
EXPANSIVE CURRICULUM: RESIGNIFYING LEARNING IN TIMES OF EXPANSIVE AND GLOBAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article presents a critical bibliographic analysis of the evolution and redefinition of the curriculum within the framework of expansive education. It explores the contemporary challenges faced by curricular models in a highly interconnected world, emphasizing the need to transcend technical and fragmented approaches. Instead, it advocates for inclusive, critical, situated, global, and transdisciplinary perspectives. Drawing on recent academic literature, the study examines international and Latin American experiences that demonstrate how a dynamic, flexible, and socially committed curriculum can be developed—one that bridges local and global knowledge, and fosters the formation of ethical, creative citizens committed to social justice, sustainability, and diversity. Within this context, expansive education emerges as an integrative paradigm that redefines the meaning of learning and the student's role as an active agent in the educational process.

Keywords: Expansive education, Transdisciplinary curriculum, Global citizenship, Educational inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has profoundly transformed the educational context, placing new demands on teaching systems and the configuration of the current curriculum. In a world characterized by economic, cultural and technological interdependence, curricula can no longer be limited to the transmission of universal, decontextualized and disciplinary content. On the contrary, an approach is required that recognizes the complexity of local and global realities, that promotes inclusion, critical thinking, and the ability of students to act with autonomy and ethical commitment in the face of contemporary challenges.

In this direction, expansive education emerges as a paradigmatic proposal that seeks to break the traditional boundaries of formal learning, incorporating vital, community and transdisciplinary knowledge. This perspective is supported by active methodologies, dialogue with the arts and neurosciences, and a conception of knowledge as a collective construction. At the same time, it raises the urgency of linking the curriculum with the great planetary challenges, such as environmental sustainability, social justice and cultural diversity. This article develops a bibliographic analysis that articulates curricular transformations with the foundations of expansive education. Based on contemporary theoretical references and international experiences, it examines how the curriculum can expand towards inclusive, critical, situated, and global approaches, integrating both academic knowledge and ancestral and emerging knowledge. In this context, the student is considered not only as a receiver of information, but as an active, creative and emotionally involved subject in his or her own training process. Thus, this paper proposes an in-depth reflection on the need to rethink the curriculum as a pedagogical and political tool to build a more humane, equitable and transformative education in the era of interconnection.

Method used

The present study adopts a bibliographic analysis methodology, focused on the critical review of scientific, academic and regulatory literature on curriculum and global education. As Gómez Crespo (2015) and Esquirol Caussa et al. (2017) state, the bibliographic review allows us to know the state of the art, identify gaps, contrast approaches and theoretically support a research proposal. This type of analysis not only organizes existing information, but also contributes to building solid interpretative frameworks to understand complex phenomena. Following these approaches, texts by key authors such as Carrillo Hernández and Benavides Martínez (2022), Ibarra Figueroa and Calderón Leyton (2022), Pérez Brito (2021), Gómez and Camero (2025) were analyzed, as well as documents and guidelines from organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD and educational experiences in countries such as Finland, South Korea, Canada and Colombia.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

The bibliographic analysis allowed us to reconstruct a critical vision of the curriculum, from its historicist roots to its contemporary expansion. Trends are identified towards models of situated, inclusive and transdisciplinary education, where the curriculum is not only an organizational structure, but a tool for the empowerment of social justice and global sustainability, as well as the non-loss of the sense of the human in an era in which AI continues to take great strength and power in the context of contemporary education.

The historical evolution of the curriculum, as Pereyra and Popkewitz (2022) state, represents a trajectory of great complexity that reflects the cultural, social, and political contexts of each era. From ancient times to the present day, the curriculum has been a tool for the expression of values, beliefs and models of society. In classical antiquity, the trivium and the quadrivium promoted an integral formation of the citizen through logical, linguistic and mathematical development, evidencing a humanistic vision of education as an engine of moral and intellectual development. This perspective was radically transformed in the Middle Ages, when the curriculum was subordinated to ecclesiastical doctrine, prioritizing theological knowledge as a vehicle for salvation, which evidences the ideological character of the curriculum as a reflection of dominant powers. With the Renaissance, an epistemological shift arose where the human being was once again placed at the center of knowledge. Education recovered the value of reason and scientific thought. According to Pérez Brito (2021), in the nineteenth century, with the consolidation of modern states and the Industrial Revolution, the curriculum acquired a social and productive function: to train obedient citizens, functional to the emerging economic model. At this stage, school disciplines were consolidated and the standardized curriculum was instituted, with emphasis on efficiency, logical sequencing, and measurement of results.

In the twentieth century, technical-rational approaches were systematized under the influence of positivism and systems theory. However, authors such as Nivela Cornejo, Chenche Jácome, and Echeverría Desiderio (2023) warn about its limitations, pointing out that excessive structuring restricted the student's experience. Based on progressive pedagogy, inspired by Dewey, Freinet and others, a curriculum focused on experience, problem solving and the protagonism of the student was promoted. This approach connected with socio-critical thinking, which, as Rodríguez (2023) points out, states that the curriculum is a field of ideological dispute where power relations are reproduced or transformed. From this perspective, the curriculum must enable the development of critical awareness and the active participation of students in the transformation of their environment.

In one of his most recent mentions regarding the curricular issue, Gimeno Sacristán, J. (2021). *Teaching professionalism, curriculum and pedagogical renewal. Research In School*, insists that the function of the curriculum should be to contribute to the development of a critical citizenship, aware of its environment and capable of actively participating in its transformation. In this sense, it proposes an open, flexible and reflective curriculum, which allows interpreting the needs and aspirations of educational communities, instead of

imposing uniform and decontextualized standards. This vision aligns with current approaches to inclusive, situated, and expansive education, by defending a curriculum that is sensitive to diversity, context, and the dignity of the learner.

On the other hand, sociocultural thinking delved into the contextual dimension of learning. According to Regalado Díaz et al. (2023), the curriculum cannot be understood as a neutral or universal entity, but must be built from the culture, language, and practices of the student. The inclusion of local knowledge and the validation of community experiences enrich the relevance of the educational process. This vision has been reinforced in the twenty-first century by the challenges posed by globalization, digital progress and the climate crisis. Soledispa Toala et al. (2023) propose that the curriculum should prepare students for global citizenship, promoting ethical, intercultural, and sustainable competencies, in coherence with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In this framework, paradigms such as inclusive, critical, situated, and global education emerge (Ramírez Ramírez et al., 2021), which expand the traditional conception of the curriculum. Inclusion, for example, is not limited to integrating students with disabilities, but recognizes diversity as a pedagogical value. It involves removing physical, cultural, linguistic, and methodological barriers. Critical education, on the other hand, is based on the analysis of the structures of domination, seeking to empower the student as a political subject. Situated education, on the other hand, is built from the territory, from the immediate context of the learner, promoting knowledge rooted in daily life and cultural practices.

Global education responds to the challenge of forming citizens capable of understanding the complexity of the interconnected world. As Juárez Lorencilla (2022) points out, the curriculum must promote systemic thinking, international cooperation, planetary ethics, and transformative action. In this line, the expanded curriculum and the global curriculum, as developed by Rubio González and Gómez Francisco (2021) and Guacho Tipán (2022), are configured as contemporary educational responses. The first recognizes learning beyond formal school, incorporating community, digital and vital contexts; the second articulates competencies to face global challenges from an intercultural, dialogic and ethical perspective.

These paradigms have found an echo in educational experiences such as Escuela Nueva in Colombia, phenomenological modules in Finland, and language immersion programs in Canada, which show how it is possible to integrate curriculum, context, and global citizenship. In all cases, the curriculum is understood not as a closed and prescriptive document, but as a collective, dynamic and situated construction. In short, as Martínez Heredia and Soto Molina (2024) state, transdisciplinarity offers a powerful framework for articulating academic, ancestral and community knowledge in a holistic vision of learning, oriented towards social justice, equity and a dignified life.

New educational paradigms: inclusive, critical, situated and global education

In the context of the cultural, social and technological transformations of the twenty-first century, new educational paradigms are emerging that reconfigure the aims, contents and forms of the school curriculum. As Ramírez Ramírez, Manrique Rojas, and Plascencia López (2021) argue, these approaches are not a passing fad, but an urgent and structural response to the multiple crises facing humanity: inequality, exclusion, fragmentation of knowledge, and environmental collapse. Education, understood as a fundamental human right, must assume the commitment to form subjects capable of ethically inhabiting the complexity of the world, from a critical, inclusive and supportive perspective.

One of the pillars of this curricular transformation is inclusive education, which has ceased to be conceived only as a mechanism for the integration of people with disabilities, to become a pedagogical model focused on the recognition and appreciation of diversity as a structural principle of learning. According to UNESCO (2017), a truly inclusive education transforms school environments into safe, democratic and culturally sensitive spaces, where the physical, linguistic, cognitive and attitudinal barriers that have historically prevented equitable access to knowledge are eliminated.

On the other hand, likewise, within the framework of the profound transformations that the curriculum is currently experiencing, it is essential to integrate proposals that transcend the technical and fragmentary approaches of the past, towards models that recognize the complexity of human learning. Along these lines, the work of Martínez Heredia & Soto Molina (2024) propose a transdisciplinary approach that allows dialogue between various areas of knowledge in such a way that both teachers and students have access to meaningful learning experiences, favoring the application of concepts to practical life and promoting an education focused on active and social learning. Likewise, Gómez Arévalo and Camero Gutiérrez (2025) turn their gaze to the category of expansive education as a critical and innovative alternative to traditional educational models, which have begun to show their limitations in the face of the challenges of a dynamic, hybrid and diverse world. The authors propose a living curriculum, nourished by active pedagogies, emotional intelligence and experiential learning, which allows the student to be the protagonist of a profoundly human, collaborative and inclusive learning experience.

Likewise, it is no less important to remember the current validity in Latin America of the so-called "critical education" proposed by Paulo Freire (1970), who argues that the curriculum is not a technical instrument, but a field of cultural dispute where it is defined what knowledge is legitimate, what voices are heard and what futures are considered possible. According to the Brazilian thinker, the curriculum must allow the development of critical awareness, the political reading of reality and the capacity of students to act as transformative subjects. Likewise, situated education introduces a fundamental epistemological turn: learning does not take place in a vacuum, but is inseparable from the historical, cultural and territorial context of the subjects. Regalado Díaz et al. (2023) stress that the curriculum must be built from the students' life experiences, their community knowledge, native languages, and forms of relationship with nature.

This is how global education poses the challenge of forming citizens capable of acting responsibly in an interdependent world. Juárez Lorencilla (2022) argues that current problems require global literacy that combines systemic thinking, international cooperation, intercultural empathy, and ethical commitment to human rights.

As Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009) points out, the challenge of emancipatory pedagogies is to build an ecology of knowledge, where the curriculum is not a homogeneous recipe, but a constellation of diverse knowledge, dialoguing and committed to human dignity.

Table 1. Summary of Author Contributions to the Current Curriculum

Author(s)	Key ideas in relation to the curriculum
Pereyra & Popkewitz (2022)	The curriculum is a historical and cultural construction that reflects the social, political and cultural transformations of each era.
Pérez Brito (2021)	During the nineteenth century, the curriculum adopted a social and productive function, at the service of modern states and industrialization.
Nivela Cornejo, Chenche Jácome & Echeverría Desiderio (2023)	They criticize the technical-rational model for its rigidity and propose a pedagogy focused on the experience and participation of the student.
Rodríguez (2023)	The curriculum must be understood as a space of ideological dispute that allows the development of critical awareness and transformative action.
Regalado Díaz et al. (2023)	They propose that the curriculum should be built from the sociocultural context of the student, recognizing local knowledge and community practices.
Soledispa Toala et al. (2023)	They propose a curriculum oriented towards global citizenship, with an emphasis on sustainability, ethics and diversity.
Ramírez Ramírez et al. (2021)	They defend the need for inclusive, critical, situated and global educational paradigms to respond to today's complexity.
UNESCO (2017)	Inclusive education must remove barriers and transform school environments to ensure equitable access to knowledge.
Freire (1970)	He believes that education is not neutral, and that the curriculum should encourage critical thinking and social transformation.
Juárez Lorencilla (2022)	He warns that education must promote systemic thinking, intercultural empathy and ethical commitment to face global challenges.
Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009)	It proposes an ecology of knowledge that articulates diverse knowledge and promotes a plural and emancipatory curriculum.
Martínez Heredia & Soto Molina (2024)	Transdisciplinarity allows the integration of academic and community knowledge, favoring education for social justice.

<p>Jimeno Sacristán (2021, 2002, 2005)</p> <p>Gómez Arévalo (2020)</p>	<p>He criticizes the technical vision of the curriculum and conceives it as a cultural and ideological project. It advocates for an open, reflective and contextualized curriculum, aimed at the formation of critical and aware citizens.</p> <p>It proposes a curricular transformation in Latin American higher education based on a holistic, flexible and integrative, person-centered vision.</p>
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Source: Authors' elaboration based on analysis by consulted authors.

Characteristics of the Expansive or Expanded Curriculum

In the above analyses, it can be observed that, to a large extent, as the inherited curricular models are critically reviewed, it becomes evident that many of them no longer respond to the changing realities of our time. We come from schemes anchored in the mechanical repetition of content, where the fragmentation of knowledge, rote evaluation and a scarce connection with real life are privileged. This approach, widely disseminated for decades, has shown structural limitations in meeting current pedagogical challenges.

In contrast, the expansive curriculum—also called expanded—introduces an open, integrative, and flexible logic. It is based on the idea that learning is not confined to a classroom or a schedule, but happens online, in community, in digital or natural environments, in intergenerational dialogue and in collective action. Its *raison d'être* is not to accumulate isolated knowledge, but to generate vital experiences where the emotional, the cognitive and the ethical are intertwined.

This model promotes an active articulation between formal knowledge and the knowledge that emerges in everyday life. Thus, education ceases to be a vertical and closed process, to become a situated practice, which recognizes the richness of local contexts, while continuing to dialogue with global challenges: social justice, sustainability, interculturality or digital transformation, among others.

In methodological terms, the expansive curriculum is committed to practices that start from the student as the protagonist. It values individual differences, learning times, and favors participatory, collaborative and creative environments. The integration of technological tools, including artificial intelligence, does not respond to a fad, but to a need: that of promoting critical thinking and connecting learning with new ways of living, inhabiting and thinking about the world. Beyond the instrumental, this curricular vision recognizes that the act of educating is also a political and ethical act. It is not only a matter of training skills, but of cultivating people capable of acting responsibly, sensitively and meaningfully in multiple scenarios. In this direction, it can be said that the expansive curriculum offers a powerful way to imagine more humane, inclusive and relevant schools for this time.

In short, the expansive curriculum is conceived as a dynamic proposal that transcends the limitations of traditional curriculum design, integrating flexible, inclusive, and transdisciplinary approaches that respond to the demands of an interconnected world. Based on the theoretical review and recent educational experiences, key dimensions are identified that guide its implementation, each supported by contributions from authors who have reflected on education from critical, intercultural, technological, and systemic perspectives. The following table summarizes these dimensions, their educational projection and the academic references that support them:

Table 2. Dimensions, theoretical support and educational projection of the expansive curriculum

<i>Key dimension</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Educational projection</i>	<i>Authors of theoretical support</i>
Curricular flexibility	It allows you to adjust content, methodologies and times at the student's pace and the realities of the environment.	Supports personalized processes and increases engagement with learning.	José Gimeno Sacristán (2000, 2021); César Coll (2010); Michael Fullan (2020); UNESCO (2022), Gómez (2020).
Articulation of formal and	It integrates learning that takes place inside and outside the classroom, including	It connects school with everyday life,	Paulo Freire (1997); Etienne Wenger (1998); David Kolb (2015); Morin (2001)

<i>Key dimension</i>	<i>Overview</i>	<i>Educational projection</i>	<i>Authors of theoretical support</i>
informal knowledge	community and digital experiences.	promoting meaningful learning.	
Cultural and territorial openness	It recognizes the plurality of voices, knowledge and territories, and promotes the inclusion of diverse perspectives.	It promotes a conscious, empathetic and rights-based citizenry.	Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009); Catherine Walsh (2010); UNESCO (2015); Banks (2016)
Technology-mediated innovation	It uses digital tools and artificial intelligence as allies in the creation of distributed learning environments.	It stimulates exploration, collaborative work and equitable access to knowledge.	Cristóbal Cobo (2016); Manuel Area (2018); Andreas Schleicher (OECD, 2021); Holmes et al. (2019), Gómez and Camero (2025)
Dialogue between disciplines	It facilitates the crossover between different areas of knowledge to address complex problems in a comprehensive way.	Develops systems thinking, cooperation, and contextual creativity.	Edgar Morin (2001); Basarab Nicolescu (2014); Julie Thompson Klein (2004); Gibbons et al. (1994)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the theoretical review and educational experiences analyzed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

When analyzing the ideas and experiences collected in this article regarding the concept of expansive curriculum, it is clear that we are not facing a simple technical adjustment, but rather a comprehensive transformation of the educational sense. Teaching is no longer centered on a rigid organization of subjects and is proposed as a living framework, where knowledge is built from experience, collaboration and connection with the everyday world.

The findings show that this evolution responds to an urgent call: to rethink how we understand people's education. Instead of focusing solely on knowledge transfer, the contemporary challenge is to train human beings capable of facing complex realities, of learning continuously, and of acting ethically and sensitively in diverse contexts.

In this transformation process, the active role of the student is highlighted. The new curricular proposals that have been analysed here agree that it is essential to offer flexible environments, where the formal and informal are intertwined and digital technologies expand the opportunities for access and autonomous construction of knowledge. From the connectivist perspective of Siemens (2005) and Downes (2012), learning involves interacting with knowledge networks and making sense of them from personal experience.

Along with these elements, a new pedagogical, social and political view of the curriculum emerges. Instead of training only to respond to the demands of the market, an education oriented towards life, inclusion, and equity is promoted. Cultural plurality, gender approaches and territorial diversity are conceived as engines of pedagogical innovation, rather than as obstacles.

It also reaffirms the need for stimulating educational environments, where creativity, exploration and critical thinking become central axes. The expansive curriculum is built in community, with the active participation of teachers and students, and in constant dialogue with the challenges of our time: from climate change to digital transformation.

Authors such as Gómez and Camero (2025), as well as Uribe-Zapata (2018), agree that this way of understanding education invites us to blur borders, to conceive of the classroom as a vital and expansive space, and to build learning that transcends school time to inhabit multiple scenarios: the home, the community, the digital space and the student's inner world.

In short, what is configured is a vision of the curriculum as a cultural and human project. This perspective not only seeks to train capable professionals, but also empathetic, critical citizens with a transformative will. A living, plural curriculum in dialogue with the world is the basis for a more just and deeply meaningful education.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this theoretical and reflective journey, it has become clear that moving towards an expansive or extended curriculum does not simply represent an educational fad, but an ethical, political and pedagogical commitment to contemporary challenges. In this sense, as researchers, we reaffirm our commitment to this curricular orientation, convinced that it can offer more humane, flexible and relevant responses to the demands of the present.

Among the main conclusions, we highlight:

- The expansive curriculum proposes a profound transformation of the education system, by conceiving education as an open process, situated and connected to real life (Gómez & Camero, 2025; Uribe-Zapata, 2018). This view challenges traditional models that fragment knowledge and reduce the student to a passive receiver.
- The integration of formal and informal knowledge allows for a richer and more meaningful learning experience, where the value of what has been experienced, the community, and the digital as legitimate sources of knowledge is recognized (Alves, 2021; Siemens, 2005).
- The expansive curriculum favors inclusion, equity, and the recognition of diversity, by incorporating sociocultural, gender, and territorial elements as articulating axes of the educational process (Aroca-Aroca, 2022; Martínez Heredia & Soto Molina, 2024).
- The role of teachers is resignified, going from transmitter to mediator, designer of experiences, companion and facilitator of autonomous and collaborative learning trajectories (Cardozo Cruz et al., 2023).
- Digital technologies and artificial intelligences must be integrated critically and ethically, not as substitutes for the pedagogical link, but as extensions of creativity and complex thinking (Downes, 2012; UNESCO, 2017).

Based on these findings, we recommend:

- Promote educational policies that support the design of open, flexible, and territorialized curricula that respond to the local and global realities of students and their communities.
- Strengthen the pedagogical training of teachers, especially in active methodologies, expanded education, digital tools, and emotional intelligence, as proposed by Gómez and Camero (2025).
- Promote hybrid and transdisciplinary learning environments, where the school actively dialogues with other social and cultural spaces: libraries, community centers, digital platforms, artistic collectives, etc. (ZEMOS98, 2006; Learning Together, 2021).
- To promote a situated and transformative pedagogy, capable of cultivating critical thinking, empathy, social responsibility and creativity in students as competencies to inhabit contemporary uncertainty with dignity and meaning.

In short, the expansive curriculum represents an opportunity to rethink education from a paradigm that is more coherent with the needs of an interconnected, diverse, and constantly changing world. Through it, it is possible to imagine schools that are more alive, humane and committed to building fairer and more sustainable futures.

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