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Review article

Knowledge integration in Latin American higher education: a critical documentary analysis of five cases

Integración de saberes en la educación superior latinoamericana: análisis documental crítico de cinco casos

Integração de saberes no ensino superior latino-americano: análise documental crítica de cinco casos

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge integration brings together pedagogical, curricular and institutional proposals that address diverse problems, and the label often replaces the description of the mechanism that sustains them. This article aims to analyze the integration mechanisms described in five Latin American higher education documents and the inferences each of them supports. A critical documentary analysis was carried out with purposive maximum variation sampling. The search, run on 7 October 2026 in Scopus, Web of Science and SciELO Citation Index, identified 1,087 records; after removing

duplicates, applying the 2019-2024 window, screening for relevance and assessing five criteria, 27 documents were eligible, of which five were retained: two examined in full text and three through abstracts and records. The information was organized in an eight-field matrix and four dimensions were coded according to their observable centrality. An independent recoding with a frozen codebook reached an agreement of κ = 1.00, and the sensitivity scenario on three borderline cells, κ = 0.76. The documents located integration in the lesson plan, the assessed task, the declared curriculum, and university policy and structures. Of twenty inferences assessed, one was admissible, four partial and fifteen not admissible; none supported claims of student learning or of co-production with non-academic actors. It is concluded that integration must be described in the unit where it occurs and with the corresponding evidence; the proposed matrix makes this possible without attributing educational effects or regional representativeness.

Keywords: Latin America; documentary analysis; higher education; knowledge integration; interdisciplinarity; transdisciplinarity.

RESUMEN

La integración de saberes agrupa propuestas pedagógicas, curriculares e institucionales que abordan problemas diversos, y su denominación suele sustituir la descripción del mecanismo que las sustenta. El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar los mecanismos de integración que describen cinco documentos latinoamericanos de educación superior y las inferencias que admite cada uno. Se realizó un análisis documental crítico con muestreo intencional de máxima variación. La búsqueda, efectuada el 7 de octubre de 2026 en Scopus, Web of Science y SciELO Citation Index, identificó 1 087 registros; tras depurar duplicados, aplicar la ventana 2019-2024, cribar por pertinencia y evaluar cinco criterios, quedaron 27 documentos elegibles, de los que se retuvieron cinco: dos examinados a texto completo y tres mediante resumen y registros. La información se organizó en una matriz de ocho campos y se codificaron cuatro dimensiones según su centralidad observable. Una recodificación independiente con libro de códigos congelado alcanzó una concordancia de κ = 1,00, y el escenario de sensibilidad sobre tres celdas limítrofes, κ = 0,76. Los documentos situaron la integración en el plan de clase, la tarea evaluada, el currículo declarado y la política y las estructuras universitarias. De veinte inferencias evaluadas, una resultó admisible, cuatro parciales y quince no admisibles; ninguna respaldó afirmar aprendizaje del estudiantado ni coproducción con actores no académicos. Se concluye que la integración debe describirse en la unidad donde ocurre y con la evidencia

correspondiente; la matriz propuesta lo permite sin atribuir efectos educativos ni representatividad regional.

Palabras clave: América Latina; análisis documental; educación superior; integración de saberes; interdisciplinariedad; transdisciplinariedad.

RESUMO

A integração de saberes reúne propostas pedagógicas, curriculares e institucionais que abordam problemas diversos, e sua denominação costuma substituir a descrição do mecanismo que as sustenta. O artigo tem como objetivo analisar os mecanismos de integração descritos em cinco documentos latino-americanos de ensino superior e as inferências que cada um admite. Realizou-se uma análise documental crítica com amostragem intencional de máxima variação. A busca, efetuada em 7 de outubro de 2026 nas bases Scopus, Web of Science e SciELO Citation Index, identificou 1 087 registros; após a remoção de duplicatas, a aplicação da janela 2019-2024, a triagem por pertinência e a avaliação de cinco critérios, restaram 27 documentos elegíveis, dos quais cinco foram retidos: dois examinados em texto completo e três por meio de resumo e registros. A informação foi organizada em uma matriz de oito campos e quatro dimensões foram codificadas segundo sua centralidade observável. Uma recodificação independente com livro de códigos congelado alcançou concordância de $\kappa = 1,00$, e o cenário de sensibilidade sobre três células limítrofes, $\kappa = 0,76$. Os documentos situaram a integração no plano de aula, na tarefa avaliada, no currículo declarado e na política e nas estruturas universitárias. De vinte inferências avaliadas, uma foi admissível, quatro parciais e quinze não admissíveis; nenhuma sustentou afirmar aprendizagem dos estudantes nem coprodução com atores não acadêmicos. Conclui-se que a integração deve ser descrita na unidade em que ocorre e com a evidência correspondente; a matriz proposta permite fazê-lo sem atribuir efeitos educacionais nem representatividade regional.

Palavras-chave: América Latina; análise documental; ensino superior; integração de saberes; interdisciplinaridade; transdisciplinaridade.

INTRODUCTION

The fragmentation of knowledge into disciplinary compartments has been questioned for decades as an obstacle to understanding complex problems. In higher education, the response has taken very different forms: approaches that combine content and language, courses run through international collaboration, curricular agreements between professions, interdisciplinary research centers and university policies on transdisciplinarity. These proposals share the aspiration of relating bodies of knowledge, but they do not operate on the same plane, nor do they require the same evidence to be assessed.

The problem that motivates this study is one of analytical precision. A course may bring together teachers from different fields without students relating concepts; a brief activity may achieve deep integration without institutional support; a university center may formally exist without this demonstrating any formative effect. When a single label designates phenomena that occur in the task, the curriculum, the program or the policy, comparisons lose their meaning and claims about their value shift from one plane to another without support.

The literature distinguishes multidisciplinarity, which juxtaposes contributions from several fields without modifying them, from interdisciplinarity, which establishes relations between concepts, methods or decisions (Klein, 1990). Max-Neef (2005) separates transdisciplinarity into a weak version, of coordination between disciplines, and a strong one, associated with levels of reality. In Latin America, the discussion also incorporates the question of who defines what counts as knowledge, formulated by Santos (2010) through the ecology of knowledges, and the analysis of how the universities of the region institutionalize interdisciplinarity (Vasen & Vienni, 2017).

From these sources, an operational definition of strong transdisciplinarity is adopted that requires two simultaneous conditions: that the process crosses disciplinary boundaries and that it opens questions, methods or decisions to non-academic knowledges and actors. Its practical consequence is demanding: evidence of co-production is admitted only when the material consulted records who formulated the problem, who validated the results or which shared decisions were documented.

Recent work on knowledge integration in Latin American education clusters around themes such as the integrated curriculum and complex thinking, STEAM education, the integration of language and content in teacher education, sustainability and university institutionalization. Health education with

an interprofessional approach offers the evidence closest to outcomes, although measured with single-group designs: Verduzco-Aguirre et al. (2024) evaluate an interdisciplinary educational intervention in geriatric oncology and Diaz-Navarro et al. (2024), interprofessional training for clinical debriefing. Within the cluster on decoloniality and the dialogue of knowledges, Rodríguez (2022) analyses university extension as an epistemic community and Ávila Rojas et al. (2024) bring together interdisciplinary discussions on colonial persistence and decolonization.

Taken together, this work shows three gaps. Most studies describe conditions of institutional or curricular design rather than the mechanism through which two fields are related in a specific task. Evidence of effect is concentrated in single-group interventions without comparison. And the heterogeneity of documentary genres (duoethnography, account of experience, consensus, policy analysis, comparative study) makes it difficult to read the results as a single variable. These gaps justify an analysis that distinguishes the unit where integration occurs and grades inference according to the accessible evidence, instead of accumulating cases as if they measured the same thing.

The aim of this article is to analyze which knowledge integration mechanisms are described in five documents with a Latin American context in higher education and professional training, and which inferences the material consulted for each of them supports. Three questions are posed: in which unit does each document locate the connection between bodies of knowledge? Which dimensions become central in each case? And what can and cannot be claimed with the access available? The contribution is a reading matrix that separates the documentary datum from the study's inference and that can be used to design and assess situated experiences.

To this end, a qualitative documentary multiple-case study was carried out, in which the unit of observation was the published document and not the people, groups or institutions it mentions. The study is not a systematic review: it belongs to the family of critical analyses of selective scope described in the typology of Grant and Booth (2009), which prioritize conceptual interpretation over exhaustiveness. The comparability of the cases is not established in the documentary genre or in the population, but in the unit where each text locates the connection between bodies of knowledge.

The search was run on 7 October 2026 in Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection and SciELO Citation Index, the latter consulted within Web of Science. The search string combined three families of terms: descriptors of knowledge integration (interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, integrated curriculum and related terms), educational descriptors and regional descriptors. A total of

1,087 records were identified (358, 461 and 268, respectively). The time interval was applied during screening, on the exported sets, which are preserved in full and are the source of all the counts.

The documents included had to meet five criteria: (a) an educational object in higher education, professional training or teacher education; (b) a Latin American context identifiable through the institution, the country or the participants; (c) an explicit relation to knowledge integration, interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity; (d) a stable digital identifier; and (e) sufficient public information to recognize the object, the mechanism and the scope.

Removing duplicates by DOI or by normalized title reduced the 1,087 records to 907. The 2019-2024 document window left 426, and the screening of titles and abstracts with an explicit relevance rule retained 96. These were assessed against the five criteria: 69 were excluded with a recorded reason, leaving 27 eligible documents. Purposive maximum variation sampling was applied to these and retained five documents, one for each integration unit identified; the remaining 22 were not selected as a sampling decision and not for failing to meet the criteria. Screening and assessment were carried out by a single person, with an individual record of each reason.

The corpus was made up of five publications: Banegas and del Pozo Beamud (2022), Huento (2024), Cardenas et al. (2022), Riveros et al. (2022) and Vienni Baptista et al. (2019). The first two were examined in full text (access A) and the remaining three through the abstract, the editorial record and repository records (access B), in consultations carried out on 8 October 2026. This distinction conditions the strength of the inferences: at level B the document makes it possible to identify object, context and scope, but not to reconstruct procedures, instruments or detailed results.

The information was recorded in a matrix of eight fields per document: reference, context, object, actors, mechanism described, available evidence, limit of the evidence and inference of the study. On that matrix, four cross-cutting dimensions were coded: relation between bodies of knowledge, pedagogical mediation, institutional organization and participation of actors. The coding expresses the observable centrality of each dimension in the material consulted and admits three levels: central, when the dimension is a central part of the mechanism described; condition or context, when it appears as a condition of the mechanism; and not addressed.

In addition, each document was assessed as to whether it supported four inferences: describing the integration mechanism, claiming student learning, claiming institutional continuity and claiming co-production with non-academic actors. An inference was considered admissible when the document

directly describes the evidence that sustains it; partial, when it sustains it only indirectly or to a limited extent; and not admissible, when the material consulted does not support it.

The coding was interpretive and was subjected to two controls: a codebook with explicit assignment rules, frozen before the recoding, and an independent recoding of the 20 cells (five documents by four dimensions) based on the primary records, without consulting the original assignments. The observed agreement was 20 matches out of 20 cells, with Cohen's $\kappa = 1.00$. Separately, a sensitivity analysis recoded the three cells whose evidence admits an alternative level; in that hypothetical scenario agreement would be 17 out of 20 and $\kappa = 0.76$, a value that corresponds to substantial agreement according to the conventional thresholds in qualitative research (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). No second human coder took part, and risk of bias was not assessed with a formal tool.

DEVELOPMENT

Unit where integration is located

In the material consulted, each document presents a main unit where it locates the connection between bodies of knowledge: the lesson plan and materials, the assessed task of a seminar, the declared curriculum of a profession, and the structures and policies of a university (Table 1). The unit assigned is the one the material makes central, not an exclusive classification.

Table 1. Corpus examined: method of the document, main unit where it locates integration, verified context and level of access

Document	Research method of the document	Main unit where it locates integration	Verified context	Access
Banegas and del Pozo Beamud (2022)	Duoethnography by two teacher educators	Lesson plan and materials of the module	Pre-service English language teacher education in Argentina and Spain	A: full text
Huento (2024)	Account of experience from the student role	Assessed task of a seminar (group podcast)	International virtual seminar in 2023; author linked to the Universidad	A: full text

			Nacional de La Plata (Argentina); course designed in Germany	
Cardenas et al. (2022)	Interdisciplinary Delphi consensus	Declared curriculum of a profession	Panel of Latin American experts in nutrition; undergraduate medical education	B: abstract and records
Riveros et al. (2022)	Case study with content analysis of policy	Institutional policy	Universidad de Chile	B: abstract and records
Vienni Baptista et al. (2019)	Comparative study of three centers	Organizational research structures	Universidad de Buenos Aires, Universidad de la República and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México	B: abstract and records

Source: Prepared by the authors from the primary records consulted on 8 October 2026

Pedagogical articulation of content and language

Banegas and del Pozo Beamud (2022) compare how two teacher educators design and deliver modules on content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in pre-service English language teacher education. The study draws on eight two-hour meetings over two months and on journals and teaching artefacts collected between 2013 and 2020. In Argentina, the module is delivered online, devotes two of its eight units to the approach and presents it as an approach centered on language teaching. In Spain, a seven-unit face-to-face module addresses it as the teaching of school subjects in English.

Integration is located in planning. The authors report that the student teachers, even though they were training as English teachers, tended to center their plans on content and to reduce language to

vocabulary. For that reason they incorporated scenarios with a specific language function and structure, a checklist and a sequence that alternates prior content, prior language, new content and new language. The source makes it possible to describe the mechanism in detail and to recognize that a single label covers different orientations. It does not make it possible to estimate effects on learning or to generalize, as its authors acknowledge when they point to the small scale of the study and the possible bias of examining their own practice.

Thematic integration and digital mediation

Huento (2024) recounts, from the role of student, a seminar on gender violence in the culture and literature of Latin America held in the first semester of 2023 using the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) methodology. The course was designed by teaching staff at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal and, over four months, combined virtual classes, a Moodle classroom and synchronous tutorials via Zoom, concluding with a group podcast. The group described brought together four students, three from Literature and one from Communication, and worked on a non-fiction book and a documentary with categories such as structural violence, symbolic violence and underground memories.

The text provides a useful datum for distinguishing integration from juxtaposition: the teachers' feedback considered the link between motherhood and femicide to be forced, and the group itself had noticed the difficulty of establishing clear links between the two works. The source makes it possible to describe the arrangement and the five assessment items (length and structure, academic rigor, style and formal correctness, creativity and originality, and joint assessment). It does not, however, make it possible to claim learning: the assessment of the product documents the demands of the task and the students' judgement of their own work, not a learning outcome. Moreover, the assessed product is limited to one group and does not document the work of the others.

Curricular coordination in medical education

Cardenas et al. (2022) administered a Delphi survey to a panel of Latin American experts in nutrition to establish objectives, core competencies and curriculum development strategies for undergraduate nutrition education in medicine. Consensus was defined as more than 70% agreement and, after four rounds, 130 competencies were validated in four areas: basic nutrition concepts; public nutrition and prevention throughout the life cycle; nutritional status and disease; and the nutrition care process. The document offers a common language between fields and legitimizes content, but its unit of

analysis is expert judgement on competencies and not the interaction of bodies of knowledge in a course. With access to the abstract and records, it can only be treated as indirect evidence of pedagogical interdisciplinarity: the consensus describes what should be taught, not how or with what effects nutrition and medicine are connected in formative situations.

Institutionalization and situated transdisciplinarity

Riveros et al. (2022) analyze, through content analysis of policy documents of the Universidad de Chile between 2006 and 2021, how transdisciplinarity is conceived and under what conditions it can be institutionalized. To that end they propose the concept of situated transdisciplinarity, which emerges from the relation between practices and policy. Vienni Baptista et al. (2019) compare interdisciplinary centers at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, the Universidad de la República and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. They conclude that institutionalization processes are diverse and that there is no single model in the region, although the centers share a rigid bureaucratic structure and the importance of building consensus, traits they relate to the legacy of the Córdoba Reform and to traditional governance. Both studies offer organizational conditions for asking about the continuity of integration; neither, in the material available, makes it possible to claim effects on training or decision-making participation by non-academic actors.

Centrality of the dimensions and scope of the inferences

Table 2 shows the centrality that each dimension reaches in the material consulted; the levels are not scores and do not allow the documents to be ranked. The relation between bodies of knowledge is a central part of the mechanism described in three documents, where the text makes explicit which bodies of knowledge are connected. Pedagogical mediation is central in the two documents examined in full text, which describe tasks, materials and assessment. Institutional organization is central in the studies on policies and centers, and appears as a condition in the others. Participation of actors is central only in the Delphi consensus, where those who participate decide the competencies. No document presents decision-making participation by non-academic actors as central, and none shows the four dimensions with the same centrality.

Table 2. Observable centrality of the four dimensions in the material consulted for each document

Document	Relation between bodies of knowledge	Pedagogical mediation	Institutional organization	Participation of actors
Banegas and del Pozo Beamud (2022)	Central	Central	Condition or context	Condition or context
Huento (2024)	Central	Central	Condition or context	Condition or context
Cardenas et al. (2022)	Central	Condition or context	Condition or context	Central
Riveros et al. (2022)	Condition or context	Not addressed	Central	Condition or context
Vienni Baptista et al. (2019)	Condition or context	Not addressed	Central	Condition or context

Source: Prepared by the authors

Of the 20 inferences assessed, 1 was admissible, 4 partial and 15 not admissible. The only fully admissible one is the description of the mechanism in the study by Banegas and del Pozo Beamud (2022). The description of the arrangement in Huento (2024), the description of the consensus in Cardenas et al. (2022) and institutional continuity in the two studies on policies and centers are partial. The claim of student learning is not admitted in any of the five documents, nor is that of co-production with non-academic actors. The limit is documentary: the absence of evidence in the material consulted does not prove that these processes do not exist.

Discussion of the findings

The main finding is that the five sources, although they can be grouped under the expression knowledge integration, describe connections that occur in different units and that require different evidence. Comparing them as if they measured a single variable would lead to transferring conclusions from one plane to another: curricular consensus would be read as learning, or the existence of a center as classroom practice.

The two documents examined in full text show that the label does not describe the mechanism. In the study by Banegas and del Pozo Beamud (2022), CLIL covers language-centered and content-centered orientations, and planning reveals that language can be reduced to vocabulary. In the COIL seminar, international collaboration, the virtual classroom and the audio format describe working conditions; what counts as integration is the relation between categories from different fields in the argument of the podcast, and the account itself records that one of those links was perceived as forced. This finding is consistent with the distinction drawn by Klein (1990) between bringing bodies of knowledge together and relating them, and suggests that the most informative evidence is found in task instructions, drafts, products and justifications, rather than in the number of sessions or tools.

In professional training, the Delphi study by Cardenas et al. (2022) provides a valuable design condition: a shared vocabulary of 130 competencies. The distance between that agreement and the implemented and assessed curriculum is precisely what the study does not address; closing it would require syllabuses, assessed cases and evidence of performance. The same pattern appears in the recent literature on interprofessional health education, where the most detailed interventions come from single-group designs (Diaz-Navarro et al., 2024; Verduzco-Aguirre et al., 2024).

The studies on the Universidad de Chile and on centers in Argentina, Uruguay and Mexico show that institutionalization admits diverse arrangements and depends on context (Riveros et al., 2022; Vienni Baptista et al., 2019). Bureaucratic rigidity and the centrality of consensus can both sustain continuity and limit innovation, and examining them requires observing organizational agreements and classroom practices at the same time, which neither of the two documents connects. The regional literature has addressed the institutionalization of interdisciplinarity on the basis of experiences in Uruguay and Argentina (Vasen & Vienni, 2017); the results of this study add that this organizational dimension must be read separately from pedagogical mediation and that it describes conditions of continuity, not formative effects.

None of the five documents describes, in the material consulted, procedures in which non-academic actors modify questions, criteria or decisions. With the demanding definition adopted (Max-Neef, 2005; Santos, 2010), this prevents the cases from being classified as transdisciplinary in the strong sense. The dialogue of knowledges therefore works as a criterion for examining future experiences (who formulates the problem, who validates the results, what records of negotiation exist) and not as a modality observed in this corpus. Huento (2024) illustrates the distinction between academic internationalization and the recognition of knowledges: bringing together universities from several

countries broadens perspectives, but is not in itself equivalent to the participation of extra-academic actors, a distinction also present in work on the decolonization of knowledge in the region (Ávila Rojas et al., 2024; Rodríguez, 2022).

The results have implications for those who design and evaluate experiences. To assess a conceptual connection in a task, it would be advisable to keep task instructions, intermediate versions, assessment criteria and students' justifications; to assess an integrated curriculum, syllabuses, rubrics and performance in integrated tasks; to assess the continuity of a structure, agreements, resource allocation and activity records; and to assess co-production, minutes of shared decisions and the feedback of results.

The analysis has limitations. The corpus consists of five purposively selected documents and does not represent the publications, institutions or countries of the region. Three of them were examined through abstracts and records, so their inferences are provisional, and the two examined in full text are a small-scale study of the authors' own practice and the account of one student group. The coding assignments are justified judgements and not measurements, and the matrix requires empirical application and validation before being used as a standardized instrument.

CONCLUSIONS

Knowledge integration can be analyzed more precisely when the unit where the connection occurs is identified and each claim is linked to the evidence that sustains it. In the five documents examined, that unit varies between the lesson plan, the assessed task, the declared curriculum and university structures. Only one of the twenty inferences assessed was fully admissible, and none supported claims of student learning or of co-production with non-academic actors.

The proposed reading matrix, with its four dimensions and its record of admissible inferences, makes it possible to describe mechanisms and conditions without attributing educational effects or regional representativeness. Further research can contrast these results with studies of tasks and products that include measures of learning, curricular follow-up, governance analysis and documentation of participatory processes with non-academic actors.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, and in the search for and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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