



Inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous students in university: reflections on potential improvements for the University of the State of Amazonas

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ABSTRACT

The central aim of this work is to provide an overview of the current status, challenges, and potential solutions related to the inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous students in Brazilian universities. Through an integrative review, data were collected regarding the perspective of indigenous university students on the subject. Due to the relevance of the state of Amazonas in concentrating the greatest diversity of Indigenous ethnicities (63) in Brazil, we selected University of the State of Amazonas (UEA, for its Portuguese acronym) as the focus of this work. The results were organized into five categories: (i) Access to the university; (ii) Retention; (iii) Discrimination against Indigenous students in the university environment; (iv) Indigenous and traditional knowledge within the university context; (v) Demands of the Movement of Indigenous Students of Amazonas (MEIAM, for its Portuguese acronym) for inclusion, access, and retention at UEA. We believe that the work has the potential to contribute to reflections and actions by individuals and collectives committed to guaranteeing the inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous peoples in Brazilian universities. Our target audience are decision-makers in Brazilian universities, mainly at UEA, specifically those who work in the following departments of the institution: Pro-Rector for Administration, Pro-Rector for Extension and Community Affairs, Pro-Rector for Undergraduate Education, Pro-Rector for Interiorization, Pro-Rector for Research and Postgraduate Studies, and Pro-Rector for Planning. In order to reach a wider audience, we also produced a cartoon that discusses the theme.

Keywords: Indigenous education, inclusion, retention.

Introduction

Have you ever stopped to reflect on people's access to university? Do you believe that all Brazilians have equitable conditions to access and remain in higher education? What goes through your mind when you observe the cartoon below (Figure 1)?



Figure 1 Cartoon: University and Indigenous peoples (Albuquerque 2023).

In the cartoon, we see a representative of Indigenous peoples, a woman, paddling towards the university and encountering an institution surrounded by a fence. This demonstrates that, despite the efforts along the way, such as those related to literacy and basic education, moving to a different city, immersing oneself in another culture, and distancing oneself from the family, they are not always sufficient when an Indigenous person wishes to enter higher education.

According to data from the 2010 Census, there are approximately 896,917 Indigenous people residing throughout the Brazilian national territory, both in urban (324,834) and rural areas (572,083) (IBGE, 2010). There are 274 Indigenous languages used by 305 different ethnic groups, representing Brazilian cultural diversity (IBGE, 2010). The social organizations, customs, languages, beliefs, traditions, lands and territories of these peoples are supported by the Brazilian

Constitution (Art. 231, CRFB/88), as well as the right to education, which aims at the full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and their qualification for work (Art. 205, CRFB/88). Sub-constitutional legislations, such as the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB) and the National Education Plan (PNE), are instruments that deal with the rights of Indigenous people to higher education. In 2009, only 8,411 Indigenous individuals had enrolled in Brazilian universities, but by 2019, this number had risen to 72,086, representing an increase of over 757% (INEP 2020). Although there is a growing number of enrollments, this percentage can still be considered small compared to the total number of Indigenous people in Brazil. Policies that concretely contribute to the inclusion, access and retention of Indigenous students in public higher education are still incipient and lack diagnoses about their effectiveness.

The logic of Western culture, introduced in Brazil through colonization, establishes hierarchies within educational systems focused on academic knowledge, sidelining non-academic, traditional, and Indigenous wisdom (Machado & Beltrão, 2018; Baniwa, 2019). Academic knowledge predominantly operates within a framework centered on the “monoculture of knowledge and the rigor of learning,” elevating academic expertise while diminishing other forms of wisdom, like traditional knowledge (Santos, 2007). Consequently, only classroom-acquired knowledge is esteemed, which stands in contrast to Indigenous and traditional wisdom, often acquired through everyday practices within specific cultural contexts (Machado & Beltrão, 2018). The reproduction of these systems by universities occurs in various forms within the structures of these institutions. Examples include the assumption that the only existing logic is based on reasoning as established by a Western cosmovision, as well as the emphasis on writing as a central form of language expression. In contrast, one of the main characteristics of Indigenous knowledge is the diversity of languages, world-views, ways of living and territories. These forms of knowledge are unique and, most of the time, shared orally and through practical means (Toledo & Barreira-Bassols 2008; Machado & Beltrão 2018).

In the Amazon Biome, traditional and Indigenous knowledge is especially relevant for the conservation of the region, for the maintenance of socio-biodiversity, and for both the material benefits (such as planetary climate regulation, maintenance of carbon stocks, biodiversity) and immaterial benefits (such as cosmovision, beliefs, symbols of a diversity of peoples) that diversity generates for quality of life (BPBES 2018; SPA 2021). Historically, the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples, their territories, and their population has been affected

by various conflicts. The risks persist due to several factors: first, colonization, followed by scientism and spiritual persecution, and, more recently, global capitalism and current paradigms that support models of development and conservation (Gómez-Baggethun 2021). Currently, the differences between academic knowledge and the ways of seeing and inhabiting the world of Indigenous peoples make us reflect on the importance of the university to dialogue with different knowledge systems for the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, and to generate new knowledge capable of dealing with contemporary issues, such as the climate crisis. The challenge posed to Brazilian universities is “to enable the circulation and validation of other knowledges, based on other cosmological, philosophical and epistemological bases” (Baniwa 2013, p. 2).

Thus, the aim of this work is to provide an overview of the current status, challenges, and potential solutions related to inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous students in Brazilian universities. Our focus is the Brazilian context, and we use the example of the University of the State of Amazonas (UEA) as a focal point for empirically articulating how these challenges unfold and what potential paths exist for solutions centered on the lived experiences, perceptions, and demands of Indigenous students. Specifically, the guiding questions of this work are: (i) What is the current panorama of inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous people at UEA? (ii) How can UEA improve its strategies for Indigenous inclusion, access, and retention in higher education? To support our arguments, we also draw on experiences from other universities and countries in Latin America in order to discuss the issue.

It is important to highlight that we, the authors of this work, are researchers from different areas of knowledge and we are not Indigenous. We are motivated to discuss the theme due to our concern regarding the current situation that Indigenous people face in accessing and remaining at the university (Box 1). We present a perspective on the subject that by no means intends to exhaust the approach; in other words, it is one perspective among many other possible ones. We recognize the importance and necessity of redefining the ways in which scientific knowledge is produced and the structure of universities in order to enhance the inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous students who aspire to pursue higher education. Furthermore, we believe that academic scientific knowledge can strengthen itself by drawing closer to the knowledge held by Indigenous peoples.

Box 1 – Positionality statement of the co-authors group

We are a group of Latin American researchers (from Brazil and Mexico) engaged in research, teaching, and outreach activities in the Brazilian Amazon. Our group comprises doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, primary school teachers, and university professors working in various disciplines, including environmental education, law, communication, ecology, sustainability, and anthropology. We are a non-Indigenous group with experience in collaborating with Indigenous people. Our interest in the theme of inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous students stems from our experience in higher education, where we have observed an underrepresentation of Indigenous students in the institutions we are affiliated with. Specifically, two co-authors are university professors who work directly with Indigenous students and movements at the University of the State of Amazonas and the Federal University of Rondônia.

Methods

A review aims to synthesize information and knowledge that already exist about a particular topic (Toronto 2020). There are several types of reviews (Grant & Booth 2009), with the most common being narrative, systematic, and integrative (Whittemore *et al.* 2014). In this work, we used an integrative review to describe an overview of the topic, using the research questions as a guide for our searches. The integrative review allows for a broader understanding of a subject (Broome 1993), as the method enables the identification of various types of materials (Soares *et al.* 2014). The sampling can be composed of empirical and/or scientific knowledge; in this study, we used letters, videos, interviews, and scientific articles.

This type of methodology can be put into practice through six phases (Souza *et al.* 2010, Whittemore & Knafl 2005):

1. **Guiding question.** In this stage, the research problem and objective are defined. The guiding questions in our case were: (i) What is the current status of inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous people at UEA? (ii) How can University of the State of Amazonas improve its strategies for inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous people in higher education?
2. **Literature sample.** In this second phase, the types of data, as well as the criteria for including and excluding reference materials, are outlined. In order to have a holistic view of the proposed topic, searches were conducted on Google and Google Scholar platforms, focusing on key-

words such as “student”, “Indigenous”, “university”, and “University of the State of Amazonas”. All searches were conducted in Portuguese. The keywords were used to allow for variations (for example, singular and plural versions of the same word). Additionally, a snowball sampling approach was employed. If the sources found cited other works that we considered relevant, they were also included in the sample. The searches were not limited to academic sources only because, given the chosen topic, Indigenous perspectives are crucial. Therefore, interviews, letters, and videos available on the YouTube platform, authored or featuring Indigenous students, were also considered as sources, as well as searches in UEA’s data sources available on the official website. Specifically, to find news on the topic, a search was also conducted on the Amazônia Real journalism portal (Lima 2019).

3. **Data collection.** With the material in hand, the third stage involves selecting relevant information. In this case, we focused on information and data about the access and retention of Indigenous people in universities, Indigenous testimonies about their aspirations regarding their higher education, and success stories of Indigenous people at universities in Latin American. The documents were selected for data collection if they represented direct discourses of Indigenous people (Mendes *et al.*, 2008).
4. **Critical analysis.** In this stage, the collected data is synthesized and critically analyzed. The results were grouped into 5 categories: (i) Access to university; (ii) Retention; (iii) Discrimination against Indigenous students in the university environment; (iv) Indigenous and traditional knowledge in the university context; (v) Demands of the Movement of the Indigenous Students of Amazonas (MEIAM) for inclusion, access and retention at UEA. The categories were created after a floating reading of the collected results and identification of emerging themes
5. **Discussion of results.** In this phase, the information is problematized. In the present study, gaps are identified and proposals for improvements are outlined for the construction of a more inclusive higher education for Indigenous people. In addition to this, there is a discussion based on identifying similarities and differences between UEA and other Latin American and Brazilian universities, considering certain educational policies.
6. **Presentation of the integrative review.** Finally, the sixth step involves the dissemination of the research results. A summary of what was iden-

tified and the proposed improvements are synthesized in the present text and in a cartoon (which uses drawing as a global language and has a critical appeal) (Silva 2008). Both communication resources have the potential to generate social mobilization in favor of improving Indigenous higher education.

1. Study area – University of the State of Amazonas (UEA): challenges related to inclusion, access, and retention faced by Indigenous students

University of the State of Amazonas (UEA) started its academic activities in 2001. As a public state university, UEA is maintained by the government of the state of Amazonas and is funded through a system linked to the revenue of the Industrial Pole of Manaus (also known as Manaus Free Trade Zone). Currently, it has approximately 25,000 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and offers 286 undergraduate, 64 specialization, 15 master's, and 5 doctoral courses. UEA is the largest multi-campus university in Brazil, with units spread across various municipalities in the state (Figure 2). Thus, it is possible to recognize the significant role of UEA in the expansion of higher education in the Amazon. According to Sabino *et al.* (2022), UEA's presence in various locations has stimulated intellectual and socio-economic development while broadening the horizons of the population.

The process of interiorization also involved the adoption of multiple teaching strategies. Costa and Oliveira (2011) describe the teaching modalities adopted by UEA, including traditional face-to-face teaching, a modular face-to-face teaching system in which teachers travel to municipalities to fulfill their workload during certain months of the year, and a face-to-face teaching system mediated by technology in which live classes are transmitted via satellite to various municipalities, and each classroom has an in-person teaching assistant. The application of several strategies to increase access to higher education demonstrates how UEA "turned the state of Amazonas into a large classroom" (Costa & Oliveira 2011, p. 40). This underscores the university's significant role for the entire state of Amazonas.

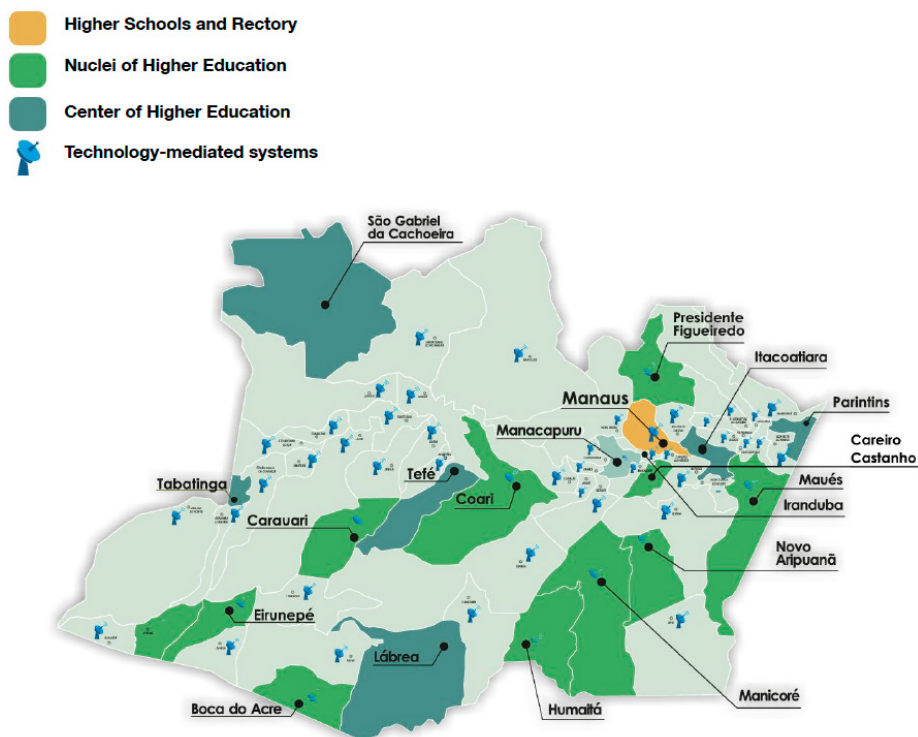


Figure 2 University of the State of Amazonas (UEA) in the state of Amazonas, Brazil. UEA has different units and infrastructures (schools, nuclei, centers, and technology-mediated systems) and models of teaching, research, and extension in different cities in the Amazon. *Source:* UEA Student Handbook (2020).

UEA has a mission to “promote education, build scientific knowledge, and foster technological innovation to meet societal demands and integrate with society in order to overcome the challenge of developing the Amazon sustainably,” based on values of respect, justice, freedom, innovation, social responsibility, citizenship, and the valorization of employees, teachers, and collaborators (UEA, 2020). Thus, we infer that UEA’s mission necessarily involves the inclusion and valorization of traditional knowledge, associated with the access and retention of Indigenous students in the university. It is worth noting that although our work focuses on Indigenous students, this mission also involves the presence and inclusion of Indigenous professors and staff in the university. Indigenous professors like Gilson Ipaxi’awyga Tapirapé at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), Gersem José dos Santos Luciano Baniwa at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), and Almiros Martins Machado at the Federal University of Pará

(UFPA) are some of the leaders who work at the interface between Indigenous and academic knowledge. Therefore, we understand the relationship between Indigenous people and the university as a two-way street in which both can benefit, generating positive changes for education and society as a whole. Lima's report (2019), published on "Amazônia Real" investigative journalism portal, exemplifies the meaning of the university for an Indigenous student at UEA:

"When we enter a public university, we don't enter just for ourselves. It's not an individual thing, it's a collective, it's a people. We are representing, beyond the individual, our family, our clan, our ethnicity, our people, and the place we came from. So, they expect this from us, they expect this return. The family supports the idea of having a relative in the university. It's rewarding." (Indigenous university student quoted by Lima, 2019).

Baniwa (2013) reinforces the challenge of individual entry into the university, given that the cultural and Indigenous rights system is based on a collective perspective, as mentioned by the university student above. However, it is worth noting at this point that the social impact of an Indigenous student's enrollment is significant due to their representation within their own people.

Starting from the premise that UEA is an agent of positive change in the state of Amazonas, but still faces several challenges to effectively value traditional knowledge and include Indigenous students, the following section (results and discussions) explores an overview of the current situation of Indigenous students, focusing on the main challenges. Based on the identification and discussion of challenges, we propose some strategies, inspired by success stories from experiences reported in the literature, as well as potential solutions to some of the identified problems.

Results and discussion

2. Access to university

Amazonas is the state with the largest Indigenous population in Brazil. According to the 2010 census, more than 180,000 Indigenous people inhabit the state, accounting for about 20% of the total Indigenous population in the country (IBGE 2010). Although UEA was established in 2001, the first record of Indigenous students enrolled only occurred in 2006 when three Indigenous students entered the university. This fact may be associated with the promulgation of Law

No. 2,894/2004, also known as the “UEA Quotas Law.” This state law establishes guidelines for the allocation of seats in university entrance exams offered by UEA and stipulates that the percentage of seats made available to Indigenous students must be at least equal to the percentage of the Indigenous population in the state. The UEA Quotas Law establishes ten different access groups based on criteria related to time spent in public schools, territorial factors, and ethnicity, with Group 10 being related to Indigenous people. In addition to seat allocation, the law also requires the university to “offer specific undergraduate courses for the Indigenous population, establishing the necessary intercultural dialogue and prioritizing regions with a higher concentration of these peoples” (Amazonas State Legislative Assembly 2004). It is worth noting the questions regarding seat allocation based on population percentage. For example, Baniwa (2013) proposes that such criteria should be based on “socio-cultural existence and historical contribution to the formation of the Brazilian state” (p. 3). Therefore, the author suggests that when the Indigenous quota is considered unviable due to a low demographic coefficient in a particular state or region, a minimum quota of one seat should be allocated for the Indigenous peoples in those states.

Admission to UEA occurs mainly through the traditional university admission exam known as “*vestibular*”, which is held annually in all cities of the state. Another pathway for admission is the Serial Entrance System (SIS), in which high school students take annual exams during their three years of school, and their performance is evaluated with respect to each grade. To a lesser extent, admission is also possible through internal transfer or transfer from other educational institutions (UEA, 2020).

Article 5, Paragraph 2, of the “UEA Quotas Law” establishes that the selection process for filling vacancies for Indigenous students should be established by UEA itself. However, the university does not have alternative admission systems focused on these students. Other Brazilian universities adopt what is known as “Indigenous *vestibular*”, which are exams specifically designed for Indigenous students. In the state of São Paulo, for example, the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar) and the University of Campinas (Unicamp) have a unified “Indigenous *vestibular*”, consisting of a test specifically targeted for these students and being applied in municipalities with a notable Indigenous population, including cities in Amazonas, such as São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Tabatinga, and Manaus (Sangion 2022). Another example is the “Indigenous Peoples’ *Vestibular*” in Paraná, a selection process that encompasses eight public universities in the state and exclusively selects students from Indigenous communities located in Paraná (UNESPAR 2022). The demand for the adoption of an exam focused on

Indigenous people is shared by an Indigenous student interviewed by Estácio (2011):

“Admission should occur differently from what happens today. And this is something the University (UEA) needs to consider. Including conducting the exam (or even the entrance exam) in an Indigenous language. Because many people understand their languages better than Portuguese. It would be interesting to have this option that is currently not available.” (Indigenous university student quoted by Estácio 2011, p. 151).

According to the official UEA website, the institution offers two courses with an Indigenous focus, in a special format, created to meet specific demands. They are: (i) Bachelor’s Degree in Education for Indigenous Teachers of Alto Solimões with seven specializations (Indigenous Ticuna Language, Portuguese Language and Literature, and Spanish; Indigenous Kokama Language, Portuguese Language and Literature, and Spanish; Arts and Physical Education, Biology and Chemistry; Physics and Mathematics; History and Geography; Anthropology, Sociology, and Philosophy); and (ii) Pedagogy - Indigenous Intercultural Bachelor’s Degree in Education.

The education degree program for Indigenous teachers from the Alto Solimões region began in 2009 and focused on the final years of Elementary and High School, aiming to train professionals who could work both as teachers and as school managers of Indigenous education in the municipalities of Tabatinga, Benjamim Constant, Atalaia do Norte, Santo Antônio do Içá, Amaturá, São Paulo de Olivença, and Tonantins. This course was created with the support of the Indigenous Teaching Training Program (Proind).

The Intercultural Indigenous Pedagogy course aims to train teachers to work in Early Childhood Education, Elementary School and school management. The course is offered in a modular face-to-face mode, characterized by the displacement of teachers to municipalities to fulfill the workload of the discipline, as well as interactions mediated by technology. The course was offered through the National Plan for Teacher Training in Basic Education (Parfor), an emergency teacher training program funded by Capes (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel), in 2014.

On June 30, 2023, the UEA website published Notice 079/2023 for the Indigenous Intercultural Bachelor’s Degree in Education Program, exclusively for Indigenous students, to be held in the following locations: in Boca do Acre at the

Boca do Acre Higher Education Center (NESBCA/UEA), serving the municipalities of Boca do Acre and Pauini; in Parintins at the Parintins Higher Education Center (CESP/UEA), serving the municipalities of Parintins, Barreirinha, Itacoatiara, Maués, and Nhamundá; and in Tefé at the Tefé Higher Education Center (CEST/UEA), serving the municipalities of Tefé, Maraã, Alvarães, Uarini, Japurá, and Juruá. The selection process would be based on curriculum analysis. The program is the result of a partnership between the State Department of Education and Sports (Seduc – AM) and Indigenous movements.

Despite the mentioned efforts, the number of Indigenous students at UEA is still small compared to the total number of students at UEA (Figure 3A). It can be observed that in the year 2021, 2,444 slots were filled through the entrance exam as a whole, but only 69 (2.8%) of these slots were occupied by Indigenous students (Figure 3A). However, slot filling refers exclusively to passing the entrance exam and is not linked to enrollment. For example, in the year 2006, 173 slots exclusively for Indigenous students were offered, 88 were filled, but only three Indigenous students enrolled (Figure 3A and 3B). Furthermore, even with enrollment, the dropout rate of Indigenous students due to withdrawal or abandonment of the course amounts to 37.5% of the slots filled between the period of 2013 and 2021 (Figure 3C). It is also noteworthy that the first Indigenous students enrolled in 2006, but the first graduations only occurred in 2014. We emphasize that the data on dropout due to abandonment or withdrawal are presented here in an unprecedented manner, as they are not publicly available (Figure 3C). The present study obtained access to the data through an official data request process with UEA (process number 01.02.011304.005260/2023-66).

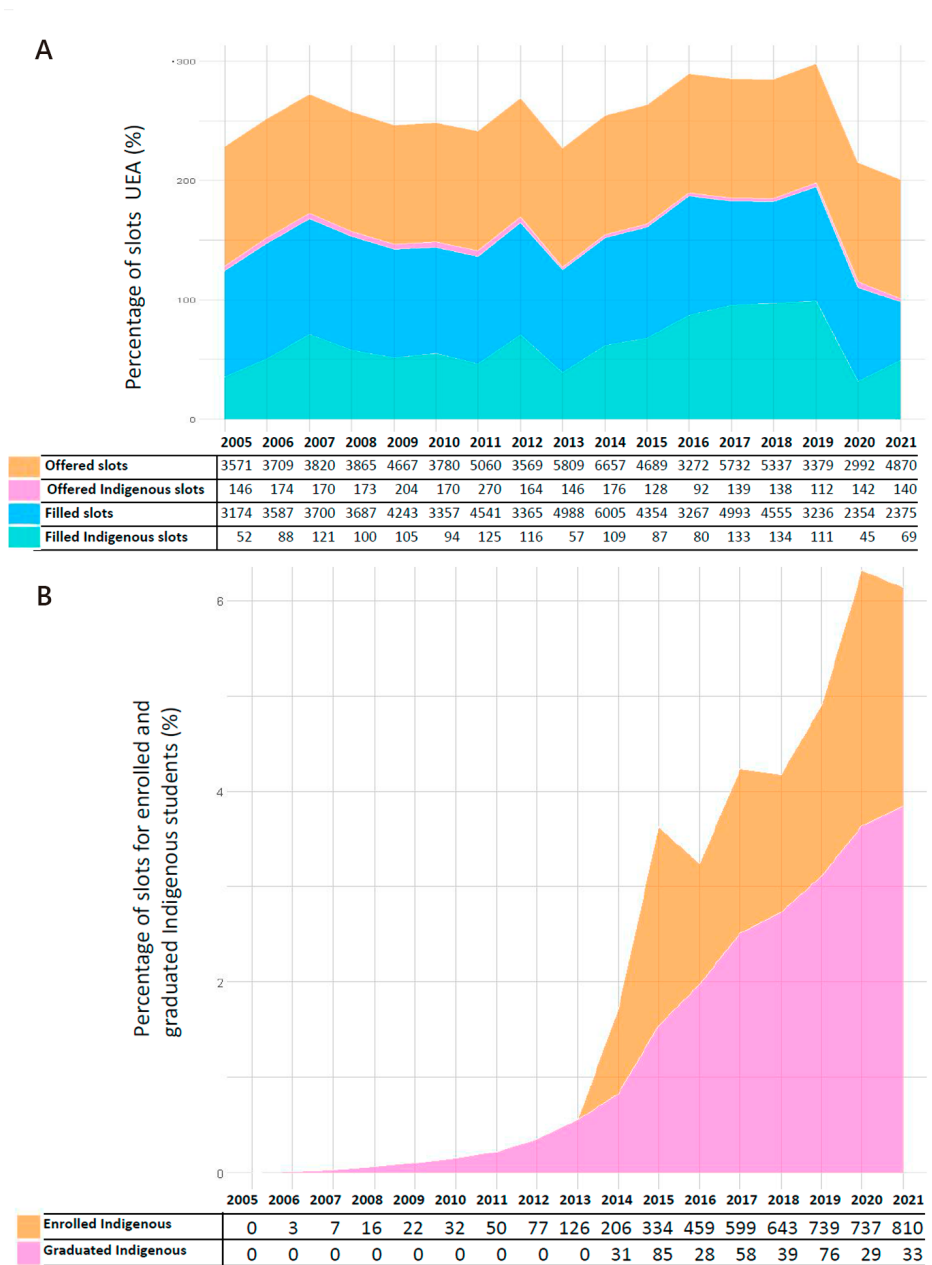


Figure 3 Percentage of slots at the University of the State of Amazonas, comparing non-Indigenous and Indigenous students. A) Percentage of slots offered to Indigenous students and slots filled by Indigenous students in relation to the total slots offered and filled; B) Percentage of slots for enrolled and graduated Indigenous students in relation to the total enrolled and graduated students in the university. (Continues).

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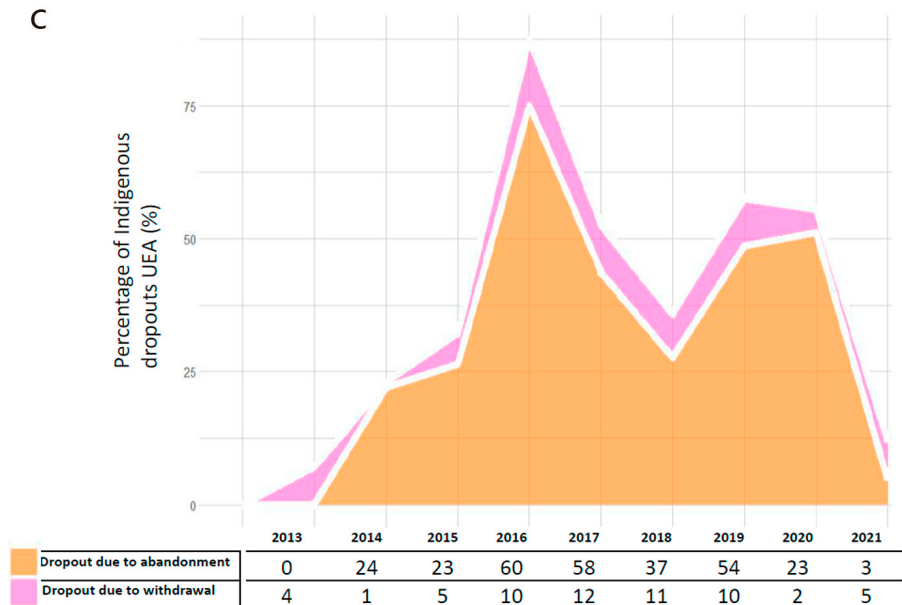


Figure 3 (Continuation). Percentage of Indigenous student dropout due to abandonment and withdrawal in relation to the total enrolled Indigenous students at the university. The tables represent the absolute number of slots offered, graduated, and enrolled at the University of the State of Amazonas. (Source: UEA in numbers, 2022; Internal process No. 01.02.011304.005260/2023-66.)

Among the challenges related to enrollment, there are bureaucratic processes within the university. At UEA, enrollment is linked to the presentation of the Administrative Record of Birth and Death of Indigenous People (RANI), a document issued by Funai (Estácio 2015). This requirement is related to the UEA's Quota Law, which defines as Indigenous only those who are formally recognized by formal institutions. This process reaffirms a "guardianship" relationship between the state and Indigenous communities, characterizing it as a practice with colonial roots that adds barriers to university access (Estácio 2015; Machado 2017). This perspective is supported by an Indigenous student who reports:

"I have always been Indigenous, but when I applied for the UEA entrance exam and was accepted, I had to get the Funai registration, which UEA required. But I was already Indigenous, I have always been. It wasn't the Funai registration that made me Indigenous. As I said, I was already Indigenous, I have been since I was born." (Indigenous student quoted by Estácio 2011, p.155).

It is worth noting that, for enrollment in the Indigenous Intercultural Bachelor's Degree in Education Program, the submission of either the RANI (Administrative Record of Birth and Death of Indigenous People) or a Declaration from the Indigenous Community confirming the candidate's ethnic status and their belonging to the village is required. This declaration should be signed by two representatives of the community, such as chiefs, elders, or other Indigenous leaders, and should include their identification numbers and addresses (as specified in items 5.1.3 and 5.1.4 of Notice 79/2023). The creation of specific courses for the Indigenous population addresses several issues and is the result of the struggle and social pressure from Indigenous movements on the government. In personal communication with the coordinator of the Indigenous Intercultural Bachelor's Degree in Education Program (Notice 079/2023), he emphasized the importance and involvement of the Indigenous Movement throughout the negotiation and creation of the program. They brought the demands of each territory and proposed the creation of instruments to promote retention, such as class frequency, class location, and scholarships. It is worth noting, therefore, that admission to the university is just the first step; the challenge of retention and completion of the course then arises, as indicated by the high dropout rate (Figure 3C).

2.1 Retention

Baniwa (2013) emphasizes the importance of expanding the concepts of affirmative action policies, going beyond the perspective of admission and proposing actions for effective retention, as the absence of retention policies widens the socio-cosmocultural gap (Machado 2007). Thus, after entering the university, the challenges faced by Indigenous students change but persist. Interviews conducted by Estácio (2015) exemplify the students' reality. In one of the accounts, the following situation is described:

"UEA quotas only favor admission, and then you have to fend for yourself to stay. There is no support. There is no follow-up. Nobody comes and asks: How are you doing? How is your education going? What are your difficulties? There's none of that. When I had financial difficulties, because I had no money for transportation or photocopies, I had to stop studying. This was because nobody helped me, not Funai, nor UEA. My husband was also studying, and I decided to stop for a while so he could finish his studies. But now I'm back to studying, and no matter how long it takes, I'm going to finish college." (Indigenous university student quoted by Estácio 2015, p. 7-8)

This statement highlights two of the main challenges for retention: the lack of financial resources and the lack of pedagogical and psychological support for students from the university, which have also been identified as crucial factors for continuity by Baniwa (2013) and Luciano & Amaral (2021).

UEA has a Student Assistance Program that includes six modalities: Student Housing; Transportation Assistance; Educational/Pedagogical Material Assistance; Socioeconomic Assistance; Meals (university dining facilities); and Daycare Assistance. In addition to these, there is the Psychosocial Support Center (Epsico) aimed at the psychological well-being of university students. Indigenous students have access to these programs like other university students, but we did not identify specific proposals tailored for Indigenous students, with qualified professionals to work with this specific population.

The lack of resources, support, and guidance is compounded by the challenges related to cultural differences, as one of the students portrays below:

"I came from the interior, and I don't have family here in the city (Manaus). Plus, I didn't know that you needed money every day here. Even to go to study, to pay for the bus. So, I had to work to be able to live here, and my work schedule is the same as my course. So, between working and studying, I had, I mean, I have to work." (Indigenous university student quoted by Estácio 2015, p. 7).

The above account exemplifies how the lack of financial and material resources, coupled with the cultural specificities of urban life, influence the retention of Indigenous students in the university. In many cases, the challenges faced are so significant that they result in dropout, attrition, and/or withdrawal (Machado 2007; Baniwa 2013; MEIAM 2019; Luciano *et al.* 2021). Although the problem is systemic and persistent, some initiatives illustrate institutional mechanisms that provide greater support for the retention of Indigenous students in higher education.

In the universities of Paraná, after admission to higher education through the Indigenous Peoples' Vestibular in Paraná, students are supported by the University Commission for Indigenous Affairs (Comissão Universidade para o Índio or CUIA) (Krainski *et al.* 2022). This commission was established in 2004 with the aim of developing integrated actions that contribute to access, retention, and conclusion in undergraduate programs. Krainski *et al.* (2022) report that the commission contributes to inclusion, support, and retention by implementing

measures to raise awareness of Indigenous students within the university, as well as providing scholarships.

In February 2023, the State University of Campinas, in response to a demand and mobilization from the Indigenous Collective of Unicamp, announced the creation of a working group to improve measures for the access and permanence of Indigenous students at the university. Among the various demands made by the Collective to promote retention, they include the hiring of Indigenous healthcare professionals, particularly focusing on mental health; an adjustment in the amount of retention grants; the establishment of spaces for academic and cultural coexistence; as well as the hiring of Indigenous teachers and researchers. Such educational policies suggest possible institutional pathways for university governance models that could potentially be applicable to Indigenous retention at UEA (Nunes 2023).

2.2 Discrimination against Indigenous students in the university environment

Prejudice, discrimination, physical and symbolic violence, mistreatment, omission, or restriction of rights are manifestations of racism committed against Indigenous peoples (Machado 2007; Machado 2017; Troquez 2022). Racism is a systemic problem, having certain specificities in the university context. For example, as discussed in previous sections, the lack of financial support policies focused on Indigenous students is a manifestation of racism. In this section, we focus on a specific type of racism manifestation against Indigenous peoples, in this case, the reports of discrimination identified in our review. It is noteworthy that structural racism is pointed out as one of the reasons for dropouts of Indigenous university students (Baniwa 2019; Luciano *et al.* 2021).

At UEA, Indigenous students report that they are discriminated against for having Indigenous names and not having Portuguese as their first language. Often, students are afraid of being identified as Indigenous. In fact, one student reports that “the university seems not to be ready for the new, for the different, nor for the richness of Indigenous peoples” (Indigenous university student interviewed by Melo 2019). Another student provides an account of their experience:

“The pressure was high, especially because of my last name, because people immediately identified me as Indigenous. Another thing they identified was my language. Today, I speak Portuguese better than before, but the prejudice was great; and I also suffered threats, me and my brothers.” (Indigenous university student interviewed by Lima 2019).

Moreover, cases of exclusion by other students are also reported:

"I felt prejudice on my own skin. I experienced this right away, in one of the first group assignments. The teacher divided the class into groups by row and my group arranged to do the assignment, completed it and excluded me. On the day of submission, I noticed that my name was not on the list. So, I told the teacher that I respected my colleagues very much and that the group I had joined had excluded me from the work. And so, I requested a new date to do the work alone. So, you have to assert yourself, otherwise you won't be respected." (Indigenous university student group interviewed by Estácio 2011, p. 124).

Therefore, there is a need for anti-racist approaches that identify discrimination and propose solutions based on the experiences of Indigenous students. Anti-racist approaches are grounded in the recognition of power relations that structure our society with the aim of identifying, contesting, and changing the values, structures, and behaviors that perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression (Dei 2005). An education project based on an anti-racist perspective can contribute to increasing visibility on the issue and propose practices and measures to mitigate the problem (Troquez 2022). Although it is a systemic problem, certain efforts by other institutions point to possible paths for mitigating discrimination against Indigenous peoples in the university context. For example, the Federal University of Western Pará has a manual entitled "Racism in the university? Guidelines for ethnic-racial equality and overcoming racism" that describes how to identify cases of racism and the institutional mechanisms for reporting them to the competent university bodies (Ufopa 2017). According to Peixoto (2017), the publication of this manual occurred after a mobilization by Indigenous students who reported cases of discrimination. Although the publication of a manual does not necessarily imply a change in behaviors and other structural changes, the mobilization of Indigenous students against discrimination brings visibility to the problem, promotes debates, values the theme, creates anti-racist spaces and fosters decolonial practices (Peixoto 2017).

2.3 Indigenous and traditional knowledge in the university context

The education models adopted in Latin American countries as a whole are influenced by Western paradigms of modernity and development, in which multicultural diversity is not valued and access to education is unequally granted to people of different ethnicities and socio-economic positions (Nájera-Castellanos *et al.* 2018; Mato 2011). In higher education, the focus is mainly on scientific

knowledge, and other knowledge systems, such as Indigenous and traditional knowledge, are not recognized or discussed (Baniwa 2019). In the context of UEA, there is a challenge for the university to intentionally recognize and integrate the knowledge that Indigenous students possess into teaching, research, and outreach activities (Estácio 2011). Such difficulties are reported in the following statements made by Indigenous students at UEA:

"When you enter the university, it makes us invisible; it doesn't have a cross-cutting curriculum that engages with our knowledge. And at UEA specifically, where I study, you have a 60 hours course, discussing the Indigenous issue in the state with the largest Indigenous population, but it doesn't incorporate our perspectives and knowledge. So, being within these spaces means distancing yourself from your own knowledge, values, and customs." (Indigenous student interviewed by Lima 2019).

"I'm not enjoying some classes, like History, which have nothing to do with us Indigenous people. It's only about white people. All college classes should focus a bit more on the Indigenous people here. On our reality. Using our knowledge and what we know. Because much of what is in the teacher's texts is not our reality, it's not our truth. And we don't have space to speak, because we can only talk about what's in the text." (Indigenous student interviewed by Estácio 2011, p. 172).

It is evident, therefore, that the issues related to Indigenous student's retention in the university are linked to the inclusion of their knowledge, also including the recognition that Portuguese is not the first language for many, as reported by one student:

"Here at UEA, the university accepts us Indigenous people into the courses, and the professors want us to speak well and master Portuguese. But I don't do that very well. If they allowed me to use my language, I would certainly do better. But the professors don't accept it because they say they won't understand. But I may not understand their texts either. And I don't accept that. It's not easy for me." (Indigenous university student interviewed by Estácio 2011, p. 172).

In Latin America as a whole, there are proposals for intercultural education, or bilingual intercultural education, in universities that aim to include In-

Indigenous peoples while considering their singularities and diversity (Mato 2011; Corbetta 2021). Intercultural education is an anti-hegemonic perspective that takes multiculturalism as a starting point for teaching, research, and outreach, emphasizing recognition, respect, and coexistence with diversity in university environments. The idea of interculturality in universities has been disseminated in recent years but has been little practiced and experienced beyond discussions in restricted groups (Baniwa 2019).

In order to concretize an intercultural perspective at UEA, some authors suggest certain guidelines for effectively practicing it. In a review of the state of the art of intercultural education, Corbetta (2021) offers the following recommendations to improve it in Latin America: (1) increase and report annually the budget allocated to intercultural education; (2) provide initial and ongoing training for teachers in bilingual education; (3) promote research in Indigenous languages and knowledge; (4) define curricula that incorporate the plurality of knowledge and epistemologies; (5) create inclusive educational materials; (6) provide training for mothers and fathers who demand education in accordance with their language and culture; and, finally, (7) involve Indigenous peoples in the conception, planning, monitoring, and evaluation of policies related to intercultural education. Additionally, Indigenous authors, such as Baniwa (2019), propose that, to reduce the dominance of ethnocentric thinking, the field of spirituality of Indigenous peoples should be taken into account, which comes from nature and is referenced in it. Such suggestions are relevant to ensure that intercultural universities do not become spaces for the homogenization and cultural assimilation of Indigenous peoples (Mato 2011).

UEA's own experience of conducting Intercultural Courses can and should foster an institutional reflection for the improvement of regular higher education in order to strengthen the inclusion, access and retention of Indigenous students. In the case of the Indigenous Intercultural Education Degree Course (public notice 79/2023) several instruments were provided to guarantee permanence: the course was held close to the Indigenous territory, financial aid grants, modular classes, and with pedagogical-cultural plan that maintains dialogues with traditional knowledge. Finally, beyond education, it is suggested that, to be truly transformative, intercultural education requires an approach that works in synergy with claims and improvements in social, economic, political, civil, cultural, cosmopolitical, and environmental rights (Varela & Lapique 2019; Baniwa 2019).

Another window of opportunity to enable dialogues, engagement with Indigenous communities, and integration of diverse knowledge systems is through the curricularization of extension. This curricularization involves the incorporation of outreach activities into the pedagogical projects of university courses, with defined workload in their curricula, according to Resolution 7/2018, which directs 10% of the workload of undergraduate courses to extension activities. In this sense, these are extension actions that involve “communities external to higher education institutions and that are linked to student training” (Brazil 2018). The aim is to include groups external to the university context (Arroyo & Rocha 2010) in order to promote the autonomy of communities in a dialogical relationship with society, to be strengthened and carried out critically (Freire 2014). The intention is to strengthen the capacity for impact and social transformation necessary for extension activities, collaborating with traditional communities to expand the exercise of their constitutional rights. Thus, practices and measures that promote the curricularization of extension in a collaborative manner between the university and Indigenous communities can contribute to the promotion of intercultural education and the valorization of traditional knowledge in higher education.

2.4 Demands of the Movement of Indigenous Students of Amazonas (MEIAM) for inclusion, access, and retention at UEA

Indigenous students in the state of Amazonas are the protagonists of a political articulation that demands improvements in conditions related to inclusion, access, and retention in the university. The Movement of Indigenous Students of Amazonas (MEIAM) leads this movement, which collaborates with various other Indigenous organizations, such as the Amazon Mobilization Front for the Defense of Indigenous Rights and the Forum for Indigenous School Education in Amazonas, as well as non-Indigenous organizations, such as the Association of Teachers of the Federal University of Amazonas. In August 2019, MEIAM published a letter that lists its main demands for obtaining improvements in UEA (Box 2).

Box 2 - Excerpt from the letter of demands of the Movement of Indigenous Students of Amazonas seeking improvements for Indigenous students at University of the State of Amazonas (MEIAM 2019, p. 2-3)

"I. To establish a Commission, with the presence of Indigenous students and Indigenous Organizations, to think and propose an articulated policy for successful access and retention of Indigenous students in UEA;

II. Conduct a study for the creation and establishment of a Hetero-Identification Commission, with the purpose of monitoring the registration, enrollment and admission process of Indigenous students through ethnic quotas at UEA. This commission should have among its members Indigenous students and representatives of Indigenous Organizations of Amazonas;

III. Creation of a seat on the University Council (CONSUNIV) and on the Board of Trustees of University of the State of Amazonas, to ensure, respectively, the presence and participation of both Indigenous students and members of Indigenous Organizations of the state of Amazonas;

IV. Establishment of an Indigenous advisory office, alongside the office of the Magnificent Rector of UEA, to monitor, articulate and develop actions for successful access and retention of Indigenous students at University of the State of Amazonas, as well as to articulate and strengthen the dialogue between Indigenous peoples and organizations and the higher administration of UEA. We demand that the indication for this advisory be discussed and forwarded to the rectorate by the Movement of Indigenous Students of Amazonas, and we commit ourselves to discuss the said indication together with Indigenous Organizations of Amazonas."

It is possible to observe that these demands focus on the creation and expansion of spaces within the university's administrative structure in which Indigenous students themselves can make and implement decisions that influence their lives. Thus, this positioning emphasizes the interest in sharing decision-making power in university governance and reinforcing the autonomy of students to determine what their problems and desired solutions are. The demands, therefore, characterize a paradigm shift compared to the historical models that Brazilian government institutions adopt regarding Indigenous peoples. MEIAM's letter can be considered as a manifesto of Indigenous peoples, in the sense of bringing to the scene their dissatisfactions, solutions, and ways of articulation that go beyond the traditional and fragmented management procedures imposed by universities, thus demonstrating that they have the potential to manage what concerns their peoples without depending on the State's agenda. The letter emphasizes the empowerment of Indigenous students and a

departure from the model of “tutelage.” Such perspective is aligned with the will for autonomy emphasized by other national Indigenous movements (Machado 2017).

In our review, we did not find any references or secondary data that discuss possible progress at UEA regarding the demands of MEIAM (2019). Therefore, monitoring potential compliance with the letter’s demands constitutes a knowledge gap. This gap stands out as relevant, as the progress made in this process can also serve as a facilitator for the transformation of the educational institution itself.

Final considerations

The issue of inclusion, access and retention of Indigenous peoples in Brazilian universities - particularly in the context of UEA - constitutes a major institutional challenge. The difficulties presented should not be seen as an obstacle to proposing actions that can minimize the problem, but rather as an opportunity for the university to mobilize and make a difference in meeting the specific needs of Indigenous peoples, reaffirming its mission, which is:

“University of the State of Amazonas (UEA) is a public university, autonomous in its educational policy, whose mission is to promote education, develop scientific knowledge, particularly about the Amazon, together with ethical values capable of integrating man into society and improving the quality of human resources existing in the region in which it is inserted.” (UEA 2023)

We believe that this work has the potential to contribute to reflections and actions of individuals and collectives committed to ensuring inclusion, access, and permanence of Indigenous people in Brazilian universities. Our target audience is decision-makers in Brazilian universities, especially at UEA, specifically those who work in the following departments of the institution: Pro-Rector of Administration, Pro-Rector of Extension and Community Affairs, Pro-Rector of Undergraduate Education, Pro-Rector of Internalization, Pro-Rector of Research and Graduate Studies, and Pro-Rector of Planning. In order to reach a wider audience, we have also produced a cartoon as a product that discusses the issue (Figure 1).

In the current structure of our society, academic knowledge allows for the education of Indigenous students to take on decision-making roles in various arenas, including universities themselves, potentially initiating a process of val-

orization of diverse forms of knowledge. Representation in these spaces can gradually bridge the gaps created by the lack of dialogue between scientific knowledge and traditional wisdom. The first step lies in non-exclusion, inclusion, access, and retention of Indigenous people in universities.

Acknowledgments – The authors would like to thank the São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp) for its support of the project “São Paulo School of Advanced Science for a Sustainable and Inclusive Amazonia” (Process 2022/06028-3), as well as all the professors and colleagues who participated in SPSAS Amazonia and contributed to the development of this work. We also appreciate the administration of the Escola Normal Superior at the University of the State of Amazonas for sharing data about Indigenous students (Process 01.02.011304.005260/66).

Author Contributions – All authors equally contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, and drafting of the initial and final versions of the text.

Conflict of Interest – The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this manuscript.

Ethics – This study does not involve human subjects and/or clinical trials that should be approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee.

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