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Public educational policies for teaching and learning reading and writing in their transit through basic education in colombia

Políticas públicas educativas para la enseñanza y aprendizaje de la lectura y la escritura en su tránsito por la educación básica en Colombia

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Ledis elvira Ramos Herazo¹

Ana Mercedes Murillo López²

Unicesar- Unimagdalena

¹ Licenciada en Filología e idiomas, Universidad Libre de Colombia, Especialista en Pedagogía de la Lengua y literatura, Universidad de Pamplona, Magister en Educación, Universidad Popular del Cesar; Estudiante del Doctorado en Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad del Magdalena; Tutora del PTAFI 3.0, Programa de Tutorías para el Aprendizaje y la Formación Integral del Ministerio de Educación Nacional, profesora catedrática del Departamento de Lenguas Modernas de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad Popular del Cesar (Colombia) Programa Español e Inglés, adscrita al grupo de investigación GIELE-HL lramosh@unicesar.edu.co y CogniEd (Grupo de investigación Cognición y Educación) lramos@unimagdalena.edu.co Tel. 3023767687

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1709-4766> <https://scholar.google.es/citations?hl=es&user=uB9R0woAAAAJ>

² Licenciada en educación preescolar, del INFOTEP (Instituto de Formación Técnica y Profesional). Magdalena, Colombia, Magíster en educación de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, de la Universidad del Magdalena. Estudiante de Doctorado en ciencias de la educación, Universidad del Magdalena. Profesora de aula, con más de 20 años de servicio en el sector público y privado. Miembro del Grupo de Investigación: GICE (Grupo de Investigación en currículo y Evaluación) de la universidad del Magdalena. ammurillo@unimagdalena.edu.co <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6908-7584> <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=pX8jVHMAAAAJ&hl=es>

Resumen

Este artículo reflexiona sobre la enseñanza de la lengua en Colombia en las dos últimas décadas y tiene como propósito analizar las políticas públicas, los referentes de calidad y otras orientaciones sobre la enseñanza de la lectura y la escritura en el país. El ejercicio reflexivo se realizó bajo la metodología de arqueología textual de diez documentos (leyes, lineamientos, referentes de calidad, orientaciones curriculares y manuales) del Ministerio de Educación Nacional. Se concluye que en las aulas existe un insondable abismo entre la teoría existente y las prácticas educativas que se llevan a cabo en las distintas transiciones educativas, puesto que aún se evidencian bajos desempeños de los estudiantes en las diferentes pruebas (TIMMS, PISA, SABER) en las que participan y se evalúan, las competencias básicas. El texto justifica, además, la importancia y la responsabilidad de la escuela de formar sujetos capaces de leer y escribir con sentido y significado en todos los ámbitos y trayectorias educativas, lo que configuraría lectores críticos y autónomos, dispuestos a comprender y transformar el mundo actual.

Palabras clave: políticas públicas; lectura; escritura; trayectorias educativas; enseñanza de la lectura; enseñanza de la escritura.

Abstract

This article reflects on language teaching in Colombia over the past two decades and aims to analyze public policies, quality standards, and other guidelines related to the teaching of reading and writing in the country. The reflective exercise was conducted using the textual archaeology methodology on ten documents (laws, guidelines, quality standards, curricular orientations, and manuals) from the National Ministry of Education. It is concluded that there exists a profound gap between existing theory and educational practices in classrooms, as

evidenced by the persistently low student performance in various tests (TIMMS, PISA, SABER) that evaluate, among other things, these basic competencies. The text also justifies the importance and responsibility of schools in forming individuals capable of reading and writing with purpose and meaning in all areas of life and educational trajectories, thus shaping critical and autonomous readers, ready to understand and transform the current world.

Keywords: public policies; reading; writing; educational trajectories; teaching reading; teaching writing.

Introduction

Reading and writing are complex and polysemic processes that go beyond the decoding and encoding of words. Both play a fundamental role in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of individuals. Various authors agree that these are essential skills for learning and personal development. For this reason, the National Ministry of Education (MEN) highlights their importance in the different quality standards and other documents that support the educational process. However, in Colombia, and generally in Latin America, although there are clear ministerial policies and references for formal learning that guide the teaching of reading and writing, analyses of the results from internal and external tests continue to show weaknesses and problems that are exacerbated in some regions.

Within this context, this article, through a reflective exercise and utilizing the textual archaeology methodology, analyzes the public policies on reading and writing that have been established by the National Ministry of Education (MEN) and other governmental entities over the past two decades in Colombia. It reviews and identifies the approaches, perspectives, and discursive changes that have emerged, related to the development and strengthening

of communicative competencies, the current reality, and possible scenarios for change and transformation.

Methodology

For this reflective exercise, the methodology of textual archaeology was employed, examining ten documents (laws, guidelines, quality references, curricular orientations, and manuals) from the National Ministry of Education. Foucault (1999) referred to the process of rediscovering that which makes knowledge possible as the archaeology of knowledge. In this vein, we as readers can be seen as archaeologists in an infinite world of texts. Therefore, similar to archaeology, this approach proposes a reconnection with the public policies that have shaped the teaching and learning of reading and writing in Colombia over the past two decades.

To apply the method of textual archaeology, it is essential to understand that considering oneself an archaeologist involves asking, "Who are we seeking, what can we come to know, how will we come to know it, how is the artifact composed, and how is it used" (Ramos, 1987, p. 1). Being textual archaeologists entails discussing the various objects or artifacts, which in this context are the texts on public policies regarding reading and writing; it involves discussing the object, constructing it, analyzing it, and refining the concepts (Ramos, 1987). Thus, performing textual archaeology means recognizing texts as artifacts that require analysis and interpretation.

This process utilized the same stages employed in the general archaeological method (Ramos, 1987; Renfrew & Bahn, 1998), which are:

- Cabinet or Findings: This stage corresponds to the discovery or data collection. It allowed for determining and delimiting the study's interest: texts related to educational policies on reading and writing over the past

two decades (laws, quality references, curricular update references, curricular orientations, manuals, etc.).

- Prospection: This involves choosing the sites and tracking information, leading to decisions about what to excavate. This includes where to excavate and which artifacts to excavate. For the present study and reflection, ten documents on public policies guiding the teaching and learning of reading and writing in Colombia were selected. These were chosen based on their significance and relevance in the educational context and their importance for continuing to explore classroom opportunities. The texts were screened, searched, selectively read, and ten were chosen.

- Excavation: This stage involves the exhumation of sites, which, in the case of textual archaeology, requires reading the texts. Excavation strategies included defining what to read in the documents, the objectives and purposes of the reading; identifying essential information, outlining central ideas; and reflecting on what was read.

- Packaging: This involves reviewing prioritized information and organizing it into categories. From the information collected during excavation and cataloged during packaging, a graphic organizer can be constructed.

- Publication and Exhibition: This stage is related to communicating the results.

The method of textual archaeology offers an opportunity to rigorously address texts through excavation. This approach allows not only for knowing the texts but also for valuing them

as artifacts subject to comprehension and interpretation in different contexts.

The following sections analyze ten public policy documents and quality references that guide the teaching of reading and writing in Colombia. Through textual archaeology, the underlying conceptions of language, reading, and writing in the teaching of the Spanish language in our country are initially analyzed, followed by a reflection on the foundations, guidelines, and transformations generated in the educational field regarding language teaching over the past two decades. This reflection is based on the perspectives of those who have been in the classrooms and have had the opportunity to observe and dialogue within the educational context with the actors involved in the process.

Public Policy References in Reading and Writing

To begin, it is important to note that it was only with the 1991 Political Constitution that education became explicitly recognized as a fundamental right in Colombia. Since then, actions have been undertaken to reduce educational disparities and eradicate illiteracy in the country. However, it was with the publication and enactment of the General Education Law (Law 115 of 1994) and the establishment of the Curricular Guidelines for the Teaching of the Spanish Language (MEN, 1998) that the first educational policies for language teaching began to emerge.

In various domains where humans participate, especially in the academic realm, it is said that from the early years of schooling, children, and later youths, must develop critical thinking and progressively improve their reading and writing skills. This is so that through reading and writing, they can understand the complexities of the world around them and face the great challenges and various life scenarios. These two processes, reading and writing, encompass not only formal teaching and learning levels but are also present

in human life from birth. Through them, one not only comprehends the world but also gains access to all that it represents.

In this regard, since the end of the last century, Colombia has outlined public policies, quality benchmarks, and curricular update references that currently guide educational processes. The General Education Law (Law 115 of 1994) contains the regulations governing public education services, aiming to guarantee an integral and continuous educational process. Additionally, it outlines the responsibilities of the State, society, and family regarding educational quality and coverage. This document not only establishes the mandatory and fundamental areas of knowledge but also places significant importance on the area of Language and communication skills as essential abilities for any person in the 21st century to be as critical as today's world demands.

Concerning quality benchmarks, the Curricular Guidelines for the Spanish Language have been directing language teaching since 1998. The Guidelines highlight the importance and necessity of reflecting on what to teach and learn in school. They also propose project-based work as a pedagogical strategy that promotes student participation in their learning process and emphasizes the importance of intercultural education and the inclusion of indigenous perspectives in the school curriculum. Additionally, they stress the importance of teacher training in interculturality and cultural sensitivity, highlighting the teacher's role as a mediator in classroom interactions between the child and culture.

Regarding update references, the Basic Learning Rights (2016), hereinafter DBA, present a set of learnings classified according to the students' grade levels. These will be discussed later.

For now, an element to consider in this analysis is related to the epistemological foundations

underlying and guiding language teaching in our country. For instance, the Guidelines (MEN, 1998) establish cognitive strategies for reading comprehension and text production and introduce the workshop methodology for analyzing written texts. In other words, they propose the development of critical skills in reading, writing, and oral production in students, driven by a conception of reading and writing oriented towards meaning, surpassing mere linguistic tradition and psychological theories. For example, regarding reading, it is stated that “the act of reading will be understood as a meaningful and semiotic process, culturally and historically situated, complex, which goes beyond the search for meaning and ultimately configures the reading subject” (MEN, 1998, p. 27).

According to the above, the reading process requires a high cognitive mastery that allows the subject to comprehend what they read, as comprehension is not simply about extracting main ideas from a text but fundamentally about situating the text within a context. According to Luri (2019), when we talk about context, we also refer to all the linguistic content stored in memory that enriches vocabulary and, consequently, textual comprehension. Therefore, it is essential to expand contexts to interpret different types of texts.

Specifically, in the Curricular Guidelines for the Spanish Language (MEN, 1998), reading is assumed as:

a process of constructing meanings from the interaction between the text, the context, and the reader. Meaning, contrary to what the perceptual-motor model of reading held, is not only in the text, nor in the context, nor in the reader, but in the interaction of the three factors, which together determine comprehension. (p. 47)

Regarding the conception of writing, the same Guidelines (MEN, 1998) state that writing is:

a process that is both social and individual, in which a world is configured, and knowledge, competencies, and interests are played out. It is also determined by a sociocultural and pragmatic context that determines the act of writing: to write is to produce the world. (p. 27)

Therefore, reading and writing as discursive activities and social practices do not exclude the technical, linguistic, and communicative components of language but surpass them, as they are based on the development of language-related competencies that seek to produce meaning and both comprehend and express a context. This implies that the teaching of reading and writing must transcend mechanical, technical, instrumental practices and processes of mere decoding. It must surpass the idea of reading and writing as motor activities (Camps, 2003), writing as a product (Camargo, Uribe, and Caro, 2011), and the formal paradigm for teaching writing (Álvarez, 2010). Therefore, the conception of reading and writing underlying the Guidelines remains a fundamental element in guiding language learning processes.

Within the framework of quality benchmarks, Colombia also has the Basic Standards of Language Competencies (MEN, 2006), which establish criteria defining what students should know and be able to do regarding language at different educational levels. They prioritize an integral approach aimed at promoting not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking, creativity, intercultural communication, and the ability to express ideas effectively and persuasively. Thus, language education in the country seeks to develop the competencies necessary to participate successfully in communicative situations in all domains of life.

To achieve this, three fundamental fields underpin the teaching of language in basic and secondary education: the pedagogy of the Spanish language, the pedagogy of literature, and the pedagogy of other symbolic systems. This is because the Standards (MEN, 2006) aim to develop communicative competencies “that enable students, through solid and reasoned linguistic action, to actively interact with society and participate in transforming the world” (p. 21). The Standards highlight two fundamental processes: production and comprehension. These processes foster the development of cognitive and metacognitive activities such as abstraction, analysis, synthesis, inference, induction, deduction, comparison, and association—skills that enable individuals to function in any social context and enhance knowledge generation through text interaction or information exchange (MEN, 2006).

An archaeological analysis of the Basic Standards of Language Competencies reveals that they holistically encompass the axes proposed in the Curricular Guidelines for the Spanish Language. Regarding the pedagogy of the Spanish language, specifically related to reading and writing, to ensure the development of language-related competencies, objectives are organized sequentially in grade groups, aligning with biological and psychological processes. Notably, a strong cognitive component transverses these standards from the first to the eleventh grade. A horizontal coherence analysis reveals that, grade by grade, the development of competencies is established through cognitive-linguistic strategies, strengthening various discursive processes according to each level. Cognitive processes involved in text writing are evident in all grades, along with a model that includes intellectual operations like communication situations, long-term memory, and mental strategies and sub-processes for writing, as proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981) and later adopted by Cassany (1989).

The fundamental objective outlined in the Standards is to learn the language from a discursive and holistic perspective, surpassing reductionist approaches associated with structural and formalist language teaching, without disregarding grammar interest. However, the presence of the sociocultural approach and the teaching of language from a perspective of reading and writing as social practices is not very clear. The Basic Standards of Language Competencies (MEN, 2006) specify that the processes involving language development:

constitute merely a reference that can enhance students’ linguistic, communicative, and cognitive development throughout their schooling, which must be articulated with the particular characteristics of students in different regions of Colombia, as well as with the needs and objectives each institution has identified and defined in its Institutional Educational Project. (p. 28)

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In this regard, Language Standards should be adapted to the specific needs and contexts of each country or region, incorporating relevant cultural, social, and linguistic elements to ensure a language education that meets the demands and challenges of contemporary society. However, these objectives are far from the realities that guide the pedagogical practices of many teachers in the country, as many language programs and plans in educational institutions are oriented more towards knowledge than the development of competencies from that knowledge. This is further evidenced by the results of external tests, which highlight the critical learning issues faced by students in Colombia: the realities show the weak correlation between what is learned and what is assessed in the school domain. This gap is exacerbated by the fact that reading and writing practices in the educational sphere often reflect tasks or

activities that are detached from sociocultural contexts and the various domains of life where reading and writing are used.

This situation is evident in many educational institutions where reading and writing are treated as subjects with allocated hours to strengthen these processes. Activities in these sessions are limited to workshops that seldom focus on teaching processes and strategies that are useful for students in life. Moreover, areas other than language rarely incorporate reading and writing into their disciplinary content. This responsibility has been left to the language area, as if reading and writing were learned at a specific moment in life and retained forever.

Implementing and actualizing the Standards in school practice has encountered difficulties. Therefore, a decade later (in 2016), the Basic Learning Rights (DBA) were introduced. These curricular update references present a set of foundational learnings that students should acquire at each grade level. They were formulated as a strategy to promote curricular flexibility and encompass broad learnings to be addressed and achieved throughout the school year, rather than through specific activities. However, this concept seems to have been misunderstood, and the DBA have, in some cases, replaced the Standards or been used in the restructuring of area plans or educational programs, which often remain merely theoretical. It seems that knowledge still prevails over what students should actually learn according to the context in which they operate.

Furthermore, when analyzing the second version of the Language DBA, it is observed that, although they do not contradict the Curricular Guidelines (MEN, 1998) and are in line with the Basic Competency Standards in Language (MEN, 2006), they limit the learnings to aspects where some cognitive elements and strategies for teaching reading and writing are no longer

evident, elements that are indeed supported by the Basic Competency Standards in Language. The DBA reduce to an update proposal that generalizes some fundamental processes for language learning, and while they provide a reference framework for teachers in designing their plans and could guide pedagogical practice in planning relevant and effective teaching activities, they end up limiting and conditioning it.

In Colombia, Language learning frameworks also exist as curricular update documents, showing the sequence and progression of learnings from basic to complex, similar to the Standards. What has often been misunderstood is that, like the DBA, these frameworks establish a general, flexible framework, and it is the teacher who must prioritize the learnings and competencies to develop in children and young people, according to their specific needs and the educational context they are in. The DBA and the Language learning frameworks, by themselves and used without considering the context, do not guarantee the objectives in teaching and learning this fundamental area in the school curriculum.

In relation to the above, it should not be overlooked that in the last two decades in Colombia, public policies for language education in schools have been defined, but they need to address the gaps that still exist, such as

the isolation between grades, the fragmentation of subjects, the disconnection with higher education, the confusion of the policies themselves, and the construction of policies from the bottom up (with consultation with communities) rather than the top down (the Ministry of National Education, MEN). (Jurado, 2016, p. 52)

It is a reality that schools continue to prioritize knowledge over the development of skills and competencies. Reading and writing practices often diverge from a sociocultural approach.

However, it should not be overlooked that schools, as Rockwell (2018) posits, “can rather be seen as a variable historical context, within which everyday practices define a certain relationship with the written language, different from those in other contexts” (p. 555). Therefore, teachers bear a great responsibility: to realize the fundamental rights of all children and citizens of our country.

Public Policy on Reading, Writing, and Orality: National Plan for Reading and Writing in Early Childhood, Preschool, Basic, and Secondary Education, PNLE, PNLEO, LEO

In relation to policies for promoting reading and writing in Colombia, in 2011, the Ministry of National Education (MEN) and the Regional Center for Book Promotion in Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLALC) established the National Plan for Reading and Writing in Early Childhood, Preschool, Basic, and Secondary Education (MEN, 2011). The objective was to provide educators and teachers with tools to improve teaching practices in reading and writing, and to create conditions for the development of reading societies. In other words, the challenge was to

foster the development of language competencies by improving the reading and writing levels (reading behavior, reading comprehension, and textual production) of students in early childhood, preschool, basic, and secondary education, through the strengthening of the role of the school and family in the formation of readers and writers. (MEN, 2011, p. 7)

The plan’s document highlights the importance of redefining the role of reading and writing in schools and offering meaningful learning experiences for students, where reading and writing are pleasurable activities across all areas of knowledge, rather than exclusive to Language

classes.

Often, teachers of other subjects (Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Ethics and Values, etc.) express dissatisfaction because their basic and secondary students struggle to read and comprehend diverse texts, attributing this issue to Language teachers. However, reading and writing across all areas require transformations in pedagogical practice, where teachers, as the primary responsible party for educational activities, recognize and understand the relevance of these social practices in human life. Therefore, it is imperative to offer appropriate conditions and spaces for reading within schools, enabling students to access various types of texts that enrich their vocabulary, understand and relate contexts, and comprehend different socio-cultural environments. Thus, the availability of books in schools and homes is crucial to consolidate engagement and participation in written culture.

It is clear that today, it seems as though new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are displacing books. However, this only implies new ways of reading and writing, and it is the responsibility of the educational community to guide these processes towards these new challenges and leverage the impact they have had on students, who now demand immediate benefits and the development of other skills. Of course, the work of the teacher cannot be undervalued, as long as they work on thought processes, they will never be replaced by ICT. In other words, it is urgent for teachers to adapt to technological advances, making good use of them, understanding that the transformations of physical books, now present in different versions and formats, are inevitable. From an educational and social perspective, the goal of promoting reading and writing will always be to develop the capacity for autonomous reflection and critical thinking, regardless of the medium in which the book is presented.

Furthermore, another important document in the context of educational policies related to language in Colombia is the National Plan for Reading and Writing, which initially ran from 2010 to 2018. The document aimed to improve students' reading and writing skills and promote their participation in written culture. As part of this plan, "Reading is My Story" was created, consisting of a collection of children's and youth literary works to motivate and stimulate reading habits and improve reading processes in children, youth, and families, with the goal of promoting the formation of critical and reflective readers, generating spaces for engagement with different types of texts, and fostering written text production. It also aimed to strengthen school management and the training of reading and writing mediators.

The National Plan for Reading and Writing team at the Ministry of National Education, concerned about low academic performance in terms of reading comprehension and textual production, particularly in rural communities and vulnerable populations, complemented the previous plan by emphasizing orality as a means of transmitting values, ideas, and customs. Therefore, the National Plan for Reading, Writing, and Orality (PNLEO) "Reading is My Story" 2018-2022 (Ministry of Culture, MEN, 2021) was created, with the ongoing goal of training reading mediators, providing reading materials, producing publications, and generating knowledge to ensure participation, equity, and inclusion in accessing and enjoying these communication skills (reading, writing, and orality). The PNLEO continues to implement pedagogical and didactic strategies that develop in the educational community the ability to understand and interpret texts, adopt a critical and reflective stance towards what is read, and enhance textual production competence.

To continue this objective, the National Policy on Reading, Writing, Orality, and School Libraries

(PNLEOBE) was formulated between 2019 and 2022, with an action plan projected to 2030. Its goal is to further strengthen and consolidate the commitment to forming active subjects—critical and creative—in their reading, oral, and writing practices throughout their lives. This action plan emphasizes the fundamental role of school libraries as dynamic and inclusive spaces, and as a transversal strategy that promotes sociocultural language practices, knowledge construction, and the development of meaningful pedagogical processes throughout school life (MEN, 2022). Additionally, this Plan aims to strengthen school libraries in educational institutions, as they help develop cognitive capacities that enhance orality, access to knowledge, and cultural appropriation, while fostering reading habits in students.

It is worth noting that since 1972, the public-school library program, initiated by Colcultura, has aimed to create suitable spaces for promoting and developing reading practices. Since then, the MEN and CERLALC have joined efforts to create national networks of school libraries with an innovative perspective. However, this goal has not been fully achieved. The reading habit has not yet been instilled in students, as many educational institutions, particularly in rural areas, do not benefit from the provision of materials and teacher training offered by these plans, or from suitable reading spaces (school libraries).

Despite these challenges, it is the Language teachers who have taken on the responsibility of encouraging research and reading motivation, implementing methods and strategies aligned with their conceptions. For example, currently, in the Language study plan, a new "subject" has been incorporated in some institutions called "reading comprehension," "reading plan," or "critical reading," aimed at improving students' reading behavior and levels. However, these objectives have not been fully met, as most teachers limit themselves to assigning texts that

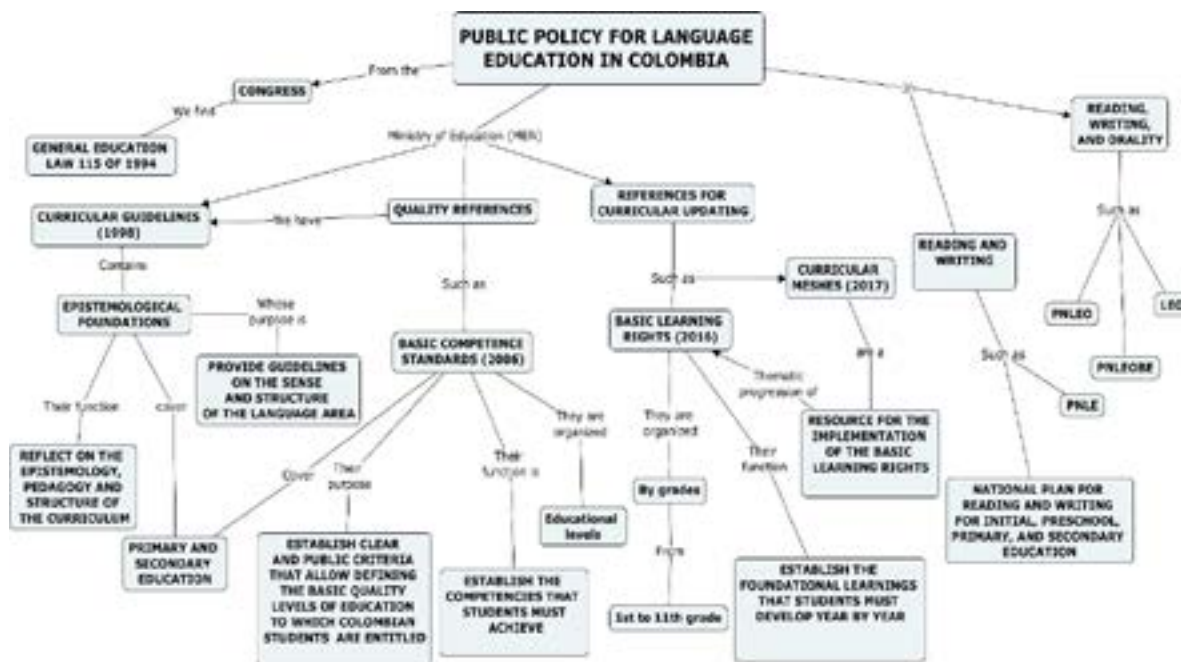
may be of little interest to students, urging them to extract explicit information and make literal inferences from the content. Thus, there is a lack of creativity and stimulation in fostering reading and writing in pedagogical practices, as teachers focus on fulfilling academic programs and undervalue the importance of these educational plans and policies that aim to strengthen or create school libraries, whether in educational institutions, homes or any unconventional space, in order to enhance reading, writing, and orality practices in the educational trajectories.

Locally, within this study, it was found that in 2022, the District of Bogotá launched the Public Policy on Reading, Writing, and Orality (LEO), with a proposal whose main objective and

slogan is “Reading for Life” (Ministry of Culture, MEN, 2021). This is the first time a public policy centered on writing, orality, and citizenship was enacted. Additionally, it was formulated from a long-term intersectoral perspective (2022-2040) with the sole purpose of reducing and closing the gaps that exist around these processes. Essentially, the goal is to “strengthen reading, writing, and orality as everyday practices to make each citizen a creator and mediator of written and oral culture for the exercise of a full life” (Ministry of Culture, MEN, 2021, p. 11).

To summarize the points discussed thus far, the following graph provides a detailed schematic of the public policies related to language education in Colombia.

Graph 1. The public policies related to language education in Colombia.



Discussion and Conclusions

Public policy on education in Colombia is clear and is supported by guidelines and quality standards which express the epistemological foundations, what must be learned in school, and the minimum competencies that children and

young people must develop at each educational level. These documents propose language learning based on various perspectives, including the development of competencies related to its use. Based on these guidelines and adhering to the principle of autonomy, educational institutions organize their curricula

and study plans, materializing them in the classroom. This is done in accordance with the pedagogical approach, teaching methodologies, and sequential and systematic curricular processes that must align with the contexts and specific needs of the students. However, it is important for educational institutions to move away from designing curricula based on a list of contents that inadequately address the development of processes and subprocesses for the consolidation of competencies, focusing instead on knowledge, that is, on learning content and concepts that are useless if not contextualized.

Moreover, it should be understood that the Basic Learning Rights (DBA), in their second version, issued by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) for each grade in the area of Language, although not conflicting with the Curricular Guidelines (MEN, 1998) and the Basic Competence Standards (MEN, 2006), are not the solution. They limit and restrict the learnings and basic competencies proposed in the initial quality references. While included in the programs and area plans of many educational establishments, they often remain on paper. In classrooms, a behaviorist perspective still predominates, emphasizing code learning and not going beyond limited reading tasks such as answering questions about a text and writing to respond to a questionnaire.

In any case, it should not be forgotten that, although the school's function concerning language is to teach reading and writing, it is linked to what Jurado (2016) asserts:

A fundamental right for all citizens of the 21st century is to know how to read critically and write authentically to discuss, propose, and coexist in the realm of differences and heterodoxies. But this is impossible to achieve if families, schools, and the outside world

(the one we face daily: street education, media, and the behavior of government officials) do not reflect this in their actions. (p. 52)

In this sense, although the school has a significant responsibility in the formation of critical citizens, society as a whole must also contribute to this formation; however, questions arise: How do they do it? Who is responsible? How is the follow-up conducted?

It is evident that a flow of information circulates through various media where reading and writing occur; most of the time, what is learned in school does not align with what these spaces require. The challenge is no longer just learning the code and cognitive strategies to approach different types of texts, but other competencies are needed to understand and use the new tools that technology offers to write, review, edit, and publish what is written.

Regarding current public policies on reading, writing, and orality, they are still a commitment of the Ministry of National Education and the current Ministry of Arts, Cultures, and Knowledge, which aim at the comprehensive education of children and adolescents, the development of communicative competencies, and the use and appropriation of public and school libraries. In this sense, programs and projects have been designed in the areas of reading, writing, and orality based on four strategic lines: creating conditions for the development of these skills, transforming pedagogical practices, ensuring access to reading materials, and mobilizing reading, writing, and orality actions. The sole purpose is to promote and encourage these skills as sociocultural practices that enhance the abilities of children, young people, adolescents, and adults to participate in diverse communicative situations, strengthen their life projects, and contribute to their comprehensive development (MEN, 2022, p. 20). Therefore, it is necessary

to rethink and redefine public reading policies to respond to the needs of contexts, especially those in vulnerable conditions, encouraging them to see reading, writing, and communication as non-violent ways to resolve conflicts.

While it is true that the State, in general, and territorial entities, education secretariats, and educational institutions, in particular, have not relented in their efforts to design and implement programs, actions, and strategies to strengthen reading, writing, and oral practices, there are still areas that lack a suitable space or a pleasant school environment to promote and encourage reading habits, as well as the availability and access to reading materials. Although the Colombian State asserts that progress has been made in strengthening school libraries in some regions of the country, in training reading mediators, in formulating territorial plans, and in providing high-quality editorial collections, among other actions, there is still a gap of inequality and inequity between territories. This gap must be bridged to ensure that public policies in reading, writing, and oral skills (LEO) and other linguistic curricular documents meet the needs and rights of students to access written culture.

Thus, there is still a long way to go. This is evidenced by the low performance of students in various tests that evaluate reading competence. In this regard, the Deputy Minister of Preschool, Basic, and Secondary Education, Dr. Oscar Sánchez Jaramillo, questions: How can Colombia address this challenge in different territories while respecting cultural diversity? Additionally, Sánchez Jaramillo adds that “the challenge we now face as a government is to build on the foundation of language and reading to enhance comprehensive education” (MEN, 2024). Furthermore, the Deputy Minister criticizes educational institutions that have school libraries equipped with books sent by the Ministry of National Education, as it is observed that the shelves in classrooms are filled with dusty books

or have become “beds for mice.” This is a harsh critique that calls for reflection on the role that teachers must play as cognitive mediators, who are called to be avid readers, to promote the circulation of books in schools and homes, and to develop communicative competencies for life.

Consequently, for over a decade, the Ministry of National Education, through the Todos a Aprender Program (PTA) and the Tutorías para el Aprendizaje y la Formación Integral Program PTAFI 3.0, has advanced in implementing comprehensive education (FI) strategies in Colombia’s educational institutions through teacher training. The goal is not only to improve pedagogical practices but also to enhance the reading, writing, and oral skills of children and adolescents according to their interests and specific needs. To achieve this, the 2022-2026 National Development Plan (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2022) proposes

the eradication of illiteracy and the reduction of inequities (...) the National Reading, Writing, and Oral Skills Plan - PNLEO will be strengthened with various modalities to create learning environments, through a diverse range of services and programs, with greater provision of bibliographic materials to promote reading, research, and community dialogue. (p. 116)

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Additionally, it is highlighted that in Bogotá, for the first time, a public policy on written and oral culture was enacted under the “Leer para la vida” plan (Mayor’s Office of Bogotá, District Education Secretariat, 2021). Evidently, this guarantees educational and cultural rights, which are fundamental for the exercise of full and democratic citizenship. In this regard, some progress is observed, as it has been a commitment of hard work between the District Education Secretariat and expert institutions in the field: the Regional Center for Book Development in Latin America

and the Caribbean (CERLALC), the Colombian Association of Independent Booksellers (ACLI), and the Colombian Book Chamber (CCL). These advances are demonstrated by the improvement in essential reading and writing skills among Bogotá students by 81% (first graders) and 146% (third graders) (Mayor's Office of Bogotá, District Education Secretariat, 2021). Currently, Bogotá stands as a pioneer in reading in a country that is increasingly reading more.

Moreover, at the national level, the indices are very promising. This is evidenced by data provided by the Colombian Book Chamber (2024), showing that 72% of the Colombian population reports reading. Of them, 75% read books, 54% read social media, and 38% read web pages. Among all, 62% say they read for pleasure.

Given this scenario, it is observed that the country has made efforts with certified territorial entities and education secretariats to meet the needs for training in reading, writing, and oral skills and encourages them to continue strengthening the strategies for fostering, developing, and promoting reading. However, more commitment, control, and follow-up are needed from all government entities, principals, teachers, library mediators, and civil society to fulfill these plans, programs, and actions that ultimately aim to form a generation of children and young people with critical thinking, more dialogue skills, capable of expressing emotions in their oral skills, exercising their citizenship, and solving their daily problems, as well as reading not only texts but also their world and context.

In conclusion, developing reading, writing, and oral skills is an educational and cultural right that all individuals have, enabling them to access all human rights. Therefore, this must be a right included in public policies and other curricular support documents, intersectoral and

interinstitutional action, and cooperation and involvement with various societal stakeholders.

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