural Higher-Education in Mexico. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* , *9*(2). 268-296. https://www.jceps.com/wp-content/uploads/PDFs/09-2-16.pdf

Pihama, L., & Lee-Morgan, J. (2019). Colonization, education, and Indigenous peoples. In E.A. McKinley & L. Tuhiwai Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous education*, (pp. 19-27). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3899-0_67

Pontarollo, N., Orellana, M., & Segovia, J. (2020). The determinants of subjective well-being in a developing country: The Ecuadorian case. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *21*(8), 3007-3035. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00211-w

Porter, J. M., & Morrison, A. R. (2024). From pilots to policies: Challenges for implementing intercultural bilingual education in Latin America. *International Review of Education*, *70*(1), 11-28. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-023-10039-5

Postero, N. (2018). Indigenous development in Latin America. In J. Cupples., M. Palomino-Schalscha & M. Prieto (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Latin*

American Development (pp. 43-53). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315162935

Prage, L. (2015). Lekil Kuxlejal-an alternative to development. *A field study in Chiapas, Mexico. mémoire de maitrise, Lund University*. https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/lup/publication/7857560

Purnell, J. (2002). Citizens and sons of the pueblo: national and local identities in the making of the Mexican nation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 25*(2), 213-237. doi:10.1080/01419870120109467

Puryear, J., Santibañez, L., & Solano, A. (2012). Education in Mexico. In C. Loser & H. Kohli (Eds.), *Emerging markets forum book chapters* (pp. 87-108). Washington, DC: Emerging Markets Forum.

Pypenko, I. S., Stadnik, A. V., Melnyk, Y. B., & Mykhaylyshyn, U. B. (2023). The impact of the war in Ukraine on the psychological well-being of students. International Journal of Science Annals 6(2), 20-31. http://dx.doi.org/10.26697/ijsa.2023.2.2

Quijano, A. (2002). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin American, en Nepantla. *Views from South*, (1.3).

Radcliffe, S. A. (2012). Development for a postneoliberal era? Sumak kawsay, living well and the limits to decolonisation in Ecuador. *Geoforum*, *43*(2), 240-249. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.GEOFORUM.2011.09.003

Radnovich, C. (n.d.). *The sign at the gate to Caracol Morelia depicts the Zapatista lifestyle - production and agriculture, health and education*. [Digital visualisation of the internet]. https://cronkite.asu.edu/projects/buffett/chiapas/for-zapatistas-revolution-moves-at-a-snails-pace-while-global-appeal-endures/

Rahnema, M., & Bawtree, V. (Eds.). (1997). *The post-development reader* (pp. xix+-440).

Ramirez, S. G. N. (2025). *Indigenous Women in the Resistance: A Decolonial, Comparative-Historical Analysis of Mexican Revolutionary Movements* (Master's thesis, University of Nevada, Reno).

Rao, N., & Sweetman, C. (2014). Introduction to gender and education. *Gender & Development*, *22*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2014.902230

Reyes-Martínez, J. (2022). Cultural participation and subjective well-being of Indigenous in Latin America. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *17*(2), 635-654. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-021-09910-0

Richardson, N. P. (2009). Export-oriented populism: commodities and coalitions in Argentina. *Studies in comparative international development*, *44*(3), 228-255.

Rico Montoya, A. (2013). Percepciones de niños y niñas zapatistas: Guerra, resistencia y autonomía. *Argumentos (México, DF)*, *26*(73), 57-78. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317443294_Percepciones_de_ninos_y_ninas_zapatistas_Guerra_resistencia_y_autonomia

Rist, G. (2014). *The history of development: From western origins to global faith*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Roberts, P. (2017). Paulo Freire. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*.

Rodas, E. R. (2022). " Los De Abajo Reconstruimos": Zapatismo & Indigenous Gender Transformation. [Master's Thesis]. 1440. University of San Francisco. https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/1440

Rojas, M. (2018). Happiness in Latin America has social foundations, *Chapter 6 World Happiness Report 2018*, 89-114. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323831952_Latin_American_Happiness_has_Social_Foundations_chapter_6_World_Happiness_Report_2018

Rojas, M., & Chávez, P. (2019). Subjective wellbeing of the P'urhépecha people: Between tradition and modernity. In C. Fleming & M. Manning (Eds.), *Routledge*

Handbook of Indigenous Wellbeing (pp. 330-341). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351051262

Romero-Contreras, S., & García-Cedillo, I. (2023). Where Does Mexico Stand Regarding the Agenda 2030 Goals for Inclusive Education?. In D. Lane., N. Catania & S. Semon (Eds.), *Progress Toward Agenda 2030: A Mid Term Review of the Status of Inclusive Education in Global Contexts* (pp. 297-315). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-363620230000021019

Ronen, T., & Seeman, A. (2007). Subjective well-being of adolescents in boarding schools under threat of war. *Journal of Traumatic Stress: Official Publication of The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies*, *20*(6), 1053-1062. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20248

Rosen, S. (1976). A theory of life earnings. *Journal of Political Economy*, *84*(4, Part 2), S45-S67. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/260532

Ross, K. N., & Genevois, I. J. (Eds.). (2006). *Cross-national studies of the quality of education: planning their design and managing their impact*. Paris: UNESCO, International Institute for Educational Planning.

Ruelle, M. L., & Kassam, K. A. S. (2013). Foodways transmission in the standing Rock Nation. *Food and Foodways: explorations in the history and culture of human nourishment*, *21*(4), 315-339. https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2013.850007

Ruiz, S., & Menocal, A. R. (1998). The politics of marginalization: Poverty and the rights of the Indigenous people in Mexico. *Journal of International Affairs, 52*(1), 85-100. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24357815

Rus, J. (1994). The 'Comunidad Revolucionaria Institucional': The Subversion of Native Government in Highland Chiapas, 1936-1968. In G. Joseph & D. Nugent (Eds.), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, (pp. 265-300). http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11hph0c.14

Rus, J., Hernández Castillo, R. A., & Mattiace, S. L. (2001). The Indigenous people of Chiapas and the state in the time of Zapatismo: Remaking culture, renegotiating power: Introduction. *Latin American Perspectives, 28*(2), 7–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x0102800202

Russell, R., Guerry, A. D., Balvanera, P., Gould, R. K., Basurto, X., Chan, K. M. A., Klain, S., Levine, J., & Tam, J. (2013). Humans and Nature: How Knowing and Experiencing Nature Affect Well-Being. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 38*(1), 473–502. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-012312-110838

Ruttenberg, T. (2013). Wellbeing economics and Buen Vivir: Development alternatives for inclusive human security. *PRAXIS The Fletcher Journal of Human Security*, *28*, 68-93.

Sachs, S. (2014). Expanding the Circle: Developing an American Indian Political Theory for Living Well in the Twenty-First Century. *Indigenous Policy Journal*, *25*(2).

Sachs, W. (Ed.). (2019). *The development dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Sadruddin, M. M. (2013). Millennium Development Goals: Are we really achieving universal primary education? *Dialogue*, *8*(1), 53-67.

Sáenz, C. M. (2023). Zapatista Seed Pedagogics: beyond rights, creating a decolonizing co-education. *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, *7*(1), 4.

Sanchez, E. (2024). Lack of Access to Quality Education for Rural Indigenous Communities in Chiapas, México. Ballard Brief 1(5). https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ballardbrief/vol2024/iss1/5

Sanchez, M. A. R. (2012). *We are all Government: Zapatista Political Community. Contexts, Challenges, and Prospects*. The University of Manchester (United Kingdom).

Satz, D., Gould, R. K., Chan, K. M., Guerry, A., Norton, B., Satterfield, T., Halpern, S., Levine, J., Woodside, U., Hannahs, N., Basurto, & Klain, S. (2013). The challenges of incorporating cultural ecosystem services into environmental assessment. *Ambio*, *42*, 675-684. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13280-013-0386-6

Schell, P. A. (2012). Dorothy Tanck de Estrada (Ed.) and Seminario de Historia de la Educación en México (Seminar for the History of Education), La educación en México (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010), pp. 261, pb. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *44*(2), 415-416. doi:10.1017/S0022216X12000284

Scheyvens, R., & McLennan, S. (2014). Introduction. In R. Scheyvens (Ed.), *Development fieldwork: A practical guide* (2nd ed., pp. 1–16). Sage.

Schimmel, N. (2007). Indigenous education and human rights. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights, 14*(4), 425-453. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/138548707X247419

Schoenhals, L. (1964). Mexico experiments in rural and primary education: 1921-1930. *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, *44*(1), 22-43. https://doi.org/10.2307/2511122

Schöneberg, J., Haudenschild, D., Darvishi, H., Momeni, S & Ziai, A. (2022). The many faces of Post-Development: alternatives to development in Tanzania, Iran and Haiti. *Sustain Sci 17,* 1223–1234 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-022-01164-5

Schools for Chiapas. (n.d.). *Mural of girl reading a book* [Digital Image]. Schools for Chiapas. https://schoolsforchiapas.org/teach-chiapas/library/

Schools for Chiapas. (n.d.). *Nearly 30 years along the path — our work now*. Schools for Chiapas. Retrieved August 19, 2025, from https://schoolsforchiapas.org/our-work-now-after-nearly-30-years/

Sclar, G. D., Penakalapati, G., Caruso, B. A., Rehfuess, E. A., Garn, J. V., Alexander, K., Freeman, M.C., Boisson, S., Medlicott, K & Clasen, T. (2018). Exploring the relationship between sanitation and mental and social well-being: A systematic review and qualitative synthesis. *Social Science & Medicine*, *217*, 121-134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.09.016

Servindi. (n.d.). [Subcomandante Galeano with children in field]. Servindi. https://www.servindi.org/tags/enlace-zapatista-manifiesto-por-la-vida

Sietz, D., & Feola, G. (2016). Resilience in the rural Andes: critical dynamics, constraints and emerging opportunities. *Regional Environmental Change*, *16*, 2163-2169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-016-1053-9

Simpson Steele, J. (2012). Talk-story: A quest for new research methodology in neocolonial Hawai ʻi. *Youth Theatre Journal*, *26*(1), 38-49. https://doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2012.678213

Shah, R., & Lopes Cardozo, M. (2015). The politics of education in emergencies and conflict. In T. McCowan & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Education and international development: An introduction* (pp. 181–200). Bloomsbury Academic.

Shenker, S. D. (2012). Towards a world in which many worlds fit?: Zapatista autonomous education as an alternative means of development. *International journal of educational development*, *32*(3), 432-443. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000216017

Silva Montes, C. (2019). The zapatista school: educating for autonomy and emancipation. *ALTERIDAD. Revista de Educación*, *14*(1), 109-121. https://doi.org/10.17163/alt.v14n1.2019.09

Smallwood, R., Woods, C., Power, T., & Usher, K. (2021). Understanding the impact of historical trauma due to colonization on the health and well-being of indigenous young peoples: a systematic scoping review. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, *32*(1), 59-68.

Smith, D. H., & Sargent, T. C. (2022). Postcolonial perspectives of international educational development interventions in countries of the Global South. *Annual Review of Comparative and International Education 2021*, *42*, 99-118.

Snilstveit, B., Stevenson, J., Menon, R., Phillips, D., Gallagher, E., Geleen, M., Jobse, H., Schmidt, T & Jimenez, E. (2016). *The impact of education programmes on learning and school participation in low-and middle-income countries.* (Systemic Review Summary 7). International Initiative for Impact Evaluation. https://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/srs7-education-report.pdf

Snowshoe, A. (2015). *The Cultural Connectedness Scale and its relation to positive mental health among First Nations youth*. The University of Western Ontario (Canada).

SooHoo, S. (2013). Humility within culturally responsive methodologies. *Culturally responsive methodologies*, 199-220.

Spring, J. (1972). Education and the Rise of the Corporate State. *Boston: Beacon Press.*

Spring, J. (2008). Research on globalization and education. *Review of educational research*, *78*(2), 330-363.

Stahler-Sholk, R. (2001). Globalisation and social movement resistance: the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico. *New Political Science*, *23*(4), 493-516. https://doi.org/10.1080/0739314012009960

Stahler-Sholk, R. (2007). Resisting neoliberal homogenization: The Zapatista autonomy movement. *Latin American Perspectives*, *34*(2), 48-63. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27648009

Stahler-Sholk, R. (2014). Mexico: Autonomy, collective identity, and the Zapatista social movement. In R. Stahler-Sholk., H.E. Vanden & M. Becker (Eds.), *Rethinking Latin American Social Movements: Radical Action from Below*(pp. 187- 208).

Stahler-Sholk, R. (2017). Constructing autonomy: Zapatista strategies of indigenous resistance in Mexico. In *The New Global Politics* (pp. 13-28). Routledge.

Stahler-Sholk, R. (2019, May 23). Zapatistas and new ways of doing politics. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1724

Stewart-Withers, R., Banks, G., McGregor, A., & Meo-Sewabu, L. (2014). Qualitative research. In R. Scheyvens (Ed.), *Development fieldwork: A practical guide* (2nd ed., pp. 59–80). Sage. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473921801.n4

Stromquist, N. P. (1990). Gender inequality in education: accounting for women's subordination. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *11*(2), 137-153. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1392827

Stromquist, N. P. (2004). Inequality as a way of life: Education and social class in Latin America. *Pedagogy, culture and society*, *12*(1), 95-119. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681360400200191

Sutoris, P., & Pradhan, U. (2025). *Reimagining development: Bold directions towards a thriving world*. Oxford University Press.

Svampa, M. (2019). The Latin American critique of development. In A. Kothari, A. Salleh, A. Escobar, F. Demaria & A. Acosta (Eds.), *Pluriverse, a Post-Development Dictionary.* (pp. 18-21). Tulika Books. https://archive.org/details/pluriverse-a-post-development-dictionary-2019

Swee, H., & Biddle, N. (2012). The relationship between wellbeing and Indigenous land, language and culture in Australia. *Australian Geographer, 43*(3), 215-232. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2012.706201

Taylor, A. M. (2003). Foreign Capital in Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. *NBER Working Papers*, 1.

Tecun, A., Hafoka, I., ‘Ulu ‘ave, L., & ‘Ulu ‘ave-Hafoka, M. (2018). Talanoa: Tongan epistemology and Indigenous research method. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *14*(2), 156-163. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1177180118767436

The Roar Mag. (n.d.). [Zapatista children in class]. The Roar Mag. https://roarmag.org/essays/zapatista-autonomous-education-chiapas/

The Roar Mag. (n.d.). [Zapatista children performing solidarity gesture]. The Roar Mag. https://roarmag.org/essays/zapatista-autonomous-education-chiapas/

Tikly, L. (2016). Education for all as a global regime of educational governance: Issues and tensions. In *Post-education-for-all and sustainable development paradigm: Structural changes with diversifying actors and norms* (Vol. 29, pp. 37-65). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Toepoel, V. (2011). Cultural participation of older adults: Investigating the contribution of lowbrow and highbrow activities to social integration and satisfaction with life. *International Journal on Disability and Human Development, 10*(2), 123-129. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/ijdhd.2011.027

Tomaselli, A. (2020). Political participation, the international labour organization, and Indigenous peoples: Convention 169 ‘participatory’ rights. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *24*(2-3), 127-143. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2019.1677612

UNESCO (2016), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2016: Education for People and the Planet: Creating Sustainable Futures for All*. Paris, France: UNESCO. Available at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/ pf0000245752

Unger, C. R. (2018). *International development: a postwar history*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*(2), 218–235. doi:10.1093/bjsw/ bcl343

United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *Human Development Report 1994*. Oxford University Press. https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1994

United Nations. Economic Commission for Latin America. (2007). *Social Panorama of Latin America*. The Commission.

Vakis, R., Rigolini, J., & Lucchetti, L. (2016). *Left behind: chronic poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean*. World Bank Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0660-5

Valtierra, P. (1998). *Women of X´oyep, Chenalhó, Chiapas* [Photograph]. Secretaría de Cultura, Gobierno de México. https://www.cultura.gob.mx/revelandomexico/pedro-valtierra/

Valtierra, P. (2003). *Photo of Tzeltal women and children blocking a dirt road to protest against military occupation, January 2, 1998* [Photograph]. In *Zapatistas: Chronicle of a rebellion*.

Vanhulst, J., & Beling, A. E. (2014). Buen vivir: Emergent discourse within or beyond sustainable development? *Ecological Economics*, *101*, 54-63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2014.02.017

Verger, A., Fontdevila, C., & Zancajo, A. (2017). Multiple paths towards education privatization in a globalizing world: A cultural political economy review. *Journal of Education Policy*, *32*(6), 757-787. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1318453

von Kuhn, J. (2020, January 21). *Can we trust the 'Colonialist Bible'?* The Gospel Coalition Africa. https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/colonialist-bible/

Walker, J., Pearce, C., Boe, K., & Lawson, M. (2019). *The Power of Education to Fight Inequality: How increasing educational equality and quality is crucial to fighting economic and gender inequality*. Oxfam.

Walker, S., Strong, K., Wallace, D., Sriprakash, A., Tikly, L., & Soudien, C. (2021). Black Lives Matter and global struggles for racial justice in education learning from the movement of black lives: Horizons of racial justice for comparative and international education *Comparative Education Review, 67(*S1), S1-S24. https://doi.org/10.1086/722487

Wallerstein, I. (2005). After developmentalism and globalization, what?* *Social Forces*, *83*(3), 1263-1278. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3598277

Walsh, C. (2009). *Interculturalidad, estado, sociedad*. Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar, Sede Ecuador: Abya-Yala.

Walton, M. (2004). Neoliberalism in Latin America: Good, bad, or incomplete?. *Latin American Research Review*, *39*(3), 165-184.

Wasserman, M. (2008). You Can Teach an Old Revolutionary Historiography New Tricks: Regions, Popular Movements, Culture, and Gender in Mexico, 1820–1940. *Latin American Research Review*, *43*(2), 260-271. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20488139

Weiss, J. (2020). Economic neoliberalism in Latin America. In M. Tribe (Ed.), *Economic Neoliberalism and International Development* (pp. 146-164). Routledge.

Westhorp, G., Walker, B., Rogers, P., Overbeeke, N., Ball, D., & Brice, G. (2014). Enhancing community accountability, empowerment and education outcomes

in low and middle-income countries: A realist review. *EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London*.

Wexler, L. (2009). The importance of identity, history, and culture in the wellbeing of indigenous youth. *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, *2*(2), 267-276.

Wilson, E. O. (Ed.). (1993). *The biophilia hypothesis*. Island Press.

Winkler, I. T., & Satterthwaite, M. L. (2018). Leaving no one behind? Persistent inequalities in the SDGs. In *The Sustainable Development Goals and human rights* (pp. 51-75). Routledge.

Wise, T. A. (2009). Agricultural dumping under NAFTA: Estimating the costs of US agricultural policies to Mexican producers.

Witter, R. A., Okun, M. A., Stock, W. A., & Haring, M. J. (1984). Education and subjective well-being: A meta-analysis. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis, 6*(2), 165-173. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1163911

Wolff, R. (2021). *Improving well-being through food sovereignty: a meta-narrative literature review* [Doctoral dissertation], University of British Columbia).

Wolhuter, C. C. (2022). Sub-Saharan Africa: Ex Africa Semper Aliquid Novi or Neo-neo-colonialism?. In *World Education Patterns in the Global South: The Ebb of Global Forces and the Flow of Contextual Imperatives* (Vol. 43, pp. 173-189). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Workers Solidarity Movement. (2008, November 4). *The Zapatistas and education*. The Anarchist Library. https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/workers-solidarity-movement-the-zapatistas-and-education

World Bank. (2023). *Education Overview*. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview

Yadeun-Antuñano, M. (2019). Indigenous perspectives of wellbeing: Living a good life. In *Good health and well-being* (pp. 1-13). Springer, Cham.

Yap, M., & Yu, E. (2016). Operationalising the capability approach: developing culturally relevant indicators of Indigenous wellbeing–an Australian example. *Oxford Development Studies*, *44*(3), 315-331. https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1178223

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Zahnow, R. (2024). Social infrastructure, social cohesion and subjective wellbeing. *Wellbeing, Space and Society*, *7*, 100210. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2024.100210

Zaldívar, J. I., Jover, G., & Uceda, P. Q. (2023). Neozapatista decolonial pedagogy: An approach to the disruptive conceptualisation of the learner. In *Southern Theories* (pp. 133-151). Routledge.

Ziai, A. (2007). *Exploring post-development : theory and practice, problems and perspectives / edited by Aram Ziai*. Routledge.

Zibechi, R. (2013, August 27). Autonomous Zapatista education: The little schools of below. *La Jornada*, *23*. https://upsidedownworld.org/archives/mexico/autonomous-zapatista-education-the-little-schools-of-below/

Zugman, K. (2008). The "Other Campaign:" The EZLN and new forms of politics in Mexico and the United States. *New Political Science*, *30*(3), 347-367. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140802276232