

Intercultural Schools? Tensions and Challenges in Addressing Cultural Diversity in Chile

Pablo Segovia-Lagos¹, Sebastián Bravo Silva¹, Paula González Zúñiga¹, Josefa Gutiérrez Gallardo¹, Claudia Naranjo Álvarez¹, Amanda Rioseco Moreno¹, Camila Stone Charles¹

¹Escuela Psicología, Facultad de Medicina y Ciencias de la Salud, Universidad Mayor Chile, Chile

Correspondence: Pablo Segovia-Lagos, Escuela de Psicología, Universidad Mayor. Manuel Montt 318, Providencia, Santiago-Chile, Chile. Email: psegovialagos@gmail.com

Received: June 23, 2026

Accepted: August 8, 2026

Online Published: August 11, 2026

doi:10.11114/ijce.v9i2.9179

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijce.v9i2.9179>

Abstract

This study analyzes the practices developed by public schools in the Metropolitan Region of Chile to address cultural diversity from the perspectives of inclusion and interculturality. The research emerges within a context characterized by the sustained increase of the migrant population in the country and the challenges this poses for educational communities. From a qualitative perspective and through a multiple case study design, the experiences and practices of 15 municipal schools with high proportions of migrant students and elevated levels of school vulnerability were explored. Data were produced through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with school leadership teams, teachers, and students. The analysis was carried out through thematic coding supported by Atlas.ti software, considering three analytical dimensions: institutional management, curricular adaptation, and school coexistence and community. The findings reveal significant progress in the institutional recognition of cultural diversity, particularly through the incorporation of inclusion and interculturality principles into institutional educational projects and the implementation of welcoming strategies for migrant students. However, important tensions persist regarding the weak institutionalization of intercultural practices, the predominance of fragmented and voluntarist initiatives, curricular limitations, and gaps in teacher training. Furthermore, many initiatives continue to focus on symbolic and folklorized dimensions of cultural diversity without promoting substantial transformations in pedagogical and relational practices. The study concludes that the schools analyzed demonstrate incipient progress toward the construction of inclusive and intercultural educational communities; nevertheless, significant structural, institutional, and formative challenges remain for consolidating systematic processes of educational transformation.

Keywords: cultural diversity, intercultural schools, inclusion, migrations

1. Introduction

During recent decades, Chile has undergone a significant transformation in its migration dynamics, shifting from being historically a country of emigration to progressively consolidating itself as a host society for migrant populations. This phenomenon has generated sustained growth in the resident foreign-born population and, consequently, profound social, cultural, and institutional transformations. According to the 2024 Census, foreign-born individuals currently represent 8.8% of the country's resident population, a figure that nearly doubles the 4.4% recorded in the 2017 Census (National Institute of Statistics [INE], 2025). This scenario has contributed to increasing cultural diversification across multiple social domains, including territorial, labor, healthcare, and educational settings, thereby creating new challenges for public policies and for institutions responsible for ensuring processes of social inclusion and cohesion. In the educational sphere, the growing enrollment of foreign students has had a particularly significant impact in specific regions and municipalities, especially in the Metropolitan Region, Antofagasta, and Valparaíso, areas that concentrate a substantial proportion of the migrant population. According to data from the 2024 Census, approximately 19% of the migrant population consists of children and adolescents of school age (INE, 2024). Furthermore, several studies have shown that this population tends to be concentrated in public and tuition-free schools located in contexts of high social vulnerability, characterized by structural limitations, scarce resources, and persistent socioeconomic inequalities (Eyzaguirre, Aguirre, & Blanco, 2019). Within this context, schools have become privileged spaces for intercultural encounters, but also settings in which tensions emerge regarding the recognition of diversity, educational inclusion, school coexistence, and equality of opportunity.

The increasing cultural heterogeneity of school communities has highlighted the need to advance toward educational models capable of responding effectively to increasingly diverse social contexts. In this regard, educating in multicultural settings involves not only guaranteeing migrant students' access to and permanence within the educational system, but also promoting pedagogical, curricular, and institutional conditions that foster the recognition, participation, and appreciation of diverse cultural identities without requiring processes of assimilation or identity loss (Bustos & Gairín, 2017). From this perspective, cultural diversity ceases to be understood merely as a demographic characteristic and instead becomes an ethical, political, and pedagogical challenge for educational institutions. Within this context, the approaches of inclusion and interculturality have gained increasing relevance in international educational debates and in the formulation of public policies aimed at promoting equity and social justice. In particular, the inclusive approach maintains that all students, regardless of their social, cultural, linguistic, or personal characteristics, should have genuine opportunities for participation and learning, through the removal of barriers that hinder the full realization of the right to education (UNESCO, 2017). In turn, the intercultural perspective emphasizes the need to promote horizontal relationships among cultures, encouraging dialogue, mutual recognition, and the transformation of historically monocultural and homogenizing school practices (Walsh, 2009; Tubino, 2005).

However, the ways in which inclusion and interculturality are understood and implemented vary considerably across national contexts and educational traditions, depending on historical, political, and sociocultural factors. The specialized literature identifies different approaches to cultural diversity, including multiculturalism, anti-racist education, social justice education, inclusive education, and critical interculturality (Banks, 2015; Portera, 2020). While some approaches have focused on recognizing cultural diversity through the incorporation of multicultural content into the curriculum, others have evolved toward perspectives aimed at transforming school structures and the power relations that generate exclusion and inequality.

2. Interculturality and Inclusion Approach

The growing cultural diversity present in contemporary educational systems has fostered the development of approaches aimed at promoting more equitable, democratic, and inclusive forms of coexistence and learning. Within this context, the approaches of inclusion and interculturality have gained particular prominence in international educational debates, especially in societies characterized by migration processes, cultural plurality, and persistent structural inequalities. Although both approaches share a concern for guaranteeing the right to education and participation for all students, they emerge from distinct conceptual traditions and emphasize different analytical dimensions.

From the perspective of inclusive education, the primary focus lies in eliminating the barriers that restrict the presence, participation, and learning of specific groups within school communities (UNESCO, 2017). This approach challenges the exclusionary and homogenizing practices historically embedded in educational systems and advocates for institutional transformation that recognizes diversity as an inherent characteristic of educational experiences rather than as a problem requiring correction. In this regard, Booth and Ainscow (2011) argue that inclusion involves critically examining the cultures, policies, and practices that generate exclusion while promoting educational communities capable of responding to the diversity of students' trajectories, identities, and needs.

The intercultural approach, in turn, is conceived as an ethical, political, and pedagogical framework aimed at fostering horizontal relationships among culturally diverse groups, moving beyond perspectives centered solely on the passive coexistence of cultures. Unlike traditional multicultural approaches, which tend to emphasize the descriptive recognition of diversity, interculturality seeks to generate processes of dialogue, interaction, and mutual transformation among individuals and communities from different cultural backgrounds (Walsh, 2009; Tubino, 2005). From this perspective, cultural diversity extends beyond folkloric or identity-based expressions and encompasses the historical relations of power, inequality, and subordination that permeate educational institutions and knowledge production. In educational terms, interculturality has been defined as a model grounded in the principles of freedom, justice, equality, and human dignity, principles that should be reflected both in normative frameworks and in the institutional practices that shape school life (Arnaiz Sánchez, 2000). This approach understands intercultural education as a cross-cutting process that permeates institutional management, curriculum design, pedagogical relationships, and school coexistence, promoting the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultural identities present within educational communities. Consequently, intercultural education is not limited to incorporating specific cultural content into the curriculum; rather, it seeks to transform school dynamics and the relationships established among culturally diverse subjects. Within this framework, one of the central purposes of intercultural education is to foster students' critical understanding of themselves and others, recognizing cultural diversity as a constitutive element of contemporary societies. This entails promoting educational processes that make visible diverse histories, memories, forms of knowledge, and ways of understanding the world, thereby overcoming assimilationist or monocultural approaches that have historically privileged certain forms of knowledge and cultural experiences over others (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2013). Consequently, interculturality implies advancing toward pedagogical practices capable of challenging cultural hierarchies and fostering relationships grounded in mutual respect, participation, and reciprocal recognition.

In Latin America, the intercultural approach has acquired distinctive characteristics due to the profound historical, ethnic, and social inequalities that characterize the region. From critical perspectives, various scholars have argued that interculturality cannot be reduced solely to policies of cultural recognition or coexistence among differences but must instead address the relations of coloniality and exclusion embedded within social and educational structures (Walsh, 2009; Quijano, 2000). In this sense, critical interculturality conceptualizes the school as a space of symbolic and political contestation, where relations of power, processes of racialization, and forms of cultural subordination are reproduced—but can also be transformed. Based on these considerations, the present study assumes that the construction of inclusive and intercultural schools requires institutional, pedagogical, and relational transformations that transcend the superficial recognition of cultural diversity. Accordingly, educational practices may be situated at different levels of development, ranging from multicultural actions focused on the symbolic visibility of differences to critically intercultural practices aimed at transforming school dynamics, challenging structural inequalities, and promoting more democratic forms of coexistence and educational participation.

3. Background of the Chilean Context

Over recent decades, Chile has progressively developed a regulatory framework aimed at recognizing the right to education of historically excluded groups and strengthening educational policies grounded in inclusion and respect for cultural diversity. This process has become particularly relevant in the context of sustained growth in the migrant population and the increasing cultural heterogeneity of school communities. Consequently, the Chilean educational system has been challenged to respond institutionally and pedagogically to new social, cultural, and territorial configurations, promoting transformations both in regulatory frameworks and in the technical guidelines provided to educational establishments.

Among the most significant regulatory developments are the National Policy on Intercultural Bilingual Education (1993 and 1996), initially designed to recognize Indigenous peoples and their native languages; the General Education Law (2009), which establishes principles associated with equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination; the School Inclusion Law (2015), focused on strengthening equality of opportunity and eliminating exclusionary mechanisms; and the Policy for Foreign Children and Students in the Chilean Educational System (2018, updated in 2024), which incorporates specific guidelines for addressing migration within school settings. Collectively, these regulations represent substantial progress in the formal recognition of cultural diversity and in promoting the right to inclusive and quality education for all students, regardless of nationality, ethnic origin, migration status, gender, or socioeconomic condition. The School Inclusion Law, in particular, introduced significant transformations into the Chilean educational system by positioning coexistence, participation, and equality as central principles of educational action. From this perspective, schools are conceived as spaces of encounter and civic formation, responsible for fostering relationships grounded in respect, democratic participation, and the appreciation of diversity (González, Berríos, & Bastías, 2023). Likewise, the enactment of Law No. 21,325 on Migration and Foreign Affairs in 2021 consolidated the recognition of the fundamental rights of migrants, including access to essential social services such as education and healthcare, regardless of the migration status of children and adolescents (Valdés et al., 2022).

In the educational field, the Policy for Foreign Children and Students has become one of the principal instruments guiding school communities in responding to the increasing enrollment of migrant students. Its 2024 update incorporates a comprehensive approach structured around four strategic dimensions: access and permanence, training and capacity building, institutional strengthening, and participation and coexistence. These guidelines seek to move beyond a perspective focused exclusively on administrative access toward a broader understanding of educational inclusion that incorporates pedagogical, institutional, and relational dimensions associated with cultural diversity and community participation (Ministry of Education, 2024). Despite these regulatory advances and the progressive development of technical guidelines by the State, numerous studies highlight the persistence of substantial gaps between the principles established in public policies and the everyday practices implemented within educational institutions (Jiménez & Valdés, 2021; Gómez & Sepúlveda, 2022). In many cases, schools continue to operate under monocultural and assimilationist logics, where cultural diversity is addressed primarily through symbolic recognition activities—such as gastronomic or folkloric celebrations—without generating substantive transformations in curriculum design, teaching methodologies, assessment processes, or forms of school participation. This situation reflects structural tensions associated with insufficient teacher training in interculturality, a lack of contextualized pedagogical resources, and institutional limitations that hinder the development of systematic strategies for educational inclusion.

Nevertheless, national evidence also reveals the existence of emerging practices and experiences promoted by school communities themselves, which have developed context-sensitive strategies to respond to the cultural diversity present within their educational environments. These initiatives include the implementation of welcoming protocols, the incorporation of intercultural facilitators, the development of institutional assessments of coexistence and diversity, pedagogical adaptations, and activities aimed at strengthening community participation (Ministry of Education, 2020;

Valdés et al., 2022). To a large extent, these experiences have emerged from the agency and commitment of school teams rather than from systematic institutional support policies. In this regard, the Ministry of Education has proposed guidelines for the development of intercultural schools organized around three major dimensions of action: institutional management, curricular adaptation, and school coexistence and community engagement. The institutional management dimension involves the cross-cutting incorporation of cultural diversity into school planning and management instruments, promoting institutional commitment to inclusion and participation. The curricular adaptation dimension emphasizes the need to develop relevant and contextualized pedagogical processes capable of recognizing diverse trajectories, forms of knowledge, and cultural experiences. Finally, the school coexistence and community dimension seeks to strengthen respectful, democratic, and participatory relationships among the various members of the educational community, reducing discriminatory practices and fostering mutual recognition (Castro Suárez, 2019).

From this perspective, interculturality cannot be understood merely as a set of isolated activities intended to make cultural differences visible. Rather, it should be conceived as a cross-cutting process of institutional, pedagogical, and relational transformation. This implies that schools must develop comprehensive strategies capable of problematizing the cultural and social asymmetries present within educational spaces, while promoting more democratic and horizontal relationships among the different actors of the school community. Table 1 presents some of the principal dimensions and actions proposed by the Ministry of Education to advance the construction of schools with an intercultural approach.

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions for the Development of Inclusive and Intercultural Educational Practices

School Management	Curricular Adaptation	School Climate and Community Engagement
Refers to institutional actions aimed at recognizing cultural diversity within the educational context and establishing guidelines for the development of plans and initiatives that promote inclusion within the school environment. Such actions may include the integration of interculturality into the educational project, procedures for supporting and safeguarding inclusion, participatory planning mechanisms, professional development and training programs, institutional management of diversity, and the coordination of interdepartmental or multi-stakeholder bodies, among others.	Refers to plans and actions designed to recognize students, educational processes, and the adaptation of teaching–learning strategies and methodologies, fostering the development of curricula and educational content from a culturally informed perspective. Examples include the incorporation of intercultural content into the curriculum, the design of pedagogical experiences, collaboration with specialized programs, and the recognition of groups historically associated with stereotypes or cultural variables, among others.	Refers to systematic and integrated actions aimed at fostering a school climate that values diversity and promotes inclusion, strengthening school coexistence through an intercultural approach, encouraging participation across all levels of the educational community, and enhancing students' sense of belonging and educational identity. Examples include addressing racism and discrimination, developing participation plans involving different stakeholder groups, fostering positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, establishing mechanisms for conflict resolution and diversity management, promoting teamwork, and strengthening links with local communities and institutions, among others.

Source: Ministry of Education (2020b).

The consolidation of an intercultural and inclusive perspective in Chilean schools requires ongoing reflection grounded in evidence and the generation of context-specific knowledge. Accordingly, the contribution of this study lies in advancing understanding of the practices implemented by schools and their educational teams in addressing cultural diversity, considering the significance of this issue within a context characterized by increasing migratory flows and the challenges generated by the absence of comprehensive state migration policies and, more specifically, by the limited development of intercultural education policies. Furthermore, the study seeks to contribute to the public debate concerning the role of schools in promoting inclusion and respect for diversity. In this regard, the existing body of evidence (Gómez & Sepúlveda, 2022; Podestá, Álvarez, & Morón, 2022; Román, 2021; Martínez, 2019) provides emerging findings regarding the challenges involved in establishing intercultural and inclusive practices within Chilean public schools, as well as the largely self-managed role adopted by school teams.

4. Intercultural Education in Chile: Approaches to the Framework

Despite the progressive advances that Chile has achieved in terms of recognizing cultural diversity and the right to inclusive education within its regulatory framework, the specialized literature highlights the persistence of significant gaps between the principles established by public policies and the concrete practices implemented within school communities. In general terms, regulatory progress has not necessarily been accompanied by institutional, curricular, and pedagogical transformations sufficiently profound to consolidate genuinely intercultural and inclusive schools. This situation is associated with multiple factors, including the fragmentation of educational practices, insufficient specialized

training among school personnel, limited technical and human resources, and institutional resistance to processes of cultural change within the educational system.

Several scholars argue that Chilean educational policies have tended to address cultural diversity through a logic of adaptive inclusion, primarily aimed at facilitating migrant students' access to and retention within the school system, without substantially questioning power relations, exclusionary mechanisms, or the normalizing practices embedded within educational institutions (Gómez & Sepúlveda, 2022). From this perspective, inclusion is often translated into strategies focused on the functional integration of foreign students into pre-existing school structures, largely maintaining the monocultural and homogenizing foundations of the educational system. Consequently, cultural diversity is frequently understood as a specific administrative or pedagogical challenge rather than as a factor capable of critically challenging traditional forms of school organization.

In the same vein, numerous studies identify teacher education as one of the principal limitations to the development of sustained intercultural practices consistent with principles of rights, equity, and educational justice (Stefoni et al., 2017; Parra & Osorio, 2023). Evidence indicates that many teachers lack the conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical tools necessary to address cultural diversity from critical perspectives, directly affecting teaching practices, school coexistence, and participation processes. Under these circumstances, intercultural education tends to be reduced to isolated and predominantly symbolic experiences, such as gastronomic celebrations, cultural fairs, or folkloric activities, reproducing what some scholars describe as a "pedagogy of otherness," in which cultural difference is made visible but is not necessarily problematized in relation to inequality or power relations (Riedemann & Stefoni, 2015).

Nevertheless, despite these structural limitations, the literature also documents significant efforts undertaken by educational communities themselves in responding to the growing cultural diversity present in Chilean schools. Several studies demonstrate that school teams have developed context-sensitive strategies for welcoming, supporting, and pedagogically adapting to cultural diversity, which in many cases emerge from everyday experience and self-directed institutional learning processes rather than from systematic public policy guidelines (Riedemann & Stefoni, 2016). Recent evidence from Chilean schools further suggests that educational practices aimed at addressing cultural diversity tend to be fragmented and weakly institutionalized, relying largely on the commitment and initiative of individual teachers and school teams rather than on consolidated organizational structures or sustained institutional policies (Segovia-Lagos et al., 2026). In this sense, schools have been required to construct practical responses to increasingly multicultural educational environments, often in the absence of specific guidance, specialized resources, and sustained technical support.

From critical perspectives, some scholars have questioned the predominance of a "functional interculturality" within the Chilean educational system, understood as an approach that recognizes cultural diversity without altering existing school structures or cultural hierarchies (Walsh, 2009). Within this framework, there is a need to conceptualize the school as a space of political and symbolic contestation, where cultural differences are not only recognized but also examined in relation to historical processes of inequality, racialization, and coloniality (Stefoni et al., 2028). Advancing toward a model of critical intercultural education therefore requires questioning the ways in which particular forms of knowledge, identities, and life trajectories continue to occupy subordinate positions within the educational system.

Available evidence regarding the Chilean context indicates that many advances in inclusion and interculturality have emerged primarily from self-directed practices developed by educational institutions themselves (Arredondo & Paidicán, 2023; Campos Bustos, 2019; Jiménez et al., 2020). However, recent literature warns that this voluntary and self-managed character also creates significant challenges related to the sustainability, articulation, and evaluation of intercultural practices implemented by schools (Valdés et al., 2019). As a result, institutional responses often depend heavily on the individual commitment of teachers and school leaders, generating fragmented and heterogeneous experiences across educational establishments. Many of these tensions can be understood in light of the recent migration history of Chile and Latin America. Until only a few decades ago, the region was characterized predominantly by processes of emigration rather than immigration, which meant that educational systems were historically constructed around logics of cultural homogenization and monocultural nation-state building (Martínez Pizarro & Orrego Rivera, 2016). From this perspective, contemporary demographic and cultural transformations challenge school structures originally designed under assimilationist paradigms, in which cultural diversity traditionally occupied a marginal or subordinate position (Quijano, 2000).

Among the most relevant studies on the inclusion of migrant students in Chile are those conducted by the Jesuit Migrant Service, the Agency for Educational Quality, and Consultorías Focus (2019), which reveal significant limitations in the institutionalization of intercultural practices within schools. Their findings indicate that, in many educational establishments, the inclusion of migrant students continues to be addressed primarily through administrative and regulatory dimensions—such as enrollment procedures, school regularization, and access to benefits—while pedagogical, curricular, and relational dimensions remain comparatively underdeveloped. Likewise, limited coordination is observed

between schools and the central level of the educational system, with isolated and insufficiently systematic actions predominating.

Regarding welcoming practices, many schools have implemented protocols designed to facilitate the incorporation of foreign students and their families, generally coordinated by psychosocial teams or school coexistence units (Valdés et al., 2022). However, these initiatives tend to focus on socioemotional and administrative dimensions, displaying weaknesses in areas related to curricular inclusion, community participation, and the recognition of diverse cultural trajectories. Similarly, several studies point to the limited presence of cultural mediators or intercultural facilitators capable of strengthening communication between schools, migrant families, and the broader educational community.

In the area of school coexistence, evidence reveals heterogeneous outcomes. While some schools report positive experiences of coexistence and mutual recognition, others document situations of discrimination, racism, and exclusion directed particularly toward Afro-descendant, Haitian, and Colombian students (Segovia-Lagos, 2021). These experiences significantly affect processes of school adaptation and integration, particularly in relational dimensions and students' sense of belonging. Consequently, various authors argue that strengthening horizontal relationships, recognizing others as legitimate interlocutors, and building democratic educational communities constitute essential elements for the development of sustained intercultural practices (Corvalán et al., 2023). The pedagogical dimension appears to be one of the most critical areas in addressing cultural diversity. Evidence suggests that the main barriers are associated with curricular rigidity, differences among national educational systems, and the persistence of assimilationist pedagogical approaches centered on monocultural and Eurocentric content (Jiménez & Valdés, 2021; Oyarzún, 2024). In particular, subjects such as History, Geography, and Social Sciences tend to privilege homogeneous national narratives, providing limited space for Latin American, migratory, or intercultural perspectives. Within this framework, several scholars identify the persistence of forms of coloniality within the Chilean educational imaginary, where certain cultural subjects continue to be represented from subordinate or deficit-based positions (Joiko, 2019). Another relevant aspect highlighted in the literature concerns the conceptions of interculturality held by different educational actors. In this regard, Segovia-Lagos and Rendón (2020) found that a substantial proportion of teachers associate interculturality primarily with the integration of foreign students and the superficial recognition of their cultural expressions, without necessarily questioning existing school structures. Likewise, a significant proportion of participants reported lacking conceptual clarity regarding the intercultural approach, a situation that contributes to the implementation of diverse, ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory practices within schools.

In summary, national evidence indicates that Chilean schools have made important advances in recognizing cultural diversity and welcoming migrant students; however, these advances remain insufficient and largely incipient in nature. Fragmented, voluntary, and predominantly symbolic practices continue to prevail, while significant challenges persist regarding the institutionalization of interculturality, teacher education, curricular transformation, and the construction of inclusive and democratic educational communities. Under these circumstances, it remains essential to continue developing research that enhances understanding of schools' progress in inclusion and interculturality while identifying both good practices and tensions present across different educational contexts.

Within this framework, the present study aims to analyze the practices implemented by public schools in the Metropolitan Region to address cultural diversity, considering the three fundamental dimensions of educational action proposed by the Ministry of Education: institutional management, curricular adaptation, and school coexistence and community engagement. Furthermore, it seeks to answer the following research questions: What practices do public schools develop to address cultural diversity in educational contexts characterized by a high presence of migrant students? and How are these practices related to the approaches of inclusion and interculturality within the school context?.

5. Methodology

5.1 Methodological Approach and Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with an exploratory-descriptive scope, based on a multiple case study design. This methodological approach enabled an in-depth examination of the practices, experiences, and meanings constructed by educational communities regarding the management of cultural diversity, inclusion, and interculturality in school contexts characterized by a high presence of migrant students. The selection of a qualitative approach was guided by the interest in understanding complex educational phenomena from the perspectives of the actors involved, taking into account the contextual, institutional, and relational particularities that shape school experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

From this perspective, the study was oriented toward an interpretive understanding of the educational practices developed by schools rather than toward the measurement or statistical generalization of variables. Consequently, the research sought to identify the meanings, tensions, barriers, and strategies constructed by school communities concerning cultural diversity and its relationship with the approaches of inclusion and interculturality.

The multiple case study design made it possible to analyze different educational institutions as situated cases, facilitating the identification of both shared elements and differences in the ways cultural diversity is addressed (Stake, 2007; Yin, 2018). Each school was understood as a contextual unit of analysis embedded within particular social, territorial, and organizational dynamics, thereby enabling a comparative examination of the institutional, pedagogical, and relational practices present across the participating schools.

The study was conducted from an interpretive-phenomenological perspective, assuming that educational practices and the meanings associated with interculturality are socially situated constructions produced through interactions within specific historical, cultural, and political contexts. In this regard, the primary interest was to understand how educational communities conceptualize and operationalize cultural diversity in their everyday experiences, as well as the tensions that exist between normative guidelines and the practices effectively implemented within educational institutions.

5.2 Participants and Study Context

The unit of analysis consisted of 15 public municipal schools located in different municipalities of the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, Chile. Cases were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria related to the significant presence of migrant students, conditions of socioeducational vulnerability, and territorial heterogeneity. All participating schools had an enrollment of foreign students exceeding 15% of the total student population and a School Vulnerability Index (SVI) above 60%.

In addition, the schools were located in municipalities characterized by high levels of socioeconomic vulnerability and a substantial concentration of migrant populations, creating particularly challenging educational contexts for addressing cultural diversity.

Participants included various members of the educational communities, such as school leadership and management teams, teachers, and students. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups was intended to capture diverse perspectives regarding the institutional, pedagogical, and coexistence-related practices developed by schools in relation to inclusion and interculturality, thereby promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Table 2 presents the distribution of participants according to stakeholder group and the municipality in which the educational institution was located.

Table 2. Distribution of Participants by Stakeholder Group and School Municipality

Municipality	School Leadership and Management Team	Teachers	Students
Peñalolén	1	–	–
La Florida	1	–	1
San Joaquín	1	–	–
Quinta Normal	1	1	–
Cerro Navia	1	–	–
Huechuraba	–	–	2
Santiago	1	–	–
Recoleta	–	2	–
Estación Central	1	1	–
Pudahuel	–	1	–
Total	7	5	3

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

5.3 Data Collection

Data were generated through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with different members of the educational communities, including school leadership and management teams, teachers, and students. This technique enabled access to participants' experiences, meanings, and practices related to addressing cultural diversity from their situated perspectives, facilitating the exploration of institutional, pedagogical, and relational dimensions present within schools. The interview protocol was specifically developed for the purposes of this study through a process of theoretical review, document analysis, and operationalization of the study's core dimensions. Its construction was informed by the specialized literature on inclusive education, cultural diversity, and interculturality, as well as by the technical guidelines issued by the Chilean Ministry of Education regarding the inclusion of foreign students and the development of schools with an intercultural approach (Ministry of Education, 2017, 2020). Based on these sources, three analytical dimensions were defined to structure the instrument: (a) institutional management, (b) curricular adaptation, and (c) school coexistence and community engagement.

Each dimension was operationalized through thematic categories and guiding questions designed to explore welcoming practices, pedagogical strategies, family participation, intercultural coexistence, institutional barriers, teacher training,

and perceptions of cultural diversity within the school setting. The development of the interview protocol sought to ensure coherence between the theoretical-conceptual framework, the study objectives, and the research questions, thereby enabling the examination of both declarative aspects and concrete experiences developed by educational communities. The instrument validation process was conducted through expert judgment and pilot testing. In the first stage, the interview protocol was evaluated by a panel of five specialists with expertise in qualitative research, inclusive education, and interculturality. The experts assessed the relevance, clarity, coherence, and adequacy of each question in relation to the study objectives. To estimate the content validity of the instrument, Aiken's V coefficient was employed, a procedure widely used in the validation of qualitative and educational instruments (Aiken, 1985). The analysis yielded an overall validity index above 0.80, which is considered satisfactory in terms of content consistency and relevance. Based on the experts' recommendations, adjustments were made to improve conceptual precision, reformulate ambiguous questions, and deepen aspects related to intercultural practices and inclusive education processes. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted with participants from educational communities sharing characteristics similar to those included in the final sample. This process enabled the assessment of question comprehensibility, thematic sequencing, interview duration, and the instrument's capacity to generate relevant information concerning the phenomenon under investigation. Minor modifications were subsequently introduced, including refinements in wording, reorganization of certain questions, and the incorporation of additional prompts aimed at eliciting more detailed accounts of practical experiences related to addressing cultural diversity.

The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated the identification of tensions, contradictions, and meanings associated with the intercultural practices developed within educational communities, allowing for the collection of heterogeneous and contextually grounded experiences. Furthermore, the inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups responded to the need to construct a comprehensive and intersubjective understanding of the phenomenon under study, recognizing that experiences related to cultural diversity may vary according to institutional role, personal trajectories, and forms of participation within the school community.

5.4 Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was conducted through a qualitative thematic analysis process that combined deductive and inductive coding strategies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, three analytical dimensions derived from the conceptual framework and the Ministry of Education's guidelines for addressing cultural diversity in school settings were defined: institutional management, curricular adaptation, and school coexistence and community engagement. These dimensions guided the preliminary construction of the coding framework and the initial organization of the empirical material.

Subsequently, an open coding process was applied to the interview transcripts, identifying segments of information related to experiences, practices, tensions, barriers, and strategies associated with addressing cultural diversity. Emerging codes were progressively grouped into broader thematic categories through constant comparison and iterative analytical review, allowing for the identification of patterns, differences, and relationships across the cases examined.

The analysis was supported by Atlas.ti software, which facilitated the organization, systematization, and traceability of the analytical process. The use of this software enabled the management of the data corpus, the establishment of relationships among codes and categories, and the construction of thematic networks to support the interpretation of findings.

Although the analysis was initially structured around predefined dimensions, the process remained open to the emergence of unanticipated categories, allowing for the incorporation of meaningful elements arising directly from participants' narratives. In this way, the analysis combined a deductive logic grounded in theoretical and policy-based frameworks with an inductive approach aimed at understanding the situated experiences of school communities.

Finally, based on the coding and categorization process, interpretive themes were developed to understand how schools implement practices related to cultural diversity and how these practices are articulated with—or, alternatively, challenge—the approaches of inclusion and interculturality described in the literature and promoted through ministerial guidelines.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 present the coding frameworks and the principal thematic axes considered within each of the analytical dimensions examined in this study.

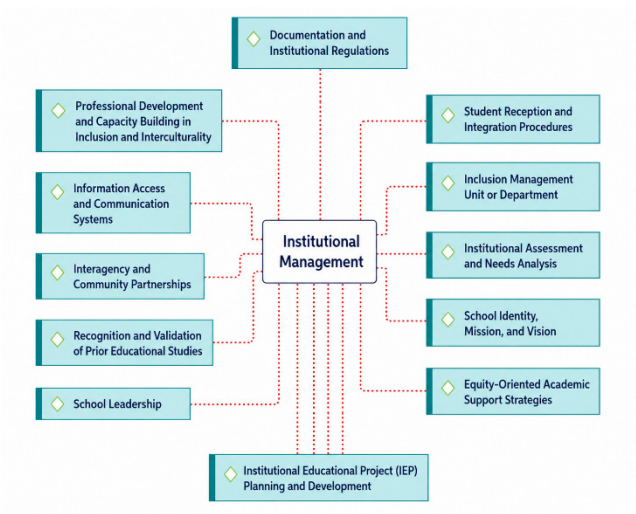


Figure 1. Coding Framework and Thematic Axes of the Institutional Management Dimension

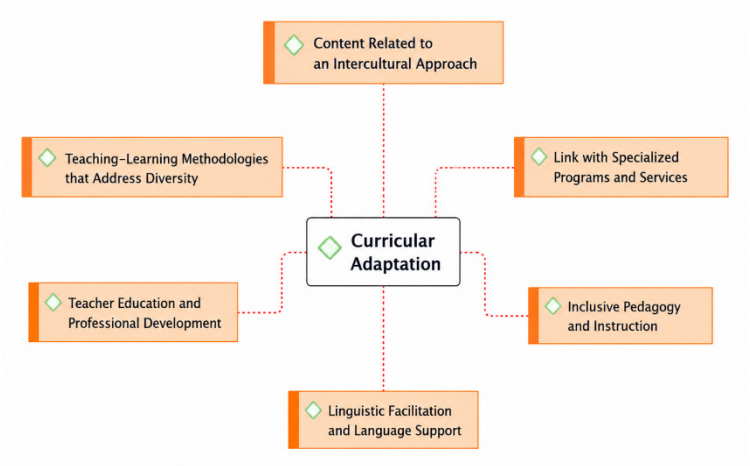


Figure 2. Coding Framework and Thematic Axes of the Curricular Adaptation Dimension

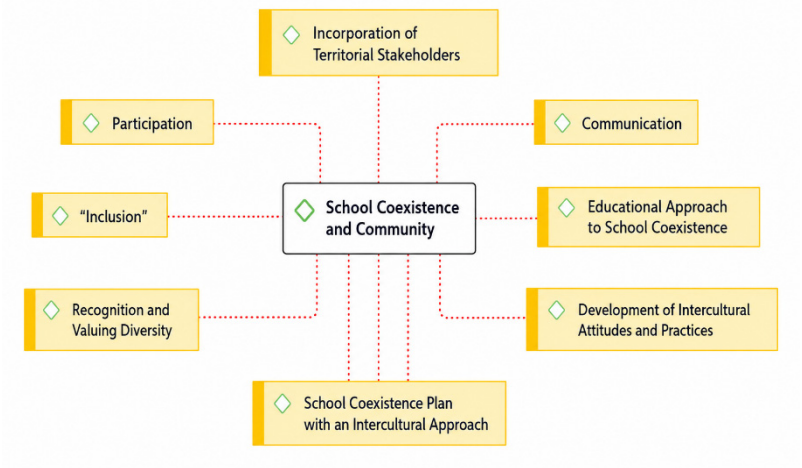


Figure 3. Coding Framework and Thematic Axes of the School Climate Dimension

5.5 Procedures

The study was conducted within the framework of the course *Qualitative Data Analysis* in the Psychology program at Universidad Mayor, incorporating the participation of undergraduate students in different stages of the research process, particularly in the generation and initial systematization of data.

Following the purposive selection of educational institutions, formal contact was established with school leadership teams to present the objectives of the study and request institutional authorization for its implementation. Subsequently, the voluntary participation of the different educational stakeholders was coordinated, and informed consent and assent forms were obtained from participants as appropriate.

The interviews were conducted between April and May 2025 in spaces provided by the participating schools or through alternative modalities previously agreed upon with participants. In parallel, secondary information regarding the schools—such as institutional characteristics and contextual background data—was collected to complement the characterization of the cases under analysis.

Upon completion of the fieldwork, the interviews were organized and systematized into analytical matrices that facilitated subsequent processes of coding, categorization, and the development of interpretive themes.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles established in the Declaration of Helsinki (1975), as revised in 2013. Ethical approval was granted by the Scientific Ethics Committee of Universidad Mayor under Resolution No. 0283, with Universidad Mayor serving as the sponsoring institution for the research.

In addition, all participants provided informed consent and/or informed assent prior to participation, following the authorization granted by the school administrations to conduct the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and measures were implemented to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, as well as the secure handling of data exclusively for the purposes of this research. The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

6. Results

The results presented below are organized according to the three analytical dimensions defined for the study: (a) institutional management, (b) curricular adaptation, and (c) school coexistence and community engagement. The analysis was aimed at identifying the practices developed by schools to address cultural diversity and examining their relationship with the approaches of inclusion and interculturality reflected in institutional discourse and organizational practices.

Across all dimensions, the findings reveal a tension between the discursive recognition of cultural diversity and the limited institutionalization of systematic intercultural practices. Although most schools acknowledge the multicultural nature of their educational communities and implement actions aimed at the inclusion of migrant students, such practices tend to rely on isolated, voluntary, and weakly articulated initiatives rather than on consolidated organizational structures or permanent institutional guidelines.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the intercultural practices developed by schools are conditioned by structural factors associated with social vulnerability within local territories, curricular rigidity, institutional constraints, and gaps in teacher education. Within this context, educational communities develop situated responses and adaptive strategies that partially address the needs arising from the cultural diversity present within schools.

6.1 Institutional Management

6.1.1 Institutional Recognition of Cultural Diversity

The findings indicate that a substantial proportion of schools have made progress in the formal recognition of the cultural diversity present within their educational communities. This is primarily reflected in the inclusion of explicit references to inclusion, multiculturalism, and interculturality within Institutional Educational Projects (IEPs), internal regulations, and institutional value statements. In many cases, schools' mission and vision statements incorporate principles associated with respect for diversity, democratic coexistence, and inclusive education.

These findings suggest that schools recognize the sociocultural transformations experienced within their educational contexts and acknowledge the need to incorporate cultural diversity into their institutional frameworks. However, the analysis also reveals that such recognition remains largely declarative in nature and does not necessarily entail structural transformations in school organization or in everyday educational practices.

Participants emphasized that the inclusion of intercultural principles in management instruments does not always translate into concrete mechanisms for implementation, monitoring, or evaluation of inclusive practices. The evidence points to a gap between institutional discourse and schools' actual capacities to develop systematic strategies for addressing cultural diversity.

6.1.2 Weak Institutionalization and Self-Directed Management

One of the most significant findings concerns the absence of permanent organizational structures specifically dedicated to the management of interculturality and inclusive education. Although recent literature recommends the creation of specialized units or departments to address cultural diversity, no institutionalized teams responsible for coordinating such efforts were identified.

Participants attributed this situation primarily to budgetary constraints, a shortage of specialized personnel, and limited training in interculturality among school leaders and teachers. Consequently, the practices developed by schools tend to be predominantly self-directed and reactive, depending largely on the commitment and initiative of specific institutional actors.

In some schools, school coexistence teams assume responsibilities related to inclusion and support for migrant students, particularly in socioemotional and relational dimensions. In other cases, these responsibilities fall to homeroom teachers, psychosocial teams, or support professionals who implement accompaniment strategies without necessarily having consolidated institutional guidelines.

One teacher stated:

"[...] in most cases, teachers are the ones who take responsibility for guiding parents in accessing school benefits, municipal services, and procedures with educational authorities related to the regularization of children's school status."

Similarly, a member of a school coexistence team explained:

"In our case, school coexistence is a cross-cutting issue. It does not have a specific section devoted to multiculturalism because it is already considered an assumed practice."

The findings suggest that the lack of institutionalization generates an additional burden for certain school actors and hinders the articulation of systematic inclusion initiatives. Furthermore, this situation produces fragmented responses that depend on individual efforts, thereby limiting the consolidation of an organizational culture grounded in an intercultural approach.

6.1.3 Territorial Networks and Municipal Support

Despite the institutional limitations identified, the findings reveal the existence of initiatives promoted by local governments aimed at strengthening schools' capacity to address cultural diversity. Some municipalities have established interculturality departments or programs designed to support educational communities through territorial assessments, awareness-raising processes, and the hiring of intercultural facilitators.

Participants particularly highlighted initiatives implemented in municipalities such as Estación Central, Recoleta, Cerro Navia, and Santiago, where intercultural coexistence assessments and support strategies for migrant students and their families have been developed. These experiences were positively valued by school leadership teams, who considered them important steps toward more coordinated territorial approaches to inclusion.

However, the analysis also demonstrates substantial differences among municipalities, with these initiatives largely dependent on local political priorities and technical capacities. Consequently, access to specialized institutional support remains uneven across educational establishments.

6.1.4 Welcoming and Support Protocols

Regarding concrete institutional practices, schools have implemented welcoming procedures aimed at facilitating migrant students' entry into and retention within the school system. The main actions identified include universal enrollment processes, guidance regarding migration regularization procedures and access to state benefits, as well as referrals to social and health support programs.

However, the findings indicate that these processes tend to focus primarily on administrative and initial integration aspects, with less emphasis placed on long-term pedagogical and relational support strategies. In addition, in many schools, welcoming protocols operate informally and flexibly, depending on the capacities and prior experiences of school personnel.

6.1.5 Institutional Capacity Building and Professional Development

Another relevant finding concerns existing limitations in teacher training and institutional capacity building. Although participants acknowledged the existence of ministerial guidelines and professional development initiatives promoted by some municipalities, these efforts were perceived as insufficient to address the complexity of intercultural processes occurring within schools.

One teacher commented:

“The Ministry of Education’s guidelines are extremely important, but they are general and universal in nature. Then we, as a team, have to adapt them to our own reality. Every school is different, every group of students is different, and that is where we still have a long way to go. There is not enough time, and there is no dedicated team responsible for this work.”

The findings suggest that the main challenge lies not only in the lack of training opportunities but also in the limited availability of institutional time and systematic spaces for pedagogical reflection that would allow schools to critically examine their practices and develop contextually relevant strategies for inclusion and interculturality.

6.1.6 Strategies for Equal Opportunities

Finally, the findings show that schools implement various strategies aimed at reducing educational inequalities associated with migratory trajectories, socioeconomic vulnerability, and curricular differences among educational systems.

Participants emphasized that many of the barriers encountered by students are not solely related to cultural background but also to structural conditions associated with poverty, cultural capital, and social inequality.

Within this context, schools implement academic leveling and pedagogical support initiatives designed to facilitate migrant students’ curricular integration. Nevertheless, these strategies continue to rely primarily on initiatives developed by teachers and pedagogical support units, without the support of specific national guidelines addressing curricular differences arising from migration-related educational mobility.

As one teacher explained:

“It is one thing for the paperwork to say that a student should be enrolled in fourth grade, and quite another for that to be entirely realistic in practice.”

This finding highlights the tensions between administrative procedures for educational recognition and migrant students’ actual educational trajectories, requiring schools to develop flexible and context-sensitive responses to challenges that are not always contemplated by national educational policies.

6.2 Curricular Adaptation

6.2.1 Curricular Rigidity and Structural Constraints on Interculturality

With regard to curricular adaptation and the provision of educational conditions that promote equality, respect, and cultural diversity, the findings reveal a limited and weakly systematized development of intercultural pedagogical practices within schools. Although educational institutions have access to support programs aimed at strengthening educational processes and pedagogical management—such as the School Integration Program, the School Admission System the School Improvement Program, and the Comprehensive Tutorial Support Center—these initiatives do not explicitly incorporate an approach focused on addressing cultural diversity and the migratory trajectories of students.

The findings suggest that opportunities for curricular transformation are strongly constrained by the centralized and standardized structure of the Chilean educational system. Participants argued that the school curriculum maintains a universal and homogeneous character that limits contextual adaptation and the structural recognition of cultural differences within educational communities. Under this framework, pedagogical practices historically associated with assimilationist models continue to predominate, requiring students to adapt to the official curriculum rather than encouraging the educational system itself to transform in response to existing diversity.

Consequently, the strategies developed by schools tend to assume a complementary rather than structural character. The adaptations identified were primarily oriented toward incorporating specific cultural content into particular subjects—especially History, Geography, and Social Sciences—without necessarily involving a profound transformation of the epistemological or pedagogical foundations of the school curriculum.

6.2.2 Incorporation of Cultural Content and the Risk of Folklorization

The findings indicate that some schools have incorporated content related to the recognition of Latin American and migrant cultural expressions, particularly through activities designed to highlight traditions, customs, traditional foods, music, and national celebrations. These initiatives aim to promote respect for diversity and foster recognition of the various cultural identities present within schools.

Among the most common actions identified were activities focused on recognizing local and national cultural expressions, exploring regional traditions and festivities, and highlighting the historical and cultural contributions of different migrant communities to Chilean society.

Furthermore, following the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools began incorporating cross-curricular content related to inclusion, non-discrimination, and multicultural coexistence within the framework of curricular prioritization processes promoted by the Ministry of Education.

However, the analysis reveals that many of these practices continue to operate within a symbolic and superficial logic of cultural recognition. In several cases, intercultural initiatives are limited to commemorative events or folkloric representations of diversity, without critically addressing power relations, structural inequalities, or institutional barriers within educational communities.

As a result, the findings suggest the persistence of predominantly representational forms of cultural inclusion, in which diversity is recognized through visible and celebratory expressions but without necessarily producing substantial transformations in pedagogical practices or school relationships.

6.2.3 Intercultural Facilitators and Language Barriers

A particularly relevant finding concerns the incorporation of intercultural facilitators in some educational institutions, especially those with a significant presence of Haitian students. Participants positively evaluated the role of these professionals, noting that they contribute to reducing language barriers, strengthening communication with families, and facilitating pedagogical and socioemotional support processes.

The presence of intercultural facilitators appears to be especially important in contexts where linguistic differences hinder students' and families' integration into the school environment. In this regard, the findings indicate that language constitutes one of the principal barriers to participation and learning, particularly during the initial stages of integration into the Chilean educational system.

Nevertheless, access to these forms of support remains uneven across schools and depends largely on municipal initiatives or specific projects rather than on a sustained structural policy within the educational system.

6.2.4 Teacher Education and Understanding of the Intercultural Approach

The findings indicate that one of the principal barriers to the development of intercultural pedagogical practices lies in existing gaps in teacher education. Both school leaders and teachers reported that many educational professionals have not received specialized training in inclusion, cultural diversity, or interculturality, limiting institutional capacities to develop contextually relevant pedagogical strategies.

One school leader stated:

"[...] I could not say that this school lives interculturality or that all classes are intercultural. That is simply not the case. We also have many teachers who come from previous educational traditions, and adapting to this reality has been extremely difficult. There is a lack of training."

The findings demonstrate that different understandings of interculturality within educational communities directly influence how cultural diversity is addressed in the classroom. While some actors understand interculturality primarily in terms of recognition and coexistence, others continue to associate it mainly with processes of adaptive integration of migrant students into the existing school system.

Participants also emphasized that teachers' personal and generational trajectories shape their understandings of cultural diversity and inclusive practices. In this sense, interculturality emerges not only as a matter of professional development but also as an experience associated with subjective dispositions, sensitivity, and openness toward diverse educational contexts.

In response to these challenges, some schools have attempted to create spaces for pedagogical reflection aimed at critically examining teaching practices and strengthening institutional awareness.

As one school leader explained:

"[...] 80% of the school is made up of teachers. Here we do not speak of a 'teachers' meeting'; we speak of 'pedagogical reflection.' With that premise, what we seek is teacher awareness and action."

Overall, the findings indicate that the development of intercultural curricular practices remains incipient and is strongly conditioned by structural limitations of the educational system, gaps in professional preparation, and the persistence of homogeneous pedagogical approaches. Nevertheless, local efforts and emerging strategies promoted by educational communities were also identified, demonstrating attempts to move toward more inclusive and contextually responsive forms of teaching.

6.3 School Coexistence and Community Engagement

6.3.1 Institutional Universalism and the Limits of the School Coexistence Approach

The findings show that school coexistence plans constitute one of the principal institutional mechanisms through which schools address relational and educational dimensions associated with inclusion. Consistent with current educational

regulations, schools have made progress in institutionalizing actions aimed at promoting school coexistence, developing intervention protocols, and establishing teams responsible for managing coexistence-related issues.

However, participants argued that these plans continue to operate from a predominantly universalistic perspective, whereby the actions implemented tend to homogenize students' experiences and obscure the cultural particularities present within educational communities. Under this logic, coexistence strategies are generally oriented toward establishing general behavioral norms and conflict-resolution procedures, without explicitly addressing the tensions, inequalities, and asymmetries associated with cultural diversity.

The findings suggest that the principal limitation is not the absence of coexistence initiatives but rather the lack of an explicitly intercultural approach capable of critically addressing power relations, discrimination, and exclusion within school settings. Consequently, many practices continue to reproduce homogeneous models of school coexistence that fail to fully recognize the distinct trajectories, identities, and experiences of migrant students and their families.

Moreover, in schools where intercultural initiatives are present, these efforts often depend on the motivation and innovative capacities of specific educational actors, once again assuming a voluntary and weakly institutionalized character.

6.3.2 Inter-Stakeholder Participation and Hierarchical Relationships

Another important finding concerns the limitations affecting participation among different stakeholder groups within educational communities. The results indicate that the participation of parents and guardians generally occurs at informational and consultative levels, primarily through institutional meetings, individual interviews, and school-organized activities.

However, there is limited evidence of deliberative participation or collective construction of educational projects grounded in an intercultural perspective. Significant decisions continue to be managed mainly by leadership teams and actors occupying hierarchical positions within schools.

As a result, opportunities to develop participatory and intercultural educational communities appear constrained by vertical organizational structures and traditional forms of school governance. This finding is particularly relevant given that participation constitutes one of the central principles underlying both inclusion and interculturality.

6.3.3 Cultural Recognition and the Folklorization of Diversity

With regard to practices aimed at recognizing cultural diversity, the findings indicate that the most common initiatives consist of symbolic and celebratory activities, such as food fairs, folkloric performances, cultural exhibitions, and commemorative events. Participants valued these activities because they make different cultural identities visible and promote recognition of the diversity present within educational communities.

Nevertheless, the analysis suggests that such practices often focus on superficial and representational dimensions of culture, reproducing processes of folklorization that do not necessarily transform pedagogical relationships or institutional structures.

One teacher commented:

"[...] they present a little of their geography, and that is folklorization, because if you stop there, you will only continue emphasizing that we are different. What you need to do is build learning processes in which that diversity helps everyone learn—that is where interculturality begins."

This finding highlights the tensions between cultural recognition practices centered on symbolic representation and intercultural perspectives aimed at transforming educational, relational, and pedagogical dynamics within schools.

6.3.4 School Communication and Barriers to Participation

Finally, the findings indicate that communication processes among the various stakeholders of the educational community constitute a central element in the construction of intercultural coexistence and participation. Participants distinguished between institutionalized communication channels designed to disseminate formal information—such as parent meetings, management meetings, and official communications—and informal forms of coordination that emerge to address everyday contingencies or implement specific initiatives.

The findings suggest that many important decisions continue to be managed through informal relationships and non-institutionalized conversations, thereby limiting opportunities for collaborative and transparent decision-making processes.

One teacher remarked:

"[...] the important decisions are made, as they say, in hallway conversations."

Participants also identified significant challenges in strengthening the participation of parents and guardians, particularly within migrant communities. The principal barriers mentioned included language differences, limited availability of time, precarious employment conditions, difficulties in institutional communication, and historically low levels of family participation in school life.

In many cases, communication between schools and families takes place primarily through instant messaging applications and individual interactions with homeroom teachers, with few robust institutional strategies designed to strengthen community ties and intercultural participation.

Overall, the findings indicate that school coexistence continues to be developed within predominantly homogeneous institutional frameworks, in which cultural diversity is only partially recognized and does not yet achieve deeper levels of participation, pedagogical transformation, or collective construction of intercultural educational communities.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

7.1 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the practices developed by public educational institutions to address cultural diversity through the lenses of inclusion and interculturality, considering three fundamental dimensions of educational action: institutional management, curricular adaptation, and school coexistence and community engagement. From a qualitative exploratory-descriptive perspective, the findings made it possible to identify advances, tensions, barriers, and challenges embedded in the situated experiences of school communities in response to the sustained growth of cultural diversity within the Chilean educational system.

Overall, the findings indicate that schools have progressively advanced in the institutional recognition of cultural diversity, particularly through the incorporation of explicit references to inclusion, multiculturalism, and interculturality within their Institutional Educational Projects (IEPs). This finding represents a significant difference from previous studies that reported a limited presence of explicit references to cultural diversity within school management instruments (Agency for Educational Quality, Jesuit Migrant Service, & Consultorías Focus, 2019). In this regard, it can be argued that there has been institutional progress associated with the formal recognition of culturally diverse school contexts and the need to develop actions aimed at educational inclusion.

However, the findings also demonstrate that such institutional recognition does not necessarily translate into systematic processes of pedagogical, curricular, or relational transformation. In many cases, references to inclusion or interculturality within IEPs assume a declarative rather than operational character, reproducing fragmented, voluntary, and weakly articulated practices. This issue is particularly relevant given that multiculturalism, inclusion, and interculturality represent distinct theoretical, political, and pedagogical frameworks. While multicultural approaches tend to emphasize the recognition of the coexistence of diverse cultures, critical interculturality involves fostering horizontal relationships, challenging structures of inequality, and transforming institutional dynamics that reproduce exclusion (Walsh, 2009; Tubino, 2005).

From this perspective, the findings suggest that many of the practices implemented by schools remain situated at initial or functional levels of interculturality, characterized by symbolic, celebratory, or adaptive forms of cultural recognition. Activities such as food fairs, folkloric celebrations, and cultural commemorations constitute representative examples of this phenomenon. This interpretation is supported by recent evidence from Chilean schools showing that symbolic recognition practices often coexist with limited institutional transformation and weakly articulated intercultural strategies (Segovia-Lagos et al., 2026). Although such initiatives contribute to cultural visibility and recognition, the findings indicate that they do not necessarily produce profound transformations in pedagogical relationships, institutional organization, or the development of culturally responsive educational processes. In this regard, the results align with literature warning against the reduction of cultural diversity to processes of “folklorization” or pedagogies of otherness that ultimately reproduce cultural hierarchies rather than challenge them (Riedemann & Stefoni, 2015).

One of the study’s main contributions lies in demonstrating that, despite existing structural limitations, schools have developed situated strategies to respond to cultural diversity, often driven by the agency of teachers, psychosocial teams, and school coexistence professionals. The findings show that many intercultural practices emerge from local initiatives tailored to the specific needs of each educational community rather than from robust institutional policies or systematic educational guidelines. However, the predominance of self-directed and voluntary practices also constitutes one of the principal tensions identified by participants. Consistent with previous studies (Campos Bustos, 2019; Jiménez et al., 2020; Toledo & Quilodrán, 2020), the findings suggest that the absence of specialized institutional structures and teams dedicated to managing intercultural processes undermines the continuity, coordination, and sustainability of these initiatives. Consequently, experiences of inclusion and interculturality frequently depend on the commitment of individual school actors rather than on consolidated institutional capacities.

In this regard, the study highlights the need to advance toward the institutionalization of interculturality within schools. The establishment of specialized units or teams would enable the development of systematic assessments, strengthen pedagogical support processes, monitor inclusive practices, and coordinate actions across different school management instruments. Furthermore, institutionalization would contribute to legitimizing interculturality as a constitutive dimension of the educational project rather than merely a contingent response to increasing migrant student enrollment.

The findings also reveal that the principal barriers to the development of intercultural practices are located within the curricular and pedagogical domains. Participants emphasized that the national curriculum maintains a homogeneous and universalistic structure that limits opportunities for contextualization and recognition of cultural diversity. Under this framework, the curricular adaptations observed primarily consist of complementary incorporations of cultural content, without challenging the monocultural epistemological foundations of the educational system. This finding is consistent with research highlighting the persistence of coloniality within the Chilean educational imaginary, where the “cultural other” continues to be represented from subordinate or deficit-oriented positions (Joiko, 2019).

Within this context, teacher education emerges as one of the central challenges for advancing inclusive and intercultural educational practices. The findings reveal significant gaps in professional preparation, as well as substantial differences in how teachers understand interculturality and inclusion. In many cases, interculturality continues to be associated exclusively with the adaptive integration of migrant students rather than with a critical examination of inequalities embedded within schools. These findings underscore the need to strengthen both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs by incorporating critical perspectives on cultural diversity, human rights, inclusion, and intercultural pedagogies.

The study also demonstrates that opportunities for developing intercultural practices are strongly conditioned by the structural inequalities affecting the schools analyzed. High levels of school vulnerability, learning gaps, resource scarcity, and territorial disadvantages constitute factors that complicate the construction of inclusive educational communities. Consequently, the findings suggest that interculturality cannot be addressed independently of the material and social conditions under which educational institutions operate, particularly in contexts characterized by high levels of socioeconomic vulnerability.

Regarding school coexistence and community participation, the findings indicate progress in the institutionalization of coexistence-related mechanisms, although important limitations remain in the development of intercultural approaches. School coexistence plans continue to operate predominantly within universalistic frameworks that tend to homogenize students’ experiences and obscure the cultural differences present within schools. Likewise, the participation of parents and guardians remains largely confined to informational and consultative levels, with limited evidence of deliberative or inter-stakeholder participation.

This finding is particularly significant given that the literature has emphasized the importance of participation in the co-construction of intercultural and democratic processes within educational communities (Aguado, 2010; Villalta, 2016). Similarly, the difficulties observed in communication processes between schools and families reveal the persistence of vertical and unidirectional relationships, especially within urban contexts characterized by high educational complexity (Cárcamo Vásquez & Mora Olate, 2020).

Taken together, the findings suggest that Chilean schools have progressively advanced in recognizing cultural diversity and implementing certain inclusive practices. However, these advances remain partial, heterogeneous, and strongly constrained by structural, organizational, and educational limitations. Rather than reflecting consolidated processes of intercultural transformation, the findings portray experiences still under construction, shaped by tensions among assimilationist, multicultural, and intercultural approaches.

7.2 Conclusions

The findings not only confirm previous evidence describing the fragmented and weak institutionalization of intercultural practices in Chilean schools, but also extend this body of knowledge by demonstrating that schools have made greater progress in the formal recognition of cultural diversity than has been reported in earlier studies. While previous research has primarily emphasized the absence of institutional responses, this study shows that many schools have incorporated inclusion and interculturality into their Institutional Educational Projects and have developed welcoming protocols, territorial networks, and local support strategies. However, these advances remain largely declarative and have not yet translated into systematic pedagogical or organizational transformation.

Furthermore, this study challenges the implicit assumption that the presence of inclusion policies necessarily leads to intercultural educational practices. The evidence suggests that schools continue to operate mainly within multicultural or adaptive approaches, where cultural diversity is recognized symbolically but rarely incorporated into curriculum design, teacher professional development, or decision-making processes. These findings indicate that the current challenge is no

longer limited to recognizing cultural diversity, but rather to transforming school structures and pedagogical practices toward a critical intercultural model.

As the main limitation of this study, we acknowledge the scope of the perspectives and sources of information considered to understand the inclusion and intercultural practices developed by schools. Although the participation of school leadership teams, teachers, and students made it possible to capture different perspectives on the phenomenon, the relatively small number and uneven distribution of participants across these groups limited the possibility of systematically comparing their experiences and perceptions. In addition, data were generated primarily through interviews; therefore, the findings mainly reflect the practices and experiences reported by participants, without incorporating direct observations of classrooms or other school settings that could have enabled comparison between participants' accounts and practices as they were actually enacted. This consideration is particularly relevant given the situated and dynamic nature of migration processes and educational policies. Accordingly, future research could broaden the participation of students and migrant families and incorporate complementary data collection strategies, such as observations and document analysis, to deepen understanding of the processes through which schools move from the formal recognition of cultural diversity toward more systematic, institutionalized, and transformative intercultural practices.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Author contributions

Dr. PSL was responsible for the study design, manuscript review, final drafting, and translation. SB, PG, CN, JG, AR, and CS were responsible for data collection and analysis. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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