

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12426528

RURAL EDUCATION IN COLOMBIA: REALITIES AND CHALLENGES OF TEACHER TRAINING IN COLOMBIA AND LATIN AMERICA

Decired del Carmen Ojeda Pertuz^{1*}, Alicia Inciarte González², Jorge Diaz Bernal³, Juan Carlos Arrieta Ruiz⁴, Lloids Finquero Varela⁵, Galvarino Casanueva-Yáñez⁶

¹Universidad del Atlántico, Barranquilla, Colombia

²Universidad de la Costa, Barranquilla, Colombia

³Universidad de Córdoba, Montería, Colombia

⁴Universidad del Atlántico, Barranquilla, Colombia

⁵Universidad del Atlántico, Barranquilla, Colombia

⁶Faculty of Engineering and Business, Universidad de Las Américas, Providencia Campus, Manuel Montt 948, Santiago, Chile

Received: 12/10/2025

Accepted: 12/01/2026

Corresponding Author: Decired del Carmen Ojeda Pertuz
(dojedapertuz@mail.uniatlantico.edu.co)

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes teacher training in rural settings in Colombia and Latin America, including countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela, from a critical perspective aimed at understanding the tensions between training models and territorial realities, with the aim of strengthening teacher education in this field. The study is framed within the socio-critical paradigm and adopts a documentary design, based on the review and analysis of academic literature, educational policies, and relevant research in rural education. The results show a persistent disconnect between teacher education and the particularities of the rural context, due to the prevalence of standardized urban-oriented approaches. This gap limits teachers' capacity to respond to challenges such as cultural diversity, multigrade education, and social vulnerability. Additionally, structural inequalities affecting teaching practice are identified, including job insecurity, limitations in infrastructure, and limited access to ongoing professional development. Nevertheless, the analysis highlights the emergence of innovative, context-based pedagogical practices developed by rural teachers, who assume an expanded role as cultural mediators and agents of social transformation. In this sense, teacher training requires a rethinking from critical, intercultural, and territorial perspectives that recognize the diversity and complexity of rural settings. Strengthening rural education in Latin America implies transforming teacher training models, articulating public policies, local knowledge, and situated pedagogical practices to advance toward more equitable, inclusive, and relevant educational systems.

KEYWORDS: rural education, teacher training, intercultural education, Latin America, critical pedagogy, multigrade teaching

1 INTRODUCTION

Rural education in Colombia constitutes a challenge marked by historical tensions, structural inequalities, and epistemological disputes, reflecting contradictions inherent in development models across Latin America. Far from being an isolated phenomenon, the precariousness of education in rural contexts is embedded in a network of social exclusion, political centralism, and, often, the subordination of local knowledge to hegemonic logics of knowledge production. In this sense, teacher training that attends to the needs of the rural context emerges as a key element for understanding both the reproduction and potential transformation of these inequalities.

Historically, rural education has been shaped by a paradigm that ignores territorial and cultural diversity. This has not only limited the relevance of educational policies but also contributed to the invisibilization of rurality as a space for cultural preservation and knowledge production. From a critical pedagogy perspective, this situation constitutes a form of epistemic violence, since campesino, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant knowledge is subordinated to standardized curricula that do not respond to the logics of a specific territory.

In the Colombian rural context, this critique becomes especially relevant because gaps in teaching-learning processes and the imposition of decontextualized content limit the capacity to fully train students, and therefore hinder their ability to respond to the real needs of rural communities and foster processes of emancipation.

2 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN RURAL SETTINGS

Teacher training in rural contexts constitutes a major challenge, as it is part of an integral process that, beyond being situated and critical, aims to respond to the social, cultural, and territorial particularities of campesino communities. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, the teacher is not a mere transmitter of content but a political actor capable of interpreting their context and transforming the conditions of inequality that traverse rural education. For this reason, teacher training to develop pedagogical and research competencies in rural settings becomes particularly important.

In line with this, Freire argues that education must start from the student's reality to promote processes of critical consciousness. Applied to rural contexts, this implies that teacher training should

include recognition of local knowledge, community practices, and cultural dynamics of the territory. Teachers must be trained to **dialogue with these knowledges** rather than replace them, which aligns with approaches to intercultural education and popular education.

From the perspective of educational sociology, the school is not only a reproducer of knowledge but also a space where social inequalities can be transformed. Giroux emphasizes that teachers must assume the role of a "transformative intellectual." In rural contexts, this translates to teachers performing multiple roles: educator, community leader, cultural mediator, and agent of social change. Consequently, their training must develop competencies for multigrade classrooms, managing education under adverse conditions, and constructing contextualized pedagogical projects.

3 PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER TRAINING IN LATIN AMERICA

In Latin America, teacher training is shaped by standardization processes promoted by international organizations, which advocate quality models based on quantitative indicators and standardized evaluations. These policies aim not only to improve educational systems, but they can also contribute to the homogenization of teaching and the devaluation of local particularities. When applied to rural education, this results in a lack of relevance that limits the impact of educational policies in achieving quality education, as stated in Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Rural teachers in Latin America, particularly in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, play a role that goes far beyond traditional teaching. Their role is shaped as a pedagogical, social, and political actor, whose work is deeply linked to the structural conditions of inequality that characterize the region.

In this sense, it is necessary to rethink teacher education from a situated perspective that recognizes the diversity of territories and the centrality of cultural contexts. This involves incorporating intercultural approaches, strengthening educational research in rural contexts, and promoting continuous professional development processes that respond to teachers' needs. Likewise, a transformation of public policies is required—one that moves beyond an assistentialist view of rural education and recognizes it as a strategic axis for social development.

However, it is important to acknowledge the emergence of alternative pedagogical experiences

that challenge these hegemonic logics. In the case of Colombia, models such as the *Escuela Nueva* (New School) have demonstrated the possibility of creating flexible, participatory, and context-based educational proposals that recognize the student as an active subject and the teacher as a facilitator of learning. These experiences align with approaches to popular education and critical pedagogy, as they promote autonomy, knowledge dialogue, and community participation.

In the Colombian context, in rural areas, it is often the figure of the teacher that represents the presence of the state, especially in remote communities, giving them a central role in social organization and the reconstruction of the community fabric. This is particularly relevant in territories affected by armed conflict, where the teacher not only educates but also contributes to processes of memory, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

Similarly, in Ecuador and Venezuela, rural teachers act as community reference points, participating in social dynamics that extend beyond the classroom: family guidance, local leadership, and the promotion of collective values.

4 THE TEACHER AS AN INTERCULTURAL ACTOR

From an intercultural education perspective, the educational process implies a horizontal exchange between different cultures, where no knowledge is imposed over another. This approach breaks with traditional models that have privileged Western knowledge, producing what some authors call cultural exclusion or invisibilization.

Freire maintains that education must start from the student's context. In rural areas, this means considering their realities, risks, and the possibility of integrating local knowledge – such as agricultural practices, oral traditions, and forms of community organization – into the school curriculum. Curriculum flexibility becomes essential. In this way, learning becomes more meaningful and strengthens students' cultural identity.

From intercultural education approaches, the rural teacher must mediate between different knowledge systems: academic knowledge and local knowledges (campesino, Indigenous, Afro-descendant).

In Colombia, this mediation is key in territories with high cultural diversity, such as the Colombian Caribbean, where Indigenous groups have played an important political role in transforming education. Through their organizations, they have promoted recognition of educational rights, creation of their

own curricula, and the training of Indigenous teachers. This process has contributed to strengthening educational autonomy and making the country's cultural diversity visible.

The Indigenous groups of the Colombian Caribbean play a fundamental role in constructing their own educational models, based on preserving cultural identity, transmitting ancestral knowledge, and defending the territory. Communities such as the Wayuu, Kogui, Arhuaco, Wiwa, and Zenú have developed educational practices that go beyond traditional schooling and integrate their worldview, social organization, and relationship with nature.

From an intercultural education perspective, these peoples are not merely recipients of the education system but active knowledge producers. Their role has been key in the development of proposals such as Indigenous education (ethnoeducation), recognized in Colombia as a pillar to guarantee relevant, culturally and linguistically respectful education.

In this sense, education in Indigenous communities of the Colombian Caribbean follows principles distinct from the regular educational model, even if not fully recognized. Significant experiences of teachers in rural contexts in Colombia constitute valuable examples of pedagogical innovation, professional resilience, and social commitment. Despite structural challenges such as geographic isolation, lack of resources, and social inequalities, teachers have managed to build pertinent educational practices that respond to community needs.

It is also worth highlighting that in regions marked by violence, rural teachers have developed experiences oriented toward peace education, promoting values such as respect, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution. Inspired by Paulo Freire's ideas, these teachers see education as a tool for social transformation, seeking through pedagogical projects to train critical students who are aware of their realities and capable of contributing to change in their communities.

In Ecuador, where Indigenous peoples have a strong presence, rural teachers play a fundamental role in bilingual and intercultural education. Teacher training has advanced toward recognizing cultural diversity as central to the educational process, reflected in the implementation of Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB). However, despite meaningful teaching experiences, rural teachers face challenging conditions, including geographic isolation, lack of resources, and limited access to continuous professional development.

In Venezuela, although intercultural education is less institutionalized, teachers must also adapt content to diverse local contexts. Rural education in Venezuela, from the perspective of teacher training and experience, presents a highly complex scenario, marked by tensions between pedagogical vocation, structural precariousness, and social crisis. Teachers face geographic challenges and the broader consequences of a national educational crisis, with one of the main problems being the lack of curricular relevance. The official curriculum follows a homogeneous model that does not consider rural particularities, forcing teachers to improvise and reorganize content to make it useful in students' daily lives.

5 METHODOLOGY

This study is framed within the socio-critical paradigm, aiming not only to understand rural education realities but also to contribute to their transformation. This paradigm allows for analyzing structural inequalities affecting rural education and questioning the conditions in which teacher training is carried out.

A qualitative approach was adopted to understand teachers' experiences and practices in rural contexts. This approach is grounded in the principles of critical pedagogy, particularly the contributions of Paulo Freire, who presents education as a practice of freedom oriented toward emancipation and social justice.

The type of research is descriptive-interpretive, seeking both to characterize conditions and realities of rural education and to interpret the challenges facing teacher training in these contexts. The study analyzes teacher training conditions and their implications in Colombia and Latin America.

Additionally, the study employs a documentary design, systematically analyzing theoretical sources, previous research, educational policies, and relevant academic documents for the subject under study.

6 FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that teacher training for rural contexts in Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela is marked by deep tensions between educational policies, structural conditions, and territorial realities. Across the three countries, common problems are identified, as well as particularities stemming from their socio-political contexts.

First, there is a clear disconnect between teacher training and rural realities. Initial training programs largely follow generalized urban-oriented models,

limiting teachers' preparation to address rural dynamics, such as multigrade education, cultural diversity, and geographic isolation. This gap forces teachers to construct pedagogical knowledge primarily through practice rather than formal training.

Second, the findings show that rural education in these countries is conditioned by persistent structural inequalities, including a lack of infrastructure, teaching resources, and connectivity. In Colombia, these challenges are compounded by the impact of armed conflict, where the teacher plays a key role in reconstructing the social fabric and promoting peace. In Venezuela, the educational crisis has resulted in teacher abandonment, labor precarization, and weakening of the school system. In Ecuador, in addition to rural limitations, challenges associated with insecurity directly affect teaching practice.

Another significant finding is that, despite these limitations, rural teachers develop innovative and context-based pedagogical practices. Examples include curriculum adaptation, use of local resources, and integration of local knowledge. These practices show that rural teachers act as creative agents capable of responding to their context through flexible and pertinent strategies.

Furthermore, rural teachers assume an expanded role that goes beyond teaching. In all three countries, teachers are community leaders, cultural mediators, and agents of social transformation. In Colombia, for example, teachers are often the only visible presence of the state in rural territories, reinforcing their social and political role.

In relation to intercultural education, the findings highlight the need to strengthen teacher training to recognize cultural diversity. In Ecuador, this is expressed through Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB), while in Colombia and Venezuela, efforts to integrate local knowledge into the curriculum are still insufficient.

Finally, the research concludes that there is an urgent need to transform teacher education in Latin America, orienting it toward critical, contextualized, and intercultural approaches. This involves not only modifying teacher training curricula but also improving working conditions and designing educational policies that respond to the realities of rural territories.

7 CONCLUSIONS

From this study, it is concluded that there is a significant disconnect between teacher training and the particularities of rural contexts, due to the

prevalence of standardized urban-focused approaches. This gap limits teachers' capacity to respond to challenges such as cultural diversity, multigrade education, and social vulnerability. Structural inequalities also affect teaching practice, including labor precariousness, infrastructure limitations, and limited access to ongoing professional development.

These conditions directly impact educational quality and teacher retention in rural areas. The rural teacher must not only master academic content but also develop intercultural competencies that allow them to mediate between different knowledge systems. Rural education in Colombia should be understood not only as an educational challenge but also as a political and ethical issue that calls society as a whole to action. Ensuring quality education in rural territories involves questioning historical inequalities that have marginalized these populations and promoting an educational model

that fosters social justice, equity, and recognition of diversity.

In conclusion, the articulation between rural education and teacher training in Latin America requires a profound transformation that goes beyond traditional approaches and embraces a critical, contextualized, and inclusive pedagogy. The rural teacher, as a political actor and agent of change, occupies a central role in this process. Recognizing their work, strengthening their training, and dignifying their working conditions constitute a crucial step toward building an education that does not merely reproduce the existing order but contributes to its transformation.

Strengthening rural education in Latin America requires transforming teacher training models, integrating public policies, local knowledge, and context-based pedagogical practices to advance toward more equitable, inclusive, and relevant educational systems.

REFERENCES

1. Avalos, B. (2023). Teacher professional development in rural contexts: Challenges and opportunities in Latin America. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 122, 103987. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.103987>
2. Bautista, G., & González, M. (2022). Rural education and teacher training in Latin America: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 89, 102541. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2022.102541>
3. Bonilla, E., & Rodríguez, P. (2024). Intercultural education and rural teacher identity in Colombia. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2024.XXXXX>
4. CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). (2023). *Education in Latin America: Inclusion and equity challenges in rural areas*. <https://www.cepal.org>
5. García, S., & Weiss, E. (2022). Multigrade teaching and teacher preparation in rural schools: Evidence from Latin America. *Prospects*, 52(3-4), 567-583. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-022-09610-4>
6. OECD. (2023). *Rural education and inclusive teacher policies: Strengthening teacher capacity in disadvantaged areas*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/xxxx>
7. Rodríguez, L., & Torres, J. (2025). Teacher agency and innovation in rural education: Lessons from Colombia and Ecuador. *Journal of Education Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2025.XXXXX>
8. UNESCO. (2022). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org>
9. UNESCO. (2024). *Global education monitoring report 2024: Technology and education in rural contexts*. UNESCO Publishing.
10. Vega, L., & Martínez, D. (2023). Intercultural bilingual education and teacher training in rural Latin America. *Educational Research Review*, 40, 100528. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100528>