Highlighting the voice of Indigenous communities for education: Findings from a case study in rural Chile

Angela Baeza Peña[1], Peter Anderson[2] and Simone White[2]

[1] Carumba Institute, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059, Australia, email: angela.baeza@qut.edu.au

[2] Indigenous Research Unit, Griffith University, QLD 4111, Australia

[3] School of Education, RMIT University, VIC 3000, Australia

The issue of how to best address Indigenous education needs has long been a public debate. There has been much discussion in the educational system, at policy levels and at universities. However, little is known about the perception of Indigenous peoples in regard to the education that their children are receiving or how to incorporate their traditional knowledge inside the classroom. This paper shares such a study and explores the views of Indigenous people living in rural communities of the Atacama Desert of Chile. Views are shared about the needs of their children and that of teacher education. Using a decolonising rights-based methodology, the study aimed to highlight the voices of Atacameños people, who talked about their relationship with schoolteachers, their role in supporting schools and the role of the traditional educator. Findings suggest that even though Indigenous community members perceived their engagement as key in incorporating local knowledge inside the classroom, they realised they are not actively participating in school organisation. There is also a perception that the role of the traditional educator needs to be valued more because they are crucial for reducing the gap between the Indigenous community and local schools.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, Indigenous education, traditional educator, decolonising methodology

Introduction

Research in Indigenous education has highlighted the importance of empowering Indigenous families to make decisions about their children's education (Anderson & White, 2011; Harrison & Sellwood, 2016; Mellado & Huaiquimil, 2015; Quintriqueo et al., 2017). These studies suggest that Indigenous communities could better support schools in incorporating local knowledge into the classroom, improve students' outcomes and help to keep Indigenous culture alive. There have been few studies on the perspectives of Indigenous community members on education. Nonetheless, understanding the perspectives and beliefs of local Indigenous communities about education is critical for developing new initiatives to improve learning in Indigenous contexts. This study contributes empirical knowledge about the Chilean Indigenous community, making it a unique contribution to Indigenous education, particularly in Atacameño contexts.

Contributing to a social justice research agenda, this paper reports on a study that explored community engagement, the relationship between Indigenous communities and school, and the experience of the traditional educator (a member of a local Indigenous family who supports Indigenous students' learning by passing on local knowledge) in the context of rural, remote Indigenous communities in the Atacama Desert of Chile. By listening to the voices of Indigenous people, this study focused on the question: How do Atacameños Indigenous people perceive the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and tradition in schooling?

A rights-based approach

The study adopted a post-colonial Indigenist rights-based approach that emphasises the significance of traditional knowledge in identifying relevant solutions to local issues, especially for minorities who have suffered from the effects of colonisation (Chilisa, 2012). The relationship between people and nature provides the foundation for Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous groups developed their own knowledge for solving quotidian problems, and this knowledge cannot be separated from the context in which it was developed (Higgins & Kim, 2018). The incorporation of and understanding of Indigenous knowledge are crucial for decolonising research, as it implies a commitment to social justice and highlights the voice of Indigenous groups who have been marginalised and silenced (Chilisa, 2012; Getty, 2010; Singh & Major, 2017; Smith, 2012). The research reported here privileges Indigenous peoples' voices and respects their perceptions, traditions and protocols. To acknowledge and facilitate the preservation of Indigenous traditions is critical in developing a rich, culturally diverse society.

In this article, we use the terms "community members" or "locals" in reference to Indigenous peoples who live in rural, remote areas in the Atacama Desert in Chile. We have adopted the convention of capitalising the term "Indigenous", which is part of respect and reconciliation.

Because the research was conducted in a specific region, it is necessary to learn more about the setting to understand the characteristics of the educational context in which the Atacameños community lives. The next section provides information about the South American and Chilean context, the consequences of colonisation and the local Indigenous laws.

Literature review

International context

Latin American countries have felt the consequences of 500 years of European colonialism. One of the most significant consequences of colonial violence in these countries was the reduction of Indigenous populations (Castro, 2005; Redmond, 2016). The region known as South America was divided into independent nations after European colonisation (Díaz & Rayas, 2019; Nahuelpán et al., 2019). The formation of these nations resulted in the separation of some Indigenous groups. Indigenous peoples were compelled to pay tribute to and collaborate with the colonisers (Díaz & Rayas, 2019). Indigenous peoples were declared citizens of their respective nations in the 20th century, but it was not until 1990 that their rights were recognised (Samson & Giroux, 2016). Over time, Indigenous groups left their traditional lands and migrated to large cities due to the inadequate policies and social conditions enforced upon them. Their relocation impacted the conservation and protection of their traditional knowledge and culture.

Scholars around the globe suggest that the Western model of Latin American education is damaging Indigenous traditions (Baeza, 2022; Ortiz, 2009; Poblete, 2003; World Bank, 2015). Additionally, inequalities in formal access to education are evident, particularly for Indigenous peoples, African descendants and low-income families (López, 2015). Currently, educational policies still do not consider the Indigenous experiences of colonisation (McKinley & Smith, 2019).

Latin American countries have enacted Indigenous laws to protect Indigenous groups. These laws also affected the development of educational policies.

Chilean context

Chile also has a history of colonisation. Indigenous groups in Chile were forced to convert to Catholicism and give up their beliefs, customs and traditional ceremonies (Moya-Santiagos & Quiroga-Curin, 2022). The adoption of Spanish as an official language in schools is part of the heritage of colonisation in Chile. More recently, Chile suffered the social consequence of the dictatorship period (Connell, 2007); this had effects in education contexts, such as the number of adults who were unable to complete their education, and also in the setbacks experienced by Indigenous peoples in legislative processes. Indigenous people were denied in the Chilean Constitution, and, consequently, they were not mentioned in education policies until the return to democracy (Moya-Santiagos & Quiroga-Curin, 2022).

As an attempt to restore the situation of Indigenous people in Chile, the Indigenous Law was established (Ministry of Planning and Cooperation of Chile, 2017); this law states:

> It is the duty of society in general and of the State in particular, through their institutions to respect, protect and promote the development of Indigenous people, their cultures, families, and communities, adopting the measures suitable for these purposes. (p. 1)

This law recognises 10 Indigenous groups: Mapuches, Rapa Nui, Atacameños (Lican Antai), Quechuas, Yagan, Collas, Diaguitas, Chango del norte, Alacalufes and Aimaras (Ministry of Planning and Cooperation of Chile, 2017). Indigenous groups represent almost 13% of the Chilean population (Chilean National Institute of Statistics [INE], 2017). The largest group are Mapuches, who live in the Araucania Region in the south of Chile, which is considered the country's poorest region (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2023). Another large group is the Atacameños, who live primarily in the north of the Atacama Desert, and they are the main participants in this research. The primary activity of the Atacameños peoples is farming and mining. However, in recent years, the number of Atacameños people working in professional and technical occupations has increased, now being 26.3% of their population (INE, 2017).

In terms of education, Chilean Indigenous Law claims Indigenous culture should be incorporated into the learning process (Williamson, 2004). As a result, an intercultural program was implemented. This program aimed "to help Indigenous peoples finally integrate into Chilean society by developing appropriate educational materials to work with Indigenous students across Chile, especially in rural areas" (Moya-Santiagos & Quiroga-Curin, 2022, p. 4). In 2009 the General Education Law was established. This law claims that education is a fundamental right, and all Chilean schools, urban or rural, should follow the National Curriculum (Ministry of Education of Chile [MINEDUC], n.d.). This law establishes that Chile is a multicultural country, and that education should be based on equality and quality with access for everyone.

The intercultural program is currently implemented; however, it has been criticised as being assimilationist and palliative (Moya-Santiagos & Quiroga-Curin, 2022). Another issue with the intercultural program is the lack of educators with the necessary knowledge to implement it (Becerra-Lubies & Fones, 2016).

Indigenous community engagement and participation

The school–community connection can be affected by different points of view, as well as power issues (Gower et al., 2021). Particularly in the Latin American context, its colonisation history affects how the local community interacts with teachers. Since most teachers are non-Indigenous, they are seen as foreigners, which impacts the communication between both groups (Hart et al., 2012; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012; Quilaqueo et al., 2014; Warren & Quine, 2013). Chilean Indigenous scholars have also found that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can have elements of fear and disbelief (Quintriqueo et al., 2017). A focus on understanding Indigenous people's perceptions could significantly improve teaching practice in local schools (Baeza, 2022). Particularly in rural areas with a high Indigenous population, families are crucial for supporting teachers (Kline et al., 2013). Thus, improving parents' community engagement can have substantial benefits.

First, family engagement increases Indigenous children's retention in schools (Anderson & White, 2011). Second, community engagement reduces teachers' classroom isolation (González et al., 2005). The recently published *Standards of the Teaching Profession, Framework for Good Teaching* in Chile (MINEDUC, 2021) states that in-service teachers should "promote opportunities for its students to develop knowledge and skills that allow them to value diversity and establish constructive relationships with people from different cultural and ethnic groups in a multicultural society" (MINEDUC, 2021, p. 41). It seems that to fulfil the requirement stated in the Standards, teachers are required to understand the particularities of their students, even more so when they teach in Indigenous settings. However, the research shows Chilean teachers lack the preparation and knowledge about Indigenous culture (Baeza, 2022; Quintriqueo et al., 2017). Australian scholars suggest that teachers need to be prepared with an understanding of Indigenous knowledge in order to perform in Indigenous contexts (Anderson et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2017; Ma Rhea, 2015; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). As traditional knowledge keepers, local Indigenous families could provide unique information about traditional knowledge that educators could use in their lessons (González et al., 2005). Additionally, families could support teachers in understanding their students' characteristics and the cross-cultural differences.

Finally, as a result of interactions between Indigenous families and school staff, a community can become more prosperous and peaceful, which also contributes to improved learning outcomes (Anderson & White, 2011; Harrison & Sellwood, 2016). As Warren and Quine (2013) discuss, in the Western tradition it is believed that school and community can operate separately. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the bond established between Indigenous families and schools makes a big difference in Indigenous education; furthermore, an unfavourable relationship between teachers and local families may increase teacher attrition (Baeza, 2022; Mafora, 2013).

The participation of the local community in school activities can build strong school–community relationships. Elders should be incorporated into school celebrations and be acknowledged (Baeza, 2022; Harrison & Murray, 2012; Mellado & Huaiquimil, 2015; Quintriqueo et al., 2017). Countries such as Colombia and Guatemala are pioneers in giving Indigenous families some agency in their school decisions. For example, community participation in school meetings may be held to provide information about the agricultural schedule (McEwan, 2008). Bolivia has also incorporated Indigenous families in the

development of literacy projects, and the local community participates in all the phases of school projects (D'Emilio, 1996). But this reality differs from other Latin American countries, such as Chile.

All of the Indigenous community and school staff must be engaged in the educational process to improve the relationship between families and schools. As the Indigenous scholars Quilaqueo et al. (2014) suggest, community engagement could lead to a change in the current power relationship. However, an effective interaction between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous school staff must be based on respect and mutual benefit (Frawley et al., 2010; Harrison & Sellwood, 2016). Indigenous and non-Indigenous people involved in education must be prepared to accept an intercultural world where "compromise, negotiation and respect for difference predominate" (Frawley et al., 2010, p. 8).

El educador tradicional (traditional educator)

Some colonised countries, such as Australia and Chile, have incorporated an Aboriginal education worker or traditional educator (TE) into the classroom to connect Indigenous communities and schools. A TE is a member of the local Indigenous families who supports Indigenous students' learning by passing on local knowledge (Harrison & Sellwood, 2016). A TE is responsible for supporting schools in terms of traditional knowledge. They represent a bridge between the Indigenous local community and schools (Harrison & Sellwood, 2016).

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2012) has described the main capabilities a TE should have. These were separated into four domains: professional (capacity of innovation; knowledge of intercultural education; flexibility), personal (appreciation of cultural diversity), cultural (knowledge about the community history), and linguistics (talk and write the official language of the community).

In Chile, since 2019, there is a new regulation that incorporates a TE in schools. This regulation claims that a TE must be a person nominated by the local Indigenous community who is appropriate for teaching the subject of Indigenous Language and teaching Indigenous cultural knowledge, including worldview and history (MINEDUC, n.d.). In addition, some other elements in this new regulation establish that the TE must be validated by the local Indigenous community, have the same working conditions as other teachers at the same school, have a workload that includes four hours per week and will be paid as a minimum the base salary of primary teachers.

This manifesto clarifies that, in the case of the absence of a person with the requirements to perform as a TE, the Minister of Education could nominate a non-Indigenous teacher who has a qualification in Intercultural Education Studies to perform this role (MINEDUC, 2018).

Although the role of the TE has been declared and regulated in the last few years, research reveals that some improvements are still needed, as it has been found that some students benefit from a TE, but not the entire school (Silva-Peña & Becerra-Lubies, 2015).

A recent study conducted by Becerra-Lubies et al. (2022) explored the perception of TEs regarding Indigenous education policies and the current intercultural program. The study included 13 TEs from Aymara, Likan Antai (Atacameños) and Mapuche communities in Chile, which are Indigenous groups with a higher population. One of this study's main findings was the absence of support from families and schoolteachers that was experienced by TEs. Moreover, some TEs noticed the lack of motivation of their students to learn about the Indigenous content. They also found that some schoolteachers discriminated against TEs because they did have not formal teaching qualifications. Another important finding of Becerra-Lubies et al.'s research was the lack of validation given to the TE role by Chilean

authorities, which is evidenced by the low salaries they receive. These substandard TE working conditions and validation may undermine the knowledge the TEs are trying to pass on to the students.

According to a review of the literature, some studies on Indigenous education have been conducted around the world. However, there have been few studies in Chilean contexts, and even fewer in Atacameños settings. The studies concentrate on Indigenous engagement and the advantages of involving Indigenous families in local schools. Current studies, however, have not taken Indigenous perspectives on education into account. This study, as an important contribution to the literature, fills a gap in Indigenous education research.

Research methodology

In accordance with the rights-based approach of this qualitative study, the primary goal was to highlight the voice of historically and systematically oppressed minorities impacted by the consequences of colonialism. The research employed a decolonising Indigenist rights-based approach (Chilisa, 2012; Nakata, 2014; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 2012). This approach aims to decolonise existing methodologies by incorporating local Indigenous knowledge into research and improving minorities' quality of life. The term "Indigenist" refers to "Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who are committed to providing support for Indigenous rights and perspectives" (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 113). Conducting a study with a decolonising methodology requires a critical understanding of the research and the inclusion of local people and their voices (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012). This methodology is "culturally appropriate, respectful, honouring and careful of local people" (Datta, 2018, p. 21) for conducting collaborative Indigenous and Western research.

Given the lack of guidelines for researching in Indigenous contexts existing in Chile, this research embraced the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012). The 14 principles suggested in this guideline were used in the research protocols and procedures.

Atacameños peoples

Atacameños have long lived in a hybrid space where Western and Indigenous practices have encountered each other. The majority of Lican Antai people live in the Atacama Desert. The aim of this research was to explore the perception of Atacameños living in rural, isolated areas; accordingly, the research was carried out in the remote hills of the Atacama Desert of Chile, which borders Bolivia and Argentina. Atacameños are 2% of the Chilean population (INE, 2017). Eight small Indigenous communities are located here, and each community has its own school. Local rural schools serve nearly 1,300 students, most of whom belong to the Atacameños group (INE, 2017; MINEDUC, 2020).

Five community members of the Atacameños peoples were the main participants, including one of the community leaders (see Table 1). Participants lived or worked in different towns, contributing to comprehensive community-level information. They were recruited using snowball sampling with the support and authorisation of some elders as key members of the Indigenous communities (Atkinson, 1998; Braun et al., 2013; Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012). This method is highly recommended to gain participants' engagement when researching in an Indigenous context (Braun et al., 2013; Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2007).

Elders were members of the Consejo de Pueblos Atacameños (Atacameños Community Board). This organisation represents all the Atacameños communities in decision-making and resource administration to ensure community wellbeing. Elders chose participants from the community based on their perceived suitability for the study, ensuring that the selected individuals possessed relevant experience in local schools, whether as former students, parents or educators. Elders suggested six participants; they were contacted and invited to participate in the study. All the participants were informed about the research's aim, steps and possible outcomes before agreeing to be part of the study. Five of them were likely to participate.

Table 1: Research participants

Name	Gender	Community role
Bilka	female	community leader/elder
Tanta	female	former community director/elder
Sairi	female	school assistant
Ayra	female	traditional educator and folklorist
Untur	male	information technology engineer

Data generation and analysis

To accomplish the research aim, participants were interviewed about their living experiences. This method allowed us to gather information about the perceptions and experiences of Indigenous members regarding education and teaching. Life-story interviews as a post-colonial interview method respect the "lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles" (Rigney, 1999, p. 117) of Indigenous participants. Indigenous peoples' perceptions, understandings and knowledge should be central to methodologies for developing Indigenous knowledge (Lambert, 2014).

To facilitate the interviewing process, the interviews were conducted in the town in which each participant lived at the time the research was conducted. The interviews were recorded in audio format and their duration ranged from 1.5 to 3 hours. Community members were invited to share their stories focused on their school experiences and their views about their own education. Spanish was used for interviewing and analysis, as it was the official language of the participants and the main researcher. Language plays an essential role in understanding participants' assumptions, which can aid in coding (Charmaz, 2012).

Field notes were also used to register informal conversations with the participants and other observations during the data-generation process. Accordingly, data analysis included four face-to-face interview rounds and transcriptions that comprised an initial purposeful sampling and two theoretical sampling interview rounds; finally, theoretical saturation occurred. Early analysis of data focused on line-by-line coding to detect emerging topics, which were then separated into categories. Finally, data were analysed using theoretical coding that focused on addressing the research questions. The following criteria, which are suggested to enhance data analysis in Indigenous research (Chilisa, 2012), were used:

Participants' engagement – To engage with the participants, the main researcher spent considerable time with them. They also participated in the discussion about the relevance of the research and the importance of the findings for the community. Participants were informed about the study's aims, steps and process. Participants voluntarily agreed to participate by signing a consent form. They could leave the study at any stage.

Member checking – Participants had access to their interview transcriptions. They had the opportunity to add, delete and improve their stories.

Triangulation and reflexivity – Different sources of information were used to triangulate data, such as memo writing, transcriptions and observations. Some related theories were also used to contrast data. The research standpoint was declared and shared with all the participants regarding flexibility. Memo writing also was used as a reflexivity documentation tool, registering perceptions of the research during all the study steps.

To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used. The study was conducted with the approval of the Queensland University of Technology Research Ethics Committee. This research was part of the critical interpretative project "Indigenous Education in Rural and Remote Areas in Chile: Exploring Teacher and Community Experiences". One of the aims of this project was to understand teachers' experiences of working in these isolated areas and to explore the perceptions of Indigenous community members about teaching. However, in this article, the focus is on the perception of Indigenous community members regarding the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and traditions into local schools.

Results and discussion

"We need more interaction with schoolteachers"

Most participants realised the benefits of having good interactions with teachers; however, members of the Indigenous community expressed their concerns about the lack of interaction with schoolteachers. This situation happened particularly in more prominent schools. Participants' opinions highlighted how the lack of teachers' involvement was caused by their lack of knowledge about Indigenous settings and education. This issue agrees with the literature (Baeza, 2019b; Harrison & Murray, 2012) that claims that teachers need good communication skills to connect with the community. However, there is a shortage of these skills, particularly in early career teachers. Participants emphasised that most teachers are not interested in communicating with local community members or participating in local celebrations.

A participant called Untur presented another point of view. He said that teachers need to earn their place in the community, but this is a difficult task because a community may be shy and may not easily trust new teachers. Untur's perspective supports the claims made by Indigenous scholars Quintriqueo et al. (2017) that there is a prevalent mistrust between Indigenous people and outsiders. Similarly, some non-Indigenous people have negative perceptions of Indigenous people, which can cause Indigenous people to be ashamed of their identity (Sarra, 2012).

Untur also affirmed that teachers would be well received if they demonstrate their validation of the local traditions. His views could be also explained by the power relationship that developed from the colonisation previously mentioned. Indigenous communities were forced to perform their traditional activities in secret from the coloniser for many years (Díaz & Rayas, 2019). Therefore, until now, Indigenous groups were not motivated to share their celebrations or traditions with non-Indigenous people, including most schoolteachers. Contrary to this idea, Frawley et al. (2010) state that "everyone working or participating in a remote Indigenous community school is expected to engage with a relatively alien mainstream education system as well as being engaged with a local Indigenous cultural reality where different values and worldviews exist" (p. 8).

Participants added that some school policies for the regulation of teacher involvement should exist. But at the moment, the interaction between teachers and locals depends on their own motivation and disposition. Moreover, the guidelines for teachers proposed in the compulsory National Curriculum do not address family participation at school (Baeza, 2019a; McEwan, 2008).

The role of local Indigenous communities in supporting teachers

Community members also reflected on their responsibility to improve communication with teachers. In rural schools, mutual support between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is critical since various cultural perspectives cause breakdowns in understanding (Frawley et al., 2010). A participant called Sairi, who works as a school assistant, suggested that the community could support teachers when they first arrive at the schools by training them about the local culture. Strong connections between teachers and community could also facilitate meaningful teaching experiences (Kline et al., 2013; Mellado & Huaiquimil, 2015). From this perspective, participants reflected on some of the primary responsibilities Indigenous community members should perform to support teachers and schools. Some of these responsibilities are as follows.

Being actively involved in school activities

Locals perceived that they should actively participate in some school activities. For example, they suggested that they should be involved in the teacher recruitment process. They were concerned about teachers' lack of commitment and the high rates of teachers' attrition. As the participant Bilka noted, many newly arrived teachers leave the schools after just one year. These statistics are even more disturbing than the reality of rural schools where the teacher attrition is about 50% after three years of arrival (Carrasco et al., 2017). The locals believe that if teachers are made aware of some of the complexities of living and working in a remote Indigenous location, they would be more prepared to face their first days at the school. This preparation could be part of information recruitment strategies and working collaboratively with the local Department of Education. As the participant Ayra stated:

> Before to employ teachers, we need to make sure they like to teach here if they are delighted with the context or not. We need to inform them how it is to work here, and they must assume it, or leave.

This vision of participants is important because the limited knowledge teachers have regarding teaching in Indigenous schools can cause emotional exhaustion and increase teacher attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). For example, the participants Tanta and Sairi highlighted how challenging the living conditions in their communities can be, as they are remote, lack facilities and entertainment, and the weather can be challenging. They said that teachers' expectations differ from the reality they face when they arrive. In addition, some teachers are young, and they find problems in managing the stress of living far away from urban settings. This factor is crucial and is underlined in the literature: challenging living conditions are one of the leading causes of teacher attrition in rural contexts (Jenkins & Cornish, 2015; Turra et al., 2015; White & Kline, 2012).

Additionally, community members said that new teachers should know what parents' expectations are. If the community clarifies community expectations about teaching and teachers' roles, the teachers may become more involved in local issues. For instance, parents could communicate the importance of teachers' participation in local celebrations for the Indigenous community. If important dates were shared with teachers, educators could be motivated to actively participate.

"No one is a prophet in his own land"

Most of the participants mentioned that if some teachers were Atacameños, they could help with the incorporation of local knowledge into the school curriculum. This idea agreed with the concept of decolonising education through the incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the school staff (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). Surprisingly, as the participants stated, although there are some Atacameños who have formal education studies, they seem to avoid working at local schools. In participant Tanta's words:

> Even though I am a teacher, I never thought of work in a local school, even if I knew that these were looking for educators. I meet some retired female teachers and other educators who are Atacameños, but just one of them worked here, and she left the school soon. No one is a prophet in his own land.

Tanta said that locals avoid working at schools because it could generate some problems with other community members and extra pressures. She also claimed Indigenous teachers working in community schools, including her, had been criticised by other locals, which discouraged them from keeping teaching there. Similarly, participant Ayra shared the story of her family. She has one sister and one brother who are teachers, so she proposed to them to work at a local school. Her brother responded: "No, can you imagine! I'm going to be fighting with my own people!"

The narration of Ayra demonstrated the lack of validation given to Indigenous teachers by the local community. In Australia, similar findings were made, where students and non-Indigenous school personnel misunderstand the role of Indigenous educators and, in most cases, Indigenous teachers lack status at schools (Harrison & Sellwood, 2016; Price et al., 2019). Similarly, Frawley et al. (2010) note that, because Indigenous teachers are members of the local group, they cannot detach themselves from it in the same way that a non-Indigenous teacher might.

Having Indigenous teachers at school could have some positive implications; for example, they can incorporate Indigenous traditions into teaching and "keep Atacameño traditions alive" (Bilka). They may also recruit non-Indigenous colleagues about Indigenous ways and knowledge through workshops or informal conversations and build a community of practice. Indigenous teachers are critical players in their communities because of "their deep understanding of the local context, languages, histories and cultures" (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Ltd, 2021, para. 1); they also can be role models for Indigenous students and motivate them to learn.

Provide training for teachers about local culture, Indigenous traditions and community organisation

Some tensions arise between local communities and outsider teachers because of the misunderstanding by educators regarding community traditions or ways of life (Baeza, 2019a; Frawley et al., 2010; Hart et al., 2012). Moreover, in agreement with another research finding (McKinley & Smith, 2019), participants perceived that the school curriculum is far from Indigenous perspectives, which is against the maintenance of their ancient culture and contributes to homogenisation of the school system (Mendoza & Sanhueza, 2016; Nahuelpán et al., 2019). These two situations are evidence that, in order to teach in Indigenous contexts, educators need to acquire knowledge about local culture and traditions. Nevertheless, teachers are currently not receiving training to learn about the specific context of where they will teach. It seems that "the first step in the process of improving teachers' knowledge is to consider the value of Indigenous culture in the Chilean Standards for teachers' professional development" (Baeza, 2019a, p. 17). Meanwhile, the local community could lead the required training for their teachers. As participant Tanta claimed, the local Indigenous community should actively participate in teachers'

training about their culture and become more involved in teachers' practices. Participant Sairi added, "If they [teachers] learn about us, they can support children more because the sad truth is that our culture is being lost."

Indigenous community members highlighted the knowledge teachers should acquire at local schools, as well as knowledge of the community organisation and possible challenges. They also mentioned some skills that educators should have (see Table 2).

Table 2: Knowledge and skills required to teach in a local school according to Indigenous community members

Knowledge/skill	Component	Description
Domestic information	General	Local food; cultural background.
	Geographic	Description of landscape; altitude of towns, general description of towns.
	Climate	Extreme temperatures; information about the weather in each season, desert features.
Indigenous (Atacameños) information	Community organisation	How the community is shaped (e.g., distribution of towns, community leaders).
	Culture	General Atacameños heritage; celebration dates; students' characteristics; history.
Possible challenges	Strategies	Planning for combined classroom; to work in intercultural environments.
	Facilities	Limited amenities; lack of connectivity; isolation.
Skills	Personal	Enthusiastic; energetic; motivated, resilient; persuasive.
	Professional	High teacher vocation; previous teaching experience.

(source: Baeza, 2022)

As Table 2 shows, according to the community, teachers need to manage a range of factors about the place, its heritage and its geographic information, among others. Some of the knowledge community members mentioned has a relationship with teaching strategies needed to teach in a combined school. These suggestions should be included in teacher education programs and training. An interesting point in the description of required skills is the suggestion by locals that teachers should have some previous teaching experience to work in their schools, as, according to the participants, most of the educators working in local schools are newly graduated teachers.

When participants were asked about how schools and locals could work together in developing educators' knowledge about the community, they mentioned the importance of designating a community member or teacher ally who supports newly arrived teachers. Western knowledge can be constructed independently of people's realities, whereas Indigenous knowledge is developed in response to people's experiences and responses to everyday needs (Martin, 2008). Therefore, educators who were born and educated in a Western culture need credible information to contextualise their

understanding of Indigenous settings. Elders and parents would be the best source of information for this. But to do this, teachers need to be made aware of the importance of being involved in Indigenous local culture.

Bringing the Indigenous culture back to school

Considering the responsibilities that the community members perceived they should have in supporting schoolteachers, it is evident that an Indigenous school ally is needed. However, there are few instances of integration between the school and the community (UNICEF, 2012). As was discussed earlier, elders and other members of the community should play a protagonist role in teaching educators about local knowledge. From this perspective, the TE could be the person who works together with the school in supporting teachers and filling the gap between the community and school knowledge.

The examination of the literature revealed that, even when some policies have regulated the job of the TEs, they still face many challenges. The study's findings agree with some of these challenges, such as the lack of recognition by authorities of the TE role and the lack of support by colleagues. Nevertheless, new information about the difficulties TEs undergo arose: the absence of teaching resources and guidelines, and the poor salaries and working conditions. These elements are explored next.

Lack of teaching resources and guidelines

Participant Ayra, who has worked as a TE for the last eight years, mentioned that the resources to use as part of the TE role are limited, and some of the available materials are not suitable for the context of the local schools. A TE receives a guiding text that is general to all the Indigenous communities in the country, and, therefore, it does not consider the cultural diversity among them. The cultural context of the guide "does not specify where stories or cultural practices were collected or observed … and it imposes a written culture where the culture is transmitted orally" (UNICEF, 2012, p. 26). Therefore, a TE needs to create their own material based on their community's context. Participant Ayra conducted her own research to gather useful information for her teaching:

> I studied [local knowledge] to be able to learn and to deliver more knowledge of my culture. I did my own recompilations and investigations. I walked around the towns with my tape recorder, and I interviewed local people.

Using her own songs and poems, Ayra brings the local culture back to the schools. Ayra's contribution was recognised by some community members; they mentioned that she is one of the few people working in keeping their traditions alive. As participant Tanta highlighted:

> We are lucky to have Ayra. I would say that [she] is an example for traditional educators, well, not all the TEs should play the guitar as [she] does, but it does not matter, they have to have other talents such as charisma, that is important … She motivates the children with her performances, her original songs and playing her unique songs.

Ayra discussed that having some teaching materials to guide her work as a TE is crucial, but, given that there are no official curriculum guidelines for TEs, there are very few. To create their own materials, TEs should use their own resources or apply for external funding if these are available. Ayra is clear in mentioning that each TE decides what topics to teach in their workshops. Most of the TEs agreed on the importance of teaching their original language, Kunza, because, currently, only the elders can speak it. Another local TE is compiling a book to use as the main material for guiding TEs. Participants such as Ayra are doing this voluntarily, using their own time and resources.

An important point to consider is that the TE is chosen from the community, but they do not necessarily have formal qualifications. As they lack teaching strategies and pedagogical knowledge, the support of the other teachers is needed. However, agreeing with prior studies (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2022), this research also revealed that TEs have little or no support from their colleagues. This situation may be the result of two reasons: first, the absence of protocols available at schools regarding working collaboratively with a TE because there is unclear information about how a TE should perform; and second, the lack of validation that schools give to the TE. As the participants mentioned, most schoolteachers are not motivated to learn about local traditions, so they avoid interactions with locals who perform the role of TE.

The collaboration between educators and the TE could benefit the whole community. The Indigenous members could support teachers in understanding their culture and way of life. Meanwhile, teachers could support the TE by providing them with pedagogical strategies inside the classroom.

Working conditions

In the exploration of TE working conditions, two main challenges appeared. First, the poor salaries they TEs receive and, second, that they work in isolation.

Most TEs are paid the base salary rate of primary teachers; however, they work fewer hours per week. Moreover, as participant Ayra suggested, the TEs usually need to use their own money to create the materials they use with their students. Participants agreed that TEs should have more working hours at school. The participant Bilka suggested that the TE should conduct an entire subject as part of the curriculum, and not just a weekly workshop.

The participants said that most teachers are not interested in learning about the local culture, so they do not interact much with the TE. The participant Tanta perceived that non-Indigenous teachers do not value the role of TEs, and, therefore, they avoid being involved in or contributing to the TE job. The Chilean intercultural program suggested that the TE should work together with a teacher-mentor who is responsible for providing pedagogical skills, but this program only mentions other Indigenous groups whose original language is Aymara, Quechua, Mapudungun and Rapa Nui (UNICEF, 2012). TEs work in isolation and with limited support from their colleagues. Moreover, in agreement with early research in Australia and Chile (Harrison & Selwood, 2016; Silva-Peña & Becerra-Lubies, 2015), TEs lack support from the local authorities, and even though they are chosen by the local community, sometimes locals do not support them.

Limitations of the study

This research considered a small number of participants due to the scope of this study. Further, while this research sheds light on certain aspects of Atacameños communities in Chile, they are not representative and further studies are needed with other Indigenous groups worldwide. Moreover, community members were asked their opinions based on their experiences as part of the research's qualitative focus, and their responses were, by their very nature, subjective. Finally, this research followed the line of work of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars such as Atkinson (1998), Chilisa (2012), Kovach (2009) and Punch (2005) to ensure the credibility of the findings from the qualitative interviews.

Excluding Indigenous students' perspectives in the study limits our understanding of Indigenous education, highlighting the need for future research to incorporate their voices and gain valuable insights.

Conclusions

The research in this study disclosed Indigenous people's perceptions about the incorporation of Indigenous local culture in schools, including the need to collaborate in some school activities such as teacher recruitment. They also realised that community engagement could improve teachers' involvement. The community was aware of the importance of having an Indigenous ally who supports teaching and helps to educate teachers about local traditions, particularly when they first arrive. However, Indigenous participants perceived that teachers lack interest in working collaboratively with them.

Finally, according to the findings of this study, although TEs are a successful initiative in some schools, they are not valued by the local authorities and school staff. They lack guidelines and teaching resources, are paid poorly and are isolated at work. Other community members could also contribute to incorporating local knowledge by creating different positions at the schools. Building a partnership between school and community can take time, but it also necessitates expertise and understanding of the community's perception of their school.

The findings of this study agreed with prior research that suggested the importance of linking the school with the community (Anderson & White, 2011; Harrison & Sellwood, 2016; Ma Rhea, 2015). However, a novel and unexpected situation arose due to the research findings. Most educators in schools are non-Indigenous, and while there are some Atacameños teachers, they do not want to teach in their community schools. There is a lack of work incentives, motivational strategies and community validation for Indigenous teachers and, consequently, Indigenous educators prefer to avoid possible conflicts with other Indigenous members. These findings are somewhat discouraging and call for a reconsideration of existing policies and motivations for educators, which require further investigation.

This research is a valuable contribution to the literature, as there are limited studies on Indigenous community perceptions regarding teaching and most of the available studies are conducted in non-Chilean contexts. Additionally, the findings could lead to a better understanding of the diversity of Indigenous cultures and inform the development of culturally appropriate policies and programs for Indigenous communities.

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About the authors

Dr Angela Baeza Peña is Diaguita First Nation from Chile. She is a Lecturer at the Carumba Institute and Manager of the *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*. Angela is a math teacher with a Master of Education and a Master of Learning Disabilities. Her research theorises the understanding of teachers' experiences and Indigenous community members regarding providing Indigenous education in rural and remote areas. Her most recent study focused on teachers' and Indigenous communities' perspectives on teacher preparation for teaching in Indigenous contexts in rural Chile. Her publications include math books and journal articles in both English and Spanish.

Professor Peter Anderson is from the Northern Territory's Walpiri and Murinpatha First Nations. His research theorises the understanding of academic freedom's organisational value in Australian universities and, more broadly, in the polar south. He is Director of the Indigenous Research Unit at Griffith University, Australia. He also served as the former Executive Director of the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN).

Professor Simone White is the Dean of RMIT's School of Education. She is a leading expert in teacher education and professional learning, focusing on the best ways to prepare teachers for various contexts, mainly rural, regional and remote settings. Her research focuses on teacher education policy, teacher learning, professional experience, and establishing and maintaining university–school/community partnerships. She is a former President of the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA). She has served in various leadership positions, including Director of Professional Experience at Deakin University, Chair of Teacher Education at Monash University and Associate Dean (International and Engagement) at QUT.

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