

A Multicultural Approach to English Teaching in Buenos Aires: Is it Happening?

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Abstract

Multilingualism is an old phenomenon which has become a central issue for language teaching professionals in recent years as the world we live in becomes increasingly globalized. While in Buenos Aires the importance of a multicultural and multilingual approach to the teaching of English is acknowledged in official documents such as the Curricular Design for Foreign Languages (*Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras*), the question remains whether this translates into concrete teaching practices or education policies; especially when Native American languages such as Quechua or Aymara are involved. As an attempt to start replying to this question, we chose to work on school districts 13 and 20, where there is a high percentage of Bolivian population. Fifty primary school English teachers were interviewed between November and December of 2014. This article analyses part of the results of these interviews, focusing on three conclusions. Firstly, most teachers do not regard multilingualism as an important component of their classes, which is reflected by their lack of knowledge of their students' linguistic background. Secondly, teaching practices are only incidentally affected by multicultural environments. Finally, training offered on these issues by the Ministry of Education is scarce and does not reach teachers, who are mostly unaware of its existence and, therefore, do not participate in it.

Keywords: multiculturalism, multilingualism, English as a 3L, Indigenous languages, teachers' perceptions.

Resumen

El multilingüismo es un fenómeno antiguo que ha cobrado nuevo protagonismo para los profesionales de la enseñanza de la lengua, a medida que el mundo en el que vivimos se torna cada vez más globalizado. A pesar de que en Buenos Aires la importancia de un enfoque multicultural y multilingüe para la enseñanza del inglés encuentra reconocimiento en documentos oficiales como el *Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras*, todavía se desconoce si esto se traduce en prácticas docentes concretas o en políticas educativas; especialmente cuando se trata de lenguas originarias como el Quechua o el Aymara. En un intento de comenzar a responder este interrogante, decidimos trabajar con escuelas de los distritos escolares 13 y 20, en donde hay un alto porcentaje de población boliviana. Cincuenta profesores de inglés de escuelas primarias fueron entrevistados entre noviembre y diciembre de 2014. Este artículo presenta parte de los resultados de estas entrevistas, poniendo el énfasis en tres conclusiones. En primer lugar, la mayoría de los docentes no consideran el multilingüismo como un componente importante de sus clases, lo que se refleja en su falta de conocimiento sobre el repertorio lingüístico de sus estudiantes. En segundo lugar, las prácticas docentes solo se ven incidentalmente afectadas por los entornos multiculturales. Finalmente, la oferta

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de capacitación sobre estas cuestiones por parte del Ministerio de Educación es escasa y no alcanza a la población docente, que la desconoce y, por lo tanto, no participa de ella.

Palabras claves: multiculturalismo, multilingüismo, inglés como tercera lengua, lenguas originarias, percepciones de los docentes.

1. Introduction

Multilingualism, in all of its forms, is an old phenomenon. As it usually happens, however, it has taken its own particular characteristics in the modern world. Due to the increasing process of globalization we are immersed in and the constant migratory movement, multiculturalism is now more widely spread than ever. Therefore, the ability to speak several languages is, undoubtedly, becoming a more valuable asset with each passing day.

The language teaching field has eventually echoed this need for multilingual speakers. Modern approaches to language teaching shift the focus from acquiring the target language to acquiring linguistic competences that would allow for further language acquisition. It remains to be ascertained whether this paradigmatic shift is just a theory or whether it has reached the classroom.

This article presents part of larger research which attempts to start providing answers to this question. The first part of this paper will establish our theoretical framework. We will first analyze the way in which the linguistic system of a multilingual individual works. This will allow us to understand why multilingual learners do not acquire further languages in the same way monolingual speakers do. We will then describe a multilingual approach to the teaching of English on three different levels: an international, national and local level. We will also analyze legislation in Argentina and the City of Buenos Aires that provides for how teachers should deal with multicultural environments.

The rest of our article will be devoted to the specific subject we have chosen: teachers of English working with students who are part of the Bolivian community and may be users of Quechua or Aymara learning English as a third language. We will start by

describing the Bolivian community in Buenos Aires which is the second largest foreign group in the city. We will then explain our sampling process and the methodology used.

Finally, we will discuss the results of our research. This article will focus on the following three questions. Firstly, teachers' knowledge on their students' linguistic backgrounds; especially as regards Quechua and Aymara. Secondly, whether these teachers consider multiculturalism a relevant factor in their classes and, if so, where they see its impact. Finally, we will assess teachers' knowledge about training opportunities on multiculturalism and indigenous languages and whether they have received any training or not.

1. The multilingual subject's linguistic systems

Linguists have long been using terms such as “multilingual”, “plurilingual” or “bilingual” in different contexts to designate different concepts. We will abide by Franceschini's definition of multilingualism, which considers it a blanket term denoting “various sorts of social and individual forms of language acquisition throughout an individual's lifetime (learning within the family, at school, etc.), as well as the practical use of language varieties in everyday life, at work, in institutions, etc.” (2009, p. 29). Therefore, we will consider bilingualism, understood as the use of two languages, a variety of multilingualism.

Much of the early literature on bilingualism in the 1950s and 1960s was concerned with measuring it objectively in quantitative terms, thus, focusing on use and competence (Romaine, 1995, p. 14). The outcome was a classification of different types of bilingualism according to different configurations of dominance of one language over the other. For example, terms such as “ambibilingual”, “equilingual”, “balanced bilingual” (Edwards, 1994, p. 9) or “ideal bilingual” (Romaine 1995, p. 5) were coined to designate those people with an equal command of both their languages. This reflects the two-code theory, “that quantitative view of bilingualism which assumes that the bilingual individual has two complete linguistic systems, two codes, each of which resembles the single system of the monolingual speaker” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984, p. 20).

However, thinking of a bilingual person's linguistic repertoire as a mere addition of two separate linguistic systems does not allow us to account for the complex ways in which these systems interact in real life situations —most often than not, quantitatively equal competence in every linguistic system is the exception and not the norm. This will be the case in diglossic societies, where two language varieties co-exist but they are specialized according to function. “Since one would be able to use only one of the languages in certain domains, the ability to use the other language in those domains would decline, or perhaps never be ‘fully acquired’” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984, p. 30). Something similar happens in the case of immigrants who may speak one language at home and another at school or work. One or two generations afterwards, the children or grandchildren of these immigrants, who will be competent enough to speak the majority language in all contexts and will do so in most cases, may still feel a strong affective attachment to their minority language which makes them prefer this language in certain situations (Romaine, 1995, p. 22).

Herdina and Jessner developed an alternative framework to understand multilingual proficiency in 2002: *The Dynamic Model of Multilingualism* (henceforth, DMM). Jessner expresses it in the following formula:

$$LS1 + LS2 + LS3 + LSN + CLIN + M = MP$$

where:

LS: language systems

CLIN: cross-linguistic interaction

M: M(ultilingualism) factor

MP: Multilingual proficiency.

In DMM the concept of multilingual proficiency is defined as a cumulative measure of psycholinguistic systems in contact (LS1, LS2, LS3, etc.), their interaction as expressed in CLIN [phenomena such as code-switching or borrowing] and the influence that the development of a multilingual system shows on the learner and the learning process [the M-factor]. (Jessner, 2006, p. 33)

While, traditionally, language acquisition was thought of as linear and continuous language growth, the DMM stresses its dynamic quality: “the development of one system influences the development of the others in ways which are not additive. A dynamic multilingual system will thus have properties that its parts do not contain” (Jessner, 2006, p. 33). This is what is referred to as the “M-factor”. One of the main components of the M-factor is heightened metalinguistic awareness.

Metalinguistic awareness can be defined as “the ability to focus attention on language as an object in itself or to think abstractly about language and, consequently, to play with or manipulate language” (Jessner, 2006, p. 42). Although we all have some degree of metalinguistic awareness, it also varies from individual to individual and it is affected in different ways by different variables such as age, education, literacy and, most importantly for us, exposure to other languages.

A higher expression of this ability results beneficial when acquiring further languages, as research has shown⁴. Let us take, for example, the ability to neologize. Once subjects become aware of how certain affixes are attached to words to create new meaning, they can recreate this process, thus arriving at new words by trial and error during the communicative process, instead of having to wait for the knowledge to be imparted by the teacher. In other words, metalinguistic awareness makes a learner more autonomous.

2. A multicultural and multilingual approach to language teaching

On an international level, the very influential *Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment* (henceforth, CEFR), issued by the Council of Europe in 2001, suggests an approach to language learning linked to the promotion of what they call “plurilingualism” (p. 4)⁵.

⁴ See e.g. Ianco-Worrall (1972), Diaz (1985) and Cenoz (2005).

⁵ We face terminological difficulties once more when resorting to the CEFR. In this case, a distinction is drawn between “multilingualism” and “plurilingualism”, associating the first to the mere “knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4) while the second would imply that an individual “does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (p. 4).

This plurilingual approach to language teaching results in the focus shifting from the target language(s) to the interaction among these language systems and the way in which this affects an individual's linguistic repertory and/or his/her future language learning:

The aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve 'mastery' of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the 'ideal native speaker' as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5)

In parallel to what has happened in Europe, Latin-American countries have also started to reconsider their position on cultural diversity. During the nineteenth century and well into the second half of the twentieth, schools attempted to turn all their students into "Argentine citizens", disregarding their diverse backgrounds, fulfilling what Thisted calls the "homogenizing" function of the school system (2011). An Argentine citizen had to bear an Argentine identity which, as it is usually the case with national identities, was built on the "we/they" dichotomy, otherwise expressed as "civilization/barbarity" (DINIESE, 2007). Indigenous people lay, of course, on the other side of the dichotomy: they were considered inferior and inclusion was always conditioned to the acceptance of this fact in the form of abandoning their culture or fulfilling a "productive role" in society, either as labor or in the army.

The constitutional reform of 1994 constitutes a pivotal moment in the history of indigenous rights. The new constitution empowered Congress to recognize the ethnic and cultural pre-existence of the indigenous peoples in Argentina and to guarantee respect for the identity and the right to bilingual and intercultural education⁶.

Following this change of the Constitution, legislation was passed to provide a legal framework for the rights promulgated in 1994. On a national level, Resolution 107/99 by the Federal Council of Culture and Education (1999), for example, defined bilingual and intercultural education as that which contemplates the diversity of cultures and languages of the populations to which it responds, while, at the same time, it considers

⁶ Argentine Constitution (1994), section 75 §17.

the relationship of these cultures and languages with the national and international societies in which they are inserted.

It becomes clear from this definition that bilingual and intercultural education (henceforth EIB, for its acronym in Spanish) should not only guarantee the learners' right to develop their own cultural identity by receiving formal education in their indigenous language, but also offer the means to communicate with other cultures on a national level (through the teaching of Spanish) and on an international level. This is where the teaching of English, although not mentioned in the resolution itself, becomes fundamental.

On a local level, the 1996 Constitution of the City of Buenos Aires, in its section 17, acknowledges and guarantees the right to be different; stating that discrimination based on ethnicity will not be accepted. However, we should bear in mind that discrimination may take different forms. Not preparing teachers to deal with multicultural classrooms efficiently is one way of disregarding the fact that these classrooms exist. Especially when the Constitution of the City itself states in its 24th article that the City takes responsibility over teacher training to guarantee their competence.

There were not many programs related to indigenous languages being carried out in the City of Buenos Aires at the moment this research was being conducted. The City Government had been participating of regional and national meetings on the EIB modality since 2008, but there were no such schools in the city at the time and none has been founded since. The teacher training center of the City of Buenos Aires, the *Centro de Pedagogías de Anticipación* (CePA, for its acronym in Spanish)⁷, which reports to the Ministry of Education of the City, had delivered some courses related to indigenous issues, such as: “Spanish as Second Language in the school. A suggestion to approach Bilingual Intercultural Education”⁸ in 2008, addressed to ZAP⁹ teachers or coordinators, or “Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in the Foreign Language Class”¹⁰ in 2014, addressed specifically to foreign language teachers. These courses were completely free of cost.

⁷ Currently called *Escuela de Maestros*.

⁸ *El Español como Lengua Segunda en la escuela. Una propuesta para abordar la Educación Intercultural Bilingüe*.

⁹ Areas of Priority Action: *Zona de Acción Prioritaria* (ZAP, for its acronym in Spanish).

¹⁰ *Diversidad Étnica y Cultural en el Aula de Lengua Extranjera*.

Since 2010, the *Dirección Operativa de Lenguas Extranjeras* (D.O.L.E, for its acronym in Spanish), has held the annual meeting “Buenos Aires and its languages” (*Buenos Aires y sus idiomas*). Talks on EIB projects or indigenous languages have been delivered during some of these meetings. However, these meetings, although free, take place during working hours and teachers who want to attend are not exempted from their duties in order to do so.

Finally, there is one last project we would like to mention: SEEDS, Sowing Experience and Evoking Diversity in Schools. The D.O.L.E., together with the U.S. Embassy, funded this program whose first edition took place during the last semester of 2012, and the second—and last—edition during the first semester of 2013. Each edition consisted of four workshops dictated in Spanish but clearly addressed to foreign language teachers on EIB and material design. This course was also free but it was dictated after school hours.

Another important resolution was passed in 2001, when the Curricular Design for Foreign Languages (*Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras*) was created through Resolution 260-SED-01. This document provides the general guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages in the City of Buenos Aires, in multicultural environments or otherwise.

The Curricular Design for Foreign Languages states six general aims. We are particularly interested in aims number one, three and six.

1. To generate an attitude of confidence in the students regarding their possibilities of learning a foreign language while being respectful of the different rhythms and learning styles, and acknowledging mistakes as constitutive of learning (Curricular Design for Foreign Languages, p. 26).

We believe this aim to be particularly important for our investigation. Being respectful of a student particular learning style implies being aware of their linguistic background, since as we have seen before, multilingual learners inevitably resort to their previous knowledge when acquiring additional languages. At the same time, in order to generate confidence in the student, teachers must be aware that this previous knowledge can and

should be used in the students' advantage and thus overcome their own prejudices and stereotypes.

3. To generate an attitude of reflection about language functioning in the particular features of each language which may facilitate the learning of other languages (Curricular Design for Foreign Languages, p. 27).

This is the objective that may be most easily linked to a multilingual approach. Schools in the city of Buenos Aires, according to what has been stated above, should not only concern themselves with the teaching of one particular foreign language, English in most cases, but with the attitude of reflection this learning involves, so that this could eventually lead to the acquisition of additional languages.

It is also interesting to notice that the Curricular Design for Foreign Languages makes a distinction between “use of language” and “reflection on language” and stipulates that teachers of foreign languages should encourage both. Students and teachers are asked to reflect on three instances: metalinguistic reflection, cognitive reflection and intercultural reflection. The instance of metalinguistic reflection is described as including the aspects related to the functioning of language in the particular features of each language: linguistic, pragmatic and discursive aspects. It also suggests contrasting other languages against the mother tongue. In the case of multilingual students, one may argue that this contrast should be carried out between the target language and the wealth of their linguistic repertoires, instead of simply assuming that all students' mother tongue is an idealized version of River Plate Spanish.

6. To contribute to the perception of a world in which several languages and heterogeneous cultures co-exist involved in different power relations (Curricular Design for Foreign Languages, p. 27).

Almost at the very beginning of the document, taking for granted the instrumental value of foreign languages, the Curricular Design develops, instead, their formative sense. By learning another language, the arbitrary quality of language in general becomes evident. The teaching of foreign languages at schools becomes, therefore, a space that promotes a fundamental ethical attitude for the processes of social and cultural democratization of a linguistic community: the awareness of the existence of the other. Thus conceived, the

foreign language class constitutes a privileged space to learn to co-exist with differences and become aware of the existence of the other. In this sense, it constitutes an invaluable instrument to acknowledge and build one's own sociocultural universe (Curricular Design for Foreign Languages, p. 26).

We could argue that the foreign language class is not only a privileged space to become aware of “the other”, embodied in foreign cultures, but also of our own cultural diversity. The teacher of English, the lingua franca per excellence, perhaps the language with the highest social status nowadays, may find himself or herself in a unique position to help students reflect on the inherent value of all languages and cultures, those coming from distant countries and those found in our own territory.

3. Multiculturalism in Buenos Aires: the Bolivian community

Buenos Aires has always been a multicultural city. According to the latest National Census, conducted in 2010¹¹, the city of Buenos Aires has a population of 2,890,151, out of which 381,778 were not born in Argentina. This means that foreigners constitute 13.21 % of the inhabitants of the city. Most of this foreign population come either from Paraguay (80,325 people, 21.04 %) or from Bolivia (76,609 people, 20.07 %). If we focus on individuals aged between 0 and 14 years old we find that Bolivians are the majority this time with 8,265 people (30.96 % of the foreigners within this age group) while Paraguayans come second with 6,733 (25.22 %). We should not forget that these figures do not include all those children of Bolivian parents who were born in Argentina but are, nevertheless, raised in Bolivian families. Immigrants coming to Buenos Aires, as it happens elsewhere, have always tried to stay together. Consequently, some cultural features are maintained within immigrant communities, despite the fact that language attrition can always be observed within the second generation. This makes the Bolivian community in Buenos Aires both much larger than what the census reflects and also impossible to measure accurately.

Neither do we have accurate information on the languages spoken by this community. However, we can hypothesize that many of them are in fact bilingual. The 2001

¹¹ Information retrieved from www.censo2010.indec.gov.ar, last accessed in January, 2015.

Bolivian national census, conducted by the National Statistics Institute of Bolivia¹², states that the total population of the country is of 8,274,325 people¹³. The languages most widely used are Spanish (6,097,122 speakers), Quechua (2,124,040 speakers) and Aymara¹⁴ (1,462,286 speakers).

The exact number of people who speak or understand Quechua or Aymara in Argentina, whether they were born in the territory or not¹⁵, is unknown. The Complementary Survey of Indigenous Peoples (ECPI, for its acronym in Spanish) conducted in 2004-2005 selected its sample population taking into consideration the National Census of 2001. In this census, there were no questions as regards languages. There was, however, the following question: “Is there a person in this house who considers himself or herself a member or descendant of an indigenous people?” The complementary survey conducted in 2004-2005, which did include questions as regards languages, sampled its population among those who replied affirmatively. As a result, individuals who do not consider themselves part of any indigenous people and yet, speak an indigenous language, were thus excluded from the ECPI.

Even if results by the ECPI are not particularly relevant, we can still reflect on the data provided the Argentinian and Bolivian national censuses and safely hypothesize that a large percentage of the Bolivian or second-generation Bolivian population currently living in Buenos Aires must have some knowledge of Quechua or Aymara, even when we cannot know the exact number.

Given that geographical distribution of this population is not even throughout the city’s territory, some areas will show a higher concentration of Quechua or Aymara users, making the question even more relevant for those teachers working in such areas. As we can see in Figure 1, while Bolivians represent only 2.65 % of all the people living in

¹² Information retrieved from www.ine.gob.bo, last accessed in January, 2015.

¹³ The latest national census, conducted in 2012, shows an increase of the population of over 1.8 million. However, the latest information on languages corresponds to the 2001 census.

¹⁴ Following Dreidemie, we will use the single term “Quechua” to refer to what is in fact a linguistic family that includes several varieties sometimes mutually unintelligible (2011, p. 120). The term “Aymara”, on the other hand, will be used to refer to Central Aymara, spoken in Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina (*Ethnologue*, Retrieved from www.ethnologue.com/language/aym, last consulted on January 2nd, 2015).

¹⁵ Current national borders do not necessarily reflect the linguistic distribution of Latin America indigenous languages. Quechua and Aymara are languages spoken both in Bolivia and Argentina by the descendants of the original inhabitants of the continent.

Buenos Aires, over half of that population, 66 %, live in *comunas* 7, 8 or 9, where they represent 8.78 % of the total inhabitants.

Figure 1: Native and foreign population of the City of Buenos Aires by *comunas*.

Comunas	Total Population	Bolivian population	Percentage of Bolivian population over total population of each comuna
COMUNA 1	205.886	5.629	2,73%
COMUNA 2	157.932	520	0,33%
COMUNA 3	187.537	2.153	1,15%
COMUNA 4	218.245	5.881	2,69%
COMUNA 5	179.005	1.370	0,77%
COMUNA 6	176.076	823	0,47%
COMUNA 7	220.591	19.566	8,87%
COMUNA 8	187.237	20.365	10,88%
COMUNA 9	161.797	10.677	6,60%
COMUNA 10	166.022	4.595	2,77%
COMUNA 11	189.832	2.166	1,14%
COMUNA 12	200.116	418	0,21%
COMUNA 13	231.331	545	0,24%
COMUNA 14	225.970	728	0,32%
COMUNA 15	182.574	1.173	0,64%
TOTAL	2.890.151	76.609	2,65%

Source: INDEC

Figure 2 allows us to appreciate the geographical disposition of these three *comunas* and their concentration within the South/South-West portion of the city, thus, confirming what we claimed earlier as to the tendency within immigrant population to stay together, as far as possible. The focus of our study will be on schools situated in these areas.

Figure 2: The City of Buenos Aires and its Comunas.



Source: www.buenosaires.gob.ar/noticias/que-son-las-comunas-0

4. Our research: objectives and methodology

The advantages of implementing a multilingual approach to language teaching, as discussed above, have led us to question ourselves about teaching practices and education policies regarding the teaching of English as a third or fourth language in multicultural environments. We have chosen to develop this question in connection to the Bolivian community, since most foreign children living in the City of Buenos Aires belong to this community. The following are some of the questions our study intends to start answering¹⁶:

¹⁶ This article presents only part of what was a larger research.

1. Are teachers working in these areas aware of their students' linguistic background, especially in the case of Quechua and Aymara? If so, how did they become aware?
2. Do these teachers foster cultural diversity as stated on the Curricular Design for Foreign Languages?
3. Have these teachers had access to any of the training workshops or courses offered by the City of Buenos Aires on multiculturalism or indigenous languages and Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB, for its acronym in Spanish)?

In order to answer these questions, we decided to interview the very same teachers whose opinions and knowledge we wanted to assess¹⁷. This means, of course, that we will be confronted with only one side of the situation. We cannot contrast what teachers know about their students with the actual students or what they say they do in class taking into account a multicultural approach with what they actually do. This falls beyond the scope of our research. We only intend to provide a first exploratory approach.

The geographical scope of our research has been dictated by different variables. In the first place, by the results of the National Census as previously discussed. Secondly, given their socio-economic status, most of these children attend state schools¹⁸. Consequently, we have decided to restrict our scope to teachers of English working in the state school system within the South-Western area of the City of Buenos Aires.

While for government purposes the city is divided into *comunas*, for educational purposes it is divided into school districts. In order to interview the teachers in any district, we needed to request permission from the district supervisor. We decided to focus on districts 13 and 20, whose supervisor at the time, Ms Elena Rivas, was willing to collaborate with our research.

Finally, we decided to restrict our scope to teachers of English working in the first cycle of primary education: first, second and third grade. We made this decision based on the fact that we believe that by interviewing first cycle teachers the feedback of our research

¹⁷ The complete questionnaire used can be found in the Appendix. This article focuses on the results for questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10.

¹⁸ By "state schools" we refer to public schools which are also completely free and funded entirely by the state.

may eventually have an impact on the rest of the school years of these students, while if we focused on second cycle teachers the chances of this happening would be limited to a fewer number of years.

In short, our population encompasses teachers of English working in, at least, one of the first cycle grades (first, second or third) of state primary schools in school districts 13 and 20, located within *comunas* 8 and 9 of the City of Buenos Aires.

There are 44 schools in districts 13 and 20. Only one of them, the plurilingual school of district 20, does not teach English in first cycle, which gives us a total of 43 schools. Twenty-one of these schools are all-day schools, which means the same group of students attend classes in the morning and in the afternoon, meeting the same teachers. The other twenty-two schools are half-day schools, which means they work as two separate schools, one in the morning with one group of students and one staff, and one in the afternoon with a different group of students and a different staff, sharing only the principal, vice-principal and secretaries.

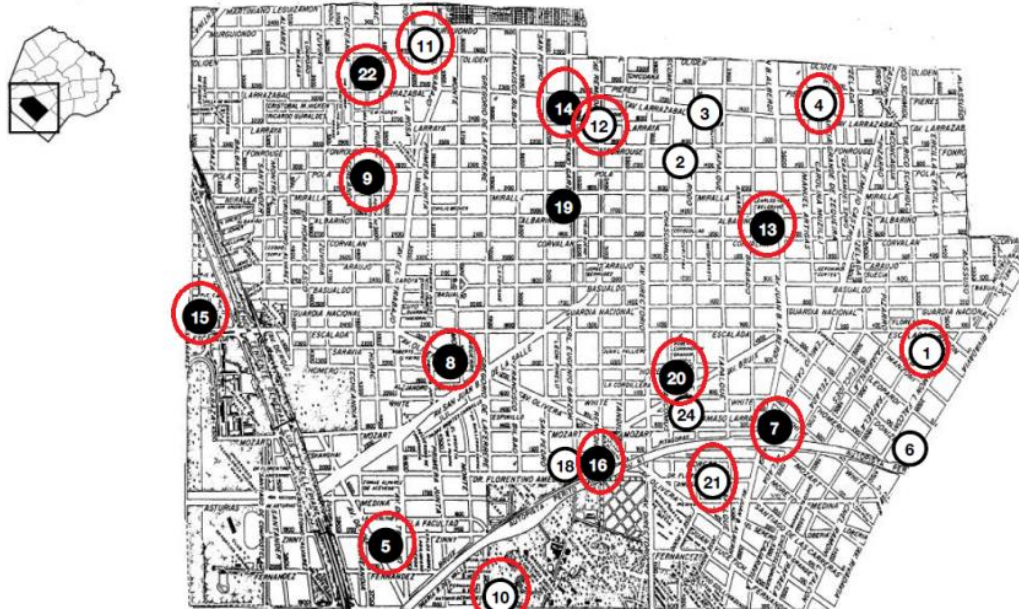
We cannot know the exact number of teachers of English working in first cycle in districts 13 and 20, but given that the most common situation is for schools to have two teachers, then we should expect the total number to be approximately 86¹⁹. After careful consideration of both our limitations and the size of the population, we decided to conduct 50 interviews, an amount that was both plausible and representative.

Supervisor Elena Rivas issued a message through official channels to all schools in the districts notifying them of the research, explaining in general terms its purpose and the fact that everyone interviewed was to remain anonymous.

In the end, during the months of November and December of 2014, we managed to conduct 50 interviews in the 29 schools which received us, out of the 43 schools which teach English in first cycle, encompassing as many schools as it was possible given our limitations. These schools are geographically distributed across the districts, making the data more representative of the total population, as it can be seen on Figures 3 and 4.

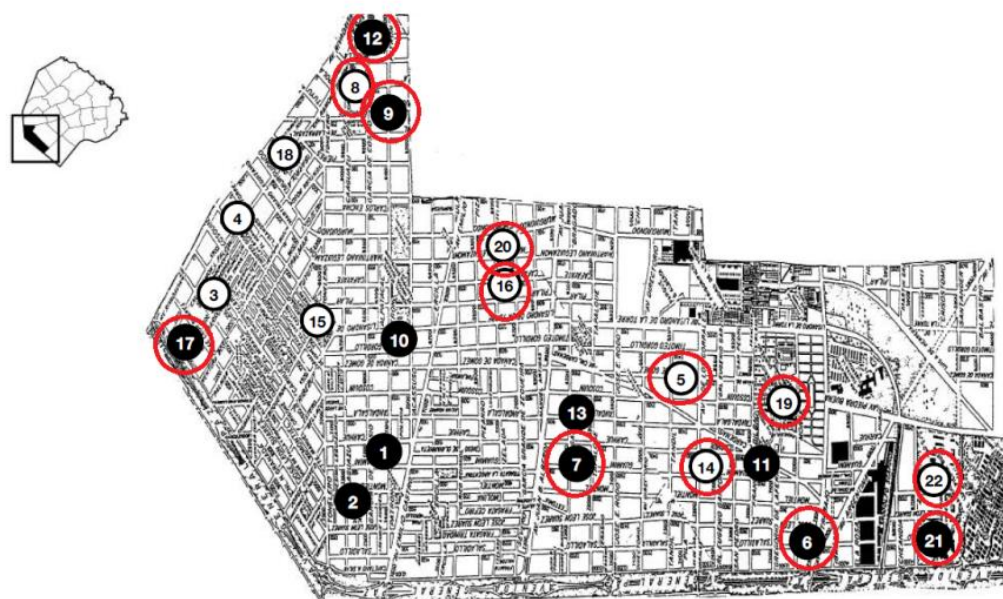
¹⁹ The Supervisor, who showed utmost collaboration with us, could not eventually gather enough information to provide us with the exact number. However, she did confirm our estimate.

Figure 3: School District Number 13. Schools circled represent schools where at least one interview was conducted.



Source: www.ute.org.ar/index.php/es/publicaciones/nomencladores

Figure 4: School District Number 20. Schools circled represent schools where at least one interview was conducted.



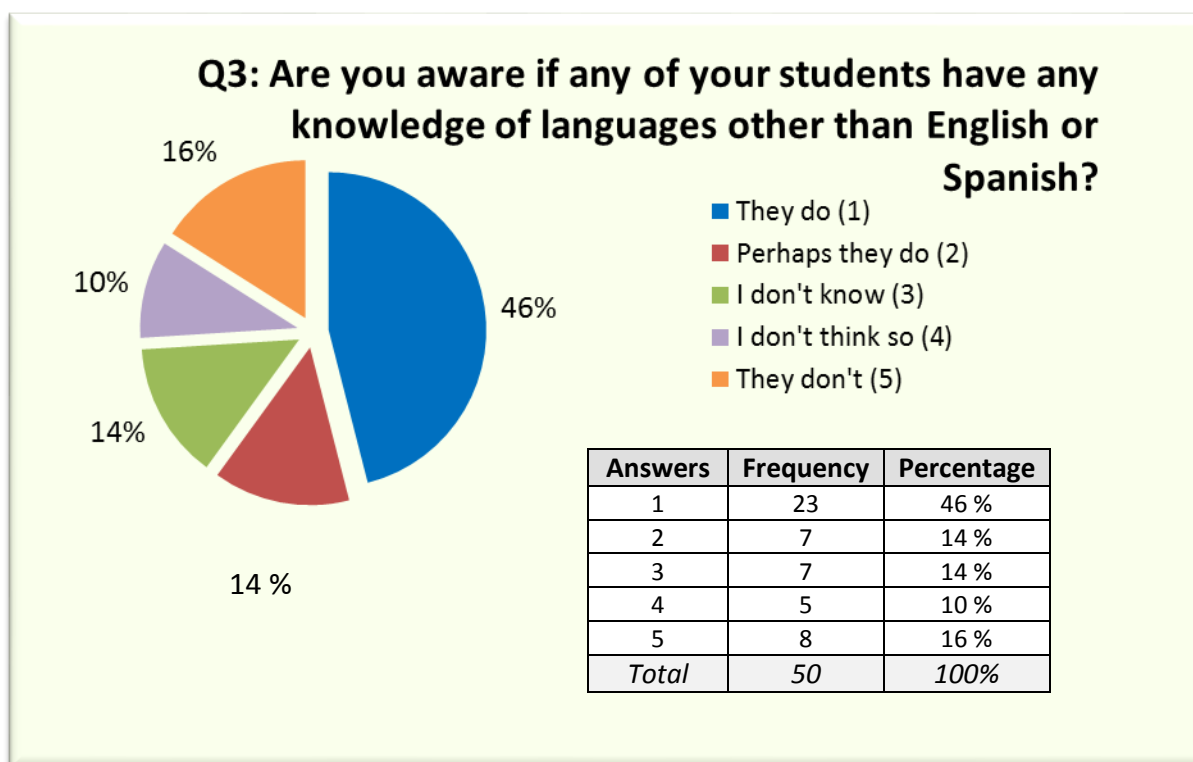
Source: www.ute.org.ar/index.php/es/publicaciones/nomencladores

5. Results and analysis

5.a. Teachers' knowledge of their students' linguistic background; especially as regards Quechua or Aymara

Figure 5 graphs interviewees' answers to question 3: "Are you aware if any of your students have any knowledge of languages other than English or Spanish?", while Figure 6 divides these answers into two categories: subjects who claimed to know about their students' linguistic background and subjects who showed some level of uncertainty.

Figure 5: Interviewees' answers to question 3

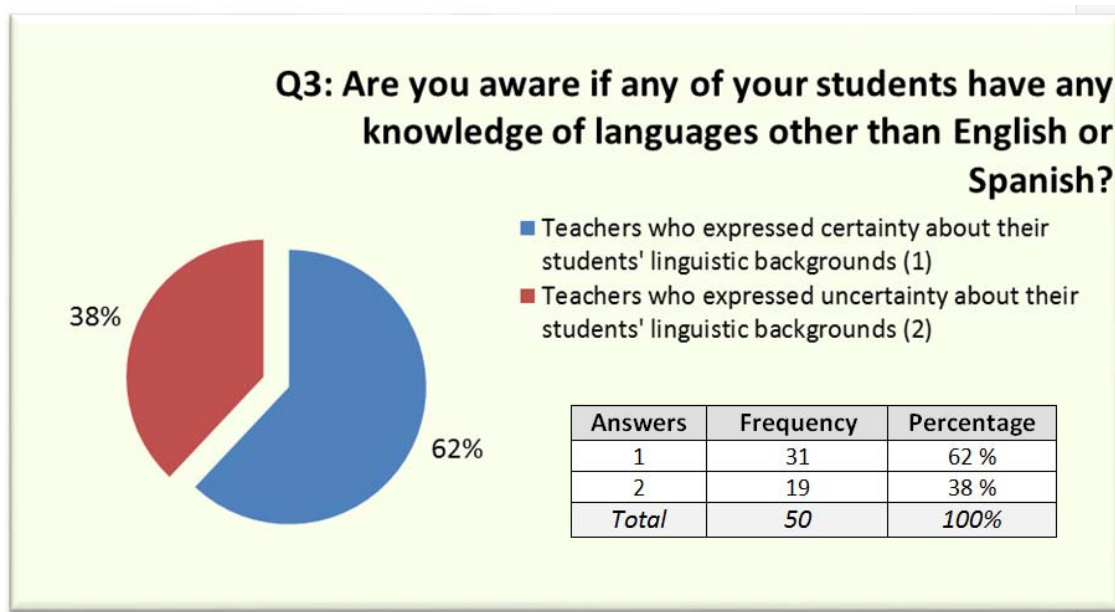


As we can see in Figure 6, the percentage of teachers who cannot claim to be sure about their students' linguistic background²⁰ is quite high per se, reaching a 38 %. As stated

²⁰ We divided answers to question 3 "Are you aware if any of your students have any knowledge of languages other than English or Spanish" as follows: Expression of certainty: "They don't (speak other

before, we have chosen to study teachers' perspective on the questions, which limits our possibilities to discover if the 62 % who believe they know if their students have any knowledge of languages other than English or Spanish are actually right on their assumptions.

Figure 6: Interviewees' awareness of students' linguistic background



It is within our possibilities, however, to further analyze the answers of this 62 % from the rest of the questionnaire. Let us analyze first the case of the 8 subjects who replied their students had no knowledge of languages other than English or Spanish. When asked in question 6: “Are you aware if any of your Bolivian or second generation Bolivian students speak Quechua or Aymara?”, 5 of them changed their answers: one stated that they did speak Quechua or Aymara, while the other 4 claimed not to know. We should conclude that these 5 teachers are not actually certain about their students' linguistic backgrounds.

On the other hand, out of the other 3 teachers who consistently replied negatively to questions 3 and 6, one also claimed that “*They find it difficult to speak Spanish, even*”,

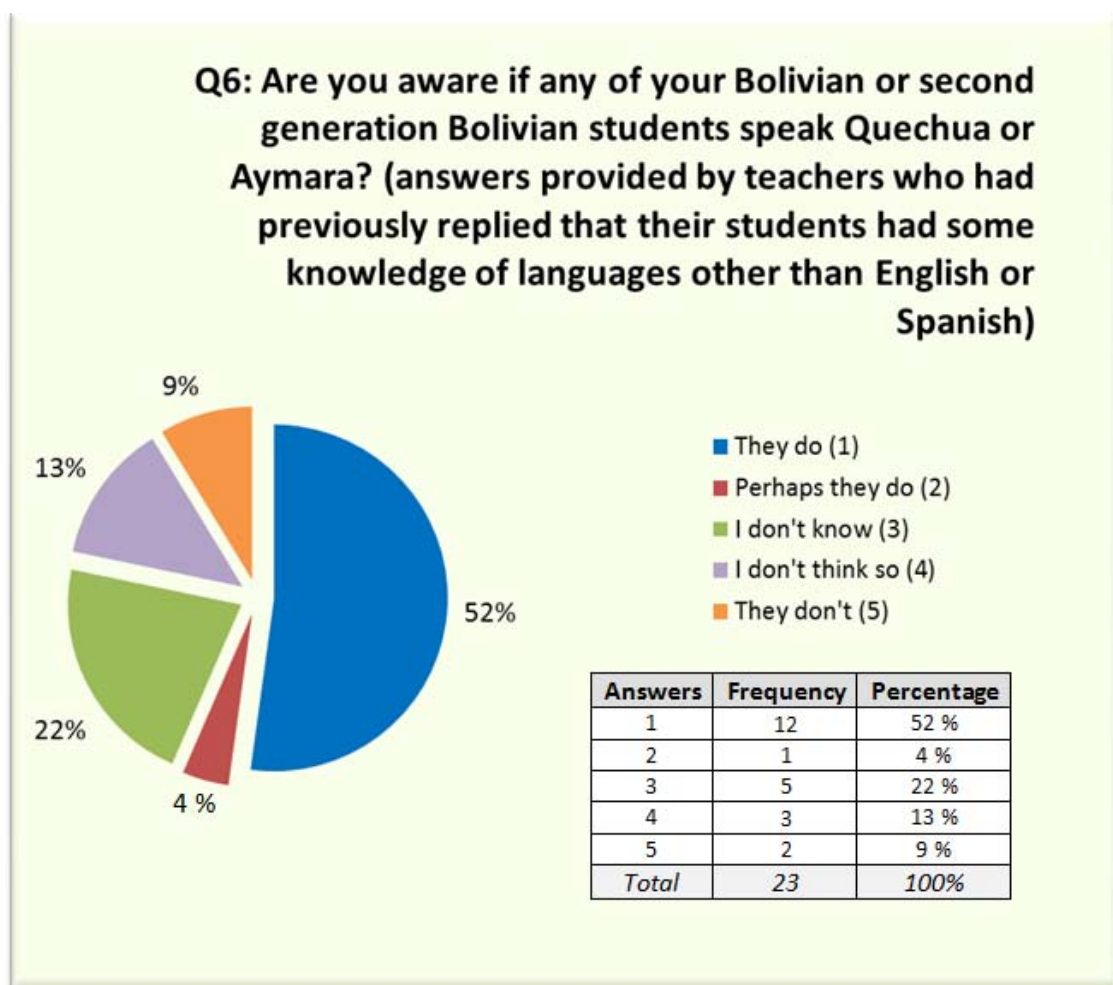
languages)” and “*They do (speak other languages)*”. Expressions of uncertainty: “*Perhaps they do (speak other languages)*”, “*I don't know*” and “*I don't think so* (i.e., “I don't think they speak other languages” as opposed to “I know they don't speak other languages”).

comment that may reveal a level of prejudice against this community, leading us to doubt whether her²¹ knowledge was actually based on facts or not.

This leaves us with only 2 teachers who claim to be sure their students have knowledge of no other languages than English or Spanish and who did not somehow contradict this answer throughout the rest of the questionnaire.

Figure 7 shows answers given to question 6 (“Are you aware if any of your Bolivian or second generation Bolivian students speak Quechua or Aymara?”) by the 23 teachers who had replied in question 3 that their students did have knowledge of languages other than English or Spanish.

Figure 7: Answers given to question 6

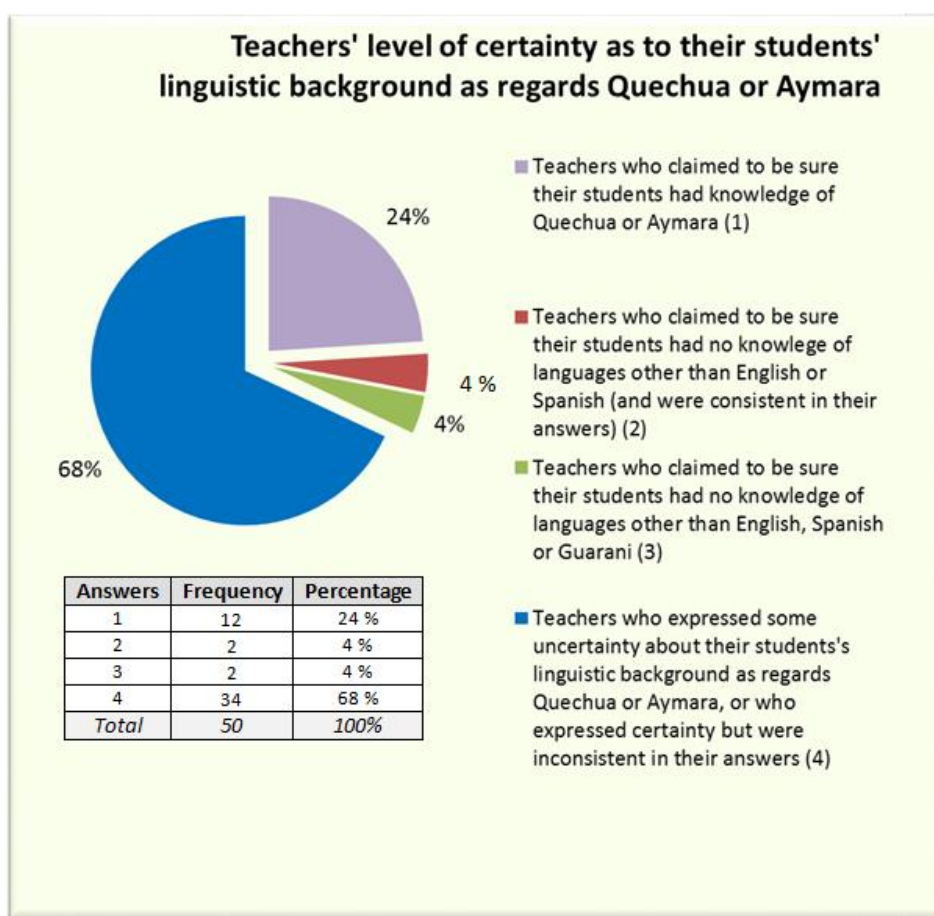


²¹ We have decided to use the feminine pronoun for singular references since most teachers interviewed were female. This should not be taken as an indication that this particular teacher, or any other mentioned below, was in fact female.

As we can see, the level of certainty diminishes when asked specifically about Quechua or Aymara. Out of the 23 subjects who said their students did have knowledge of other languages, we found that 9 teachers were, nevertheless, uncertain as regards their students' knowledge of Quechua or Aymara. These 9 teachers, as well as those 2 teachers who claimed to be sure their students had no knowledge of these languages, were recorded during interviews to have mentioned Guarani as the language their students spoke.

In short, if we contrast questions 3 and 6 we realize that lack of knowledge as regards students' linguistic backgrounds is especially high when it comes to Quechua or Aymara, since 68 % of our sample either expressed uncertainty on the topic or expressed certainty but then were inconsistent in their other answers. We have graphed our conclusions in Figure 8.

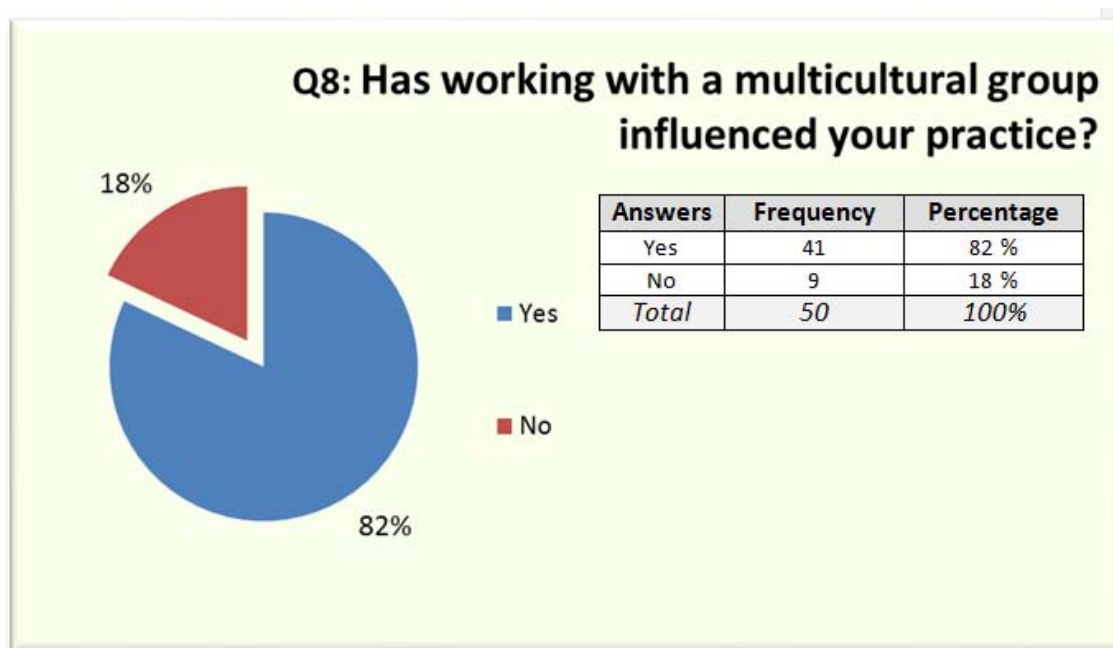
Figure 8: Conclusions



5.b. Teachers' perception on the effect of multiculturalism on their teaching practices

As it was explained before, when analyzing this variable our intention is not to discuss the actual impact of multiculturalism on teaching practices but teachers' perception of this impact. In order to do so, we will analyze first answers given to question 8, represented in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Interviewees' answers to question 8



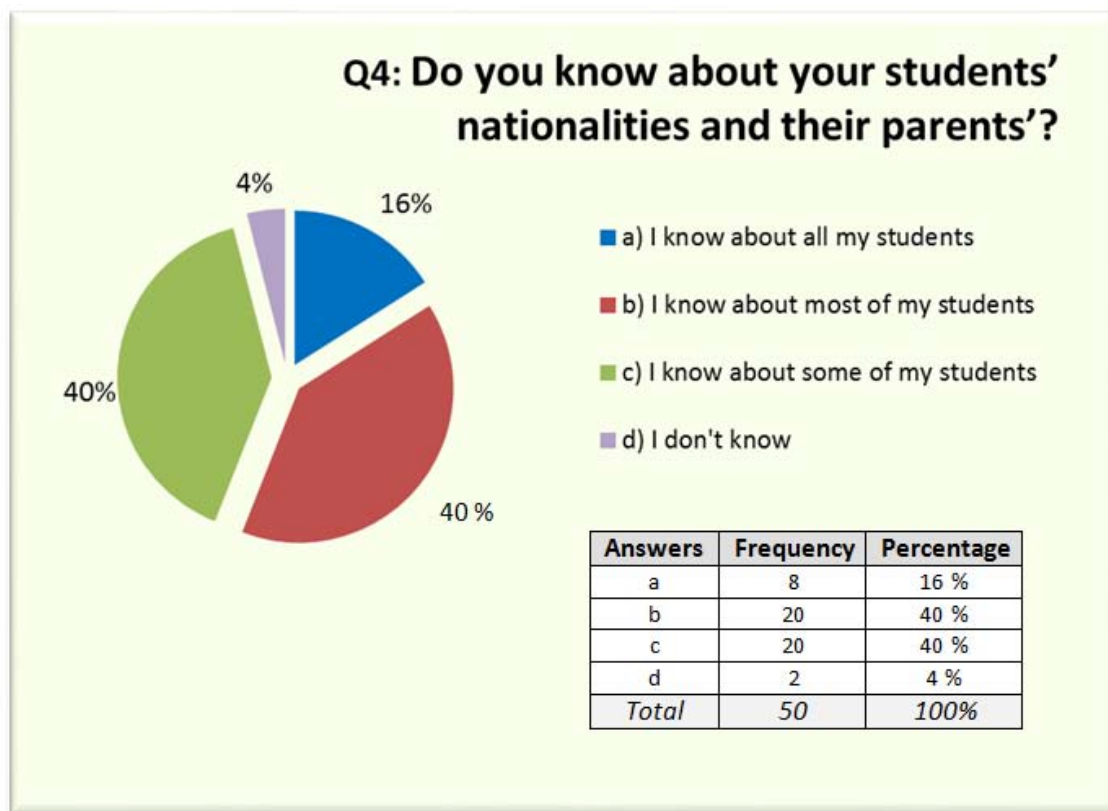
All teachers surveyed worked in multicultural environments where you could find students from different national backgrounds, especially from Bolivia or Paraguay. Some teachers said their students were not Bolivian or Paraguayan per se, since they had been born in Argentina to Bolivian or Paraguayan parents²². Nevertheless, as it has been previously argued, a person's family background informs that person's identity, so all classes encompassed by this study were, in a larger or lesser degree, multicultural. However, 18 % of our sample claimed not to be affected in their teaching practices by the multicultural factor²³.

²² Even in these cases, teachers said "most" of their students were second generation immigrants. They all allowed for at least one fully foreign student.

²³ One teacher replied multiculturalism had not affected her practice, but then chose option g. (Others) and added: "Maybe in group management. Because sometimes they offend each other". We considered that teacher actually did feel multiculturalism had affected her practice.

We could also analyze this topic by considering answers to questions 4 and 5, which inquired into teachers' knowledge of their students' national backgrounds. As we can see in Figure 10, 40 % of the teachers surveyed declared to know only about some of their students, while 4 % did not know about any of them at all. This means that almost half of the sample (44 %) was not thoroughly informed on their students' national backgrounds. This inevitably poses the question of how much these teachers actually felt affected by the multicultural factor when, in fact, they could not accurately describe it.

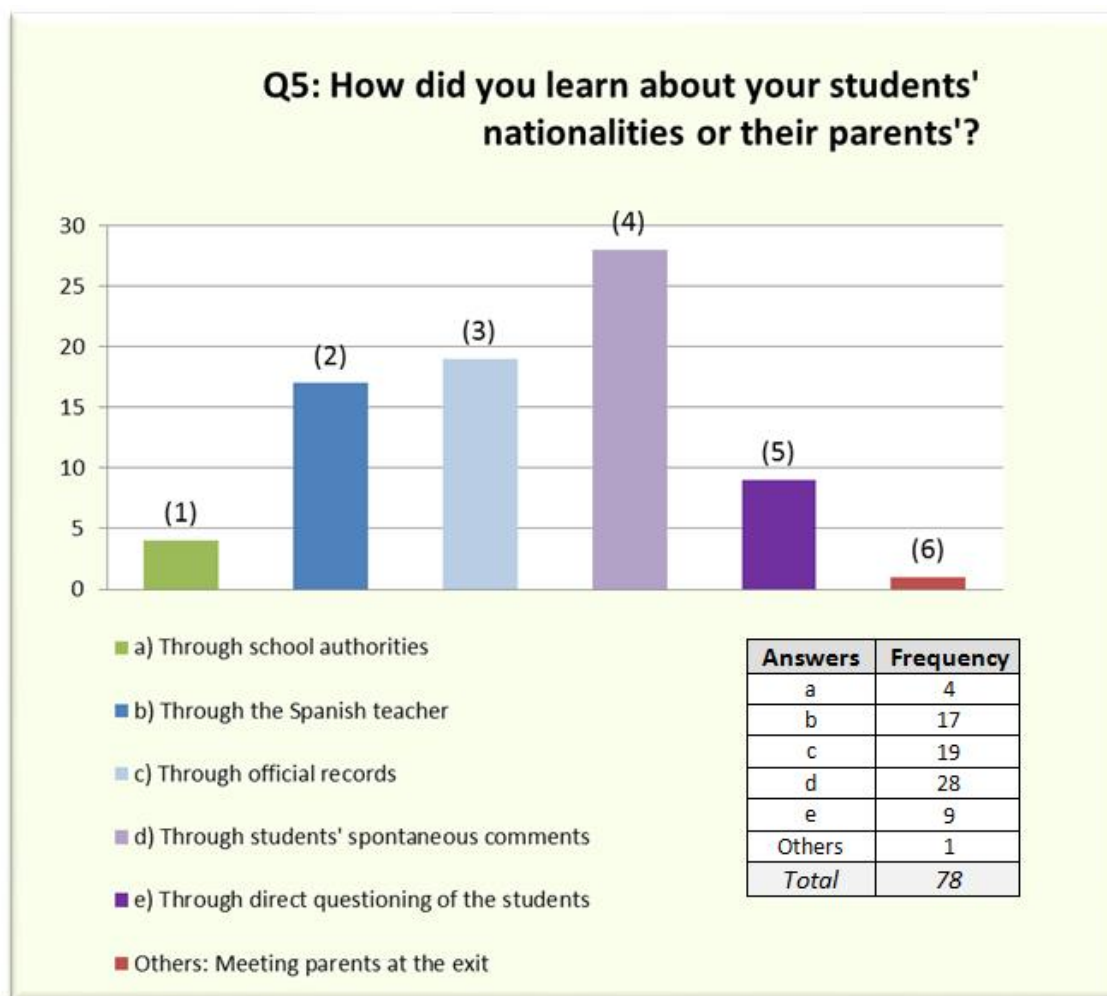
Figure 10: Interviewees' answers to question 4



It remains to know if these teachers' knowledge on the subject is actually accurate. Figure 11 shows how those 48 teachers who claimed to have at least some knowledge as to their students' national background said to have acquired such knowledge²⁴.

²⁴ Subjects could choose more than one source for this question.

Figure 11: Interviewees' answers to question 5

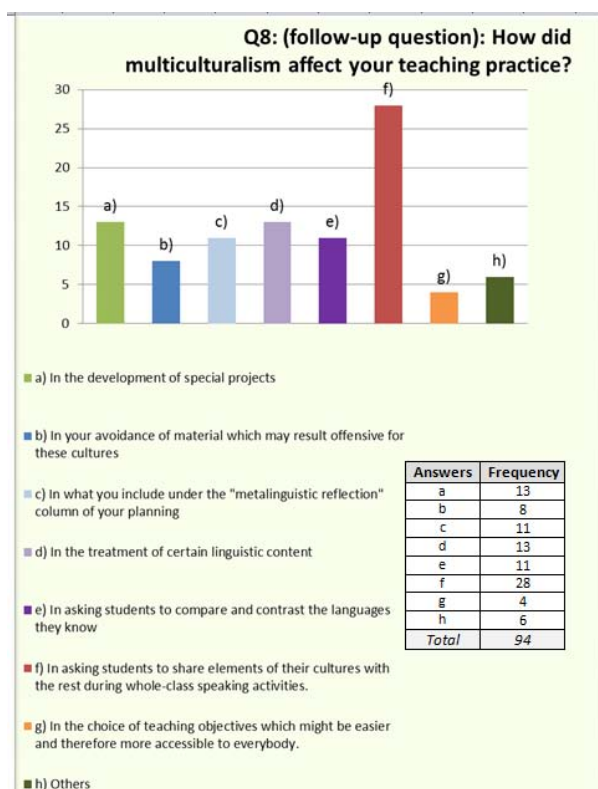


Before analyzing these results, we should bear in mind that teachers had been asked by their supervisor to account for their students' nationalities before this survey took place, which made some of them resort to official records when they had not done so before, as it was sometimes told to us during interviews. Even so, the most common source was students' spontaneous comments. Only nine teachers said to have directly asked their students on this issue. The source least resorted to, except for the one teacher who claimed to personally know their students' parents, was school authorities. Given that we cannot know how much our own study impacted the subjects' answers to this question, we cannot say how many teachers resort to the most reliable source which would be official records. We can say, however, that the number of teachers who actually asked their students is very low (9 teachers), indicating that students' cultural background is not perceived as a relevant factor per se, but something teachers

“overhear” while talking to their colleagues (17 teachers) or when listening to their students chat (28 teachers).

Finally, as a follow-up question to item 8 in our questionnaire, teachers were asked to select one or more ways in which they felt multiculturalism had affected their teaching practices, if they had been affected at all, or to provide their own answers. As we can see in Figure 12, once again, spontaneity plays a main role. By far the most chosen option was f): “In asking students to share elements of their cultures with the rest during whole-class speaking activities” (28 teachers). In order to clarify what was meant by this statement, the following example was provided: “for example, if talking about carnivals, asking them to share what carnivals are like in their countries”. It is during spontaneous interactions when multiculturalism is most often seen to affect teaching practices, with more planned activities (such as the implementation of special projects or the treatment given to certain linguistic contents) in a distant second position, chosen less than half as many times.

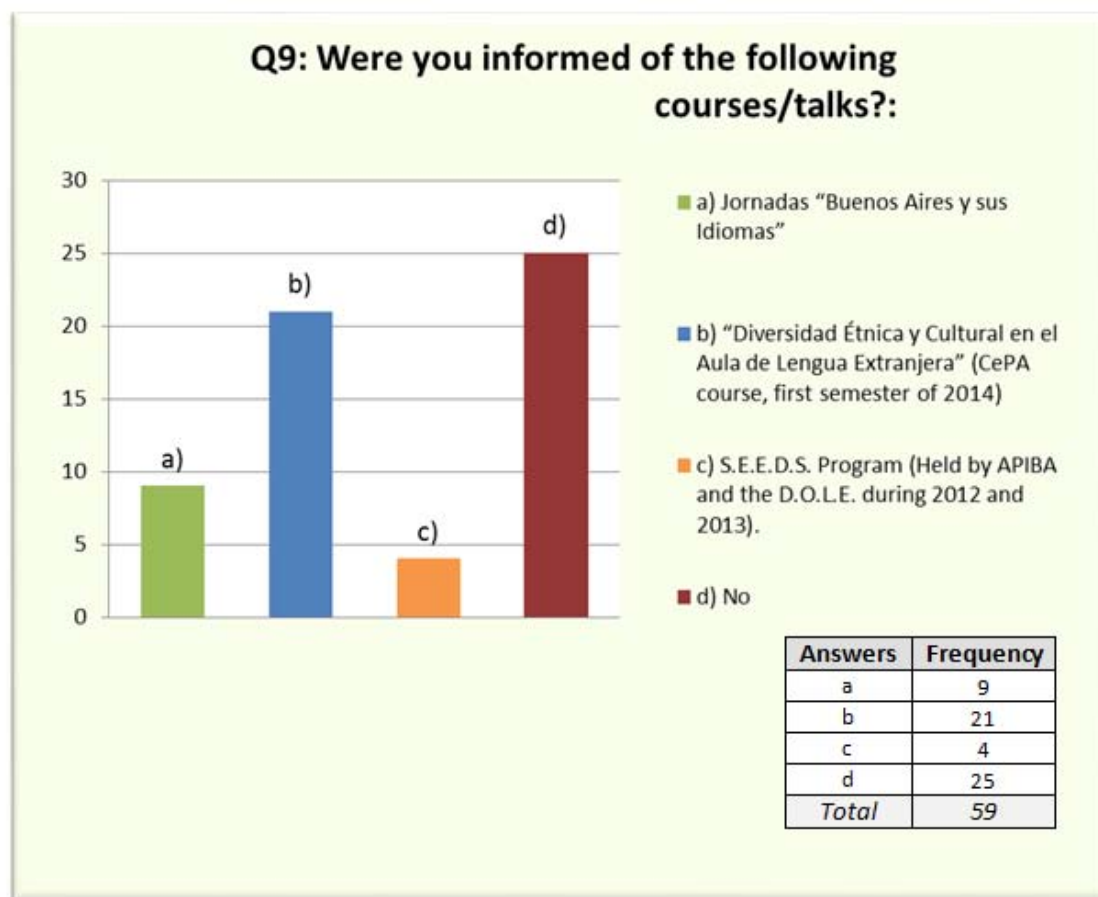
Figure 12: Interviewees’ answers to question 8



5.c. *Teachers’ participation in courses or workshops on multiculturalism, multilingualism or indigenous languages organized by the City of Buenos Aires*

The last questions in our survey aimed at profiling teachers’ training on the subjects of multiculturalism, multilingualism and indigenous languages, as shown in Figure 13. During our research, we discovered only three training opportunities for teachers to deepen their knowledge on these subjects. As shown in Figure 13, half the teachers surveyed had no information at all about any of these courses or workshops. On the other hand, the best known course was the one delivered by CePA, which is a well-known and respected institution among teachers in the City of Buenos Aires.

Figure 13: Interviewees’ answers to question 9



However, when teachers were asked if they had attended any of these courses, no teacher replied they had attended this particular CePA course. The only four teachers who had actually profited from any of these training opportunities had attended the *Jornadas Buenos Aires y sus idiomas*.

We believe valuable information can be drawn from these results. Firstly, training opportunities either are not advertised widely enough or they are not advertised through the proper channels. The *Jornadas Buenos Aires y sus idiomas* are always socialized through the *Política Lingüística GCBA* blog and their regular newsletters. This blog communicates all sorts of very relevant information to teachers, yet, as we can see, teachers do not subscribe to its newsletter. Similarly, teachers do not seem to be aware of training opportunities offered by APIBA.

Secondly, even when teachers become aware of a course, they may not attend. We should not take this as an indicator that teachers are not interested in receiving training on the question of multiculturalism, since, we believe, other factors may have influenced their decision as well. On the one hand, this CEPA course that none of our subjects attended was delivered in the neighborhood of Villa Urquiza, more than an hour away from the districts involved in our research. It is also interesting to notice that this neighborhood is part of *comuna* 12, the *comuna* with the lowest percentage of Bolivian population in the City of Buenos Aires—only a 0.21 % while *comuna* 10 holds a 10.88 %. On the other hand, the duration of the course may be a factor as well: you had to attend seven classes of three hours each delivered in the evening.

The fact that four teachers did attend the “Jornadas” points to the possibility that teachers may not be inclined to attend a course that requires meeting several times but might be willing to participate in a whole-day workshop, even if it does not represent a quantifiable asset for their careers²⁵.

6. Conclusion

We should not be surprised if teachers who have received no training on the importance of a multicultural approach do not consider it a relevant element in their classes. As long as a multicultural and multilingual approach to the teaching of English remains a mere concept it will have little impact on teaching practices. The aims stated in the Curricular

²⁵ Passing a course delivered by CePA may provide teachers with up to 0.24 points. These are used, in turn, to rank teachers in the city according to how many points they have accumulated in their careers. Teachers who rank the highest get to choose where they want to work before the rest, which means teachers who rank in the last positions may not have jobs to choose from when it becomes their turn to choose. Attending the “Jornadas Buenos Aires y sus Idiomas” provided no points at all.

Design for Foreign Languages can only be truly achieved if further education policies guarantee teacher training on the subject. This teacher training should not be optional and it should be implemented taking into consideration the geographical distribution of multicultural population across the city.

Further research on these subjects should inform the content of this training. We should not forget that the present research focuses on teachers' perceptions. For us to have the complete picture, we should also start wondering about students and how they live their own multiculturalism.

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Legislation:

Constitución de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires [Constitution of the City of Buenos Aires] (1996)

Constitución de la Nación Argentina [Constitution of the Argentine Nation] (1994)

Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires [Curricular Design for Foreign Languages] (2001)

Resolución N° 107/99, Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, Consejo Federal de Educación, Secretaría General [Resolution No. 107/99, Ministry of Culture and Education, Federal Council of Education, General Secretariat] (1999)

Appendix: Teachers' Interview Questions

Q1: Are you bilingual?

Which languages do you speak?

Q2: Do you think that knowing a second language:

- a) Makes it easier to learn a third language.
- b) Has no influence on the learning of a third language.
- c) Makes it more difficult to learn a third language.
- d) No opinion.

Why?

Q3: Are you aware if any of your students have any knowledge of languages other than English or Spanish? If so, which languages and how many students per class?

Q4: Do you know about your students' nationalities and their parents'?

- a) I know about all my students.
- b) I know about most of my students.
- c) I know about some of my students.
- d) I do not know.

Q5: How did you learn this information?

- a) Through school authorities.
- b) Through the Spanish teacher.
- c) Through official records.
- d) Through students' spontaneous comments.
- e) Through direct questioning of students.

Q6: Are you aware if any of your Bolivian or second generation Bolivian students speak Quechua or Aymara? If so, how many?

Q7: Do you think knowing any of these languages may influence the students' learning of English?

- a) No.
- b) Yes. / How?
- c) No opinion

Q8: Has working with a multicultural group influenced your practice? **No / Yes** In which ways?

- a) In the development of special projects.
- b) In your avoidance of material which may result offensive for these cultures.
- c) In what you include under the “metalinguistic reflection” column of your planning.
- d) In the treatment of certain linguistic content (e.g.: the teaching of grammar, pronunciation, etc.).
- e) In asking students to compare and contrast the languages they know.
- f) In asking students to share elements of their cultures with the rest during whole-class speaking activities (for example, if talking about carnivals, asking them to share what carnivals are like in their countries)
- g) In the choice of teaching objectives which might be easier and therefore more accessible to everybody.
- h) Others.

Q9: Were you informed of the following courses/talks:

- a) Jornadas “Buenos Aires y sus Idiomas”
- b) “Diversidad Étnica y Cultural en el Aula de Lengua Extranjera” (CePA course, first semester of 2014)
- c) S.E.E.D.S. Program (Held by APIBA and the D.O.L.E. during 2012 and 2013).

Q10: Have you attended any of the above mentioned courses/talks?