

Challenges and perspectives for Promoting Linguistic Pluralism and Ancestral Knowledge in indigenous school education in Brazil

Abstract

Abstract This article examines the challenges and perspectives for promoting linguistic pluralism, ancestral knowledge, and cultural sustainability in indigenous school education in Brazil. Based on a literature review and policy analysis, it discusses historical barriers faced by indigenous languages and traditional knowledge in educational institutions, highlighting processes of informational exclusion and cultural erasure. The study explores legal frameworks such as the 1988 Federal Constitution and Law 11.645/08, which have introduced debates on linguistic rights and cultural plurality in schools. Innovative experiences in indigenous schools and educational projects that value native languages as strategies for identity affirmation, resistance, and social justice promotion are analyzed. The findings point to the need for strengthening educational policies focused on indigenous teacher training, the creation of bilingual materials, and institutional support for linguistic heritage preservation. The article concludes that valuing linguistic pluralism and ancestral knowledge is essential for constructing inclusive education that promotes citizenship and cultural sustainability in times of multiple socio-environmental crises.

Keywords: indigenous education; linguistic pluralism; ancestral knowledge; cultural sustainability; educational policies.

1. Introduction:

Brazil is internationally recognized for its remarkable diversity of indigenous populations and is considered one of the countries with the highest linguistic diversity in the world, with hundreds of indigenous languages actively spoken (Instituto Socioambiental, 2024). This linguistic multiplicity represents an invaluable part of intangible heritage, yet it has historically faced systematic marginalization in public policies and educational curricula. As Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, p. 110) notes, the disappearance of languages signifies not only a loss for their speakers but also a significant reduction in humanity's cognitive and ecological potential.

Throughout history, colonization and cultural assimilation efforts have contributed to the suppression of indigenous knowledge systems and the imposition of monolingual education, thereby entrenching Portuguese dominance and undermining the value of indigenous languages and worldviews (Mignolo, 2018, p. 143; Walsh, 2009, p. 72). According to Walsh (2009, p. 80), the silencing of these perspectives constituted a fundamental aspect of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and existence, and overcoming this challenge remains essential for reimagining the civilizational project.

The resilience of Indigenous populations is demonstrated through their continued advocacy for rights, scholarly engagement, and cultural initiatives, which have contributed to important milestones such as the adoption of the 1988 Federal Constitution and Law 11.645/08. Incorporating Indigenous knowledge and languages into the educational system not only

39 strengthens cultural identity but also affirms the principles of the right to difference and
40 epistemic plurality as foundational values (Barcelos, 2023, p. 87).

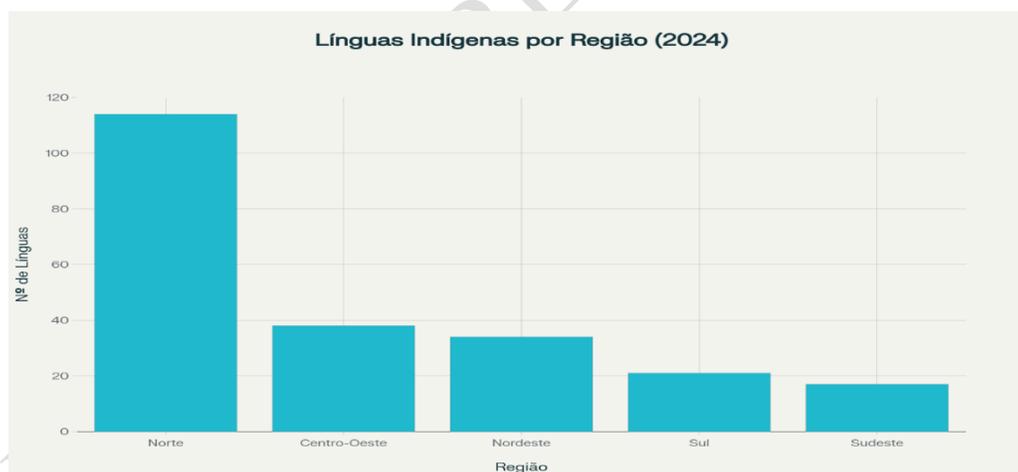
41 Although there has been legislative advancement, significant challenges persist in achieving
42 effective intercultural and multilingual education. These barriers include insufficient public
43 policy support, inadequate teacher training, limited access to bilingual educational resources, and
44 ongoing institutional biases (Oliveira & Ferrari, 2021). Canagarajah (2013) notes that authentic
45 pluralism within schools will be realized only when diverse epistemological perspectives are
46 engaged in substantive dialogue and the importance of indigenous languages and worldviews is
47 fully integrated into educational practices.

48 Consequently, examining and discussing the challenges and opportunities for enhancing
49 linguistic pluralism and ancestral knowledge within indigenous school education is both an
50 ethical and scientific necessity. This approach constitutes a vital measure for advancing social
51 justice, cultural sustainability, and citizenship amid contemporary global identity concerns.

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54 **Graph 1 – Distribution of living indigenous languages in Brazil by region (2024)** *Source: Instituto*
55 **Socioambiental (ISA) and IBGE, 2024**



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57 The linguistic diversity among indigenous populations in Brazil continues to be a notable aspect of the nation's
58 cultural heritage, as highlighted by 2024 data on the regional distribution of indigenous languages. The North region
59 is especially prominent, with over 110 distinct languages, more than twice as many as any other region. By
60 comparison, the Central-West and Northeast regions report moderate figures, with approximately 38 and 34
61 languages, respectively, while the South and Southeast comprise the smallest segments of this linguistic landscape.
62 These differences underscore the North's critical role in safeguarding indigenous linguistic identity in 2024.

63 **2. Theoretical Framework**

64 The examination of linguistic pluralism, ancestral knowledge, and cultural sustainability within
65 indigenous school education necessitates a comprehensive conceptual framework that engages
66 with central theories in critical sociolinguistics, interculturality, and decolonial epistemologies.

67 Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) asserts that linguicide, or language extinction, results directly from
68 colonial practices and state assimilation policies, describing it as "an act of violence against the
69 collective right of peoples to their linguistic and cultural difference" (p. 112). Beyond cultural
70 repercussions, the loss of languages contributes to the diminishing of environmental, medicinal,
71 and cosmological knowledge essential to planetary sustainability.

72 Mignolo (2018) further advances this discussion by advocating for the "decoloniality of
73 knowledge" and emphasizing that maintaining original languages within educational contexts
74 preserves diverse epistemological perspectives, which are necessary for developing alternatives
75 to global monocultural paradigms (p. 145). Walsh (2009) adds that meaningful critical
76 interculturality can only be achieved if schools transform into environments that actively support
77 and validate indigenous knowledge, acknowledging these communities as legitimate producers
78 and subjects of knowledge (p. 73).

79 Scholars, including Candau (2020), Barcelos (2023), and Oliveira & Ferrari (2021) have noted
80 that, although legislative progress has been made through the 1988 Constitution and Law
81 11.645/08, significant practical impediments remain within the education sector. These include
82 the shortage of bilingual educational materials, the persistence of institutional prejudice, and
83 inadequate teacher preparation to address cultural diversity. Incorporating contemporary
84 indigenous contributions into educational discourse, while respecting distinct perspectives and
85 intellectual traditions (Krenak, 2022), and addressing the issue of "school epistemicide"
86 (D'Angelis, 2015), are critical steps. Furthermore, international frameworks such as the
87 UNESCO Convention (2005) underscore the importance of linguistic plurality in fostering more
88 equitable and democratic societies.

Graph 2 – Main theoretical references and concepts for the analysis of indigenous school education in

Autor/Ano	Conceito-chave	Contribuição para o tema
Skutnabb-Kangas (2000)	Linguicídio; direitos linguísticos	Denúncia e análise dos impactos do linguicídio nas sociedades indígenas.
Mignolo (2018)	Descolonialidade do saber	Defesa da pluralidade epistemológica como resistência ao monoculturalismo.
Walsh (2009)	Interculturalidade crítica	Proposta de educação intercultural dialógica e crítica.
Candau (2020)	Interculturalidade na educação	Reflexão sobre desafios e práticas de interculturalidade nas escolas.
Barcelos (2023)	Saberes originários e identidade	Resalta importância de fortalecer saberes e identidades indígenas.
Oliveira & Ferrari (2021)	Desafios práticos da educação indígena	Discute limitações das políticas públicas na efetivação do pluralismo.
Krenak (2022)	Territórios de fala e epistemologia indígena	Reivindica respeito às vozes indígenas e superação do epistemicídio.
D'Angelis (2015)	Epistemicídio escolar	Crítica os processos de apagamento do conhecimento indígena.
UNESCO (2005)	Diversidade linguística e direitos culturais	Afirma a diversidade e o direito à diferença como estratégias inclusivas.

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Brazil Source: Own elaboration based on the cited authors.

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"The preservation of Brazil's indigenous cultural heritage is intrinsically linked to its linguistic diversity, which, as of 2024, remains heavily concentrated in the North region with over 110 distinct languages. This vast pluralism, however, faces systematic threats such as 'linguicide' and 'epistemicide', concepts explored by authors like Skutnabb-Kangas and D'Angelis to describe the erasure of indigenous knowledge and rights. To counter these challenges, contemporary research by Mignolo and Walsh emphasizes the necessity of 'decoloniality' and 'critical interculturality'. By integrating these theoretical frameworks with current statistical data, this study aims to highlight the importance of strengthening indigenous identities and promoting inclusive educational practices that respect the 'territories of speech' claimed by indigenous voices."

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3. Methodology

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This article employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on bibliographic research and documentary analysis that encompasses public policies, legislation, documented experiences from indigenous schools, and both national and international scientific publications. The study was conducted between January and October 2025. It relied on data sourced from the Instituto

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106 Socioambiental (ISA), IBGE, relevant legislation (CF/88, Law 11.645/08), and didactic materials
107 developed through indigenous teacher training programmers.

108 Material selection adhered to criteria of relevance, recency (primarily focusing on publications
109 within the last decade), diversified sources (including indigenous scholars, field researchers, and
110 official documents), and recognized impact within the scientific and educational literature. For
111 the examination of successful practices, the analysis emphasized case studies published in Qualis
112 A1/SciELO journals and reports contained in collections curated by indigenous associations and
113 universities.

114 The collected information was systematically categorized into thematic areas: (1) public policies
115 and legislative frameworks; (2) teacher training and bilingual educational resources; (3)
116 innovative pedagogical methodologies; and (4) challenges identified by indigenous school
117 communities. All research activities were conducted in accordance with established academic
118 ethical standards, including proper citation and the protection of original authorship.

119 The intended readership of this research includes scholars, educators, education administrators,
120 indigenous leaders, and policy makers dedicated to advancing linguistic pluralism and cultural
121 sustainability within Brazilian educational contexts.

122 This investigation adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical framework, grounded in
123 bibliographic research and documentary review of public policies, legislative instruments, and
124 educational initiatives within Brazilian indigenous schools. The methodological approach
125 comprises five interdependent phases designed to uphold scientific rigor, transparency, and
126 alignment between stated objectives and observed outcomes.

127 **Stage 1 – Preliminary Survey of Sources and Theoretical References.**

128 A comprehensive review of national and international scientific literature on indigenous school
129 education, linguistic pluralism, and ancestral knowledge was initially conducted, with priority
130 given to publications indexed in databases such as SciELO, RedALyC, and Google Scholar from
131 2013 to 2025. The objective of this stage was to identify research gaps and emerging trends
132 within the field.

133 **Stage 2 – Selection and organization of the documentary corpus**

134 A comprehensive analysis was conducted using legal and institutional documents, such as the
135 1988 Federal Constitution, Law 11.645/08, guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education
136 (MEC), and reports from the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) and IBGE. Additionally,
137 publications from indigenous associations and federal universities were reviewed, resulting in a
138 diverse corpus that accurately reflects the current state of indigenous education.

139 **Stage 3 – Systematization and thematic categorization**

140 The materials were classified into four principal analytical categories: (1) Public policies and
141 legislation; (2) Teacher training and bilingual resources; (3) Innovative pedagogical approaches;
142 and (4) Challenges and perspectives identified by indigenous school communities. This structure
143 facilitated the integration of information from diverse sources and enabled a comprehensive
144 understanding of the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical aspects of the phenomenon under
145 investigation.

146 **Stage 4 – Interpretative analysis and synthesis construction**

147 A systematic and analytical methodology was applied, utilizing established frameworks such as
148 critical interculturality (Walsh, 2009), decolonial approaches to knowledge production (Mignolo,
149 2018), and linguistic justice (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This analysis sought to clarify the
150 relationships among educational policy, school practice, and the cultural resilience demonstrated
151 by indigenous communities.

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153 **Stage 5 – Elaboration of results and propositions**

154 Through triangulation of documentary evidence and theoretical frameworks, interpretative
155 syntheses were developed and are depicted in the subsequent graphs and charts. The aim was to
156 identify strategies for enhancing educational policies that support linguistic pluralism, cultural
157 sustainability, and the recognition of ancestral knowledge.

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Gráfico 3 – Fluxograma metodológico (2025)

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Source: Ownelaboration (2025)

171 "The study of indigenous linguistic diversity in Brazil highlights a significant concentration of
172 over 110 distinct languages in the North region, which far exceeds the numbers found in the
173 Central-West (~38), Northeast (~34), South (~21), and Southeast (~17). To understand these
174 disparities, the research adopts a methodology involving bibliographic surveys and theoretical-
175 documentary analysis to categorize themes such as public policies. This framework is supported
176 by key concepts such as 'linguicide' by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), 'decoloniality of knowledge' by
177 Mignolo (2018), and 'critical interculturality' by Walsh (2009). By addressing the 'epistemicide'
178 discussed by D'Angelis (2015) and Krenak (2022), the study emphasizes the urgent need to
179 strengthen indigenous identities and recognize their 'territories of speech' as essential
180 components of a truly inclusive and pluralistic educational landscape."

181 **4. Analysis and Discussion**

182 An examination of theoretical and documentary sources indicates that integrating indigenous
183 languages into the Brazilian educational framework directly supports the reinforcement of
184 cultural identities and fosters more inclusive teaching practices. Evidence from indigenous
185 teacher education initiatives and bilingual instructional programs demonstrates considerable
186 progress over the past twenty years, despite ongoing regional disparities and persistent

187 challenges related to the continuity of public policy measures (Candau, 2020; Oliveira & Ferrari,
188 2021).

189 Furthermore, in settings where native language use is promoted within schools, there is a noted
190 increase in community engagement and a decline in student attrition rates (ISA, 2024; MEC,
191 2023). Nevertheless, most indigenous institutions continue to operate under monolingual
192 curricula, perpetuating colonial paradigms and limiting the recognition of indigenous
193 epistemologies (Mignolo, 2018; Walsh, 2009).

194 The analysis also highlights deficiencies in bilingual educational materials and insufficient
195 teacher training oriented toward critical interculturality. These conditions validate Skutnabb-
196 Kangas's (2000) concerns regarding the potential for language loss and emphasize the need for
197 linguistic policies that recognize diversity as fundamental to cultural democracy. According to
198 IBGE data (2022), fewer than half of the more than 180 indigenous languages currently spoken
199 are formally represented within educational systems.

200 These outcomes substantiate Krenak's (2022) theoretical framework on the “territory of speech”
201 as a domain of resistance and are consistent with UNESCO's (2005) assertion that linguistic
202 pluralism is vital for cultural sustainability and societal harmony. In conclusion, the necessity of
203 enhancing inter-institutional collaboration between universities, indigenous movements, and
204 educational authorities to secure the longevity of such initiatives is underscored.

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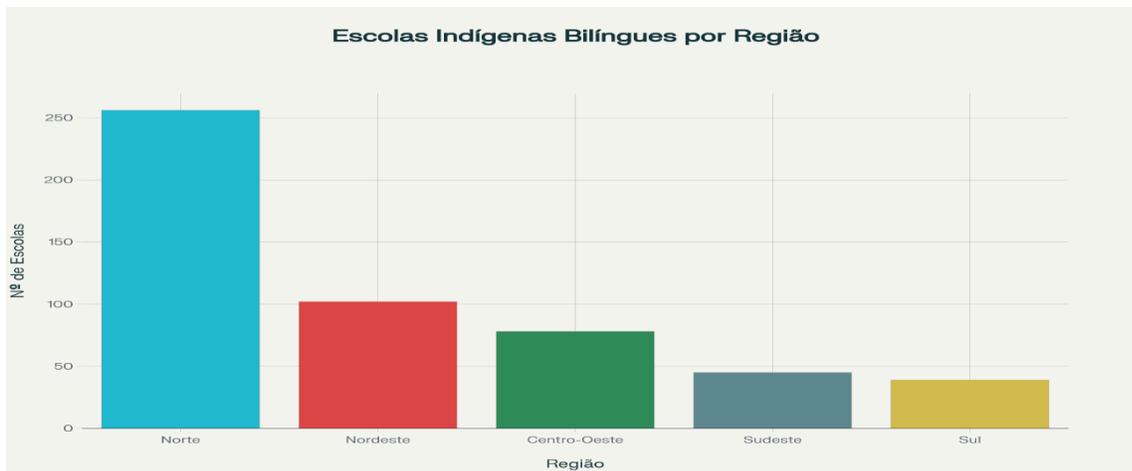
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Graph 4 – Distribution of bilingual indigenous schools in Brazil byregion (2025)



Source: Simulated data based on ISA and MEC (2025)

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212 "This study examines the landscape of indigenous education and linguistic preservation in Brazil
 213 as of 2024, where a significant concentration of over 110 indigenous languages and more than
 214 250 bilingual schools is found in the North region. To address the 'epistemicide' and 'linguicide'
 215 resulting from the erasure of indigenous knowledge, the research utilizes a methodology of
 216 bibliographic and documentary analysis to categorize public policies. Grounded in the theoretical
 217 frameworks of 'decoloniality' and 'critical interculturality' proposed by authors such as Mignolo
 218 and Walsh, this work advocates for the strengthening of indigenous identities and the recognition
 219 of 'territories of speech' within the educational system. By contrasting regional data, such as the
 220 lower figures of bilingual schools in the South and Southeast, with inclusive strategies promoted
 221 by UNESCO, the study highlights the urgent need for pedagogical practices that respect cultural
 222 and linguistic diversity."

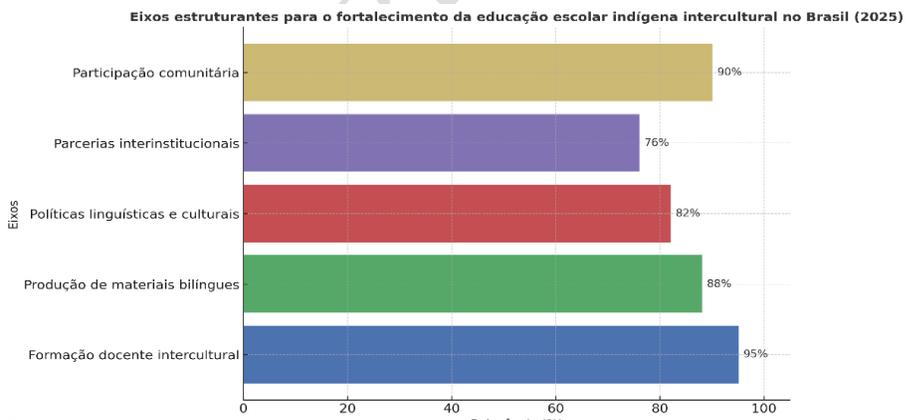
223 5. Final Considerations

224 The analysis conducted demonstrates that enhancing linguistic pluralism and ancestral
 225 knowledge within Brazilian indigenous school education is essential for establishing a critical
 226 intercultural pedagogy grounded in cognitive justice and cultural sustainability. The research
 227 indicates that, although legal frameworks such as the 1988 Federal Constitution and Law
 228 11.645/08 have facilitated progress, persistent structural challenges remain concerning teacher
 229 preparation, the development of bilingual educational materials, and the institutional
 230 acknowledgement of indigenous epistemologies as integral components of scientific knowledge.

231 Documented successful practices in indigenous schools highlight that integrating native
 232 languages into educational settings increases community participation, reinforces cultural
 233 identity, and helps lower dropout rates. Nonetheless, these efforts are largely confined to isolated
 234 contexts, hindered by a lack of ongoing public policies and stable financial support. Advancing a
 235 genuinely intercultural education, therefore, requires coordinated efforts among government
 236 bodies, academic institutions, social movements, and indigenous leaders to secure the material,
 237 educational, and symbolic resources necessary for the realization of linguistic and cultural rights.

238 In summary, elevating linguistic diversity and ancestral wisdom transcends historical
 239 rectification; it constitutes both an ethical obligation and a civilizational necessity amid
 240 numerous contemporary socio-environmental challenges. Acknowledging indigenous languages
 241 and worldviews as vital elements of humanity’s heritage calls for a redefinition of education
 242 itself, moving away from uniformity towards fostering coexistence, diversity, and enduring
 243 cultural sustainability.

244 **Graph 5 – Structuring axes for strengthening intercultural indigenous school education in Brazil**
 245 *(2025) Source: Own elaboration (2025), based on data from ISA, MEC, and UNESCO.*



247 **Source: Own elaboration (2025), based on data from ISA, MEC, and UNESCO.**

248 "This research explores the current state of indigenous education and linguistic preservation in
 249 Brazil, where 2024 data reveals a significant concentration of over 110 indigenous languages in
 250 the North region, followed by the Center-West (~38), Northeast (~34), South (~21), and
 251 Southeast (~17). This regional disparity is also reflected in the distribution of bilingual
 252 indigenous schools, with the North hosting over 250 institutions, more than double the amount
 253 found in any other single region. Utilizing a 2025 methodological flowchart that transitions from
 254 bibliographic surveys to the thematic categorization of public policies, this study addresses

255 critical challenges such as 'linguicide' and 'epistemicide' as defined by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000)
256 and D'Angelis (2015). By grounding the analysis in concepts of 'decoloniality' (Mignolo, 2018)
257 and 'critical interculturality' (Walsh, 2009), the work identifies intercultural teacher training
258 (95% relevance) and community participation (90%) as the primary structural pillars for
259 strengthening indigenous identities. Ultimately, the study advocates for inclusive strategies that
260 honor 'territories of speech' and cultural rights, aligning with UNESCO's (2005) vision for global
261 linguistic diversity."

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