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# Curriculum and assessment in Latin America: neoliberalism, educational standardization, and external interference

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the school curriculum in Latin America, with specificities to Brazil, Chile and Bolivia. We carried out a bibliographical and documentary research, which highlights laws and reports from the curricular analysis reports of the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study, as well as other documents relating to the curriculum. The investigation points to the force of neoliberalism in the Latin American context, stimulating an organization that standardizes the educational curriculum, aiming to favor large-scale evaluations and, therefore, goes against the preservation and respect for diversity and social and cultural plurality. The study identifies Unesco as an international agency that promotes educational and curricular reforms, linked to participation of schools in international evaluations and the creation of own evaluation instruments as a way of monitoring the quality of education in Latin American countries. The results reveal movements that provide a counterpoint to neoliberalism and highlight voices that disagree with the logic of capital in the field of education.

Keywords: Education. Curriculum. Latin America. Neoliberalism.

## Currículo e avaliação na América Latina: neoliberalismo, padronização educacional e interferência externa

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## Resumo

Este artigo analisa o currículo escolar na América Latina, com as especificidades do Brasil, do Chile e da Bolívia. Realizamos uma pesquisa bibliográfica e documental, que evidencia leis e relatórios da análise curricular do Estudo

Regional Comparativo e Explicativo, bem como outros documentos que versam sobre o currículo. A investigação aponta a força do neoliberalismo no contexto latino-americano, estimulando uma organização que padroniza o currículo educacional, visando favorecer as avaliações em larga escala e, por conseguinte, caminha na contramão da preservação e do respeito à diversidade e à pluralidade social e cultural. O estudo identifica a Unesco como uma agência internacional indutora das reformas educacionais e curriculares, atreladas à participação das escolas nas avaliações internacionais e na criação de instrumentos próprios de avaliação como forma de monitorar a qualidade da educação nos países latino-americanos. Os resultados revelam movimentos que assumem um contraponto ao neoliberalismo e destaca vozes dissonantes à lógica do capital na educação.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Currículo. América Latina. Neoliberalismo.

## **Currículo y evaluación en América Latina: neoliberalismo, estandarización educativa e injerencia externa**

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#### **Resumen**

Este artículo analiza el currículo escolar en América Latina, con las especificidades de Brasil, Chile y Bolivia. Se realizó una investigación bibliográfica y documental, que evidencia leyes e informes del análisis curricular del Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo, así como otros documentos relacionados con el currículo. La investigación señala la fuerza del neoliberalismo en el contexto latinoamericano, estimulando una organización que estandariza el currículo educativo para favorecer las evaluaciones a gran escala y, en consecuencia, va a contracorriente de la preservación y el respeto a la diversidad y la pluralidad social y cultural. El estudio identifica a la Unesco como una agencia internacional inductora de reformas educativas y curriculares, vinculadas a la participación de las escuelas en evaluaciones internacionales y a la creación de sus propios instrumentos de evaluación como forma de monitorear la calidad de la educación en los países latinoamericanos. Los resultados revelan movimientos que asumen un contrapunto al neoliberalismo y ponen de relieve voces disonantes de la lógica del capital en la educación.

Palabras clave: Educación. Plan de estudios. América Latina. Neoliberalismo.

## Introduction

This article arises from reflections presented at the *I International Congress on Educational Policy Studies* and at the *I International Congress on Latin-American Education and Curricula*, both linked to the extension project *Dialogue Network in Debate*, at the Federal University of Latin-American Integration (UNILA). In this investigation, we analyze the school curriculum in Latin America by focusing on the specifics of Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia. The choice of these countries is justified by their inclusion in the studies and actions carried out since 2021 through the Dialogue Network in Debate project.

This article emphasizes a documentary study (Favero; Centenaro, 2019) focusing on the period starting from 1990, the year when neoliberalism began to emerge in Latin-American contexts. This timeframe highlights the significant presence of Educational Reforms, which, among other factors, have impacted the development of school curricula in Latin America. A notable example in this regard is the Program for Educational Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREAL), which began in 1996, with the goal of “contributing to the improvement of education quality and equity [...]” (Werlang; Viriato, 2012, p. 11).

The presence of educational system evaluation mechanisms in the region is significant: “standardized assessments were more strongly implemented in Latin-American countries throughout the 1990s” (Martínez Rizo, 2008 *apud* Unesco, 2020, p. 10, our translation). Moreover, we refer to the legislation regulating the curriculum in these countries and to the curricular analysis reports from the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Erce) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) over the past decade.

Since 1990, Unesco has played a significant role in disseminating neoliberal principles through research and documents, particularly in the field of education. Regarding the curriculum, it has published educational reports emphasizing the need to monitor learning outcomes obtained in international assessments. These outcomes are published and developed annually by the Latin-American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE)

and through the reports of the Curriculum Analysis of the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Erce).

For the document analysis in this article, we used the Erce reports, considering the first three publications on curriculum analysis: the 1997 "First Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study – Perce" (Unesco, 1998); the 2005 "Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study 2004-2007: Curriculum Analysis" (Unesco, 2008); and the 2013 "Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study – Terce: Curriculum Analysis" (Unesco, 2013). Thus, we aim to understand the relation between curriculum and assessment as well as the role of Unesco in this context. One of the primary objectives of these documents is to provide relevant data to local decision-makers regarding educational policy in Latin America, covering everything from basic education to levels of success within the educational system. The goal is to promote a culture of assessment in the participating countries through the "establishment" of educational assessment capacities. The curricular analysis is also connected to the curricula of subjects such as Language, Communication, Mathematics, and Natural Sciences.

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The exam developed by Erce is composed of "[...] criteria shared in curricula, texts, and assessment approaches in the region [...], as well as promoting additional studies aimed at Latin-American integration around what to know and what to learn" (Unesco, 2008, p. 7, our translation). The objectives of the areas of knowledge covered by the assessments include providing support to foster and reflect "[...] on the relevant conceptual frameworks so that teacher training plans effectively generate a commitment to the quality of schools and educational materials" (Unesco, 2008, p. 7, our translation). Thus, Unesco's mission is to act as a catalyst in curricular reforms, especially in peripheral countries participating in LLECE. These countries adhere to the assumptions of Erce evaluations as a possibility to create a neoliberal Latin-American curriculum that impacts all aspects of social life – economy, politics, culture, and education – with a focus on "[...] the quality and efficiency of educational systems" (Unesco, 2008, p. 9, our translation).

Erce was conducted in Latin America in 1997, covering 11 countries; in 2006, 16 countries; in 2013, 15 countries; and in 2019, 18 countries (Brazil, n.d.). According to the Brazilian Ministry of Education, "Erce includes

different countries that share a context closer to ours. [...]. While Pisa assesses 15-year-old students, Erce focuses on school grades, specifically 4th and 7th grades" (Brazil, n.d.).

In order to compose the analysis in this article, we selected three countries: Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia. Although we had interactions with other countries in events and studies – such as Paraguay and Argentina – the scope of this work required a focused approach. Thus, we chose these three countries, as Brazil allows us to analyze our local reality and compare it with the other countries. In the case of Bolivia and Chile, we observed notable examples of a model deeply linked to neoliberal principles, as seen in Chile, and a counterpoint of a country that has chosen a curricular approach committed to ensuring respect for and diversity among indigenous peoples in educational processes, as is the case with Bolivia. It is important to note that all the countries researched – Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia – participated in the Erce editions and provided data on curricular analysis in the four reports, with the exception of Bolivia. The country lacks data in Unesco's third report (2013) because it does not have its own assessment system like the others, which use monitoring tools for curriculum and other school actions.

Most of the sources that unify curriculum information in Latin-American countries are provided by platforms connected to international organizations, such as the Information System on Educational Trends in Latin America (Siteal, n.d.), affiliated with Unesco. However, this work prioritizes academic studies by critics of neoliberalism, assuming that it seeks contributions from intellectuals from the countries being investigated, which allows for an approach that reflects the educational complexity of the diverse Latin-American realities. Therefore, the analysis begins with the Brazilian context and subsequently examines other countries.

We also emphasize that our analysis seeks to question the hegemonic concept of educational quality, with the aim of making more complex the relation that major educational organizations establish between school quality and economic development. As Werlang and Viriato (2012, p. 12) point out, for instance, when mentioning the perspective of the Program for Educational Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREAL). We recall, along with Cabrito (2009), that the evaluation of quality is a process that has migrated

from the economic field to the educational one, making it necessary to take the appropriate epistemological precautions when analyzing evaluation specifically in the educational field. As the author warns, "when we succumb to the temptation of measurement, we forget the specificity of the educational process, always unique and original, and difficult to fit into any framework of objective measurement" (Cabrito, 2009, p. 178).

Based on the above, drawing on Bauer's reflections (2020, p. 1), which indicate that "external and large-scale assessments have induced curricular and pedagogical practices", we highlight that the framework of this research is based on the following research problem: *What are the connections between curriculum and assessment in the education of Latin-American countries, and what interconnections arise from the influence of major international organizations?*

Concerning methodological aspects, a comparative study methodology is adopted, which involves analyzing the school curriculum in Latin America by using bibliographic sources and the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study reports from 1997 to 2013, during which three reports were published. In this direction, the possibility of this article contributing to existing reflections on comparative education is highlighted, particularly based on Gomes's (2015) warning in the article titled "Comparative Education in Brazil: a draft agenda", which indicates that: "One of the topics requiring critical mass is educational evaluation, including international evaluation, in which the country has been participating" (Gomes, 2015, p. 243).

UNESCO and the World Bank drive a global movement towards curriculum homogenization in national and regional contexts through tensions arising from the guidance of international organizations. Given the constraints of a scientific article, we will not analyze each context individually, but we will focus on the specificities related to the curriculum and the tensions in implementing an assessment system based on the cited reports. We did not use the 2019 report for this research, as it includes an analysis of the progress towards the SDG in Latin-American countries and educational objectives.

## Curriculum: tensions, duels, and disputes in the Brazilian context

The field of school curriculum is a territory marked by disputes (Arroyo, 2013), which, in the current context, reveal themselves with notable intensity. These disputes arise from various fields, such as social movements, which organize actions and advocate for pedagogical work based on certain themes, such as gender social relations and ethnic-racial relations, for example. Naturally, education professionals also participate in this dispute, as they legitimately seek to secure their identity in their teaching work as well as to have the autonomy to construct their own curricula and develop their pedagogical actions. In turn, the students contest for space in the sense of being recognized as "active-affirmative, resistant subjects" (Arroyo, 2013, p. 295), so that the school and the curriculum acknowledge their knowledge, their interpretations of the world, their precarious lives, and their struggles for survival. In this sense, the curriculum, from the perspective of political and epistemological commitment, indicates the possibility of ensuring access to knowledge and culture. However, the curriculum is also highlighted as a territory contested by market interests, which view education as a commodity. In other words, "[...] it is extremely concerning that curricular policies and even curricular reorientations follow this servility to the market's movement". (Arroyo, 2013, p. 121).

Paraíso (2023, p. 10) points out that this dispute "[...] synthesizes political power games and provisional alliances regarding what should be taught". Given the complexity and the challenging task of centralizing the content that must be taught in schools, many interests come into play. They reveal the intentions of education professionals, scholars in the field, businesspeople – who aim to profit from education – and various social actors who, even though they are not directly involved in educational work, they have expectations about the role of the school. Among these intentions, the perspective that we strongly oppose stands out: the view that "education is not a social right, but a product" (Uchoa; Chacon, 2021, p. 1156).

The relation between curriculum and large-scale assessments began in the 1990s in all countries of the region, except Cuba. In that year, coordinated by UNESCO, the *Latin-American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education* (LLECE) was established. Its first comparative study was

published in 1998, involving 14 countries, and through an exam similar to PISA" (Trojan, 2010, p. 63). Casassus (2001, p. 23) emphasizes that this assessment demonstrates "that in the educational systems of the region, except for national particularities, there exists a common regional curriculum".

Brazil implemented the Basic Education Assessment System in 1995 and, soon after, in 1997, began its participation in the Erce. Since then, the country has undergone numerous educational reforms aiming to achieve the desired quality of education. Curricular reforms have aligned with the reference matrices of the assessments implemented within the Brazilian context, as stated by Pasini (2023). Brazil is notable for its participation in international tests proposed by international organizations, including Perce (1997), Serce (2005), Talis (2008, 2013, and 2018) (Brazil, 2020), and Pisa (2000 onwards) (Brasil, n.d.).

8 The latest Brazilian curricular reform occurred with the approval of the National Common Curricular Base (NCCB) (Brazil, 2018) for Early Childhood and Elementary Education, in 2017, and for High School, whose reform derived from Provisional Measure No. 746, of September 22, 2016 (Brazil, 2016), converted into Law No. 13.415, of February 16, 2017 (Brazil, 2017), which establishes the Policy for Promoting the Implementation of Full-Time High Schools (Ferreira; Ramos, 2018). The NCCB contributed to aligning curricular content with national and international assessments, promoting changes in the organizational context of schools, which instilled principles focused on performance, management, and control of both schools and the educational system. The promise of a common framework was long-standing and had been outlined since the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988), in the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Brazil, 1996), and in the National Education Plan (Brazil, 2014).

The disputes woven until the approval of the NCCB revealed distinct intentions between education professionals and scholars and the business-people who aimed to profit from the curriculum reform, embedding in the curriculum the false narrative that all educational problems would be mitigated or resolved with a document that would ensure the same "rights to learning and development" (Brazil, 2018, p. 7).



Freitas (2018) understands the process that led to the approval of the NCCB as a "business-oriented reform of education", noting that, among other factors, it facilitated: "a) control over teacher training agencies through the national teacher education base, and b) control over the organization of instruction itself through educational materials and interactive learning platforms" (Freitas, 2018, p. 104). Thus, these aspects enabled the establishment of a market for consultancies and advisory services around schools.

We recall that the NCCB began being discussed during Dilma Rousseff's presidency (2015/2016). However, with the coup against democratic structures and the removal of the president in 2016, the development of the document took a distinctly different shape between the initial and final versions. It reflected a clear shift towards addressing business and conservative interests, aligning with neoliberal principles.

The institutionalization of neoliberalism in the Brazilian educational context is not exclusive to the aforementioned moment, as it had already manifested in the development of the National Curriculum Parameters (NCP) in the 1990s (Brazil, 1997, 1998), linking the NCP to the "demands of the globalized economic order and the neoliberal policies" (Galian, 2014, p. 653). In this way, specific concepts of "competitiveness, equity, productivity, citizenship, flexibility, performance, integration, and decentralization" (Galian, 2014, p. 653) are developed, with the Parameters aligning with international organizations – World Bank (WB), Unesco, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Cepal) – focusing on "knowledge, information, and technical-scientific expertise with the aim of training human resources that are flexible and adaptable to market demands" (Galian, 2014, p. 653).

Nonetheless, according to Freitas (2018), the Workers' Party government, from 2003 to 2016, attempted to counteract the institutionalization of neoliberalism in the education sector, though not entirely. Since 2016, Brazil has faced a surge of neoliberalism. Since then, there has been a pronounced emphasis on the standardization/uniformity of education through a common curriculum and a deliberate focus on large-scale assessments. These elements, while already present in Brazil, became particularly prominent with the NCCB. Hence, schools began to be evaluated without considering their

actual situations, which are deeply unequal, which resulted in pedagogical abstractionism. This leads to “[...] simplistic interpretations of education that prevent us from recognizing the different issues involved in the educational phenomenon” (Giroto, 2018, p. 21).

This configuration greatly hinders the ability to conduct pedagogical work tailored to each school community, which addresses the specific demands and unique characteristics of each context and student. As a result, everyone is evaluated and measured in the same way, disregarding existing particularities and the challenges faced by different schools, especially those in contexts of greater social and economic vulnerability. Such a scenario is not exclusive to Brazil: to varying degrees, it is present in different Latin-American countries, including those we have chosen to analyze.

## Chile and Bolivia: Similarities and Differences with Brazil

As Latin-American scholars have been warning us for over 20 years,

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[...] multilateral organizations [...] have guided educational policies in peripheral countries with the aim of addressing, within the limits of the educational field and its scope, the structural crisis of capitalism triggered in the 1970s. Education began to be viewed not only as an important economic frontier to be exploited but also for its role in preparing a new generation of workers who could adapt, in terms of knowledge and skills, to the new productive and organizational demands of a context marked by the restructuring of production processes (Mota Junior; Maués, 2014, p. 1139).

Furthermore, “the proposals for educational and curricular policies, inserted in a context of globalization, involve the establishment of parameters proposed by international organizations” (Voigt, 2019, p. 1); the neoliberal tension, which became evident in Brazil with the NCCB, can also be identified in other Latin-American countries, driven by different factors.

### Chile

According to Oliva (2017), the Chilean curriculum is guided by technical rationality. In analyzing the architecture of Chilean educational policy

from 1990 to 2014, the author examines the National Curriculum Framework and the National Curricular Bases. She highlights that the curriculum based on technical rationality began with the educational reform of 1965 and continued through the dictatorship period, becoming more entrenched and refined under the *Concertación* governments, which "caused an alignment of the school order with the neoliberal order" (Oliva, 2017, p. 406). The National Curriculum was "outlined in its prescribed framework by Law No. 18.962" (Oliva, 2017, p. 416, our translation) and also provided for the establishment of a Higher Education Council, which defined the Fundamental Objectives and Minimum Contents for Basic and Secondary Education (Oliva, 2017).

Regarding the National Curriculum Framework and the National Curriculum Guidelines, we emphasize the description found on the website of the Chilean National Education Council (CNED, n.d., our translations): the Curriculum Guidelines highlight the Learning Objectives (LO) as defining the "minimum performances expected of students in each subject and educational level". The LO are comprised of knowledge, skills, and attitudes "that are considered relevant for [...] achieving a harmonious and comprehensive development, enabling them to face their future with the necessary tools and to participate actively and responsibly in society". Additionally, as a gradual reform, it maintains the Fundamental Objectives (FO) and the Mandatory Minimum Contents (MMC) from previous educational regulations. The FO are the "competencies that students must achieve during different periods of their schooling in order to meet the general purposes and objectives as well as the requirements at the end of the different levels of basic and secondary education". The MMC are "specific knowledge and practices required to achieve skills and attitudes that schools must mandatorily teach, cultivate, and promote in order to meet the fundamental objectives established for each level" (CNED, n.d., our translations). The National Education Council highlights that it will comment on potential

[...] curricular adaptations for specific populations enable the implementation of specific educational requirements, whether personal or contextual, that require special adjustments in the curriculum to ensure equality in the right to education. Although MINEDUC may create new special modalities, the General Education Law refers

to special or differentiated education [...] and adult education (CNED, n.d., our translation).

Criticism of Chile's educational policy is evident in the work of Oliva and Gascón (2016), who analyze the period from 2001 to 2016 and highlight the serious drawbacks of relying on a standardized and neoliberal educational model. Furthermore, it undermines the establishment of the measurement-control-evaluation triad set by Chile's standardized curriculum, which is linked to an excessive focus on performance in assessments. Scholars offer severe criticisms of the Chilean educational model: the triad appears to be

[...]linked to the control of the efficiency of the process in its objectives, means, and evaluation, in which learning is defined by criteria and indicators. [...] the standardization of school knowledge is associated with a standardized system of learning measurement represented by the National Quality Measurement System [...], in which content standards appear to be aligned with performance [...] (Oliva, 2017, p. 421, our translation).

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Among the Latin-American countries participating in LLECE, Chile is the pioneer in international assessments. According to Terce (Unesco, 2013), the first test was administered in 1960; between 1968 and 1971, the tests focused on Spanish and Mathematics; from 1982 to 1984, the Program for the Assessment of School Performance (PER) was created, and in 1985, the Education Quality Assessment System (Sece) was established. Consequently, the data obtained from PER were combined with Sece's surveys and later contributed to the proposal of new educational policies. Aiming to support the country's Ministry of Education, Unesco (2013) indicated that it gathered information for the

[...] *curriculum development*, setting parameters to improve resource allocation, contributing to the improvement of education quality through the decentralization of responsibilities, and providing an explicit signal to the educational system [regarding the LO] (Unesco, 2013, p. 21, our emphasis and translations).

Additionally, in 1997, alternating assessments were maintained; in 1988, tests in Languages and Mathematics were incorporated into High

School through the creation of the National System for Measuring Education Quality, with a focus on "*generating information for the work of the different actors in the educational system*" (Unesco, 2013, p. 21, our emphasis and translations). Subsequently, the assessments focused on: "Mathematics, Language, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences in the 4th grade, and in the following year, 8th-grade students were assessed in the same areas" (Unesco, 2013, p. 21, our translation). Since has been applied to the present day, and the curriculum follows the assessment's curriculum matrix, which aims to provide information on the "performance of students in different areas of the national curriculum and relate them to the school and social context in what they learn" (Unesco, 2013, p. 21, our translation). In the last decade, Chile has participated in the following international assessments: Pisa (in 2000, 2006, and 2009), Cived (in 1999), ICCS (in 2009), Timss and Perce (in 1997), and Serce (2006) (Unesco, 2013, p. 21).

## Bolivia

Since European colonization, Latin-American countries have experienced conflicting frameworks of domination and crises, which are exacerbated in the realm of education by educational policies. At times, these policies are imported projects or directed by international organizations. In this colonial context, indigenous peoples and their struggles were rendered invisible or silenced throughout many civilizations. Nonetheless, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous peoples resist for a Latin-American intercultural education, especially in the counter-hegemonic movement to build a school curriculum that respects cultural plurality.

Bolivia has also undergone numerous educational reforms, notably the implementation/planning of the new curriculum, arising from a reform characterized by "regionalized curricula, coordinated by the Ministry of Education together with its various indigenous and native peasant nations and peoples, based on a system that is intracultural, intercultural, and plurilingual" (Gonçalves; Urquiza, 2017, p. 42). Unlike Brazil and Chile, Bolivia "has not had a fully developed capitalist economy, which resulted in community-based structures that remained for a long time without any relation to the market" (Silva; Machado; Espinoza, 2023, p. 161). The Economic and Social Development

Plan 2016-2020 marked the foundation of the Bolivian Republic as "the result of the tenacious struggle and the blood shed by martyrs, liberators, and indigenous leaders who lived in the past in these lands and territories, with great ideals and dreams of building a sovereign, free, just, and egalitarian homeland" (Bolivia, 2015, p. 1, our translation). It can be added that, from 1985 to 2005, the Plan did not eliminate the social, political, and economic inequalities that had been established, as there was still significant social exclusion, particularly of the indigenous majority and native peoples, who were deprived of their political and citizenship rights.

The first curricular reform, promoted by Law 1.565, of July 7, 1994 (Bolivia, 1994), influenced and financed by the World Bank, involved the participation of other international organizations (Morais, 2008). The legislation aimed to expand access to education, which until then had been a privilege only for white people living in the country. Since then, there have been struggles and resistance from indigenous and native peoples, who make up the majority of the Bolivian population. In 1997, Bolivia participated in international assessments. However, having a monolingual education in a multilingual country led to new resistance (Morais, 2008). In 2003, a movement to restructure the educational system began with the creation of the Study Plans and Curricular Programs for the primary level, in the second cycle.

According to the Serce (Unesco, 2008), the difficulty in evaluating the Bolivian educational system lies in its intercultural focus, "insofar as it is expected that children learn Spanish and use it as an instrument of intercultural dialogue as well as a means of knowledge and interaction with other cultures" (Unesco, 2008, p. 28, our translation). Bilingualism includes new competencies in the curriculum, which are not covered by assessments that prioritize learning Spanish. Among the countries studied, Bolivia is the only one that does not have data in the Terce (Unesco, 2013).

Starting in 2006, with the administration of Evo Morales Ayma, a descendant of indigenous peoples, new reforms were proposed. The administration lasted from 2006 to 2019, resulting in significant changes, especially in the educational system. Notably, Law No. 70 (Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Pérez Law) (Bolivia, 2010) – established following the promulgation of the

Plurinational Constitution (Bolivia, 2009) – regulates the curriculum, as outlined in Article 69:

The curricular organization establishes the mechanisms for linking educational theory and practice, expressed in the intercultural basic curriculum, in regionalized and diversified intracultural curricula that, in their complementarity, ensure the unity and integrity of the Plurinational Educational System as well as respect for Bolivia's cultural and linguistic diversity (Bolivia, 2010, p. 404, our translation).

The Law became a landmark for democracy: it provides for the full participation of Bolivians in the plurinational educational system, including respect for the various social and cultural expressions in their different forms of organization, aligned with the consolidation of the Democratic and Cultural Revolution. "The law guarantees all people the right to education at all levels in a universal, productive, free, comprehensive, and intercultural manner, without discrimination, making education mandatory up to the *bachillerato*" (Gonçalves; Urquiza, 2017, p. 46).

According to Mallea (2011), the struggle of indigenous peoples and communities for rights, particularly the right to education, underscores that a regionalized curriculum, which takes into account social, cultural, and multilingual characteristics, helps reduce inequalities and disadvantages. It also supports students living in urban centers to advance to higher levels of education, such as attending university. "The strategies of subversion by the indigenous community are self-justified, as they aim to achieve the same conditions of equality concerning access to educational capital" (Mallea, 2011, p. 108, our translation).

In addition to free basic education, teacher training takes place in public institutions, also with free offerings, under the administrative responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MEC). "The teacher training curriculum is uniform across the country. It encompasses general and specialized education with a duration of five years, leading to a bachelor's degree" (Gonçalves; Urquiza, 2017, p. 47).

Although Bolivia is a participant in LLECE, and Unesco conducts evaluations and monitors the developing curriculum there, it is a country that resists

shaping its school curriculum according to the frameworks of external assessments. It presents distinct characteristics in its curriculum and schools that do not cater to the demands of capital, unlike the other countries studied. This does not mean that the struggle against the hegemony in the educational field is over: on the contrary, there is still a long way to go. The challenge is to overcome "the figure of authority centered on those who possess the most educational or other forms of capital, [which] must disappear" (Mallea, 2011, p. 114, our translation). Decisions should be collective, involving everyone in each school community. Hence, addressing pedagogical/school issues should be done "recurringly", integrated "into the planning of the educational unit and additional extraordinary sessions when necessary to discuss, analyze, and propose solutions for emerging problems" (Mallea, 2011, p. 114, our translation).

## Final Considerations

16 This article analyzed the school curriculum in Latin America, with a focus on Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia. It is evident that international organizations exert a strong influence on the curricula of these countries, which leads to a process of standardization of documents. This is a factor that contributes to large-scale assessments, with the implementation of their own assessment systems, as already occurs in Brazil and Chile. The drive for standardization and uniformity of the school curriculum contrasts with the construction of school environments that ensure cultural diversity and are committed to effective inclusion in formal education.

The analysis of the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study reports (Unesco, 1998, 2008, 2013) and comparative analyses, combined with the bibliographic studies conducted, allowed us to understand the relation between curriculum and large-scale assessments in the countries researched. The research highlights the increase in the diversity of external assessments being implemented in Latin-American countries, about which numerous reports are published, without truly reflecting or measuring the desired quality of education.

A rigorous analysis of these reports is necessary, as Freitas (2018) points out, since they have not produced public policies that result in quality



education. On the contrary, they focus on "analyzing the numbers, hiding the underlying concepts and preventing a discussion about the conception of education and society that should guide what we understand to be a good education" (Freitas, 2018, p. 61). In this sense, this research identifies UNESCO as a driver of the creation and implementation of educational reforms and policies, focusing on the evaluation of education systems and data production. This is an attempt to implement a Latin-American curriculum that does not ensure the quality of education and, moreover, ignores the economic, social, and cultural context of each location. The concept of curriculum and assessment present in UNESCO's documents guides the standardization of the school curriculum and the implementation of management mechanisms to ensure the efficiency of the educational system. Also included in the guidelines is the creation of teacher training policies that align with these propositions.

Among the countries analyzed, all began their initial curricular reforms in the 1990s. They were guided by international organizations, with a particular emphasis on UNESCO. Furthermore, they started participating in LLECE in 1995, during the early evaluations of UNESCO's proposal, with Chile being a pioneer in implementing and participating in external evaluations since 1968. Brazil stands out for the number of international and national evaluations conducted. Since the 1990s, curricular reforms have followed the changes and the implementation of new external assessments in the educational system.

Bolivia is the counter-hegemonic example in confronting curriculum standardization: it has regionalized curricula that respect the languages of indigenous peoples and invests in robust teacher training, which is provided exclusively by the public sector. It does not have its own assessment system, and although it participates in LLECE, its education system does not align with market-driven, meritocratic, and result-comparison aspirations.

Although such a scenario presents significant challenges to the development of alternative curricula, we highlight that these measures do not materialize without resistance, as revealed by this investigation based on the bibliographic references used, which critically address the entry of neoliberalism into education.

From a micro perspective, we can mention that the Federal University of Latin-American Integration (UNILA), in Brazil, with its Latin-American perspective notably distinct from other curricula, has stimulated the study that culminates in this article.

Finally, we consider the relevance of future investigations and productions that strengthen the critique of the Latin-American curriculum, as we are aware that, given the limitations of this study, it does not preclude new and forthcoming research on the topic, which will certainly continue to provide data for the field of education. An interesting element in this direction would be the inclusion of other Latin-American countries that were not covered in this research.

## Notes

1. Erce is an international assessment focused on Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay). It is a monitoring tool for student learning, conducted since 1997, and led by the LLECE. Brazilian data: Brazil (n.d.).
2. As can be observed in the following news reports: "Educational Transformation Plan 'has gender ideology from end to end', says Lizarella Valiente" (La Unión, 2022) and "Hundreds of people march against educational reform plan in Paraguay" (SwssInfo, 2022).

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