

Between Theory and Practice: The Configuration of the Pedagogical Experience by Students of the Faculty of Basic Sciences, Engineering and Architecture of the University Corporation of the Caribbean (CECAR)

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Citation: Acosta, B. K. F., Támarra, V. E. R., Molina, H. F. P., Vásquez, Y. A. B. and Torres, D. E. C. (2025). Between Theory and Practice: The Configuration of the Pedagogical Experience by Students of the Faculty of Basic Sciences, Engineering and Architecture of the University Corporation of the Caribbean (CECAR), *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(3), 1075-1082. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i3.2548>

Published: November 29, 2025

ABSTRACT

The present study explores how students of the faculty of Basic Sciences, Engineering and Architecture of the University Corporation of the Caribbean (CECAR) They configure their pedagogical experience within the framework of the Institutional Pedagogical Model and the Institutional Educational Project (PEI, 2022). A qualitative interpretative design was used, using focus groups with 12 students from the Faculty of Basic Sciences, Engineering and Architecture (3rd-8th semester). The sessions, recorded and transcribed, were analyzed with MAXQDA software by open and axial coding, based on Dubet's Sociology of Experience (2010), complemented by Tinto (1993), Foucault (1994) and Coleman (1988). The findings reveal a strong but partial academic social integration, reflexive subjectivation that negotiates identities in tension, and resilient strategies supported by social capital, Evidence of mismatches between the design of the PEI and student practice. It is concluded that the pedagogical experience in CECAR transcends the institutional model through the student agency, suggesting the need to review resources, methodologies and student participation to align design and reality.

Keywords: Pedagogical Experience, Integration, Subjectivation, Strategy, Social Capital, Focus Groups, CECAR.

INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical experience in higher education is a multidimensional construct that encompasses not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also processes of social integration, identity building and strategic adaptation to institutional structures. In a globalized world, where universities face pressures to align their teaching models with labour market demands and social expectations, understanding how students perceive and shape this experience has become a critical issue in educational research (Marginson, 2016; Altbach & Knight, 2007). This

challenge is accentuated in contexts of developing countries, such as Colombia, where socio-economic inequalities and institutional constraints significantly shape student trajectories (García-Villegas et al., 2016).

At the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe (CECAR), located in Sincelejo, Sucre a historically marginalized region of Colombia with high poverty rates and low economic development (DANE, 2023), the Institutional Education Project (PEI, 2022) It sets out an ambitious pedagogical model. This model seeks to promote integral training, the development of technical and transversal skills, and the linkage with the needs of the regional environment, aligning itself with the principles of social responsibility and sustainability that characterize modern higher education (UNESCO, 2021). However, the implementation of this design faces structural challenges such as lack of institutional accreditation, limited infrastructure and a socio-economic environment that requires students to combine studies with work and family responsibilities (CECAR, 2022).

Recent literature stresses that pedagogical experience cannot be reduced to institutional objectives, but emerges from the interaction between educational policies and students' daily practices (Biesta, 2015; Barnett & Coate, 2005). In this sense, students are not merely passive receivers of the pedagogical model but active agents who negotiate their training in response to the material and symbolic conditions they face (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This perspective becomes relevant in CECAR, where the diversity of student trajectories from young people in rural areas to working adults challenges the homogeneity implicit in many pedagogical designs.

This study aims to analyze how CECAR students configure their pedagogical experience within the framework of the PEI (2022), exploring the tensions between institutional design and lived practice. To this end, the Sociology of the Experience of Dubet (2010) is adopted as the main framework, which postulates three logics of integration action, subjectivation and strategy as pillars of educational experience. These logics are complemented by the theories of Tinto (1993) on academic and social integration as factors of permanence, Foucault (1994) on subjectivation as a process of resistance and self-construction against institutional power, and Coleman (1988) social capital as a key resource in contexts of adversity.

The aim is to contribute to the international debate on how pedagogical models translate into concrete experiences, especially in universities in peripheral regions, and to offer ideas for their improvement from a student perspective.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The configuration of pedagogical experience in higher education has been approached from multiple theoretical approaches, which converge on the idea that this is not a one-way process, but a complex interaction between institutional structures and student agency (Tight, 2012). This study is anchored in Dubet's Sociology of the Experience (2010), which offers a robust analytical framework for unraveling the dynamics of educational action. Dubet identifies three fundamental logics:

Integration: Refers to the incorporation of the student into the academic community through acceptance of institutional norms, values and practices. This logic involves both an academic (performance and learning) and a social (belonging and relationships) dimension, echoing the model of Tinto (1993), who argues that integration is a key predictor of student persistence. However, Dubet (2010) expands this notion by considering that integration can be partial or conflictual in contexts of inequality.

Subjectivation: It involves the reflexive construction of personal identity in the face of external expectations, a process that Foucault (1994) describes as a negotiation with power structures that seek to discipline the subject. In the educational sphere, subjectivation occurs when students reinterpret or resist the roles imposed on them by the institution, configuring their sense of agency (Biesta, 2020). This logic is especially relevant in environments where socio-economic conditions challenge institutional narratives of success.

Strategy: Focuses on the rational and pragmatic decisions students make to achieve their goals, such as graduating or entering the job market. This dimension is linked to the concept of social capital by Coleman (1988), who argues that networks of relationships (family, friends, teachers) provide resources for overcoming structural barriers. In contexts of precariousness, the strategy often transcends the formal pedagogical design (Bourdieu 1986).

These logics do not operate in isolation, but in a dynamic tension which reflects the contradictions between institutional expectations and individual realities (Dubet & Martuccelli, 1996). In the case of CECAR, the PEI (2022) establishes a pedagogical model that prioritizes integral training, critical thinking and social responsibility, inspired by principles of transformative education (Mezirow, 2000). This design seeks to respond to the demands of a regional environment marked by poverty, exclusion and the need for sustainable development (DANE, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). However, the literature suggests that pedagogical models in universities in developing countries face challenges such as lack of resources, disconnection with the labor market and student heterogeneity, which creates gaps between design and implementation (Salmi, 2009; Teichler, 2007).

Tinto (1993) brings a practical dimension to the framework, stressing that academic (successful courses) and social integration (links with peers and teachers) are essential in preventing dropout, especially for students of vulnerable origin. However, their approach has been criticized for assuming an institutional homogeneity that is not always fulfilled in peripheral contexts (Thomas, 2002). Foucault (1994) complements this vision by analysing how educational institutions exercise power through curricula and evaluations, while students resist or adapt these impositions to build their subjectivity. Coleman (1988) introduces social capital as a compensatory mechanism, particularly relevant in regions such as Sucre where informal networks tend to fill institutional gaps (Putnam 2000).

Recent international studies have explored how students negotiate their pedagogical experience in contexts of adversity, highlighting resilience as a key factor (Walker et al., 2019; Ungar, 2011). In Latin America, research such as that of Guzmán and Saavedra (2020) shows that regional universities face tensions between their pedagogical aspirations and structural limitations, a phenomenon that this study seeks to deepen in the case of CECAR. This integrated theoretical framework allows to analyze how students configure their pedagogical experience, revealing the dissonances between institutional design and emerging practices in a specific context.

METHODOLOGY

This study was developed under a qualitative design with an interpretative approach, based on the principles of scientific research that seek to understand subjective meanings and social contexts from the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach is particularly suitable for exploring the configuration of the pedagogical experience, since it allows capturing the complexity of student perceptions in their interaction with the institutional pedagogical model, aligning with the logics of Dubet (2010).

Research Design

A single case study design (Yin, 2014) was chosen, focusing on the Caribbean University Corporation (CECAR) as the unit of analysis, with the objective of deepening in the specific dynamics of how students of the Faculty of Basic Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, configure their pedagogical experience within the framework of the Institutional Educational Project (PEI, 2022). The interpretative approach was based on the premise that meanings emerge from social interactions and collective narratives (Schwandt, 2000), which justified the use of focus groups as the main technique to promote building knowledge among participants.

Participants And Sampling

The sample was composed of students from the Faculty of Basic Sciences, Engineering and Architecture of CECAR, selected through an intentional non-probabilistic sampling (Patton, 2015). This approach ensured the inclusion of participants with diverse experiences relevant to the study objective. A total of 12 students were recruited (6 per focus group), equally distributed between men and women, aged 18-36, and academic semesters ranging from the 3rd to the 8th (average 5.5). The programs represented included Industrial Engineering, Architecture, Systems Engineering and Industrial Design, reflecting the disciplinary diversity of the faculty. The selection considered variables such as socioeconomic origin (urban/rural), employment status (workers/non-workers) and academic background (low semesters vs. advanced), to ensure a broad representation of student experiences in CECAR.

The sample size was determined by theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), achieved after the two focus groups, when no new significant categories emerged in the preliminary analysis. Participants were contacted through teachers, with an informed consent process detailing the purpose, procedures and participation rights.

Data Collection

The main technique used was the focus group, selected for its ability to generate rich data through dynamic interaction between participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Two sessions were conducted, each averaging 90 minutes, in a classroom at CECAR, with audio recording. The sessions were facilitated by a trained moderator (the lead researcher) and a co-moderator, who followed a semi-structured script based on Dubet's (2010) logics: integration (belonging and relationships), subjectivation (identity and reflections), and strategy (actions and resources).

The script included open-ended questions such as: "How would you describe your experience at CECAR since you entered?", "What challenges have you faced in adapting to academic demands?", and "What strategies have you used to overcome obstacles?". During the sessions, the collective construction of a fictional character, "María Victoria," was employed as an innovative methodological tool to depersonalize narratives and facilitate the expression of shared experiences (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). This approach allowed participants to project their experiences onto a character, reducing inhibitions and enriching the dialogue.

The sessions were audio recorded with the explicit consent of the participants, and supplemented by field notes taken by the co-moderator to register contextual observations (non-verbal expressions, group dynamics, general aspects). The recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researchers to ensure fidelity to the original discourse.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an inductive-deductive approach, with MAXQDA software (2022 version) used to manage and code the transcripts. The process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis stages, adapted to the study's needs:

Open Coding: Emerging themes were identified from the narratives, such as "resilience," "social capital," and "institutional tension," without imposing predefined categories. Each transcript was coded line by line by the researchers to minimize bias.

Axial Coding: Initial codes were grouped into categories related to Dubet's (2010) logics—integration, subjectivation, strategy—establishing relationships between them (e.g., "social capital" as a bridge between integration and strategy).

Theoretical Interpretation: Categories were triangulated with the Institutional Educational Project (PEI, 2022) and complementary theories (Tinto, Foucault, Coleman), generating a coherent narrative about the configuration of the pedagogical experience.

Internal validity was ensured through triangulation of data (two sessions) and perspectives (analysis by multiple researchers), while reliability was strengthened by cross-checking codes and thoroughly documenting the analytical process (Flick, 2018).

Ethical Implications

The study adhered to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017). Informed consent was obtained from each participant, detailing the purpose, procedures, minimal risks (e.g., emotional discomfort), and benefits (contribution to institutional knowledge). Anonymity was guaranteed through the exclusion of real names in the transcripts and the use of "María Victoria" as a collective representation. Recordings were stored on a secure server with restricted access and were used strictly for research purposes.

RESULTS

The analysis of the data obtained through the focus groups, focused on the collective construction of the fictional character "María Victoria" (woman, 20-22 years old, industrial engineering student in 5th-6th semester, originally from Sincelejo), revealed three interrelated dimensions of the pedagogical experience: academic and social integration, subjectivation as an identity negotiation, and strategy based on resilience and social capital. These dimensions, identified by open and axial coding in MAXQDA, are aligned with the logics of Dubet (2010) and enriched with the complementary theories of Tinto (1993), Foucault (1994) and Coleman (1988). The findings with textual evidence and their relation to the PEI (2022) and the cognitive social pedagogical model are presented below, from a systemic perspective.

Academic and Social Integration

Contextual description: Maria Victoria enters CECAR on a partial scholarship, faces intense academic hours (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and works nights, probably in a restaurant. Participants described their arrival as an initial experience of belonging: "Feel the university as a home, because it identifies with others who go through the same thing" (Participant 1, Session 1). However, this social integration contrasts with limited academic integration.

Evidence: The transition from college to university is perceived as a "cultural shock" due to the requirement of complex projects (e.g. chemistry, reports with APA standards): "In the school it was consultation and practice, but here everything is in-depth research" (Participant 2, Session 2). Insufficient resources, such as "old and slow computers in the library" (Participant 3, Session 2), hinder learning.

Relation to the PEI: The design of the PEI (2022) promotes a student-centred approach, but the lack of infrastructure (e.g. "eco and no ventilation" halls, Participant 4, Session 2) and technological support contradicts this aspiration, limiting academic integration. Socially, social capital emerges as a key support: "A friend rides her every day" (Participant 5, Session 1), highlighting informal networks as a substitute for institutionalism.

Strategy: Resilience and Social Capital

1. **Contextual description:** Maria Victoria uses pragmatic strategies to overcome barriers. Save subsidies for a used laptop: "First he helped at home, then he realized he needed it" (Participant 11, Session 2).

Collaborates in group work: "Knows how to negotiate with colleagues" (Participant 12, Session 1) and plans internships or thesis for employment: "Wants to stay at the company where he does his internship" (Participant 2, Session 2).

2. **Evidence:** Its future reflects strategic vision: "Seek a master's degree in the National, not here" (Participant 8, Session 2), and a desire to transform Sucre: "Don't want to go, want to change the context" (Participant 1, Session 2). Learn emerging technologies autonomously (AI, 3D design): "The university only showed us slides" (Participant 3, Session 2).
3. **Relationship with the PEI:** The integral training of the PEI is overwhelmed by the need for self-training in modern competences, evidencing a mismatch between design and student practice supported by social networks.

DISCUSSION

The results reflect a pedagogical experience configured in tension with the design of the PEI (2022), where the logics of integration, subjectivation and strategy of Dubet (2010) operate in an interdependent but unequal way. This configuration is interpreted in the light of the theoretical framework and contextualised in international debates on higher education.

Academic and Social Integration: Maria Victoria's social integration, based on informal networks ("friends who support her"), resonates with Tinto (1993), who highlights relationships as a factor of permanence. However, academic integration is fragile, contradicting the Tinto model by relying less on the institution and more on social capital (Coleman, 1988). The "lack of adequate computers" (Participant 3) and the "cultural shock" (Participant 2) show a gap between EIP and material conditions, in line with studies that question the homogeneity implicit in integration models (Thomas, 2002). In peripheral contexts such as Sucre, social integration compensates for institutional limitations, a finding consistent with research in Latin America (Guzmán & Saavedra, 2020).

Subjectivation and Power: The identity evolution of Maria Victoria, from survivor ("I have had to work hard", Participant 6) to professional ("I can grow as a person", Participant 7), reflects the subjectivation of Foucault (1994) as resistance to institutional power. Demanding teachers ("prepare you for reality", Participant 8) exercise a discipline that shapes subjectivities, but the lack of accreditation ("has no weight outside", Participant 9) imposes a subordinate identity vis-à-vis prestigious universities. This contrasts with the PEI, which promotes critical thinking but does not provide conditions for full subjectivation, a phenomenon observed in unaccredited universities (Teichler, 2007). Reflection in the cafeteria ("this was not what I wanted," Participant 6) suggests a student agency that transcends institutional design, aligning with Biesta (2020).

Strategy and Social Capital: "Maria Victoria's" strategies save for a laptop, plan internships, learn AI autonomously, embody the strategic logic of Dubet (2010), where students act rationally in the face of obstacles. Social capital (Coleman, 1988) is pivotal: "Without my friends I could not" (Participant 5), a common pattern in contexts of adversity (Putnam, 2000). However, the need for self-training ("the university does not teach us new things", Participant 3) reveals a mismatch with the PEI, which aspires to comprehensive competences but does not respond to emerging demands (Marginson, 2016). His ambition to transform Sucre ("I'm not leaving, I want to change this," Participant 1) reflects a long-term strategy that goes beyond institutional design, resonating with student resilience in vulnerable regions (Walker et al., 2019).

Theoretical and Contextual Implications: Maria Victoria's experience challenges the narrative of homogeneous integration by Tinto (1993), showing that in contexts of inequality, permanence depends more on strategies and networks than on institutional structures. Foucaultian subjectivation manifests itself as a partial resistance to the power of the PEI, limited by resources and prestige. Coleman's social capital (1988) emerges as a key compensatory mechanism, a finding that enriches the debate on how students in global peripheries negotiate their training (Salmi, 2009). Compared to the PEI, student-centered design is overtaken by student practices that transform its objectives, suggesting that pedagogical models should integrate the socio-economic conditions and demands of today's labour market (UNESCO, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

This study has analysed how the students of the University Corporation of the Caribbean (CECAR) configure their pedagogical experience in the framework of the Institutional Educational Project (PEI, 2022), revealing a complex interaction between institutional design and emerging student practices. Through the logics of integration, subjectivation and strategy proposed by Dubet (2010), complemented by the theories of Tinto (1993), Foucault (1994) and Coleman (1988), three key findings were identified that contribute to knowledge about higher education in peripheral contexts.

First, the social integration of students, supported by informal networks of social capital, compensates for limited academic integration due to insufficient resources and methodologies that fail to bridge the gap between school and university. This pattern diverges from Tinto's (1993) model, suggesting that in environments of inequality, permanence depends more on student resilience than on institutional structures, a team that enriches the debate about retention in vulnerable regions.

Second, subjectivation emerges as a dynamic process of identity negotiation, where students resist the limitations of the PEI (lack of accreditation, poor technological infrastructure) to affirm their agency, aligning themselves with the Foucaultian perspective (1994) the construction of the subject against power. This process, however, is constrained by the inability of pedagogical design to provide an environment that fully encourages critical thinking and innovation as PEI aspires.

Third, student strategies, driven by social capital (Coleman, 1988) and remarkable resilience, transcend institutional expectations by prioritizing pragmatic adaptation (e.g. self-training in emerging technologies) and the transformation of the regional context into mere integration into the formal education model. This strategic configuration shows a significant mismatch between the design of the PEI focused on integral training and practice, where students must fill structural gaps with their own resources and external networks.

From a theoretical perspective, this study expands the Dubet's Experience Sociology by demonstrating how the three logics operate asymmetrically in contexts of precariousness, with strategy and subjectivation overcoming integration as coping mechanisms. Methodologically, the collective construction of "Maria Victoria" as a character in student experiences offers an innovative tool to unravel narratives in sensitive environments, with potential for future qualitative research. In practical terms, the findings underline the need to re-evaluate pedagogical models at regional universities, integrating socio-economic conditions and global labour market demands as design pillars.

In conclusion, the pedagogical experience in CECAR is configured in a dialectical tension between institutional design and student practice, where resilience and social capital emerge as key factors to overcome the limitations of the PEI. This study not only provides a critical view from the bottom up, but also positions peripheral universities as spaces of agency and potential transformation, challenging traditional narratives of dependency and subalternity in higher education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to align the pedagogical design of the PEI (2022) with the reality experienced by CECAR students, with implications for institutional management, Future research and education policies in similar contexts:

Strengthening of Technological and Infrastructure Resources: Implementing a strategic investment in modern equipment (computers with specialized software) and access to updated digital platforms, essential to support academic integration and reduce dependence on external resources. This responds to the gap identified between PEI design and practice, where students resort to individual strategies to compensate for technological obsolescence (e.g. "slow computers," Participant 3, Session 2).

Redesign physical spaces (e.g. rooms with natural ventilation and adequate acoustics) to foster a learning environment that inspires subjectivation and creativity, in line with the PEI's student-centred approach.

Revision and Flexibilization of Pedagogical Methodologies: Develop transition programs that mitigate the "cultural shock" between school and university, incorporating tutoring and introductory workshops in critical academic competencies (e.g. writing with APA standards, use of ICTs). This strengthens Tinto's academic integration (1993) and reduces early drop-out rates.

Incorporation of the Student Voice in Institutional Planning: Establish formal mechanisms for student participation (e.g. curricular committees, faculty council, periodic surveys) to update and enrich the PEI, enhancing a practical perspective that reflects socio-economic realities and aspirations for regional transformation ("I want to change this", Participant 1, Session 2). This aligns institutional design with student subjectivation and strategy (Dubet, 2010).

Encourage partnerships with external networks (companies, NGOs) to expand institutional social capital by reducing the burden on informal student networks (Coleman, 1988).

Future Research and Educational Policies: Extend this study to other regional faculties and universities to compare how the Dubet logics manifest themselves in different contexts, strengthening the theoretical and practical generalization of the findings.

Prioritizing the institutional accreditation of CECAR, addressing the identified identity insecurity ("does not weigh out", Participant 9, Session 2) and raising its global competitiveness, a critical challenge in Latin America (Salmi, 2009).

These recommendations not only seek to optimize the pedagogical experience in CECAR, but also provide a transferable framework for institutions in vulnerable regions, promoting educational models that balance design and practice in pursuit of inclusive and transformative higher education.

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