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Teachers' Perceptions of Oral Communicative Competence in Intercultural Mexican Classrooms: Validation of a Questionnaire and Analysis Across Educational Contexts



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Abstract

Mexico presents a complex intercultural and multilingual educational context shaped by linguistic diversity and persistent structural and symbolic inequalities. Within this framework, the development of Oral Communicative Competence (OCC) plays a central role in enabling students to participate meaningfully in culturally and linguistically diverse environments. This study presents the results of a quantitative descriptive-correlational and inferential analysis based on the perceptions of 202 early childhood teachers regarding the teaching of oral language and OCC in Mexican intercultural educational contexts. An *ad hoc* questionnaire was designed and psychometrically validated to examine teachers' perceptions, the strategies they use, and the challenges they face. The results reveal significant differences according to educational sector (public vs. private), geographical area (urban vs. rural), and years of teaching experience. These differences reflect how structural inequalities, linguistic hierarchies, and unequal access to resources shape teachers' perceptions and opportunities to foster OCC and intercultural communication in their classrooms. Additionally, a gap was identified between teachers' recognition of the importance of OCC and its systematic implementation in practice. These findings highlight the need to strengthen teacher professional development and to support pedagogical approaches that explicitly integrate OCC as a key component of intercultural education. The validated

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instrument provides a valuable tool for future research aimed at understanding and improving the teaching of OCC in multilingual and intercultural educational settings.

Keywords: Oral communicative competence, intercultural education, early childhood education, teacher perceptions, multilingualism

Introduction

Mexico presents a complex intercultural and multilingual educational landscape shaped by the coexistence of Indigenous languages, Spanish as the dominant vehicular language, and growing internal migration processes. With 68 Indigenous languages and 364 variants recognized across the country (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas [INALI], 2012), Mexican classrooms reflect diverse sociolinguistic realities that intersect with structural and symbolic inequalities. In this context, early childhood education becomes a crucial stage for supporting the development of language and for recognizing and valuing students' diverse linguistic repertoires within intercultural and multilingual classrooms.

Oral language (OL) plays a central role during the early years of the individuals, as it mediates children's access to learning, social interaction, emotional expression, and classroom participation (Gràcia *et al.*, 2025a; Rafferty, 2014). In multilingual and intercultural settings such as Mexico, the development of Oral Communicative Competence (OCC) is particularly significant, as it enables students not only to construct academic knowledge but also to engage culturally in diverse communicative spaces. However, despite its relevance, the systematic teaching and development of OL in early childhood classrooms remains underdeveloped and with differences across different educational settings. Furthermore, the implementation of Intercultural Education (EI) and Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB) policies has been shaped by differentiated institutional practices, resource distribution, and sociolinguistic hierarchies (Hamel, 2008; Wei, 2023). Public and private sectors, as well as urban and rural contexts, offer distinct opportunities and constraints for fostering OL development and intercultural communication. These contextual differences raise important questions regarding how teachers conceptualize, implement, and reflect upon the teaching of OCC in diverse Mexican educational scenarios.

In response to these challenges, this study seeks to examine teachers' perceptions of the teaching of OCC in Mexican intercultural and multilingual contexts. The article is structured as follows: first, the sociolinguistic and intercultural educational context of Mexico; second, the theoretical and conceptual foundations of OL and OCC are presented; third, the validation process of the instrument and the main findings are described; fourth, the implications for research and teacher professional development are discussed and finally, we address the conclusions and acknowledgements of this study.

Sociolinguistic and Intercultural Educational Context of Mexico

Mexico presents a particularly complex linguistic setting, with 68 Indigenous languages and 364 variants in addition to Spanish as the vehicular language (INALI, 2012). In line with this diversity, Mexico recognizes itself as a pluricultural country in Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2022), meaning that it is constitutively formed by multiple peoples and cultures, but its engagement with interculturality in education has evolved over recent decades, moving from subtractive bilingual paradigms toward more inclusive and culturally grounded approaches (Schmelkes, 2004; Vergara, 2021; Viveros-Márquez, 2016). Historically, educational policy promoted linguistic assimilation, privileging Spanish as the main language of instruction and marginalizing Indigenous languages in the school contexts. In response to persistent inequities and

Indigenous support movements, intercultural and bilingual frameworks were gradually incorporated into national educational policy during the twentieth century (Schmelkes, 2004; Vergara, 2021).

To address cultural and linguistic diversity in educational settings, Mexico developed the Intercultural Approach (*Educación Intercultural*, EI) and the Bilingual Intercultural Approach (*Educación Intercultural Bilingüe*, EIB) (Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP], 2014). The EI aims to recognize and value the country's cultural diversity, emphasizing the role of multilingualism as an integral part of identity and acknowledging language as a crucial tool for its preservation. Unlike multicultural education, which primarily recognizes the coexistence of multiple languages and cultures within a territory, the intercultural approach goes beyond mere acknowledgment, seeking to promote dialogue, mutual understanding, and the transformative potential of intercultural and multilingual practices in shaping social reality. As part of this framework, the EIB represents a more structured implementation of EI, incorporated into planned educational processes with explicit objectives: to train students to observe, analyse, reflect, and understand the world from diverse cultural perspectives, fostering respect, critical awareness, and appreciation of cultural diversity not only as a formal posture but as a practical tool for social transformation (Barriga, 2020; SEP, 2014; Zarza, 2018).

However, these approaches (EI and EIB) present various difficulties in their implementation, since as mentioned in the Mexican Constitution, in the educational programmes of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) and in the General Coordination of Bilingual Intercultural Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública-Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe [SEP-CGEIB], 2004), they recognize the need for intercultural and bilingual education, but the EIB is only explicitly mandated in populations with the largest concentrations of indigenous peoples (Cardona, 2014; Pérez, 2025), as reflected in official SEP policy documents and normative frameworks for intercultural and bilingual educational practice, while in the rest of the country only an intercultural approach is established.

This differentiated implementation has generated different educational dynamics. In many Indigenous schools, EIB has often remained limited to bilingual instruction without fully integrating intercultural practices due to sociocultural, political, and institutional challenges (Cardona, 2014; Viveros-Márquez, 2016). Teachers frequently face limited curricular flexibility, lack of materials, insufficient professional preparation, and challenges in effectively developing students' first languages and Spanish (García & Velasco, 2012; Hamel, 2008). As a result, intercultural bilingual education often operates as part of centralized state frameworks that restrict local autonomy and limit its transformative potential (Hamel, 2008; Wei, 2023). As Sichra (2005) argues, without intentional planning, community involvement, and curricular adaptation, schools cannot effectively support the revitalization or maintenance of Indigenous languages.

Beyond these policy challenges, sector-based inequalities also diversify multilingual educational scenarios in Mexico. Public and private schools differ not only in material conditions, remuneration, and access to resources (Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación [INEE], 2017; Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos [OCDE/OECD], 2015; Suárez-Zozaya 2013), but also in access to languages associated with prestige and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Liddicoat, 2013). Similar patterns have been documented across Latin America, where public-private divisions intersect with unequal educational opportunities and different access to languages considered of "prestige" (Bellei, 2005; Hornberger, 2009; López & Küper, 2000).

These structural differences are not only administrative; they are also symbolic. Indigenous-Spanish bilingualism in Mexico has historically been associated with rural and marginalized contexts, while private urban schools frequently promote global languages such as English as economic and social assets (Cruz, 2024). This reflects persistent linguistic hierarchies shaped by colonial and neoliberal

ideologies that attach unequal value to different forms of bilingualism and reinforce dominant language hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1991; Hamel, 2008; Wei, 2023).

Consequently, multilingual educational contexts in Mexico are internally diverse and structured by both economic and symbolic inequalities that shape how OL, bilingualism, and interculturality are understood and put into practice in schools. Under these conditions, the implementation of Intercultural (EI) and Intercultural Bilingual (EIB) approaches continues to reflect persistent tensions between policy discourse and classroom practice, shaped by political, structural and sociolinguistic barriers (Hamel, 2008; Sichra, 2005; Wei, 2023).

These conditions influence how bilingualism and OL practices are legitimized, valued, and enacted in educational settings, while simultaneously requiring teachers to manage highly complex classroom dynamics. In these scenarios, teachers are expected not only to teach curricular content but also to create spaces for coexistence and communication, often without the sufficient training to respond to the specific characteristics of their classrooms (García & Velasco, 2012; López & Sichra, 2016; Rodríguez & Fraga, 2024). Taken together, these structural, symbolic, and policy-related tensions shape the conditions under which teachers are expected to develop and promote OCC in intercultural and multilingual classrooms.

Under these conditions, the teaching of OCC in Mexico raises several unresolved questions and highlights the need to involve the educational community, investigating teachers' perceptions, strategies, and difficulties across the wide range of intercultural educational scenarios in which they work. As previously argued, these scenarios are not homogeneous; they vary significantly according to educational sector and geographical area, which often imply differences in linguistic diversity, access to resources, teacher preparation opportunities, and sociocultural conditions shaped by historical inequalities, language ideologies and hierarchies affecting Indigenous and rural communities.

Theoretical Foundations of OCC

Social-constructivist perspectives establish that we develop as people shaped by the society and culture that surrounds us (Gràcia *et al.*, 2024; Wertsch, 1988), where the environment plays a crucial role in how we develop socially and linguistically (Gibson *et al.*, 2021). From this perspective, Vygotsky (1978) underlined the influence that adults have on children, who, from an early age, learn the rules and uses of language by observing how adults use it in everyday life (Gràcia *et al.*, 2021a; Mercer *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, OL plays a central role in children's lives, as it mediates their social interactions, learning processes, emotional expression, and participation in their everyday social environments, influencing their cognitive and socio-cultural development (Gràcia *et al.*, 2025a; Rafferty, 2014).

Gràcia *et al.* (2021b) and Zarza *et al.* (2024) understand OCC as a multidimensional communicative competence that integrates speaking and listening skills through socially situated interactions. It involves managing communication, constructing coherent discourse, using linguistic and paralinguistic resources effectively, and participating in meaningful communicative dialogues. In a wider sense, communication implies the ability to express and interpret concepts orally and in writing and to interact linguistically across diverse social and cultural contexts (Parlamento Europeo, 2006). This conceptualization is closely related to the notion of *oracy*, widely used in educational research to refer to the development of speaking and listening skills as tools for learning, reasoning, and social interaction (Alexander, 2018; Mercer *et al.*, 2020).

However, within competence-based educational frameworks, OCC extends this perspective by integrating linguistic, metalinguistic, cognitive, social, and multimodal resources required to communicate

effectively, enabling individuals to participate effectively both within and beyond school settings (Coll, 2009; Gràcia *et al.*, 2021b). This competence-based perspective highlights not only the use of OL for learning and interaction, but also individuals' ability to self-reflect on, regulate, and adapt their communicative practices according to contextual, social, and intercultural demands (Gràcia *et al.*, 2018). OL, in consequence, can be understood as an evolving multimodal OCC that develops throughout life.

Recent research highlights the importance of dialogic and reflective pedagogical frameworks in fostering the development of OCC, emphasizing structured classroom interaction as a key space for reasoning, participation, and shared construction of knowledge (Alexander, 2018; Gràcia *et al.*, 2021b; Mercer & Howe, 2012). However, studies observe that, generally, teachers' pay little attention and time to the teaching of OL compared to other aspects, and they do not always conceptualize it as a competence that continues to be developed and perfected through interaction and joint construction (Gràcia *et al.*, 2015, 2023; Gutiérrez & Rosas, 2008).

In consequence, strengthening teacher professional development through opportunities for reflection on classroom discourse and interactions becomes essential. When educators critically reflect on their communicative practices, they are better positioned to design learning environments with meaningful interaction, promoting students' participation and oral development in inclusive and intercultural contexts (Gràcia *et al.*, 2021b, 2025b; Sabrina *et al.*, 2026). These pedagogical considerations are especially relevant in multilingual educational contexts such as Mexico, where linguistic diversity and internal migration have reshaped classroom composition across all educational settings, making multilingualism a common part of everyday school life (Cardona, 2014; Schmelkes, 2004; Zarza *et al.*, 2024).

OCC in Mexican Educational Settings

Despite extensive theoretical discussion on OL, the formal recognition of communicative competence in Mexican educational policy (SEP, 2017), and longstanding debates surrounding intercultural and bilingual education in Mexico, the specific conceptualization of OCC as a multidimensional construct has received comparatively limited empirical attention. Additionally, there is limited empirical research examining the integration of OCC and the intercultural communicative competence in intercultural and multilingual classrooms (Sabrina *et al.*, 2026). Furthermore, there is a lack of validated instruments specifically designed to explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of the development and implementation of OCC in these contexts. In this sense, documenting teachers' experiences is not enough; it is also necessary to develop reliable instruments that allow us to understand how they conceptualize and put into practice OCC in diverse educational contexts.

In response to this gap, we conducted a quantitative study to explore teachers' perceptions of the teaching of OCC in intercultural contexts, addressing the difficulties they face and the strategies they use in the classroom, with particular attention to differences across educational sector and geographical area, given the internal diversity of the Mexican educational system. Through an *ad hoc* designed and validated questionnaire, we analyse how teachers conceive their role in the development of OCC, and what factors influence its implementation in their classrooms.

Methodology

Overview

A descriptive correlational study with an instrumental design (see Hernández *et al.*, 2010) was conducted to design and validate a new questionnaire on teachers' perceptions of OCC and to describe

these perceptions in multilingual Mexican early childhood education contexts, addressing the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the *ad hoc* questionnaire developed to explore early childhood education teachers' perceptions and needs in intercultural and/or multilingual contexts provide evidence of validity, reliability, and a theoretically coherent factor structure?
2. What perceptions do early childhood education teachers in multilingual Mexican contexts hold regarding the teaching and use of OCC?

The study was organised into two complementary phases: a Design and Validation Phase and a Perception Analysis Phase. The first phase addressed research question 1 by analysing the psychometric properties and factor structure of the *ad hoc* questionnaire designed to explore the perceptions and needs of early childhood education teachers (0–8 years; Organización Mundial de la Salud & United Nations Children's Fund [OMS & UNICEF], 2013) in intercultural and/or multilingual contexts in relation to the teaching of OL, the development and use of OCC, and their perceptions of interculturality in the classroom. The second phase addressed research question 2 by describing teachers' perceptions regarding the teaching and use of OCC in multilingual contexts in Mexico.

In both phases we used a new digital questionnaire, *Teaching Oral Language in Mexico: Early Childhood Teachers* (ELODPMex). The instrument is composed by 49 items organised into seven sections: informed consent, sociodemographic data, and five dimensions on the teaching and use of OCC in intercultural classroom contexts (Table 1). Responses are given on a 6-point Likert type agreement scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with 4 multiple-choice questions and one final open-ended question for additional comments.

Participants

202 teachers of early childhood education (0–8 years old) from different Mexican educational settings participated, with 89.6% women, 10% men and 0.4% who did not specify gender. The mean age was 38.6 years (SD = 9.54 years), and the average teaching experience was 15.6 years (SD = 9.2 years) (see Table 1).

Table 1 Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample ($N = 202$)

Category	N	%
Sex		
Women	181	89.6
Men	20	10.0
Not specified	1	0.4
State of the Mexican Republic		
Querétaro	144	71.3
Oaxaca	13	6.4
Hidalgo	11	5.4
Other states	34	16.8
Age		
<25 years	9	4.5
25–30 years	27	13.4
31–40 years	95	47.0

(Continue)

Table 1 (Continued)

Category	N	%
41–50 years	46	22.8
51–60 years	21	10.4
>60 years	4	2.0
Years of Teaching Experience		
<5 years	19	9.4
5–10 years	58	28.7
11–20 years	76	37.6
21–30 years	31	15.3
>30 years	18	8.9
Educational Sector		
Public	116	57.4
Private	86	42.6
Geographical Area		
Urban	124	61.4
Rural	78	38.6

Procedure and Instrument

To validate the instrument, an expert trial was carried out. The questionnaire was reviewed through a six-expert judgment process involving specialists in intercultural education, language education, and educational research based in Mexico and Barcelona. The experts were invited to participate and agreed voluntarily. They received written guidelines explaining the context of the study, the objectives of the questionnaire, and the theoretical and methodological framework behind its design.

Experts were asked to evaluate each item using a three-point scale (1 = unnecessary, 2 = neutral, 3 = essential) according to three criteria: relevance (the importance of the item in relation to the objectives of the questionnaire), adequacy (the alignment of the item with the specific purpose of each dimension), and clarity (the comprehensibility and formulation of the item). They were also invited to provide written comments and suggestions regarding the wording, content, structure, and overall organization of the questionnaire. This combination of quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback made it possible to refine and strengthen the instrument before its final application (see Figure 1).

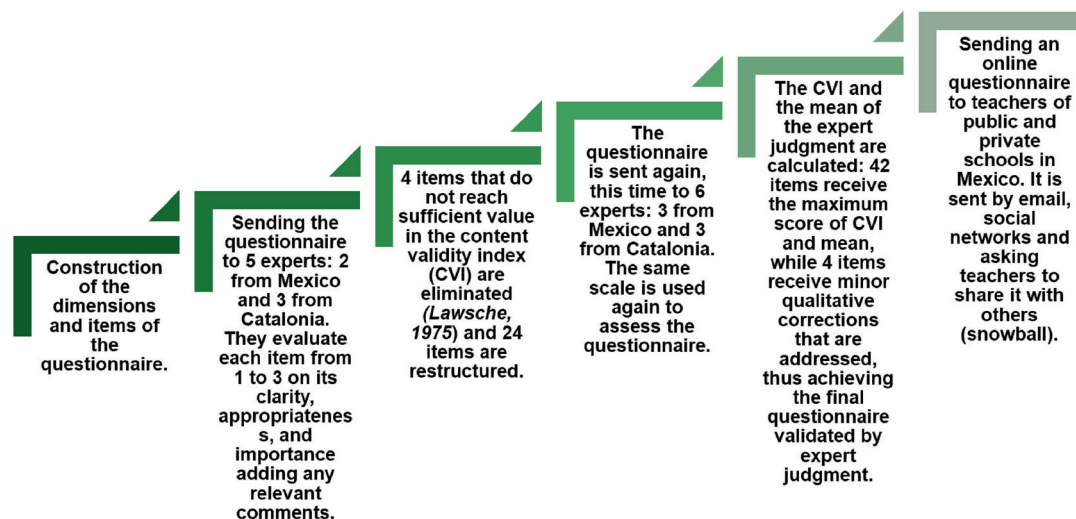


Figure 1 Expert Trial Process

Subsequently, a factorial analysis was performed in R with the Lavaan package, to test the theoretical model which divided the questionnaire in five dimensions (see Table 2)

Table 2 *Items Divided by Questionnaire Dimensions*

Dimensions	Items
D1. Bases of the conversational methodology and the development of the OCC.	D1.1. Oral communication skills must be developed inside and outside school, in order to be able to use them efficiently in daily life. D1.2. In all subjects, the OL can and should be worked on explicitly. D1.3. Students learn significantly when they participate in class to build their learning, for example, in project work or talking about their previous knowledge. D1.4. It is necessary to generate training for the teaching team and families on the importance of teaching OCC.
D2. Classroom conversation management.	D2.1. In my classroom, I create an environment in which students have the opportunity to express themselves freely and confidently. D2.2. I give students numerous opportunities to participate and make personal contributions in the classroom; for example, I ask what they know about a topic, I ask them to propose solutions to a problem and test it, to propose what they would like to know more about, etc. D2.3. In my classes, I frequently use teamwork, pairs, group discussions and/or collaboratively. D2.4. The arrangement of furniture, people and materials within the classroom are adjusted to the characteristics of the activity, encouraging dialogue and participation. D3.1. I activate the students' previous knowledge and encourage participation in class.
D3. Strategies and communicative functions within the classroom.	D3.2. I teach the language mainly through activities on written language. D3.3. I know what oral communication skills I must have as a teacher to use them in the classroom. D3.4. I am completely clear about how to teach OCC in class.
D4. Instructional design.	D4.1. I carry out daily activities in which my students speak. D4.2. I am aware that OL is an important competence that I must teach and evaluate in my classes. D4.3. I dialogue with the students, expanding on the information they give me when necessary, answering their questions, expanding their statements, etc. D4.4. I use continuous assessment to follow up on the teaching of OL in my classroom. D4.5. I am aware that any communicative situation in the classroom is a good opportunity to teach OL.
D5. Interculturality and multilingualism in school spaces and strategies teachers around it.	D5.1. The school context must respond to the diversity of languages, when different languages are spoken, understood, read and/or written within it. D5.2. Linguistic diversity or multilingualism in the classroom is a barrier in the teaching and learning process of the OCC. D5.3. The intercultural approach is necessary in any school in Mexico, not only in rural areas or indigenous communities. D5.4. I believe that students who speak a language other than Spanish should continue to cultivate their own language and culture at home, but not so much at school. D5.5. It is mainly the responsibility of the language teacher, the teachers of the indigenous education subsystem and/or special education (attention to diversity), to provide attention to students who speak a language other than Spanish. D5.6. Working collaboratively with families in various classroom and/or school activities allows the recovery of significant knowledge for the school community, such as the language and culture of each family. D5.7. Active listening, fostering dialogue and working with students who speak a language other than the one used in school are key aspects to improve educational practices in Mexico.

Quantitative, descriptive and inferential methodologies (ANOVA, t-student, Chi-square) were used to explore the perceptions of the 202 teachers about OCC and interculturality.

Ethics and Declaration of use of Generative AI

The studies were approved by the Ethics Committees of the University of Barcelona (UB), Spain and the Autonomous University of Querétaro, Mexico (UAQ) with number IRB00003099 of the Institutional Review Board approval. All participants were informed about the objectives, voluntary nature, and procedures of the research before collecting data. Informed consent was obtained electronically before completing the questionnaire, and participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. No personal identifiers were collected, and all data were analysed in this form. A preliminary stage of the instrument validation was presented at the *X Congreso Internacional en Contextos Psicológicos, Educativos y de la Salud* (CICE 2024) and the *XVII Congreso Internacional Latina de Comunicación Social* (CILCS 2025).

AI was used for textual editing (since English is not the first language of neither of the authors) and for some rewriting to make the text clearer and more fluent for readers.

Results

Validation of the Instrument

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to check whether the items corresponding to each of the five dimensions (Table 2) were coherently organized into five factors. To assess the model of five dimensions structure of the questionnaire, we applied the following cut-off criteria: SRMR < .08, RMSEA < .06, and for CFI and TLI > .90 for an acceptable fit or more than .95 for optimal fit (Brown, 2015; Hu and Bentler, 1998, 1999). In this first five dimensions structure of the questionnaire, both χ^2 which was significant and the rest of the indices, showed a poor fit: CFI and TLI with .803 and .775, respectively, while RMSEA with a value of .073 was above the recommended cut-off points, as was SRMR with a value of .093.

Because the initial 5-factor model did not achieve acceptable fit, modification indices (MI) were examined using the *Lavaan* package in R to identify where the model was not adequately representing the data. These MI highlighted which relationships between items and factors may need reconsideration to improve the overall model fit.

The MI analysis indicated that three items (D5.2, D5.4 and D5.5) from Dimension 5 (Interculturality and multilingualism in school spaces and strategies) behaved more coherently as a separate group, suggesting a new subdimension. Conceptually, these three items referred to barriers to developing OCC and interculturality in the classroom. For this reason, they were grouped into a new subdimension, resulting in the division of the original fifth dimension into two related but conceptually differentiated dimensions: D5A = Interculturality and multilingualism in school spaces and strategies (items D5.1, D5.3, D5.6, D5.7) and D5B = Barriers to developing OCC and interculturality in the classroom (items D5.2, D5.4 and D5.5). Additionally, item D5.1, which refers to the need for schools to respond to linguistic diversity, showed a comparatively lower statistical association with the remaining items, as we can see in Figure 2. However, given its clear conceptual alignment with interculturality and multilingualism, we decided to keep it with D5A.

Likewise, item D3.3 (I know what oral communication skills I must have as a teacher to use them in the classroom) showed a strong statistical association with D2 (Classroom conversation management).

This strong correlation is theoretically understandable, as management of classroom interaction and communicative strategies are closely related constructs. Nevertheless, because the item specifically addresses teachers' awareness of their communicative skills and functions, it was maintained within D3 (Strategies and communicative functions within the classroom).

Based on this combined statistical and conceptual evaluation, the original five-dimensional structure was refined into a six-dimensional model, with the fifth dimension being conceptually differentiated into two related subdimensions (i.e. Interculturality and Barriers). The revised model (Figure 2) was subsequently re-estimated to assess its fit: except χ^2 ($p < .001$) whose sensitivity to small local mismatches is well known (e.g. Morata-Ramírez *et al.*, 2015), the model of fit indices of the final model were adequate: CFI = .95, TLI = .94, SRMR = .043 and RMSEA = .059. This supports the adequacy of the model and confirms that the instrument reflects the theoretical construct on which it was designed.

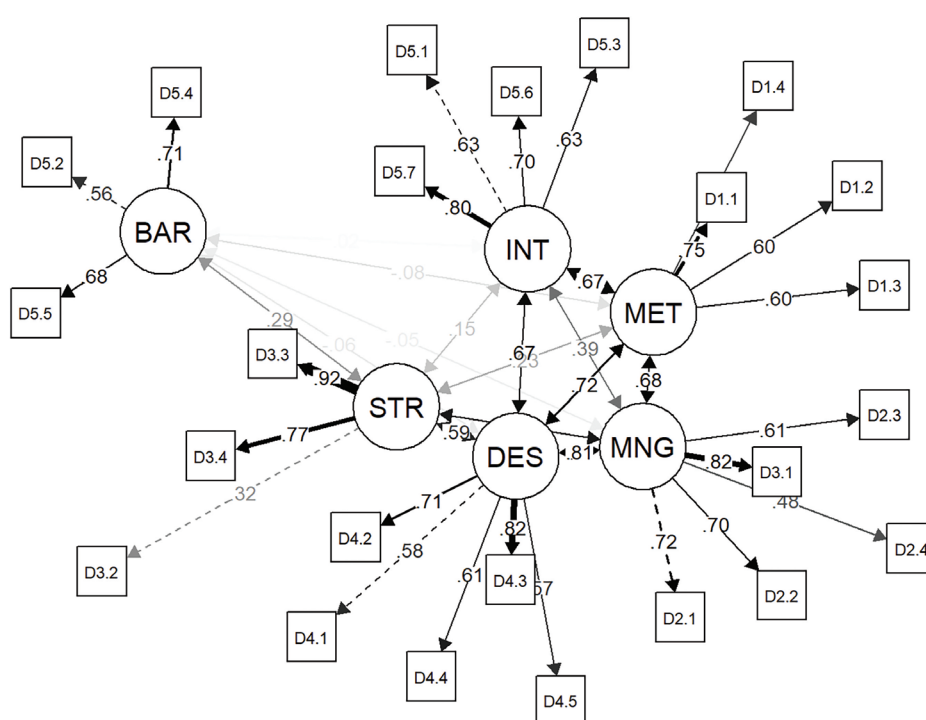


Figure 2 Graphical Representation of the Final model of the Questionnaire Dimensions

Note: MET = Bases of the conversational methodology and the development of the OCC, MNG = Classroom conversation management, STR = Strategies and communicative functions within the classroom, DES = Instructional Design, INT = interculturality and multilingualism in school spaces and strategies teachers around it and BAR = Barriers to developing OCC and interculturality in the classroom.

In this study, the term *dimensions* refer to the theoretical structure proposed during the questionnaire design, based on the conceptual model of OCC. In contrast, the term *factors* refer to the empirical structure obtained through CFA. Although the original theoretical model had five dimensions, the CFA results supported a modified six-factor structure, with the fifth theoretical dimension empirically differentiated into two related but distinct factors (F5A-INT and F5B-BAR, see Figure 2).

Regarding the correlations between factors, Table 3 shows that, except for Barriers to developing OCC and interculturality in the classroom (BAR), the rest of OCC factors are generally strongly correlated with each other. This pattern suggests the presence of shared variance and supports the interpretation of OCC as an integrated multidimensional construct.

Table 3 *Correlations Between the Factors of the Questionnaire*

	F1 (MET)	F2 (MNG)	F3 (STR)	F4 (DES)	F5A (INT)	F5B (BAR)
F1 (MET)	1					
F2 (MNG)	.68**	1				
F3 (STR)	.23*	.63**	1			
F4 (DES)	.72**	.81**	.59**	1		
F5A (INT)	.67**	.39**	.15	.67**	1	
F5B (BAR)	-.08	-.05	.29*	-.06	.02	1

Note: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$.

BAR presents weak or non-significant correlations with most of the other factors. Although it is conceptually related to F5A (Interculturality and multilingualism in school spaces and strategies), its distinct statistical behaviour may be explained by the nature of its items. Specifically, the three items in F5B measure barriers or negative aspects of OCC and interculturality in the classroom. This difference in wording direction may have contributed to what has been described as a reverse wording or writing method effect (İlhan *et al.*, 2024), which can produce lower correlations with positively worded dimensions.

In terms of reliability, high factor weights resulted in total omega coefficients greater than .70 for all factors except F5B ($F1 = .717$, $F2 = .804$, $F3 = .744$, $F4 = .833$, $F5A = .783$, $F5B = .691$). These values suggest acceptable reliability by consistency (Schumacker & Lomax, 2016). In fact, if an overall measure for the questionnaire were to be obtained, this would also be acceptable, since the hierarchical omega is also slightly above .70. However, if you want to use the global questionnaire score, it is recommended to remove the F5B items from the global score to maximize the shared common variance (Ondé & Alvarado, 2022).

What Perceptions do Teachers have About the Teaching of OL in Intercultural Contexts in Mexico?

First, the teachers were asked about their knowledge, use and teaching of the OCC within their classroom, based on the same dimensions described above and used in the design of the instrument.

Table 4 *Answers in Items Related to OL: Theory and Practice*

Items related to their awareness and appreciation of OL	Frequency of responses			
	Strongly agree	I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree
OCC must be developed outside and inside the school.	76.23%	23.27%	0.50%	0.00%
Active students as builders of their knowledge.	77.72%	19.80%	2.50%	0.00%
Any communicative situation is a good opportunity.	71.78%	27.22%	0.50%	0.50%
Create the right environment and opportunities to develop OL.	72.27%	26.23%	1.50%	0.00%
OL must be taught and evaluated.	70.79%	28.71%	0.50%	0.00%

(Continue)

Table 4 (Continued)

Items related to their awareness and appreciation of OL	Frequency of responses			
	Strongly agree	I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree
I am completely clear about how to teach OCC in class.	27.23%	53.96%	13.36%	5.45%
I know what oral communication skills I must have as a teacher to use them in the classroom.	43.56%	46.53%	8.91%	1.00%
Items related to the practice in their classrooms developing the OCC				
I carry out daily activities in which my students speak.	60.89%	36.63%	1.98%	0.50%
I use continuous assessment to assess OCC.	51.48%	39.60%	7.42%	1.50%

As shown in Table 4, most teachers (81.19%) reported that they know how to develop their students' OCC in the classroom. However, 13.36% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 5.45% indicated partial or total uncertainty about how to teach it. To provide a common conceptual reference, the item included an explicit definition of OCC (understood as the ability to express and interpret concepts orally and to interact appropriately across diverse social and cultural contexts, following our conceptual framework by the European Parliament, 2006 and Gràcia *et al.*, 2021a).

Likewise, when asked if they are clear about the oral communicative skills they should have as teachers, most perceive themselves as aware of knowing them, with 43.56% who completely agree, 46.53% agree, 8.91% who are not entirely clear and 1% who do not know them.

In addition, when we asked them about some concepts related to the importance of teaching OL and developing OCC in the classroom, most of them show that they are aware of the importance of developing it in daily life, even beyond language class or the classroom.

A small discrepancy between theoretical awareness and classroom implementation was observed. Although teachers largely recognized the importance of evaluating OL, only 60.89% totally agreed that they consistently engage students in daily activities with the specific objective of fostering the active use of OL.

In addition, they were also asked if they continuously evaluated the development of the OCC of their students, where only 51.48% consider that they strongly agree with doing it and 7.42% that they do not take a clear position.

Are the Challenges the Same for a Teacher Working in a Rural Public School as for a Teacher Working in an Urban School?

As we have seen, teachers know and value the importance of developing OCC in class; despite this, they perceive different problems they face when teaching OL in class, since most of them scored more than one difficulty (Figure 3).

In addition, as several options could be scored in this item, differences are observed between the number of difficulties perceived by sector, with an average of 1.75 of problems perceived by the public sector vs. an average of 1.35 of problems perceived by the private sector.

Regarding the type of difficulties, the teachers agree that their main challenge to teach OL is the limited instructional time to teach it (45.54%). Additional challenges included large class size (27.72%), the lack of resources to teach it (27.23%), prioritizing other contents/activities (25.74%) and not being entirely clear about how to teach it (15.35%).

Figure 3 presents these difficulties, according to how teachers in each education sector perceive them, as they vary depending on their specific teaching context.

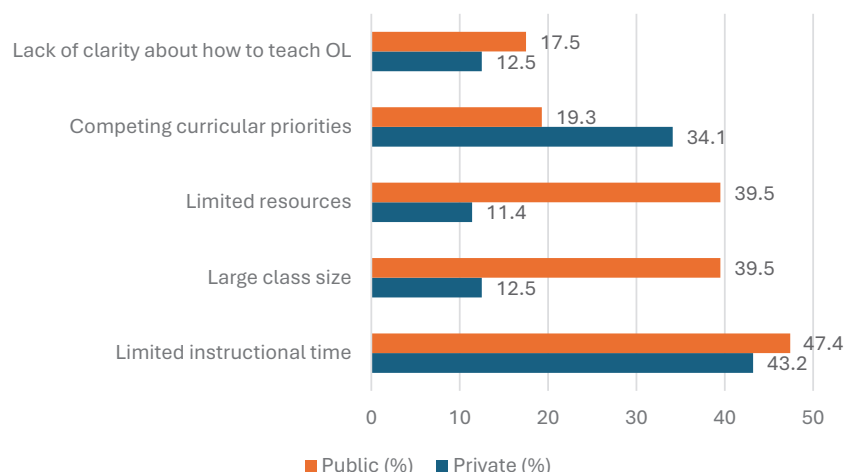


Figure 3 Perceived Difficulties in Teaching OL by Education Sector ($N = 202$)

Note: Percentages represent row proportions within each sector.

To analyse in depth each difficulty or variable identified, a Chi-square was also conducted for the five main challenges comparing public and private education sectors, as presented below.

Table 5 Perceived Limited Instructional Time for Teaching OL by Educational Sector

Education sector	No, n (%)	Yes, n (%)	Total (n)
Private	50 (56.8%)	38 (43.2%)	88
Public	60 (52.6%)	54 (47.4%)	114
Total	110	92	202

Note: Percentages represent row proportions. χ^2 test: $p = .554$.

As mentioned above, the limited instructional time for teaching was perceived as a difficulty in both educational sectors, with 47.4% in the public vs. 43.2% in the private sector. This difference was not statistically significant (Table 5).

Table 6 Perceived Large Class Size by Education Sector

Education sector	Large class size, n (%)	Small class size, n (%)	Total (n)
Private	11 (12.5%)	77 (87.5%)	88
Public	45 (39.5%)	69 (60.5%)	114
Total	56	146	202

Note: Percentages represent row proportions. χ^2 test: $p < .001$.

With respect to class size, the difference between sectors was highly significant (Table 6, $p < .001$). A substantially higher proportion of public-school teachers (39.5%) reported large class sizes compared to private school teachers (12.5%), positioning this issue among the main difficulties of the public sector.

Table 7 *Perceived Availability of Resources for Teaching OL by Education Sector*

Education sector	Limited resources, n (%)	Sufficient resources, n (%)	Total (n)
Private	10 (11.4%)	78 (88.6%)	88
Public	45 (39.5%)	69 (60.5%)	114
Total	55	147	202

Note: Percentages represent row proportions. χ^2 test: $p < .001$.

The perceived availability of resources for teaching OL was also found to be statistically highly significant (Table 7, $p < .001$) between sectors, with 39.5% of the public sector considering that they have limited resources, compared to 11.4% of the private sector.

Table 8 *Prioritization of Other Curricular Activities Over OL Instruction by Education Sector*

Education sector	No, n (%)	Yes, n (%)	Total (n)
Private	58 (65.9%)	30 (34.1%)	88
Public	92 (80.7%)	22 (19.3%)	114
Total	150	52	202

Note: Percentages represent row proportions. χ^2 test: $p = .017$.

Regarding the need to prioritize other curricular contents or activities over OL instruction, the difference was moderately significant towards the private sector, with 34.1% considering that it should constantly prioritize other aspects, versus 19.3% in the public sector (Table 8, $p = .017$).

Table 9 *Perceived Clarity About How to Teach OL by Education Sector*

Education sector	Lack of clarity, n (%)	Clear about how to teach, n (%)	Total (n)
Private	11 (12.5%)	77 (87.5%)	88
Public	20 (17.5%)	94 (82.5%)	114
Total	31	171	202

Note: Percentages represent row proportions. χ^2 test: $p = .324$.

Regarding teachers perceived clarity in teaching OL, no statistically significant differences were found between educational sectors (Table 9, $p = .324$). In general, teachers from both sectors did not consider this a major difficulty.

Additional analyses were conducted to examine potential effects of relevant contextual variables on the questionnaire dimensions using Student's t -tests, repeated measures ANOVAs, and post hoc anal-

yses. These analyses considered educational sector (public vs. private), geographical area (rural vs. urban), and years of teaching experience.



Figure 4 *Difference in Questionnaire Dimension Scores by Education Sector*

Figure 4 shows that teachers in the private sector obtained significantly higher factor scores in the management of conversation in the classroom (F2), and in the roles and strategies of teachers related to the teaching of OL (F3), which reflects that teachers in private sector perceive themselves as having a higher score in how they manage communication in the classroom. with a mean of 0.882, compared to -0.681 in the public sector ($p = .001$ and size of Cohen's d -effect = 0.457). In the same way, in the communication strategies and functions, a statistically significant difference was observed ($p = .007$), where the private sector scores higher (mean of 0.681), compared to -0.526 for the public sector.



Figure 5 *Difference in Questionnaire Dimension Scores by Geographical Area*

In terms of geographical area (Figure 5), teachers in urban areas also obtained significantly higher scores in the same dimensions related to communication management and strategies and functions. In communicative management, teachers in urban areas scored with a mean of 0.535 compared to -0.869 for non-urban areas ($p = .005$ and Cohen's moderate d -effect = 0.409). And in strategies and functions, also in favour of urban areas, with $p = .045$ and a light effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.292$). On the other hand, in the items related to interculturality in the classroom (F5A), the opposite effect occurs, showing higher scores for the non-urban area, this being marginally significant ($p = .057$).

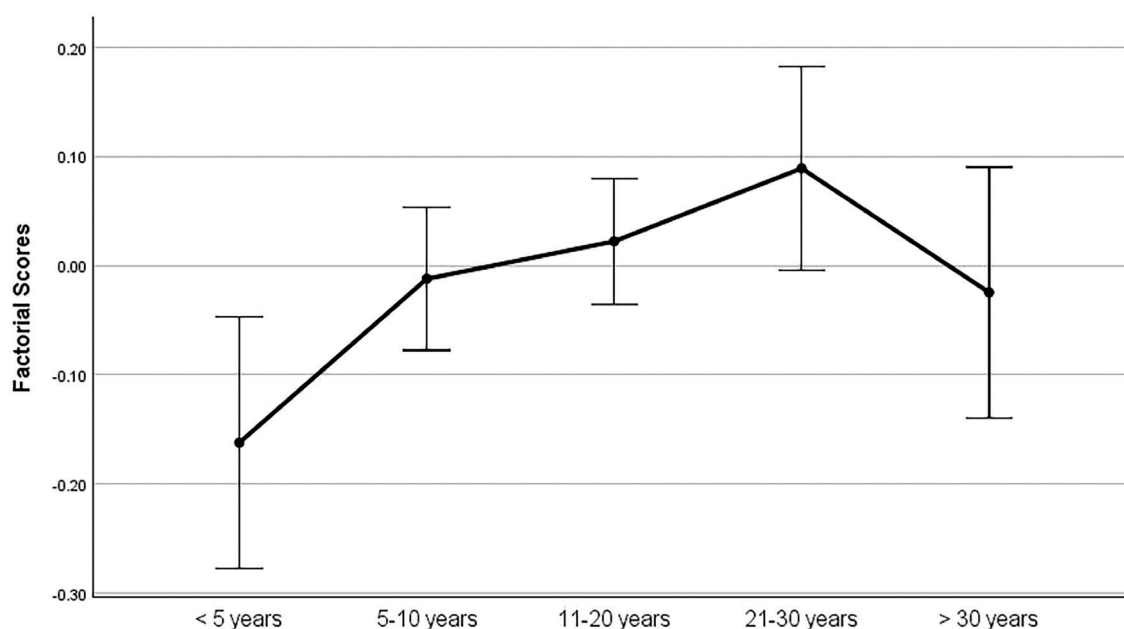


Figure 6 Mean Factorial Score in Relation to Years of Experience (Error Bars: 95% CI)

Finally, in teaching experience, no significant interaction between factors and experience was found, $F(20, 985) = 0.789$, $p = .730$, but there was a significant effect on the years of teaching experience (Figure 6), where those teachers with more experience had a tendency to higher scores, compared to those with less experience: This difference was significant, $F(4, 197) = 3.047$, $p = .018$, and an effect size $\eta^2_p = .058$, which shows a moderate influence of teaching experience on their perceptions of the teaching of OL and interculturality in the classroom.

Discussion and Conclusions

Validation and Scope of the Instrument

Regarding the first research question on the validity, reliability, and factor structure of the *ad hoc* questionnaire, the results provide strong support for the instrument. The confirmatory factor analysis showed an acceptable fit for the proposed six-dimensional model, which is consistent with existing theoretical frameworks on the development of OCC (Gràcia *et al.*, 2024; Mercer *et al.*, 2020; Rafferty, 2014).

Regarding internal consistency reliability, the questionnaire showed that each dimension was measured consistently as a separate construct and, although it also demonstrated consistent reliability as a unidimensional instrument, its use as a multidimensional instrument is recommended, considering that each dimension contributes to understanding teachers' perceptions of the different components that build OCC and how to develop it in intercultural and multilingual contexts.

This finding is particularly relevant because the theoretical multidimensional structure proposed for the questionnaire was supported by the empirical data. The CFA showed that the items grouped consistently according to the theoretically defined dimensions, with only one dimension empirically differentiated into two related factors. This result provides strong evidence of structural validity, as it confirms the coherence between the theoretical model and the observed factorial structure.

Therefore, the questionnaire is valid and reliable for exploring teachers' perceptions regarding the teaching of OL and the development of OCC in their classrooms, considering that it is necessary to provide teachers with a shared conceptual framework from which this competence is understood as a competence that is constructed jointly with students and developed and refined over time (Gràcia *et al.*, 2015, 2023; Gutiérrez & Rosas, 2008).

In this sense, the validated questionnaire was originally designed for the Mexican context, considering its pluricultural nature and the existing intercultural policy framework (Schmelkes, 2004; Vergara, 2021; Viveros-Márquez, 2016), and we consider that it could be useful in other contexts similar to Mexico, such as other Latin American countries characterized by high levels of multilingualism and diverse educational scenarios, especially where public–private divisions intersect with unequal educational opportunities and different access to languages of prestige (Bellei, 2005; Hornberger, 2009; López & Küper, 2000). Therefore, this type of analysis of teachers' perceptions regarding OL teaching in intercultural and multilingual contexts is necessary, especially to make minoritized languages more visible. Nevertheless, it is recommended to use it with awareness that it was originally created for the Mexican context and to make the necessary adaptations, considering the relevant literature.

Similarly, in line with previous research highlighting the differences between theoretical discourse and classroom practice in OL teaching (Gràcia *et al.*, 2015, 2023; Gutiérrez & Rosas, 2008), we consider that the instrument could contribute to comparative studies across different educational scenarios, evaluations of teacher professional development related to OL and interculturality, as well as longitudinal studies examining teachers' perceptions on these topics.

Interculturality, Inequality, and Sectoral Differences

In response to the second research question on early childhood education teachers' perceptions of the teaching and use of OCC in multilingual Mexican contexts, the results reveal significant differences between the public and private sectors across several dimensions, including perceived difficulties related to the teaching and use of OCC in multilingual settings.

Teachers in the private sector reported a greater emphasis in their perception of how they manage classroom conversation and use communicative strategies. This may be associated with institutional cultures that prioritize discursive skills aligned with academic and global capital, particularly in contexts where English and other prestige languages are valued (Cruz, 2024; Hamel, 2008; Wei, 2023). In contrast, teachers working in predominantly public and rural contexts reported greater awareness of interculturality, which likely reflects the more visible presence of Indigenous languages and historically marginalized communities in these areas (Schmelkes, 2004; Vergara, 2021), as well as the Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB) policy implemented in these regions, which, despite its difficulties and limitations in implementation, has opened pathways for the teaching of Indigenous languages in Mexico (Cardona, 2014; Pérez, 2025; Vergara, 2021).

Furthermore, the questionnaire also seems to show that teachers in public and rural sectors, while demonstrating greater awareness of interculturality, perceive themselves as placing less emphasis on strategies to develop OL in these contexts, which is consistent with the literature addressing the gap between EIB policy discourse and classroom practice (García & Velasco, 2012; Sichra, 2005; Wei, 2023).

However, rurality in Mexico cannot be simplistically equated with interculturality. As discussed in the introduction, Indigenous–Spanish bilingualism has historically been associated with rural and marginalized contexts, while private urban schools often promote English–Spanish bilingualism linked to prestige (Cruz, 2024; Hamel, 2008). These patterns reflect persistent linguistic hierarchies shaped by colonial and neoliberal ideologies (González, 2015; Wei, 2023). Therefore, the differences observed in this study appear to reflect not only inequalities affecting vulnerable sectors, but also how socioeconomic inequality has historically intersected with symbolic hierarchies of linguistic power and prestige (Cruz, 2024; Hamel, 2008; Wei, 2023).

Additionally, it is important to consider that Indigenous–Spanish multilingualism is also present in urban areas, primarily due to internal migration processes (SEP-CGEIB, 2005; Zarza, 2018). However, symbolic language hierarchies that privilege foreign languages reinforce the belief that Indigenous–Spanish multilingualism exists only in rural settings, while multilingualism involving prestige languages such as English is associated with urban contexts. When combined with policies that focus EIB primarily on rural multilingual areas, these conditions may further limit the visibility of Indigenous–Spanish multilingualism in urban educational environments (Cardona, 2014; Viveros-Márquez, 2016; Zarza, 2018).

In this sense, interculturality, multilingualism, and historically rooted structural inequality across diverse multilingual Mexican educational contexts, together with differences in educational frameworks in which EIB is primarily institutionalized in areas with higher multilingual density, intersect in shaping how OCC is conceptualized and enacted in schools (Schmelkes, 2004; Sichra, 2005). Therefore, these findings are also consistent with previous research highlighting tensions between intercultural policy discourse and daily classroom contexts (García & Velasco, 2012; Hamel, 2008).

The reported challenges provide deeper insight into these structural dynamics. Teachers in the public sector more frequently identified large class sizes and limited resources as barriers, which is consistent with documented inequalities in material conditions between educational sectors (INEE, 2017; OECD, 2015; Suárez-Zozaya, 2012). In contrast, teachers in the private sector more frequently reported the need to prioritize other curricular content, which is also consistent with previous literature indicating that private educational contexts often prioritize extensive curricular content and prestige languages as forms of cultural capital (Cruz, 2024). This suggests the presence of institutional pressures that may limit sustained attention to dialogic and reflective OL teaching practices (Gràcia *et al.*, 2023).

Importantly, these barriers should not be attributed to linguistic diversity itself. Rather, they reflect the ways in which educational systems manage diversity under conditions shaped by structural inequality (Hornberger, 2009; López & Küper, 2000). In Mexico, intercultural and bilingual approaches have frequently faced implementation challenges due to limited curricular flexibility, lack of adequate materials, and the operationalization of EIB as part of centralized state frameworks that restrict local autonomy and limit its transformative potential (Hamel, 2008; Wei, 2023).

This, together with limitations in teacher preparation (Cardona, 2014; García & Velasco, 2012; Hamel, 2008), as well as linguistic ideologies and myths about bilingualism and multilingualism, for example, beliefs that bilingualism confuses children or hinders academic achievement, despite research showing that such myths lack empirical support (González, 2015), are factors that directly influence teachers' perceptions of language, multilingualism, and interculturality, and consequently shape how these are addressed in classroom practice.

From Awareness to Practice: The Need for Resignification of OCC in Multilingual Contexts

Another key finding was the discrepancy between teachers' recognition of the importance of OL and their reported implementation of systematic strategies. This aligns with previous studies documenting the limited instructional time and pedagogical intentionality dedicated to OL despite its recognized relevance (Gràcia *et al.*, 2021b; Gutiérrez & Rosas, 2008; Mercer *et al.*, 2020; Zarza *et al.*, 2024). In multilingual contexts such as Mexico, this gap is further complicated by sociolinguistic hierarchies and policy ambiguities surrounding intercultural education (Hamel, 2008; Wei, 2023).

Consequently, these results underscore the importance of teachers engaging in a resignification toward the intentional teaching of OCC (planned, developed, and evaluated) as a developing competence, to help eradicate the belief that it is acquired naturally (Gutiérrez & Rosas, 2008). By resignification, we refer to a shift from perceiving OL as naturally acquired toward recognizing it as a competence that must be intentionally planned, scaffolded, and evaluated, reconceptualized as a competence that continues to develop and be refined through interaction and joint construction (Gràcia *et al.*, 2015, 2025a; Gutiérrez & Rosas, 2008).

The positive association between years of teaching experience and higher scores in certain dimensions seems to support previous research showing how OCC develops through sustained interaction and reflective practice (Gràcia *et al.*, 2015; Gutiérrez & Rosas, 2008). However, experience alone is insufficient. Structured professional development programs that integrate reflection on discourse, intercultural communication, linguistic ideologies, and classroom interaction are essential for fostering resignification and awareness of how OCC develops in multilingual contexts (Gràcia *et al.*, 2025b; Liddicoat, 2013; López & Sichra, 2016), particularly considering that teachers trained primarily in monolingual environments tend to show lower levels of confidence and international posture toward intercultural communication practices (Demir, 2025).

As Gràcia *et al.*, (2025b) highlight, teacher development should include systematic spaces for analysing classroom dialogue, allowing teachers to connect theory with their own communicative practices. In multilingual contexts such as Mexico, this reflection acquires additional importance, as it helps teachers and school communities recognize and use linguistic diversity as a resource for learning rather than as a challenge to be overcome.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study presents some limitations. The sample included a higher proportion of public-school teachers and was geographically concentrated, with a considerable number of participants from the state of Querétaro. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution and should not be generalized to all educational contexts in Mexico, for which a larger and more representative sample would be necessary. Additionally, the data reflect teachers' self-perceptions rather than their observed practices, an issue that has been previously highlighted in research on teacher beliefs and OL teaching (Gràcia *et al.*, 2021b, 2023). In this sense, we do not assume that these results reflect everything that teachers know and/or do with respect to OL and interculturality, as a more in-depth evaluation would require additional methodological approaches to examine classroom practices directly and to better understand how teachers address the daily challenges of intercultural educational contexts in Mexico.

Therefore, one future line of research should focus on how teacher training programs can be designed to integrate the teaching of OCC and interculturality into classroom practice. Such programs should provide shared spaces for reflection, where experienced teachers can exchange their insights with

those who have less experience, and where pedagogical tools are provided to address cultural and linguistic diversity in an integral and inclusive manner, in alignment with active learning methodologies (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Sedova, 2017) and transformative practices that consider multilingualism as a pedagogical resource for social transformation (Barriga, 2020; García & Torres, 2009; Palmer *et al.*, 2014).

Future research could also examine the functioning of the instrument in other multilingual contexts characterized by different configurations of linguistic hierarchy (Hornberger, 2009), as well as combine questionnaire data with classroom observations, interviews, and teacher training programs that include collaborative reflection, to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions and their educational practices.

Conclusion

Firstly, this study contributes a psychometrically validated instrument designed to examine early childhood teachers' perceptions of the development and teaching of OCC in multilingual and intercultural educational contexts. By providing a structured and reliable tool, this study opens possibilities for future research with the objective of understanding how teachers conceptualize, implement, and experience the development of OCC across diverse educational scenarios.

The findings also revealed significant differences in teachers' perceptions according to educational sector, geographical area, and years of teaching experience. These differences suggest that teachers' self-perceived capacity to foster OCC and engage with interculturality is shaped by the specific conditions in which they work. Teaching experience appears to strengthen teachers' confidence and awareness regarding the intentional development of OCC in their multilingual classrooms.

However, these differences should not be understood as isolated variables, but rather as part of a complex and interconnected system shaped by structural inequalities, linguistic ideologies, language hierarchies, and educational policies. These factors interact to influence not only structural conditions, but also how multilingualism, interculturality, and OL are understood, valued, and enacted in everyday school practice.

Addressing this complexity requires making these structural and symbolic conditions visible, while actively working in collaboration with teachers who are immersed in these realities in their everyday practice. Listening to their perspectives, recognizing their experiences, and incorporating their needs into pedagogical and policy frameworks is essential for moving beyond formal intercultural discourse toward meaningful educational transformation. Strengthening OCC in multilingual classrooms therefore involves not only pedagogical change, but also a collective effort to bridge the gap between policy intentions and the lived realities of teachers and students.

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