

Thematic Research

FROM INDIGENOUS EDUCATION TO INTERCULTURAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The P'urhepecha Community, Michoacán, Mexico

SONIA GARCÍA SEGURA

Sonia García Segura is a researcher at the Laboratorio de Estudios Interculturales, Departamento de Antropología, Universidad de Granada, Campus Cartuja s/n, 18071, Granada, Spain E: sgarcia@ugr.es

Abstract:

The analysis of Mexico's educational policies is becoming a referent of minority education for other multicultural societies. Therefore, the historical, political and ideological analysis of such policies during recent years will provide an underlying theoretical basis. The idea of aiming indigenous education at the assimilation of indigenous peoples into national society has been gradually replaced by proposals based on intercultural integration beyond the educational context. The description of the educational reality of the Purhepecha community is a clear example of a pioneer group in the implementation of projects in intercultural bilingual education. The analysis of these projects will contribute to compiling relevant information on project design and execution.

Key words: educational policy, intercultural education, indigenous education, bilingual education, Purhepechas, Mexico.

Introduction

During the last fifty years, changes have occurred in the design of educational policies in Latin American countries, and especially in programs planned for national ethnic groups. Attention to the ethnic and cultural diversity of these societies in general, and the Mexican society in particular, has assumed not only a challenge for the state but also a gradual change in exclusive and acculturating forms of thinking and acting. The current challenge is the cultural integration of minorities in a perspective not simply of assimilation, but also of the mutual enrichment of majority and minority cultures—a basic principle of interculturality. Multiculturalism is a present fact in our society, while interculturality is the project to which we aspire.

Analyzing the reality of Mexican education assumes an innovative referent, as well as proposals for other multicultural societies with similar problems. This paper will present, in first place, a description of the evolution of educational programs aimed at indigenous peoples—programs that have passed from an indigenous position to one of intercultural bilingual education (IBE). A compilation of the educational characteristics of the P'urhepecha region will follow, as an example of a pioneering community in implementing IBE programs. In this manner, the analysis of an IBE project carried out by the Regional Technical Team of Pátzcuaro will provide us with the strengths and achievements as well as the weaknesses and problems of the project's implementation, and will serve as a referent for other indigenous peoples in Mexico and for other countries with similar problems.

Theoretical and Methodological Starting Points

This study will center on the analysis of the Mexican educational process during recent years, in order to describe its development in a pioneer region, in the implementation of educational projects aimed at the indigenous population. Thus, the P'urhepecha region becomes a key element for understanding the mechanisms, from educational administration to the community itself, that have been implemented to meet the socioeducational needs of a sector of the population previously banished from decision-making in education.

This article presents an historical, political and socioeducational analysis of the P'urhepecha region, characterized by its long struggle for the recognition of its linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as other rights demanded by ethnic groups for decades. For the paper to reach its objective, various techniques have been utilized to compile and analyze information, ethnographic data, and data obtained from diverse documentary sources, which have been studied in terms of content as well as discourse. The ultimate end of this work has been to compile the necessary information for describing and studying the region's educational process. Compiled sources include political and legal documents dealing with educational policies implemented at the national level, and in concrete form, policies aimed at ethnic minorities from colonial times to the present. In addition to data collected from interviews and observation, documentary sources describing the educational reality of the P'urhepecha regions have been utilized. The set of empirical and archival data form the corpus of this report.

The Beginnings of Indigenous Education in the Mexican Context

Educational policy in Mexico is based on the Mexican Revolution as well as on the ideas de Vasconcelos, but truly originated at the time of national independence in 1810. After this period, the new nation adopted Spanish as the national language without considering the opinions of those having another native language; in addition, schools and education were of a Western nature, and in Spanish. In this initial stage, Indians were not viewed as individuals who would need education (Nolasco, 1988:207).

During the 19th century, an attempt was made to accent the isolation of indigenous communities, which would be transformed into small agrarian properties. Schools were responsible for teaching Spanish and literacy. Attempts to take schools to the countryside were limited by economics, and education was restricted to the cities (Acevedo, 1988:221).

Within the project of national education, indigenous people and indigenous education were not considered a problem for the government. Indians were assumed to be citizens having the same rights as other Mexicans, including the right to be included in the national education system; in other words, equal education for all. Creating a national identity as a mechanism to attain national unity was a constant in politicians' discourse. During the presidency of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), Indians were once again rejected:

It must be clarified that the policy does not recognize the Indian reality as distinct, but simply does not consider or see its uniqueness: the other culture, the other language, present and visible in daily events, do not form part of education, not even as a serious problem to solve (Nolasco, 1988:208).

During the Mexican Revolution, the role of Indians entered the public sphere and the first problems arose: many languages other than Spanish were spoken and Mexico's national identity began to be restated in all political settings through different nativist organizations. The first step consisted of "Mexicanizing" Indians, but with the national language. In 1911, a law of rudimentary instruction (Ley de Instrucción Rudimentaria) was passed to create, for the entire nation, schools charged with teaching Indians to speak, read and write in Spanish and to carry out fundamental operations in arithmetic.

In the 1920s, a home for Indian students (Casa del Estudiante Indígena) was established in Mexico City, with the objective of gathering young Indians from diverse ethnic groups in a single institution, in order to teach them predominant customs. In spite of the efforts of all of the involved institutions, the experiment failed: the boarding schools' alumni did not want to return to their communities to promote cultural change.

With the creation of the ministry of public education (Secretaría de Educación Pública—SEP) in 1921, and Vasconcelos' encouragement of mandatory education in Spanish, a true push was given to the integral improvement of Indian peoples and rural education. The institution known as "houses of the people" (Casas del Pueblo) hoped to provide schools for the community (Aguirre, 1973:90), not only to teach literacy but also to help the community in increasing production, promoting cooperation and perfecting local industry. More emphasis was placed on the community's integral development and less on individual instruction and childhood education. Results were positive in locations enjoying a degree of acculturation and a certain proportion of bilingual population, but not in monolingual communities. These Casas del Pueblo were later transformed into Mexico's rural schools. Other institutions that worked in the indigenous and rural setting were the cultural missions (Misiones Culturales) and indigenous improvement brigades (Brigadas de Mejoramiento Indígena), which taught art and diverse skills to communities' adult members (Aguirre, 1973). Indians have perceived these attempts as simply another mestizo imposition for attaining complete national integration.

In the 1930s, interest in Indians became evident and some of their problems were acknowledged, including education. In the same manner, socioeducational projects (more associated with linguistics) were undertaken, such as the work of Mauricio Swadesh in the P'urhepecha zone, through Proyecto Tarasco. The need was seen to promote the teaching of literacy and the formal education of indigenous children in their native language, before starting to teach Spanish, through the method known as indirect teaching in Spanish (*castellanización indirecta*). Official discourse maintained the opposite posture of promoting the direct teaching of Spanish (Acevedo, 1988:224).

Because of the results of Proyecto Tarasco, President Lázaro Cárdenas invited a linguistic institute (Instituto Lingüístico de Verano—ILV) to visit Mexico; the institute was a United States evangelical organization with experience in teaching literacy in unwritten vernaculars in various parts of the world. The idea was to study Mexico's indigenous languages and prepare alphabets and primers for teaching literacy and promoting education in these languages.

In 1940, the first inter-American indigenous congress (Congreso Indigenista Interamericano) was held in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán. This congress led to the creation of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano. Nativist proposals supported the idea of an integral focus. With the participation of pedagogues, linguists and anthropologists, the attempt was made to provide a theoretical basis for the policy of indigenous assimilation.

The desire was not only to promote education in these communities but also to encourage cultural exchange through integral action in education, economic matters, infrastructure, lifestyles, consumption habits, and social and political organizations (Stavenghagen, 1988).

In 1946, the indigenous affairs department (Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas) was dismantled and some of its functions were transferred to the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), created in 1948, while education remained with the SEP. Efforts to teach in Spanish were carried out through the creation of indigenous coordinating centers that the INI established in various parts of the country. The final goal was national integration.

In the 1950s, discussion was centered on the relative successes of direct teaching in Spanish, as well as teaching literacy in the indigenous language prior to teaching in Spanish. The two positions did not differ widely in their final objective, which was none other than teaching the indigenous language in order to teach in Spanish.

Outstanding at that time was the increased number of elements related to indigenous education, such as the presence of promoters and bilingual professors, hostel schools, boarding schools, the creation of primers, etc.. However, the design of such policy was focused on the idea of an educational model for the entire nation.

In the 1960s, due to massive political mobilization (Nolasco, 1988:212), another analysis and viewpoint of national problems were adopted, and Mexico's education and multi-ethnicity began to be a subject of debate. The practices of those years encouraged literacy in indigenous languages and the teaching of indigenous languages during the early years of elementary education. This idea was reflected in an increased number of institutions and professionals dedicated to indigenous education; for example, bilingual teachers working in their native communities to teach literacy and to teach the lower elementary grades in the indigenous language before students' education in Spanish in the higher elementary grades.

During that decade, great impetus was provided to the writing of textbooks for teaching Spanish to native speakers of indigenous languages; in addition, teachers' guides were prepared and technical cadres and indigenous professionals were trained to work in their communities of origin. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a series of textbooks in more than twenty indigenous languages had been published and used in educational practice.

The ultimate end of indigenous policy was the disappearance of Mexico's indigenous peoples, a posture criticized as "ethnocide" since it tends to destroy a group's ethnic and cultural identity and its possibility to reproduce as such (Stavenghagen, 1988:12). Indigenous peoples were not present for the preparation of those educational policies, created far from the communities to which they were targeted. In response to the process of ethnocide, mention was made of the need to recognize the nation's ethnic plurality, to recover the values of indigenous cultures as national values, and to conserve and promote such values instead of discarding them. Indigenous languages were recouped as part of the nation, and bicultural bilingual education was promoted as a goal in itself and not simply a step for facilitating the teaching of Spanish in Indian communities.

From Indigenous Education to Intercultural Bilingual Education

The analysis of the historical process in which indigenous peoples have been immersed, shows how their direct participation in various indigenous movements has been neither real nor transforming. However, the participants have reached a milestone in becoming

critical of the system's impositions and active in the search for an identity, lost in many aspects.

The creation of an educational system for the indigenous was not based on ethnic groups, but on the interests and conceptualizations designed and operated from the governmental sphere. This situation created a diversity of educational policies throughout Mexico—policies that have followed the political and ideological bases of the Mexican Constitution as well as various national and international regulations (García, 2000a).

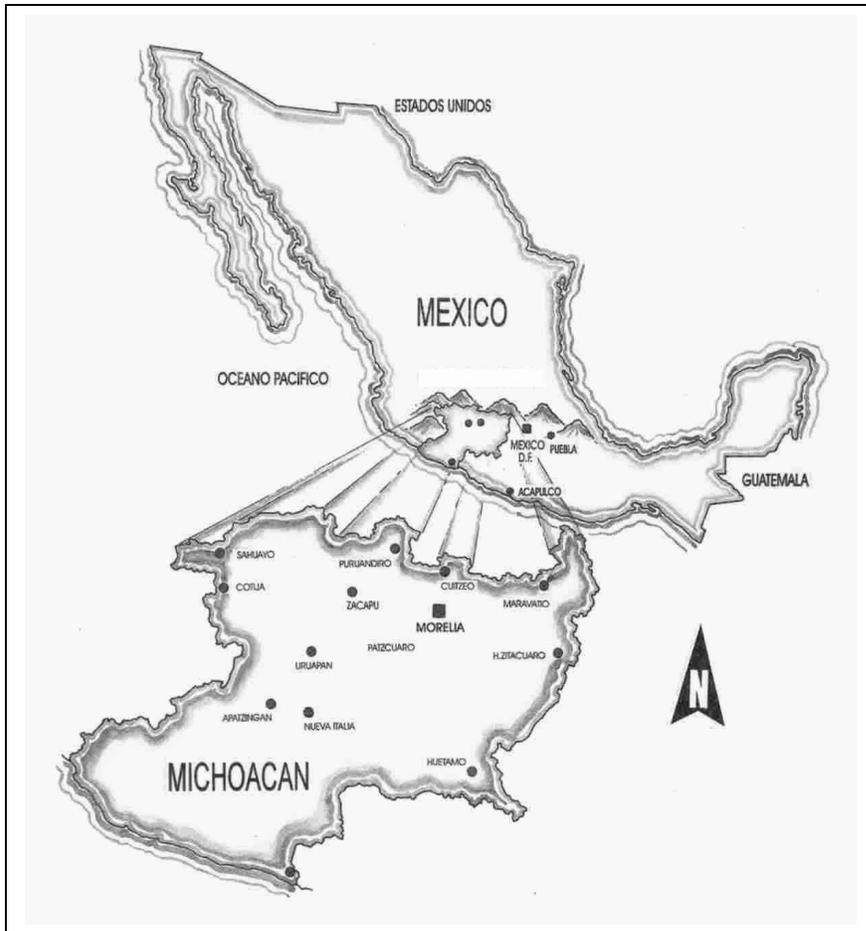
As a result, a new proposal was established, known as bicultural bilingual indigenous education (Educación Indígena Bilingüe Bicultural—EIBB). It arose opposite to nativist policy, and in spite of attempts to be different, fell into contradictions and reproductions (Herrera, 1997). This new position was recognized as a pillar of indigenous education, but yet to be defined were its basic elements and pedagogical, curricular and instrumental modes. The central core of the policy was focused on new indigenous education as a national question in addition to an indigenous matter, and the need to refer to national education with regard to the recognized multi-ethnicity of Mexican society (Nolasco, 1988:215).

The EIBB supplied the indigenous community with an instrument more oriented to ethnic development (Acevedo, 1988:226; Odena, 1995:523) in order to satisfy community needs and aspirations. It aimed at creating the conditions necessary for enriching the identity of each culture and of society in general. In this manner, a nation's diversity, differences and cultural plurality would not negate unity: rather, bilingualism and biculturalism would mean learning to use two languages and achieving personal development in two cultures (Coheto, 1988:232).

Mexican educational policy, however, has been redefining the educational model for the nation's ethnic population according to research recommendations, both Mexican and foreign. Such contributions remain manifest in the current proposal, which not only follows DGEI guidelines for educating indigenous children (in terms of the follow-up and evaluation of the educational process as well as the design of teaching material and teacher training), but also considers other national and international experiences in which multicultural societies have addressed cultural and linguistic diversity by implementing various intercultural educational projects (García, 2000a).

The P'urhepecha Community: Identity, Language and Education

During the Spanish conquest, the P'urhepecha group extended far beyond the state of Michoacán: to Colima and Jalisco on the west; to the Pacific Ocean on the south; to the Bajío zone of Guanajuato and Querétaro to the north; and to the states of Estado de México and Guerrero to the east. At the present time, the P'urhepecha region is subdivided into a minimum of four sub-regions (Map 1): the lake district of Pátzcuaro, the Ciénaga de Zacapu wetlands, the mountainous Sierra P'urhepecha and the eleven towns of the Cañada.



Most of the P'urhepecha communities are located in the vicinity of the Pátzcuaro lake and its surrounding mountains; and a smaller number is to be found in the Cañada (Muntzel y Pérez, 1987:590). The group's fundamental economic activity is agriculture, even in regions where fishing is an important occupation, such as in the lake area and especially on the islands, where crops are grown. The main crops are corn, wheat, beans and squash, along with small amounts of vegetables. The P'urhepechas have basically a subsistence economy; the only products sold in markets are garden produce and surplus from crop harvests and fishing. Although some arts and crafts have been replaced by manufactured items (especially textiles), hammered copper and handmade wooden objects, pottery and some weaving remain. Lacquered containers have apparently been produced since pre-Hispanic times.

P'urhepecha Identity and P'urhe Language

The characteristics that determine the identity of the P'urhepecha people are their territory, language and social interaction, in addition to their music, dance, cooking and other cultural activities that contribute to strengthening their ethnic identity. The territory is of fundamental importance since the development of the P'urhepecha culture would have been almost impossible outside of it; the territory guarantees implementing an infrastructure in the different areas of science and technology. The language is another

fundamental element, since it permits communication among the culture's members. Like any other language, P'urhepecha has its own grammatical and structural characteristics, currently under investigation:

Well, our P'urhepecha writing has rules. As I was telling you the last time, all words in P'urhepecha must end in a vowel, even if it is silent. If I say *auani*, I am saying 'rabbit' and it ends with an 'i'. If I say *karári*, 'desk', you also hear the 'i'. There are words that don't end in a clear vowel, but it has to be written, because of the rule. As I was telling you, in P'urhepecha all words have a root and a suffix can be added. They can be translated according to the verb tense—future, present and past. There are also words that can be translated, for example, if I want to say 'I am singing', it is *piresaka*; or *pirepiri* is 'I would sing'; *pireska* is 'I sang', in the past (E-Teacher-Language).

Efforts to preserve the P'urhepecha language have functions such as communication, personal identity, the exercise of tradition, community identity and the sociocultural organization of reality (Jacinto, 1997:256). Another outstanding aspect corresponds to social interaction, such as the services that must be provided by each member of the community or culture. For example, becoming an authority does not mean enjoying a privilege or business, but represents compliance with community obligations and subjection to standards that have been clearly established verbally, without a need for written laws.

Beginning of Education in the Community

In all cultures, education has played an important role in the group's social reproduction. In the indigenous communities, organizations were responsible for educating children and young people; present in the P'urhepecha culture was Uandajkperakua (Rojas 1995:202), which provided a traditional education to boys and girls: "This institution was utilized by Vasco de Quiroga to conquer the ancient people of Michoacán spiritually and to implement in a subtle manner the teaching of the conquerors' cultural values" (Rojas, 1995:202).

The teacher was in charge of educational activities and providing guidance for youth. Both younger teachers and experienced teachers worked, and were recognized by their areas of expertise. Teaching was centered on personal experience: young people learned the activities of the P'urhepecha culture, including agricultural activities and crafts (textiles, ceramics, woodcarving, precious metals, vegetable fibers, etc.), all intimately related to the techniques for producing utensils for community use. Teachers were required to know the P'urhe language, as any teacher in an indigenous community.

In 1921, when the ministry of public education (Secretaría de Educación Pública—SEP) was created, a department was established to address indigenous problems (Departamento para Atención de los Problemas Indígenas). However, the actions aimed at operating the department's plans and programs would not be carried out until well into the 1920s, with the creation of the cultural missions (Departamento de Misiones Culturales) and the founding of boarding schools in rural and indigenous zones. Boarding schools were designed to educate the population in these locations, and would play a very important role in Michoacán. The rural normal school for preparing the state's teachers was opened in the municipality of Erongarícuaro; the gardening school, in the municipality of Morelia; the school of agricultural practice in the community of Huaracha, in the

municipality of Villamar; and the Indian boarding schools in Paracho, Pátzcuaro and Morelia.

At a later date, secondary education was included with the founding of the boarding school at Tacámbaro and the school for agricultural technicians in Antúnez, in the municipality of Apatzingán, as well as the normal school for young ladies in Tiripetío, part of the municipality of Morelia. After completing secondary studies, students could continue in the normal schools or in the federal normal school, founded in 1915, in the city of Morelia. These institutions hoped to incorporate teenaged Indians and peasants into the national mestizo society, by teaching them Spanish.

The Tarasco Project

In 1939, the first assembly of philologists and linguists of Mexico was held as an instrument to guide Indians in learning literacy and in using native languages.

The meeting convened the nation's most important anthropologists, linguists and educators. An outstanding linguist in attendance was Mauricio Swadesh, who was backed by the assembly to implement an educational plan for the Tarascan or P'urhepecha people of Michoacán. The plan would serve as a model for the rest of the nation's ethnic groups, as an indirect method of teaching Spanish. This initiative was called the Tarasco Project (Proyecto Tarasco).

The pilot project began on July 19, 1939, in Carapán, Michoacán, with a group of twenty P'urhepecha young people selected from among the graduates of the normal school (Escuela Normal) of Morelia, the Indian boarding school (Internado Indígena) of Morelia, the "Hijos del Ejército" school of Pátzcuaro and the Indian boarding school (Internado Indígena) of Erongarícuaro. The students were trained in the use of the P'urhepecha alphabet, translation and advertising, the preparation of posters and the most efficient methods of teaching literacy (Pérez, 1995:58).

After an initial search for dialectal variations of P'urhe, one was chosen for standardization. Three dialectal variations were identified and the P'urhe de Cherán was selected as the vehicle of communication (Jacinto, 1997:250). A preliminary diagnosis was made of teaching Spanish based on the theory of indigenous incorporation. The results reflected that few children mastered Spanish and that most dropped out before finishing elementary school.

It was believed that theory should not be separated from practice: therefore, a printing press was opened in the boarding school, so that the students could print the textbooks. The work was divided into groups, and another team would be in charge of:

[...] translating and writing in the Tarasco language, national laws of special interest for Indians, as well as stories, topics on agriculture, nutrition and hygiene and the prevention of smallpox, typhoid fever and other diseases (Reyes, 1997:58).

The result was the preparation of a primer, a reader, a story, and a brochure that explained (in Spanish) the P'urhe alphabet. At present, various bulletins are published to discuss health-related topics and advice for growing crops.

The guiding principle was to teaching literacy in the native language, with domination of the new P'urhe alphabet; Spanish would be taught once the student was sufficiently familiar with letters to write in a second language, which he would learn as a foreign

language. The calculation was that within two years, an Indian literate in his own language could learn to write in Spanish (Jacinto, 1997:246). Instead of standardized textbooks, two methods of reading by syllables were established: a primer and a poster, both adapted by the teacher to the linguistic setting, without concern for "how one must speak".

The second edition of the Tarasco Project was carried out in the P'urhepecha highlands, based in Cherán. Its goal was to teach students to read in P'urhe with a modern system, in order to eliminate the native language and replace it with Spanish (Reyes, 1997:264).

The Project, in many aspects considered experimental and innovative, suffered from serious budget cuts around 1940. Other major obstacles were a growing bureaucracy and a new administration: Mexico's incoming minister of education declared his opposition to bilingual education. Nonetheless, the Project continued until the 1970s.

Proof was provided of the possibility of teaching literacy in only 45 days, when the content of the teaching materials was significant or familiar for the student. For the first time, educational organizations in addition to schools were included. Materials were circulated among the Project's students and sent to Paracho in the form of a weekly poster, which was displayed in the market to offer general instruction in the indigenous language in practical matters (Pérez, 1995:58).

The Current Situation of Intercultural Bilingual Education in the Community

The Tarasco Project was the only project that truly established the bases to implement quality education in the state's indigenous zones. If we examine the region's educational services, we can prove that they consist of projects and programs prepared outside of the communities' reality, far from the students' interests and needs, and aimed at Indians' integration into national culture (Rojas, 1997:43).

The Educational Project of the Regional Team of Pátzcuaro

In 1998, the regional technical team of Pátzcuaro prepared a project called "La importancia de la enseñanza de la lengua p'urhepecha en la región lacustre, correspondiente a la jefatura del sector 03 de educación indígena" ("The Importance of Teaching the P'urhepecha Language in the Lake Region, Corresponding to the Supervisor of Sector 03 of Indigenous Education"). The project establishes the objectives, actions, methodology, resources, evaluation and follow-up of the region's program of indigenous education. From its beginning, the institution has worked to develop education that harks back to 1965, when the indigenous coordinating center (Centro Coordinador Indigenista) was created in Cherán.

The group's proposal is bilingual intercultural education, under the guidelines of the national alliance of bilingual indigenous professionals (Alianza Nacional de Profesionales Indígenas Bilingües, AC—ANPIBAC) proposed in 1980 in the national plan for implementing bicultural bilingual education:

Bilingual in the sense of considering the indigenous language, in this case the P'urhepecha language, not as a bridge, but as a language of instruction. Intercultural understood as the relation between cultures, which allows enrichment, collective learning and an exchange of experiences— experiences that far from impoverishing Indians, give them an integral, quality education (Equipo Técnico Regional, 1998:5).

The ideological bases of education took a turn and began to be called intercultural bilingual education. The bicultural concept was left behind because the centers are not limited to serving children from two cultures; rather, they have become a place for linguistic and cultural interchange. In addition, this educational concept, as experienced in the communities, has the characteristic extending beyond school-age children into the community, into families and into the role that language and culture play in a broad context. Teachers in the subsystem have expressed that language and culture, their own as well as those designated as national, play an important role in the teaching/learning process:

[...] I would say [...] that bicultural bilingual education could be parallel, that children could learn about the other culture based on their own culture; yes, combine them and they could go together; one would not be abandoned to take the other [...] (E-Advisor-Elementary).

Language is central in the discourse of professionals in indigenous education, as an element kept alive in some communities but threatened by the national language—the language necessary for moving to the city or obtaining employment.

The depreciation of the ethnic group's language has caused some communities to lose the use of P'urhe and open the way for Spanish, although the family unit may continue to use the indigenous native language. In some cases, only the parents speak the indigenous language at home, and the children are passive learners who listen but do not speak the language:

[...] Many children no longer speak the P'urhepecha language because their native language is Spanish [...] The indigenous language is used very little because the children in few communities speak the native language, which is P'urhepecha (E-Advisor-Elementary, 2000).

Proposals assign the indigenous language the importance of other languages that have arrived from the outside, such as Spanish and English. English has been incorporated into the school curriculum as another mandatory subject, a category that P'urhe could acquire if made mandatory by educational authorities.

Attempts are being made to overcome the ideological biases that for years have renounced the P'urhepecha language and culture, since the educational concept in effect has achieved only gradual incorporation into the dominant national system. The principles of emancipation and perpetuation of these ethnic groups have been ignored:

About ten years ago, Mexico was recognized as a pluri-cultural and multilingual nation [...], but the reality is still [...] very slow and desperate for us, since we lack the support to build our educational model. All teachers and towns are now aware that we must offer another type of education (E-Supervisor).

The IBE project operated by the technical team of the P'urhepecha has been designed by the advisors and teachers who work in this educational sector. The project adheres to the recommendations of the SEP as well as the DGEI, in the form of general guidelines for bilingual intercultural education for indigenous boys and girls (SEP-DGEI, 1999).

One of the main objectives proposed in this sector of indigenous education was to serve more than 1,700 preschool children and 500 parents. In the early grades, educating the parents became a very important factor, which covered the whole community in promoting women in the community, teaching infant care and the bases of intercultural indigenous education. In the 1999-2000 school year, elementary education centered on fewer than 900 students in this sector of indigenous education. Another proposed objective was the promotion, development, maintenance and diffusion of the P'urhepecha language in the indigenous educational services of the lake region and lowlands of Ciénaga de Zacapu, as well as encouragement for linguistic and cultural recovery in communities where Spanish has displaced the P'urhe language (cfr. Equipo Técnico Regional, 1998).

Along with these objectives, the IBE project set the goals of training teachers in workshops and encouraging family participation in the educational process, in addition to teaching school-age children. Technological development has been included in some teachers' goals, since teaching far from the cities should not isolate these future consumers of technology from scientific progress.

Evaluation of the IBE Project

The evaluation of this project will indicate its achievements and strengths as well as the weaknesses and problems solved for its implementation.

The educational project encompasses not only the intercultural focus but also various actors that intervene in the project's preparation and implementation. Although IBE was designed by educational administrators, teachers participated as well. For implementation, a sociolinguistic diagnosis was designed in the region to present the region's needs and the resulting proposal of concrete actions, such as:

- encouragement for teachers to include the teaching of the P'urhe language in their lesson plans (programmed activities);
- suggestions for operation (the indigenous language present in teaching units);
- implementation of a reading and writing workshop in the P'urhe language; a workshop of materials for teaching the indigenous language and a workshop for learning the methodology to teach the indigenous language;
- promotion of a regional library to collect books in the P'urhe language, from all institutions that have published materials related to the indigenous language;
- encouragement for the establishment of reading corners in the indigenous language in each supervised area of the region;
- support for reading in the P'urhe language in each work center of the lake region's indigenous education system (Equipo Técnico Regional de Pátzcuaro, 1998:9).

This diagnosis assumes the initial step of analyzing the sociolinguistic reality of the region and then making adaptations according to the beneficiaries' needs. Faced with these demands, one of the achievements (in addition to the education for school-age children, as the government proposes through compensatory programs) has been to meet teachers' needs through training and recycling workshops. Such workshops have been centered on learning and managing reading and writing in the P'urhe language, preparing teaching material to support the strengthening, promotion and development of the indigenous

language, as well as learning the content, use and handling of books published in the P'urhe language, in order to research and then learn to use methodology for teaching in the indigenous language and in Spanish.

Given the need for teaching material to support teaching in P'urhepecha, materials published in the P'urhe language by different organizations and institutions were compiled, as well as oral history that forms part of the region's cultural heritage. Books are available in the P'urhe language according to DGEI indications and standards.

One of the characteristics of these books is the detailed care of their content. The materials have the "ethnic contents" of the P'urhepecha region, in an attempt to introduce children to the culture, language, traditions and customs that have been present in the community for years and have served their ancestors as a mechanism of differentiation from other ethnic groups in national society: "Besides, the books have ethnic content. Notice the books, and the impact of indigenous education in Mexico. Before people looked at us as if we were weird, like someone from another planet, but they have realized that we are natives here" (E-Supervisor).

In terms of the books' specific content, topics are sometimes taken from the work center locations, to involve them with plans and programs. In this manner, certain topics refer directly to the community.

Another strength of the IBE project is the use of the radio to teach and strengthen the P'urhepecha language and culture. The radio station, XEPUR, "The Voice of the P'urhepecha", has become a means outside of school to keep the entire community informed. It has gradually been incorporated into the classroom to serve as a resource in the teaching and learning process for all community members (Dietz, 1999).

The materials available for each grade, however, as well as the resources allotted for their purchase are minimum. The P'urhepecha communities and schools receive help thanks to the compensatory programs. Many teachers solve the situation with their scarce personal resources by contributing material needed in their classes or workshops or even for other teachers. Materials from the DGEI generally arrive too late for the school year.

The economic difficulties that teachers and educational centers must face are sizeable. A shortage of resources in schools will impoverish the future education of students and will not favor the work of teachers, who will be forced to search for income to supplement their low salaries as rural teachers in the subsystem of indigenous education.

Attempts are being made to remedy this situation through the compensatory programs. Their objective is to help not only students, but also other individuals involved in the educational process, such as the program for combating educational backwardness (Programa para Abatir el Rezago Educativo—PARE). Aid for the system of indigenous education is directed mainly to basic levels, such as preschool, elementary and secondary school (a level still absent in some communities). Thus, an institutional vacuum is created in terms of economic aid for students wanting to continue in higher education; responsibility is transferred to the students' family and depends on family income.

The IBE project proposes advancement in evaluation and follow-up, which are not static and vertical, but open to modifications and adaptations for meeting objectives and goals. In this manner, in addition to a prior diagnosis to detect beneficiaries' needs, a process of feedback counteracts the weaknesses and problems brought about by the project's implementation.

Conclusions

In spite of the success of the different socioeducational programs and projects carried out in the P'urhepecha community, the group's situation and that of the rest of the nation's ethnic groups have not varied substantially in recent years. Language has served various purposes for this community: as an ethnic identifier for the speakers of P'urhe, in the local as well as regional setting; a legal instrument, since forms and writing are generated, produced and reproduced; and as a catalyzer or social homogenizer, since language in the domestic group determines social status and the roles of age groups and gender (Reyes, 1997:270).

The description of the process of indigenous education in the P'urhepecha region reveals that the community's cultural, economic and political aspects should not be underestimated: they are the basis of future learning and teaching.

An obvious need exists for changes that are required and demanded by teaching professionals. On a daily basis, teachers must deal with the lack of teaching materials, meager financial resources, and the difficulties of facing reality due to deficient training. In spite of the recovery that has become apparent in different sectors of society, teachers explain that this reality is changing to the benefit of the community in particular, and the national society in general.

This paper reflects the reality of a people who have struggled for years for educational, social and economic equality, and for the recovery and strengthening of their language and culture, which have become the bulwark of their identity. The P'urhepecha community is a clear example of the efforts of indigenous teachers along with the rest of the community and members of various educational institutions, in a struggle to combat educational backwardness, to reduce dropout rates and especially, to speak of intercultural education for all citizens of Mexico.

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Indigenous-language education is a right. Indigenous parents and leaders fought for their children to go to school in their own language. Inuit land claims agreements, for example, include the right to protect Inuktitut and control Inuit schools. Undoing Linguicide: The legal right to the survival of Indigenous languages.Â However, because these benefits don't show up until middle school and most Indigenous bilingual education programs only run in elementary school, these benefits aren't always evident. Although Canada led the way in proving bilingual education works and bilingual education is the norm in many countries, Canadian educational policies and practices often reflect a unilingual bias. Knowing 2 languages leads to better futures. Specialization Course in Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) in Latin America. (Third Edition). 33.Â providing indigenous people with access to Higher Education, in a context of recognition and promotion of cultural differences, such institutions offer innovative responses to some important challenges faced by contemporary Higher Education, around the world and in the region, such as those pertaining to the diverse modes of generating knowledge and the dialectic between research, teaching and learning, innovations and the solution of people's problems (Mato, 2008a, p.11).