

## Los actores educativos frente al uso de la lengua materna en un centro escolar indígena de Chiapas

*The educational actors faced with the use of the mother tongue in a indigenous school of Chiapas*

*Agentes educativos sobre o uso da língua materna em uma escola indígena em Chiapas*

**Oscar Cruz Pérez**

Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, México

[oscar.cruz@unicach.mx](mailto:oscar.cruz@unicach.mx)

**Germán Alejandro García Lara**

Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, México

[german.garcia@unicach.mx](mailto:german.garcia@unicach.mx)

**Jesús Ocaña Zúñiga**

Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, México

[jesus.ocana@unicach.mx](mailto:jesus.ocana@unicach.mx)

**Carlos Eduardo Pérez Jiménez**

Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, México

[carlos.perez@unicach.mx](mailto:carlos.perez@unicach.mx)

### Resumen

En este trabajo se analizan aspectos en torno a la educación, la escuela y la lengua, así como sus implicaciones en el proceso de escolarización de alumnos de bachillerato. El estudio realizado es de tipo cualitativo en la modalidad de estudio de caso y los sujetos participantes son alumnos, profesores y directivos de un centro escolar de nivel medio superior de la comunidad de San Andrés Larráinzar, en el estado de Chiapas.

Para ello se aplicaron entrevistas abiertas dentro del centro escolar, las cuales fueron audiograbadas y transcritas en formato digital mediante la herramienta de software Atlas.ti, y analizadas con la estrategia *bottom-up* (ascendente). De esa manera se elaboraron síntesis a manera de redes conceptuales donde se recuperan los elementos más representativos relacionados con la concepción que tienen los alumnos frente al uso de la lengua materna, su posición al respecto y sus consecuencias, así como la visión de los profesores y directivos del centro escolar frente a la práctica pedagógica monolingüe en castellano, las alternativas ante los problemas académicos de los alumnos y la evaluación de los aprendizajes.

Se concluye que la lengua indígena constituye una limitante para el proceso educativo en la escuela, ya que se contrapone con su uso informal a los procesos comunicativos e interactivos entre los mismos alumnos.

**Palabras clave:** lengua indígena, bachilleres, monolingüe.

### Abstract

This paper discusses issues surrounding education, school and language as well as its implications for the process of schooling for high school students. The study is qualitative in the form of case study and the participants are students, teachers and managers of a school in upper level of the community of San Andrés Larráinzar, in the State of Chiapas.

So were open inside the school, interviews which were recorded and transcribed into digital format using Atlas.ti software tool, and analyzed with the strategy bottom-up (ascending). That way were prepared synthesis as conceptual networks where where recovered the most representative items related to the conception that students have related to the use of the mother tongue, its position on the matter and its consequences, as well as the vision of teachers and directors of the school about the monolingual teaching practice in Spanish, the alternatives for the academic problems of students and the learning evaluation.

It is concluded that the indigenous language is a limiting factor for the educational process at school, since he is at odds with his informal use communicative and interactive processes between the students.

**Key words:** indigenous language, bachelors, monolingual.

### Resumo

Este artigo discute questões em torno da educação, escola e linguagem, bem como suas implicações no processo de educação para estudantes do ensino médio. O estudo é qualitativo na forma de participantes do estudo de casos e temas são alunos, professores e gestores escolares de nível médio mais elevado da comunidade de Larráinzar, no estado de Chiapas.

Para fazer isso de entrevistas abertas na escola foram aplicadas, que foram áudio-gravadas e transcritas em formato digital pela ferramenta de software Atlas.ti, e analisados com a estratégia de bottom-up (ascendente). Assim síntese foram desenvolvidos por meio de redes conceituais onde os elementos mais representativos relacionados com a concepção de que os estudantes têm sobre o uso da língua materna, a sua posição e as suas consequências recuperar e visão de professores e gestores escolares versus prática de ensino monolíngue em castelhano, alternativas para os problemas escolares dos alunos e avaliação da aprendizagem.

Conclui-se que a língua indígena constitui uma limitação para o processo educativo na escola, uma vez que contrasta com o seu uso informal processos comunicativos e interativas entre os próprios alunos.

**Palavras-chave:** indianas, licenciado, linguagem monolíngues.

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## Introduction

Education is a process that helps the human being to form part of the society. For Hameline (1981), education is a civilizing oath, a second birth of humanity within the social order from a process of institutionalization based, legitimate and operates in all the social and symbolic spaces that man as a social being built for its continuity. Family, Church, neighborhood, work and play spaces and, of course, the school, are only some contexts where human beings get educated.

Given the complexity of education, modern society has created institutions for take charge or take responsibility for certain tasks and actions that promote its stability, performance and development, as well as to overcome conflicts therein arise. It was thus how a specialized institution came up to offer a set of knowledge spaces and informal and spontaneous encounters cannot teach. This institution is responsible to carry out the complex process of teaching and learning, through which new generations take information and knowledge about science, technology, literature or art, and which we call school, scholar center or educational institution.

In contemporary society, the school provides to individuals accessing cultural content that are outside the scope of the primary groups, i.e., family, friends and the neighborhood, being the responsible of imparting what is has called formal education. For Gimeno (2000), the school is a social invention full of symbolic representations that constructs meanings, values, aspirations and expectations that operate in the ways of thinking, of love and relationship between individuals and nature, creating thus images of what they should be and do as members of society. Education is considered a necessary, desirable and even indispensable institution for the constant improvement of the human being; it is constructed by the desires and expectations of authorities, politicians, parents, teachers and children, which is sediment and naturalized, hindering his questioning and criticism. However, for some theorists school represents an area of violence, repression and sacrifice (Belgich, 2005), of social reproduction

and symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1998), discipline of consciousness and body (Foucault, 1993), and even something unnecessary (Illich, 1985).

To Arísti (1990), educational practices in schools have a moral foundation, whose actions are executed on the nature of the subject to direct or to oppose it by prohibitions and restrictions, repetitive teaching practices at the same time potentiate their skills create values and guidelines that enable students to acquire the fundamental elements of collective morality. Thus, schools assume responsibility for planning and organizing the children's learning. Also, they try, not always successfully, to provide direction to such learning and provide it with maximum efficiency (Stenhouse, 1991).

The school is an article of intellectual and social consumption offered to the community, which explores the importance or interest groups can give you and then try to guide students toward what ultimately is valuable, important and necessary:

School knowledge acquired concrete social existence through a series of mediations. First, they are a particular cut and ordering of reality, the result of several institutional mediations are conducted through a series of decisions and discrimination from a specific set of supposedly scientific knowledge, that the school should transmit. These decisions constitute a definition of legitimate knowledge (Edwards, 2005, p. 147).

In actual practice, schools teach or inform about science, art, literature and the world of values and try to develop skills for learning to know, do and think; such content and skills are transmitted as absolute truths to build a pattern of reference for the student. This is more likely to "succeed" as it can develop and adequately replicate what determines the pattern. In this sense, the school is conceived as a homogeneous institution in which they interact administrators, teachers, students and parents with the same interests, goals, concerns and resources, so that denies other knowledge and disdains cultural differences subjects.

From these references, education schooled in Mexico unaware of the existence of cultural diversity in indigenous communities in the country, which make up a large and representative population of Mexico. Among the states with indigenous peoples are Oaxaca, Chiapas, Quintana Roo and Yucatan. In Mexico, 6.5% of the population speak an indigenous language (INEGI, 2010). Chiapas, like other states in southeastern Mexico, has a multiethnic and multicultural composition. According to the SEGOB (2014), 1,511,010 people belong to an indigenous people in Chiapas, however, the data vary depending on the criteria to be taken on the indigenous term.

Each tribe has a cultural identity, closely associated with certain traditions and dialect. Orduna (2003) calls this set of features and elements that distinguish each community and cultural identity, which the community is judged, valued, appreciated, defined or rejected by others. Cultural identity is not stagnant but dynamic, evolving from contact with other cultures. According to UNESCO, all ethno-cultural group has the right to belong to a particular culture and be recognized as different, to preserve their own culture and tangible or intangible cultural heritage, and not be forced to belong to a different culture or be assimilated by it .

In the words of Varas and Serrano (2001), the identity of a people is historically defined across multiple aspects that reflect their culture, for example, the language of communication - an instrument and construction of reality among members of the community, the social relations, rites and ceremonies, or collective behavior, ie, value systems and beliefs. In this sense, language is a prerequisite to name this culture, transmit, rebuild and learn element, so the language of the indigenous is an identity element whose loss leads to abandon their roots, to oblivion and incomprehension of its origins. Precisely on language ideology of a culture is built. Ideology and reproduces itself is expressed through language. Moreover, the language is assimilated to the nation, a people. The mother tongue is a symbol of identity, a link identifier element or group membership. Minority languages (not to be confused with regional or local languages) are also considered as an expression of cultural wealth and a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage, whose disappearance inevitably leads to permanent loss of oral traditions and expressions.

In this regard, Masso (2006) argues that strengthening cultural identity is not solely intended to preserve cultures; also seeks to promote the deployment of its potential in the present and in the future, allow for the exercise of cultural rights, establish fairer channels for dialogue and participation in decision-making and avoid a process of dominating interaction among different cultures.

Regarding the educational aspect, forms and models of care in Mexico indigenous populations have and have had the same denominator, to integrate the indigenous communities to hegemonic Westernized society. The General Directorate of Intercultural Education (DGEI) argues that the recovery of the indigenous language as a powerful resource in the classroom and in educational and pedagogical practices is essential, recognizing that the mother tongues of children are the starting point for the construction and reconstruction of knowledge, and therefore for dialogic and horizontal communication in the negotiation of meanings and signifiers of school contents and social relations. However, from following the Mexican Revolution decades and until now government policies have been characterized by a willingness to serve indigenous people, but they are still far from realizing the fundamentals of their origin and counter the hegemony of the dominant culture .

According Piero Gorza (2002), the school is proposed as an ideological instrument of integration of marginalized sectors of the population to the national context, rather than as a means of affective cultural growth. Charles (1987), meanwhile, described the school as a new system of political domination, of new working practices, the introduction of beliefs and customs and the imposition of a foreign language, which led to a complete breakdown in the system Indian life. As Garcia (2004) emphasizes, education schooling for indigenous ethnic groups did not start from themselves, but of the interests and conceptualizations from the governmental sphere were designed and operated.

According to Stavenhagen (1995), indigenous groups in Mexico have led movements for the recovery of their lands that have been displaced, recognition of their languages and defense use, adapting the education system to their cultural needs , control over their community

schools, combating racism they face, the defense of their participation and political self-determination, and so on.

While it is true that one of the achievements of these indigenous movements has been the right to public education, still has not materialized fully an educational service that meets their cultural diversity and to ensure to all members of the Indian peoples training that integrates its history, knowledge, techniques, systems of values and mother tongue. In this sense, this paper analyzes the use of the mother tongue in an Indian school Altos de Chiapas, from educational actors who participate.

### **Methodological process**

This analysis was done from a qualitative perspective, which allows us to interpret, understand and reveal the motives of human actions. The subjective reality of man is manifested through messages and meanings (Murrueta, 2004).

The research context is the municipality of San Andres Larrainzar, located in the economic region "II Altos". The mother tongue of its inhabitants is Tzotzil and Tzeltal. According to INEGI, in 2005 the municipality had 15,304 inhabitants, 12,715 speakers of their mother tongue, of which 62.35% is bilingual (Tzotzil or Tzeltal / Castilian) and 37.61% are monolingual. Most residents of the community is engaged in farming and sheep breeding and domestic animals for their own consumption. According to Indicators of Poverty and Social Gap 2005, the National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy, set them at an extremely high degree of marginalization and social backwardness and medium human development level.

We worked with the director and 7 teachers from high school, 4 members of the committee of parents and 12 students in the campus, which has a total of 240 students.

With the consent of the participants, open interviews were conducted with each of them within the school on the subject of school and his work in it. To this end the registration



audiograble erected on the site of the application and proceeded to transcribe all interviews in digital format was used. Subsequently, by Atlas.ti software, it was conducted content analysis with bottom-up strategy (up), and quotes about language and its relation to the learning process and indigenous identity were highlighted. In this sense, interviews with teachers and the school principal, with particular interest in the description made on the academic performance of students were processed. After reviewing transcripts of interviews completed, we proceeded to attach codes to each of the textual marks made. Subsequently, the resulting codes were grouped into families according to the criteria of semantic matching and context. With these elements we proceeded to create synthesis way of conceptual networks on families of codes and free codes by semantic links that allow better represent the responses of students and teachers. Finally, they were described and analyzed the conceptual networks to create a narrative structure of the elements.

## **EDUCATION, LANGUAGE AND SCHOOL**

### *Students over the use of the mother tongue*

From the responses expressed by students, the conceptual network shown in Figure 1. The student responses regarding the use of the mother tongue in school was built, refer emphatically that Castilian, in his opinion, is a communication barrier that results in difficulties and problems in the understanding of the thematic content of the subjects. For students, the education monolingual (Castilian) receiving at school is opposed to the use of the mother tongue, in this case the Tzotzil or Tzeltal. There is recognition of the asymmetrical relationship between us and the others, between the discourse of superiority of the Castilian language against Tzotzil, a situation that devalues constructive social relationships between teachers and students.

Given this reality is relevant argue that in everyday school practice, carried out a murder of indigenous languages, a murder to linguistic codes and the word, unaware that language is not only an element of communication but also a tool used to name the reality and we name ourselves. Language is a manifestation of perceptions we have of reality, of life and of others, as well as a way to understand the content of other cultures, because these include and express

the (Lenkersdorf, 2002). According to Cummins (2002), to educate a child in a cultural context and linguistically diverse it is necessary to feed alike intellect and identity in a way that, by necessity, challenge coercive power relations. When the possibility that students speak their own language in the classroom is canceled, it is not violent only the individual as such, but the whole group to which it belongs is also canceled; a culture and a way of being is removed and live in the world. It is a slow and silent death that leaves no trace and prosecute culprits, so it is tolerated and encouraged.

Moreover, the role of the mother appears from the speech of students, as a cyclical element in academic, social and cultural formation of the young, as it is the mother who has taught children the Castilian from small, with argument that it is necessary to move forward, promoting their desire to excel by way of academic preparation: "... my mother taught me Spanish that says many people speak ... but in my house speak Tzeltal" (student 17 years).

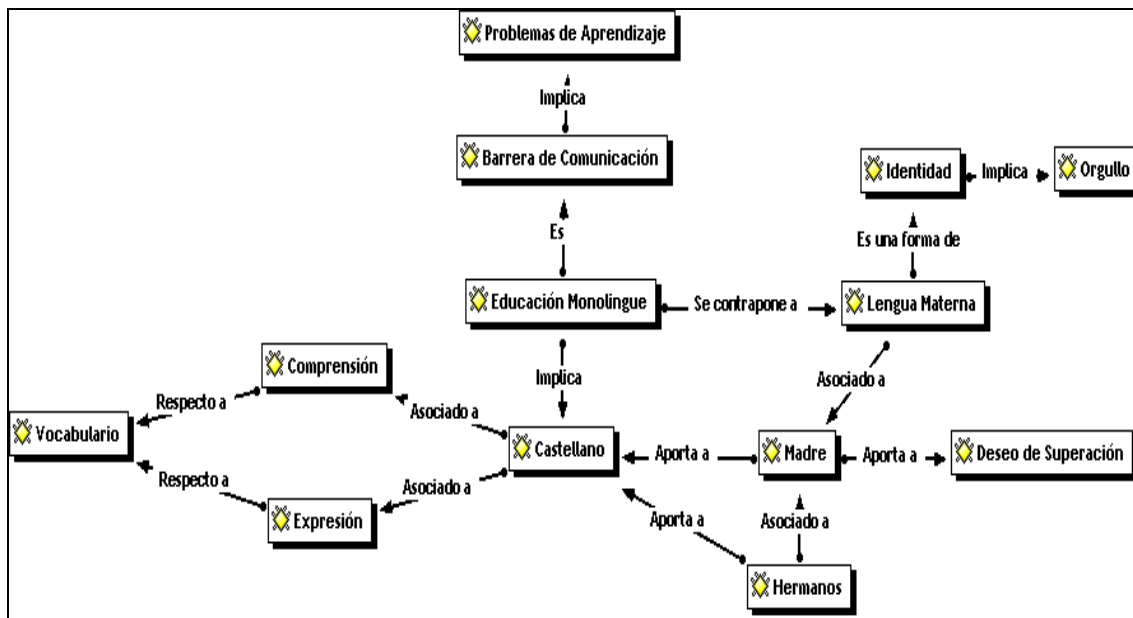
In the same family environment, the role of the brothers for understanding the Castilian is extremely important because they represent the opportunity to practice at home. Furthermore, a reduced view of the problem of understanding and expression of the Castilian of students is maintained. For them, the problem boils down to not having a sufficient vocabulary, which justified the sentence: "... do not know what that word means", or with this one: "... we do not know how to say or write a word (in class). " This problem has a much deeper and complex origin. Finally, regarding the mother tongue, young people refer to it as an element of identity that makes them feel proud of themselves, their family and their community: "... I remain indigenous, that will not change although large have a career. "

However, years of exclusion and marginalization of indigenous groups and indigenous policies that have operated as mechanisms of cultural integration, marked awareness and educational practices in the family. Given the contemptuous way you look at indigenous mothers, responsible for the education of their children, promote the incorporation of the Spanish language to resemble the Ladino; strategy to avoid being stigmatized, cheated or undervalued. The indigenous population suffers a double marginalization: their ethnicity and for being poor,

so a way to counter it is the incorporation of cultural elements of the hegemonic culture, in this case the Spanish language.

Figure 1 shows that students identify learning problems as a consequence of their lack of proficiency in Castilian. The school operates with a single curriculum monolingual national language, so that young people from other ethnic groups living in situations of educational disadvantage in relation to the demands of the curriculum. Because of this teachers who speak the mother tongue of the students, to recover local knowledge and link the curriculum with culturally significant content for community groups are required. When Cummins (2002) wonders why teachers do not encourage bilingual students to maintain and develop their mother tongues, it responds that simply because the programs of teaching and teacher training have mostly overlooked issues relating to cultural and linguistic diversity. In this sense, the school introduces another language and asks students to represent and interpret their reality from the codes of the dominant culture.

**Graph 1. Language and school from the student's perception**



*Teachers and administrators over the use of indigenous languages*

Regarding the teachers and administrators of the school, the information was broader and could be detected important elements as the situation and the consequences of monolingual teaching practice in Castilian, alternatives to the academic problems of students, and that make learning assessment of students (figure 2).

With regard to the situation and consequences of pedagogical practice in Castilian, similar to the way students, teachers and the principal recognize that the scheme monolingual education erects a communication barrier makes learning problems arise. Repeatedly, teachers said, "young people have the ability, are intelligent, but do not throw win." In this way they explain why many young people repeatedly ask the meaning of a word, sentence or instruction given in class. institutional vision appears when mentioned alternative solutions, including the tutorials -the individualized support student activities are to address conflict situations in the escolar- center, implementation of remedial courses to strengthen the subjects teachers and principals or difficult content for students and support of parents in the home.

His speech revolves around indicators and evaluation mechanisms of the institution by the Ministry of Education. In this sense, they adhere to the mechanisms provided by official regulations in that there is an institutional mentoring program to meet young people in the issues that they may present, including language. In this sense, they emphasize that they have come to offer remedial workshops for understanding the Castilian to students who have obvious communication problems, although it should also consider the teachers themselves, because: "... some words we do not understand and only the say in Spanish (teachers). "

In the classroom, teachers point out that recurrently take out the teaching strategy peer support, where the boys have a "Castilian fluid" form teams with those who have more difficulty in understanding, with the expectation that may exist between equals greater confidence, so that allows them to express their doubts, overcoming the problems of language comprehension and carry out the activities and tasks requested. Understanding the content presented in books and in the oral exchange, which invariably occurs in Spanish, is the crux of

the problem in the teaching process "(student) ... can read, but if you do not understand what they say as simple as it is the question well will not answer! ".

Teachers have the notion that the home can potentially help to give young people a better understanding of language and thereby break the communication barrier and achieve better academic achievement. Repeatedly, teachers argue that parents should be more involved in the school support and enhance the capabilities of understanding and expression of the Castilian. Regarding parents, striking teachers claim that some of them only send their children to school in order to access grants and government support, "just send them to meet requirements of Opportunities" says director school.

While students valued positively in terms of their ability and intelligence, they also indicate his disinterest, apathy and poor study habits and reading, all factors related to poor school performance and dropout.

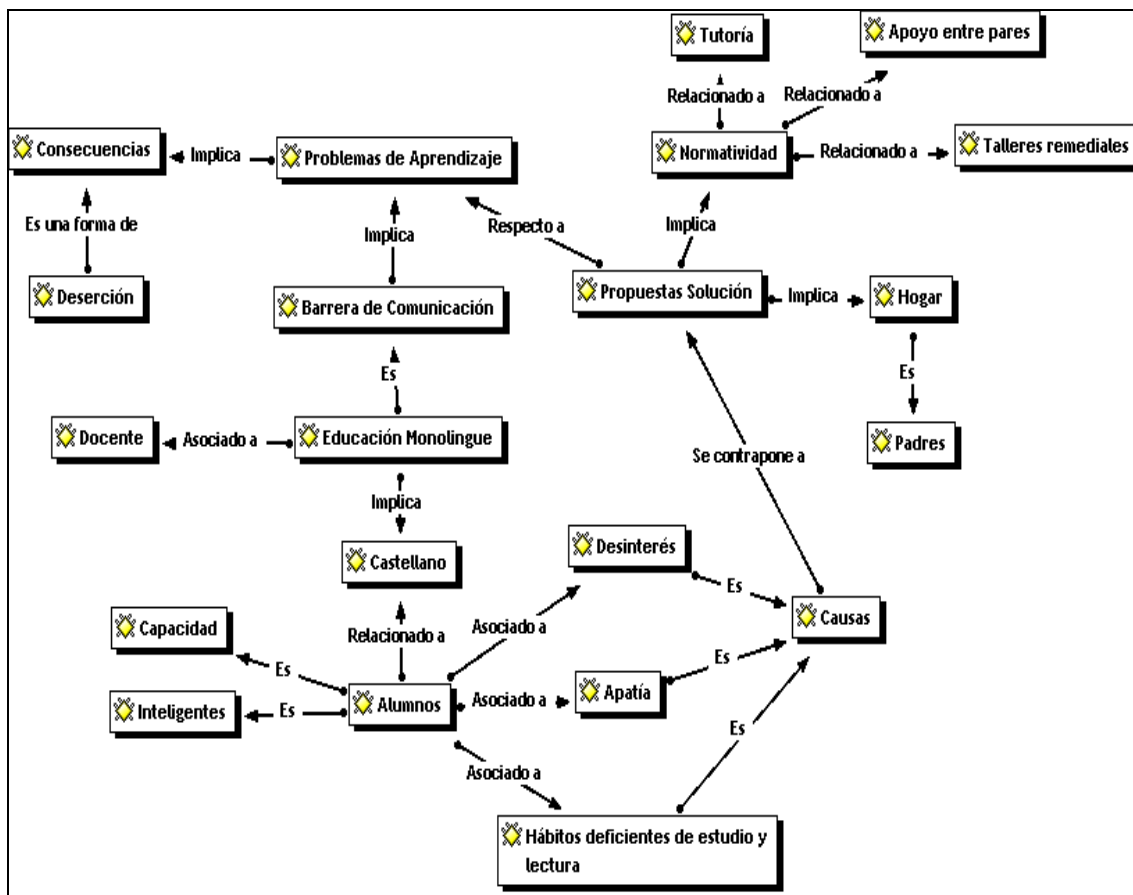
The conception of teachers and administrators about problems in learning indigenous students and low utilization rates coincides with westernized and ladinizadas positions that argue that "the Indian is the problem." Apparently it is repeated or updated conception of European settlers, who believed that Native Americans were inferior and incapable as a civilization because they were wild (De Sousa, 2006).

The way the school orients its work, communicate and requires accentuates the differences with the indigenous, who ranks as deficit (hence its argument to reinforce the Castilian in the tutorial work and remedial courses). Thus, indigenous status remains a "problem" that prevents meeting the objectives of the school. To Schmelkes (2001), these situations are naturalized and show a veiled form of racism.

Finally, teachers and school authorities express concern regarding limitations by language, with the consequent problems of learning, which culminates in many cases with young dropouts. Unfortunately, the tasks that have been undertaken are far from claiming to indigenous culture and therefore benefit the educational process of young people.

It is encouraging that teachers and the school principal have a broader perspective of the problem; it is evident that offer a diagnosis, alternative solutions and to warn consequences of inattention, however, put before institutionalized vision of the school as one that is limited to the indicators, statistics and scores, away from the holistic involvement language as an element that articulates reality.

**Graph 2. The language and the school from the perception of teachers and school authority**



## **Conclusion**

While it is true that teachers and school authorities have a wider language and paper perspective it plays into the school, not considered important to the recovery of the social and cultural context where students develop defining their skills and learning opportunities. Thus, one of the goals of the school is to free students from their ethnic characteristics in order to acquire the values and behaviors of the dominant culture.

Despite this, teachers accept that as the tsotsil the mother tongue of young, monolingual education in Castilian is a communication barrier that often accompanies or precedes the onset of problems in learning. They also agree that the role of the mother of young people in training, understanding and expression of the Castilian, is fundamental. In this regard, it is worth noting the expectation on the part of teachers that this work is carried out in the home for young people arrive at school with fewer deficiencies. Meanwhile, young people do not care about the difficulties encountered in understanding the Castilian; on the contrary, they feel proud of their indigenous origin and their mother tongue as evidence of his identity. Because of this, we ask: is valid castellanización seek indigenous youth in order to improve their school ?, use does not that violate the principle of preservation of indigenous languages?

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