THEMATIC SECTION: EDUCATION AND AFFIRMATIVE POLICIES

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Journeys, Challenges, and Contributions of Afro-Peruvian Students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National University of San Marcos

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ABSTRACT – Journeys, Challenges, and Contributions of Afro-Peruvian Students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National University of San Marcos. This study addresses the social and academic dynamics among Afro-Peruvian students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National University of San Marcos (UNMSM) in Peru, based on research that included interviews with Afro-descendant students, professors, and university welfare staff. The study examines patterns of access to and persistence in higher education among Afro-descendants, the challenges related to invisibilization and stigmatization, as well as their participation within the public university, including activism and academic contributions. The findings highlight the urgency of strengthening inclusive policies within the Peruvian public higher education system.
Keywords: **Afro-Peruvians. Public Higher Education. Ethnic-Racial Identity. Educational Inclusion. Student Participation.**

RESUMEN – Trayectorias, Desafíos y Aportes de Estudiantes Afroperuanos en la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos. Este estudio aborda dinámicas sociales y académicas entre alumnas y alumnos afroperuanos de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la UNMSM en Perú, con base en una investigación con entrevistas a estudiantes afrodescendientes, profesores y personal administrativo del bienestar universitario. El estudio verifica el patrón de acceso y permanencia universitaria en afrodescendientes, desafíos vinculados con la invisibilización y estigmatización, y su participación dentro de la universidad pública, los activismos y el pensamiento académico. El estudio documenta la urgencia por reforzar políticas inclusivas para el ámbito público peruano.
Palabras-clave: **Afroperuanos. Educación Superior Pública. Identidad Étnico-racial. Inclusión Educativa. Participación Estudiantil.**

Introduction

The admission and permanence of young Afro-descendant in Peruvian public universities is a field of research still under construction. Interest in this topic has gained strength within the framework of state initiatives such as the Beca 18 scholarship program and in his modality for the Afro-Peruvian population, one of the most recent policy measures aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education. However, the Afro-Peruvian presence in institutions such as the National University of San Marcos (UNMSM) remains to be little explored academically, despite the fact that this population has historically faced systematic processes of social, economic, and educational exclusion.

Existing studies consistently show that the university journeys of Afro-descendant students are deeply shaped by structural inequalities linked to racism, stigmatization, and the absence of Afro-descendant role models in academic spaces. While countries such as Brazil and Colombia have consolidated affirmative action policies aimed at ensuring greater equity in university access, progress in Peru has been more fragmented, with weak institutionalization and limited scope.

Within this context, examining the social and academic journeys of Afro-Peruvian students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at UNMSM is essential to understanding how racism operates within the university. Such an analysis makes it possible not only to identify the challenges these students face throughout their higher education experience, but also to recognize their contributions to academic production and to the strengthening of a more inclusive and plural university.

UNMSM, the oldest university in the Americas and a landmark institution in Peruvian public education, has historically served as a site for the training of academic, political, and professional elites. Yet the ethnic-racial diversity of its student body has not always been acknowledged or made visible in university policy. Recent research shows that, although the Afro-Peruvian population constitutes a significant ethnic group in the country, its representation in the university sphere remains limited and, in many cases, invisible.

In the specific case of the Faculty of Social Sciences, a tension can be observed between the official discourse of inclusion and diversity and actual institutional practices. In practice, there are few mechanisms specifically designed to recognize and support Afro-Peruvian students, even though the faculty has long been characterized by its critical engagement with social inequalities. Internal dynamics nevertheless continue to reproduce indifference toward Afro-descendant identities, privileging narratives associated with Andean or mestizo identities as dominant references of the national identity.

From this perspective, analyzing the experiences of Afro-Peruvian students in the Social Sciences makes it possible to question the limits of the public university's capacity to consolidate itself as a genuinely inclusive space. Documenting their experiences is essential not only for highlight the daily obstacles they face in their academic journey, but also to underscore the contributions they make to the construction of agendas

centered on equity, diversity, and social justice in Peruvian public higher education.

The limited body of research focused on Afro-Peruvian students in public universities underscores the urgency of this topic. Unlike other groups, such as Indigenous peoples, who have received greater attention in educational policy and research, Afro-descendant populations continue to occupy a position of invisibility in university spaces.

This article seeks to help fill that gap by studying the social and academic experiences of Afro-Peruvian students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at UNMSM. Based on interviews with students, faculty members, and university welfare staff, it analyzes their access journeys, dynamics of identity self-affirmation, the difficulties they face throughout university life, and the contributions they make to the construction of spaces of recognition and diversity.

The article is organized into five sections. First, it develops a theoretical framework that reviews debates on higher education, structural racism, and the inclusion of Afro-descendant populations in Latin America. Second, it presents the qualitative methodology employed in the study. Third, it discusses the interview findings through thematic categories. Fourth, it situates these findings in dialogue with the specialized literature. Finally, conclusions and recommendations aimed at strengthening equity policies in Peruvian public universities are presented.

Literature Review

Understanding Afro-descendant experiences in higher education requires situating them within the broader framework of the structural inequalities that shape Latin American societies. A growing body of scholarship has shown that racism remains a persistent factor in the reproduction of social and educational hierarchies, limiting the access and opportunities available to Afro-descendant populations in comparison with other social groups (Ocoró Loango et al., 2023).

In the field of education, these inequalities reflect themselves both in access to higher levels of education, and in the conditions that shape students' persistence and degree completion. Sánchez Moretti (2016), for example, shows that in Brazil Afro-descendant students have lower enrollment and graduation rates than white students, a pattern linked to the intersection of class, race, and gender. Similarly, Freire, Schwartz Orellana, and Carbonari de Almeida (2023) argue that the historical legacy of slavery and subsequent mestizaje policies have contributed to the naturalization of Afro-descendant exclusion within the region's educational systems.

Over the past few decades, several Latin American countries have implemented affirmative action policies aimed at reducing these gaps, particularly through quota systems, scholarships, and academic support programs (Pérez-Bravo et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of these measures has been uneven. While countries such as Brazil and Colombia have seen positive results in expanding access for Afro-descendant youth, in other contexts these initiatives have remained limited or fragmented,

often reproducing the historical invisibility of these populations within higher education.

In Peru, studies on Afro-descendants in higher education have been less frequent than in other countries in the region, which has contributed to sustaining the invisibility of this population in academic spaces (Mato, 2012). Unlike the affirmative action policies implemented in Brazil or Colombia, efforts to promote Afro-Peruvian inclusion in Peru have been fragmented and have lacked sustained institutionalization (Pimentel Sánchez, 2022).

In its National Policy for the Afro-Peruvian People (2022), the Ministry of Culture acknowledged the need to ensure access to and persistence in higher education for Afro-Peruvian youth. However, the document also notes that Afro-descendant populations continue to face significant inequalities associated with poverty, racism, and the lack of role models in academic settings. Benavides et al. (2015), in a specialized study on the Afro-Peruvian population and ethnic-racial inequalities in Peruvian higher education, show that Afro-Peruvian students have lower enrollment and degree-completion rates than other groups, while also facing greater financial difficulties in sustaining their university journey.

On the other hand, Turpo Gebera and Gutierrez Gala (2019), argue that racism in Peru often operates in veiled or "cordial" ways, manifesting through stereotypes and microaggressions that tend to be minimized in public discourse, yet have profound effects on the self-esteem and academic performance of Afro-descendant students. These everyday experiences of exclusion contribute to the fact that many young people do not self-identify as Afro-Peruvian in educational settings, thereby reproducing processes of invisibility.

In the specific case of the National University of San Marcos, studies such as Nureña, Ramírez, and Salazar (2014) suggest that although there has been progress in recognizing cultural diversity at the university, there are no institution-specific policies aimed at Afro-Peruvian students. This stands in contrast to the university's significance as a space of social mobility and critical knowledge production, and highlights the urgency of producing research that makes visible the experiences of this sector of the student population.

The specialized literature has shown that processes of identity self-affirmation are a central dimension of Afro-descendant students' experiences in higher education. Ramirez (2022) argues that multicultural citizenship in Latin America has been constructed unevenly, often privileging Indigenous inclusion to the detriment of Afro-descendant populations, thereby hindering the development of policies specifically aimed at them. This form of symbolic exclusion is also reflected in university spaces, where Afro students often find themselves in minority positions and are compelled to actively assert their identity.

Caicedo Ortiz and Castillo Guzmán (2022) note that in countries such as Colombia and Brazil, Afro-descendant student organizations have played a decisive role in making racial agendas visible within universities, linking academic struggles to broader processes of political and

cultural organizing. These spaces of participation have not only strengthened Afro-descendant identity, but have also generated forms of resistance to institutional and symbolic racism.

Within the university sphere, political participation is expressed both through the creation of Afro-descendant associations and collectives and through the promotion of seminars, conferences, and publications that seek to challenge traditional canons of knowledge production. Ocoró Loango and Da Silva (2017) note that these initiatives contribute to democratizing academic space by introducing critical perspectives on racial inequality and Afro-descendant history in the region.

At the same time, the identity self-affirmation of Afro-descendant students is fraught by tensions: while some openly recognize and affirm themselves as Afro-descendants, others choose invisibility as a strategy to avoid stigmatization or discrimination (Solano-Zamudio & Castañeda Gamboa, 2024). This ambivalence reflects the persistence of racism in university life and the need to generate institutional conditions that foster recognition and appreciation of ethnic-racial diversity in higher education.

Recent studies emphasize that the presence and organization of Afro-descendant students not only make inequalities visible, but also they also produce knowledge and transform academic practices. From the perspective of Southern epistemologies, Santos (2010) argues that universities must broaden their "ecology of knowledges" in order to recognize historically subalternized experiences. In this vein, decoloniality calls for questioning the canons and curricula that have rendered Afro-descendant contributions invisible, while promoting critical readings of modernity/coloniality (Quijano, 2000).

In pedagogical terms, the incorporation of Afro-Latin American authorship, local histories, and participatory methodologies contributes to curricular revision and to the formation of more democratic learning communities. These initiatives also resonate with Fraser's (2008) framework of recognition, redistribution, and representation, by linking the struggle over the epistemic status of Afro-descendant knowledges to material demands—such as scholarships and mentoring—and to claims for political voice in university governance.

Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach. This perspective was appropriate because it made it possible to examine the social, academic, and political experiences of Afro-Peruvian students in public higher education through their own narratives and meanings. Rather than focusing on numerical indicators or broad trends, the study sought to understand how participants interpreted their university journeys and the meanings they attached to their experiences within the institution (Buzeki, 2019).

The main data collection technique was the semi-structured interview. In August 2025, seven interviews were conducted: four with Afro-

Peruvian students from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National University of San Marcos, two with faculty professors from the same faculty, and one with the person in charge of the University Welfare Office. Interviews with students and faculty members were conducted online via Google Meet, whereas the interview with the administrative staff member was conducted in person. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed; the automated transcripts were then manually reviewed to ensure accuracy.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. In the case of students from the Faculty of Social Sciences, the process began with a scholarship recipient database provided by the University Welfare Office, through which invitations were sent describing the study and asking those who identified as Afro-descendant to contact the researcher. Two students agreed to participate, and through snowball sampling it was possible to contact two additional students. In the case of professors, participants were identified by the students because of their teaching journeys in the Social Sciences, while the inclusion of the administrative staff member responded to her role in monitoring and supporting student life.

From an ethical standpoint, confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms (for example, Student 1 and Faculty Professor 2). Informed consent was obtained digitally through a form that explained the objectives of the study, the use of the data, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Data analysis was based on a close reading of the interview transcripts. Through this process, thematic categories were identified in relation to academic journeys, processes of identity self-affirmation, social and academic challenges, and forms of academic and social participation. Organizing the material around these categories made it possible to connect participants' testimonies with the debates identified in the literature, thereby offering a critical perspective on Afro-Peruvian students' contributions to university life.

Results

Academic journeys

The academic journeys of Afro-Peruvian students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National University of San Marcos unfold within a context in which inclusion policies coexist with institutional practices that are not always clear or effective. One of the main access routes identified in the interviews was admission through the additional score granted to Afro-descendant applicants within state scholarship schemes. Yet rather than being experienced as a meaningful mechanism of access, several testimonies suggest that this pathway was perceived as a bureaucratic and exclusionary process. As one student explained: "*I applied with the extra points granted to the Afro-descendant population … but it was a tedious and even somewhat discriminatory process; they did not want to recognize the signatures*" (Student 1, interview, 2025).

This testimony illustrates how policies designed to reduce social inequalities may, in their implementation, reproduce dynamics of exclusion. Requirements involving excessive verification—such as the certification of signatures by Afro-descendant organizations—generated suspicion regarding the authenticity of applicants' identities. This situation is consistent with what Valdivia, Benavides, and Torero (2007) point out when they argue that policies demanding strict forms of validation can become instruments of both symbolic and practical exclusion by questioning the cultural legitimacy of their beneficiaries. It also underscores the need for a more sensitive and participatory approach to ensuring the effective inclusion of Afro-descendant populations.

Once admitted to the university, students face the challenges common to many young undergraduates, such as completing their studies and entering the labor market. In the Afro-Peruvian case, however, these difficulties are compounded by more precarious socioeconomic conditions and by the lack of institutional support networks. As one faculty member stated: "*Academically, I have not seen differences compared with other students … their main challenge is the same as everyone else's: completing their studies and finding work*" (Faculty Professor 1, interview, 2025). While this perspective seeks to normalize their experience, it may also end up obscuring the structural inequalities identified by the students themselves, which are linked both to material constraints and to the absence of culturally relevant support policies.

For this reason, the academic journeys of Afro-Peruvian students cannot be reduced to a linear path of admission, persistence, and graduation. Rather, it is configured as a process in which individual effort is intertwined with the need to confront institutional practices that, either explicitly or implicitly, call their identity into question or minimize it. These accounts make clear that formal access to the university does not in itself guarantee effective inclusion. On the contrary, they highlight the urgency of designing comprehensive policies capable of supporting Afro-descendant students throughout their university experience.

Identity and Self-Affirmation

The second dimension that emerged from the findings concerns the construction and self-affirmation of identity among Afro-Peruvian students within the university setting. In a context in which Afro-Peruvian identity continues to have limited visibility in society, the university becomes an ambivalent space: on the one hand, it offers the possibility of expressing pride and belonging; on the other, it lacks policies and mechanisms capable of recognizing and strengthening these identities. One student summarized this tension as follows: "*I have always identified myself as Afro-Peruvian, and I say it openly … but at the university there is no recognition; it is simply neutral*" (Student 2, interview, 2025).

This testimony shows how Afro-Peruvian identity, although embraced with conviction at the individual level, finds little support in institutional practice. University "neutrality," understood as the absence of specific measures, ultimately leads to invisibility. In this way, the public university, even when it defines itself as inclusive, reproduces a model of

academic citizenship that homogenizes and marginalizes ethic and racial differences.

Professors interviewed agreed that the Faculty of Social Sciences lacks clear policies aimed at recognizing or supporting Afro-descendant students. One professor expressed this quite directly: "*I do not feel there is any real willingness to promote students' self-affirmation … there is indifference instead*" (Faculty Professor 2, interview, 2025). This type of perception reveals, on the one hand, the absence of institutional initiatives and, on the other, the limited training of faculty in matters of ethnic-racial diversity, which restricts their ability to address these needs.

Within this context, the identity self-affirmation of Afro-Peruvian students becomes a complex process shaped by the tension between personal pride and institutional indifference. Rather than actively fostering diversity, the university appears as a space in which recognition of Afro-Peruvian identity depends almost entirely on individual initiative. These experiences resonate with Restrepo's (2024) analysis of multiculturalism in Latin America: although diversity may be formally recognized, in practice mechanisms persist that keep Afro-descendant populations in the shadows.

Social and Academic Challenges

The testimonies collected reveal that the social and academic challenges faced by Afro-Peruvian students go beyond the ordinary demands of university life. Although none of the interviewees reported instances of overt discrimination, they did point to the persistence of stigmas and microaggressions that mark their experience of university life. As one student explained: "*The stigma still exists… many Afro-Peruvians do not recognize the racist processes that are at work*" (Student 1, interview, 2025).

These accounts align with the observations of Turpo Gebera and Gutierrez Gala (2019), who describe racism in Peru as a covert phenomenon that operates in "cordial" and subtle ways, easily normalized in everyday life. In the university setting, this manifests as seemingly harmless jokes about skin color or hair texture, as well as overreactions to the use of the word "black" in class. One professor illustrated this as follows: "*I've heard racist comments in the classroom… when someone says 'black,' it causes surprise or laughter, as if it were something forbidden*" (Professor 2, interview, 2025).

On the academic front, students highlighted the lack of Afro-Peruvian role models both in the curriculum and among the faculty, which creates a constant sense of invisibility. The absence of figures with whom students can identify limits the possibility of recognizing the contributions of people of African descent to the Peruvian social sciences.

Taken together, these experiences show that the challenges faced by Afro-Peruvian students at San Marcos manifest as a dual demand: on the one hand, they must continually reaffirm their identity and sense of belonging in a space that questions them; on the other, they face stereotypes and structural barriers that affect their ability to remain in school and achieve academic success.

Political and Cultural Participation

Despite the difficulties noted, Afro-Peruvian students do not see themselves solely as individuals affected by inequalities; rather, they position themselves as agents with the capacity for agency within the university. Their accounts reveal forms of political and cultural participation that seek to raise the visibility of people of African descent in higher education. One student explained it this way: "*I always post about Afro events on social media… I do a little activism to make our identity more visible*" (Student 2, interview, 2025).

This activism, which combines digital and in-person dimensions, is also expressed in organizational spaces such as the Seminar on Afro-Peruvian Studies, created with the purpose of promoting academic reflection on the Afro-Peruvian population in the country through the UNMSM. However, the university's structural and economic limitations hinder the continuity of these initiatives. As one faculty member noted: "*We established the Seminar on Afro-Peruvian Studies, which lasted two years… but it was interrupted by the pandemic and did not continue*" (Faculty Professor 1, interview, 2025).

It is important to note that the political participation of Afro-Peruvian students does not always take place in formal settings. It often unfolds within cultural collectives, social media, or commemorative activities, which highlights both their capacity for organization and the lack of institutional structures to support these processes. In this regard, the findings align with the arguments put forth by Anton Sanchez and Santacruz Palacios (2023), who maintain that collective action by people of African descent in Latin America has been decisive in challenging racial discrimination and opening up spaces in historically exclusionary settings, such as the university.

Likewise, Afro-Peruvian cultural expressions take on a political character on campus. Music, dance, and celebrations linked to Afro-Peruvian identity serve not only as practices of identity but also as strategies of resistance against invisibility. However, within the university context, these activities are often considered "complementary" rather than an integral part of academic education.

In this context, the cultural and political participation of Afro-Peruvian students constitutes a fundamental contribution to university life, although it remains limited by the lack of formal recognition and by the need to rely primarily on individual and collective initiative rather than on institutional support policies.

Institutional Role

Testimonies from students, faculty, and university wellness staff indicate that, at the UNMSM School of Social Sciences, the institution's role regarding ethnic and racial diversity is perceived as insufficient and fragmented. Although the university has general wellness initiatives and scholarship programs, there are no specific policies aimed at Afro-Peruvian students. One faculty member was emphatic: "*I have not received any*

training on ethnic or racial issues at the faculty" (Faculty Professor 2, interview, 2025).

This training gap results in a lack of tools for faculty to identify and adequately address situations of racism or exclusion in the classroom. Another faculty member noted: "*There is no formal effort by the faculty to address diversity or intercultural issues*" (Faculty Professor 1, interview, 2025).

University Wellness staff, for their part, acknowledged that, although the office coordinates scholarships and financial aid, providing differentiated support to Afro-Peruvian students is not part of their standard procedures. The most visible actions are concentrated in commemorative activities: "*The university only remembers the issue during Afro-Peruvian Heritage Month*" (Faculty Professor 1, interview, 2025). This practice reveals an institutional culture that limits itself to symbolic gestures and fails to articulate a sustained policy of recognition and support.

The role of the University Welfare Office appears somewhat more active in terms of scholarships and student support, particularly in relation to access routes such as Beca 18. However, even here the interviews suggest that support is concentrated on administrative processes rather than on the broader social, cultural, and academic dimensions of inclusion. In this sense, institutional action remains focused on admission and formal student assistance, without fully addressing the deeper conditions required for Afro-Peruvian students to experience the university as a space of belonging and recognition.

Thus, public universities appear as spaces of educational opportunity, but with rigid structures that reproduce the invisibility of people of African descent, confirming Mato's (2012) observations regarding the tensions between inclusive discourse and exclusionary practices in Peruvian higher education.

Contributions of Afro-Peruvian Students

Despite the limitations noted, Afro-Peruvian students do not position themselves solely as victims of inequality, but also as active agents who transform academic and cultural life within the university. Their classroom contributions and participation in extracurricular activities enrich discussions by introducing critical perspectives that challenge dominant narratives. As one faculty member acknowledged: "*When an Afro-Peruvian student speaks up in class about her identity, it forces you to broaden your perspective… it invites you to see beyond*" (Faculty Professor 2, interview, 2025).

These contributions go beyond the dynamics of the classroom. Through their participation, students drive the process of establishing role models, bringing to light the careers of Afro-Peruvian and Afro-Latin American intellectuals who have been excluded from the curricula. One student put it clearly: "*Talking about Afro-Peruvian scholars like José Manuel Valdés helps us break down stigmas… to show that we, too, are scholars*" (Student 1, interview, 2025).

Similarly, the students interviewed link their university experience to the strengthening of collective identities. They publicize Afro-Peruvian events on social media, participate in cultural collectives, and promote debates on racism and diversity—actions that help create spaces for remembrance and resistance on campus. Although many of these initiatives depend on individual effort, they have a tangible impact on raising awareness among their peers and faculty.

In this vein, the contributions of Afro-Peruvian students not only enrich cultural life but are also part of an epistemic struggle to democratize knowledge in the social sciences. By introducing new perspectives, they broaden analytical frameworks and help the university fulfill its critical and transformative role.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the experiences of Afro-Peruvian students in the UNMSM School of Social Sciences are marked by tensions between formal inclusion and structural invisibility. In terms of identity, the students interviewed express pride and a willingness to assert themselves as people of African descent, but this attitude is met with institutional neutrality that, in practice, perpetuates invisibility. This situation resembles that analyzed by Ramirez (2022), who describes how Latin American states have prioritized Indigenous inclusion in their multicultural policies, relegating people of African descent to the background. In the Peruvian context, this pattern is confirmed by the absence of specific university programs, in contrast to what has been observed in Brazil or Colombia (Pérez-Bravo et al., 2023).

The social and academic challenges reported—microaggressions, racist comments, and a lack of role models in the curricula—reflect the dynamics of veiled or "cordial" racism described by Turpo Gebera and Gutierrez Gala (2019). This racism, though less explicit than in other contexts, seeps into daily life and the university classroom, limiting the sense of belonging and reinforcing inequalities. At the same time, the lack of teacher training on ethnic and racial issues confirms what Nureña, Ramírez, and Salazar (2014) noted: that Peruvian universities maintain an inclusive discourse but lack the pedagogical tools to make it effective.

Faced with these limitations, Afro-Peruvian students do not merely experience exclusion but emerge as active agents of transformation. Their digital and in-person activism, participation in collectives, and the introduction of Afro-Peruvian role models into academic discourse constitute contributions that engage with the notion of cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu (1997). These contributions not only enrich the curriculum but also challenge the epistemic hierarchies of academia, in line with Santos's (2010) proposals regarding the need to expand the "ecology of knowledge."

In this regard, the experiences analyzed show that Afro-Peruvian students contribute to democratizing the university space, pushing its boundaries and highlighting the need for more inclusive policies. The School of Social Sciences, given its tradition of critical thinking, is in a

privileged position to incorporate these agendas into its academic practices, recognizing people of African descent not only as beneficiaries of inclusion but also as producers of knowledge who challenge traditional frameworks in the social sciences in Peru.

Conclusions

The analysis of the social, academic, and political experiences of Afro-Peruvian students in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National University of San Marcos makes it possible to bring into view both the challenges they face and the contributions they make within public higher education in Peru.

With regard to academic journeys, the study shows that although access mechanisms such as state scholarships do exist, they are often mediated by bureaucratic requirements and practices that may themselves become discriminatory, thereby limiting their actual reach. Formal admission to the university, in and of itself, does not guarantee effective inclusion and instead reveals the gap between what policies promise and what is ultimately implemented in practice.

A second key dimension concerns identity self-affirmation. Although the students interviewed expressed pride in their Afro-Peruvian identity at the personal level, the institutional response was largely one of neutrality or indifference. This lack of recognition affects the construction of role models and sources of identification within the university and, in many cases, reproduces dynamics of invisibility.

The testimonies gathered also show that the social and academic challenges are multiple: from microaggressions and covert forms of racism to economic precarity and the absence of Afro-descendant references in the curriculum. Yet these limitations have not prevented Afro-Peruvian students from developing strategies of resistance. Their participation in collectives, the organization of events, and the incorporation of critical perspectives into classroom discussions are all forms of agency through which they seek to open space for diversity in an environment where it remains marginal.

In this regard, the contributions of Afro-Peruvian students are not limited to university cultural life; they also directly shape academic production. By introducing debates on racism, diversity, and social justice into the Social Sciences, they contribute to transforming the university into a more critical and plural space. This, in turn, underscores the need for higher education institutions to adopt a sustained commitment to inclusion—one that goes beyond scholarships or symbolic gestures—through policies that recognize ethnic-racial diversity as a fundamental dimension of academic formation.

In this sense, the Afro-Peruvian experience at San Marcos constitutes a call to rethink the role of the public university in Peru. Advancing toward a genuinely inclusive institution requires recognizing Afro-descendant students not merely as beneficiaries of policy, but as subjects of rights and producers of knowledge whose journeys, forms of knowledge,

and practices of resistance decisively enrich the university and academic life of the country.

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