

Beyond Spanish: Exploring Multilingualism in the Classroom.

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Abstract: This descriptive study, carried out in public educational institutions in Tuluá, Colombia, aimed to analyse the degree of multilingualism in primary and secondary school students. Using a mixed approach, quantitative and qualitative data were collected to characterise linguistic diversity and attitudes towards multilingualism.

Objectives: To analyse the degree of multilingualism in children and adolescents attending public schools in the municipality of Tuluá

Method: The research analyses multilingualism in children and adolescents in Tuluá through a descriptive cross-sectional design. It was approached methodologically from a socio-critical and mixed perspective. A 43-question questionnaire was used to demographically characterise the students and to evaluate language use. A total of 3,791 students from 12 institutions were surveyed, guaranteeing validity and representativeness. The analysis was carried out with quantitative and qualitative tools, using Power BI and Excel for data processing.

Results: The results revealed that, although Spanish is the predominant mother tongue, linguistic diversity is limited and manifested mainly through indigenous languages, which provides opportunities to promote intercultural education or ethno-education. In addition, the presence of foreign languages and a positive attitude towards the learning and use of multiple languages among students were observed. These findings emphasise the need to implement pedagogical strategies that foster interest in linguistic and cultural diversity in the educational sphere, contributing to a more inclusive education that guarantees the preservation of native languages and their ancestral knowledge, as well as access to information through foreign languages. It also highlights the relevance of designing educational policies that recognise and promote the use of multiple languages in the classroom, enriching learning and preparing students for an increasingly globalised world.

Keywords: Multilingualism, education, linguistic diversity, educational inclusion

1. Introduction

This paper addresses the need to recognize that Colombia is a multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural country, with a wealth that is evident in both its biological and linguistic diversity, in which it is possible to find 65 indigenous languages. Likewise, there are 2 Creole languages, which are Palenquero from San Basilio and Creole, native to the islands of San Andrés and Providencia. These languages, together with the Romaní or Romaníes language of the Rom or Gypsy people, Colombian sign language and Spanish, as the dominant language, make up the 70 languages found in the national territory and denote the wide linguistic variety of the country (Ministry of Culture of Colombia, 2018). Additionally, the continuous migration phenomenon causes many families to settle in other countries with languages other than Spanish, later returning having learned other languages. Due to the above, it makes it possible for bilingualism and multilingualism to occur in some environments, linguistic phenomena common in many

regions, especially in areas where indigenous languages are spoken or places where foreign families or Colombian families from other countries have settled and use other languages.

Multilingualism is a concept that has become common today, due to globalization and population mobility. It refers to the ability of a person, community or society to communicate effectively in two or more languages, both in understanding and production. This ability transcends linguistic and cultural borders, manifesting itself in diverse social and geographical contexts. As Crystal (2013) points out, multilingualism is a complex phenomenon that influences and is influenced by social, historical and cultural factors. This phenomenon focuses on how different languages coexist and relate in an increasingly interconnected world. Likewise, the role of multilingualism in global communication and in the construction of individual and collective identities is discussed. With respect to multilingualism, it is important to value and respect

linguistic diversity, as well as promote multilingualism as an enriching resource for society.

Since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2020), multilingualism has been established within the programs of this organization, promoting educational inclusion through the education sector, making multilingualism play an important role in guaranteeing access to education for all people regardless of their race or culture. Taking this into consideration, it is important to mention that the Political Constitution establishes that the State recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian Nation and that it is the obligation of the State and the people to protect the cultural and natural riches of the Nation. (Political Constitution of Colombia, 1991). In this context, it is relevant to highlight Law 115 of 1994, known as the General Education Law of Colombia, which in its articles 55, 56, 57, 58 and 59 includes articles related to the guarantee of ethno-education. This establishes the obligation that the education of ethnic groups with their own linguistic tradition be bilingual, thus guaranteeing that these communities can receive education in their mother tongue along with Spanish. This legislation underlines the importance of bilingual education as a right and a necessity to maintain and promote linguistic and cultural diversity in the country.

Despite the existence of national regulations that promote the care and preservation of other languages in the Colombian territory, which makes multilingualism possible, it is necessary to mention that the state does not have a process to promote this phenomenon; since 2006 with the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference, only bilingualism is promoted; This is how the Ministry of National Education proposed the National Bilingualism Plan (2006), which has generated laws, plans and projects on bilingualism, where the promotion of the English language in public schools is prioritized, without neglecting the special educational needs of indigenous and tribal peoples (Congress of the Republic of Colombia, Law 1651, 2013). Unfortunately, in many contexts, such as in the case of Tuluá, this guideline is not specifically complied with, since priority is not given to ethnic groups and the few students recognized as indigenous attend educational institutions where classes are given in Spanish and English is taught as a foreign language, meaning that there are no qualified teachers in ethno-education. This

makes it difficult for students belonging to other ethnic groups to understand what their teacher says in Spanish.

The results of this study are expected to provide an insight into the degree of multilingualism in the student population of the public sector of the municipality of Tuluá, due to the presence of indigenous communities and migratory processes. In addition, it is expected that there will be a positive relationship between multilingualism and academic performance, as well as a favorable attitude towards linguistic diversity on the part of students.

This research uses a descriptive cross-sectional design. This is taking into account that, as Sekaran and Bougie (2016) point out, descriptive cross-sectional studies offer a snapshot of a population at a given time, revealing the prevalence of certain characteristics or conditions. In terms of approach, the research is mixed to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2013). The scope is descriptive. According to Hernández Sampieri et al. (2014), descriptive studies seek to provide a thorough characterization of a phenomenon, detailing its most relevant attributes and properties. The above is in line with the objective of understanding and describing the phenomenon of multilingualism in public educational institutions in the municipality of Tuluá.

The sample is made up of 3,791 students from different school grades in public educational institutions in Tuluá. This number of participants is equivalent to 18.55% of the universe, which corresponds to 20,429 students. The data collection instruments include documentary analysis and a questionnaire. The data obtained were analyzed using statistical techniques and content analysis.

In conclusion, this study is presented as a significant contribution to the field of education and sociolinguistics, by addressing the complex reality of multilingualism in the school context of Tuluá. The results obtained will allow a better understanding of the linguistic situation in the region and generate valuable information for decision-making in the educational and social spheres. This will allow a better understanding of the linguistic situation in the municipality and provide relevant information for the development of educational and cultural policies. This, given that basing a multilingual education on a mother tongue, especially of minority groups, such as

indigenous populations or speakers of non-predominant languages, ensures their access and inclusion to a better education, recognizing that language is more than a communication tool, it constitutes an innate and distinctive cognitive capacity of the human species, serving as a fundamental vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of experiences, traditions, knowledge and identity elements. (Giannini, 2024).

Research on multilingualism has revealed a variety of theoretical perspectives that enrich the understanding of this phenomenon, especially in educational contexts. In the review of the literature, a convergence has been observed towards a sociocultural vision of multilingualism, which considers it not only as the ability to speak multiple languages, but as a social and cultural phenomenon that develops in specific contexts. This is supported by studies such as that of Paulsrud et al. (2023), who investigated the attitudes of educators in Sweden towards multilingualism, found a more positive attitude among in-service teachers compared to teacher trainers. The need to address and challenge negative beliefs about multilingualism in teacher training is therefore evident.

Within this sociocultural perspective, the postulates of authors such as García (2009) and Cummins (1979) are aligned, who emphasize the influence of the social environment on the development of language skills. In this sense, multilingualism is considered a social resource for identity, inclusion and participation in diverse communities. However, other approaches, such as the cognitive one, have also been explored. For example, Parrish and Bailey (2024) examined the relationship between multilingualism and student motivation in language classrooms in England, suggesting that exposure to multiple languages can enhance motivation to learn.

Additionally, Carbonara (2023) used qualitative methodologies to investigate the evolution of linguistic awareness in children through the creation of “linguistic portraits.” This study, conducted in Italy, demonstrated that multilingual pedagogies can help students develop a deeper understanding of their linguistic repertoires. On the other hand, Krulatz et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of teacher professional development in the practice of multilingual teaching, indicating that this should be long-term and adapted to the individual characteristics of teachers.

In the Colombian context, research on multilingualism also aligns with international trends. A study by Rebolledo et al. (2017) found that translanguaging can be an effective pedagogical tool to develop literacy skills in bilingual students. Likewise, Arias-Ortiz et al. (2018) highlighted the relevance of recognizing and valuing heritage languages in the educational field. This diversity of methodological approaches enriches the understanding of multilingualism and allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon.

The research findings reflect a growing awareness of the importance of multilingualism in education. Studies such as those by Gartziaarena and Altuna (2022) and Krulatz et al. (2024) underline the need for ongoing training for teachers in this area. Furthermore, it is evident that the social and cultural context influences the development of multilingualism, as demonstrated by research by Paquet and Levasseur (2019) and Intke-Hernández (2023). A crucial aspect is to consider multilingualism as a resource for identity and social inclusion, as Siebenhütter (2023) explains.

The reviewed studies also highlight the importance of attitudes towards multilingualism. The results indicate a predominance of positive attitudes among students towards learning new languages, suggesting significant potential for the development of multilingual education programs in Tuluá. However, there is also a minority with negative or neutral attitudes, implying that there are still challenges that need to be overcome to foster a broader appreciation of linguistic diversity.

The analysis of linguistic diversity among students in Tuluá reveals a significant concentration in groups of 15 and 16 years, and a wide range of ages that suggests different linguistic experiences. The representation of students from different school grades, especially in the upper secondary levels, indicates that school programs to promote multilingualism are having an impact. However, it is crucial to implement strategies from the first years of schooling, given that early exposure to multiple languages favors cognitive development (García and Wei, 2014).

The distribution of languages spoken at home shows that Spanish is the predominant mother tongue, but the presence of other languages, such as English and indigenous languages, indicates a diversity that can enrich learning. The findings support Cummins' (2000)

claims about the value of bilingualism in cognitive and academic development.

Regarding participation in cultural activities, a moderate participation of students in them is observed. Although a significant percentage indicates their participation, there is clear room for improvement, which coincides with the research of García (2017) that advocates strengthening linguistic identity through cultural activities. The lack of participation may also reflect the need to strengthen school resources and programs that promote cultural diversity in schools.

To address these challenges, it is vital to develop educational policies that recognize and value linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as to train teachers in pedagogies that foster the learning of multiple languages. Collaboration with communities is essential to design programs that respond to the needs and interests of students, thereby promoting respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. This includes creating safe spaces where students can express their cultural identity without fear of being judged.

Finally, the triangulation of methods used in the research, which combines quantitative and qualitative data (Denzin, 1978), provides a more complete and accurate view of the phenomenon studied. The diversity of theoretical perspectives on multilingualism, together with empirical findings, emphasize the complexity of the topic and its importance in contemporary education. Educational institutions in Tuluá have the opportunity to take advantage of this linguistic diversity to enrich the curriculum and promote inclusion, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop multilingual skills and participate fully in an increasingly diverse society.

2. Methodology

The purpose of the research is to analyze the degree of multilingualism in children and adolescents enrolled in public educational institutions in the municipality of Tuluá. A descriptive cross-sectional research design is used, which, according to Hernández et al. (2014), is appropriate to explore phenomena at a specific time. This type of design, according to Babbie (2010), seeks to describe variables and examine their incidence, allowing a snapshot of multilingualism in Tuluá, according to Shaughnessy et al. (2009). To ensure the validity of the results, a representative sample was

selected following the guidelines of Kothari (2004). In addition, a mixed approach is adopted that combines quantitative and qualitative tools for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013; Martínez et al., 2022). The study has a descriptive scope, focused on understanding and characterizing the phenomenon of multilingualism in public educational institutions in Tuluá, without seeking causal relationships (Ramos-Galarza, 2020). In the first phase, the existing literature on multilingualism was reviewed to establish an analytical framework, using the meta-analysis methodology (Glass, 1970). This approach allows combining and synthesizing results from multiple studies to obtain more robust conclusions. Hedges (2010) highlights the importance of considering heterogeneity between studies, and Cooper (2009) emphasizes that meta-analysis identifies gaps in research and suggests new lines of study. This method allows for the extraction of relevant data and facilitates the interpretation of results, thus responding to the first objective of the research.

To characterize the students and obtain information about the languages spoken in Tuluá, a 43-question questionnaire divided into two sections was designed. The first part focuses on demographic characterization, which involves the collection and analysis of data on variables such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, educational level, occupation and family income, seeking to understand social composition and dynamics (Hernández et al., 2014). Kerlinger and Lee (2002) emphasize that an accurate description is essential to understand the complexity of social phenomena.

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on the use of languages and ethnic groups, characterizing linguistic and cultural diversity in educational institutions and assessing attitudes toward multilingualism. This aligns with the general and specific objectives of the research, which include the demographic characterization of schoolchildren, the identification of ethnic groups and the use of languages other than Spanish in Tuluá, as well as the degree of acceptance of multilingualism.

In this way, the analysis of multilingualism in public educational institutions in Tuluá is deepened, collecting quantitative information through the questionnaire applied to a representative sample of students. According to the Municipal Education Secretariat, in 2024 there were 20,429 students enrolled in 18 institutions and their respective

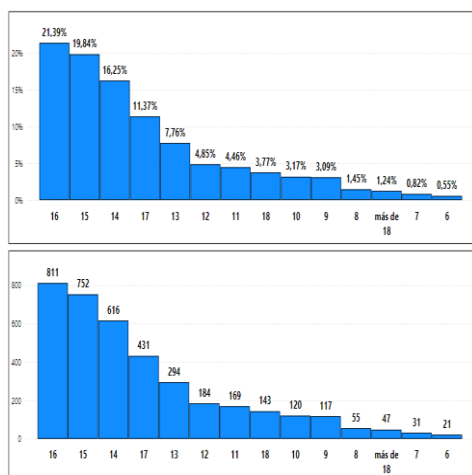
campuses. Twelve of these were selected, which had students from ethnic or foreign groups. To obtain a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, a minimum sample size of 378 students was established. In total, 3,791 surveys were conducted in 10 institutions and their different campuses, guaranteeing a rigorous study that serves as a reference for future research and policy proposals.

The research was developed in three phases: the first included the collection of bibliographic and documentary information that underpinned the theoretical framework (Salcedo et al., 2022; Martínez et al., 2024). The second phase consisted of the application of the survey to capture information on the characterization, use of other languages, and attitudes towards multilingualism. Finally, a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data collected was carried out, using Power BI software to process and visualize the information, and Excel for the analysis of documents and previous studies.

3. Results

Characterization:

Total participants: 3791. Please indicate how old are you?



The analysis of the data related to the age of the students surveyed in the sample reveals a varied distribution. The results obtained are the following:

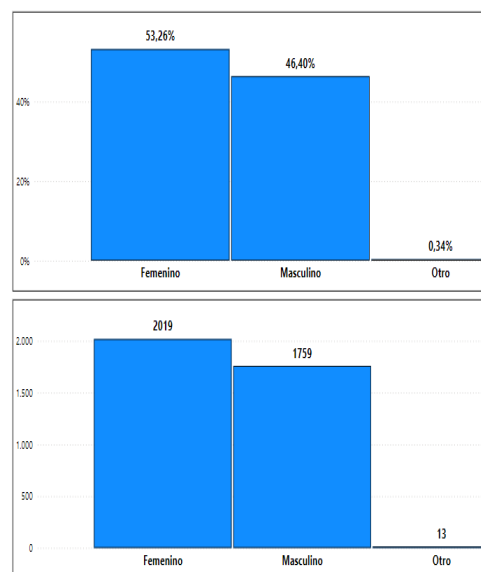
21.39% of the students (811) are 16 years old, 19.84% (752) are 15 years old, and 16.25% (616) are 14 years old. In addition, 11.37% (431) have reached 17, 7.76% (294) are 13, and 4.85% (184) are 12 years old. 4.46%

(169) are in their 11th year, 3.77% (143) are turning 18, 3.17% (120) are 10, and 3.09% (117) have turned 9. The youngest include 1.45% (55) aged 8, 1.24% (47) aged over 18, 0.82% (31) aged 7, and finally 0.55% (21) aged 6.

The above shows a predominant concentration at certain ages - a significant majority of students are grouped between the ages of 16, 15 and 14. This concentration may be relevant to understanding how students at these ages perceive and relate to multilingualism, as well as their language skills. There is also diversity in the distribution: Although the majority is concentrated in a few ages, the data also reveal a distribution across a broader range, from 6 years to over 18 years. This variability indicates the presence of a wide representation of students at different stages of development, which is crucial to characterize students demographically and understand their different experiences and exposures to multilingualism.

Therefore, less frequent ages were found, a small percentage of students are grouped between the ages of 7, 6 and over 18 years, which, although minimal, reflects the diversity and dispersion of the data in the sample. This may indicate specific areas where educational policies and linguistic inclusion strategies need to be strengthened.

What is your gender?



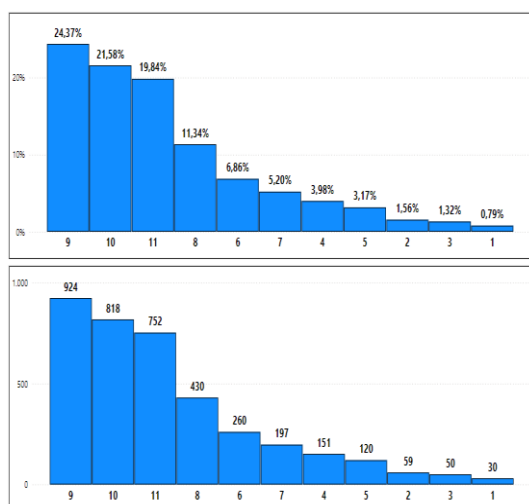
The analysis of the data related to the question “What is your gender?” reveals that the gender distribution in

the sample is varied. The results obtained are the following:

53.26% of the students (2,019) identified themselves as “Female”. 46.40% (1,759) identified themselves as “Male”. A minimum of 0.34% (13) identified themselves as “Other”.

The above shows a predominance of the female gender: These data show that a majority of the students identify themselves as “Female”. This indicator is relevant and suggests that there is a greater female representation in the sample. On the other hand, although the majority identify themselves as female, 46.40% of the students identify themselves as “Male”, which is also a significant representation. Finally, a small percentage (0.34%) of the students identify themselves as “Other”, which, although minimal, reflects the presence of gender diversity in the sample.

What grade are you currently in?

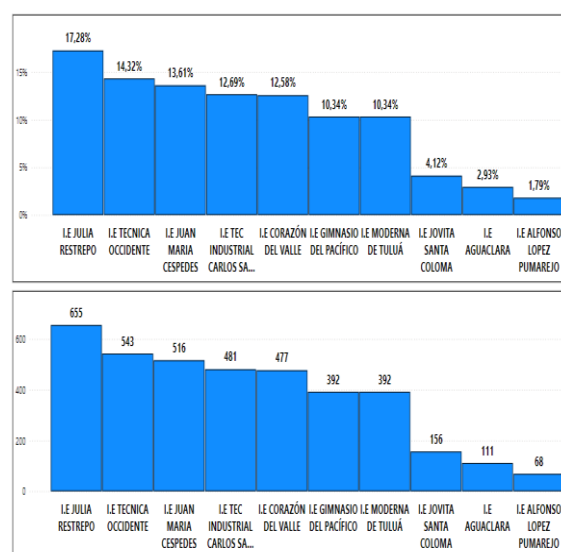


The analysis of the data related to the distribution of respondents by high school and primary school grades reveals an interesting perspective for the study. This is considering that this project aims to identify the theoretical perspectives of multilingualism, demographically characterize the students, determine the presence of ethnic groups and the use of languages other than Spanish, and establish the degree of acceptance of multilingualism in the public educational institutions of the municipality.

Based on the data collected, a concentration is evident in higher grades, particularly in grades 9 (24.37%, 924), 10 (21.58%, 818) and 11 (19.84%, 752). This

concentration may be relevant to understand how the most advanced levels of secondary education relate to perceptions and attitudes towards multilingualism, as well as the linguistic skills acquired in these grades and their possible contact with other languages. This distribution across the different grades, from primary to high school, provides a comprehensive and varied view of the educational landscape in Tuluá. Grades such as 8 (11.34%, 430), 7 (5.20%, 197), 6 (6.86%, 260), 5 (3.17%, 120), 4 (3.98%, 151), 3 (1.32%, 50), 2 (1.56%, 59) and 1 (0.79%, 30) are also represented. This diversity is crucial to characterize students demographically and to understand the different stages of development and exposure to multilingualism.

What is the name of the Educational Institution you study at (headquarters)?



The results show a diverse and representative participation of educational institutions in Tuluá. This diversity is essential for demographic analysis and the study of multilingualism, providing a deeper understanding of language attitudes and competencies in different educational contexts. This offers a solid basis for the development of inclusive and effective policies and programs that promote multilingualism in the municipality, contributing to social development and the preservation of the cultural and linguistic identity of the region.

Distribution by Educational Institution:

- I.E. Julia Restrepo: 17.28% (655 students)
- I.E. Técnica Occidente: 14.32% (543 students)
- I.E. Juan María Céspedes: 13.61% (516 students)

- I.E. Técnico Industrial Carlos Salazar: 12.69% (481 students)
- I.E. Corazón del Valle: 12.58% (477 students)
- I.E. Gimnasio del Pacífico: 10.34% (392 students)
- I.E. Moderna de Tuluá: 10.34% (392 students)
- I.E. Jovita Santa Coloma: 4.12% (156 students)
- I.E. Aguacalara: 2.93% (111 students)
- I.E. Alfonso López Pumarejo: 1.79% (68 students)

The diversity in the participating institutions ensures that the study addresses a broad representation of the student community in Tuluá. With the highest proportion of students coming from I.E. Julia Restrepo, I.E. Técnica Occidente and I.E. Juan María Céspedes, a significant coverage of perceptions and attitudes towards multilingualism in different educational contexts is ensured. The variation in participation of different institutions allows for the identification of specific needs and particular challenges in each educational context. This is vital to developing customized strategies that promote multilingualism, adapting to the unique characteristics of each institution. The high participation of institutions such as the I.E. Julia Restrepo and the I.E. Técnica Occidente provides a solid data base to influence the creation of public bilingualism policies in Tuluá. By having a robust representation of these institutions, the need for inclusive policies that favor the development and use of multiple languages can be more effectively argued.

Please indicate the location where you study

¿Cuál es el nombre de la Institución Educativa en la que estudia (sede)?	Por favor indique la sede en donde estudia.	Estudiantes Encuestados
I.E. JULIA RESTREPO	Sede Central	466
	Sede Santa Clara	149
	Sede Maria Luisa Roman	40
	Subtotal	655
I.E. JUAN MARIA CESPEDES	Sede La Graciela	276
	Sede Central	233
	La Graciela	5
	La Graciela Juan Maria de Cespedes	1
	sede central la graciela	1
	Subtotal	516
I.E. TEC INDUSTRIAL CARLOS SARMIENTO LORA	Sede Central	458
	Sede San Cayetano	23
	Subtotal	481
I.E. CORAZÓN DEL VALLE	Sede central - Tomás Uribe	264
	Sede Guillermo E. Martínez	150
	Sede José Antonio Galán	62
	Guillermo E. Martínez	1
	Subtotal	477
I.E. MODERNA DE TULUA	Sede Central	392
I.E. GIMNASIO DEL PACIFICO	Sede Central	250
	Sede Julia Becerra	141
	Julia Becerra	1
	Subtotal	392
I.E. AGUACLARA	Sede Luis Carlos Delgado	98
	Sede Pedro Carlos Ortiz	13
	Subtotal	111
I.E. TECNICA OCCIDENTE	Sede Central	543
I.E. MODERNA DE TULUA	Sede Central	392
I.E. JOVITA SANTA COLOMA	Sede Central	156
I.E. ALFONSO LOPEZ PUMAREJO	Sede Central	68
Total general		3791

The analysis shows that, in some institutions, the number of students surveyed was concentrated in their central campuses. This pattern underlines the importance of these campuses as key educational centres in the region, where a large part of the proposed interventions and strategies to improve multilingualism can be focused.

Educational institutions and their participation

1. I.E Julia Restrepo: The institution has a considerable participation with a total of 655 students surveyed distributed in the Central campus (466), Santa Clara (149) and María Luisa Román (40).

2. I.E Juan María Céspedes: It has a total of 516 students surveyed, with 276 in the La Graciela campus and 233 in the Central campus, in addition to other minor combinations.

3. I.E Técnica Industrial Carlos Sarmiento Lora: It has 481 students surveyed, the majority in the Central campus (458) and a minority in San Cayetano (23).

4. I.E Corazón del Valle: Has a total of 477 participants, with the Central headquarters - Tomás Uribe (264), Guillermo E. Martínez (150) and José Antonio Galán (62).

5. I.E Moderna de Tuluá: With 392 students surveyed at the Central headquarters.

6. I.E Gimnasio del Pacífico: Totals 392 participants, distributed in the Central headquarters (250) and Julia Becerra (142).

7. I.E Jovita Santa Coloma: Participates with 156 participants at the Central headquarters.

8. I.E Aguacalara: Has a total of 111 respondents, distributed between the Luis Carlos Delgado (98) and Pedro Carlos Ortiz (13) headquarters. The latter is a particularly important site, as it has a group of 21 indigenous students from the Emberá Chamí and Waunana (Wounaan) communities, who are studying different grades of basic primary education where the “New School” educational model is implemented, which according to the Ministry of National Education (n.d.) corresponds to a model that allows offering the five grades of basic primary education in multigrade schools with one, two or even three teachers, which emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional

education in rural and marginal contexts. It should be noted that the teacher is not an ethno-educator and provides traditional education.

9. I.E Alfonso López Pumarejo: It has 68 students surveyed at the Central site.

10. I.E Técnica Occidente: With 543 participants at the Central site.

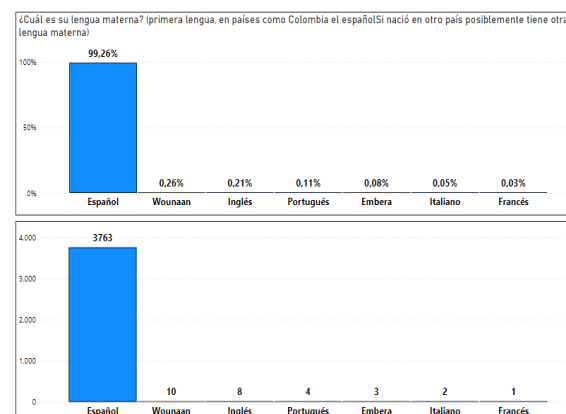
In total, 3,791 students were surveyed.

The participation of students from various institutions and campuses ensures a broad and diverse representation of the student population of Tuluá. This aspect is fundamental for the study, as it allows for a comprehensive view of multilingualism in the municipality. The inclusion of different institutions ensures that the results are not limited to a single perspective or context, which enriches the quality and depth of the analysis. Likewise, the distribution by campuses and the significant number of students surveyed allow for a detailed demographic characterization. This is crucial for identifying patterns and trends in the use and knowledge of languages, as well as in linguistic practices. With this information, specific and effective interventions can be designed that respond to the needs of different groups of students. In the institutions I.E Moderna de Tuluá, I.E Jovita Santa Coloma and I.E Técnica Occidente, the number of students surveyed was concentrated in their central campuses. This underlines the importance of these campuses as key educational centers in the region, where much of the interventions and strategies proposed to improve multilingualism can be focused. The analysis of the participating educational institutions and their distribution highlights the importance of having a broad and diverse sample for the study of multilingualism in Tuluá. This information is crucial to better understand the linguistic and cultural wealth of the region, and to promote policies and programs that foster the inclusion and integral development of its inhabitants. In addition, the proposed alternatives can further enrich the study, providing a more complete and detailed view of the linguistic situation in the municipality.

Use of Languages and Ethnic Groups (Aspects of multilingualism)

What is your mother tongue? (first language, in countries like Colombia Spanish. If you were born in

another country you possibly have another mother tongue).



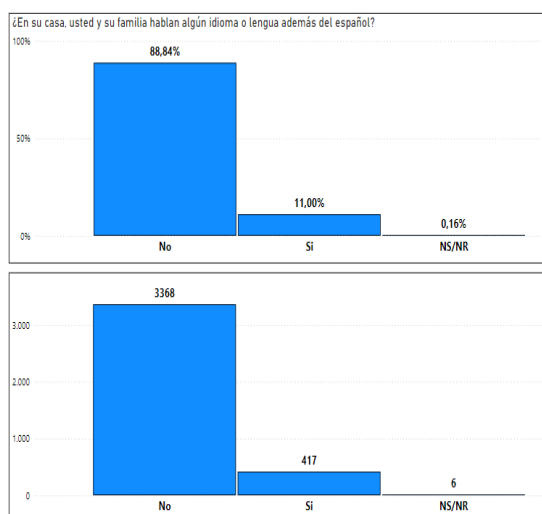
The analysis of the graph presented on the mother tongue of students in public educational institutions in the municipality of Tuluá highlights an absolute predominance of Spanish as the mother tongue. With 99.26% of students (3,763 individuals) indicating that Spanish is their first language, it is clear that multilingualism in this context is very limited. Only a small percentage of students report other mother tongues: Wounaan 10 (0.26%), English 8 (0.21%), Portuguese 4 (0.11%), Emberá (0.08%), Italian (0.05%) and French (0.03%).

These data are consistent with the Colombian sociolinguistic context, where Spanish is the predominant language. However, the presence of foreign and ethnic languages, although minimal, is significant to assess the cultural and linguistic diversity in the region. Wounaan, although a minority (0.26%), followed by Emberá (0.08%), reflect the presence of indigenous communities in the area. In this regard, it is important to mention that the Municipal Education Secretariat reported several educational institutions with locations in rural areas, in which there are significant numbers of indigenous people, who could not be surveyed due to difficult access due to their geographic location or security situation, because they are located in areas of armed conflict, such is the case of the Alto Rocío Educational Institution and the San Juan de Barragán Technical Educational Institution, which have 18 and 8 indigenous students, respectively.

Based on the data collected, this behavior suggests that the degree of multilingualism in public educational institutions in Tuluá is low, but it presents opportunities to incorporate pedagogical strategies that promote the teaching and appreciation of other

languages. In addition, the low percentage of students with native languages other than Spanish may be related to the low international migration of inhabitants of the municipality or the low presence of foreign languages learned during migration processes and the limited access to education by members of indigenous communities in the region. This context provides a starting point for promoting policies that integrate a multicultural and multilingual approach in education.

Do you and your family speak any language other than Spanish at home?



Regarding the question “Do you and your family speak any language other than Spanish at home?” The results show that 88.84% of students (3,368 individuals) reported that no language other than Spanish is spoken at home. On the other hand, 11.00% (417 students) indicated that another language besides Spanish is used in their families, while a minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not respond or did not know how to respond.

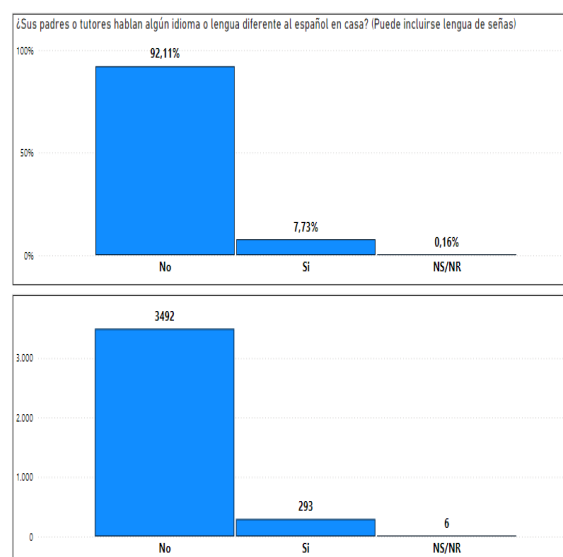
These data reaffirm the prevalence of Spanish as the only language in most homes, which can limit the development of multilingualism in the family environment. Although the percentage of families that speak other languages is low (11%), it is important to highlight that it reflects a significant minority that could be linked to factors such as migration, indigenous communities or interest in other foreign languages.

Based on the previous question, it was asked to indicate: If your answer is YES, please indicate which ones? If NO, continue with the next question.

The responses show that English and Portuguese are the predominant languages among students, while indigenous languages and sign language also have a notable presence. Linguistic diversity in Tuluá not only reflects the cultural richness of the region, but also poses challenges and opportunities for the educational system and social inclusion. Promoting policies that recognize and value this diversity will be crucial for the development of a more inclusive and equitable community.

Based on these results, it is evident that English is the most commonly spoken additional language at home, with 63.14% (221 students) of the total respondents mentioning it. This reflects a strong influence of English, possibly due to globalization and the importance of English as an international language. Next, Portuguese and Other Languages: Portuguese is spoken by 10.57% (37 students), followed by other languages such as sign language (3.43%, 12 students), Wounaan (2.00%, 7 students), and Emberá (1.71%, 6 students). These percentages reflect a variety of linguistic influences that enrich the students' family environment and that, according to the participants, were learned in migration processes or through personal interests that have led to independent or self-taught work.

Regarding the following question, Do your parents or guardians speak any language other than Spanish at home? (Sign language may be included). The following results were found:

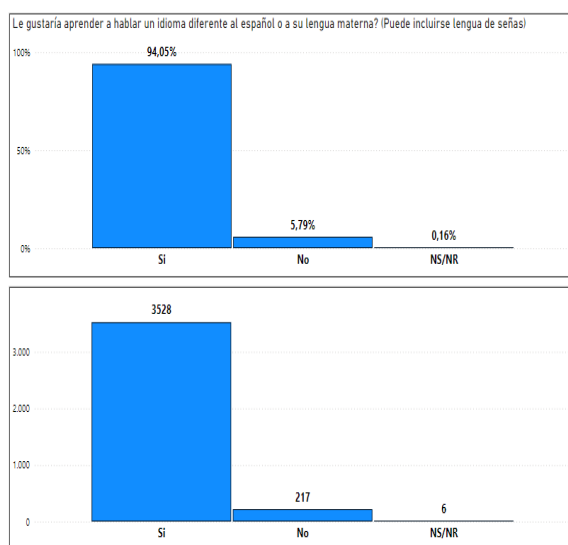


It is revealed that the vast majority of guardians or parents in the municipality of Tuluá do not use

languages other than Spanish at home. The results obtained are the following:

- 92.11% of the students (3,492 individuals) reported that their parents or guardians do not speak any language other than Spanish at home.
- 7.73% (293 students) indicated that their parents or guardians do speak another language at home.
- A minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question.

Would you like to learn to speak a language other than Spanish or your native language? (Sign language may be included).



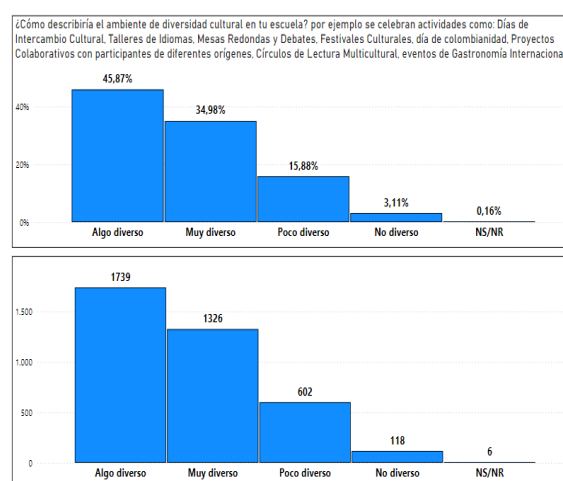
Regarding the data related to the question “Would you like to learn to speak a language other than Spanish or your mother tongue?” it reveals that the vast majority of students in the municipality of Tuluá show a significant interest in learning new languages.

94.05% of students (3,528 individuals) expressed that they would like to learn to speak a language other than Spanish or their mother tongue. 5.79% (217 students) indicated that they would not like to learn a different language. A minimal 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question.

These data show that an overwhelming majority of students are interested in learning an additional language other than Spanish or their mother tongue. This suggests a great openness and motivation towards multilingualism, which is a positive indicator for the

implementation of new language teaching programs in educational institutions. Only 5.79% of students are not interested in learning another language. This small proportion may be due to different factors, such as lack of personal interest, the perception of not needing another language, or possible barriers that they consider difficult to overcome.

How would you describe the environment of cultural diversity at your school? For example, activities such as: Cultural Exchange Days, Language Workshops, Round Tables and Debates, Cultural Festivals, Colombian Day, Collaborative Projects are held.



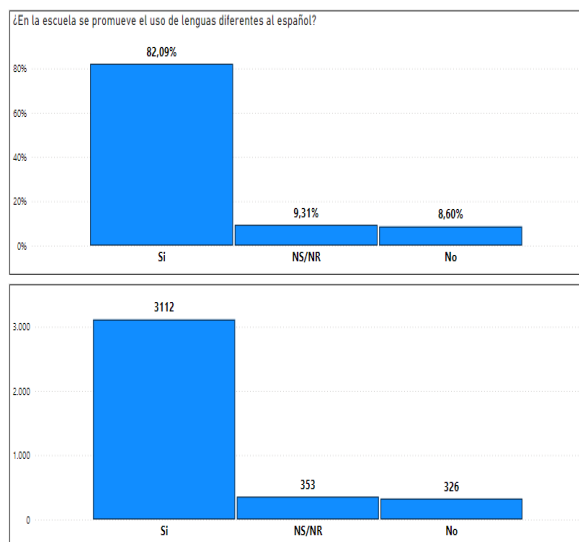
The data related to the question “How would you describe the environment of cultural diversity in your school?” reveal that the perception of cultural diversity in educational institutions in the municipality of Tuluá is varied. The results obtained are the following:

45.87% of the students (1,739 individuals) described the environment as “Somewhat diverse.” 34.98% (1,326 students) indicated that the environment is “Very diverse.” 15.88% (602 students) mentioned that the environment is “Not very diverse.” 3.11% (118 students) considered that the environment is “Not diverse.” A minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question.

These data show that a majority of students perceive an environment of cultural diversity in their schools, either “Somewhat diverse” or “Very diverse.” This indicator is positive and suggests that activities are being carried out that promote interculturality, such as Cultural Exchange Days, Language Workshops, and Cultural Festivals. Although a majority perceives a diverse environment, there are 15.88% of students who

consider the environment to be "Not very diverse" and 3.11% who believe that it is "Not diverse." These percentages indicate areas where inclusion and the promotion of cultural diversity can be improved.

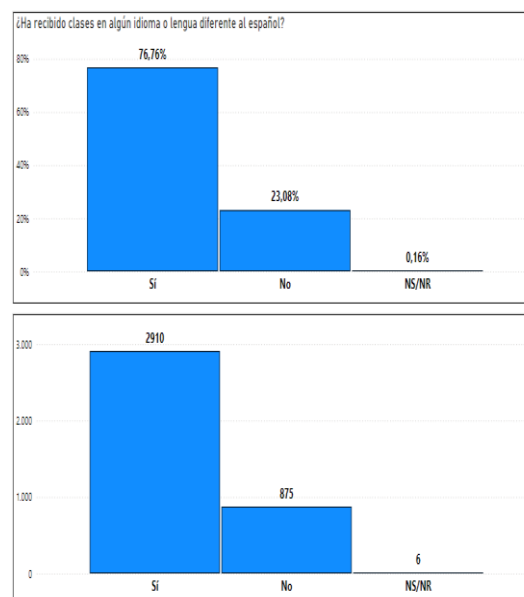
Does the school promote the use of languages other than Spanish?



The data regarding the question "Is the use of languages other than Spanish promoted at school?" reveals that a large majority of students perceive a significant effort by schools to promote the use of additional languages. The results obtained are as follows:

82.09% of students (3,112 individuals) responded that the use of languages other than Spanish is promoted. 9.31% (353 students) indicated that they do not know or did not respond. 8.60% (326 students) mentioned that the use of other languages is not promoted. These data show that an overwhelming majority of students (82.09%) perceive a significant effort in promoting the use of languages other than Spanish at their schools. This is a positive indicator for multilingual education programs. In contrast, 9.31% of students did not know or did not respond to the question, which could suggest the need for greater communication and visibility of multilingual activities and programs within educational institutions. As for negative perception, 8.60% of students believe that the use of languages other than Spanish is not promoted. This percentage represents a minority, but it is still relevant and points to the possibility of improving the implementation and perception of these programs.

Have you received classes in any language other than Spanish?



The data related to the question "Have you received classes in any language or language other than Spanish?" reveals that a significant majority of students have had some experience with languages other than Spanish. The results obtained are the following:

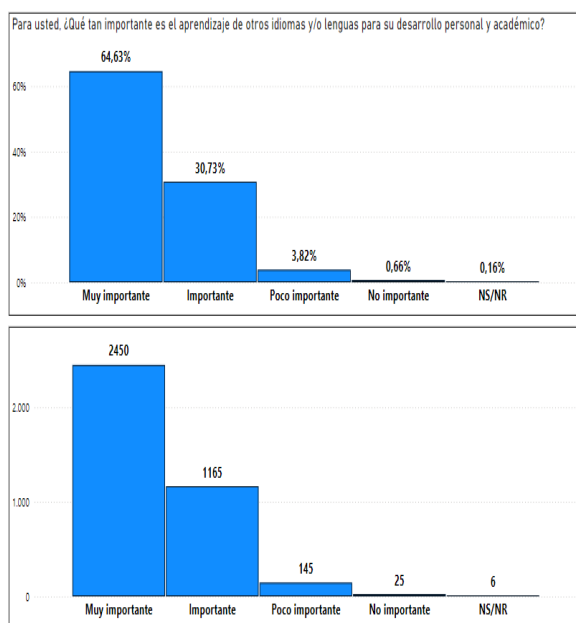
- 76.76% of students (2,910 individuals) responded that they have received classes in a language or language other than Spanish.
- 23.08% (875 students) indicated that they have not received classes in other languages.
- A minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question.

These data show that a majority of students have been exposed to the teaching of languages other than Spanish, which is a positive indication of the effort made by educational institutions to promote mainly bilingualism. It is important to consider that, although bilingualism can be a starting point for multilingualism, it is not a necessary condition. Both phenomena share many benefits and have important implications for individuals and societies.

Similarly, 23.08% of respondents indicated that they have not received classes in other languages, which indicates an area of opportunity to expand language teaching programs and ensure that more students have

access to these experiences, considering that English (Humanities, Spanish and foreign languages) is one of the fundamental areas according to the General Education Law (Ministry of National Education – General Education Law, 1994).

For you, how important is learning other languages and/or languages for your personal and academic development?

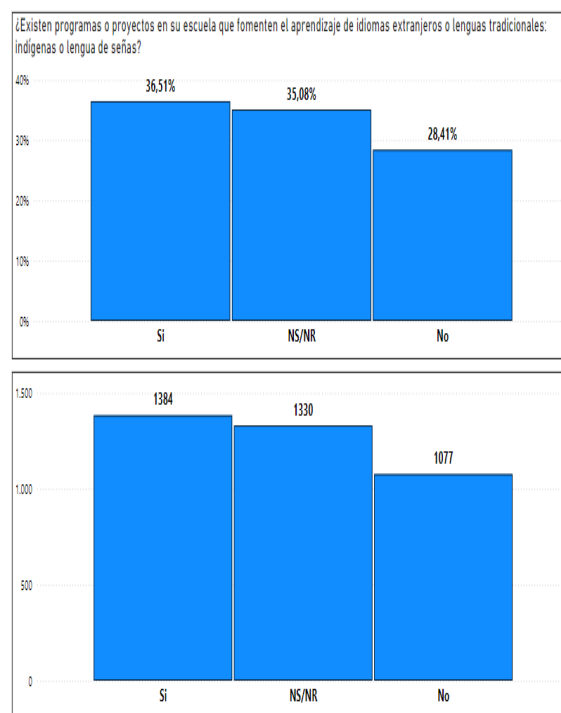


The data for the question “How important is learning other languages and/or languages for your personal and academic development?” reveals that the majority of students consider this learning to be highly relevant. The results obtained are as follows:

64.63% of students (2,450 individuals) responded that it is “Very important.” 30.73% (1,165 students) indicated that it is “Important.” 3.82% (145 students) mentioned that it is “Not very important.” 0.66% (25 students) considered that it is “Not important.” A minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question. These data show that a large majority of students (95.36%) consider that learning other languages is important or very important for their personal and academic development. This underlines the positive perception and appreciation of multilingualism as a key tool for individual and academic growth. A small percentage of students (4.48%) consider learning other languages to be unimportant or not important. This minority may be influenced by factors such as lack of exposure to other

cultures, lack of awareness of the benefits of multilingualism, or even lack of personal interest.

Are there programs or projects at your school that encourage the learning of foreign languages or languages?



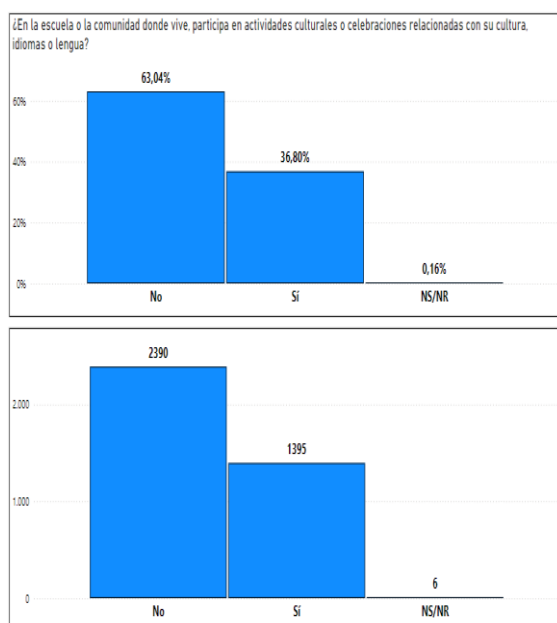
The data for the question “Are there programs or projects in your school that promote the learning of foreign languages or traditional languages: indigenous or sign language?” shows diverse opinions among students about the presence of such initiatives.

36.51% of students (1,384 individuals) responded that there are programs or projects in their institution. 35.08% (1,330 students) indicated that they do not know or did not respond. 28.41% (1,077 students) mentioned that there are no such programs or projects.

The data show that 36.51% of students perceive that there are programs or projects that promote the learning of foreign languages or traditional languages in their schools. This suggests that there are significant efforts in some institutions. 35.08% of students did not know or did not respond to the question. This high percentage suggests the need for greater communication and visibility of these programs within educational institutions to ensure that all students are informed. 28.41% of students believe that the learning of other languages or traditional languages is not

promoted in their schools. This significant group reflects the need to improve the implementation and perception of these programs to ensure that more students have access to these opportunities.

At school or in the community where you live, do you participate in cultural activities or celebrations related to your culture, language or language?



The data related to the question “Do you participate in cultural activities or celebrations related to your culture, language or language at school or in the community where you live?” reveals a variety of experiences among students regarding their involvement in cultural activities. This aspect is fundamental to understanding how cultural and linguistic diversity is promoted and valued in their educational and community environment. The results obtained offer a perspective on the level of participation and access to these initiatives, highlighting the importance of strengthening their reach and visibility.

63.04% of students (2,390 individuals) responded that they do not participate in cultural activities or celebrations. 36.80% (1,395 students) indicated that they do participate in such activities. A minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question.

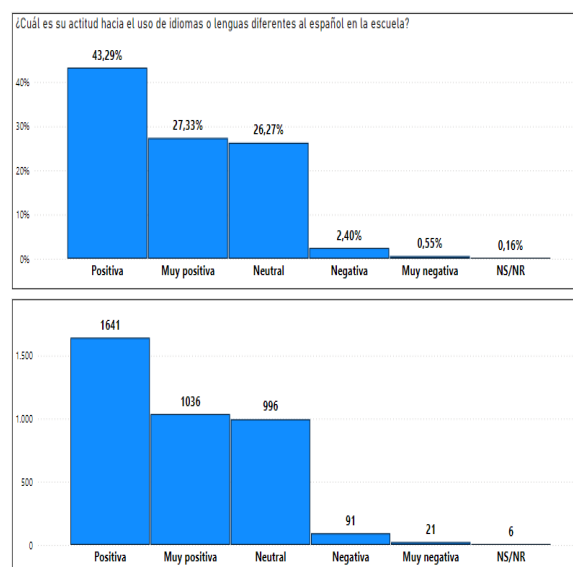
The majority of students (63.04%) do not participate in cultural activities or celebrations related to their culture, language or language at their school or

community. This could indicate a lack of opportunities or incentives to participate in such activities, or a lack of interest on the part of the students.

36.80% of the students do participate in these activities. This percentage shows that there is a considerably active and committed group with the promotion and celebration of their culture and languages, although it is not the majority.

Only 0.16% of the students did not know or did not answer the question, which is almost insignificant compared to the total, but it indicates that there is a small fraction of the student population that might not be aware of the cultural activities available.

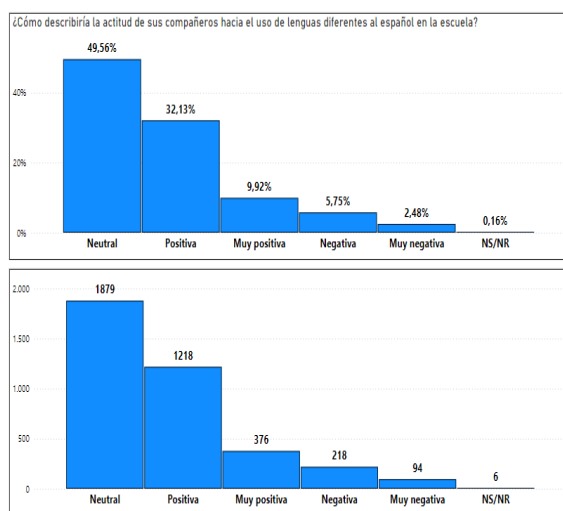
What is your attitude towards the use of languages other than Spanish at school?



The data related to the question “What is your attitude towards the use of languages other than Spanish at school?” reveal a variety of positions among students regarding the presence and use of other languages in the educational context. This diversity of attitudes reflects both the degree of openness to multilingualism and the possible cultural, social or pedagogical barriers that influence the perception of learning and using languages other than Spanish. Understanding these perspectives is essential to assess how educational institutions are addressing linguistic inclusion and to identify opportunities for improvement in the design of strategies that strengthen coexistence and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

43.29% of students (1,641 individuals) expressed a "Positive" attitude towards the use of languages other than Spanish. 27.33% (1,036 students) indicated a "Very positive" attitude. 26.27% (996 students) mentioned a "Neutral" attitude. 2.40% (91 students) expressed a "Negative" attitude. 0.55% (21 students) showed a "Very Negative" attitude. A minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question. The majority of students (70.62%) have a positive or very positive attitude towards the use of languages other than Spanish at school. This suggests a significant openness and positive appreciation of multilingualism in the educational environment. 26.27% of students have a neutral attitude towards the use of other languages at school. This group could represent students who do not have a strong opinion on the subject or who have not had sufficient exposure to the benefits of multilingualism. A small percentage of students (2.95%) have a negative or very negative attitude towards the use of other languages. This group could be influenced by factors such as lack of interest, possible difficulties in learning new languages, or the perception that it is not necessary.

How would you describe your classmates' attitude towards the use of languages other than Spanish at school?



The data related to the question "How would you describe your classmates' attitude towards the use of languages other than Spanish at school?" reveal diverse attitudes among students regarding the use of other languages in the school environment. The results obtained are the following:

49.56% of the students (1,879 individuals) described their classmates' attitude as Neutral. 32.13% (1,218 students) indicated a Positive attitude. 9.92% (376 students) mentioned a Very Positive attitude. 5.75% (218 students) expressed a Negative attitude. 2.48% (94 students) showed a Very Negative attitude. A minimum of 0.16% (6 students) did not know or did not answer the question. The majority of students (49.56%) describe their classmates' attitude as Neutral towards the use of languages other than Spanish. This indicates that many students do not have a strong opinion on the subject or are not sufficiently involved in forming one. 32.13% of students have a positive attitude and 9.92% have a very positive attitude towards the use of other languages. This group represents a significant part of the student population that values multilingualism in the school environment positively. A small percentage of students (5.75% with a negative attitude and 2.48% with a very negative attitude) have a negative perception towards the use of other languages. This group may be influenced by factors such as lack of interest, difficulties in learning new languages or the perception that it is not necessary.

Conclusions

The findings of the research on multilingualism in children and adolescents in Tuluá offer a broad and enriching view of the linguistic and cultural reality of this municipality. Firstly, it is evident that multilingualism is not only a phenomenon related to the ability to speak several languages, but is part of a sociocultural context that influences the identity and cognitive development of students. This finding is consistent with the sociocultural perspective that predominated in the literature review, which highlights that linguistic diversity in the classroom can be a valuable resource for the inclusion and strengthening of students' cultural identity.

The research demonstrates the importance of teachers' attitudes towards multilingualism. The results indicate that, while there is a positive trend among students towards learning new languages, negative or neutral attitudes persist in certain groups. This suggests that it is essential to carry out teacher training programs that address and challenge negative beliefs about multilingualism, as suggested by previous studies. Proper training will enable educators to implement pedagogical strategies that foster an inclusive learning

environment and recognize the linguistic diversity present in classrooms.

In addition, the data obtained show moderate student participation in cultural activities related to their languages and cultures. This indicates a significant opportunity to improve the connection between students and their linguistic roots. Educational institutions should actively work on creating spaces that promote cultural and linguistic diversity, not only through annual celebrations, but through ongoing programs that integrate these dimensions into the curriculum. This would be essential to strengthen students' linguistic and cultural identity, as well as to improve their academic performance, as suggested by the research reviewed.

Likewise, linguistic diversity in students' homes is a key aspect to consider. The prevalence of Spanish as a mother tongue is complemented by the presence of other languages, such as English and indigenous languages. This context offers a unique opportunity to enrich learning and teaching by promoting a more holistic approach that is not limited to foreign language teaching, but also values and utilizes indigenous languages and the language skills of migrant students.

On the other hand, it is crucial to address the barriers that limit the implementation of multilingual education programs, such as the lack of resources and the need for an institutional framework that supports these initiatives. Educational policies must recognize and value linguistic diversity in Tuluá, promoting an intercultural education approach that fosters the coexistence of different languages in the classroom. This will not only benefit those students whose native language is not Spanish, but will also enrich the educational experience of all students by promoting an environment of respect and recognition towards cultural diversity.

In conclusion, this study highlights the need for a multifaceted approach to address multilingualism in Tuluá. Integrating sociocultural perspectives, valuing native and foreign languages, and providing ongoing teacher training are key to developing multilingual skills in students. Only through a genuine commitment to linguistic and cultural diversity can we ensure inclusive, quality education that prepares students for an increasingly globalized and diverse world.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there are no actual or potential conflicts of interest related to the conduct, analysis or publication of this study.

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