

Review Article

Occupational therapy and culture in Latin America: a scoping review

Terapia ocupacional e cultura na América Latina: uma revisão de escopo

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Abstract

The study aimed to map and analyze the scientific production of occupational therapists and occupational scientists in Latin America regarding the relationship between culture and human occupation. The study followed the methodological recommendations of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), aligned with PRISMA-ScR, with a previously registered protocol. The search was conducted in national and international databases and in Latin American journals specific to the field. Of more than 3,000 records identified, after removing duplicates and applying the Population, Concept, and Context criteria, 57 studies were included. Only studies by Latin American occupational therapists or scientists that explicitly addressed the relationship between culture and occupational therapy were considered. The studies are concentrated primarily in Brazil, Colombia, and Chile and exhibit methodological diversity, with a predominance of experience reports, qualitative research, and theoretical-reflective essays. The references used and sources consulted encompass institutional documents, works from the humanities, and literature specific to occupational therapy and occupational science, highlighting critical perspectives and studies aligned with the Global South. The thematic analysis identified four main themes: culture as an interpretive lens; as an intervention strategy; as a field of practice; and as an ethical, aesthetic, and political commitment. The review highlights a growing field, with studies grounded in and committed to emancipatory practices, which underscores the importance of expanding research in other countries and of establishing culturally sensitive practices aimed at ensuring rights, participation, and diversity.

Keywords: Occupational Therapy, Activities of Daily Living, Culture, Latin America.

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Resumo

O estudo teve por objetivo mapear e analisar a produção científica de terapeutas ocupacionais e cientistas ocupacionais na América Latina acerca das relações entre cultura e ocupação humana. O estudo seguiu as recomendações metodológicas do Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), alinhadas ao PRISMA-ScR, com um protocolo previamente registrado. A busca foi realizada em bases de dados nacionais e internacionais e em revistas latino-americanas específicas da área. Dos mais de 3.000 registros identificados, após a remoção de duplicatas e a aplicação dos critérios de População, Conceito e Contexto, foram incluídos 57 estudos. Foram considerados apenas estudos de terapeutas ocupacionais ou cientistas ocupacionais latino-americanos que abordassem explicitamente a relação entre cultura e terapia ocupacional. Os estudos concentram-se principalmente no Brasil, na Colômbia e no Chile e apresentam diversidade metodológica, com predominância de relatos de experiência, pesquisas qualitativas e ensaios teórico-reflexivos. As referências utilizadas e as fontes consultadas abrangem documentos institucionais, obras das ciências humanas e literatura específica da terapia ocupacional e da ciência ocupacional, destacando perspectivas críticas e estudos alinhados ao Sul Global. A análise temática identificou quatro temas principais: a cultura como lente interpretativa; como estratégia de intervenção; como campo de prática; e como compromisso ético, estético e político. A revisão destaca um campo em expansão, com trabalhos fundamentados e comprometidos com práticas emancipatórias, o que ressalta a importância de ampliar a pesquisa em outros países e de estabelecer práticas culturalmente sensíveis, voltadas para garantir direitos, participação e diversidade.

Palavras-chave: Terapia Ocupacional, Atividades Cotidianas¹, Cultura, América Latina.

Introduction

Chauí's (2008) notes support an understanding of culture as a moving and non-homogeneous field, in which people can construct signs and symbols capable of shaping everyday practices, values, differences, temporalities, meanings for life and death, as well as relationships with the other, the sacred, and the profane. We therefore understand culture in a polysemic and contested sense (Lavacca & Silva, 2023). We will not seek to reduce it to definitive concepts, but to understand it based on a set of knowledges that illuminate the spectrum of life and human occupations that record their histories in the world. We also draw on Hanners (1997) by disregarding the traditional idea of culture as something static, uniform, and universal. For this author, culture can be understood as a continuous movement interrelated with other flows of knowledge. In the same direction, Durham (1980) states that it is through culture that individuals orient and signify their actions through socially constructed symbols.

In the Brazilian context, the 2013 National Culture Plan, an official document that defines guidelines for cultural policies, emphasizes that: "[...] culture is an axis of development and enables Brazilians to advance, culturally and economically, with social justice, equal opportunities, environmental awareness, and coexistence with diversity [...]" (Brasil, 2013, p. 9), being articulated through three dimensions: symbolic, citizen, and economic.

¹ The term *Atividades Cotidianas* was used to comply with the standardized terminology of the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS).

More broadly, in the Latin American context, cultural policies constitute a heterogeneous field, marked by disputes between projects and conceptions of culture (Rocha, 2016). The tensions between culture as an instrument of economic development and as a social right stand out in specific contexts and State models for the formulation of such policies (Canclini, 1987; Rocha, 2016; Rocha et al., 2024). Canclini (1987) also emphasizes that, historically, these policies have been fragmented and subordinated to systematic development crises. Social movements and popular culture are also identified as pillars that broaden the conception and promotion of cultural policies (Rocha, 2016). Thus, this set of knowledges assists us in a situated understanding of the interface between occupational therapy and culture, which has historically grounded theoretical reflections and practical propositions for occupational therapists (Coelho et al., 2024; Gonçalves et al., 2017).

In Brazil, since the early 1990s, discussions have already been recorded that highlight cultural compositions (both of activities and interventions and of the people assisted) in occupational-therapeutic practices (Brunello, 1991). Following the restructuring of the management model of the Ministry of Culture in 2003, when culture began to be situated as a right, through cultural policies (Dorneles & Lopes, 2016; Rubim, 2022) and grounded in notions of cultural citizenship (Chauí, 2008), occupational therapy became more strongly inserted into the National Culture Policy (Dorneles & Lopes, 2016; Gonçalves et al., 2017).

Although there are relevant studies on occupational therapy and cultural compositions, whether as an interpretive lens, intervention strategy and/or field of practice (Gonçalves et al., 2017; Lavacca & Silva, 2023), literature reviews that examine the state of the art of this interface are often based on foreign realities (Beagan, 2015; Castro et al., 2014). As noted by Coelho et al. (2024), studies that seek to understand this interface based on Latin American realities remain scarce.

Consequently, this scoping review is anchored in the calls made by Gonçalves et al. (2017) regarding the need to discuss the place of culture in occupational therapy. Castro et al. (2014) also invite us to dialogue about cultural expressions in relation to occupational therapy practices and foundations, strengthening local and global debates and avoiding generalizations in the profession. Likewise, the focus on Latin American realities arises from the need to foster discussions that move beyond the Anglophone context (Magalhães, 2013), illuminating rich, diverse, and polysemic occupational therapies from the Global South (Coelho et al., 2024; Morán & Ulloa, 2016; Silva et al., 2019a). Given this scenario, this scoping review aims to map and analyze the scientific production of occupational therapists and occupational scientists regarding the interface between culture and human occupation in Latin America.

Method

This scoping review followed the methodological criteria recommended by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) (Peters et al., 2020) and the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco et al., 2018). The review protocol was registered in the Open Science Framework (OSF) (Open Science Framework, 2023), and published in Coelho et al. (2024).

The review was conducted in six stages recommended by the JBI: 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria; 2. Search strategy; 3. Selection of sources of evidence; 4. Data extraction; 5. Data analysis and presentation of results; 6. Final considerations.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The Population, Concept, and Context (PCC) strategy was adopted for the inclusion of sources of evidence (Peters et al., 2020). For the Population, studies conducted by at least one occupational therapist or occupational scientist from Latin America were considered. Regarding the Concept, studies related to human occupations in interface with the field of culture were included. To this end, studies that explicitly addressed the cultural field, its theoretical frameworks, concepts, methodologies, or perspectives for the study of human occupations were considered. For the Context, studies exclusively addressing the Latin American reality were considered, whether practical or theoretical-methodological, with no time restriction, and published in English, Portuguese, or Spanish. The included studies had diverse methodological designs and were peer reviewed (Coelho et al., 2024). Studies unavailable in full text; studies that presented a relationship between human occupations and culture outside the Latin American reality; and studies in which there was not at least one occupational therapist or occupational scientist as an author were excluded, as were grey literature and literature reviews (Coelho et al., 2024).

In this study, the analytical focus falls on human occupations, understood as the set of everyday doings through which subjects and collectives organize their lives and produce meanings, while also being crossed by power dynamics (Angell, 2014). To broaden the sensitivity of the search for sources of evidence, descriptors referring to this dimension of human doing were used, such as Activities of Daily Living, Cultural Practice, and Cultural Activity, as made available in descriptor thesauri. Throughout the literature analyzed, different authors were found to mobilize varied terminologies to refer to this everyday doing as human activity. Thus, in this text, these expressions are understood as analytical approximations to the human doing that structures everyday life, although it is recognized that the topic still requires further development in the literature of the field.

Search strategies

After an initial scan of the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and Scopus databases (via the CAPES Journal Portal), to identify keywords and indexing terms frequently used in titles and abstracts (Coelho et al., 2024), a broad search strategy was developed with the assistance of a librarian from the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar).

The search strategy used descriptors in English, via Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), which were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR. The descriptor Latin America (MeSH) was not included in the search strategy to avoid restricting the identification of articles. However, verification of the Latin American context was conducted in later stages of the review, according to the guidelines of the PCC strategy.

In September 2024, the following search strategy formula was applied: (“Occupational Therapy” OR “Occupational Therapist” OR “Occupational Science” OR “Occupational Scientist” OR “Activities of Daily Living” AND Culture OR “Cultural Practice” OR “Cultural Activity”), considering the systems of the following databases: Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS), via the Virtual Health Library (VHL), SciELO, Scopus, and Web of Science, via the CAPES Journal Portal. The result of each search was imported into the Mendeley Desktop reference manager (version 1.19.4) for organization, duplicate removal, and identification.

In each database, a filter system corresponding to the guidelines of the PCC strategy was applied. In LILACS, results were filtered by language; in SciELO, by article and language; in Scopus, by article and language; and in Web of Science, by article, language, and open access. The results of the sources, after application of the filters, are presented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1), corresponding to a total of 3,591 sources of evidence. After importing the sources into Mendeley Desktop (version 1.19.4), 931 duplicates were removed.

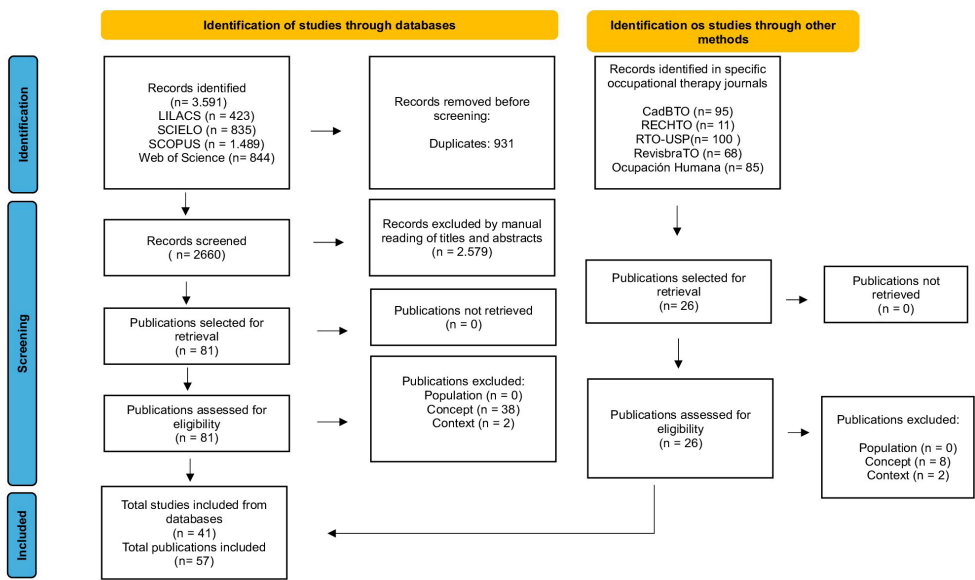


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram and process for selecting sources of evidence.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025), based on Page et al. (2021).

Selection of sources of evidence

According to the procedures predefined by Coelho et al. (2024), the selection of sources of evidence was conducted in three stages by two independent reviewers. In each stage, the following procedures were performed:

First stage: The reviewers analyzed 2,660 references by reading titles and abstracts, considering the eligibility criteria of the PCC strategy. The included and excluded articles, as well as the justifications for inclusion and exclusion, were imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, version 2402. Articles were included by simple majority; however, in some manuscripts, there were disagreements that were resolved by consensus and/or by the decision of a third reviewer. In the end, 2,579 studies were excluded according to the criteria defined by the PCC strategy.

Second stage: The included studies were retrieved and read in full, resulting in 81 sources of evidence. According to the PCC strategy criteria, 38 sources were excluded because of inadequacy regarding the Concept and two regarding the Context. Based on the search strategy applied to the four databases, 41 studies were included in the review (Figure 1).

Third stage: In March 2025, a second search was conducted in five specific occupational therapy journals in Latin America: *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional* (CadBTO), *Revista Chilena de Terapia Ocupacional* (RECHTO), *Revista de Terapia Ocupacional da Universidade de São Paulo* (RTO-USP), *Revista Interinstitucional Brasileira de Terapia Ocupacional* (RevisbraTO), and *Revista Ocupación Humana* (Ocupación Humana, Colombia). The selection of the five journals in the scoping review was based on their relevance in the field of Latin American occupational therapy. The choice is justified not only by the volume of indexed publications, but above all by the centrality they occupy in the construction of knowledge and practices that have historically dialogued with the field of culture.

According to the guidelines of Coelho et al. (2024), the descriptor “Culture” was applied in each journal via the Thesaurus of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to identify new evidence that had not been identified in the databases. The isolated application of the descriptor “Culture” was conducted because of the greater reach of sources of evidence (Coelho et al., 2024).

At this stage, 359 sources of evidence were identified, as follows: CadBTO (95), RECHTO (11), RTO-USP (100), RevisbraTO (68), and Ocupación Humana (85). The evidence was added to Mendeley Desktop (version 1.19.4) using the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) or by manually adding the complete reference. Titles and abstracts were read according to the criteria of the PCC strategy, from which 26 sources were identified and retrieved. After full-text reading, 10 sources were excluded, eight according to the Concept criteria and two according to the Context criteria, resulting in 16 potentially included sources. Thus, the review includes a total of 57 publications, which are presented in Table 1.

This literature scoping review identified the sources of evidence that the descriptors, databases, and identification systems of each specific occupational therapy journal in Latin America enabled the review to reach. Therefore, considering the limits of the indexing systems, the results may not represent the totality of studies published on the phenomenon under investigation.

Results

Of the included studies (Table 1), the following were considered analytical lenses for data extraction: country of origin, year of publication, journal, study design, main theoretical foundations, and interpretive synthesis of the studies.

Table 1. Presentation of the included references.

No.	Journal	Citation
1	CadBTO	Barros et al. (2013); Galvanese et al. (2014);
		Takeiti & Vicentin (2016); Silva et al. (2016, 2018b, 2019b, 2022b);
		Castro et al. (2016); Correia & Rocha (2016);
		Dorneles & Lopes (2016); Liberman & Maximino (2016); Gonçalves (2016);
		Sato & Barros (2016); Macedo et al. (2016); Alves et al. (2016);
		Galvani et al. (2016); Valent & Castro (2016); Bardi et al. (2016);
		Prado et al. (2020); Souza et al. (2021); Bezerra & Alves (2022);
		Lavacca & Silva (2023); Perilla & Magalhães (2024); Perilla et al. (2021);
		Silvestrini et al. (2019); Coelho & Magalhães (2023); Gomes & Emmel (2016);
		Brito & Santiago (2009); Franco (2003); Alvarenga & Costa (2016).

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

Table 1. Continued...

No.	Journal	Citation
2	RTO-USP	Brunello (1991); Maluf et al. (2009); Coutinho et al. (2009); Castro et al. (2009, 2011); Lima et al. (2009); Batista & Lima (2023); Silva et al. (2018a, 2022a); Castro & Silva (2007).
3	RevisbraTO	Antil-Arévalo et al. (2023); Gonçalves et al. (2017); Carvalho et al. (2025); Brega et al. (2025); Dantas & Ferigato (2025); Romano et al. (2025); Cordeiro et al. (2021); Queiroz et al. (2024).
4	RECHTO	Jong et al. (2010); Muñoz et al. (2014); Silva et al. (2021); Carvalho & Dorneles (2019).
5	Ocupación Humana	Silva et al (2020); Tolvett (2016).
6	Estilos da Clínica	Takatori et al. (2007).
7	Interface (Botucatu)	Angeli (2021)
8	Saúde e Sociedade	Alves et al. (2024).

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

Regarding the country of publication, 51 studies were published in Brazil, three in Colombia, and three in Chile. Regarding the year of publication (Figure 2), 2016 stands out, with 16 publications, followed by 2021 (6) and 2009 (5), with the first publication included in this review dating from 1991.

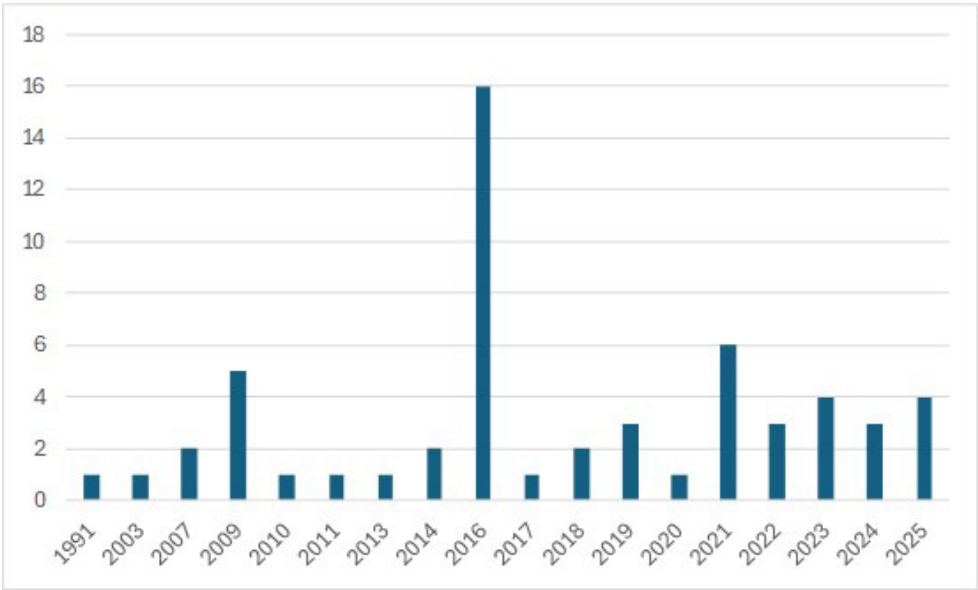


Figure 2. Number of articles by year of publication.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

Most studies were published in specific occupational therapy journals, namely CadBTO (30), RTO-USP (10), RevisbraTO (8), RECHTO (4), and Ocupación Humana (2). In journals outside the field, texts were found in Estilos da Clínica: Revista sobre a infância com problemas, Revista Interface (Botucatu), and Revista Saúde e Sociedade, with one study each.

Regarding study design, three major units were identified: 1. Experience reports (25); 2. Qualitative studies (19); 3. Theoretical-reflective essays (10). Also noteworthy are one mixed-methods study, one descriptive-exploratory quantitative study, and another with an unspecified design. The qualitative studies were subdivided into different types and/or research methods: Case study; Exploratory; Descriptive-exploratory; Exploratory and case study; Life history; Action research; Narrative; Ethnographic; Documentary; Descriptive-documentary; Community-based; and Cartographic.

A plurality of theoretical frameworks was identified, specifically to inform the interface between culture and occupational therapy, whether to demarcate culture, describe a subject, group, or object of study/intervention, or characterize intervention objectives and/or strategies. Thus, three major theoretical axes became evident:

1. Normative and institutional instruments: The authors use formal, official, and institutional documents as theoretical parameters. These include UNESCO guidelines on culture; the National Culture Policy; the Universal Forum of Cultures; as well as Brazilian laws, decrees, and regulations on culture.
2. Arts and Humanities: The authors use sources from academic disciplines such as Anthropology, Education/Critical Pedagogy, Philosophy, History, and Sociology, as well as fields of study such as contemporary art, corporeality, cultural studies, Afro-Brazilian culture studies, Indigenous studies, decolonial/postcolonial studies, and epistemologies of the South.
3. Knowledge in occupational therapy and occupational science: In the analyzed studies, a body of knowledge specific to occupational therapy and occupational science was identified, considering its approximation to specific disciplines or fields of study. These include critical occupational science, occupational therapy and artistic compositions, critical/Southern occupational therapy, occupational therapy and culture, social occupational therapy, occupational therapy and community issues, and Afro-referenced occupational therapy.

In the thematic analysis of the studies (Braun & Clarke, 2021), through which data extraction, the construction of initial codes, and the organization of themes on the focus of the review were performed, four specific thematic categories were identified, bringing together the current scope of knowledge on the interface between culture and occupational therapy:

1. Culture as an interpretive and situated lens;
2. Culture as an intervention strategy;
3. Culture as a field of practice;
4. Culture as an ethical-aesthetic-political commitment.

In thematic category **1**, titled **Culture as an interpretive and situated lens**, different matrices of knowledge about and based on culture and cultural studies are mobilized as an analytical resource to deepen the understanding of human activities, occupations, and doings in their specific contexts. This perspective enables the recognition of subjects in their actions in a situated manner, valuing the plurality and diversity that traverse their experiences.

Regarding thematic category **2**, **Culture as an intervention strategy**, culture is activated as a guiding axis of occupational-therapeutic practice through the incorporation of resources, strategies, and symbolic elements of artistic and cultural expression. These elements may be mobilized both as a means and as an end of interventions, considering the specificities, contexts, and singularities of the subjects receiving care.

With regard to thematic category 3, **Culture as a field of practice**, professional practices of occupational therapists are observed within cultural facilities, expanding their field beyond spaces traditionally linked to the profession. In this context, culture is understood as a legitimate space for practice, and occupational-therapeutic practices may operate in dialogue with the technical language and specific objectives of the cultural field and of the facilities in which they are inserted, articulating forms of knowledge and strategies in a situated manner, in accordance with the specificities of the subjects and contexts.

Thematic category 4, **Culture as an ethical-aesthetic-political commitment**, is configured as a guiding principle that traverses and grounds the positionality of occupational therapists and their practices, directing ways of understanding, acting, and producing care. From this perspective, this category is anchored in the recognition of diversity, the valuing of sensitive and situated practices, and the commitment to ensuring rights, especially in contexts marked by social inequalities.

Discussion

Overview of Latin American production

In this review, the scientific production on culture and occupational therapy highlights three Latin American countries: Brazil, Colombia, and Chile. This prominence may be related to the publication dynamics of the main journals of the profession in the region, influenced by linguistic, economic, and political factors. Among these factors, inequalities in research funding, the concentration of specific graduate programs in occupational therapy in Brazil, and the different levels of institutionalization of the profession across countries in the region stand out. In addition, these countries lead the number of undergraduate occupational therapy programs, which contributes to strengthening professional training and developing occupational science in the region.

Cruz et al. (2019) emphasize that Latin American journals specific to occupational therapy publish in Portuguese, English, and Spanish and keep studies in open access, which may represent an attractive factor for publications in the field. It is worth recalling that the focus on demands beyond the biomedical sphere in Latin American occupational therapies has been prevalent since at least the late 1970s (Malfitano, 2005), which may explain the focus and scope of the journals, attentive to the realities of the regions they reach. In the Brazilian context, Oliver (2008) highlights the body of literature in occupational therapy, particularly those studies that go beyond the realm of health. Vinzón et al. (2020) identify other forms of knowledge production valued by Latin American occupational therapists, such as community practices. This information serves as a lens for understanding the increase in occupational therapy research in Latin America (Cruz et al., 2019).

Over the years, the panorama of publications on occupational therapy and culture has shown an oscillating pattern. Although the first article found in this review dates from 1991 (Brunello, 1991), a more significant number of studies in this field was found only more than 10 years later. The thematic dossier proposed by *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional* (vol. 24, no. 1, 2016), titled “culture and diversity,” which aimed to “[...] disseminate qualified texts, present practices and reflections, and promote dialogue on culture, diversity, and cultural diversity, from the perspective of occupational therapy [...]” (Dorneles et al., 2016, p. 1), may have influenced this renewed attention to the theme. The proposal for the dossier may have originated in reflections focused on

identity-related aspects of human experience, emerging at the time, in which cultural processes became fundamental to claiming the citizenship and diversity constantly denied to countless subjects in the postmodern world. In occupational therapies that use elements of art and culture, this began to be signaled in enabling or social support proposals (Dorneles et al., 2016; Lavacca & Silva, 2023).

Most studies presented research designs anchored in experience reports, qualitative approaches, based on diverse methodological compositions, and theoretical-reflective essays. Thinking about culture and occupational therapy may shift attention toward paths more attentive to the experience of lived life, in which metric parameters of quantitative approaches (Minayo, 2006), for example, may not be so relevant. In qualitative approaches, the focus is on attributed meanings. Participants' narratives and observation of their reality, for example, are privileged. The studies examined may not be concerned with meeting the logics of the pyramid of scientific evidence (Evans, 2003), but rather with the meanings and complexities that shape human experience. The studies demonstrate a situated production of knowledge (Haraway, 1995), illuminating diverse forms of knowledge and perspectives aligned with Global South perspectives (Silva et al., 2019a).

For Daltro & Faria (2019), the experience reports frequent in the material studied emerge as a creative possibility for scientific dissemination, based on the production of subjectivities and breaking with generalist and Cartesian logics. For these authors, the knowledge produced by experience reports is generated through processes in which the subjects involved are active and relational. Reports may therefore be conceived as a means of expanding and encouraging the production of knowledge.

In turn, according to Souza Filho et al. (2022), theoretical essays or reports may function as sources capable of illuminating the scope of a phenomenon and/or guiding scientific construction. These essays seek to avoid the mechanized and exhaustive repetition of authors and frameworks, becoming a true interpretive lens for diverse or specific ways of viewing social phenomena.

The review data revealed experiences attentive to diverse demands that traverse people's lives, in which knowledge in occupational therapy is produced at a certain distance from scientific neutrality, based on interpretive frameworks that enable critical readings of reality (Galheigo, 2023; Silvestrini et al., 2019).

The plurality of theoretical frameworks found in the review may be considered encouraging, as it identifies a living, active field of knowledge attentive to the problems that traverse it. This scenario dialogues with what Galheigo et al. (2018) called movements of knowledge production in Brazilian occupational therapy, by recognizing that this construction, although it presents synchronicities and consonances, results from diverse and weakly articulated processes, as well as from previously constituted conceptions and practices.

Theoretical plurality evidences concerns about the power dynamics that traverse human occupations. Gender, class, race, old age, disability, and territory influence how groups participate, or do not participate, in occupations. These analyses dialogue with the Social Paradigm of Occupation (Jara, 2018) and with Community Practices in occupational therapy (Oyarzún et al., 2012).

This review also aligns with Lavacca & Silva (2023) in understanding that developments on culture and occupational therapy are more closely aligned with the 3rd movement of theoretical-methodological perspectives and theoretical-practical frameworks of the profession in Brazil (from 1956 to 2017), as outlined by Galheigo et al. (2018).

Regarding the third movement, Lavacca & Silva (2023, pp. 729-730) highlight the “[...] construction and consolidation of the fields of research, knowledge, and practices of occupational therapy in Brazil, toward the proposition of emancipatory practices [...]”. Thus, occupational therapy is guided by practices that favor processes of citizenship, the guarantee of rights, and the inclusion of historically assisted people and groups, corroborating the scenario identified in the review data.

Culture as an interpretive lens

The relationship between occupational therapy and culture in Latin American realities goes beyond an instrumental or illustrative understanding of culture. Culture as an interpretive lens brings together studies that mobilize culture as an analytical framework to understand human occupations, activities, and doings in specific sociocultural contexts. In these studies, culture functions as a constitutive element of everyday practices, based on cultural matrices that shape subjects and their relationships with the social world (Brunello, 1991; Correia & Rocha, 2016; Jong et al., 2010; Muñoz et al., 2014; Takatori et al., 2007; Tolvett, 2016), with emphasis on the immigrant population (Bezerra & Alves, 2022; Sato & Barros, 2016); Indigenous peoples (Antil-Arévalo et al., 2023; Perilla & Magalhães, 2024; Perilla et al., 2021); youth (Gonçalves et al., 2017; Prado et al., 2020); childhood and religiosity (Cordeiro et al., 2021); and phenomena of popular culture (Batista & Lima, 2023; Coelho & Magalhães, 2023; Silva et al., 2022a; Souza et al., 2021).

In the articles examined, culture appears as a structuring dimension of human occupations and, simultaneously, as a terrain of political, symbolic, and epistemological dispute. The review highlights non-hegemonic perspectives of professional knowledge/practice, linked, for example, to popular, community, territorial, Afro-diasporic, and Indigenous forms of knowledge (Macedo et al., 2016; Perilla et al., 2021; Souza et al., 2021).

Culture as an intervention strategy

The inclusion of non-hegemonic forms of knowledge broadens the perspectives of occupational therapy, questioning power structures that have historically defined which practices are considered legitimate. In the review, Latin American occupational therapists challenge these boundaries by valuing community practices, Global South epistemologies, and ways of living marginalized by hegemonic discourses (Alvarenga & Costa, 2016; Alves et al., 2016; Alves et al., 2024; Angeli, 2021; Bardi et al., 2016; Barros et al., 2013; Brega et al., 2025; Brito & Santiago, 2009; Carvalho & Dorneles, 2019; Carvalho et al., 2025; Castro & Silva, 2007; Castro et al., 2009; Castro et al., 2011; Coutinho et al., 2009; Dantas & Ferigato, 2025; Franco, 2003; Galvanese et al., 2014; Galvani et al., 2016; Gonçalves, 2016; Liberman & Maximino, 2016; Lima et al., 2009; Macedo et al., 2016; Maluf et al., 2009; Queiroz et al., 2024; Romano et al., 2025; Silva et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2019b, 2020, 2021; Valent & Castro, 2016).

In this thematic category, culture appears not only as an analytical element of occupations, but also as a resource mobilized by occupational therapists, guiding intervention strategies that dialogue with cultural expressions, ways of life, and symbolic repertoires of the subjects and collectives with whom they work. Examples of the use of cultural practices include: frevo in the rehabilitation of children affected by the Zika virus (Silva et al., 2019b); capoeira as an Afro-referenced care strategy for people who misuse psychoactive substances (Alves et al., 2024); and the use of visual arts, bodily, and cultural activities aimed at the sociocultural participation of people in situations of social vulnerability (Castro et al., 2011).

This scenario shows that culture can operate simultaneously as an emancipatory resource and as a field of dispute between different cosmologies. In this case, different cosmologies function as different fields of knowledge that support care productions capable of addressing occupational demands in a situated manner.

Thus, occupational therapy ceases to operate only as rehabilitation and begins to operate as a political device (Prado et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2016) for affirming identities (Alves et al., 2016; Muñoz et al., 2014), strengthening collectivities (Brega et al., 2025; Silva et al., 2022b), and defending cultural rights (Carvalho & Dorneles, 2019; Gonçalves, 2016), revealing potentially transformative strategies for participation in social life (Lavacca & Silva, 2023; Silvestrini et al., 2019).

Culture as a field of practice

In this thematic category, culture appears as a field of professional practice characterized by the insertion of occupational-therapeutic practices into cultural facilities, such as museums, cultural centers, and toy libraries, as well as into projects aimed at preserving and valuing cultural expressions (Alvarenga & Costa, 2016; Barros et al., 2013; Carvalho & Dorneles, 2019; Carvalho et al., 2025; Castro et al., 2016; Dorneles & Lopes, 2016; Franco, 2003; Gomes & Emmel, 2016; Lavacca & Silva, 2023; Macedo et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2016, 2018b, 2021; Takeiti & Vicentin, 2016).

The analyzed studies indicate that this insertion occurs predominantly through university-based initiatives, especially teaching, research, and/or outreach projects developed by occupational therapy faculty and students. In this case, the university appears as a promoter of experiences that articulate professional practices with care facilities and initiatives. However, the presence of professionals in these spaces suggests incipient arrangements in the institutional sphere and in the labor market, as the formal hiring of occupational therapists for permanent practice in cultural facilities is not common, according to the analyzed studies. This scenario also dialogues with the fragility of investment in public cultural policies, with strengthened agendas for expanding the professional staff (Rubim, 2022). Among the analyzed studies, the experience described by Franco (2003) on the construction of a playful space stands out, aiming to value cultural practices of play in an Amazonian context.

This scenario suggests that the insertion of occupational therapists into cultural facilities is still configured as an emerging field of practice, marked by specific experiences and frequently linked to academic projects.

Culture as an ethical-aesthetic-political commitment

Culture, as an ethical, aesthetic, and political commitment, is not restricted to a field of practice or an intervention resource, but constitutes a guiding principle for ways of understanding, acting, and producing care. Thus, the experiences described show that recognizing the cultural expressions of the subjects and collectives assisted implies assuming ethical commitments to valuing diversity, aesthetic commitments to sensitive ways of producing life, and political commitments to defending rights and transforming social inequalities (Castro et al., 2016; Lavacca & Silva, 2023; Silvestrini et al., 2019; Takeiti & Vicentin, 2016).

In the studies, the ethical dimension suggests responsibility toward concrete lives marked by restrictive dynamics that have historically forged silencing (Coelho & Magalhães, 2023; Souza et al., 2021). It is therefore ethical because it implies recognizing the other in their dignity, singularity, and specific ways of signifying their marks in the world.

The aesthetic dimension appears as a field of creation and alignment with sensitive practices capable of shifting experiences hardened by power relations, favoring new arrangements for life. Artistic tools have therefore been widely used in this process. Thus, the focus on ancestral and affective memories, the valuing of specific doings and perspectives, as well as cultural and community participation and production, are framed as technologies in occupational therapy (Lima et al., 2009; Silva et al., 2019b).

The political dimension shows that occupational therapy practices are embedded in power relations and produce effects. This requires a professional position in the face of inequalities, oppressions, and forms of invisibilization of subjects and everyday occupations (Barros et al., 2013; Valent & Castro, 2016).

Regarding the effects of these dimensions, Lima (2003) pointed to ways of doing in occupational therapy that invert the logic of docilization, a commitment between occupational therapists and subjects who occupy marginal positions in society. Silvestrini et al. (2019) note that the interface between occupational therapy and culture should assume an ethical-political commitment aligned with the precepts of human rights, citizenship, diversity, and social participation, which corroborates the direction of the dimensions presented. Other authors highlight the need for an ethical-aesthetic-political position in the processes of knowledge/practice in occupational therapy, aligned with the real needs of subjects who have been historically marginalized or restricted to closed institutions, aiming at participation, coexistence, and subjectivity (Castro et al., 2016), as well as the achievement of human rights, diversity, and citizenship (Silvestrini et al., 2019; Takeiti & Vicentin, 2016).

These dialogues point to paths of re-existence in this interface, resisting practices and discourses that limit ways of living and produce erasures. At the same time, they affirm forms of life that create alternatives, strengthen identities, and sustain dignified practices, within a field of forces that denies what reduces life and affirms what enables living.

The reflections developed thus far also enable approximations with productions from other contexts. Although this review focuses on Latin American studies, dialogues with foreign literature are important. Critical occupational scientists have produced studies on occupations, culture, and lives marked by processes of resistance. Pyatak & Muccitelli (2011) affirm that U.S. rap music is configured as a resistive occupation by affirming Black identities and aesthetics in a context that has historically delegitimized these cultural practices. Ramirez et al. (2022) indicate that the Indigenous Filipino tattoo batok has been affected by stigmatization as a colonial legacy, so that tattooing and being tattooed become practices of cultural resistance against the attribution of derogatory meanings, which contradict the meanings employed by Indigenous peoples. Simaan (2017) points to Palestinian olive farming practices as everyday forms of resistance that directly confront colonial forces attempting to interrupt the territorial and cultural continuity of the Palestinian people. These studies argue that certain occupations not only express cultural practices, but also become paths of confrontation and affirmation.

The review indicates that culturally situated practice requires recognizing asymmetries, problematizing dominant narratives, and sustaining practices that value historically subalternized forms of knowledge. Decolonizing practices imply creating spaces for the subjects assisted themselves to produce meaning and express their experiences based on their cultural references. The review reinforces the need to expand Latin American investigations on this interface and strengthen a plural occupational therapy committed to social justice, cultural participation, and the transformation of inequalities.

Final Considerations

Despite the effort undertaken by the authors, this study has some limitations. First, the focus on the term human occupation restricted the scope of the analysis, as other notions mobilized by occupational therapists and occupational scientists to understand the interface between occupational therapy and culture, such as everyday life and ways of life, were not considered and could offer new interpretive contours to the theme.

Second, there was an almost exclusive emphasis on specific occupational therapy journals in Latin America, which may have limited the identification of productions published in interdisciplinary journals or journals from related fields. In addition, the manual identification of other sources of evidence, based on the cross-references of the included studies, may not have guaranteed the exhaustiveness of the survey. Other limitations include the restriction of the search to English, Portuguese, and Spanish, which may have limited access to productions published in other languages, as well as the exclusive inclusion of evidence published in the form of scientific articles, reducing the scope of the sources analyzed.

Even so, the findings of this review make it possible to affirm that the interface between culture and occupational therapy in the Latin American context is configured as an expanding field of knowledge production, marked by theoretical, methodological, and political plurality. Far from occupying a peripheral place, culture emerges as a constitutive dimension of human occupations and as a fundamental analytical, practical, and ethical-political axis for understanding the experiences of subjects and collectives in their territories and ways of life. In this sense, the review shows that thinking about culture in occupational therapy implies shifting universalizing perspectives and recognizing that processes of care, participation, and production of everyday life are traversed by power relations, symbolic disputes, and historically situated conditions.

At the same time, the predominance of publications from Brazil, Colombia, and Chile reveals not only the centrality of these countries in consolidating the regional debate, but also the asymmetries that traverse Latin American scientific production, especially with regard to research funding, the institutionalization of the profession, and the concentration of graduate programs. This scenario indicates that the visibility of the field does not derive exclusively from its intellectual vitality, but also from the material and institutional conditions that enable the circulation of certain productions to the detriment of others.

The review also makes it possible to recognize that culture, in occupational therapy, goes beyond its use as an instrumental or complementary resource, affirming itself as the foundation of practices committed to valuing diversity, legitimizing non-hegemonic forms of knowledge, and expanding possibilities of existence, participation, and citizenship. The analyzed experiences point to the construction of an occupational therapy that is culturally situated and sensitive to the marks of gender, race, class, disability, generation, and territory, in dialogue with critical and decolonizing perspectives that challenge dominant epistemologies and claim other ways of producing knowledge and care.

Finally, this review reinforces the importance of deepening and expanding Latin American investigations on the interface between culture and occupational therapy, both with regard to the diversity of contexts and countries contemplated and to the theoretical-methodological strengthening of the field. This involves sustaining a research and practice agenda committed to social justice, cultural rights, and the transformation of inequalities, capable of affirming a plural and critical occupational therapy that is ethically implicated in the ways of life and resistance produced in Latin American territories.

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Author's Contributions

Flávia dos Santos Coelho, Bianca Casseb Medeiros, Amanda dos Santos Pereira and Camille Cássia Carvalho da Silva were responsible for the study design, organization and analysis of the sources, writing, and final revision of the manuscript. Lilian Magalhães was responsible for the research supervision, writing, and final revision of the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the text.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

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