



Cultural identity in Colombian schoolchildren

Identidad cultural en escolares colombianos

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ABSTRACT

Cultural identity is one of the fundamental pillars in the process of citizenship. The objective was to analyse cultural identity in Colombian schoolchildren through a review of the literature. A qualitative narrative review was carried out, gathering and comparing the theoretical and empirical contributions of 25 scientific papers. The review shows that the construction of cultural identity in the Colombian school environment is a complex and multidimensional process, characterised by the confluence of hegemonic discourses and strategies of resistance. Analyses of school textbooks and traditional pedagogical practices reveal mechanisms of exclusion and stereotypes, in contrast to innovative proposals oriented towards interculturality, which integrate ancestral knowledge and participatory methodologies. In this sense, the prevailing need to update teaching materials and to promote continuous training in intercultural competences is highlighted, with a view to establishing a 'pedagogy for encounter' that facilitates inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

Descriptors: cultural identity; education and culture; intercultural education. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

La identidad cultural es uno de los pilares fundamentales en el proceso de ciudadanía. Se planteó como objetivo analizar la identidad cultural en escolares colombianos desde una revisión de literatura. Se realizó una revisión cualitativa narrativa, reuniendo y comparando los aportes teóricos y empíricos de 25 trabajos científicos. La revisión evidencia que la construcción de la identidad cultural en el ámbito escolar colombiano es un proceso complejo y multidimensional, caracterizado por la confluencia de discursos hegemónicos y estrategias de resistencia. Los análisis de textos escolares y prácticas pedagógicas tradicionales revelan mecanismos de exclusión y estereotipos, en contraste con propuestas innovadoras orientadas a la interculturalidad, que integran saberes ancestrales y metodologías participativas. En este sentido, se destaca la necesidad imperante de actualizar materiales didácticos y de fomentar la capacitación continua en competencias interculturales, con miras a instaurar una "pedagogía para el encuentro" que facilite la inclusión y el diálogo intercultural.

Descriptores: identidad cultural; educación y cultura; educación intercultural. (Fuente: Tesoro UNESCO).

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Review articles section



INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity is one of the fundamental pillars in the process of personal development and citizenship, with greater incidence in social contexts characterised by ethnic and cultural diversity, as in the case of Colombia, the school must transcend the simple transmission of knowledge, being, therefore, a privileged place for the establishment of processes that build belonging and the reaffirmation of identity (Cintora, 2011; Herrera, Díaz & Suaza, 2003).

In the Colombian scenario, which reveals a historical heritage in the shadow of colonisation, forced displacement and the mixing of cultures such as Afro-descendant, indigenous and mestizo, it is necessary to investigate how the formal education process impacts on the process of constructing cultural identity in students. Thus, textbooks, pedagogical discourses and curricular practices can either promote inclusion or reproduce mechanisms of exclusion and segregation (Castillo, 2009; Tenorio, 2011); numerous studies demonstrate this (many of which share an analytical framework developed by US scholar Christine Sleeter, who, along with others, also clarified how discourses and guidance of multicultural education have permeated the educational landscape, but have still developed alongside the maintenance and legitimisation of racism).

Therefore, this literature review aims to reveal important aspects present in the studies and to point out guidelines for reshaping more inclusive educational practices with a plural cultural identity. The relevance of the study around cultural identity within the academic environment comes not only from its relationship with educational performance and social cohesion, but also from the possibility of impacting on the construction of citizenship and the transformation of realities of historical marginalisation (García, 2003; Rojas & Araque, 2021).

The review of empirical and theoretical studies allows us to recognise specific tensions between hegemonic discourses and strategies of resistance that appear in contexts of cultural diversity. In this way, the need has been realised to show critical perspectives that problematise the processes of "normalisation" of certain knowledge and, at the same time, to show strategies that make it possible to integrate diverse perspectives into the school curriculum (Hurtado & Castellanos, 2020; Giraldo & Taborda, 2020).

This review is based on literature that critically examines, in various ways, how the "other" is represented in textbooks and pedagogical discourses, as exemplified by Almeida & Ramírez (2011) who show how textbook illustrations can reproduce stereotypes and reductionist views that students have of Afro-Colombians, while studies such as Arroyo & Agurto (2021) advocate the need to move towards didactic strategies that strengthen a true and plural cultural identity.

Similarly, other authors have used the concept of cultural identity construction in pedagogical interaction with family and community (Rodríguez-Cruz, 2020; Pincheira-Muñoz, 2021). Therefore, in the first place, this literature review is fundamental to enter into the knowledge already generated on the construction of cultural identity in Colombian schoolchildren, identifying in turn the strengths and limitations of the way in which this topic has been treated in the research reviewed. Thus, this article seeks to: a) describe the conceptual and empirical overview of how cultural identity is framed in the school environment, b) characterise the methodologies used in the studies reviewed, and c) analyse the pedagogical implications derived from these studies for education in Colombia.

Therefore, it becomes essential to be part of the discussion on what it means to be inclusive and how cultural diversity should also be part of the educational programme. As education policies have alternated between homogenisation and recognition of diversity, it is necessary to analyse the construction of discourses that shape students' cultural identity. These discourses have evolved around the world to respond to new challenges, especially in the context of globalisation and the prevalent interdependence of educational processes globally, including that of migration, digitalisation and multiculturalism (Rodríguez, Cruz, Naranjo & Torres, 2020; Subero & Esteban-Guitart, 2020).

This indicates the need for a reconceptualisation of pedagogical practice, integrating traditional knowledge and intercultural dialogue as a means to strengthen a rich and diverse cultural identity (Leiva-Miranda, Rambaud-Almanza & González-Arismendi, 2024). Thus, it emphasises



the importance of integrating critical theories and innovative methodologies capable of paving the way beyond the shortcomings of reductionist models of analysis of the existing theoretical landscape, while taking into account the complexity of cultural identity formation itself in educational settings.

Therefore, the research objective was to analyse the cultural identity of Colombian schoolchildren based on a review of the literature.

METHOD

This article is presented as part of a qualitative narrative review, bringing together and comparing the theoretical and empirical contributions of 25 scientific papers. The selection of this design is justified by the need to understand in depth the multiple dimensions that constitute cultural identity in the school context, from discourses in educational texts to pedagogical practices in the classroom (Buitrago-Bonilla, 2020; Soria, 2020).

A literature search was conducted in academic databases and institutional funds, using keywords such as "cultural identity," "Colombian schoolchildren," "intercultural education," "school text" and "pedagogy of diversity". Studies published in indexed journals were included, as well as additional scholarly work applicable to the topic, prioritizing those developed in the Colombian context. We also included research that, despite not being directed exclusively to the Colombian context, provided useful theoretical and methodological frameworks for analysing cultural identity in educational contexts (Díaz-Sánchez, 2015; Laura, 2020).

To maintain relevance and quality in the selected studies, the following inclusion criteria were adopted:

- a) Literature that focuses on the construction and/or representation of cultural identity in the school context.
- b) Studies carried out in Colombia or, in the case of international studies, with direct implications in the Colombian educational context.
- c) Peer-reviewed articles and theses in academic journals and university repositories.
- d) Papers containing analysis of school texts, pedagogical discourses and/or didactic strategies guided by interculturality and inclusion.

The exclusion criteria were:

- a) Journals that do not offer a substantial theoretical and/or empirical angle on cultural identity.
- b) Works that situate educational contexts unrelated to the Colombian reality without dialogue with the categories of interculturality or diversity.
- c) Studies with poor methodology or inadequate evidence to support their results.

The selection of 25 studies was carried out in two phases: first, a review of titles and abstracts to identify relevant papers, and then a full review of the selected texts. The following tasks were carried out in this process:

First, a list of articles, theses and academic literature dealing with the topic was compiled. Some documents linked to the topic are Almeida & Ramírez (2011), Arroyo & Agurto (2021), Castillo (2009), Cintra (2011), Díaz-Sánchez (2015) and others that have been fundamental for the different processes of drafting the discussion on cultural identity in the school space.

The studies were evaluated in terms of their methodological soundness, clarity of theoretical orientation and coherence of empirical analysis. Great effort was put into the theoretical underpinning of the articles, as well as the validity of the evidence provided, discarding those studies that presented considerable methodological weaknesses or offered a superficial representation of the ethnographic phenomenon.



The studies reviewed were classified according to common themes in the data analysis process, highlighting their contributions to representation in school texts and institutional discourses; pedagogical practices; and strategies of cultural resistance. This classification allowed for the organisation of the presentation section of the review in a logical and methodological manner.

The results were synthesised for each thematic group, identifying convergences and divergences in the literature. By establishing a dialogue between the various studies, theoretical advances and remaining gaps in knowledge have been highlighted. This synthesis has been fundamental not only to integrate existing contributions, but also to present recommendations for future lines of research and pedagogical practice in Colombia.

The review process was conducted following ethical research principles to ensure proper citation and acknowledgement of the sources consulted. However, it should be noted that there are some intrinsic limitations that may affect the validity of the study. First, although there are studies that have addressed aspects of cultural identity among Colombian schoolchildren, they are few, so some of the current theoretical or methodological approaches have not been explored.

RESULTS

The review is organised into different sections that address the main dimensions in which the study of cultural identity in Colombian schoolchildren has been articulated. Each section analyses both theoretical contributions and empirical evidence, allowing for a reflective understanding of the existing dynamics in the educational context:

Contextualisation of cultural identity in Colombia

Colombia is a country characterised by a remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity, where indigenous, Afro-Colombian and Raizal communities coexist with a mestizo majority that has assimilated influences from different origins (García, 2003; Laura, 2020). This cultural mosaic is reflected in social practices, traditions and, of course, in the educational sphere. In this sense, the school is thus presented as a scenario in which multiple discourses on identity come into play, some of which may reinforce stereotypes or, on the contrary, promote the recognition of diversity.

Therefore, the recognition of this plurality is fundamental to understand the tensions that exist in the construction of cultural identity in the classroom, being important to study the importance of integrating diverse perspectives in the school curriculum, so as to promote an inclusive and respectful vision of cultural differences (Arroyo & Agurto, 2021; Hurtado & Castellanos, 2020), this integration poses a challenge for educators, who must balance official discourses with the socio-cultural realities of their students.

In this way, the formation of cultural identity in Colombia cannot be separated from its history, marked by processes of colonisation, exclusion and, in some cases, forced displacement, accompanying this epistemic position, Tenorio (2011) shows that schooling has had a double impact: on the one hand, it has served to integrate diverse social groups into the national fabric, but on the other, it has contributed to the loss or distortion of their own cultural identities, in this sense, the need to reconfigure the educational discourses that have historically privileged a homogeneous vision of national identity arises.

On the other hand, the analysis of school texts from a historical perspective allows us to identify how narratives have been constructed that have sometimes marginalised or made invisible the cultural contributions of certain groups (Almeida & Ramírez, 2011; Herrera, Díaz & Suaza, 2003). Thus, the study of cultural identity becomes a tool to question power structures and to promote a pedagogy that recognises and values diversity.

The representation of cultural identity in school texts

One of the most studied aspects in the literature is the representation of cultural identity through school textbooks, both in written content and in illustrations and graphic resources, to which Almeida & Ramírez (2011) highlight that the images present in textbooks can reproduce

stereotypes and simplified visions of cultural reality, especially with regard to the representation of the Afro-Colombian, these representations not only have aesthetic implications, but also shape perceptions and attitudes that are transferred to the classroom.

The analysis of illustrations in Social Studies textbooks for primary education, in this order, reveals how certain visual elements reinforce narratives that can be exclusionary or reductionist (Castillo, 2009). In contrast, other studies point to the possibility of using school textbooks as tools for inclusion, as long as their contents are critically reviewed and updated (Subero & Esteban-Guitart, 2020).

In addition to images, written discourses in textbooks play a crucial role in the formation of cultural identity; it can be argued that texts that present the nation as a monolithic entity can contribute to the invisibility of the diverse cultural identities present in the country (Díaz-Sánchez, 2015; Rodríguez-Cruz, 2020). On the other hand, the inclusion of stories, legends and testimonies from diverse communities can favour the construction of a more complex and plural identity.

In this order, approaches such as those of Rodríguez et al. (2020) have shown that the incorporation of narrative elements that reflect oral traditions and ancestral knowledge in the curriculum can have a positive impact on students' self-esteem and sense of belonging; this approach, known as interactive education, is based on the idea that meaningful learning is enhanced when the experiences and knowledge of each cultural group are integrated (Rodríguez et al., 2020).

The role of the school in the formation of cultural identity

The school, as a social institution, plays a determining role in the configuration of cultural identity, and educational policies in Colombia have historically oscillated between the centralisation of a hegemonic discourse and the incorporation of intercultural approaches; however, despite advances in regulations, there are still pedagogical practices that favour the exclusion of diverse cultural knowledge and experiences (Arroyo & Agurto, 2021; Hurtado & Castellanos, 2020).

In this sense, the position of various authors suggests that a transformation in teacher training is essential to achieve a substantial change in the way cultural identity is addressed in the classroom. Training in intercultural education, valuing teaching-learning processes based on experience and the inclusion of participatory methodologies are some of the strategies proposed to strengthen the cultural identity of schoolchildren (Leiva-Miranda, Rambao-Almanza & González-Arismendi, 2024).

Teaching strategies for cultural inclusion

In recent years, teaching strategies have been proposed to promote the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity in the classroom, for example, the use of active and participatory methodologies allows students to recognise their own roots and those of their peers, facilitating an intercultural dialogue that enriches the learning process (Rentería & Jara, 2023; Rojas & Araque, 2021).

On the other hand, an outstanding strategy is "pedagogy for encounter", which seeks to transform the educational experience based on the recognition of otherness and the inclusion of practices that promote respect and empathy among students (Leiva-Miranda et al., 2024), this approach not only affects the curricular content, but also the way in which classroom interactions are developed, contributing to the resignification of cultural identity within a framework of equality and social justice.

Coloniality in school discourse

An important line of literature focuses on the tensions between discourses of coloniality and practices of resistance that emerge in the school environment, where the colonial legacy has left a deep imprint on the way in which cultural identity is conceptualised and transmitted in Colombia. According to Hurtado & Castellanos (2020), institutional discourses often reproduce

hierarchies that position certain knowledge and practices as superior, to the detriment of those coming from historically marginalised communities.

Therefore, the critical analysis of school texts has revealed how certain narratives reinforce stereotypes and exclusions that hinder the affirmation of a plural and authentic cultural identity; this phenomenon is particularly evident in the representation of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, whose contributions and knowledge have traditionally been relegated to the background (Almeida & Ramírez, 2011; Turra-Díaz, Lagos-Pando & Valdés-Vera, 2018).

Strategies of resistance and cultural revalorisation

In contrast to hegemonic discourses, the literature also documents various resistance strategies that seek to reclaim cultural diversity and promote a more inclusive vision of identity. In this sense, self-education and the integration of ancestral knowledge are presented as fundamental tools for rescuing and strengthening the cultural identity of students (Giraldo & Taborda, 2020; Laura, 2020).

On the other hand, the work of Pincheira-Muñoz (2021) highlights how the incorporation of content that reflects the cultural diversity of immigrant students can contribute to the construction of an identity that recognises and values the plurality of experiences. Likewise, initiatives that promote interculturality in the classroom have shown positive results in terms of inclusion and social cohesion, favouring the resignification of cultural identity in contexts of diversity (Rentería & Jara, 2023; Zambrano-Acosta, 2020).

Likewise, interactive pedagogy is configured, in this sense, as an approach that allows transforming power relations in the classroom, promoting spaces for dialogue and collective construction of knowledge, this perspective recognises that meaningful learning is strengthened when personal experiences and collective knowledge are integrated, generating an environment in which cultural identity is enriched through the encounter with diversity (Rodríguez, Cruz, Naranjo & Torres, 2020).

Methodological innovations in teacher training

The current literature review highlights the need to innovate in teacher training, orienting pedagogical practice towards approaches that value cultural diversity. In this sense, training in participatory methodologies, the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the teaching-learning process, and the strengthening of intercultural competencies are some of the strategies proposed to transform the role of the educator (Buitrago-Bonilla, 2020; Rojas & Araque, 2021).

In addition to the above, it is conceived that the training process should go beyond the mere transmission of academic content, encompassing the development of skills that enable teachers to recognise and value the different cultural manifestations present in the classroom. In this sense, pedagogy for encounter is presented as an innovative approach that favours the construction of a shared cultural identity, promoting dialogue and cooperation between students from different backgrounds (Leiva-Miranda et al., 2024).

Incorporation of traditional knowledge and community practices

Another important aspect identified in the review is the need to incorporate traditional knowledge and community practices into the school curriculum. In this sense, the contribution of authors has shown that the inclusion of cultural elements specific to the communities, such as traditional dances and oral narratives, enriches the educational process, contributing to the resignification of identity (López, 2021; Rentería & Jara, 2023).

In this order, the integration of these practices not only favours the recognition of diversity, but also promotes a sense of belonging and the valuing of each group's own history and culture. Thus, the school becomes a space for encounter and dialogue, where differences are articulated and collective knowledge is built, reflecting the cultural richness of the country (Cintra, 2011; Zambrano-Acosta, 2020).

Challenges and opportunities in the implementation of interculturality

Despite advances in regulations and educational theory, the practical implementation of interculturality in Colombian schools faces significant challenges, including resistance to changes in traditional curricular structures, insufficient teacher training in intercultural approaches and limited resources to implement innovative initiatives (Arroyo & Agurto, 2021; Castillo, 2009).

However, these challenges also open up opportunities to rethink and redesign educational strategies that respond to the needs of a society in constant transformation, in this order, the construction of collaborative networks between educational institutions, communities and government entities is presented as a promising way to promote structural changes in the education system, aimed at strengthening the cultural identity of students (Rodríguez-Cruz, 2020; Subero & Esteban-Guitart, 2020).

Final reflections

Based on what has been scrutinised in the review, it is suggested that the transformation of cultural identity in the school context involves a multidimensional process that encompasses both the revision of content and the reconfiguration of pedagogical relationships. Among the practical implications, the following stand out:

- a) Revision of school textbooks: It is essential that textbooks undergo updating processes that include diverse perspectives and reflect the country's cultural richness. The inclusion of narratives that value ancestral knowledge and the experiences of historically marginalised groups is essential to avoid the reproduction of stereotypes (Almeida & Ramírez, 2011; Castillo, 2009).
- b) Continuous teacher training: Teacher training should be oriented towards the development of intercultural competences, which includes not only theoretical knowledge but also the practice of didactic strategies that promote dialogue and inclusion in the classroom. Training and refresher programmes focused on interactive pedagogy and "pedagogy for encounter" are fundamental to this process (Leiva-Miranda et al., 2024; Rojas & Araque, 2021).
- c) Fostering community participation: The active involvement of communities in the educational process allows cultural identity to be built collaboratively. The integration of activities that involve families, cultural leaders and local organisations favours the creation of spaces for dialogue and the strengthening of community ties (Rodríguez-Cruz, 2020; Pincheira-Muñoz, 2021).
- d) Development of inclusive policies: Education policies must be articulated with a real commitment to interculturality, ensuring that curricular reforms and educational programmes respond to the needs and particularities of the country's cultural diversity. This commitment implies a constant review of institutional practices and the implementation of evaluation mechanisms to measure the impact of intercultural initiatives (Hurtado & Castellanos, 2020; Soria, 2020).

Corresponding to the above, it should be noted:

It is evident how certain mechanisms of exclusion and the persistence of hegemonic discourses can limit the full expression of cultural diversity. On the other hand, resistance strategies and interculturally oriented pedagogical proposals show the transformative potential of education, insofar as they promote the resignification of identity and the strengthening of a sense of belonging among students.

The integration of ancestral knowledge and the critical revision of school texts are central to the transformation of the educational process. The construction of a cultural identity that recognises and values the plurality of experiences and knowledge is an objective that requires the commitment of teachers, institutions and communities. In this sense, continuous teacher training, the active participation of the community and the implementation of inclusive policies are essential elements in order to move towards an education that responds to the demands of a diverse and constantly changing society.



Likewise, reflection on cultural identity in the school environment invites us to rethink teaching-learning models, promoting an interactive and participatory pedagogy that places the student at the centre of the educational process. The transformation of teaching spaces into environments that favour dialogue, criticism and the exchange of knowledge represents a challenge and, at the same time, an opportunity to build a future in which cultural diversity is recognised and celebrated as a fundamental value.

CONCLUSION

The review shows that the construction of cultural identity in the Colombian school environment is a complex and multidimensional process, characterised by the confluence of hegemonic discourses and resistance strategies. Analyses of school texts and traditional pedagogical practices reveal mechanisms of exclusion and stereotypes, in contrast to innovative proposals oriented towards interculturality, which integrate ancestral knowledge and participatory methodologies. In this sense, it highlights the urgent need to update teaching materials and promote continuous training in intercultural competencies, with a view to establishing a "pedagogy for encounter" that facilitates inclusion and intercultural dialogue. Likewise, the active participation of the community and the development of inclusive educational policies are decisive elements in reconfiguring the dynamics of teaching-learning, contributing to the formation of a critical and plural citizenship.

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