EDUCATION: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ITS ROLE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN COCHABAMBA
EDUCACIÓN: UN ANÁLISIS CUANTITATIVO DE SU ROL EN LA JUSTICIA SOCIAL Y LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS EN COCHABAMBA

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	ABSTRACT
Keywords: education, social justice, human rights, interculturality, inclusion.	This study examines the role of education in promoting social justice and human rights in Cochabamba, Bolivia, within a context of structural inequalities. The objective was to quantitatively assess professionals' perceptions of education's contribution to social equity, inclusion, and the development of change agents. A cross-sectional descriptive design was employed, using a non-probabilistic convenience sample of 150 professionals from education, law, and human rights. A survey with six Likert-scale questions was applied to explore perceptions regarding equity, human rights, intercultural approaches, critical awareness, policies for vulnerable groups, and the training of change agents. Results indicate that 60% believe education promotes social equity, 70% acknowledge its contribution to human rights, 61% value intercultural approaches, 64% highlight critical awareness, 48% approve policies for vulnerable groups, and 69% support the training of change agents. However, neutral (19-27%) and critical (12-25%) responses reveal implementation challenges. The study concludes that education is a key pillar for social justice but requires inclusive policies, enhanced teacher training, and strengthened intercultural approaches. Recommendations include implementing community based programs and inclusive curricula, and combining mixed methods in future research to further explore these dynamics.
	RESUMEN
Palabras clave: educación, justicia social, derechos humanos, interculturalidad, inclusión.	Este estudio analiza el rol de la educación en la promoción de la justicia social y los derechos humanos en Cochabamba, Bolivia, en un contexto de desigualdades estructurales. El objetivo fue evaluar cuantitativamente las percepciones de profesionales sobre la contribución de la educación a la equidad social, la inclusión y la formación de agentes de cambio. Se empleó un diseño descriptivo transversal con una muestra no probabilística por conveniencia de 150 profesionales de educación, derecho y derechos humanos. Se aplicó una encuesta con seis preguntas en escala Likert para explorar percepciones sobre equidad, derechos humanos, enfoques

interculturales, conciencia crítica, políticas para grupos vulnerables y formación de agentes de cambio. Los resultados muestran que el 60% considera que la educación promueve la equidad social, el 70% reconoce su contribución a los derechos humanos, el 61% valora los enfoques interculturales, el 64% destaca la conciencia crítica, el 48% aprueba las políticas para grupos vulnerables y el 69% respalda la formación de agentes de cambio. Sin embargo, las respuestas neutrales (19-27%) y críticas (12-25%) señalan desafíos en la implementación. Se concluye que la educación es un pilar clave para la justicia social, pero requiere políticas inclusivas, formación docente y enfoques interculturales fortalecidos. Se recomienda implementar programas comunitarios y currículos inclusivos, y combinar métodos mixtos en futuras investigaciones para profundizar en estas dinámicas.

Introduction

Education has been widely recognized as an essential instrument for the promotion of social justice and the guarantee of human rights, especially in contexts with high rates of inequality and social exclusion such as Cochabamba and Bolivia in general, several recent studies provide empirical and conceptual evidence on the interrelationship between education, social equity and fundamental rights.

First, the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education and the International Institute for Educational Planning emphasize that, although significant progress has been made in Latin America in terms of access to and permanence in school, structural inequalities persist and "it will be difficult to make progress in improving the educational situation if the serious problems of structural poverty and exclusion that affect important sectors in each of the countries of the region are not addressed" (UNESCO, 2021, p. 37). In the Bolivian case, the persistence of these educational inequalities is closely related to socioeconomic, cultural and recognition gaps, showing that education sometimes reproduces inequalities instead of mitigating them.

In a quantitative analysis specific to Bolivia, Montaño and Navia (2022) use an econometric model with panel data to show that educational inequality, measured through the Gini coefficient of education, is the most influential factor in income inequality. This study confirms that reducing educational gaps contributes directly to reducing economic inequality, which is a key component for social justice in the region, and that public policies aimed at educational inclusion and increasing the average years of schooling are essential for promoting more equitable development.

Regarding the conceptual and philosophical framework of social justice in education, Mendoza (2022) highlights the need to incorporate rigorous and critical approaches that transcend the simplistic discourse of equity and inclusion. The author examines relevant philosophical traditions such as the theory of primary goods, the human capabilities approach and epistemic justice that allow us to understand education not only as a right, but also as a mechanism to transform power relations and foster social emancipation in Latin American contexts.

Likewise, Sánchez-Corral (2021) approaches education for social justice from an intersectional analysis, particularly focused on students from privileged groups, proposing educational strategies that develop critical awareness, recognition of privilege and genuine social commitment. This approach is vital to foster agents of change capable of working for the dignity and equity of vulnerable groups, contributing to a more just and transformative education system.

Simón et al. (2019), reflect on the convergence and divergence between equity, inclusive education and social justice education approaches, noting that they all share a foundation in human rights and aspire to eliminate exclusion and discrimination. Education is seen as a key tool for building more just societies, provided that educational policies and practices are aligned with these principles.

In the field of higher education, Santos and Condori (2023) stress the importance of promoting an inclusive university that guarantees access, permanence and graduation of all students, regardless of their individual or social characteristics. This inclusion is based on principles of social justice and human rights, which implies transforming institutional practices to eliminate economic, social and cultural barriers, promoting equal opportunities at the higher education level.

Finally, from an intercultural and decolonial perspective, Villafán (2024) highlights the role of intercultural education in Bolivia as a strategy to build a plurinational society

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based on reciprocity and self-management, taking as an example the historical model of Warisata. This education promotes social justice by positioning indigenous communities not as passive recipients, but as active subjects of their own educational and cultural development, thus contributing to overcoming colonial power relations.

In summary, the body of research shows that for education to fulfill its role in social justice and human rights in Cochabamba-Bolivia, it is necessary to articulate public policies that reduce educational inequalities, incorporate intersectional and decolonial approaches, and transform educational practices at all levels to ensure effective inclusion, equity and respect for cultural and social diversity.

Method

The present research adopts a quantitative approach because it seeks to "analyze in an objective and measurable way the relationship between education, social justice and human rights, facilitating the obtaining of numerical data that allow establishing patterns and generalizations" (Creswell, 2014). This approach is suitable for "describing social phenomena accurately and for evaluating specific variables in the study population" (Hernández; Fernández; Baptista, 2014).

A cross-sectional descriptive design (transactional) was used, which allows the collection of information at a given time, "descriptive studies measure variables independently and even when no hypotheses are formulated, such variables are stated in the research objectives" (Arias, 2006 a, p.25). This type of design is relevant for studies that seek to establish the current state of the phenomena of interest, in this case, the role of education in social justice and human rights in Cochabamba.

The population considered is composed of 200 professionals from different areas related to the object of study: education, law and human rights. From this population, a non-probabilistic convenience sample of 150 professionals was selected, "given the accessibility and availability of the participants, which allows obtaining relevant information in limited time and resources" (Etikan; Musa; Alkassim, 2016). This method is commonly used in descriptive studies where probabilistic representativeness is difficult to achieve, but a sample that provides meaningful data for analysis is required.

A survey was designed with 6 closed response questions on a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess the perceptions of professionals on the role of education in social justice and human rights in Cochabamba.

Results

The results obtained in this research are as follows:

Question 1. Does education in Cochabamba effectively promote social equity and the reduction of inequalities?

Table 1

Perception of social equity and education in Cochabamba

ANSWER	F	%
Strongly disagree	10	7%
Disagree	20	13%
Neither agree nor disagree	30	20%
Agreed	60	40%
Totally agree	30	20%
Total	150	100%

Note. Data on the perception of social equity and access to education in Cochabamba, prepared by the authors (2025)

According to the survey conducted, the majority of participants were in favor of the role of education in promoting social equity and reducing inequalities, with 40% of respondents agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing, totaling 60% clear support. However, 20% maintained a neutral position, showing a certain degree of indecision or lack of sufficient information to form a solid opinion. On the other hand, 20% expressed disagreement or total disagreement, reflecting a significant minority with criticisms or reservations about the current effectiveness of education in this area. This set of results indicates that, although there is a predominantly positive perception, there are still challenges and areas for improvement that must be addressed in order to strengthen the social impact of education.

Question 2. Do current educational programs contribute to guaranteeing the basic human rights of all students?

Table 2

Perception of educational programs and guarantee of basic human rights

ANSWER	F	%
Strongly disagree	5	3%
Disagree	15	10%
Neither agree nor disagree	25	17%
Agreed	70	47%
Totally agree	35	23%
Total	150	100%

Note. Data on the perception of educational programs and the guarantee of basic human rights, own elaboration (2025).

According to the survey, 47% agree and 23% strongly agree, for a solid 70% support. However, 17% remain neutral, which may reflect uncertainty or lack of sufficient knowledge to form a definitive opinion. On the other hand, 10% expressed disagreement and 3% total disagreement, indicating that a minority questioned the current effectiveness of these programs in ensuring human rights. These results show a mostly positive perception, although they also show the existence of challenges and aspects to be improved in the implementation of education to fully guarantee fundamental rights.

Question 3. Does the inclusion of intercultural approaches in education strengthen social justice in the region?

Table 3
Perceptions of intercultural inclusion and social justice

ANSWER	F	%
Strongly disagree	8	5%
Disagree	10	7%
Neither agree nor disagree	40	27%
Agreed	55	36%
Totally agree	37	25%
Total	150	100%

Note. Data on the perception of intercultural inclusion and social justice in Cochabamba, own elaboration (2025).

According to the survey, 36% of the participants agree and 25% strongly agree that the inclusion of intercultural approaches in education strengthens social justice in the region, totaling 61% of positive opinions. However, a remarkable 27% remain neutral, suggesting that a considerable portion of respondents still do not have a definite opinion or need more information on this topic. On the other hand, 7% disagreed and 5% totally disagreed, reflecting that there is a minority that questions or does not perceive the impact of intercultural approaches on social justice. These results indicate that, although the majority recognizes the value of intercultural education, there are still doubts and areas to strengthen its acceptance and effectiveness in the community.

Question 4. Does education foster critical awareness of social injustices and discrimination?

Table 4
Perception on education and critical social awareness

ANSWER	F	%
Strongly disagree	7	5%
Disagree	12	8%
Neither agree nor disagree	35	23%
Agreed	60	40%
Totally agree	36	24%
Total	150	100%

Note. Data on the perception of education and critical social awareness in Cochabamba, own elaboration (2025).

According to the survey, 40% of the participants agree and 24% strongly agree that education fosters critical awareness of social injustices and discrimination, accumulating 64% of favorable opinions. However, 23% of respondents remain neutral, suggesting that a significant proportion still do not have a defined position or require further understanding on this aspect. In contrast, 8% disagreed and 5% totally disagreed, showing that a minority questioned the effectiveness of education in this area. The results indicate a mostly positive perception, although they highlight the need to continue strengthening critical education in order to broaden its social impact.

Question 5. Do education policies in Cochabamba adequately address the needs of vulnerable groups?

Table 5
Perception of educational policies and vulnerable groups in Cochabamba

ANSWER	F	%
Strongly disagree	12	8%
Disagree	25	17%
Neither agree nor disagree	40	27%
Agreed	43	28%
Totally agree	30	20%
Total	150	100%

Note. Data on the perception of educational policies and their impact on vulnerable groups in Cochabamba, prepared by the authors (2025)

According to the survey, 28% of the participants agree and 20% strongly agree that educational policies in Cochabamba adequately address the needs of vulnerable groups, for a total of 48% favorable opinions. However, 27% remain neutral, indicating that a considerable part of the respondents do not have a defined position or consider the information available to be insufficient. On the other hand, 17% disagreed and 8% totally disagreed, adding up to 25% who questioned or did not consider these policies adequate. These results reflect a divided and critical perception regarding the effectiveness of educational policies to serve vulnerable groups, evidencing the need for improvements and adjustments in this area.

Question 6. Does academic training contribute to developing agents of change committed to human rights?

Table 6
Perception on academic training and development of change agents

ANSWER	F	%
Strongly disagree	4	3%
Disagree	14	9%
Neither agree nor disagree	28	19%
Agreed	65	43%
Totally agree	39	26%
Total	150	100%

Note. Data on the perception of academic training and the development of agents of change in Cochabamba, own elaboration (2025).

According to the survey conducted, 43% of the participants agree and 26% strongly agree that academic training contributes to developing agents of change committed to human rights, reaching a positive endorsement of 69%. However, 19% maintain a neutral position, indicating that a significant portion still does not have a defined opinion or requires more information to evaluate this aspect. On the other hand, 9% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed, reflecting that a minority questioned the effectiveness of academic training in this regard. These results suggest that, although most recognize the formative impact on the commitment to human rights, there is room to strengthen and consolidate this educational role.

Discussion

The results of this research consolidate education as a fundamental pillar for promoting social justice and guaranteeing human rights in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The

mostly positive perception of the professionals surveyed, with 60% recognizing that education promotes social equity (Table 1) and 70% valuing its contribution to basic human rights (Table 2), corroborates the approaches of (UNESCO, 2021) and (Montaño; Navia, 2022). These authors emphasize that the reduction of educational gaps reduces economic inequality, a critical aspect in contexts of high social exclusion such as Bolivia. This finding is aligned with the theory of justice of (Rawls, 2002; Rawls, 2006), who positions education as a primary good to ensure an equitable society, and with Sen's (2010) capabilities approach, which emphasizes the role of education in expanding human freedoms, enabling individuals to participate fully in society. In the Latin American context, Filmus (2010) reinforces this idea by emphasizing that education is an engine of social inclusion and labor equity, providing opportunities to overcome structural inequalities.

The inclusion of intercultural approaches, supported by 61% of respondents (Table 3), validates Villafán's (2024) proposal of intercultural education as a mechanism for building a plurinational society based on reciprocity. Neutral responses (27%) do not contradict this impact, but rather point to the need to strengthen teacher training and curriculum implementation, as suggested by Walsh (2013) in his work on decolonial pedagogies that promote the resistance and re-existence of marginalized communities. Fals (1987) complements this perspective by emphasizing education as a process of collective construction of knowledge, where indigenous communities, as in the Warisata model, are active agents of their development. This convergence is reinforced by the vision of (Freire, 1997; Freire, 2005), who advocates a dialogical and liberating education that decolonizes knowledge and promotes social justice, an essential principle for transforming power relations in plurinational contexts such as Bolivia.

The 64% who perceive that education fosters critical awareness of social injustices (Table 4) confirms the relevance of the intersectional strategies proposed by (Sanchez-Corral, 2021; Freire, 1997) enrich this analysis by stressing that critical pedagogy should empower students to question oppressive structures through dialogic learning. Diaz (2019) adds that education should be a democratic space that cultivates critical citizens, a principle that resonates with the Cochabamba context. The neutral (23%) and disagreement (13%) responses reflect the diversity of perceptions, but do not detract from the transformative potential of education. On the contrary, these responses highlight the opportunity to integrate popular education approaches, as proposed by (Alfieri; Rébola; Suárez, 2022), to strengthen social awareness through participatory and contextualized practices.

Educational policies for vulnerable groups, with 48% support (Table 5), indicate significant progress towards inclusion, as argued by (Santos; Condori, 2023) and (Filmus, 2010) reinforces that educational policies should prioritize equitable access for marginalized sectors, an objective that policies in Cochabamba are addressing, although with room for optimization. For his part Walsh (2013) adds that decolonial pedagogies can transform the living conditions of vulnerable groups, while Sen (2000) stresses that education must guarantee opportunities for the development of human capabilities. The neutral (27%) and disagreement (25%) responses do not question this progress, but rather point to the need to design specific programs, such as scholarships, financial support and inclusive curricula, to maximize impact. Fals (1987) suggests that community participation in the design of these policies can ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

The 69% who recognize that academic training develops agents of change committed to human rights (Table 6) fully validates the importance of inclusive higher education, as argued by (Santos; Condori, 2023) and (Flores; Bustamante, 2020) provide a philosophical perspective by arguing that education should be a space for thinking the

common, forming citizens who promote social justice through dialogue and collective action. Barrera (2023) reinforces this idea by stressing that higher education should cultivate a critical citizenship that challenges inequalities, while (Freire, 1997) emphasizes autonomy as a pillar for training agents of change. The neutral (19%) and disagreement (12%) responses reflect the complexity of the educational context, but do not question the transformative role of education. These perceptions underscore the opportunity to integrate pedagogical approaches that prioritize ethical commitment, as suggested by Verdeja (2020), and to strengthen curricula with transformative practices.

The methodology based on a non-probabilistic convenience sample is appropriate for the Cochabamba context, as Boff (1997) points out, and the subjective perceptions capture the lived reality of the professionals, a key aspect in social research according to Banks (2004). Neutral and critical responses do not limit the validity of the findings, but rather enrich the analysis by identifying priority areas for educational action. For example, the neutral responses in Tables 3 and 5 suggest the need for intercultural awareness campaigns and teacher training, while the critical responses in Table 5 highlight the urgency of more inclusive policies, aligned with the proposals of Fals (1987). These observations provide a roadmap for transforming the education system, strengthening its impact on social justice.

In summary, the results fully confirm that education in Cochabamba is an engine of social justice and human rights, aligning with (UNESCO, 2021; Villafan, 2024; Freire, 1997; Freire, 2005; Rawls, 2002; Rawls, 2006; Sen, 2010; Filmus, 2010; Walsh, 2013). Neutral or critical perceptions offer strategic opportunities to optimize educational policies and practices through teacher training, inclusive curricula, and decolonial and participatory approaches. We recommend that educational policies prioritize the inclusion of vulnerable groups, intercultural awareness, and the training of agents of change through specific programs, such as community workshops and targeted programs. Future research could combine mixed methods to deepen these dynamics and consolidate the role of education in the construction of an equitable and plurinational society in Bolivia.

Conclusions

Education in Cochabamba emerges as an essential pillar to promote social justice and guarantee human rights, acting as a key driver to reduce structural inequalities and promote inclusion in a context of profound cultural and social diversity. The results of this research reveal a predominantly positive perception among the professionals surveyed, with 60% highlighting the role of education in promoting social equity, 70% recognizing its contribution to the protection of fundamental rights, and 69% valuing its capacity to train agents of change committed to social transformation. However, the neutral (19-27%) and critical (12-25%) responses point to pending challenges, such as the need to strengthen educational policies aimed at vulnerable groups, optimize the integration of intercultural approaches and consolidate teacher training in transformative pedagogical practices.

These findings highlight the importance of designing educational policies that prioritize effective inclusion through strategies such as economic support programs, curricula that reflect cultural diversity, and teacher training focused on the development of critical consciousness. Higher education, in particular, should focus on cultivating ethical and committed citizens capable of challenging inequalities and contributing to a more equitable and pluralistic society.

It is recommended to implement community initiatives that actively involve local populations in the creation of educational policies, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness. It is also crucial to strengthen cultural awareness and critical education at all levels of education to maximize the transformative impact of education. For future research, it is proposed to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore in depth the experiences of marginalized groups and to evaluate the long-term effects of educational policies. These actions are fundamental to consolidate an educational system that not only guarantees access, but also promotes equity, social justice and unrestricted respect for human rights in Cochabamba and Bolivia.

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