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Discourses around Bilingualism and Bilingual Education in the Local Policy Context of Public Education in Quindío, Colombia

Discursos en Torno al Bilingüismo y la Educación Bilingüe en el Contexto Político Local de la Educación Pública en Quindío, Colombia

JEFERSSON ARIAS-ALZATE 

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4054-1100>

 Corresponding Author

I.E. Enrique Olaya Herrera, SEM- Armenia- Universidad del Valle

jefersson.arias@correounivalle.edu.co

JORGE MARIO PERDOMO-SANTACRUZ

I.E. Normal superior del Quindío, Colombia

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5372-0423>

SILVIA VALENCIA-GIRALDO

Universidad del Quindío, Colombia

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4558-9819>

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Abstract

Public bilingual education in Quindío is often lauded as exemplary in Colombia. However, a critical examination of the criteria underlying such commendations reveals a complex linguistic, political, discursive, and ideological landscape in which the terms “bilingual education” and “bilingualism” warrant discussion, given the sociocultural context in the country and the evolution of sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and language teaching. This article proposes a Critical Discourse Analysis of various trends in bilingual education in Quindío, with a particular focus on how bilingualism has been understood within the department’s educational policies. Using documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009), we analyze and discuss the different conceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education contained in public educational documents such as departmental and municipal bilingualism projects, Institutional Educational Projects, curricula, and area plans of some traditional public schools in the department during the last two decades. The study demonstrates how deeply ingrained language ideologies influence the discourses found in local official educational documents and the foreign language teaching practices in public schools. Nonetheless, the analysis of recent documents also shows a different view of multilingualism, understood from more plural perspectives that include other languages present in the local educational landscape, such as French and Colombian Sign Language, among others, often neglected by monoglossic ideologies that tend to privilege exclusively English teaching and learning in Quindío’s public schools. This article aims to advance the current understanding of bilingualism and language education in the region.

Keywords: Bilingualism, bilingual education, CDA, language ideologies, monoglossic ideologies, multilingualism

Resumen

La educación pública bilingüe en el Quindío es frecuentemente elogiada como ejemplar en Colombia. Sin embargo, un examen crítico de los criterios que subyacen a tales elogios revela un panorama lingüístico, político, discursivo e ideológico en el que los términos «educación bilingüe» y «bilingüismo» merecen ser discutidos, dados los fenómenos socioculturales del país y la evolución de la sociolingüística, la lingüística aplicada y la enseñanza de lenguas. Este artículo propone un Análisis Crítico del Discurso de las diferentes tendencias de la educación bilingüe en el Quindío, prestando especial atención a cómo se ha entendido el bilingüismo en las políticas educativas del departamento. Utilizando el análisis documental (Bowen, 2009), este artículo analiza y discute las diferentes concepciones de bilingüismo y educación bilingüe contenidas en documentos educativos públicos como proyectos departamentales y municipales de bilingüismo, Proyectos Educativos Institucionales, planes de estudio y planes de área de algunos colegios públicos tradicionales del departamento durante las últimas dos décadas; así mismo, demuestra cómo las ideologías lingüísticas influyen en los discursos que se encuentran en los documentos educativos oficiales y en las prácticas de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en las escuelas públicas locales. Sin embargo, el análisis de documentos recientes también muestra una visión diferente del multilingüismo, entendido desde perspectivas más plurales que incluyen otras lenguas presentes en el panorama educativo local, como el francés y las lenguas de señas, entre otras, a menudo desatendidas por ideologías monoglósicas que tienden a privilegiar exclusivamente la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés en las escuelas públicas del Quindío. Este artículo busca avanzar en la comprensión actual del bilingüismo y la educación bilingüe en la región.

Palabras clave: Bilingüismo, educación bilingüe, ACD, ideologías lingüísticas, ideologías monoglósicas, multilingüismo

Résumé

L'enseignement public bilingue dans le Quindío est souvent salué comme exemplaire en Colombie. Cependant, un examen critique des critères qui sous-tendent ces éloges révèle un panorama linguistique, politique, discursif et idéologique dans lequel les termes « éducation bilingue » et « bilinguisme » doivent être discutés, compte tenu des phénomènes socioculturels du pays et de l'évolution de la sociolinguistique, de la linguistique appliquée et de l'enseignement des langues. Cet article propose une analyse critique du discours des différentes tendances de l'éducation bilingue dans le Quindío, accordant une attention particulière à la manière laquelle le bilinguisme a été compris dans les politiques éducatives du département. À partir d'une analyse documentaire (Bowen, 2009), cet article examine et discute les différentes conceptions du bilinguisme et de l'éducation bilingue contenues dans les documents éducatifs publics tels que les projets départementaux et municipaux sur le bilinguisme, les projets éducatifs institutionnels, les programmes d'études et les programmes régionaux de certaines écoles projets éducatifs institutionnels, programmes d'études et plans régionaux de certaines écoles publiques traditionnelles du département au cours des deux dernières décennies. Il montre également comment les idéologies linguistiques influencent les discours que l'on trouve dans les documents éducatifs officiels et dans les pratiques d'enseignement des langues étrangères dans les écoles publiques locales. Cependant, l'analyse de documents récents montre également une vision différente du multilinguisme, compris dans une perspective plus plurielle qui inclut d'autres langues présentes dans le paysage éducatif local, telles que le français et les langues des signes, entre autres, souvent négligées par les idéologies monoglossiques qui ont tendance à privilégier exclusivement l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de l'anglais dans les écoles publiques du Quindío. Cet article vise à faire progresser la compréhension actuelle du bilinguisme et de l'éducation bilingue dans la région.

Mots clés : Bilinguisme, éducation bilingue, ACD, idéologies linguistiques, idéologies monolingues, multilinguisme

Resumo

A educação pública bilíngue no Quindio é frequentemente reconhecida como exemplar na Colômbia. Todavia, um exame crítico dos critérios que subjazem aos elogios revela um panorama linguístico, político, discursivo e ideológico no qual os termos (educação bilíngue (bilinguismo) merecem ser discutidos, tendo na conta os fenômenos socioculturais do país e a evolução da sociolinguística, a linguística aplicada e o ensino das línguas. Esse artigo propõe uma análise crítica do discurso das diferentes tendências da educação bilíngue no Quindio, dando ênfase a como o conceito de bilinguismo tem sido entendido nas políticas educacionais do estado. Usando a análise documental (Bowen, 2009) Esse artigo analisa e discute as diferentes concepções do bilinguismo e educação bilíngue contidas nos documentos educativos públicos como projetos de bilinguismo por estado e por cidade, projetos educativos institucionais, planos de estudo, e planos de área de algumas escolas públicas tradicionais do estado durante as últimas duas décadas. Além disso, demonstra como as ideologias linguísticas influem nos discursos que estão nos documentos educativos oficiais e as práticas do ensino das línguas estrangeiras nas escolas públicas locais. No entanto, o análise de documentos recentes também mostra uma visão diferente do multilinguismo, compreendido desde perspectivas mais plurais que incluem outras línguas presentes no panorama educativo local, como o francês é a língua de sinais, entre outras, frequentemente desatendidas pelas ideologias monoglossicas que dão privilégio exclusivo a ensino e aprendizagem do inglês nas escolas públicas do Quindio. Esse artigo procura avançar na compreensão atual do bilinguismo e a educação bilíngue na região.

Palavras chave: Bilinguismo, educação bilíngue, ACD, ideologias linguísticas, ideologias monoglossicas, multilinguismo.

Introduction

Over the last years, public bilingual education in Quindío has garnered considerable attention from various local and official governmental media, and it is often lauded as exemplary within the country (El Espectador, 2023; El Quindiano, 2019; Gobernación del Quindío, 2018). However, a critical examination of the criteria underlying such commendations reveals a linguistic, political, and discursive landscape in which a complex reality is evident in the educational context.

It is a fact that in such a diverse country as Colombia, with different cultural, linguistic, and ethnic communities, where economic inequalities prevail, the term bilingualism has usually brought to the fore the possibility of making viable the dominance of a foreign language – English in this case-, by students in state schools. However, despite changes or transformations throughout time, neoliberal ideologies are still present, overshadowing the bilingualism of ethnic communities in their vernacular or indigenous languages or the presence of other ‘more prestigious’ languages (Miranda et al., 2023; Miranda, 2016; Usma, 2015).

Considering the present situation, the possibility of a bilingual society remains unavailable for the vast majority, a fact highlighted in the official policy documents on bilingualism, documents that privilege English as ‘the’ language that people, and in this case, students in state or public schools, should learn or ‘master’, reinforcing the idea of two bilingualisms, a ‘visible’ and an ‘invisible’ bilingualism, as De Mejía (2011) has stated, a position, very much in line with what Pennycook (2017) has referred to as discourses about the spread of English worldwide, often embodying a positive image of English, as a new commodity on the educational market, or as Usma (2009) has argued, the instrumentalization of English. Nevertheless, although this position has received criticism, these discourses seem to remain unchanged in the national and local policy documents, directly influencing classroom practices.

The impact of national bilingual policies has been documented for many years in different regions of Colombia (Cárdenas & Miranda, 2014; Cardona et al., 2023). It is clear from the literature that there are considerable limitations to the implementation of such policies in aspects that range from conceptual limitations of bilingualism to issues related to logistical restrictions like the lack of human resources, materials, and connectivity, among others (Aponte, 2024). Despite all the claims from academia about the weaknesses of the policies and a possible consensus on the ways to improve their conceptualization and execution (Guerrero, 2008, 2010a), every change of national government has come with a continuity of the policies, making only superficial adjustments (Guerrero, 2010a).

This article proposes a critical analysis (Blommaert, 2005; Fairclough, 1995; 2003; Gee, 2005; Wodak, 2012; Wodak & Meyer, 2015) of the discourse around bilingual education in Quindío, paying particular attention to how bilingualism has been understood in the department’s educational policies¹. To achieve this purpose, through a documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009), this article examines the different conceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education contained in public educational documents such as departmental and municipal bilingualism projects, Institutional Educational Projects –PEI-², curricula, subject plans, and course plans of some traditional public schools in the department during the last two decades. It is expected that this article will contribute to the state of the

1 This study mentions Quindío, generically, including Armenia, its capital city. Nonetheless, we clarify that the department of Quindío, and Armenia, has different boards of education, which are autonomous in their decisions, planning, and application of national education policies. However, in both cases, the promotion of ‘bilingualism’ –understood as English learning and teaching- has been one of the main goals of local policies, especially during the last two decades.

2 Acronym in Spanish of *Proyecto Educativo Institucional*.

art of bilingualism and language education in the region, inform about the evolution of what is known to date as bilingual education in Quindío, and serve as a starting point for future critical studies in the area. Thus, the following general question guides this analysis: How have official and social discourses on bilingualism and bilingual education in the department of Quindío evolved over the last twenty years, and how have these discourses influenced local educational policies, pedagogical practices, and notions of bilingualism in the region?

Theoretical Framework

Colombia is a multiethnic and multilingual nation (Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991) where approximately 67 local -aboriginal and creole- languages coexist alongside Spanish -the official language-, Colombian Sign Language, and various foreign languages introduced through migration and educational policies, such as French, German, and Portuguese, among others (Miranda et al., 2023). Despite this diverse linguistic landscape, public discourses and media representations in Colombia often equate bilingualism narrowly with the Spanish English binary (De Mejía, 2006; Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2023). This dominant association has its roots in longstanding national linguistic policies influenced by neoliberal ideologies, which have positioned English as the language of economic competitiveness and globalization and the key to success (Guerrero, 2008).

These discourses and representations surrounding bilingualism in Colombia have also shaped the language ideologies that frame bilingual education in the country, which has historically prioritized English language teaching, frequently at the expense of the recognition and promotion of minority local languages, cultures, and identities (Bonilla & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016; De Mejía, 2011; Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2023; Vargas et al., 2008). As a result, English has occupied a privileged position in the country's language education agendas and budgets, leading to the adoption of foreign frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to guide language instruction in public schools. This has granted organizations such as the British Council a central role in shaping national language policies (De Mejía, 2011; González, 2007; Usma, 2009), while sidelining the voices of national scholars and minority groups in the development of inclusive language education models.

In response, contemporary trends in language education and research, particularly those informed by intercultural, decolonial, and critical perspectives, have begun to challenge these reductive views (Heller, 2007; Miranda et al., 2023). Such emerging approaches advocate for a broader, more inclusive understanding of multilingualism, one that genuinely values and integrates the diverse linguistic and cultural realities of the Colombian context. Accordingly, current critical studies in the field in Colombia examine how bilingualism and bilingual education are defined, legitimized, and contested in public education and official discourses (Miranda et al., 2023; Usma, 2015).

Through this lens, this article adopts an intercultural and critical perspective on bilingualism. It begins by recognizing Colombia's complex cultural and linguistic landscape, where bilingualism is not merely a matter of individual language proficiency, but rather a contextually situated phenomenon involving the dynamic interplay of multiple local and foreign languages within intercultural communication and educational settings (De Mejía, 2006; Miranda et al., 2023; Usma, 2015). From this vantage point and recognizing the multiple nature of the diverse Colombian linguistic and cultural landscape, we approach bilingualism just as one possible facet of multilingualism, especially in the

context of public education, where institutions must include the teaching of at least one foreign language in their curricula. Thus, multilingualism is understood as the interaction among diverse linguistic and cultural resources that shape communication and discourse in different sociohistorical contexts.

Moreover, grounded in a critical sociolinguistic perspective, this analysis conceptualizes bilingualism as both ideology and practice (Heller, 2007). That is, it views the use, value, regulation, and promotion of languages as deeply embedded in broader social, political, and ideological processes. In the same way, bilingual education is assumed as a place either for the reproduction or contestation of these ideologies, even in the teaching and learning of English. This approach challenges neutral or technical understandings of bilingualism by interrogating the nexus between political and institutional forces in the construction and understanding of language policies and practices. In doing so, the article aims to uncover the discourses surrounding bilingualism and bilingual education in official documents from various public schools in Quindío, one of the first Colombian departments that started to implement immersive bilingual education initiatives in public schools.

Methodology

This article employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the discourses surrounding bilingualism and bilingual education within public education policies contained in official documents in Quindío and its capital city, Armenia, over the past two decades. In line with the research question, the analysis focuses on how the notions of bilingualism and bilingual education have been constructed in both historical and contemporary policy documents. These include the Integral Bilingualism Plan of the Department of Quindío (2017), the English Subject Municipal Plan of Armenia –PAMI-³ (Alcaldía de Armenia, 2012), as well as various public schools' PEIs, subject plans, and other official documents produced during the years 2008 to 2024 by Gobernación del Quindío, Alcaldía de Armenia and several local public educational institutions.

Emerging from various disciplines such as rhetoric, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, among others, CDA can be understood as both a social science field (Fairclough, 1995, 2001, 2003; Gee, 2005; Wodak, 2014) and a research method (Bryman, 2012). Its primary purpose is to uncover how discourse -language in use- constructs or frames people's understanding of the world, emphasizing the power relations that operate behind or beyond words and structure institutional practices (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005; Wodak, 2014). As Wodak (2014) explains, all CDA approaches share a problem-oriented nature, aiming to “demystify ideologies and power through the systematic investigation of written, spoken, or visual data” (p. 303). This allows CDA to analyze, for instance, how certain discourses dominate during specific historical periods and how these discourses evolve, change, persist, and are reproduced within society. Furthermore, CDA critically examines whose interests benefit from the prevalence of discourses.

It is then possible to critically approach the discourse that frames a phenomenon from a synchronic or diachronic perspective. If the analyst chooses to study discourse from a synchronic perspective, the focus will be languages sociocultural “situatedness” and how it operates within current power dynamics. On the other hand, from a more diachronic perspective, the focus of analysis will be the change, persistence, or evolution of certain discourses throughout a given period. Discourse

3 By its acronym in Spanish of *Plan de Área Municipal de Inglés*.

analysts may also study language in different modes, media, and genres. Thus, print or spoken language, interviews, political speeches, books, articles, laws, or policy documents may be the object of CDA. It all depends on the analyst's purpose and the data available for the analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005; Wodak, 2014). CDA has been extensively used in contemporary educational research for various purposes. It has proven helpful in describing and explaining the relationships among language in use, power, ideology, and institutionality within different educational settings and contexts. In this way, CDA is often used in the analysis of curricula and textbooks, classroom interaction, policy formulation and implementation, and foreign language education, among others.

To address the research question, documents will be analyzed from a diachronic perspective, focusing on how the conceptualization of bilingualism persists or changes in local policy and official school documents over the past two decades, paying particular attention to (a) intertextuality and (b) interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2001, 2003). In this context, intertextuality refers to how documents relate to similar ones—i.e., national educational policy documents—. At the same time, interdiscursivity examines how the discourses within the documents relate to other discourses and how they influence social practices. Following Fairclough's (2003) framework, we analyze documents as elements of social events with causal effects and the potential to shape people's knowledge, ideologies, beliefs, and assumptions, ultimately leading to changes in social practices such as language teaching.

To select the contents and operationalize the analysis, we adopted Documentary Analysis (Bowen, 2009), a process involving several steps. First, a guiding research question was formulated to direct the inquiry. Next, as researchers, we familiarized ourselves with the context within which the documents were produced. A sample of twenty-one documents was thoroughly read and discussed to understand the content better. Content analysis was subsequently carried out to identify the key categories guiding the initial discourse analysis. During this process, special attention was paid to intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2003).

Based on the initial findings, additional documents were included to compare how terms such as bilingualism and bilingual education have evolved in local educational policy documents over the years. The analysis focused on examining changes in the PEIs, subject plans, and institutional bilingualism projects across different periods. The final corpus for the analysis consisted of twenty-three official documents obtained from the Boards of Education's files, institutional websites, and principals' and school teachers' personal files, among others. These documents were classified as follows: 1) Local Policy Documents, 2) Departmental and Municipal Boards of Education's and Schools' Official Documents, and 3) Schools' Language Planning Documents (See Table 1 below). The documents corresponding to each group were later subcategorized according to date and current validity and classified as current and past documents (See Table 2 below).

Table 1 <i>Classification of Documents</i>		
1) Local Policy Documents	2) Departmental and Municipal Boards of Education's and Schools' Official Documents	3) Schools' Language Planning Documents
Gobernación del Quindío (2017). Implementación del programa integral de bilingüismo “Quindío bilingüe y competitivo” en el departamento del Quindío. (SED)	IE CASD (2016). Bilingual pilot project “English learning for living”. (Armenia)	IE Ciudad Armenia (2010). Plan de área de inglés. (Armenia)
Gobernación del Quindío (2019) Proyecto de ordenanza por medio de la cual se establece la política pública departamental de multilingüismo como parte de la oferta educativa de las instituciones educativas oficiales adscritas al departamento del Quindío. (SED)	IE Enrique Olaya Herrera (2011). Horizonte Institucional. (Armenia)	IE Ciudadela del sur (2010). Plan de área de inglés. (Armenia)
Alcaldía de Armenia (2019). Mapa de bilingüismo. (SEM)	IE CASD (2013). Proyecto de Bilingüismo CASD 2013-2020. (Armenia)	IE Ciudadela del sur (2009). Plan Área 2009. (Armenia)
Alcaldía de Armenia (2024). Circular No 69. Orientaciones para el fortalecimiento de proyectos de bilingüismo y/o plurilingüismo de las diferentes instituciones educativas oficiales de Armenia. (SEM)	IE Ciudadela del sur (2012). Presentación de la asignatura idioma extranjero inglés. (Armenia)	IE. Enrique Olaya Herrera (2012). Plan de asignatura 2012. (Armenia)
Alcaldía de Armenia (2012) Plan de Área Municipal de Inglés, PAMI. (SEM)	Alcaldía de Armenia (2024). Estrategia de acompañamiento educativo territorio SCHOLA, Armenia 2024-2027.	IE Ciudadela de occidente (2011). Plan de área de preescolar a undécimo. (Armenia)
Alcaldía de Armenia (2013). Consolidado de proyectos de bilingüismo 2013. (SEM)	Alcaldía de Armenia (2024). Criterios para registro y aprobación de la oferta de la educación media técnica y/o académica en el municipio de Armenia (En la IE Enrique Olaya Herrera).	IE Santa María Goretti (2023). Plan de área. (Montenegro)

Alcaldía de Armenia (2014). Proyecto de Fortalecimiento de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera Inglés. Portafolio PMCLE. Secretaría de Educación Armenia. Ppt (SEM)	IE Santa María Goretti (2024). Proyecto Educativo Institucional. (Montenegro)	IE Santa María Goretti (2023). Plan de aula. (Montenegro)
Alcaldía de Armenia (2012). Presentación estado actual de bilingüismo junio de 2012. Ppt (SEM)	IE Policarpa Salavarrieta (2024). Proyecto Educativo Institucional. (Quimbaya)	IE Policarpa Salavarrieta (2024). Plan de área de inglés. (Quimbaya)
	IE Enrique Olaya Herrera. (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional. (Armenia)	I.E Enrique Olaya Herrera. (2023). Plan de área de inglés. (Armenia)
	IE Normal Superior del Quindío (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional. (Armenia)	IE Normal Superior del Quindío (2023). Plan de área de inglés. (Armenia)
	IE CASD. Proyecto de Bilingüismo CASD 2013-2026. (Armenia)	IE Rafael Uribe Uribe (2024). Plan de Área de Inglés.
	IE Santa María Goretti. Proyecto de Bilingüismo. (Montenegro)	
	IE Rafael Uribe Uribe (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.	

Table 2. <i>Subcategorization according to Date and Validity</i>	
A. Past	B. Current
Alcaldía de Armenia (2013). Consolidado de proyectos de bilingüismo 2013.	Gobernación del Quindío (2017). Implementación del programa integral de bilingüismo “Quindío bilingüe y competitivo” en el departamento del Quindío.
Alcaldía de Armenia (2014). Proyecto de Fortalecimiento de Competencias en Lengua Extranjera Inglés. Portafolio PMCLE. Secretaría de Educación Armenia.	Gobernación del Quindío (2021). Proyecto de ordenanza por medio de la cual se establece la política pública departamental de multilingüismo como parte de la oferta educativa de las instituciones educativas oficiales adscritas al departamento del Quindío.
Alcaldía de Armenia (2012). Presentación estado actual de bilingüismo junio de 2012.ppt	Alcaldía de Armenia (2019). Mapa de bilingüismo.

IE CASD (2016). Bilingual pilot project “English learning for living”.	Alcaldía de Armenia (2024). Circular No 69. Orientaciones para el fortalecimiento de proyectos de bilingüismo y/o plurilingüismo de las educativas oficiales de Armenia.
IE Enrique Olaya Herrera (2011). Horizonte Institucional.	Alcaldía de Armenia (2012) Plan de Área Municipal de Inglés, PAMI.
IE CASD (2013). Proyecto de Bilingüismo CASD 2013-2020	IE Santa María Goretti (2024). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
IE Ciudadela del sur (2012). Presentación de la asignatura idioma extranjero inglés.	IE Policarpa Salavarrieta (2024). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
IE Ciudad Armenia (2008). Plan de área de inglés.	IE Enrique Olaya Herrera. (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
IE Ciudadela del sur (2010). Plan de área de inglés.	IE Normal Superior del Quindío (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
IE Ciudadela del sur (2009). Plan área 2009.	IE Santa María Goretti (2024). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
IE Enrique Olaya Herrera (2012). Plan de asignatura 2012.	IE Policarpa Salavarrieta (2024). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
IE Rafael Uribe Uribe (2024). Plan de Área de Inglés.	IE Enrique Olaya Herrera. (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
	IE Normal Superior del Quindío (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
	IE Rafael Uribe Uribe (2023). Proyecto Educativo Institucional.
	IE CASD (2013). Proyecto de Bilingüismo CASD 2013-2026.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the main findings derived from the analysis of official documents and policies related to bilingual education in the department of Quindío over the last two decades. The analysis is organized into interconnected categories that reflect the historical development, ideological underpinnings, and current orientations of bilingual policies in the region. The categories emerge as common themes in the texts and as a token of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2001, 2003) within these documents at the national and regional levels.

Evolution of the “Bilingual” Policy in the Department of Quindío in the First Decade of the 2000s

During the first decade of the 2000s, several bilingual education initiatives emerged in the Department of Quindío’s public schools as the local economy transitioned from coffee and agriculture

to tourism and as the internet started to spread and develop worldwide. Tourism and technology quickly became the rationale for positioning 'being bilingual' as an essential skill for participating in the regional and world economies. At the time, some traditional public schools in the department started to offer high school vocational tracks (*medias académicas o técnicas*) on techno-bilingualism, as part of the official policy being implemented. These schools included changes in the curricula during the upper high school grades (10th and 11th), emphasizing informatics and English.

The purpose of this was either to prepare students for the emerging tourism market in the region, which was supposed to attract hundreds of foreign visitors and investors to Quindío shortly, or to get students acquainted with the contents of professional or technical programs in informatics, languages -English- or tourist administration.

Emerging “Bilingualism” Pilot Programs

By the late 2000s, several public schools in the department of Quindío and its capital, Armenia, had launched pilot programs in “bilingualism”. These initiatives involved increasing the hours allocated to English instruction from primary through secondary school in some institutions, while others implemented Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), teaching content subjects in English. These pilot programs were methodologically guided and advised by private elite bilingual schools and local organizations within the department.

Around 2008 and 2010, for instance, two pilot programs in “bilingualism” were set in motion in the municipalities of Quimbaya and Montenegro. In 2012, the Municipal English Subject Plan –PAMI– was launched as a pioneering initiative spearheaded by the Board of Education of Armenia –SEM– in collaboration with a group of English teachers from different schools in the city. This document aimed to establish a unified framework for English language education across public schools in the city, from first to eleventh grade. The PAMI attempted to provide clear guidelines and an integrated syllabus to ensure coherence and consistency in the content taught at each educational level in Armenia. By doing so, anchored in national educational and language policies, it aimed to bridge educational gaps and create unity in the teaching and learning of English as a second language within the public school system.

However, in Colombia, it is common for schools to maintain autonomy in curriculum development despite ongoing efforts to standardize educational content. For this reason, initiatives such as the PAMI often coexist with and contribute to each school’s unique institutional language planning. Every school is expected to create its own subject and course plans, shaped by its specific pedagogical approaches and the framework of its PEIs. Consequently, besides the PAMI, the English subject and course plans of different institutions were also analyzed.

The Integral Bilingualism Program Quindío Bilingüe y Competitivo

Another local policy document that informs “bilingual” education in the department of Quindío is the *Programa Integral de Bilingüismo “Quindío Bilingüe y Competitivo”* (2017). The Integral Bilingualism Program was launched as part of the development plan of the government of Quindío during the period 2016-2019, with the purpose of:

Implementing in the department the National Bilingual Colombia Program through training, monitoring of learning processes, applying and advocating for continuous improvement to promote the advancement of educational quality standards in the department and make Quindío a

pioneer in bilingualism in educational institutions in the public sector (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017, p. 4; AT⁴).

The document is intertextually and interdiscursively related to Colombian national policies, mainly to the National Bilingual Program –NBP-. As evidenced in its theoretical framework and other sections of the document, the understanding of bilingualism as English learning and teaching, among other monoglossic ideologies linked to this conception, predominates in the text, as in the NBP. For instance, the Integral Bilingualism Program states that “Colombian students live in a world that requires them to communicate more in English every day, to interact with citizens of other countries and to access knowledge through this language” (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017, p. 22; AT). Besides, the program purports that competency in English will enable public school students to access the global labor market and secure improved employment opportunities. (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017).

As Guerrero (2008) holds, referring to the NBP and the Basic Competence Standards in Foreign Languages: English (MEN, 2006), “bilingualism is based on a set of myths” (p. 31), and one of those myths could be the pervasive promise that English is the key to economic success and access to the global economic and academic market. Additionally, based on Guerrero (2008), the analysis of the document shows that, like the English standards, the Integral Bilingualism Program of Quindío was designed with an idealized group of students in mind, which significantly differs from the actual student population in Quindío, who typically come from predominantly monolingual backgrounds and lower economic strata, despite the influence of tourism in some towns. This mismatch between the envisioned and real learners, along with the ambitious goals of the plan, raises concerns about the program’s effectiveness and cultural relevance in addressing the specific needs of public-school students in Quindío, especially given the substantial public budget invested in the project. This has also drawn criticism from political actors in the region and local media: “From the get-go, the project was not correctly planned; if so, you can never expect successful results” (La Crónica, 2018; AT).

Draft Law of Bilingual Education

In 2021, the government office of Quindío proposed a draft law to regulate bilingual public education in the department. This document was also based on NBP’s objectives. Its main objective was to improve the English proficiency of both teachers and students. Many details set this document apart from previous intentions. First, the term multilingualism is introduced in the draft of the law, marking a distance from bilingualism or plurilingualism, and it is the concept that is supposed to guide the decisions to be made regarding learning languages, English in this case (Gobernación del Quindío, 2021). Despite the use of the concept, there is still the issue of conflating it with learning foreign languages, disregarding the role of Spanish and other languages in the region:

The purpose of the Departmental Public Policy on Multilingualism is aligned with the guidelines established in the National Bilingualism Program and other related and complementary national regulations, in order to guide the official education sector towards the vision of strengthening of a foreign language, English, for public school teachers in Quindío, as well as for students in public institutions (Gobernación del Quindío, 2021, p. 1; AT).

4 AT: Authors’ Translation. All translations from the documents in Spanish are the authors’ own (AT), unless otherwise indicated.

Second, it is the first official document in the region proposing a firm intention and legal rationale to invest taxpayers' money to achieve bilingual objectives derived from a national program. There is an elaborate list of all related bills (intertextual links) to support it, from the Constitution to legal regulations to assign an appropriate budget to these kinds of programs.

A Shared Restrictive View on Bilingualism

The analysis of official regional documents such as the PAMI, PEIs, departmental bilingual programs, and other related documents also reveals direct intertextual links with key national education policies, such as Law 115 of 1994, the curricular guidelines, and the Basic Competence Standards of English (MEN, 2006). This connection ensures that the goals articulated in the documents are not only locally relevant but also aligned with broader national educational objectives. Furthermore, in the case of the PAMI (Alcaldía de Armenia, 2012), the document was organized into several sections that included “suggestions for teaching and learning practices,” outlined a “teacher’s profile,” and provided detailed plans with suggested content for primary, secondary, and high school education, among others.

Overall, the documents reflect persistent trends in the discourse surrounding bilingualism in Armenia and Quindío over the past two decades. A prevailing theme is the utilitarian and exclusionary conception of bilingualism, wherein “being bilingual” is largely construed as the addition of English to Spanish to enhance competitiveness in a globalized world. This perspective is evident, for instance, in the PAMI, which states:

Following the implementation of strategic aims of the National Bilingualism Plan, and as part of the Municipal Bilingualism Program framed within the 2012–2015 Municipal Development Plan, ‘Armenia, a Paradise to Invest, Live, and Enjoy,’ the Municipal Department of Education of Armenia is pleased to present and share with the municipality’s educational community the work carried out on the English curriculum project. This project integrates the English competence standards from the first grade of primary school to the eleventh grade of secondary school, adapting them to the context of our city from a communicative perspective (Alcaldía de Armenia, 2012, p.1; AT).

In the same way, some public schools in the department project a similar notion of bilingualism in their PEIs:

We can understand how national and departmental policies are committed to bilingualism as a necessary factor for development. In this way, it has been institutionally integrated as a Pilot Project that has greatly strengthened the skills of students from different social strata, especially those from strata 1 and 2, enabling them to face problematic situations in their context — from communicating with foreign visitors (tourists) to the region, to engaging in dialogue with students from other countries through the media and translating texts in English (IE Policarpa School, 2024; AT).

As mentioned above, this perspective often marginalizes indigenous and sign languages, as well as other foreign languages like French, present in the region's educational landscape since the 70s. Besides, this utilitarian perspective is closely linked to the development of tourism in Armenia and its surrounding municipalities, where, in recent years, the promotion of the Coffee Cultural Landscape as a marketable asset has been particularly emphasized. The discourses that sustain this view mainly derive from monoglossic reductionist language ideologies and ideological claims about the "universality of English" and its links to economic prosperity. As previously explained, it could be inferred in the discourse of historical and contemporary educational documents of the department of Quindío that "bilingualism", narrowly focused on Spanish English, may enhance the competitiveness of Armenia's residents in the global market and local tourism economy, but at the cost of overlooking the linguistic and cultural diversity of Quindío.

Discourses about Globalization and Economy in Official Policy Documents in Quindío

As the literature analyzing the discourses behind the NBP, the Basic Competence Standards of English, and other educational policies has already shown (Cardenas & Miranda, 2014), bilingualism is projected in Colombia as an essential requirement for insertion into the globalized world. Such a discourse has been replicated almost verbatim in most official decisions in the department, the city, and the schools. The rationale for promoting bilingualism in most official documents derives directly from the same perspective on bilingualism in the national documents, i.e., the NBP. Thus, making Quindío a pioneer in bilingualism, according to local policies such as the department's Integral Bilingualism Program, which stands for attaining levels of English based on international standards:

To achieve this, the training of teachers and students in a second language will be strengthened, aiming for a B1 level on the SABER tests⁵. Additionally, the program seeks to train licensed teachers in modern languages with a B2 proficiency level in English, preschool and primary school teachers with A1 and B1 proficiency levels in English, and to implement competitions to strengthen communicative competencies in English (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017, p. 4; AT).

A similar notion of bilingualism appears in some local schools' documents: In all professional and educational fields, languages have become an essential tool for the proper development and management of various social activities in both national and international settings. Naturally, throughout humanity around the world, the language that has been given the most importance is English. For this reason, our community cannot remain indifferent to this reality, which is becoming more evident every day, as sociocultural environments are increasingly demanding of today's communities. The Ministry of Education requires and supports institutions in their academic process of teaching English through several initiatives and incentives under the National Bilingualism Program (IE Ciudadela del Sur, 2021, p. 4; AT).

These documents do not refer to the type of bilingualism that can exist in a linguistic community or an individual who is bilingual in Spanish and an indigenous language, but rather to a bilingualism in which the binomial is completed exclusively with English, which is the language that "magically" opens the doors to success, prosperity abroad, access to technology and the possibility of access to

5 The SABER tests are national standardized exams in Colombia that assess student performance in subjects like math, reading, and science at different grade levels. They are used to measure educational quality across the country.

science. Sometimes, as has been noted in various analyses of political discourse, the term bilingualism is even mistakenly used to refer to the promotion of English monolingualism in some educational settings (Miranda & Valencia Giraldo, 2023), where students' home languages are barely used in Spanish language and Social Studies lessons. However, in some cases, even Social Sciences are taught in English (IE Ciudadela del Sur, 2009).

In Quindío and its capital city, Armenia, the commodification of bilingualism, understood as English learning, projects the same hegemonic and neoliberal tendency that authors such as De Mejía (2006), Guerrero (2008; 2010b), Miranda (2016), Miranda and Valencia (2023), and Usma (2014) have pointed out. Thus, in the documents analyzed for this article, the same metaphors that promote English as a key to the global world continue to be traced, opening doors to better employment opportunities and “facilitating communication with English-speaking communities” (Alcaldía de Armenia, 2012; Gobernación del Quindío, 2017; AT).

This discourse is also reflected in regional policy documents, where additional arguments used to justify the promotion of English include the potential for international travel, particularly to English-speaking countries, as well as opportunities for pursuing studies abroad or obtaining scholarships. The above can be seen in the Integral Bilingualism Program of Quindío (2017), which states that “Proficiency in English will surely allow [students] to have access to scholarships in other countries, greater academic mobility and better job opportunities even in Colombia” (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017, p. 3; AT).

Likewise, the interdiscursive analysis of the documents reveals that English is appropriated in the documents to reinforce the commodification of language in the service of Quindío's tourism industry. The promotion of a tourism-oriented economy permeates most of the analyzed texts. This started to be highlighted in the local language policy since the 2000s, but gained more popularity after the year 2011, when UNESCO declared the territory of Quindío as part of the Coffee Cultural Landscape and Cultural Heritage of Humanity:

Quindío was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO in 2011 as a Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which recognizes its cultural and landscape richness and expands its possibilities as a world-class tourist destination. However, the department must comply with quality standards that will improve customer care and service and enable a better tourism infrastructure regarding human talent (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017, p. 5; AT).

In this way, ecotourism, as the main economic activity of the department, began to be used as a leitmotif framing the necessity of English learning within the documents, and used as a key rationale for the formulation of a policy of bilingualism in the department. Thus, the insertion of labor into the department's economy is projected as one of the benefits of English-Spanish bilingualism, according to the departmental bilingualism plan, which states:

This benefit refers to the increase in the possibilities that, because of students' knowledge of English, they can more easily access the labor market, both in the department and nationally. In addition, the Development Plan “In Defense of the Common Good 2016-2019” has as a strategic priority the strengthening of tourism in the Department of Quindío, which will require a population with a high level of English proficiency. (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017; AT).

The regional panorama is no different from the national one in a trend towards the commodification of English, which continues to be hegemonically considered the key language for insertion into the global economy. This dynamic carries discursive, political, and economic

consequences, reflecting the reproduction of neoliberal narratives anchored in the constructed “need to be bilingual.” Intertextual analysis of the documents reveals a causal relationship between national educational policy and official frameworks such as the NBP, which is constantly cited in the Integral Bilingualism Plan.

These documents are cited to legitimize local interpretations of bilingualism and “the need to be bilingual”, for instance, to serve English-speaking tourists visiting the region. In addition, the NBP is specifically cited to justify the implementation of departmental bilingualism policies, which have received significant public investment. On the other hand, and no less importantly, the intertextual analysis has also revealed a causal relationship between documents that impacted educational practices. It is possible to observe in the English subject plans of some public institutions how the simulation of the tourist service is proposed as an exercise of classroom interaction in English lessons. (IE Ciudad Armenia, 2010; Enrique Olaya Herrera, 2012)

Monoglossic Ideologies within Regional Bilingual Policies and School Documents

The discourse surrounding bilingualism is influenced not only by globalization and the economy, but also by clear linguistic tendencies. One of the most common criticisms of bilingual policies in Colombia has been the privileged status of English over the other linguistic realities of Colombia (Mackenzie, 2020). For example, the role of Spanish in promoting bilingual education in a predominantly Spanish-speaking country has not been directly addressed or promoted in any official document to date (Truscott and Tejada-Sánchez, 2020), not to mention the nonexistent role of minority languages (Usma, 2015). This situation can be better understood by discussing language ideologies, or how different social actors perceive and promote language practices (Woolard, 1998). A restrictive perspective that views languages as separate codes with differing values within a hierarchy is considered a monoglossic ideology (Bettney, 2022), evident in how Colombian bilingual policies primarily focus on English learning as their main objective.

Cardona et al. (2024) argue that this oversimplification is a distinct characteristic of bilingual policies in Colombia. Deriving from Fairclough’s (2003) intratextuality and intertextuality approach to discourse analysis, the authors conclude that promoting a homogenous national curriculum around a privileged foreign language does not address the real contexts of most public schools. This is evident when a similar discourse is present in national and regional documents.

For instance, the NBP states that its main objective is “having competent citizens to communicate in English, with internationally comparable standards, that insert the country in the processes of universal communication, in the global economy and cultural openness” (MEN, 2006, p. 12; AT). The interchangeability of bilingualism for learning English as a foreign language has been present ever since the first official document supporting bilingual policies in Colombia was issued. It can be similarly traced in many of the local documents that regulate decisions in schools and classrooms. In this way, the PAMI document states: “Being bilingual is essential in a globalized world. Using a second language means being able to communicate better, to open borders, to understand other contexts, to appropriate knowledge and to make it circulate” (Alcaldía de Armenia, 2012; AT). By the same token, the Integral Bilingualism Plan of the department claims: “for the department of Quindío, it is essential to design and implement strategies that allow, as proposed by the National English program, 2015-2025, to raise the communicative competence in English of students and teachers in all official

educational institutions” (Gobernación del Quindío, 2017; AT).

The previous quotes are part of the official rationale for bilingual policies for the city and the department. The direct relation between these documents and the official position towards bilingualism as a synonym of English learning is evident, as it is also clear how a national perspective in an official document trickles down to a regional level and, subsequently, to more local contexts, directly influencing decision-making in schools and classrooms. A similar wording and intention are purported in the general objectives regarding bilingualism on the PEIs of the different schools analyzed, for instance:

It is a necessity to continue with the Pilot Project in Bilingualism and to end it on a high note with the implementation of the Bilingual Academic vocational track which allows students and the Educational Community the possibility of accrediting their competencies in the English language through the measurement of the level of performance shown in an international evaluation (IE Policarpa Salavarrieta, 2016; AT).

“For all of the above reasons, it is important to implement an institutional educational project, which aims at state policies but simultaneously strengthens and potentiates the students’ communicative skills in foreign languages” (IE CASD, 2016; AT).

“Given that the spaces for interaction with the foreign language are limited only to English classes, it is necessary to create a bilingual environment inside and outside the classroom where students must express themselves in a foreign language” (IE Santa Maria Goretti, 2021; AT)

The acknowledgment of English as the main focus of any bilingual school program has existed since the beginning of official bilingual policies (De Mejía, 2011) and continues to be present, possibly because it is a practical way to solve a complex problem. According to Kahneman (2012, 2011), this is a typical cognitive process when dealing with multifaceted issues. The author suggests that when people are faced with a difficult question, they tend to instinctively answer a different, easier question related to the original one. This process is known as substitution bias, and in this context, it can clarify why discussions about bilingualism are frequently mixed with discussions about English learning. However, this substitution results in a restrictive or monoglossic approach to languages that can hinder a richer educational experience.

The monoglossic tendencies in official school documents directly relate to the restrictive perspective on bilingualism in national policies. This intertextuality is manifest and can be understood as the way schools and teachers attempt to answer the issues that national policies arise. In every document, English is the main objective of bilingualism policies, and its importance is consistently highlighted as an economic asset that favors students. Another evident similarity and intertextual link is the absence of a discussion about the role of Spanish and other languages in developing bilingual education.

According to Spiro and Crisfield (2018), a monoglossic perspective of languages in bilingual education can mean that at the school level, programs are proposed to decrease the interference of the “mother tongue” so that each language has a separate existence that cannot and should not account for the other. A monoglossic perspective implies a disavowing of linguistic variety and translanguaging (García, 2009) and a kind of dissection of the target foreign language. Substituting bilingualism for English learning as a quantifiable goal can also explain how English learning is separated into skills to be promoted in isolation. As a result, some schools have decided to separate English teaching from skills taught by different teachers. (IE Rafel Uribe Uribe, 2023)

It can be argued that there is a direct relationship between the monoglossic perspective and the commodification of English. It not only implies substituting a complex problem for a more achievable and quantifiable goal, but it also implies a prevalence of traditional beliefs about language learning. Traditional beliefs around education are manifest in discourse and decision-making: “Teachers and other stakeholders are left struggling with their own tacit beliefs that have evolved and resemble practices that look like their own experience as students rather than an informed decision based on the theory” (Berger, 2012, p. 57). It is tradition rather than reflection that ultimately influences policies and practices in schools, a tradition that resists change, 20 years after implementing the first bilingual national policy. The overemphasis of English as the only goal in practice when talking about bilingualism is a distinct characteristic of Quindío and Armenia, which implies an apparent influence from the shortcomings of official discourses in the first bilingual policies.

Another way of making sense of the monoglossic tradition within bilingual policies is to consider background incentives, as Sowell (2000) proposes: “Policies are often discussed in terms of the goals they proclaim rather than the incentives they create” (p. 469). In this light, the commodification of English is a straightforward incentive for several profit organizations that have been influential in developing national and regional policies. Cardona-Escobar et al. (2024) argue that the role of Public-private partnerships (PPPs) is also a significant influence on the regional decisions around bilingual policies: “The cost that public educational institutions pay usually comes in the form of the loss of autonomy for those public institutions and the strengthening of accountability pressures exercised on them” (Cardona et al., 2024, p. 2).

The lucrative incentives created by the national policies are part and parcel of PPPs (Bonilla & Tejada, 2016) and must be considered when analyzing the impact and local decisions inside public institutions. Private institutions and other organizations in the region, such as *Colombo Americano*, *Empresarios por la Educación*, and the British Council, undeniably influence the decision-making process. For instance, these three private organizations were the main sponsors of two national bilingualism congresses, both held in Armenia, Quindío, in 2009 and 2011. This has paved the way for such institutions to become “authorities in the matter”, materializing in professional training programs for teachers and students, participation in the department board of bilingualism, and other related events. For instance, in the last report from Armenia’s Board of Education regarding bilingual education in the city, partnerships with these institutions are described as “technical assistance,” which is emphasized as a crucial aspect of bilingual development from 2014 to 2019 (Alcaldía de Armenia, 2019).

The Current State of Bilingualism Discourses in the Region

In the present government national administration (2022-2026), characterized by introducing ‘change’ at all levels of social, economic, cultural, and political life, a different type of discourse is perceived not only in recent documents issued by the Ministry of Education (MEN) but also at the local level; such is the case of *Estrategia de Acompañamiento Pedagógico Territorio SCHOLA 2024-2027* (Pedagogical Guidance Territory SCHOLA 2024-2027) (SEM, 2024), a document published this year by the local Board of Education in Armenia. Following directives by MEN, the SEM presented the document as a ‘strategy’: the re-signification of school space-time.

The national government, in line with the *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* (National Development Plan) (2022-2026), and Law 2294 (2023), stipulated what could be understood as a reconsideration

of the education system and a re-signification of the school day towards school time, entitled “resignification of school time towards comprehensive development and the protection of life and education paths” (AT); in other words, problematizing existing traditional concepts of education, and extending learning opportunities through a more diverse educational offer, so that schools may cater to regional characteristics. This should then enable an understanding of the territory of education beyond the school borders. As the document highlights, the SEM will play a protagonist role in guiding, constructing, or updating the pedagogical strategy of schools so that they may respond to the specific needs in each territory. That is, each society needs to recognize the place in which the formative process takes place, so that a particular city may become an education system. The pedagogical guidance strategy includes ‘badges’-or labels- on different topics, among them a new PEI 2024-2027. Other labels, for instance, refer to education, including multilingualism and social and environmental issues, a more inclusive discourse compared to other policies and school documents, like the ones mentioned above.

Multilingualism

In the case of multilingualism, the SCHOLA document of the SEM (2024) takes distance from bilingualism, understood as bilingualism in English and Spanish, referring to that concept so common in previous official policy documents. The section on multilingualism starts by referring to the pioneering role of the department of Quindío in the teaching of foreign languages, a fact that is especially highlighted in most official documents in the SEM, citing as evidence of this the curricular construction by teachers in Armenia, around the Curricular Project Humanities- English which produced the PAMI (Alcaldía de Armenia, 2012), as noted previously, a guide for teachers, published in 2012. However, as stated in the document, “the city aims at acknowledging the linguistic diversity of the territory, recognizing the importance of all ethnic languages, sign languages, and foreign languages, through education for multilingualism” (AT), calling attention towards diversity and inclusion of all languages in the ‘territory’, without a direct mention of English.

Additionally, the ‘label’ of multilingualism reinforces the concept of proficiency *-competencia-*, a commonly used term in most school documents in Quindío, not mentioning other more recent approaches to the teaching and learning of a foreign language. As the SCHOLA document adds, the contribution of schools is fundamental in strengthening the skills and communicative and cultural proficiency that students must achieve in an articulate and coherent way with the process of teaching and learning of languages, according to their sociocultural and sociolinguistic needs. A positive aspect of the discourse here is the attention students receive in this process, one that is more connected with the students’ lives.

A significant turn in the discourse around bilingualism in SCHOLA is notable, in this case, changing from the previous rhetoric around the hegemony of English language teaching to recognizing the existence of other languages in the territory and the students’ realities. This opens the possibility of a more inclusive panorama in education in Armenia, and Quindío, acknowledging the region’s existing linguistic and cultural diversity. This new trend in official policy is also perceived in the school’s PEIs, as some institutions have recently updated their discourse to include other languages, Spanish, French, and sign language, as it has been highlighted in the analysis of the data selected for the discourse analysis in this article.

The multilingual perspective is starting to be part of the discourse around bilingualism in the latest versions of documents of some schools in the region. The term and its implications are explicitly

referenced, as is the recognition of Spanish as a central part of bilingual education: “It is crucial to highlight the importance of students’ first language in learning a second language. The knowledge gained from their first language can be a foundation for acquiring the second language” (IE CASD, 2016; AT).

Despite these new narratives, changes in the discourse of policy implementation in the schools, militate against a significantly rooted ideology of bilingualism among teachers, in this case, ‘English only’ in the everyday pedagogical practices in the majority of institutions, where teachers insist on the presence of one foreign language, English, in their classes, practically ignoring any possibility of translanguaging into Spanish; even if in their practices, they resort to Spanish very frequently. This seems to be a valid option for students and for teachers in their everyday practices, as previously shown in the data analysis; nevertheless, despite the strategies proposed by SCHOLA, tensions will continue to be present in schools in Quindío.

As for the near future, as stated in SCHOLA, the SEM intends to sort out difficulties, working closely with the schools, considering what the schools have been doing so far, guiding them, and working on what they have constructed already. According to a recent interview with the document’s author (Velez, 2024), the strategies proposed are designed for a medium term, about four years, showing respect for what the schools have done so far regarding multilingualism and its important role. The author also insists on the work one of the schools (Normal Superior del Quindío) has done over the last six years, trying to build their multilingual proposal in English, French, and Sign Language, besides teaching Math in English. This school has started this process with lower grades and plans to integrate grade 11 into the scheme. Their goal is to reach the B1 level in the CEFR. One of the issues public schools faces is the shortage of teachers of English in primary school, as in the case of Normal Nacional school, with teachers teaching all subjects, including English. To meet their needs, they have reached agreements with local private and public universities in Armenia, so that teachers who need more preparation in ELT may teach English. As the author of SCHOLA admits, there has been a lack of articulation of the SEM with the schools, and resources are limited.

As shown here so far, even though the discourse of bilingualism now reflects a more inclusive tone, and new spaces are created for Spanish and other languages such as French and Sign Language, there is a persistent attitude towards English and its instrumentalization, as evidenced in the majority of the documents analyzed here, as tourism, and the need to learn English is considered a must for the future of Education in the region. As the author of SCHOLA mentioned, it is necessary to adopt a more ‘aggressive’ strategy in future investment in tourism in the SED, in articulation with the schools and the strategies to innovate in education, especially in multilingualism.

Conclusions

The analysis of the various documents indicates a clear tendency in the discourse around bilingualism at the local level that directly relates to the national discourse that has not evolved officially since the implementation of the NBP in Colombia. In the light of CDA (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2005; Wodak, 2014), the analysis of this tendency can be better understood. Such a framework points to an intertextual connection that has persisted for at least twenty years in the national and local policies.

From a diachronic perspective, the analysis of the documents reveals a common pattern, that is, the pervasive predisposition to promoting English learning as the core of most bilingual policies. This intention manifests in policies regulating and promoting bilingual education, such as the draft law

of bilingualism in the department, a curriculum proposal for public schools in Armenia (PAMI), and most of the PEIs and school curricula analyzed in the sample. The findings suggest that this pattern is related to commodifying English as a valuable skill in terms of economic opportunities in a framework of globalization, leading to a conflation of bilingualism with English learning.

Another way to understand this reductive view of bilingualism is the process of simplification proposed by Kahneman (2011,2012). Based on the author's notion, the complexity of bilingualism incentivizes the use of an easier, quantifiable proxy, English learning, which becomes a more precise objective to regulate in any policy and curriculum proposal than addressing bilingualism with all its implications. Consequently, the influence of private-public partnerships (PPPs) is another characteristic of regional bilingual policies. As Cardona et al. (2024) have pointed out, allocating budget and decision-making power to institutions that design materials, workshops, and mentorships is a direct consequence of the commodification of English.

In the same way, there are many traces of a monoglossic perspective of languages (Spiro & Crisfield, 2018) in the rationale of the local policies analyzed. The absence of an explicit mention of the role of Spanish and other local languages in the learning and teaching of English and other foreign languages presupposes an independence of languages, each as a separate body of knowledge and skills to be learned in isolation. It also implies a particular hierarchy of languages where English and the Anglo-Saxon cultural expressions carry a reputation over the local linguistic realities.

Despite all the propensities for the stagnation of bilingual discourse, there has been a small but significant change in some local policies in schools and education agencies. Specifically, the proposal of SCHOLA (2024) by the SEM in Armenia and the development of some curricular decisions in a couple of schools in the region open the possibility of multilingualism as an alternative perspective to profit from the ecology of languages and cultures in the local context. This becomes a significant starting point to address the complexities of language learning and its implications for cultural enrichment.

The conclusions of the analysis presented so far have become more relevant for discussing bilingual education and multilingual perspectives, especially now that a void is evident in the development of official national policies. Schools, universities, and other public institutions should aim to endorse their own contextualized analysis to promote bottom-up policies that make more sense to the needs and expectations of each regional context.

Statement of originality

We declare that this manuscript is the result of original research and that it has not been published before and is not currently under evaluation in another journal.

Conflicts of interest

We do not have any potential conflict of interest to declare.

Authors Contributions

Jefersson Arias-Alzate: Conceptualization, data curation, investigation, project administration, validation, writing original draft.

Jorge Mario Perdomo-Santacruz: Software, formal analysis, investigation, visualization, Writing original draft, resources.

Silvia Valencia-Giraldo: Methodology, Writing, review and editing, investigation, supervision, writing original draft.

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