

**Challenges and opportunities to express gender identity for one trans woman student
in a foreign language teacher education program with regulated autonomy: A case
study at a Colombian Public University**

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates the challenges and opportunities for one trans woman student within the Foreign Language Teacher Education Program at Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia. Framed by the principles of Queer Theory and Intersectionality, the study addresses the central question: *What are the challenges and opportunities for one trans women student in the program to perform their gender identities?* A single descriptive case study design was employed, utilizing semi-structured in-depth interviews with one trans woman student and one professor, alongside a critical document analysis of the Program's Educational Project (PEP) and the Institutional Educational Project (PEI). The findings reveal a significant contradiction. While student-led activism, particularly through *Campus Diverso*, has fostered a safer and more visible environment on campus, the program's official curriculum remains predominantly cisheteronormative. Analysis of the PEP and PEI shows a systematic absence of explicit references to gender diversity or trans populations. As a result, inclusion within the classroom often depends on a model of "regulated autonomy", where the exploration of gender identity is permitted but not required, placing the burden of advocacy on students. Key challenges identified include this institutional silence, a lack of structured teacher training on gender diversity, and the persistence of discriminatory incidents. Opportunities arise from supportive peer networks, individual teacher sensitivity, and the unique potential of foreign language learning as a space for identity exploration. The study concludes that the program's current adherence to a passive, choice-based model of inclusion ultimately reinforces normative structures. It recommends a dual transformation: the explicit integration of gender diversity into curricular documents, and mandatory, practical training for teachers to enable active pedagogical inclusion.

Resumen

Este estudio de caso cualitativo investiga los desafíos y oportunidades para una estudiante trans en el Programa de Formación de Profesores de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia. Enmarcado en la Teoría Queer y la Interseccionalidad, responde a la pregunta: ¿Cuáles son los desafíos y oportunidades para que una estudiante trans exprese su identidad de género en el programa? Se empleó un diseño de estudio de caso descriptivo único, con entrevistas semiestructuradas en profundidad a una estudiante trans y una profesora, junto con un análisis crítico de documentos del Proyecto Educativo del Programa (PEP) y el Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI). Los resultados muestran una contradicción: aunque el activismo estudiantil, especialmente a través de Campus Diverso, ha generado un entorno más seguro y visible en el campus, el currículo oficial sigue siendo predominantemente cisheteronormativo. El análisis del PEP y el PEI evidencia una ausencia sistemática de referencias explícitas a la diversidad de género y a las poblaciones trans. Así, la inclusión en el aula depende de un modelo de “autonomía regulada”, donde explorar la identidad de género está permitido pero no es obligatorio, recayendo la carga en las estudiantes. Entre los principales desafíos se encuentran el silencio institucional, la falta de formación docente estructurada y la persistencia de incidentes discriminatorios. Las oportunidades surgen de redes de apoyo entre pares, la sensibilidad individual del profesorado y el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras como espacio de exploración identitaria. El estudio concluye que este modelo pasivo refuerza estructuras normativas y recomienda una doble transformación: integración explícita de la diversidad de género en los documentos curriculares y formación práctica obligatoria para el profesorado.

Résumé

Cette étude de cas qualitative examine les défis et les opportunités rencontrés par une étudiante transgenre femme au sein du programme de formation des enseignants de langues

étrangères de l'Universidad del Valle à Cali, en Colombie. S'appuyant sur les principes de la théorie queer et de l'intersectionnalité, l'étude aborde la question centrale suivante : *“quels sont les défis et les opportunités pour une femme transgenre étudiante inscrite dans ce programme quant à l'expression de leur identité de genre ?”* Une étude de cas descriptive unique a été menée, combinant des entretiens semi-directifs approfondis avec une étudiante transgenre et une professeure, ainsi qu'une analyse documentaire critique du projet pédagogique du programme (PPE) et du projet pédagogique institutionnel (PPE). Les résultats révèlent une contradiction majeure. Si l'activisme étudiant, notamment à travers Campus Diverso, a favorisé un environnement plus sûr et plus visible sur le campus, le cursus officiel du programme demeure majoritairement cisgenre et hétéronormatif. L'analyse du PPE et du PPE met en évidence une absence systématique de références explicites à la diversité de genre et aux personnes transgenres. Par conséquent, l'inclusion en classe repose souvent sur un modèle d'« autonomie encadrée », où l'exploration de l'identité de genre est permise mais non obligatoire, faisant peser la responsabilité du plaidoyer sur les étudiantes. Parmi les principaux défis relevés figurent le silence institutionnel, l'absence de formation structurée des enseignants sur la diversité de genre et la persistance d'incidents discriminatoires. Des opportunités émergent grâce aux réseaux de soutien entre pairs, à la sensibilité individuelle des enseignants et au potentiel unique de l'apprentissage des langues étrangères comme espace d'exploration identitaire. L'étude conclut que l'adhésion actuelle du programme à un modèle d'inclusion passif et fondé sur le choix renforce en fin de compte les structures normatives. Elle recommande une double transformation : l'intégration explicite de la diversité de genre dans les documents curriculaires et une formation pratique obligatoire pour les enseignants afin de permettre une inclusion pédagogique active.

1. Introduction

1.1 Chapter overview

The present study investigated the challenges and opportunities there are for one trans woman student in a Bachelor's degree in Language teaching to express their gender identity in a public university in Colombia. To do this, it investigated the students' and professors' perceptions regarding the gender diversity in the program, more specifically regarding the experience of one trans woman student, as well as the curriculum active in the program. In this chapter, we describe the context, the research problem, and research questions, as well as highlighting the contributions of the current investigation to the field of language teaching in a local and national context.

1.2 Trans women in education

While global LGBTQ+ visibility has increased, trans and gender non-conforming identities remain marginalized. In Colombia, this visibility is supported by legislative actions like the constitutional right to same-sex marriage (Corte Constitucional de Colombia, 2016) and national laws that penalize discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2011). These legal frameworks are key elements that enable non-heteronormative people to participate in a community, such as the city of Cali, in a safer and more dignified way.

However, this progress has not been translated equitably for trans women, in contexts such as families, healthcare spaces, law enforcement (Beltrán, 2020), and particularly in educational spaces where classrooms, EFL classrooms, often reproduce and reinforce heteronormative curricula and pedagogies that tend to erase their lived experiences. In Paiz's words: "Full engagement with transgender issues and creating trans inclusive classroom spaces remains a massive area of opportunity for ELT in general, and for queer informed approaches to the field more specifically."

This lack of visibility has been reinforced in academia, as research on queering education reduces LGBTQ+ inclusion to only gay/lesbian contents and narratives, leaving Trans, Gender Non Conforming, Bisexual, and others' identities aside. (Paiz, 2020). A practice also reproduced in what would be thought of as safe queer spaces as this "LGBTQ+ safety" will often end up leaving aside these identities as well (Levin, 2018).

To add to this, research in Latin America surrounding trans identities seldom focuses on their lived experiences in EFL classrooms. Studies in the region have addressed trans rights in healthcare and sex work-related topics (Sevelius et al., 2024; Souza & Tanaka, 2022), leaving higher education experiences, and more specifically experiences in EFL classrooms, underexplored. This gap reproduces a cycle of invisibility in which curricula are often used only to depict cisheteronormative realities. By centering trans women's voices in a public university in Cali, this study gives an insight into what the lived experiences are inside higher education spaces and EFL classrooms, and how these spaces reinforce or deny trans identities.

1.3 Description of the context and research problem

The study was conducted at the Universidad del Valle, where the Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages (English and French) is offered. Despite legal advances as those mentioned in the chapter prior, towards a more gender inclusive and diverse society, and the perceived safe environment at the Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje at Universidad del Valle, the curriculum and pedagogical practices of the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program remain predominantly cisheteronormative. Previous research (Galíndez & Mejía Blandón, 2024; González Orozco, 2024) has identified a systematic exclusion of LGBTQ+ content, a lack of teacher training on gender diversity, and an absence of these perspectives related to gender. This institutional erasure marginalizes gender diverse students, fails to prepare future teachers for diverse classrooms, and contradicts the program's apparent atmosphere of inclusivity. Consequently, there is an urgent need to center the experiences of trans women to critically assess and transform the curriculum, ensuring it truly supports and reflects all gender identities.

1.4 Research questions

1.4.1 Main research question

What are the challenges and opportunities to express gender identity for one trans woman student in the program to perform their gender identities?

1.4.2 Specific research question

- How does the Program support or discourage the inclusion for a trans woman student?
- And how does she perceive inclusion, or exclusion, in these academic context? (Semi-structured in-depth interviews)
- To what extent does the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program's curriculum at Universidad del Valle strengthen or constrain their identities?
- What are a teacher's experience and actions to enhance gender diversity in the language education program?

1.5 Contribution of the study

The present study makes contributions to two interrelated fields that will be presented separately, acknowledging their intrinsic connection.

In the first place, this study provides a nuanced, contextualized contribution to Foreign Language Teacher Education (FLTE). By conducting a deep qualitative analysis of a single case, it moves beyond identifying general barriers to reveal the precise, lived mechanisms through which a specific program's curriculum, pedagogical practices, and institutional culture can either constrain or affirm a trans student's identity by triangulating the experiences of both teacher and student as a way to analyze the curriculum's awareness and behavior towards trans students. The study also contributes to queer the curriculum, as it addresses critical gaps in teachers' preparedness in this academic context at Universidad del Valle.

In second place, the research gives space to institutional accountability in regards to gender diversity in higher education, and more importantly it generates a social impact in the program's curriculum by bringing the experiences of an individual trans woman's educational narrative within a Latin American university setting, countering the systemic erasure in academic discourse. With this in mind, the research provides an analysis of how institutional policies, or lack of, and social day-to-day interactions inside the classrooms, either with teachers or fellow classmates, have an impact in a trans person's educational experience in higher education. By doing so, the study brings the conversation into the spotlight and advocates for a program that actively encourages their trans students in their educational journeys.

In conclusion, the study makes a contribution to making the academic processes less troublesome for transgender folks in academic spaces such as the program of Foreign Languages, as they are as capable and deserving of it as cisgender students.

1.6 Thesis organizer

This thesis is organized into 7 chapters, where *Chapter 1: Introduction* introduces the research topic, the context, the relevance, and its significance of the study. Then, *Chapter 2: Literature Review* reviews the empirical research, summarizes relevant local, national and international studies regarding the inclusion of Trans women in the fields of Language Teaching. Afterwards, *Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework*, delves into the theories and lenses used for the development of the study (Intersectionality, Queer theory), as well as the terms and concepts that work as the backbone for it, such as Gender performativity, Gender identity in Language learning, and Aesthetics. After that, *Chapter 4: Methodology* introduces the research design, participants, data collection methods, and practices done for assuring ethical validity and reliability. *Chapter 5: Findings* discloses the results found according to our specific research questions. Following that, *Chapter 6: Discussions* interprets and discusses the study results, as well as pondering on their significance and pertinence with regard to the already existing research in the field explored in the Literature Review. Finally, *Chapter 7: Conclusions* presents the final key findings, discussing their importance, and offering recommendations for further research in the field.

2. Literature review

2.1 Chapter overview

This chapter maps the existing literature regarding gender diversity in language education. It details the process done for the literature search before synthesizing the texts collected, presented from a global to a local scope. In its review, the studies reveal a lack of teacher preparation, an institutional resistance to more inclusive practices, and a systemic exclusion of transgender identities inside Foreign Language Education. As the chapter concludes with local studies from the Foreign Languages Program at Universidad del Valle itself, this chapter establishes the distinct research gap that the present study aims to address: the lack of focused inquiry into the lived educational experiences of trans women within a Foreign Language Teaching program in a public university in Colombia.

2.2 Process

Gender diversity is a topic that has been explored through different scopes throughout academia, mostly in medical, sociological, or sports-related fields. However, they often focus on identities like gays and lesbians, leaving aside the realities of multiple others, like one trans woman studying in a foreign language teacher education program.

When it comes to studying gender diversity concerning education, it often replicates this practice of ignoring trans identities entirely. Proof of this is my own experience searching for previous work around Trans Women in Higher Education, where only a short number of the refined search results were connected to both Trans Women and Higher Education spaces.

The academic literature from 2015 to 2025 was reviewed in three databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Figure 1 shows the descriptors used in English:

Search Descriptors Used Across Databases

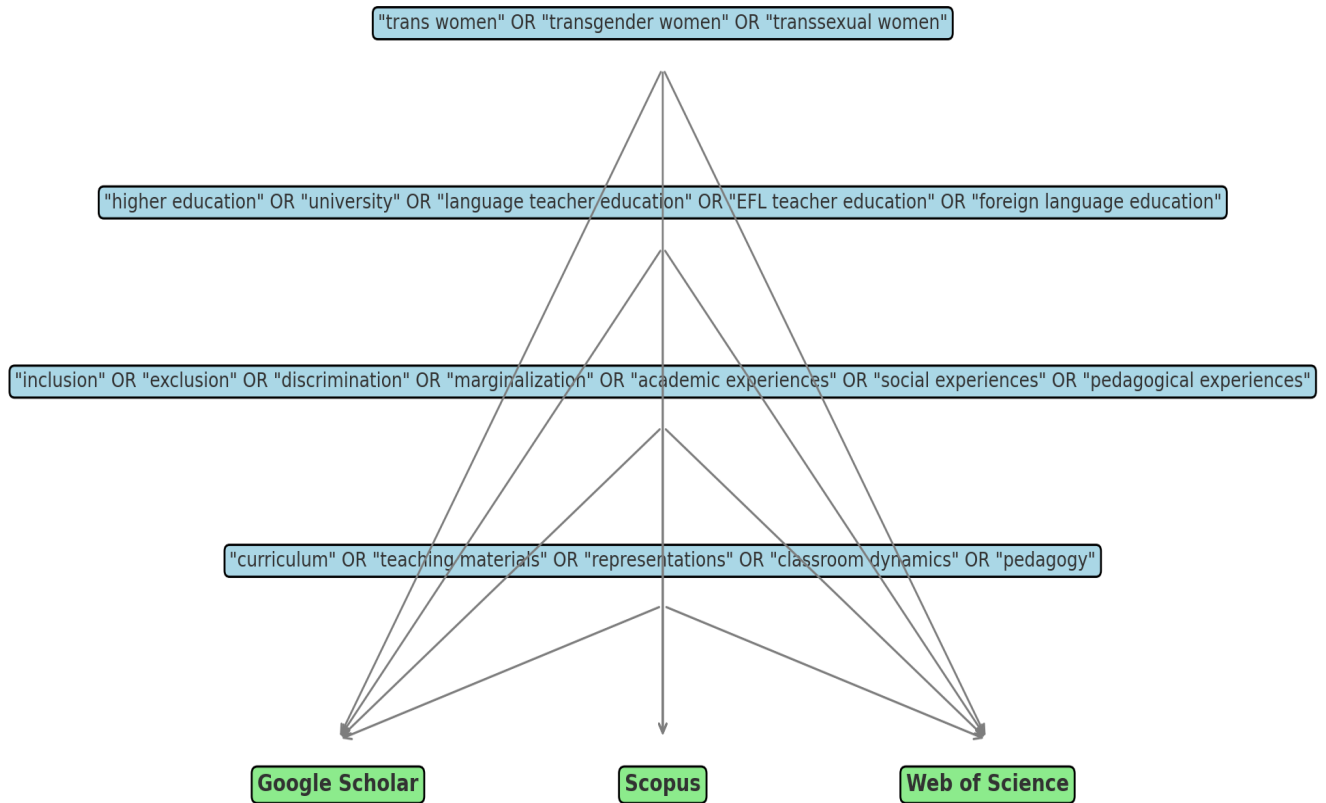


Figure 1: *Descriptors used in the academic search databases.*

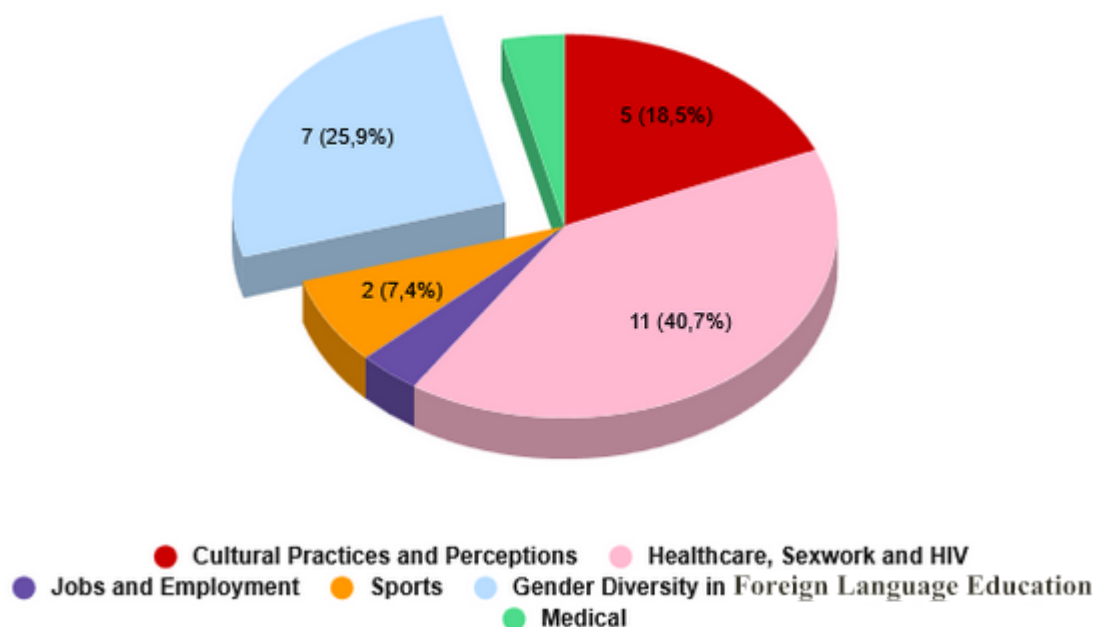
Own elaboration

This search yielded 41 texts, including academic articles and book chapters. As no duplicates were found, there was no need to extract any for that reason. However, six texts from Scopus and seven from Google Scholar were excluded because they were not open-access. Subsequently, the abstracts of each were reviewed to determine whether they addressed or were related to the research objectives.

This literature review had to widen its initial scope of Trans Women in Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education spaces to Gender Diversity in Foreign Language Teaching in general, due to the nature of the findings (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Results of topics of studies found related to trans women in education



Note: *The author's.*

The studies are presented and organized from a global to a local perspective.

2.3 Global

To structure this review, the literature is organized into three scales: Global, International, and Local. It is important to clarify the difference between the first two as “Global” refers to large-scale analyses and discussions that look at widespread trends, systems, or forces affecting English Language Teaching (ELT) and gender inclusion across the world, often without focusing on a single country. These studies talk about broad patterns, like how entire curricula or the global publishing industry operate. In contrast, the “International” scale presents specific research studies carried out in one or several particular countries, by presenting concrete examples of how these tendencies and obstacles are found in actual classrooms in different nations. By doing this, the review goes from the general

conversation and big picture, to the manifestations of these trends, ending up with local studies done both in Cali, and at the Universidad del Valle.

Starting with, Gray (2024) did a critical literature review on the systematic erasure of transgender inclusion in ELT's curricula globally, while focusing on how this is linked to sociopolitical factors such as neoliberalism. With this investigation, Gray presents three important results for the current study, which are: Curriculum Exclusion: Curricula and ELT materials globally systemically erase the existence of trans identities entirely. This exclusion might be fault of commercial interests to fit into more hetero-normative and socially acceptable contents; Lack of Teacher Preparation: There is a big lack of training on gender diversity, and even a bigger one when it comes to transgender inclusion, which often perpetuates the erasure of their realities inside the classrooms; Institutional Resistance: The fear of social consequences because of the inclusion of different identities from the hetero-normative ones.

Similar are the findings discovered by Viana and O'Boyle (2023), where they compile practical lesson plans and research outcomes from the international *Gender-ing ELT* project, which took place in ten different countries, Colombia being one of them. The project followed a qualitative methodology alongside Participatory action research, where Teachers designed and implemented gender-focused lessons, reflecting on their efficacy for further analysis of teacher-submitted lesson plans, interviews, and questionnaires.

This text addresses, as its main objective, the lack of gender-focused materials for English Language Teaching (ELT) through different lesson plans and content. While the book focuses broadly on gender equality, Lesson 21 is the only one that explicitly addresses transgender women's rights in sports, critiquing exclusionary policies and advocating for inclusive frameworks. Apart from this, trans issues are not explored deeper or related to educational contexts.

As I mentioned, the findings were compatible with Gray's (2024) as teachers reported a lack of gender-inclusive materials and institutional support, requiring them to create resources

from zero. Also, the book shows the curriculum's exclusion of trans realities, when only one of forty lesson plans had any direct link with transgender issues.

These two studies provide a general global image of how the topic of gender diversity, hopefully transgender issues, has been explored in educational spaces. Next, I will present the international studies that fit this criterion.

2.4 International

To begin, three studies really exemplify the erasure of Trans Realities from the educational system and spaces.

Firstly, Di Stefano, Almazán-Vázquez, Yepes-Amaya, and Britton (2021) made a journal article titled “Tu lucha es mi lucha”: Teaching Spanish Through an Equity and Social Justice Lens; in here they intended to develop and implement a social justice-oriented Spanish curriculum to challenge stereotypes related to Latiné identities like gender, race, language, immigration and nationality in a graduate course at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and two secondary schools in Vermont and Massachusetts. It was done through Participatory Action Research, collaborative self-study, and most importantly, Critical Pedagogy around lesson plans, curricular units, and multimedia texts used. They found that through this practice, the students’ intersectional identities were reaffirmed using authentic materials that expressed this seek for equity. Also, more related to gender, there was an introduction on non-gendered pronouns that disrupt gendered binaries like *elle/elles* in Spanish that foster inclusivity of Gender Non Conforming identities.

Through engagement in these processes, the researchers propose inclusive terminology that teachers can introduce in post-secondary settings. In particular, they advocate for the use of the term “Latiné” as an inclusive adjective or noun to refer to cisgender women and men, transgender women and men, and LGBTQ community members from Latin American roots. This study, although it intends to explore equity inside Spanish as foreign language classrooms, reproduces the perpetual exclusion of trans realities when the only mention of

them is the collective use of Latiné for including all identities, without stopping to think about the issues each group lives through on a day-to-day basis.

In second place, Benrebiha and Ternoukhi (2020), in their Master's Thesis, had as their main goal to examine gender representation in Algerian second-generation EFL textbooks for third-year middle school students *My Book of English* using critical discourse analysis. Through their meticulous exploration of this book, they found that there are big stereotypes being reproduced in how it portrays women and men. These stereotypes go from: Occupational roles (Men as doctors, scientists, leaders; Women as nurses, caregivers, cooking); Adjectives used (Women described as "patient," "sociable"; men as "intelligent," "powerful.") and Visibility, where men's portraits outnumbered women's in texts and visuals (e.g., 4:1 ratio in historical figures).

Most relevant for the current study, they found that there was a big exclusion of non-normative Algerian identities because Saharan women were often highlighted, but northern Algerian women, non-binary identities were omitted.

This mirrors the exclusion of non-normative identities from the classrooms, as they often reproduce the gender stereotypes and biases that make it harder for LGBTQ+ students to feel safe in these spaces. Not only did the book perpetuate this binary idea of gender, but it also erased the existence of transgender identities.

Thirdly, Méndez López y Peña Aguilar (2023) published a book named *Inclusión, Equidad y Calidad en la Enseñanza de Lenguas*, which is the result of the collaborative effort among academics from various Mexican universities, aiming to share scholarly work on language teaching, research, and translation in both modern and indigenous languages. Relevant for the current study is Chapter 4, "Japanese Women's Language in Social Media" by Marcela Salgado Mercado.

The study aimed to analyze the use of joseigo (Japanese women's language) by cisgender and transgender Japanese women on Twitter. It focused on lexical features to determine how

femininity is indexed linguistically and whether trans women consciously adopt jouseigo to align with societal gender norms, enacting their gender through language, according to Butler (1999). For this objective, she collected twitter posts from minor celebrity users based in Japan (10 Japanese women (5 cisgender, 5 transgender/transsexual)) to see what was the frequency of these jouseigo features. The data collected and its analysis showed that both, cisgender and transgender women, reflected societal pressure to conform to gender norms to project femininity by using jouseigo.

So, even though the study focuses on Japanese twitter users, its insights into gendered language pressures and identity performance are broadly relevant to understanding trans students' experiences in educational contexts, particularly in language-teacher programs. Because, just like trans women use jouseigo to "pass," trans students might adapt to hetero-normative curricula, highlighting the need for trans including and accepting content.

Now, going back to educational spaces, Ellis, M. (2019) shared in this conference paper published in Diversity and Inclusion, the experience of implementing queer materials, in this case surrounding Drag and an episode of the show Rupaul's Drag Race, in a Japanese high school EFL context to promote awareness of gender diversity and challenge traditional gender norms. The sample was 198 Japanese high school EFL students (1st-year: 23; 3rd-year: 86) of whom 109 students (55% of the total) self-selected to watch Drag Race; others chose alternative videos. This case study follows a mixed-method approach with a central focus on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that compiled a pre-viewing true/false questionnaire to assess myths about drag, a minilecture on drag culture, the viewing of the episode of the show, and finally the Post-viewing survey.

As a result, Ellis identified systemic gaps in LGBT representation in educational materials and tried to solve this lack with the implementation of drag culture. Also, when it comes to the students, they show to have a more nuanced understanding of gender as performative and as a social construct. And most importantly, there were long-term impacts due to it, such as parental discussions, a student coming out, and a thesis project interviewing a drag activist.

This study highlights how LGBTQ+ inclusive content, in this case drag, fosters safe spaces and encourages marginalized students to engage openly. The biggest example is the coming out of a student, showing that safe spaces allow students to grow and be their better selves inside the class. This mirrors the need to explore how trans women perceive safety and representation in the educational spaces in Cali, Colombia.

Lastly, Coghill-Behrends' (2019) PhD dissertation from the University of Iowa explores how high school foreign language teachers interpret and integrate LGBTQ identities and queer-inclusive practices inside their classrooms. The methodology of the study was centered around Seidman's (2013) three-interview protocol, with three interviews per participant that focused on experiences, curriculum review, barriers/supports. Beside the interviews, the curriculum and the district climate survey data were analyzed through thematic coding. By doing so, the study delves into the experiences of seven teachers, making emphasis in the challenges and supports they have encountered while advocating for more inclusive educational spaces inside their own classrooms. After analyzing the results, it was shown that there were two clear barriers when trying to approach gender inclusion in the classroom: Institutional Resistance and Lack of trans inclusive materials and teacher training, mirroring Gray's (2024) findings.

The thesis identified gaps in teacher training and curriculum materials regarding LGBTQ issues in a Midwestern U.S. school district. Gaps and challenges that might be present also in our context here in Cali, Colombia.

2.5 Local

When it comes to Cali, two studies have explored higher education curricula and gender diversity inclusion (Galíndez & Mejía Blandón, 2024, and González Orozco, 2024). These studies work as the backbone of this study since they focused on examining how the Foreign Languages Program (FLP) at Universidad del Valle supports (or fails to support) the identity development of first-year and third-year, respectively, LGBTQ+ students. Both followed a qualitative case study approach with two important moments: the Document analysis of the

PEP (2018) and 35 syllabi from English courses (2018–2023), and the Semi-Structured Interviews with 5 LGBTQ+ students. First, regarding the document analysis, there was no explicit mention of LGBTQ+ populations in the PEP, showing that the inclusion of gender diversity is superficial, as well as the syllabi analyzed, where only 2/35 syllabi referenced LGBTQ+ topics (e.g., a transgender documentary), leaving the inclusion to students' choice as students were voting and selecting the topics in class. Now, regarding the interviews, students expressed both positive factors (e.g., Peer solidarity and extracurricular activities (e.g., queer film forums)) and also exclusionary practices (e.g., lack of teacher training on LGBTQ+ issues and absence of trans specific content in materials.)

The monographs identify systematic exclusion of LGBTQ+ students, the FLP's hetero-normative curriculum, and the lack of teacher training. And, although this is not trans specific, it mirrors barriers trans women may face in academic/social contexts as teaching materials and methodologies largely ignore non-hegemonic gender identities.

Based on this research and seeing what concepts were central to most of them, next will be presented the theoretical framework used in the current study.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter delineates the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of this study. This framework provides the analytical lenses needed to analyse how identity, power, and social structures intersect inside educational spaces, by being structured around two main theories: Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2020) and Queer Theory (flores, 2019). This gives space to examine how the overlapping systems of oppression and normative regimes shape the educational environment for trans women inside a Foreign Language Education program such as the one at Universidad del Valle. To complement the two theories, the concepts of Gender Performativity (Butler, 1990), which elucidates the daily enactment and policing of gender, and Aesthetics (Preciado, 2022), which questions the sensorial and cultural norms that render certain bodies invisible, are present in the framework as well. Lastly, Norton's (2013) concept of investment is incorporated to specifically analyze how trans women's agency and engagement with the language learning process are influenced by the program's recognition or erasure of their identities. Collectively, this framework provides the tools to critically analyze how the Foreign Languages Program at Universidad del Valle can act as a site that either constrains or affirms transgender folks' gender identities, thereby directly informing the study's pursuit of curricular transformation.

3.2 Intersectionality

In the first place, Intersectionality as theoretical framework and analytical tool analyzes how different aspects related to identity and their social effects, such as race, gender, sexuality, social class, ability, age, mother tongue (Gee, 2010), migration status and others, overlay themselves, interacting, transforming and molding to bring forth experiences of oppression, discrimination, or privilege and comfort, that are rather unique.

The term was originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), to describe the specific and unique marginalizations black women were subjected to, focusing on the North American

legislation, where these women's experiences were "erased". Intersectionality theory criticizes approaches where these categories of subordination are seen as independent and mutually exclusive. In Crenshaw's words (1989), the "intersectional experience is bigger than just the sum of racism and sexism". (p. 140) meaning that the interactions between these social systems bring forth unique and different forms of subordination that cannot be analyzed separately.

According to this, Collins & Bilge (2020) argue that intersectionality is part of *critical investigation* as it aims to question not only knowledge itself, but the power structures that produce it. Also, they state that it is a *critical practice* because it guides the research in pro of social justice through the socially constructed knowledge in it.

3.3 Queer Theory

This is a framework that started to take shape around the early 1990s, coming out of post-structuralism and also feminist theory, and at the beginning it was mostly concerned with questioning the fixed categories we use to talk about sexuality, like gay, straight, bisexual, and so on (Hall & Jagose, 2013). But over time, it grew into something broader. It is not just about sexuality anymore, or not only about that. It became a way to question the whole system of how we categorize identities in general, and also how normativity works, and how power operates through all of that. What Queer Theory does, basically, is to take things that we assume are natural, normal, just the way things are, and it pulls them apart to show that they are not natural at all. They were constructed, and they were constructed in a way that benefits some people and excludes others. So when Warner (1991) or Butler (2006) talk about denaturalizing the cis-heteropatriarchal order, what they mean is that we have to question the whole structure that decides, without ever saying it aloud, who counts as a normal human being inside the institutions we all live in.

And this is not just an abstract intellectual exercise. It is not just about theory for the sake of theory. It is a tool, a practical one, for dismantling heteronormativity. Because when you look closely at institutions, universities, schools, hospitals, you start to see that many of

them say they are inclusive, they say they welcome everyone, but underneath all that language, they are still organized around the same old power structures. So they end up marginalizing people who do not fit, people like trans women, and they end up depriving them of things that should be rights, like education, like healthcare, without ever having to say that is what they are doing.

To give a concrete example of this, flores (2019) talks about how in schools, the simple act of correcting a boy for walking or speaking in a way that is considered feminine is not just a casual comment, it is a way that the institution reinforces, without ever writing it in any manual, that there is only one correct way to be a man and that any deviation from that norm is something that needs to be fixed. So the school does not have to say out loud that it excludes gender non-conforming students, it just does it through these small, repeated acts of correction and disapproval that happen every day in the classroom and in the hallways, and the result is that those students learn that they do not belong, that their way of being is wrong, and many of them end up leaving school or being pushed out without ever having been explicitly told that they were not welcome.

Another example that flores¹ gives is about how the curriculum itself, in universities and in schools, assumes a certain kind of student, a student who is heterosexual, who is cisgender, who comes from a certain background, and it organizes all of the knowledge around that assumption. So when a class talks about family, it talks about mom and dad and children, when it talks about love, it talks about romantic relationships between men and women, when it talks about history, it leaves out the contributions of people who were not heterosexual or who did not fit the gender norms of their time. And this is not an accident, it is not just that they forgot to include those perspectives, it is that the whole structure of what counts as knowledge is built on the exclusion of people who are not normative. So trans students and queer students sit in those classrooms and they hear about a world that does not include them, and the institution never has to say a word about it, it just happens through the silence, through what is not said, through what is never questioned.

¹ The author val flores makes uses of no capitalization letters in her name as a mean to subvert grammatical and patriarchal hierarchies related to academic ego. With this in mind, she's referenced in this manner throughout this research.

An adaptation of this theory is what we can find in the Latin-American context, where Queer Theory assumes distinct dimensions, often intertwining with more decolonial, anti-racist, and feminist thoughts to correctly address the specific historical and social realities that the region has. For example, the Argentinian scholar, flores has contributed significantly to this dialogue by applying Queer Theory fundamental ideas into pedagogic spaces, generating the concept of a “pedagogia marica” (queer pedagogy) that goes against the naturalization of heterosexuality, the heteronorm from the educational and academic fields (flores, v, 2017).

Also, flores puts in the spotlight the normative and hegemonic discourses used by the feminist movement in Argentina and in Latin America in general, which tend to leave aside identities aside from what they consider “woman”, silencing the experiences of lesbians, and also transgender women.

3.4 Gender performativity

Regarding the concepts, on the one hand, we have Gender Performativity, as theorized by Judith Butler (1990). It challenges the idea that gender is a fixed, biological, inherent identity. Instead, Butler argues that gender is constructed through repeated actions, behaviors, and linguistic practices that create the illusion of a natural category such as gender. These performances are not freely chosen but are enforced and regulated by societal norms, institutions, and power structures.

The concept emphasizes that gender is not something one *is* but something one *does*, through daily repetition. Butler’s theory also shows how institutions, such as education, police these performances, rewarding those who stay inside the norm, be it cisgender, heterosexual, white, etc... while punishing deviations, be it transgender, homosexual, BIPOC, etc... This system maintains the dominance of cisheteronormativity by naturalizing certain identities while pathologizing others.

However, gender performativity also opens possibilities for resistance as trans individuals consciously disrupt gender norms, through different semiotic instances like language, clothing, among others, they reveal the instability of these categories.

3.5 Language, identity and gender.

Finally, and with more relation with the scope of this present investigation, the work of Norton and Toohey (2011) on identity and language learning brings an intersectional lens directly into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. They argue that poststructuralist theories of identity and power are crucial for understanding the language learning process, contending that a learner's investment, in the sense of the payoff that one expects for one's effort in a language, is shaped by their complex and changing social identities. From this perspective, an EFL classroom is not a neutral space but a social context where power relations based on race, gender, class, and sexuality converge. To further understand the relationship between identity and language learning for trans women within the Foreign Language Teacher Education Program at Universidad del Valle, this study also draws on Bonny Norton's concept of investment (Norton, 2013). This framework helps to explore not only *whether* trans students are motivated, but also why and how they feel encouraged or discouraged from the process of language acquisition and teacher training.

Norton (2013) argues that investment differs from motivation in that it is deeply sociological in nature, as a student's investment in learning a language is influenced by their perception of the cultural capital they can gain, such as educational recognition, professional opportunities, and social legitimacy. There is also this idea, that comes from Norton and Toohey, about investment. It is not exactly the same as motivation. Motivation is more about wanting to learn, but investment has to do with how much of yourself you are willing to put into learning a language, and that depends a lot on whether you feel like you belong to the community that speaks that language, the community you are trying to enter through the

words you learn.

In the case of this study, what happens is that for trans women, their investment in the program, in becoming language teachers, is deeply connected to whether the environment where they are studying tells them that who they are is valid or tells them, without saying it directly, that they do not belong. When the curriculum never mentions anything outside of the cisnormative experience, when the reading materials only show men and women in very traditional roles, when teachers avoid the topic or do not know how to use inclusive pronouns, all of that sends a message. It is not that the program is openly attacking trans students, but it is refusing to see them. It is erasing them from the page, from the conversation, from the example sentences. And that erasure, even when it is quiet, makes a student feel like she is studying in a place that was not built for her. She might still want to learn English or French, she might still want to become a teacher, but the program itself starts to feel distant, foreign, like something she has to survive more than something she belongs to, that is disinvestment.

But when things are different, when a teacher takes the time to ask for pronouns and actually uses them, when a textbook is put aside and the teacher brings in a text that talks about a trans experience, when a classroom discussion opens space to question why we assume there are only two genders, that changes everything. It does not have to be a whole course about gender diversity, it can be small things, but those small things tell the student that she exists here, that her life is not outside the limits of what is considered academic, that she can bring herself into the room and not have to leave parts of her identity at the door. And when that happens, her investment grows, not just in the language but in the program, in her future as a teacher, in the profession itself. Because she starts to see herself in it. These practices signal that the program values trans identities as integral to the learning community, thereby encouraging fuller participation and engagement.

In this way, Norton's framework helps illuminate how the micro-dynamics of the classroom and curriculum influence trans women's educational trajectories. It complements the macro-level analyses of Queer Theory and Intersectionality by focusing on the individual and collective agency of students as they navigate, resist, and invest in their language learning and teacher training personal journeys.

3.6 Aesthetics

According to Paul Preciado (2022), an aesthetic is related to “the structure of perception, and the configuration of a shared sensitive experience [...] it implies a specific way of dwelling in the sensorial world, a regulation that is both social and political in all senses: sight, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting and the sensory-motor perception” (p. 42). That is, aesthetics are the sensorial, but also cultural, products of that which is audible and inaudible, of that which is visible and invisible, of that which is tangible and intangible inside a social reality. In Preciado's words, aesthetics are “the technology of producing culturally constructed consciences, the result of a community both human and not human. Therefore, an aesthetic is a shared sensorial world, and also a subjective consciousness capable of decoding it and understanding it.” (p. 42.). *own translation.*

This concept is of high importance for the study because it puts in question what is perceived, that which makes part of the social collective, that which composes the Aesthetics. Showing how the cis-hetero norms are perceived and made to seem natural, while others are left outside of the Aesthetics, as is the case with trans folks in educational systems such as higher education.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter explains how the research was carried out. It begins by describing the overall approach, which is qualitative, because the goal was to understand the personal experiences and stories of one trans woman student, not to collect numbers or statistics. Next, it presents how participants, for both interviews, were chosen and why semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data, how they were conducted, and respective translation for its analysis. The chapter then details the ethical considerations that took place to make sure the information recollected, and its analysis through themes, were reliable.

4.2 Research design

This study was guided by a qualitative research perspective, which means that it is inductive, interpretive, and flexible in its design. The focus here is on reconstructing the meanings people construct from their own experiences inside specific contexts, as Aspers and Corte (2019) explain. Following what Creswell and Creswell (2018) propose about social constructivism, this perspective allowed the research to go deep into the complex and layered realities that trans women navigate inside the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program at Universidad del Valle.

More specifically, the investigation adopted a single descriptive case study design, based on Yin (2014). According to Yin, a case study is useful when you want to examine a contemporary phenomenon inside its real-life context, especially when it is hard to tell where the phenomenon ends and the context begins. In this research, the case that was studied is precisely that: the experiences, challenges, and opportunities that trans women students encounter when expressing and performing their gender identities inside the Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en Inglés y Francés, which is part of the Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje at Universidad del Valle, in Cali, Colombia. This design was a good fit because the program functions as a bounded case, meaning that the experiences of trans women cannot really be separated from the institutional environment,

the curriculum, the teachers, and the everyday campus culture. A descriptive approach was useful here because it allowed the study to develop a holistic and in-depth understanding of everything that is happening in this particular context, without trying to generalize the findings to other places. This study does not pretend that what was found here is exactly the same in other places or that it can be applied to every context. The intention was always to describe in detail, and from the inside, how things actually work inside this specific program, at this particular university, and with the people who live it every day (Yin, 2014). So what the study focused on, then, was that space, that intersection, where the official documents of the institution, the decisions teachers make about their classes, the way the curriculum is structured, and the activism that students have built over time, all of that meets the daily lived experiences of trans women and the ways they have to constantly negotiate their identities, both inside the classroom and beyond it.

To make sure that the findings were solid and could be trusted, the research used two different techniques to collect information, and this also made it possible to do triangulation, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) talk about as something that helps qualitative studies be more credible and not just rely on one single source or perspective. The first technique was semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were carried out with both a trans woman student and a professor from the program. The second technique was document analysis, where the study reviewed the Program's Educational Project (PEP), the university's Institutional Educational Project (PEI), and other official documents that were relevant to understanding how the institution frames diversity and inclusion. By bringing together what people said in their interviews and what the institution said about itself in its own documents, the research was able to compare, contrast, and build a more complete picture of the dynamics at play.

4.3 Context and participants

4.3.1 Research Site

The research took place inside the Universidad del Valle, in Cali, Colombia, more specifically in the campus of Melendez, as the specific context was the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program.

4.3.2 Research participants' profiles

The participants were selected purposely (Given, 2008) to include people who could provide rich, firsthand insights with regards to the research question in hand. With this in mind, the participant group consisted of:

- One (1) trans woman currently enrolled in the program of Foreign Languages
- One (1) teacher from the program with experience teaching trans students or engaging with gender-related topics.

This dual perspective between student and teacher's perspective generates a more complete view of the case, as it enhances the weight of the data recollected by triangulating it among themselves and also with official institutional documents reviewed.

4.4 Data collection and Data analysis methods

The data in the research was collected through two primary methods that aligned with the specific research questions:

4.4.1 Instruments

4.4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

For this part of the study, interviews were carried out with trans women who were either still studying in the program or had already graduated, and also with professors who teach there. Each interview lasted around an hour or sometimes a little more, up to an hour and a half, and with the consent of each person, the conversations were recorded in audio and later transcribed exactly as they were spoken, word for word. The questions were open-ended, meaning there was no rigid script, and the idea was to let the participants speak from their own experience about several things: how they had navigated their gender identity inside the program, how they perceived the institution in terms of support or obstacles, what their experience had been with the curriculum and the materials teachers used in class, and finally, what recommendations they would give so that the program could become a more inclusive space for people like them.

It is also important to clarify that all of these interviews were conducted in Spanish, since that is the native language of the participants and also the language in which the research context unfolds on a daily basis. However, because this study is being written and presented in English, all the material that was gathered, including the direct quotes and the longer narratives that the participants shared, had to be translated. That translation work was done by the researcher herself, and she tried to be as careful as possible so that the meaning of what each person said would not get distorted, keeping the same tone, the same intention behind the words, and also the little nuances that come out naturally when somebody speaks in their own mother tongue. In this way, the study can be accessible to an academic audience that reads in English, but without losing or misrepresenting the voices of the women who participated and the context in which they originally spoke.

4.4.1.2 Institutional documents

To get a better understanding of the inclusion of gender diversity inside the program, an analysis of institutional official documents was conducted. Both the Program's Educational Project (PEP), and the larger Institutional Educational Project (PEI) were analyzed to examine to what extent does it have references either to trans relevant content or more generally to gender diversity inside their components.

4.5 Data analysis

The way the data was analyzed in this study followed a process that was qualitative, rigorous, and also iterative, which means that it was not something that happened just once in a straight line, but rather it went back and forth many times, always moving between the data and the codes and the themes that were starting to take shape and also the research questions that were guiding everything. The whole idea was to construct meaning from what the participants said and from what the documents said, but to do it in a way that stayed close to the data itself, not imposing things from the outside. To help with that, the study used thematic analysis, following what Braun and Clarke (2022) propose, and also

took some elements from Grounded Theory, especially from Saldaña (2021), because that approach allows the themes to emerge from the data instead of being decided beforehand. So it was a cyclical process, not linear, and that constant movement, that going back and forth, is what made it possible to arrive at a deep understanding that was also contextualized and, most importantly, grounded in the actual voices of the people who participated.

Now, this analysis was done in two main streams that ran more or less parallel to each other. One stream was for semi-structured interviews, and the other stream was for documentary analysis. Each of these was worked through separately at first, with their own coding and their own emerging categories. But then, after that, came a final phase where both streams were brought together, and that was the moment of triangulation and integration, where the study started to see how what came from the interviews and what came from the documents spoke to each other, sometimes in agreement, sometimes in tension, and that is where the fuller picture began to emerge.

4.5.1 Analysis of Semi-Structured Interview Data

The interview transcripts from Layra and the professor, Bosco, were analyzed through a process that unfolded in several stages. First came transcription and familiarization. Both interviews were transcribed exactly as they were spoken, in Spanish, keeping all the expressions and particular ways of speaking that each participant used. Then the researcher read the transcripts many times, over and over, until the data became familiar and initial impressions started to surface.

Next was initial coding, also called open coding. Here the researcher went through each transcript line by line and assigned codes to what the participants were saying. These codes stayed close to the data and captured concrete actions, perceptions, and experiences. A snippet of the process of initial coding is shown below to better picture how the interview was analyzed, in Figure 3:

Figure 3

Snippet of the open coding process for the interview with the student.

34	yo hacía trabajos de, yo qué sé, estábamos viendo cosas en Lingüística Aplicada, hice mi autobiografía lingüística, también hice una presentación sobre el lenguaje inclusivo, el masculino genérico, de cómo invisibiliza a las mujeres, a las personas no binarias y demás.	Ejemplos de Relacionar la Identidad propia con los Contenidos de las Clases
35	el segundo semestre, persona no binaria	Autonombramiento como persona no binaria en el segundo semestre de Lenguas
36	luego ya como en sexto yo era como con mis dudas, bueno y este nombre qué, este nombre que tengo como que no me gusta, porque yo seguía con mi nombre, pero entonces yo como que este nombre no me gusta	Disconfort con su deadname alrededor de sexto semestre
37	Digamos que yo ya lo había cambiado, digamos que era eh... no voy a decir mi nombre pero voy a dar un ejemplo. Digamos Anthony, o Alejandro, entonces yo lo acorté a Anto o Ale, porque era una manera neutral. Cuando me identifiqué como persona no binaria era como normal	Intentos y estrategias de sobrellevar el Disconfort con su deadname.
38	pero estaba aprendiendo portugués y mi nombre era chistoso en portugués porque significaba otra cosa, y yo como "ay no qué meque, a mí me encanta el portugués y yo luego presentarme en portugués y decir esta pendejada, no privo!"	La abreviación de su nombre en portugués significaba otra cosa, mas disconfort sobre el deadname.
39	entonces era como que me satisfacía entonces yo coji e hice mi camino de introspección y yo privaba por dos nombres, yo me iba a llamar Layra, ese va a ser, o bueno no sé, yo cada vez que doy una entrevista o pseudónimo digo "coloqueme Layra". Pero eso en realidad es porque ese iba a ser mi otro nombre, porque yo me iba a poner "Layra María" pero yo quería que María fuera el principal y yo dije "pues María Layra no suena, no tiene musicalidad, no tiene ritmo, no me gusta" entonces solo me dejé Layra porque quería que Layra fuera el nombre principal.	Proceso de Introspección sobre cambio de nombre, Opciones de Nombres, Razones para la decisión.
40	Y eso ya la decisión ya la tomé entre sexto y séptimo	Decisión de cambiar de nombre en Sexto o Séptimo

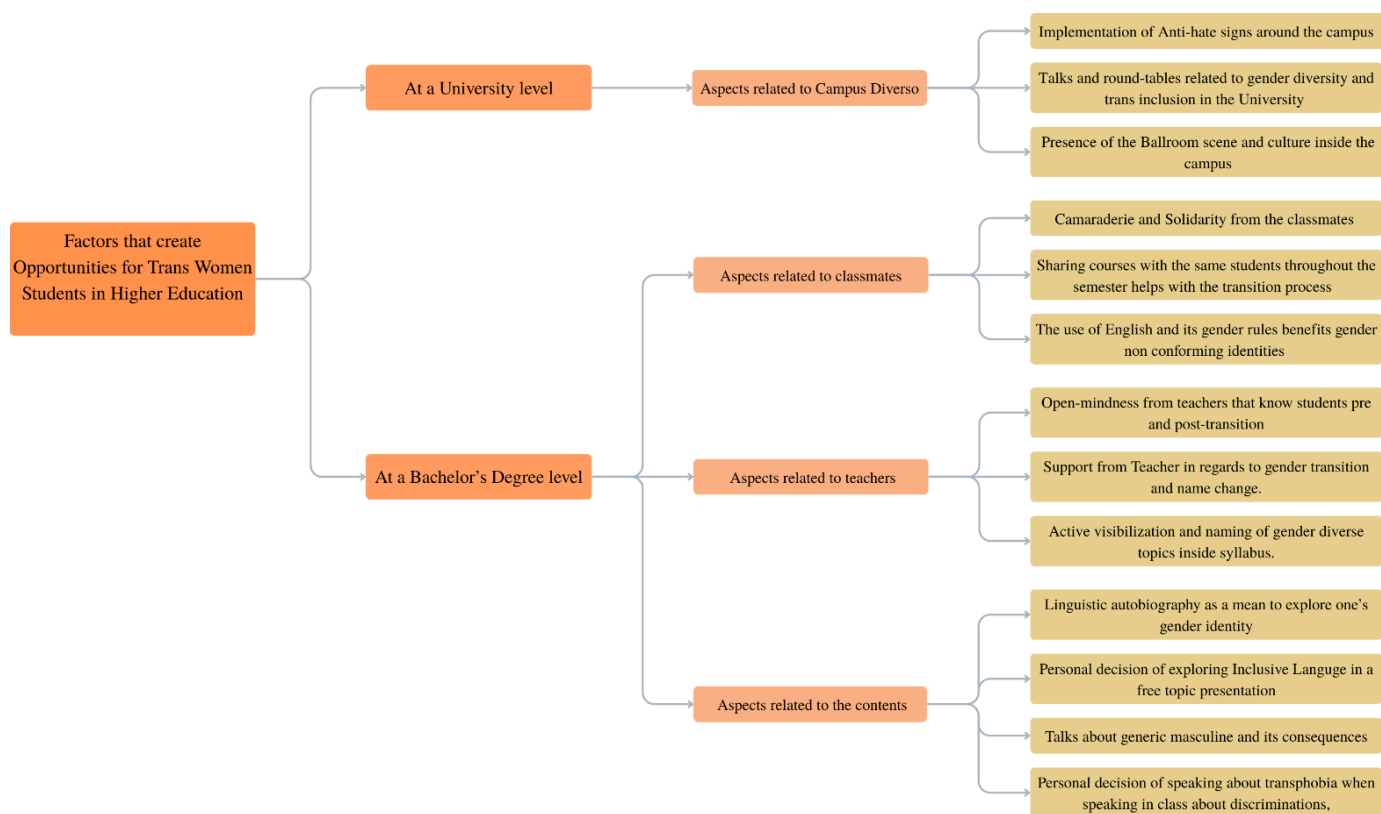
Note. The figure shows a snippet of the process of coding, more specifically the initial coding of the interview with the student. The author's.

After that came axial coding. At this stage, all the initial codes were compared and grouped together based on what they had in common. From this, broader categories began to form. For example, codes like camaraderie from classmates, sharing courses helped with transition, and using English gave freedom for gender non-conforming identities were all grouped under a category called aspects related to classmates.

Then selective coding and theme development followed. Here the categories were refined and pulled together into larger analytical themes. These themes went beyond just describing what was said, they tried to interpret what it meant. And throughout, the researcher kept going back to the transcripts to check that the themes were actually grounded in what the participants had said. One step of the theme development process is portrayed below in the Figure 4 to show part of the procedure.

Figure 4

Snippet of theme development and final selective coding.



Note. The figure shows the selective coding and theme development stage that took place for the student interview. The author's.

Finally, to make sure the analysis was reliable, two things were done. The whole process was reviewed by the research director, who looked at it from the outside. And a summary of the codes and themes was shared with Layra and Bosco so they could confirm that the interpretations matched what they had meant. That member checking was the last step in making sure the analysis stayed faithful to their voices.

4.5.2 Document Analysis

Now, for the documentary analysis, the way the PEP and the PEI were examined followed a different route than the interviews. It was more structured, a mix of deductive and inductive, because the goal was to go through these documents in a systematic way and see, with as much clarity as possible, what they actually said about gender diversity, or what they did not say.

The process began with familiarization. The documents were read several times, not just once, until the researcher understood their structure, what each section was trying to do, and the kind of language they used throughout. After that, an analytical matrix was built. This matrix was designed to guide the reading and keep it focused on the research objectives. Two central questions were placed at the core of this matrix. First, is there any explicit mention that talks about trans students or trans populations anywhere in the document? Second, is there any explicit mention or any kind of framework that addresses gender diversity or queer perspectives? These two questions were applied to each major section of both documents, the mission, the vision, the principles, the curricular strategy, everything. To better picture this, one example of the matrices that were used is presented below in the Figure 5:

Figure 5

One of the matrix used in the document analysis process

Is there any mention that explicitly talks about trans students across the components of the PEP?	No	Partially	Yes
General Aspects of the Program	x		
Purpose and Pertinence of the Program	x		
Organization and Curricular Strategy	x		
Articulation with the Environment	x		

Note. The figure shows one of the matrix used in order to analyze the official documents, more specifically the PEP. The author's

Then came the coding. Each section was examined and the researcher marked, for each question, whether the answer was yes, no, or partially. The partially category was used

when the language was ambiguous, when the document used umbrella terms like identity or diversity that could, in theory, include trans experiences but did not name them explicitly. All the excerpts that were relevant, whether they answered yes, no, or partially, were recorded in the matrix so there would be a clear record of what was found and where. A snippet of this process is pictured and showed below in Figure 6:

Figure 6

Snippet of the process of document analysis

Partial mention of Gender Diversity

22 de diciembre de 2017.

En esencia, a la perspectiva del anterior PEP, se integró la perspectiva social crítica en la formación de docentes; las pedagogías multimodales a los enfoques pedagógicos sociales y críticos, y la formación general; la resignificación de la práctica pedagógica y una visión más articulada y transversal de los diferentes componentes de la formación. A su vez, se hicieron ajustes en los objetivos específicos de la formación de licenciados en lenguas extranjeras, el perfil de egreso y el perfil ocupacional, y unos ajustes menores que propiciaron la creación de otros espacios de la formación representados en nuevas asignaturas. Estos cambios se socializaron con los estudiantes y profesores del Programa, lo que permitió enriquecer la propuesta pedagógica.

El Programa Académico basa su formación de docentes en perspectivas en las que se interrelacionan enfoques constructivistas, sociocríticos y reflexivos para la formación en lenguas extranjeras, fundamentación lingüística, investigación, pedagogía y didáctica de las lenguas extranjeras y en la formación general, enfoques que se orientan de manera transversal y a través de componentes específicos agrupados en asignaturas y actividades extracurriculares.

Segun el texto, desde la actualizacion se empezó a practicar mas con una perspectiva social critica. Veremos qué se refieren con eso.

General mention of Culture

1 CARACTERÍSTICAS GENERALES DEL PROGRAMA

1.1 Aspectos contextuales

1 Programa Académico Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés y en Francés Inscrito a la Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje de la Facultad de Humanidades de la Universidad del Valle se desarrolla en la sede Campus Meléndez de la ciudad de Cali y busca contribuir a su contexto social mediante la formación de profesionales preparados para enseñar inglés y francés como lenguas extranjeras y brindar soluciones en el campo de la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras. De esta manera, el graduado del Programa aporta al contexto político y cultural en la medida en que forma maestros para la educación básica y media, que contribuyen a la construcción de una sociedad culturalmente diversa y multilingüe.

1 ejercicio del profesional en la enseñanza del inglés y del francés como lenguas extranjeras es relevante para la sociedad contemporánea al encontrarse capacitado para enseñar inglés y francés para la promoción de la diversidad cultural, el multilingüismo, la conciencia intercultural, la democracia y la equidad en su entorno.

1.4 Justificación del Programa

La Escuela de Ciencias del Lenguaje de la Facultad de Humanidades de la Universidad del Valle ha definido su misión en torno a dos ejes que vinculan la necesidad de ofrecer una formación de licenciados en lenguas extranjeras:

- El estudio del lenguaje como fenómeno sociocultural, sistema de comunicación y medio de construcción y expresión de identidad y de conocimiento.
- La formación de un profesional en lengua materna y en lenguas extranjeras capaz de desempeñarse en la docencia y la investigación con proyección social.

Nuestros egresados cubren una demanda creciente de docentes de lenguas extranjeras en el medio que surge de la necesidad de promoción del aprendizaje de las lenguas como pilares para los procesos de internacionalización de las instituciones, el intercambio de bienes, servicios, conocimientos científicos y capitales culturales en un mundo globalizado. Estas tendencias crecientes, con políticas, planes y programas a nivel nacional, regional y local, justifican la pertinencia de una formación de licenciados en lenguas extranjeras que es incluso insuficiente para atender estas demandas, pero que reflejan el profesionalismo de nuestros egresados y la calidad de la formación que el Programa ofrece.

El Programa, también plantea su pertinencia social desde la necesidad de instalar el aprendizaje de las lenguas extranjeras como una estrategia de promoción de la diversidad cultural y lingüística y desde la necesidad de construir una sociedad más equitativa y democrática desde consensos construidos desde la colectividad que suponen la materialización de nuevas formas de realización

Modelo de Formación de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés y en Francés

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graph TD
    A[Modelo de Formación de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés y en Francés] --> B[Enfoque Constructivista Social  
La interacción con otros miembros del grupo social es la base del desarrollo del individuo]
    A --> C[Enfoque Reflexivo]
    A --> D[Enfoque Social Crítico]
    
    B --> B1[Principios Pedagógicos Constructivistas]
    B --> B2[Principios Pedagógicos Sociales]
    
    B1 --> B1a[Necesidad de estabilidad y modificación para nuevos aprendizajes]
    B1 --> B1b[Construcción identitaria (individual) del aprendizaje]
    B1 --> B1c[Comprensión del aprendizaje significativo]
    
    B2 --> B2a[Concepción del aprendizaje como proceso de mediación cultural]
    B2 --> B2b[Concepción del lenguaje como herramientas de construcción de pensamiento]
    B2 --> B2c[Observación como]
    
    C --> C1[Reflexión durante las prácticas]
    C --> C2[Reflexión sobre el saber]
    C --> C3[Reflexión desde la acción]
    
    C1 --> C1a[Comprensión de fenómenos y procesos del saber disciplinario]
    C2 --> C2a[La construcción del saber a partir de procesos investigativos]
    
    D --> D1[La lengua como ideología]
    D --> D2[Lenguas, cultura e interculturalidad]
    D --> D3[Lengua e identidad]
  
```

Note. The figure shows a snippet of the process done to analyze the official documents of the program, more specifically the PEP. The author's.

After the coding was done, the interpretation phase began. This was not just about counting how many times something appeared or did not appear. The patterns themselves, the fact that no was the dominant answer across almost every section, and that partially appeared only in places where the language was strategically vague, that became a finding in itself.

From this, themes started to emerge, like the absence of explicit mentions and the use of a vague, hegemonic discourse around diversity that says everything and nothing at the same time.

Once both streams of analysis, the interviews and the documents, had been worked through separately, the study moved into the final phase, which was triangulation and integrative interpretation. Following what Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose about methodological triangulation, the findings from both sides were brought together and placed side by side. This is where the analysis really started to thicken, because connections began to appear that were not visible when each data source was looked at alone.

The student had talked about this model she experienced in the classroom, where inclusion depended on personal initiative and nothing was guaranteed. And there, in the PEP, was that same principle, named and endorsed as a teaching strategy. The professor had pointed out, more than once, that teachers do not have clear guidelines, that they are left to figure things out on their own. And that complaint found its echo in the silences of the documents, in all those sections where the answer was no. And both participants had spoken positively about Campus Diverso², about the spaces it opens and the visibility it brings. But when the researcher went back to the PEI and the PEP, those documents, the ones that are supposed to articulate the university's institutional project, made no mention of it. There was a gap between what the university officially writes and what it actually supports, and that gap became visible only when the two data sources were read against each other.

So this triangulation phase was not just about comparing. It was about building a cohesive argument, one that could show, layer by layer, how institutional texts, teacher preparedness, and student agency all interact and shape what trans women students encounter inside the program. The whole process was iterative, the researcher kept moving back and forth between the data and the emerging interpretation until no new themes appeared and the

² Campus Diverso is an institutional project at Universidad del Valle that works to promote an environment of inclusion and respect for people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions within the university community. It functions as a space for education, advocacy, and support, and it organizes cultural events like the Ballroom scene, talks, and visibility campaigns. Although it is an initiative that comes from the institution, in practice its work is driven mostly by students and it has become the main force behind the advances in recognition and rights for LGBTQ+ people on campus.

narrative that answered the research questions felt complete, grounded, and coherent. A visual representation of this entire analytical process is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Data analysis procedure



Note. The figure shows the process and steps taken for the data analysis that took place. The author's.

4.7 Validity and Reliability

When you are doing qualitative research, one of the things that matters a lot is validity, which basically means making sure that what you are presenting as findings is accurate and can be trusted, not just from where the researcher stands but also from the perspective of the people who participated and the people who will read the study later on (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). So, to make sure that this study could stand on that ground, several strategies were put in place from the beginning and throughout the whole process.

To take care of validity, the study used what is called rich, thick description and also peer debriefing. What rich, thick description means is that instead of just saying things in a general way, the study tried to describe the context, the stories the participants told, and even the steps of the analysis itself in a lot of detail, so that the reader can almost feel like they are inside the research setting and can see for themselves whether what is being said makes sense and whether it could apply, in some way, to other contexts that might be similar. That is what transferability is about. So in this study, the experiences of the participants and also the whole institutional landscape were described with as much detail as possible so that the reader is not just taking the researcher's word for it, but can actually follow the thread. The second strategy, peer debriefing, was done with the research director, Professor Hugo Nelson Areiza. He acted as someone from the outside, who could look at what the study was doing and question it, challenge the assumptions that maybe the researcher was not seeing, ask hard questions about the interpretations and the conclusions, and all of that helped to make the analysis stronger and more rigorous, because it forced the researcher to go back and check herself, to not just stay comfortable with her first impressions.

Also, the instruments that were used to collect the data, especially the guides for the semi-structured interviews, which were designed carefully, always keeping in mind what the study was trying to find out, and they were also adapted from other international research that had worked with similar topics and populations. And before going into the formal interviews, a pilot interview was done first. That pilot helped to see if the questions were clear, if the timing was reasonable, around an hour or so, and if the whole protocol

was actually working the way it was supposed to, meaning that it was really getting at the kind of information the study needed. So by the time the real interviews happened, the instrument had already been tested and adjusted.

Now, about reliability. Reliability in qualitative research is not exactly the same as in quantitative studies, but it has to do with whether the approach is consistent and stable, whether another researcher could follow the same steps and arrive at conclusions that are coherent with what was found here (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). So to make sure that was taken care of, several procedures were followed. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed exactly, word by word, and after that, each transcription was checked again against the audio to make sure nothing was missing and no mistakes had been made. The thematic analysis was done in a way that was systematic, and even though this was an individual research project, meaning the researcher was working alone most of the time, there were still mechanisms in place to keep things consistent. The coding framework, the categories that were emerging from the data, the themes that started to take shape, all of that was discussed regularly with the research director. And when something did not match, when there was a discrepancy or something that did not seem to fit, the researcher went back to the data, looked at it again, and consulted with the director, and together they worked through it until the final analytical framework was solid and applied in a consistent way across the whole study.

So, by putting all of this into practice, what the study tries to do is to present findings that are not just interesting or compelling, but that are also credible, that are grounded in a process that was careful and rigorous from beginning to end, and that can be trusted by the people who read it and by the people whose voices are represented in it.

4.7 Ethical considerations

When a study focuses on a community that has been historically marginalized and whose voices have not always been listened to or taken seriously, thinking carefully about ethics is not just an extra step, it is really at the center of everything. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) say, the researcher has the responsibility to protect the people who participate, to build a relationship of trust with them, and to make sure that the integrity of the research is

never compromised. So, from the very beginning and all the way through, this study tried to follow a strict ethical protocol that could honor that responsibility.

The first and maybe most important piece of that was informed consent, (see Appendix 1, and Appendix 2). Before anyone agreed to participate, both the trans woman student and the professor received a detailed consent form, and this form was written in Spanish so there would be no confusion or language barrier. It explained clearly what the study was about, what the procedures were going to be, what kind of risks or benefits could come out of participating, and also that participation was completely voluntary and that even if they said yes at the beginning, they could change their mind at any moment and withdraw without any problem or consequence. All of this was signed and in writing before the interviews even started.

Then, to protect the privacy of the people who trusted the study with their stories, anonymity was taken very seriously. Any piece of information that could identify them was removed from the data, and when it came time to write the findings and the discussion, the student was given a pseudonym, Layra, and the professor was called Bosco. Other details that came up in the interviews that might point to who they are were either left out or written in a more general way so that no one reading the study could trace anything back to them.

Also, because the study was specifically about the experiences of a trans woman, there was a constant effort to approach everything with sensitivity and respect. The interviews were not designed to be invasive or to pressure the participant into sharing aspects or topics she was not ready to talk about. On the contrary, the idea was to let her lead the conversation, to let her decide how much she wanted to say and what she preferred to leave unsaid. The researcher tried to listen actively, not just to the words but to what was behind them, and to always communicate that the participant was the expert on her own life and that the researcher was there to learn from her, not to extract information.

Regarding the documentary analysis, the PEP and the PEI are public documents, so anyone can access them and read what is written there. The analysis that was done on these documents was not about pointing fingers at specific people or criticizing individuals who

might have participated in writing them. It was about trying to understand, from a scholarly perspective, what kind of discourse the institution is putting out there, what it says about inclusion and diversity and also what it does not say. That is a legitimate and ethical way to do research.

And finally, all of this, the whole design of the research, was developed under the guidance and supervision of the research director, who was there to make sure that everything was aligned with the ethical standards that Universidad del Valle and the broader academic community expect from a study like this. So, by putting all of these considerations into practice at every stage, what the study tried to do was to carry out research that was not only methodologically sound but also ethically grounded, research that could treat its participants with the dignity they deserve and that could honor their voices in a way that was respectful and true.

5 Findings

5.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, what the study found is presented and organized in a way that tries to answer the main research question, which is about what challenges and opportunities trans women in the program encounter when it comes to performing their gender identities. All of the findings that are presented here come from putting together what came from the documents and what came from the interviews, and the chapter is divided into two main parts.

The first part is the document analysis. This part shows what came out of reading the Program's Educational Project, the PEP, and also the Institutional Educational Project, the PEI, in a careful and systematic way. And what was found there is that throughout both documents, there is a silence that repeats itself. Trans populations are never mentioned explicitly, there is no framework that talks about gender diversity, there is no language that recognizes that trans people exist and are part of the university. So what that silence does, even if it is not said out loud, is that it sets a baseline where cisheteronormativity is just assumed, it is the default, and everything else is left outside.

Then, the second part is the interview analysis. This part presents all the things that came out of the interviews, the stories and the experiences that the trans woman student, who is called Layra in the study, and the professor, who is called Bosco, shared. And here the findings are organized by themes, because that helped to really see how things are lived inside the program. From what Layra said, a picture starts to form of a landscape that is full of contrasts. At the level of the university, she talks about things that have helped, like the work of Campus Diverso, but she also talks about situations where discrimination happened openly and there were no repercussions or consequences about it, there was no accountability. And inside the Bachelor's degree itself, she describes this model that the study ended up calling regulated autonomy, which is when inclusion is not something the program guarantees, it is something that depends on whether a student decides to talk about her life or whether a teacher decides, on their own, to do something. But at the same time, she also talks about what does help, and that is when there is solidarity among peers, when

a teacher is supportive and actually listens, and when there is room in the coursework to bring in her own perspective and make it academic.

On the side of the professor, what his interview adds is a view that goes back in time, because he has been there for many years and has seen how the environment have changed. And he confirms that compared to before, the environment today is safer, and he credits that change to the students who organized and pushed for it. But he also points out that there are still very clear gaps, especially in teacher training, in the time that teachers have to prepare and rethink their classes, and in the absence of clear guidelines from the program. Without those things, even teachers who want to be inclusive end up not knowing how to do it consistently or end up avoiding it because they do not want to do it wrong.

So when you put all of this together, what the findings show is a program that is, in some ways, stuck in the middle. On one side, there are the official documents that do not speak, that leave trans identities outside of what is considered academic and legitimate. On the other hand, there is a pedagogical culture that does not forbid inclusion but also does not require it, so everything depends on individual initiative and that makes it fragile and uneven. And then on yet another side, there is this powerful movement that comes from the students themselves, the collectives, the events, the visibility work, the community building, and that is what has really moved things forward. And it is in the middle of all of that, in that tension between institutional silence, passive permission, and student-led activism, that the challenges and opportunities for trans women inside this program are shaped every day.

5.2 Document Analysis

In this component, the *Proyecto Educativo del Programa* (PEP, 2018) was examined and explored in order to address the specific research question of: To what extent does the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program's curriculum at Universidad del Valle strengthen or constrain their identities?. The document was analyzed through the use of two matrices that will be shown as appendices as they correspond.

5.2.1 PEP

As previously mentioned, the Proyecto Educativo del Programa (PEP, 2018) was analyzed through the use of two matrices, each one with a specific question, that aimed to find relevant information regarding the specific research question: To what extent does the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program's curriculum at Universidad del Valle strengthen or constrain the identities of students who are trans women?

Firstly, as a sort of general review of the document, we can say that the PEP (2018) does align with the legal and academic standards established by the university and its faculty of humanities, as it embodies the institution's core mission and adheres to the relevant regulations issued by the Ministry of Education. Also, the methodology, pedagogy, and teaching practices present in the program are also defined as grounded primarily in a social constructivist framework. Additionally, due to adaptations and updates, the document states the importance of fostering critical thinking skills in their students through a sociolinguistic and intercultural approach that is centered around the importance of understanding different cultures when learning a foreign language.

However, when it comes to inclusion or awareness of trans students or any information related to gender diversity perspectives, the document does not cover any of that. To understand this, two questions were asked when reviewing and analyzing the document. With regards to the first question, the document does not address or mention the existence of trans or gender diverse students in any of its components.

Table 1

Results of the matrix to evaluate the explicit mention of Trans population across the components of the PEP

Is there any mention that explicitly talks about trans students	No	Partially	Yes

across the components of the PEP?			
General Aspects of the Program	x		
Purpose and Pertinence of the Program	x		
Organization and Curricular Strategy	x		
Articulation with the Environment	x		

Note. The author's.

With this in mind, as an attempt to widen the lens of analysis, the next specific question used was with regard to the presence of gender diverse perspectives through the components of the PEP. As the document is centered around a sociolinguistic and intercultural point of view, there are several mentions of umbrella terms such as “cultural diversity”, “a culturally diverse society”, “reducing inequities” that might, or might not, envelop gender diversity-awareness. Due to this ambiguity on whether interculturality encompasses gender diversity, the matrix focused on explicit mention of gender diversity only. Similarly to the first question, the results showed that there is no real exploration or a real explicit mention of gender diversity inside its components; however, there are vague mentions of gender identity.

Table 2

Results of the matrix to evaluate the explicit mention of gender diversity across the components of the PEP

Is there any explicit mention of gender diversity across the components of the PEP?	No	Partially	Yes	Examples
General Aspects of the Program		x		“Tanto la pedagogía crítica como los trabajos en torno a teorías sociales críticas relacionadas con clasismo, estudios género, identidad, racismo, estudios poscoloniales...” “Esto implica que tanto en los objetivos, contenidos y procedimientos metodológicos, se abran perspectivas relacionadas con identidad de género, etnicidad, clase social, afiliaciones culturales...”
Purpose and Pertinence of the Program	x			
Organization and Curricular Strategy	x			

Articulation with the Environment	x			
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Note. The author's.

With these two matrices, it can be concluded that the PEP (2018) of the Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages works efficiently in presenting features like the pedagogical practices and the theoretical frameworks behind them; however, it can also be concluded that the document follows a very hegemonic point of view when it comes to gender diversity and more precisely, trans inclusion, as we can see that there is a big lack of representation besides vague mentions of gender as a cultural feature.

5.2.2 PEI

The Institutional Project (PEI) of the Universidad del Valle, established in 2015, outlines the university's mission to provide comprehensive higher education and generate knowledge for societal development, guided by principles of autonomy, academic freedom, and public service. Its vision is to become an internationally recognized, high-quality institution. These foundational elements are supported by core values such as dignity, justice, and environmental defense, which inform the conduct of the entire university community.

To achieve its goals, the PEI details strategic guidelines focused on consolidating and transforming key areas like teaching, research, social outreach, and internationalization. It also provides essential definitions of its core functions: teaching as an interactive process, research as knowledge creation, and social outreach as reciprocal engagement with society for democratic and inclusive development.

However, a review of this foundational document reveals that there is not really anything explicitly related to gender, its perspectives, or specific policies addressing gender equality within the institution's principles, values, or strategic guidelines.

In addition to the PEP, and as an attempt to have a wider view, the document Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI, 2015) was also analyzed through the use of the same two matrices in order to solve the same specific research question: To what extent does the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program's curriculum at Universidad del Valle strengthen or constrain the identities of students who are trans women?

Table 3

Results of the matrix to evaluate the explicit mention of Trans population across the components of the PEI

Is there any mention that explicitly talks about trans students across the components of the PEI?	No	Partially	Yes
Mission and Vision	x		
Principles and Values	x		
Purposes	x		
Strategic guidelines	x		
Essential definitions	x		

Note. The author's.

With this information and seeing the clear absence of explicit mentions, the next specific question was used to widen the view even more as it goes from analyzing explicit mentions of trans population, to analyzing mentions, frameworks and components of queer and gender diverse perspectives throughout the document. However, similarly to the PEP analysis, for the sake of the study, ambiguous mentions that encompass other types of

diversity different from gender diversity were left out of the analysis, such as “the defense of the virtues, expressions and traditions typical of diversity and interculturality...”, or “helping students have a personal, social and cultural development...”, and “the University helps to the construction of a more inclusive, equitable and democratic society...”. This was done for the sake of really finding those aspects that speak on gender diversity, and more specifically trans people, as those mentioned before use terms as “diversity” in a all-encompassing manner that attempts to cover all these different types of diversity.

Table 4

Results of the matrix to evaluate the explicit mention of gender diversity across the components of the PEI

Is there any explicit mention of gender diversity across the components of the PEP?	No	Partially	Yes	Examples
Mission and Vision	x			
Principles and Values	x			
Purposes	x			
Strategic guidelines	x			

Note. The author's.

When the researchers sat down to read the PEI of Universidad del Valle, the one from 2015, it was clear that this is a document that does what an institutional project is supposed to do.

It lays out the mission, the values, the big picture of what the university wants to be, how it thinks about academic development, how it understands its social responsibility, all of that is there. But when you read it with a different kind of attention, not just to what it says but also to what it does not say, something else becomes visible. The document talks about human diversity, yes, but it does it from a place that is very broad, very general, and in a way that ends up being hegemonic even if that is not the intention. Because when you look for anything that speaks directly to gender diversity, or more specifically to trans inclusion, there is nothing there. There are principles about respect and equality and difference, but those are words that float on the surface, they are not anchored to any concrete definition, any real conceptual development, any strategic line that tells the university community what to actually do. And that is the limit of the document. It cannot guide practice because it does not go deep enough.

Now, it is also important to think about what these documents are and what they are supposed to do. Both the PEI and the PEP are, by their very nature, foundational texts. They are summary documents. Their job is not to list every single action the university will ever do, but to establish a philosophy, a direction, a framework that can then be taken up by each faculty, each program, each unit and adapted to their specific context. So from an administrative point of view, it makes sense that the language stays broad, that it talks about diversity and inclusion and social responsibility in general terms, because that way it can apply to everyone and everything. And it is true that no foundational document can possibly name every dimension of human diversity, every identity, every experience. That would be impossible. But more importantly, this tendency to stay in the general, even if it is understandable for both the university's perspective and the document's purpose, has a real consequence. When you do not name something, when you do not make it explicit, when you subsume it under a category that never gets defined, what happens is that the specific needs and the specific experiences of that community become invisible. They disappear into the general language. And for communities that have already been made invisible by the institution, like trans people, that erasure is not neutral. It means that the document, even if it is not trying to exclude anyone, does not give anyone a mandate to act. There is no policy to implement, no strategy to follow, no concrete practice that can be pointed to and said, this is what we are supposed to do. So the gap between what the university says it

believes in and what actually happens on the ground, that implementation gap, stays open and nothing comes along to close it.

5.3 Interviews Analysis

5.3.1 Interview with a student of the program

In order to answer the main research question of the research: What are the challenges and opportunities for one trans woman student in the program to perform their gender identities?, the perceptions of one trans woman student, near to finishing her studies at the Bachelor's, were gathered using semi-structured interviews. This interview was carried out virtually through the use of Google Meet during the second semester of 2025. The interview was recorded using the software OBS and its following transcription was done by hand by the researcher since none of the software found were efficient enough in transcribing localized terms and idioms. The transcript was then analyzed, by the researcher, using Grounded Theory (Saldaña, 2021), following its steps of starting up with an initial coding based on the transcript, then an axial coding where relationships and categories were created between the initial codes, to finally a selective coding where the most relevant, to the research questions in hand, codes and subcategories were selected for its presentation. This process of analysis was both reviewed by an external auditor as well as the interviewee through a member checking process in order to make sure the analysis was according to the participant's original intent.

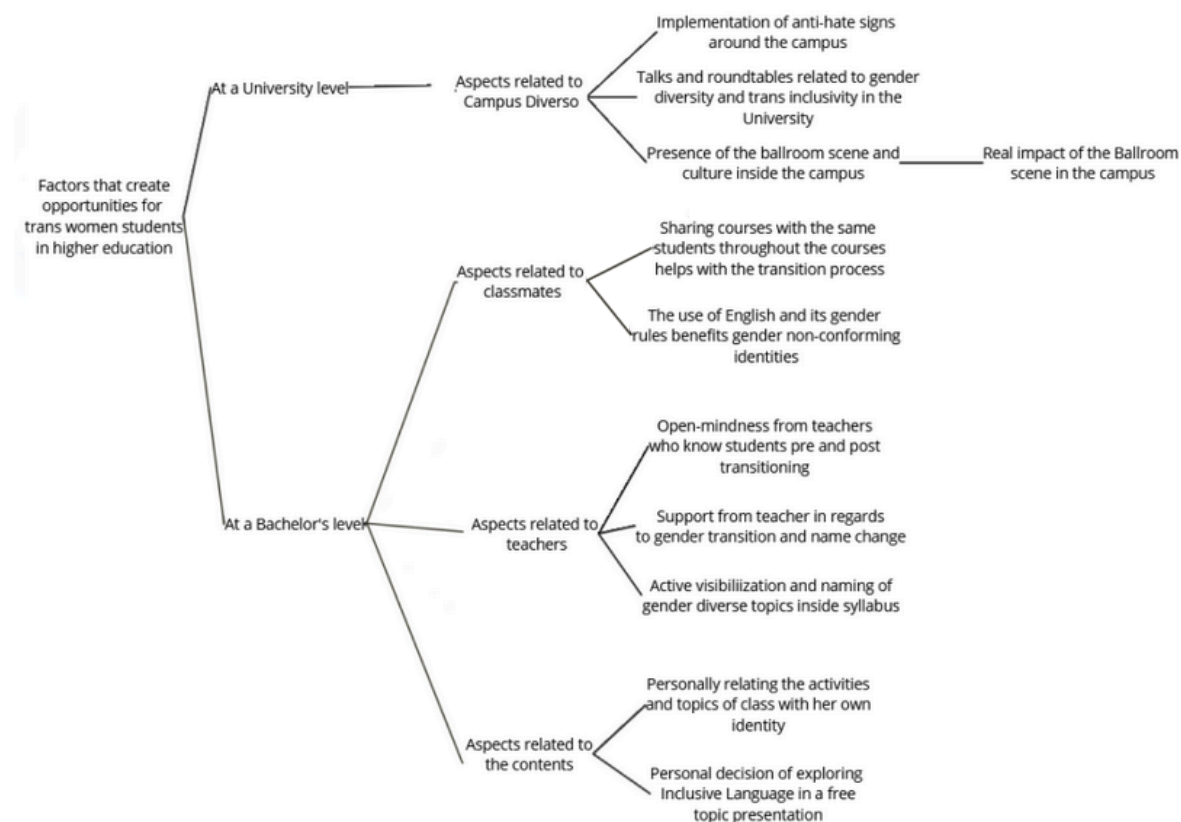
With this in mind, the information recollected from the interview will be presented in two categories that are related to the aspects that either challenge or encourage the experiences of trans women students in the program, namely: (1) *Factors that create Opportunities for Trans Women Students in Higher Education*, and (2) *Factors that create Challenges for Trans Women Students in Higher Education*. These categories are both divided into two levels with their own subcategories that are: (1) *At a University level*, and (2) *At a Bachelor's degree level*.

5.3.1.1 Positive factors that create Opportunities to Express their Gender Identity (or to develop), or to negotiate, for Trans Women Students in a Bachelor's degree in foreign languages

This category groups the factors that encourage the expression of the trans identity of the trans women studying in Higher Education. These factors cover experiences with classmates, teachers, and contents from inside the Bachelor's degree, as well as aspects from outside of the program. Accordingly, a total of eleven codes were identified organized into two subcategories that allows the distinction between those factors inside the program and those outside of it: *Aspects at a University level*, with one further subcategory, *Aspects related to Campus Diverso*, three codes and one subcode, ; and *Aspects at a Bachelor's degree level* with three further subcategories: *Aspects related to classmates*; *Aspects related to teachers*; and *Aspects related to the contents* and a sum of seven codes.

Figure 8

Factors that create opportunities for Trans Women Students in Higher Education



Note. The figure shows the subcategories and codes derived from the main category ‘Aspects that create opportunities for Trans Women Students in Higher Education’. The author’s.

5.3.1.1.1 At a University level

This main subcategory collects those factors outside of the Program of the Bachelor’s degree itself that allow trans students to express their gender identity in a comfortable way inside the campus. With this in mind, three codes were identified: *Implementation of anti-hate signs around the campus*, *Talks and round-tables related to gender diversity and trans inclusion*, and *Presence of the Ballroom scene and culture inside the campus*. Also, as these factors all fall under the authority of Campus Diverso, a further subcategory, *Aspects related to Campus Diverso*, was developed to understand its relevance to a greater extent.

5.3.1.1.1.1 Aspects related to Campus Diverso

This subcategory groups together all the factors that have to do with Campus Diverso, which includes things like extracurricular activities and also some of the policies that come out of that space.

Campus Diverso is an institutional project, and it was created to try to make the environment at Univalle more inclusive and respectful for people who are diverse in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, whether they are students, professors, or staff. It is supposed to function as a place where education happens, where advocacy happens, and also where support is offered to people who need it inside the university community. The idea is to prevent discrimination and to build a culture where equality and inclusion are not just words but something people actually practice. In theory, it represents the formal commitment that Universidad del Valle has made to diversity, which is important.

But from what the student said, and from what other testimonies suggest, the important factor about Campus Diverso is that its effectiveness really depends on how much the students themselves get involved and push things forward, and also on the cultural

movements that bring visibility to LGBTQ+ realities, like Ballroom, for example. Without that energy coming from below, from the students and the collectives, the project can sometimes feel like it is just sitting there, a structure that exists on paper but does not do much on its own. So it is seen as necessary, absolutely, but also as passive in a way, because it does not fully realize its goals unless there is student initiative pushing it and also institutional follow-through from the university side. It is like a bridge, it connects the official discourse of the institution with what students actually live and experience every day, and it opens up spaces where diversity can be celebrated and rights can be defended and inclusion can be practiced in a real way, not just talked about. But a bridge does not walk itself, someone has to cross it, and that is where the students come in.

From the analysis of what Layra and Bosco shared in their interviews, several codes emerged that have to do with the role that Campus Diverso plays in the experience of trans students inside the university and in the changes that have happened on campus over time.

Layra talks about this when she explains the difference between institutional symbols that just exist on a wall and the real presence that Campus Diverso creates through its events and activities: “One thing is like 'well we have a sign there that says trans people exist' and another thing is showing you that on campus there are these people who inhabit it, who study here, and who are there” (Layra, 2025).

She also adds that the cultural events like the Ballroom scene and the Kiki sessions made trans people visible in a way that nothing else had done before, because they showed real people living their lives and not just an abstract concept: “When you go to a Kiki, when you go to a diversity fair and you see all those people being who they are, showing themselves, dancing, that changes your perspective. It is no longer a concept, it is a person with whom you can share a classroom” (Layra, 2025).

On the other side, Bosco, from his perspective as a professor who has observed the university for many years, confirms that concrete advances like the gender-neutral bathrooms were not gifts from the administration but results of sustained pressure from student collectives:

“The gender inclusive bathrooms were not put inside the campus just because the University became more inclusive all of the sudden. They were put in place because students fought and put pressure to the institution. All that is work and results from the collectives”(Bosco, 2025).

He also points out that the normalization of students transitioning during their academic journey, without having to hide or wait until graduation, is a direct consequence of the environment that Campus Diverso helped to create:

“Before, students would stop their studies or wait until they graduated to transition. Now one sees students who do their transition while being in the majors, and that’s because there is a different environment, and that was constructed by the collectives, not by the university alone” (Bosco, 2025).

Implementation of anti-hate signs around the campus

This code refers to the construction and set-up of the anti-discrimination signs that were built in the recent years inside the campus of Melendez, Universidad del Valle.

“well there is Campus Diverso and other things. And, for example, I remember vividly that it was them that put up those little signs, I’m pretty sure they are still up, that say “Dismantle your prejudices”...” (Layra).

Talks and round-tables related to gender diversity and trans inclusion

This code mentions the extracurricular activities, more specifically, the talks that have taken place inside the campus in the last year where the topic of Gender Diversity has been the center of them. Also, many of these talks and spaces have explored trans experiences, as shown in the example below.



“So I think there was greater visibility there because it’s one thing to be like, ‘Well, we have a sign there that says trans people exist,’ versus showing you that these people live, study, and are present on campus. It’s a big difference... the round-tables and talks that have been organized...” (Layra).

Presence of the Ballroom scene and culture inside the campus

This code refers to the emergence, institutionalization, and impact of Ballroom culture, a dance and performance subculture rooted in LGBTQ+ communities, within the Universidad del Valle. It encompasses the founding of “monitorias” (paid workshops done by students), the key figures involved, its connection to entities like Campus Diverso, and its role in creating visibility and community for diverse gender identities through events like Kiki Sessions and balls.

“I like dancing, oh well, you know about ballroom culture, my categories are like Vogue Femme, right now I'm entering Face so I'd be New Face. I used to do Runway a lot but lately not so much... With Ballroom I started almost from the beginning, a few months after it started... that was started by Roman, well it's Roman Mattel... They started it... Then from there they managed it, Roman managed to get the workshop linked through Campus Diverso, so then the Ballroom workshop existed” (Layra).

To understand the importance of these spaces brought by the Ballroom culture, the subcode *Real Impact of the Ballroom scene in the campus* was identified.

“so I feel like Ballroom arrived, and it’s what really worked to say “no gurl, we really are here.” Because I feel like Ballroom, besides Campus: I’d say Campus is the means, but it was Ballroom that really brought the people in so they can see and say “oh wow, look at all the diversity there is.” That’s how I see it, because then there were the Kiki Sessions and everybody gagged and people went out with their flags, with their identities, to say: this is me, this is who I am, and such... So I feel like there really was a major visibility, because one thing is to just “well we have these signs here saying trans people exist”, to really show that inside the campus

there are these people who inhabit, who study and who in any case are there. So it is a really big difference” (Layra).

5.3.1.1.2 At a Bachelor’s level

This main subcategory gathers those factors inside the Program of the Bachelor’s degree itself, that allow trans students to express their gender identity in a comfortable way. In this sense, seven codes were identified and organized into three further subcategories to understand more clearly their relation among them. Accordingly, the codes, *Sharing courses with the same students throughout the semester helps with the transition process*, and *The use of English and its gender rules benefits gender non conforming identities* both fell under the subcategory *Aspects related to classmates*. In second place, the codes *Open-mindedness from teachers that know students pre and post-transition*, *Support from Teacher in regards to gender transition and name change*, and *Active visibilization and naming of gender diverse topics inside syllabus* all fell under the subcategory *Aspects related to teachers*. And lastly, the codes *Personally relating the activities and topics of class with her own identity*, and *Personal decision of speaking about transphobia when speaking in class about discriminations* all fit into the subcategory *Aspects related to the contents*.

5.3.1.1.2.1 Aspects related to classmates

Sharing courses with the same students throughout the semester helps with the transition process

This code makes mention of the easier experience of transitioning within the tight-knit group of students in the same major. It highlights how having the same classmates in most courses, due to shared schedules, creates a sense of normalcy, camaraderie, and a shared process among the students, giving space to a more comfortable transition without so much judgement from their peers.

“With the other students in the major, it was a normal relationship, because, I don’t know, we were the same students, there was some diversity but due to things like workplace schedules, we would always choose the same class schedules. So, almost

always we were the same people in the classes, therefore, it was not really different, it was more of a collective transition. There was no discrimination, or at least that I felt. Like, directly, I never felt any discrimination from my classmates” (Layra).

The use of English and its gender rules benefits gender non conforming identities

This code mentions how using English, with its different gender rules, can sometimes make things easier for gender non-conforming people. It points out that English allows for more natural gender-neutral conversation compared to Spanish. The example shows how a classmate preferred to use English to avoid the difficulties of Spanish inclusive language.

“... and as he (a classmate) used to often speak in English, I feel like in English there is this facility that allows one to speak in a gender neutral manner. Meanwhile, in Spanish, gender is way more noticeable... And also, as I had this duality of “you can refer to me as feminine or neutral”, he would prefer to refer to me either in English, or as feminine or directly through my name, rather than using inclusive language” (Layra).

5.3.1.1.2.2 Aspects related to teachers

Open-mindedness from teachers that know students pre and post-transition

This code is about teachers who knew a student before their transition and then met them again afterwards. It shows how some professors reacted with openness and ease when the student informed them of their new name, making the interaction simple and positive.

“Suddenly it was like funny, to meet again with some teachers, whose courses were only in the first semesters, and meet them after making my transition. And, it was like “oh, by the way, this is go I go by now,” for example with this teacher, I loved her so much, she is a sweetie, and obviously she first met me with my dead-name and all of that. So I was like, “Oh, teacher, my name now is...” and like just this correction and she was like, chill, she took it really well” (Layra).

Support from Teacher in regards to gender transition and name change

This code shows support from a teacher during the process of a student figuring out their name and gender identity. It focuses on a Portuguese professor who responded in a simple and accepting way when the student was trying out different names in their coursework. This example highlights how small acts of understanding from authority figures can be important during a personal transition.

“...because I was like “well, how do I write down my name in this papers”, oh that was another decision as well, since I was in this transition between “Ale, Alejandro” and all of that. In some class papers I’d write down Ale, in others I’d write Alejandro, and later it was more Layra... and it was funny to me, because the one that asked me the most about it, was the Portuguese professor, but she would just say “don’t worry, write down the one you prefer.” And that was it, it was around my seventh semester that I had more defined my identity as a trans woman. I had not done the self-nomination of identifying as a trans woman, but I had done the step of “I want to be addressed to, by this name”” (Layra).

Active visibilization and naming of gender diverse topics inside syllabus

This code highlights the importance of actively including gender diversity topics directly in a course syllabus. It focuses on a pedagogy class where the professor not only listed these subjects in the curriculum but also used dynamic methods, like role-playing and real-life case studies, to teach them. This approach made the lessons contextualized and relevant beyond just theory.

“In Pedagogy III, one does learn a lot about learning rights and all that stuff, with a teacher, I loved that teacher. She is not from foreign languages, but from the Institute of Pedagogy and Education. She’s a goddess, she put all type of things in. That class did show in an active way all regarding to diversity: Intersectionality, racism, diverse people, discrimination, what to do if that happens in our classrooms, the steps we must take. I lived for her classes. I can say that, in her classes there was an active way of talking about diversity, as in its curriculum one could find these

topics explicitly. So, that was like chef kiss. It was a more active manner because these topics were established in the syllabus, with specific outlines of how we are going to talk about them. So they are properly named, and from this is that we can make things visible. I really like that sentence “That which is not named, doesn’t really exist. And what doesn’t exist, it’s marginalized.” oh god, I live for La Veneno. You gotta watch the tv show about her, it was with La Veneno that I had my trans awakening. So, we used to do a lot of roleplay games, but not only that, we used to talk about the ethics, the manual, and let’s bring that to the real life, relate it with real-life cases that you have heard of and bring it to class. So it was like that, making this interpolation of what we live through, bring it to class, but not only based on the theory, beyond that” (Layra).

5.2.1.1.2.3 Aspects related to the contents

Personally relating the activities and topics of class with her own Identity

This code is about how a student connects their coursework in the Bachelor's program directly to their personal identity. It shows how they used assignments, like a linguistic autobiography or a presentation on inclusive language, to explore and express their gender identity. The example also highlights how this happened within a diverse cohort where classmates similarly brought their own racial and cultural perspectives into class discussions.

“Everything that I saw and learned in the classes in the Bachelor’s, I tried to relate it with my identity... I was making classwork around, I don’t know, we were learning things in Applied Linguistics, there I made my linguistic autobiography. I also did a presentation about the inclusive language, as well as about the generic masculine and how it invisibilizes women, non-binary people and more... because I’d say that my cohort was really diverse: there was me, who always spoke about topics of Gender; Jazmin, Maria Paula, and Carol were also there... they talked extensively about race, as they all are racialized people, they are black women, so they spoke from their experiences. Also, Daniela and Lizeth were there, and they were native

indigenous people, so they spoke about that. There was also another person that was non-binary, so they also talked about that” (Layra).

Personal decision of speaking about transphobia when speaking in class about discriminations

This code is about the personal choice to bring up the topic of transphobia, discrimination against trans people, during class discussions that focus on discrimination in general. It shows how the speaker actively directed projects and conversations in subjects like French or Applied Linguistics toward trans experiences, even when the assignment was broader.

“let’s say that, I don’t know, we were talking in French classes about topics of discrimination so we chose to create a little video about trans women, the discrimination they live in schools, yada, yada, yada. But, it wasn’t mandatory to talk about trans women, since we were talking about more general things in class. In Applied Linguistics, it was something private, something that happened to me personally... I don’t know, in Literary Genres with one teacher, we spoke about Gender Identity. But, it was used more like a “lens” or like a manner of analyzing literature aspects and all that stuff. And, it is there that one chooses to tuck in the diversity, and all. I don’t know, it is a very passive manner” (Layra).

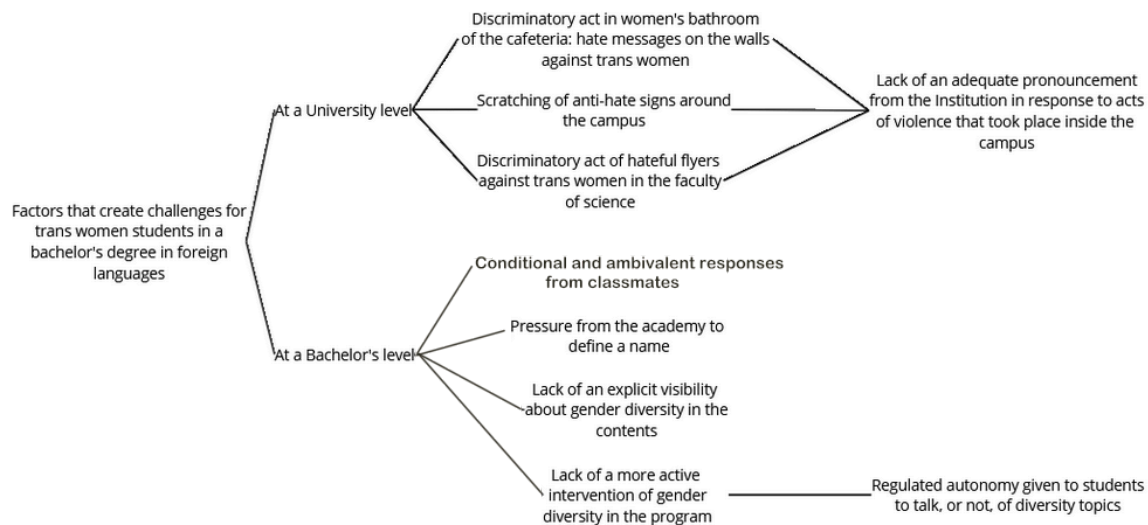
5.3.1.2 Negative factors that create Challenges for Trans Women Students in a Bachelor’s degree in Foreign Languages

This category comprises elements and aspects experienced by a student of the major that hinder, invalidate, and dis-empower identities belonging to the queer spectrum. These aspects are related to actions, perspectives, and characteristics that obstruct inclusivity, prevent acknowledgment, and foster misunderstanding of non-hegemonic diversity in the classroom. Similarly to the *Factors that create Opportunities for Trans Women Students in Higher Education*, two main subcategories were put in place in order to understand those factors inside the Program, namely: (1) *At a University level*, and (2) *At a Bachelor’s level*. In these, a total of seven codes were identified and organized accordingly, with a subcode

each subcategory: Lack of an adequate pronouncement from the Institution in response to acts of violence that took place inside the campus; and, Regulated autonomy given to students to talk, or not, of diversity topics.

Figure 9

Factors that create challenges for trans women students in higher education



Note. The figure shows the codes and subcategories derived from the main category ‘Factors that create challenges for trans women students in higher education’. The author’s.

5.2.1.2.1 At a University level

This subcategory groups up the negative experiences and aspects with regards to students expressing their trans identity at a University level, outside of the Bachelor’s itself. With this in mind, three codes were identified based on the participant’s experiences and interactions, namely: *Discriminatory act in Women’s bathrooms in the Central Cafeteria*, *Hate messages on the walls against Trans Women*, *Scratching of Anti-hate signs around the campus*, and *Discriminatory act of hateful fliers against Trans Women in the Faculty of Sciences*. Deeply related to the codes, a subcode connected to all three of the codes was also identified and organized as well, *Lack of an adequate pronouncement from the Institution in response to acts of violence that took place inside the campus*.

Discriminatory act in Women's bathrooms in the Central Cafeteria. Hate messages on the walls against Trans Women

This code describes a discriminatory incident that took place in the women's bathrooms at the Central Cafeteria on campus, involving hateful graffiti specifically targeting trans women. The speaker recalls not just the physical act of vandalism, but also the significant mental and emotional impact it had on the community.

I remember vividly about what they did in the bathrooms in Cafeteria Central, that was a “meki”(the term meki is used to communicate discomfort, disapproval, similar to the word “yucky” in English), because it wasn't only messages on the walls of the bathrooms, that left mental repercussions in us [nervously laughs], that was really “meki”, to see that happening” (Layra).

Scratching of Anti-hate signs around the campus

This code describes an act of vandalism where anti-hate signs around the university campus were scratched and defaced. It points to a lack of effective institutional response, with the speaker feeling the university's actions were only superficial and did not create a real sense of support or presence for gender-diverse people.

“...and it was like no, people took that and scratched them all. And that was a “meki”, since I don't feel like there was a real appropriate intervention regarding gender diversity. As it was only something visual, there was not really something that said “here is the gender-diverse people”” (Layra).

Discriminatory act of hateful fliers against Trans Women in the Faculty of Sciences

This code describes a discriminatory incident that took place in the Faculty of Sciences, where hateful fliers targeting trans women and opposing gender-neutral bathrooms were posted throughout the building. The act was a coordinated effort, occurring

on the International Day of Trans Visibility, and used derogatory language to spread a message of exclusion.

“it also happened with the fucking TERF’s (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists). On the International Day of Trans Visibility, they also put up a bunch of messages in the Faculty of Natural Sciences. They read something about the gender neutral bathrooms, this and that, calling us men in skirts, and all those pejorative terms that those fucking assholes create. They even made fliers, and I was like “This people are crazy, deranged people...” I don’t recall if it was before or a little after the pandemic... To put it in a timeline, this happened when they implemented the gender neutral bathrooms in the Faculty of Natural Sciences... On the Day of Trans Visibility, is that they did that stupidity of making the fliers that read “fuck these bathrooms,” they didn’t scratch the walls or anything like that. But, they made a flier and pasted it all around the building.” (Layra).

Lack of an adequate pronouncement from the Institution in response to acts of violence that took place inside the campus.

This code addresses the perceived failure of the university institution to formally and adequately respond to acts of hate and discrimination that occur on campus. It criticizes the lack of official statements condemning such violence, arguing that this silence normalizes transphobia, racism, and other forms of discrimination, and allows situations to escalate:

“And, in reality, there never really is a statement from the institution that says “we condemn these acts, yada, yada.” Instead, it is like “oh well, that happened, whatevs, who cares.” Similarly, when people scratched all the signs put up by Campus Diverso, because that is also a type of violence. So, this is a representation of the type of people that inhabit the University, and, it’s awful that the institution doesn’t do something, nothing! Consequently, it seems like it is allowed to discriminate, to be transphobic, to be racist, to be ableist... All those type of things because like, yikes. So, it is allowed to be a feminicide, yada, yada, yada. Because, that’s how we get to those extents, that’s why these things take place, because the

institution doesn't do anything about it. And, that's how those cases escalate, like the femicide, what happened with the girl students, what is happening with the suicide attempts inside the university. All these because there is not a real care for these things, and they are not given the proper importance." (Layra).

5.3.1.2.2 At a Bachelor's level

This subcategory groups together the challenges and negative experiences that Layra encountered specifically within the Foreign Languages program, inside the classrooms and in her interactions with the structures and expectations of the Bachelor's degree itself. With this in mind, five codes were identified based on the participant's experiences, namely: Conditional and ambivalent responses from classmates, Pressure from the academy to define a name, Lack of explicit visibility about gender diversity in the contents, Lack of a more active intervention of gender diversity in the program, and Regulated autonomy given to students to talk, or not, of diversity topics. These codes together reveal how the program's passive approach to inclusion, its silences in the curriculum, and even the well-intentioned freedom it gives to students end up creating additional burdens for trans women, who are left to navigate their identities in a space that does not actively affirm them.

Conditional and ambivalent responses from classmates

This code captures the mixed reactions that Layra received from some of her classmates, where they were not openly hostile but their responses still created a burden because they communicated that her identity was seen as strange, difficult, or not fully valid. She describes how some classmates expressed respect but accompanied it with judgments about her identity. The following excerpts illustrate these dynamic:

"I'd say that there were some classmates with whom we'd speak about this transition, back when I used to identify as non-binary, and about what they thought about the non-binary language. And, some said things like 'I think it is sort of stupid, but I respect you'... what a friend of mine used to say was like 'no, I don't think it's correct to use inclusive language but if you identify that way, I respect you. So, I am not going to use the

inclusive language when referring to you, because it is difficult for me. Instead, I will refer to you, as an alternative, by naming you, I will simply say “Layra” and so on” (Layra, 2025).

She also talks about a classmate who kept her religious beliefs separate from her behavior in the classroom, which created a kind of polite distance rather than genuine connection:

“There even was this girl who was very, very christian, with all the stuff, and, I did some classwork with her and she was normal. Well, normal... she was a lil' stiff. I'd hear things about her beliefs, that this and this, but she didn't exteriorize it in class, so it was like: Did she had her beliefs? yes. Was she discriminatory? no, or at least, not in class” (Layra, 2025).

Pressure from the academy to define a name

This code is about the internal pressure and uncertainty of deciding which name to use on official academic documents during a gender transition. It highlights the conflict between an evolving personal identity and the practical need to provide a consistent name for coursework and assignments.

“...because I was like “well, how do I write down my name in this papers”, oh that was another decision as well, since I was in this transition between “Ale, Alejandro” and all of that. In some class papers I’d write down Ale, in others I’d write Alejandro, and later it was more Layra... ” (Layra).

Lack of an explicit visibility about gender diversity in the contents

This code identifies a gap in the formal curriculum regarding the explicit and mandatory inclusion of gender diversity topics. It highlights how subjects like the experiences of trans women were often absent from standard course content, only appearing when students were granted the autonomy to help design their own syllabus.

“I’d say that with regards to gender diversity, well and, about trans women, because there was not one time that we spoke specifically about trans women directly.

Maybe with one teacher, I don't really remember, that we arranged the class curriculum together so there we decided to also talk about diversities. But this happened because there was this freedom." (Layra).

Lack of a more active intervention of gender diversity in the program

This code mentions the critique done by the student regarding the pedagogical approach to gender diversity inside the foreign language teacher education program, characterizing it as passive and fully reliant on students' initiative rather than active, institutionally mandated, professor-led inclusion. It argues that placing the burden on students to choose diversity topics creates gaps in learning and overlooks the responsibility of educators to proactively integrate these essential perspectives into the curriculum.

"but I'd say that with regards to an active way (of handling topics of diversity), there is a big gap in the Bachelor's in Foreign Languages. Because, currently it is very passive to just say "well, since we are talking about topics of discrimination, you guys and girls choose which one," or "we are talking about aspects of language, so you all see what you want to do" and that's it. It is left to the things that one has gone through, because I have had gone through those things. Because I used to live through them, I still experience them, and I lived them, it is about choosing to talk about it, not anything more. It is about freedom, it really is a passive way... so we must really recognize this diversity, this intersectionality and stop being so unassertive, and really say "well, if there's this freedom and there is still a gap," well cover that gap in an assertive way. As that is the role of the professor" (Layra).

Regulated autonomy given to students to talk, or not, of diversity topics

This code is about the "regulated autonomy" given to students in the Foreign Languages program to decide whether or not to bring up personal topics of diversity in class. It describes a system where discussion relies entirely on personal choice and lived experience rather than active inclusion in the curriculum. This creates a passive form of

visibility, where important perspectives on ethnicity, gender, or other identities are only heard if a student from that group is present and chooses to speak up.

“it was more born out of that freedom, because it wasn’t like... Let’s say that the Bachelor’s degree in Foreign Languages is very open. Not like “oh well, let’s talk openly about diversity,” no, it’s more like they give you the freedom to choose... But outside of that, no. Throughout the semesters it was like “oh well, if you want to talk about that” and that was it... it’s a responsibility that falls upon... you speak about your own experiences, and we speak about our own experiences... what’s the matter with this? that left to autonomy, visibility is done through the people themselves, through those who live the experiences. So, if there is not a diverse person inside the classroom, then that visibilization is never going to happen, because it’s not done through an assertive way. For this, I feel like this is a passive way of visibilizing the diversity... people speak from their experiences. So, what happens if in the classroom we don’t have any native indigenous person, for this we would never talk about ethnicity, and what it is to be a indigenous student of foreign languages. So, those are experiences that are not going to be taken into account, simply because there was no one in the classroom to speak on that. There is no one to say “well look, I live through this”” (Layra).

5.3.2 Interview with a professor of the program

To understand better how the institution and the way teaching happens inside the program shapes what trans students go through, the study also gathered the perspective of a professor who has been in foreign language teacher education program for a long time. This professor has more than twenty years of experience at the university, first as a student and then as a faculty member, so his view is valuable because it is not just about how the inclusion, or exclusion, is present now, but also about how they have changed, or not changed over time. The interview with him was done through Google Meet, during the second semester of 2025, and it was recorded using a software called OBS Studio. After that, the transcription was done manually by the researcher, and this was done with a lot of care so that nothing would be lost, especially because in the conversation there were specialized terms from the academic field, also expressions that are more local and

particular to the context, and also the natural rhythm of how people speak when they are not reading from a script. All of that was important to keep.

Then, to analyze the transcript, the study used Grounded Theory, following what Saldaña (2021) proposes. So the analysis went through different phases. First, an initial coding was done, where the researcher went through the text line by line and assigned codes to what was being said. Then came axial coding, which is when those codes start to be grouped together, connections start to emerge, categories begin to form. And finally, selective coding, which is when the most important themes, the ones that really hold the story together, are identified and pulled to the front. To make sure that this whole process was not just something the researcher was doing alone in her head, the analysis was reviewed by an external auditor, someone who could look at it from the outside and ask questions, and also the professor himself was consulted through a member-checking procedure, where he could see if what was being said about his interview actually matched what he meant.

Finally, what came out of this analysis, all the findings from this interview, were organized into two big categories, and both of them have to do with the teacher, with his role, his practices, his way of being in the classroom. The first category is about the aspects of teachers that create opportunities for trans women students inside the Licenciatura. The second category is about the aspects of teachers that create challenges for them. So it is not a one-sided picture, it is both sides, what helps and what gets in the way, and both come from the same place, which is the teacher and what they bring, or do not bring, into the classroom.

5.3.2.1 Teachers' aspects that create opportunities for Trans Women Students in a Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages

This next category is about all those aspects that come from the teachers themselves and that end up opening doors, creating opportunities, for trans women students inside the Licenciatura. So here the focus is not on what is missing or what is broken, but on what is

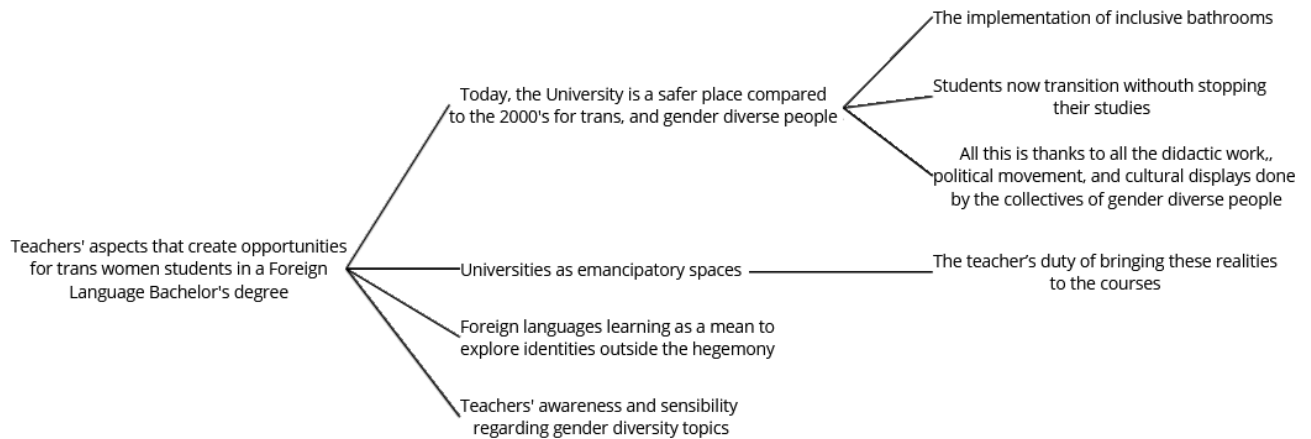
already there, the attitudes that teachers bring when they are willing to do things differently, the pedagogical principles that guide them even when the institution does not tell them what to do, and also the changes that have been happening at the university level that teachers can see and recognize and build upon. Because even though there are a lot of barriers, and the study talks about those too, there is also agency on the part of teachers. They are not just passive recipients of whatever the system gives them. They make decisions, they have beliefs about what education should be, they notice when there is a cultural shift and changes around them, and all of that can become a foundation, something to stand on, when it comes to building practices that are more supportive and affirming.

So what this category does is that it brings together both the changes that are happening in the campus climate, the way the environment itself is becoming, slowly, a little more open, and also the specific aspects that make the foreign language classroom a space with a lot of potential. Because a language classroom is not just any classroom. It is a space where identity, culture, expression, all of that is part of the content, it is not separate from it. And when a teacher is aware of that, when they are sensitive to who is sitting in front of them, when they consciously decide to activate that potential instead of ignoring it, then the classroom becomes a place where trans women students are not just surviving or passing through, but where they can actually learn, explore who they are, and thrive. That is what this category is trying to name.

Figure 10

Teachers' aspects that create opportunities for Trans Women Students in a Foreign

Language Bachelor's Degree



Note. The figure shows the subcategories and codes derived from the main category ‘Teachers’ aspects that create opportunities for Trans Women Students in a Foreign Language Bachelor’s Degree’. The author’s.

5.3.2.1.1 Today the University is a safer place for trans, and gender diverse people, compared to the 2000’s

The subcategory “Today the University is a safer place for trans, and gender diverse people, compared to the 2000’s” is grounded in the longitudinal, lived-in perspective of a long-term professor, contrasting the historical and contemporary climates on campus. It frames the current institutional environment not as a static reality, but as the outcome of a discernible, and relatively recent, socio-political transformation. The following codes detail the concrete manifestations of this shift, from material changes in infrastructure to profound evolutions in social dynamics and visibility within the academic community.

The implementation of gender-neutral bathrooms is progress won by trans collectives

This code points to a concrete, institutional change that materially improves safety and comfort for gender-diverse people. This implementation is portrayed as a result of the work done by trans collectives inside the campus and it shows that although the institutional

support is not sufficient, there is still a slow responsiveness in creating a more inclusive campus for everyone.

“The mere fact that we have gender-neutral bathrooms is something that is thanks to the trans collectives and their didactic work.... that is already a win, it already speaks to a campus that is truly trying to be more inclusive and more diverse”(Bosco).

Students now transition during their academic journey within the University

This code speaks about a major shift perceived by teachers as they now see students who transition from one gender to another without putting a halt to their university studies. This open process serves as a powerful, shared learning experience for the entire educational community, fostering empathy and practical understanding.

“Nowadays, students transition within their academic process at the University, in different programs. And, an example of this is the case of a trans student who transitioned throughout his foreign language teacher education program, which provided many lessons for the School of Sciences” (Bosco).

The University is a safe space today thanks to the educational work of collectives

This code highlights that the current, more secure and accepting campus environment is a direct result of the pedagogical and humanizing work done by trans and sociosexually diverse collectives. Their efforts to share their lived experiences dismantled stereotypes and essentialization, allowing the broader university community to understand gender diversity as just one facet of a person's complex identity.

“The University is a safe space today thanks to all the didactic work done by the collectives, which humanizes trans people and people diverse in gender and sexual orientation... a more political movement began to emerge, collectives started to form, cultural showcases began to happen where trans communities, but also sociosexually diverse communities, positioned themselves... I feel that nowadays people no longer gossip, no longer look strangely, we no longer judge based on

aesthetics we consider androgynous or masculine or feminine, I mean I think there is much more freedom” (Bosco).

Besides this comparison between the 2000’s and now, other aspects that help are...

Universities as emancipatory spaces

This code articulates a foundational philosophical principle of higher education: that the university's core mission is emancipatory. It posits that university education should expand individuals' intellectual and critical repertoires, liberating them from prejudice and dogma to access all forms of knowledge. This role is distinct from ideological training; instead, it is about equipping students with the analytical tools to engage with diverse ideologies and make informed, autonomous decisions.

“The mission of the University is an emancipatory one... the mission of a university professor is precisely not to train in one ideology but rather to equip the student so they have all the tools to access all ideologies that exist and be able to choose and make informed decisions... I believe that local realities, current realities, cannot be ignored.” (Bosco)

Deeply related to this, is the next subcode

The teacher’s duty of bringing these diverse realities to the courses

This code establishes an ethical and pedagogical imperative for educators. It argues that a university’s emancipatory mission demands that professors actively integrate pressing social realities, like the visibility and political movements of trans communities, into the curriculum. Ignoring these realities is framed as a failure of the educator's role to foster informed, critical, and socially engaged citizenship.

“So in the face of that reality, I cannot ignore it from my teaching, from university education, I cannot ignore what is happening in society, and I must bring it into the classroom so that together we can build a discourse of openness toward those realities” (Bosco).

Foreign Languages learning as a mean to explore identities outside of the hegemony

This code identifies the unique potential of foreign language classrooms as safe, emancipatory spaces where students can explore non-hegemonic identities. Learning a new linguistic and cultural discourse can empower individuals to articulate and experiment with aspects of their identity, such as gender or sexuality, that may have been suppressed within their primary linguistic and cultural context.

“The foreign language classroom is a safe space for students to explore other identities... when they come to university and learn another language... it seems that these languages give them freedom, empower them to start talking about identities that have been hidden there, among them gender identity.” (Bosco)

Teachers’ awareness and sensibility regarding gender diversity topics

This code is about something that exists in the program, particularly in the Languages department, and it has to do with how teachers are, or are not, prepared to deal with gender diversity in the classroom. What it captures is that there are teachers who, on a personal level, are not opposed to these topics. They are sensitive, they are interested, they do not react with hostility when the subject comes up. That is something, it is a base, it is better than the opposite. But the problem is that this personal openness does not automatically translate into professional capacity. Because even when a teacher wants to be inclusive, even when they have good intentions, they often do not have the training, they do not have the guidelines, they do not have the didactic tools that would allow them to integrate gender

diversity into their classes in a way that is confident and competent. So there is a gap, a real one, between what they feel personally and what they are able to do professionally. And that gap has consequences. Because when a teacher does not know how to do something, even if they want to do it, the tendency is to avoid it, to stay quiet, to wait for someone else to bring it up. So the classroom becomes a space of passivity, not because teachers are hostile, but because they are not equipped. And good intentions, on their own, are not enough to close that gap.

“In the Foreign Languages department, the teachers show an awareness, a sensibility, and interest in these topics of gender diversity... the apathy in addressing the topics has to do with them not being trained for it, so they feel unprepared and unease. So it's necessary to provide training... they know the topics exist, they know these realities exist within their classes, they know policies exist, but the institution itself does not give them real tools to incorporate this gender diversity into their classes in a way in which they feel comfortable” (Bosco).

5.3.2.2 Teachers’ aspects that create Challenges for Trans Women Students in a Bachelor’s Degree in Foreign Languages

This category looks at the concrete barriers, the specific patterns and aspects that are present in the teacher's everyday work environment and that, even if they are not put there on purpose, end up getting in the way of creating a classroom that is fully supportive for trans women students. So here the attention moves away from the big institutional policies, the documents and the mission statements, and goes instead toward the practical realities of what happens inside the classroom on a regular day. What this category does is that it identifies the gaps in how prepared teachers actually are, the structural constraints that limit what they can do even when they want to do more, and also the pedagogical mindsets, the ways of thinking about teaching, that sometimes, without meaning to, end up pushing gender diversity to the margins.

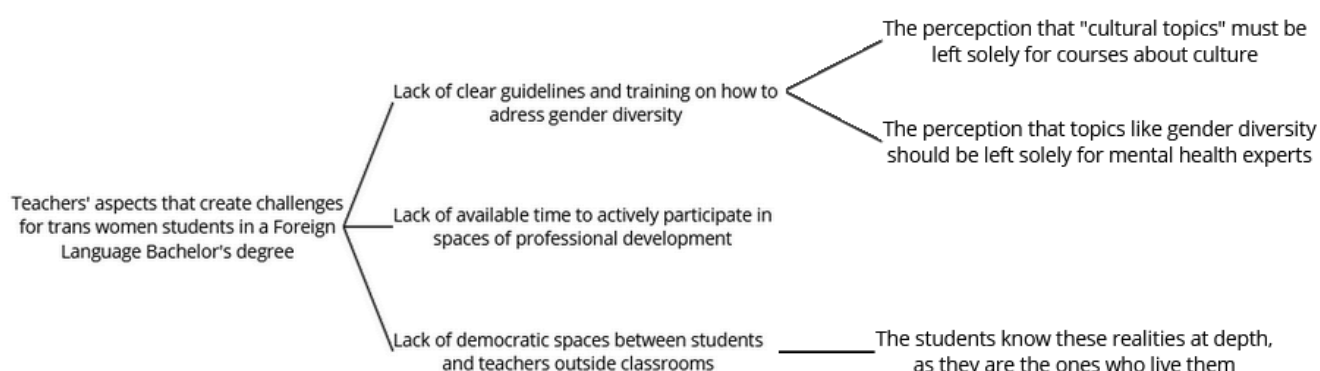
What happens because of all this is that the approaches teachers take often become passive or avoidant. Not because they are against inclusion, but because they do not have what they need to do it well. So inclusion ends up depending on whether a particular teacher, on that

particular day, with that particular group, decides that it matters. It becomes something individual, personal, optional. It is not a commitment that runs through the whole program. And that makes it fragile, inconsistent, and unpredictable for the students who need it most.

Then, when you look closer, what this category finds is that the main barriers are very concrete as there is a lack of clear guidelines, so teachers do not know what is expected of them or what they are allowed to do. There is a lack of time, because preparing a class that integrates gender diversity in a thoughtful way takes work, and that work is not recognized or accounted for anywhere. There is a lack of training, because nothing in their education as teachers prepared them to think about these questions or to handle them in the classroom. And there is a lack of collaborative spaces, places where teachers could talk to each other, share what they have tried, learn from what worked and what did not. All of these absences, together, directly affect the quality and the consistency of the support that trans women students receive inside the foreign language classroom.

Figure 11

Teachers' aspects that create challenges for Trans Women Students in a Foreign Language Bachelor's Degree



Note. The figure shows the subcategories and codes derived from the main category 'Teachers' aspects that create challenges for Trans Women Students in a Foreign Language Bachelor's Degree'. The author's.

Lack of clear guidelines and training on how to address gender diversity

This code identifies an absence of practical, program-level frameworks and professional development that translate institutional diversity policies into classroom practice. This gap manifests itself as a “passive approach”, where teachers, despite being aware of the topics and policies, feel unequipped and unprepared to proactively and confidently integrate them, often leaving it to just avoiding the topics in general or superficially treating them.

“Documents like the PEP, the university's own gender policy, which is very recent, sometimes stay there, in that nebula up there in some documents, but there's no way to translate them or there are no guidelines to transfer those discourses to the classroom programs... That's why they continue to be addressed simply based on individual interests, so you have a class with me, and probably in my course we talk about that topic. But next semester you have a language class with another professor, and that professor isn't interested, so the topic was left incomplete there, so to speak.. They know the topics exist, they know these realities exist within their classes, they know policies exist, but the institution itself does not give them a tool to incorporate it into their classes... besides guidelines, teachers needed training.. I believe that passive approach has precisely to do with the lack of didactic tools” (Bosco).

This code was deeply related to the subcode:

The perception that “cultural topics” must be left solely for courses about culture

This subcode critiques a widespread, compartmentalized mindset within language programs that marginalizes topics like gender diversity. It identifies the false assumption that such themes are relevant only in dedicated “cultural,” “intercultural,” or “decoloniality” courses, rather than being understood as fundamental, cross-cutting dimensions of human communication, identity, and society that should permeate all language, linguistics, and discourse analysis instruction.

“Sometimes teachers tend to think: "well, let the language teachers talk about that, let the teachers of subjects related to culture talk about that." But no, really these are topics that concern the entire education...regarding the bachelor's curriculum, because for some years now we have been talking a lot about interculturality and decoloniality, but the idea persists that decoloniality has to do with Indigenous and Afro communities, and that interculturality has to do with a dialogue between cultures, where often those cultures are from the Global North, of blonde speakers, of fair-skinned speakers” (Bosco).

The perception that topics like gender diversity should be left solely for mental health experts

This subcode highlights a significant barrier rooted in teachers' perceptions of their professional boundaries and competencies as it captures a sense of unease among teachers who, while sensitive and aware to the topics and realities surrounding gender diversity, believe that engaging with the profound personal and psychological dimensions of gender identity and transition exceeds their role as language teachers. This is caused by the fear or concern of causing unintentional harm, “opening Pandora's box” as the teacher mentions, or mishandling deeply sensitive student experiences, leading them to believe these matters are the exclusive and safer domain of mental health professionals like psychologists, psychiatrists, or therapists. Due to this perception, proactive inclusion is discouraged and left aside as it reinforces a passive manner in the classrooms.

“There are teachers who feel like it is a delicate topic, for example some have told me for example that they wouldn't know how to approach the issue because it touches on very “sensitive fibers” in the students, and I don't want to open Pandora's boxes that become difficult for me because I am not a psychologist, I am not a psychiatrist, I am not a therapist, I am a teacher” (Bosco).

Lack of available time to actively participate in spaces of professional development

This code points to something very concrete and very practical. The problem is not just that teachers lack training, it is that they do not have the time to even think about training in the first place. Professors at the university carry a workload that is excessive and comes from many different directions, teaching, research, administrative duties, all at the same time. So when it comes to something like gender-inclusive pedagogy, even if they want to learn, even if the institution offers workshops or resources, there is simply no space left in their week to engage with it. And this is not a small problem, it is a logistical constraint that cuts the ground from under any effort the institution claims to be making. Even when training programs, workshops, or reflective spaces are made available, and even when teachers are personally interested, the crushing demands of teaching, research, administration, and service leave no protected time for this essential development. This lack of institutional prioritization and time guarantees that well-intentioned policies and optional training fail to translate into widespread, consistent, and confident classroom application, perpetuating the cycle of passive approaches and unmet pedagogical needs.

“Another barrier is the lack of time, unfortunately, the university professor has to attend to so many things that even when they are interested in participating in a professional development program, they often don't have the time to go...University policies must be tied to guarantees, I mean, if the university is going to implement a new policy, like the gender policy, the diversity policy... it is not enough to issue the resolution and publish the paper everywhere, this should be tied to guarantees in terms of space and time so that professors have the opportunity to reflect, to digest this and to truly include it in the curriculum” (Bosco).

Lack of spaces of democratic spaces between students and teachers

This code identifies a critical structural deficiency in the academic environment: the absence of informal, non-hierarchical forums for dialogue outside the formal teacher-student dynamic of the classroom. It highlights how the inherent power relationship in graded, curricular spaces inhibits the open, vulnerable, and reciprocal exchange necessary to genuinely understand complex lived realities. This lack of dedicated democratic spaces prevents the collective construction of knowledge and ensures that

pedagogical approaches remain primarily theoretical, missing the crucial opportunity to be informed by the direct experiences and expertise of the student community.

“One difficulty is that we don't have many spaces, beyond the classroom, many spaces for dialogue between professors and students [...] The few spaces that exist between professor and student are classroom spaces where there is still a power relationship [...] If there were other dialogue spaces different from classes and they were more democratic, I believe that from there very interesting things could be built to address them from the curriculum. So that would also be a difficulty, those spaces do not exist” (Bosco).

From this code originates the subcode of *The students know these realities at depth, as they are the ones who live them*.

The students know these realities at depth, as they are the ones who live them

This subcode mentions how students from trans and gender-diverse communities hold an intimate, nuanced, and comprehensive understanding of the very social realities the curriculum seeks to address, an understanding that is inaccessible through purely academic or theoretical study as this experiences mold and intersect several areas of their lives such as personal identity, institutional, legal, familial and medical. Consequently, without structured mechanisms to center and learn from this student expertise, pedagogical approaches and curricular content risk being superficial, hypothetical, or missing the crucial, lived dimensions of these experiences, limiting their relevance and effectiveness.

“ I feel here that the students are the ones who know their own realities best, so even if we want to address it from an academic perspective, we fall short in understanding all the facets that make up the problem [...] The trans issue is not only a question of identity, and an individual question, it is an issue that goes through family problems [...] there are labor policies that exclude trans people [...] the simple act of going to a healthcare provider, the simple matter of legal issues, of

what a name implies [...] there are so many things one can imagine, and many things that escape us because one is not living that process oneself” (Bosco).

6 Discussion

6.1 Chapter overview

This chapter discusses and interprets the main findings from the previous chapter. It connects these findings to the theories used in this study Intersectionality, Queer Theory, and the idea of student investment, and, to the research mentioned in the literature review. Its goal is to give a deeper meaning to the results and explain how they answer the research question about the challenges and opportunities for trans women in the program.

The discussion is organized around four key ideas from the findings: Regulated Autonomy, the Absence of explicit mentions in the documents, the Need for teacher training, and the Importance of Campus Diverso. By looking at these four areas together, this chapter explains how the program's rules, classroom practices, and student activism all mix to create the specific situation that trans women students experience.

6.2 Regulated Autonomy as only mean to explore gender diversity

A central finding of this study is what has been called regulated autonomy, a model where the inclusion of gender diversity is not something the institution guarantees but something that is permitted under certain conditions, depending on the personal initiative and lived experience of students. Although this model is framed within a discourse of academic freedom and student-centered learning, the study argues that it actually functions as a structural barrier, keeping gender inclusion elective, passive, and inconsistent instead of making it a foundational commitment of the program.

This model finds its origin in the institutional silence of the guiding documents. The analysis of the PEP and the PEI showed a systematic absence of explicit mentions of gender diversity or trans populations. The PEP itself formally endorses a pedagogical model it calls *autonomía regulada*, stating that this strategy is present in most courses. However, while the documents speak broadly about interculturality and diversity, they offer no concrete definitions, guidelines, or mandatory competencies related to gender inclusivity. This vagueness creates a policy vacuum where the responsibility for inclusion

gets delegated to the personal discretion of teachers and the voluntary self-disclosure of students.

The lived consequence is clear in Layra's experience. She explained that discussions about ethnicity, trans experiences, or other marginalized identities only happened if a student from that specific group was present and chose to bring their reality into the conversation. As she notes, if there is no diverse person in the room, that visibility never happens. This produces a passive and fragmented visibility where the curriculum depends on the emotional labor of marginalized students instead of being designed to educate everyone about a diverse society.

From the teacher's perspective, Bosco identifies the core issue as a lack of clear guidelines and training. Without practical frameworks, teachers feel unequipped and apprehensive, leading to perceptions that cultural topics belong only in culture courses or that gender diversity should be left to mental health professionals. These perceptions, born from lack of training, lead educators to adopt a passive approach, giving students freedom as a way to navigate subjects for which they feel unprepared. Regulated autonomy thus becomes a symptom of institutional failure to equip its faculty.

This local dynamic reflects what Gray (2024) identified as curriculum exclusion and lack of teacher preparation, global barriers in ELT. It also mirrors what Coghill-Behrends (2019) called institutional resistance, where systems avoid mandating inclusive practice by keeping it voluntary. This case study shows how regulated autonomy manifests as the specific mechanism through which exclusion operates in a Colombian teacher education program.

Through a queer theory lens, following flores (2019), this model upholds cisheteronormativity by treating non-normative identities as voluntary add-ons to a core, unchallenged curriculum. It does not disrupt normative foundations, it simply adds diversity on the side. Using Norton's (2013) concept of investment, this model can erode a trans student's investment because when the curriculum refuses to validate their identity as worthy of academic study, it signals that their community lacks relevant cultural capital, leading to disengagement.

In conclusion, regulated autonomy emerges as a central and critical finding of this study, because although it presents itself as pedagogical freedom and as respect for student agency, what it actually does is operate as a mechanism of control that preserves the cisheteronormative status quo by making the responsibility for inclusion an individual matter. It places the weight and the responsibility of educational transformation on the very individuals that the system marginalizes, and this directly contradicts the university's proclaimed emancipatory mission. So for inclusion to be real, for the program to actually become a space where trans students are not just tolerated but affirmed, gender diversity must move from being a topic that is merely permissible under a regime of regulated autonomy to becoming an articulated, mandated, and critically engaged pillar of the program's curriculum and of its pedagogical practice.

6.3 Absence of explicit mentions of gender diversity in institutional documents

A foundational finding of this research is the systematic absence of explicit mentions of gender diversity, and more specifically of trans identities, inside the core documents that guide the university and the Foreign Languages Program. This institutional silence, identified through the matrix analysis of the PEP from 2018 and the PEI from 2015, is not a simple oversight or accidental omission. It is a constitutive act that actively shapes the educational environment by establishing from the beginning a normative framework where cisheteronormativity remains the unchallenged default, and where gender diversity is positioned as something unofficial, peripheral, and ultimately marginal to the formal academic project.

The document analysis showed that this absence runs through every component of both documents. Neither the PEP nor the PEI contains a single explicit reference to transgender students or the trans population. When the search was widened to broader terms like gender diversity or sexual diversity, the finding remained the same, there was nothing. The PEI is full of broad principles about respect for difference and an inclusive society, but it never defines these terms in a way that would clearly include gender identity. The PEP mentions gender identity in only two phrases, listed alongside classism and racism as part of critical

social theories, but without any development or explanation of what this means for the curriculum. This tokenistic inclusion, coded as partially in the analysis, never translates into curricular objectives, pedagogical strategies, or actionable guidelines that teachers could follow. As Bosco noted, the documents sometimes stay up there in a nebulous place, and when foundational documents lack explicit mandates, policies remain in the clouds and never land where teaching and learning actually happen.

This institutional erasure directly informs the lived experiences reported by Layra and the challenges identified by Bosco. The student's critique of a lack of explicit visibility about gender diversity in the contents finds its origin in this documentary vacuum. If the PEP does not require it, the syllabus does not contain it, so trans topics enter only through regulated autonomy. Similarly, the teacher's identification of a lack of clear guidelines and training is a direct consequence of this absence. The institution provides no tools because its core documents have not defined gender inclusion as a priority requiring structured support.

This finding resonates powerfully with the international literature as it confirms at an institutional level what Gray (2024) called curriculum exclusion, where erasure happens not because someone forgot to include something, but because silence is structured into how the curriculum is designed. The analysis shows how this exclusion is codified in a Global South context. It also aligns with what Galíndez and Mejía Blandón (2024) and González Orozco (2024) found in earlier work inside the same program, where they identified superficial inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics. This study builds on theirs by tracing that superficiality back to its origin in the foundational documents. The absence also explains what Coghill-Behrends (2019) called institutional resistance, because without explicit policy, the lack of mandate becomes a shield that normalizes inaction.

Through a queer theory lens, following flores, this silence is not neutral but an active political act. By not naming gender diversity, the institution upholds the cisheteropatriarchal order without having to defend it. This connects to what Preciado calls aesthetic regulation, the way institutions decide what is visible and legible within academic discourse. By remaining silent, the university relegates trans identities to the realm of the invisible. Through an intersectional lens, following Crenshaw (1989) and Collins and Bilge

(2020), this absence is compounded because the documents also lack explicit commitments regarding race, ethnicity, and disability, creating a hierarchy of invisibilities where the burden of advocacy falls on the most marginalized. From the perspective of investment, following Norton (2013), when an institution's most sacred texts do not recognize a student's identity, it sends a message that the educational process was not designed with her in mind, undermining her belief that she belongs.

In conclusion, the absence of explicit mentions in the PEP and the PEI is not a minor omission but a critical mechanism of exclusion. It is the foundational layer upon which regulated autonomy, pedagogical passivity, and fragmented visibility are built. This silence is a form of symbolic violence that naturalizes the idea that the only legitimate subject of higher education is the cisgender and heterosexual student. Any serious attempt at trans inclusion cannot limit itself to workshops or course adjustments. It must begin with a transformative revision of the institutional documents themselves, where gender diversity is named, defined, and strategically integrated as a non-negotiable component of the university's mission, principles, and curricular objectives.

6.4 Need for proper training for teachers

Beyond the silence of the institutional documents and beyond the constraints of regulated autonomy, there is another barrier that is perhaps the most immediate and practical when it comes to creating affirming spaces for trans students, and that barrier is the unpreparedness of the educators themselves. Across all the data, what appeared consistently and with urgency was the need for specialized, practical training that would prepare teachers to understand gender diversity, to discuss it with students in an informed and respectful way, and to integrate it pedagogically into their courses. This deficit in professional formation is not a minor oversight or a detail that can be fixed later with a few workshops. It is a fundamental flaw that perpetuates a cycle where apprehension leads to passivity, and passivity leads to missed educational opportunities, undermining any possibility of the program becoming truly inclusive.

The interview with Bosco provides the most direct diagnosis of this gap. He identifies the root cause of the passive and avoidant approach many teachers take as precisely this lack of clear guidelines and training. What is striking is that this is not a problem of teachers being personally opposed to inclusion, because many of them, as he points out, have personal awareness and sensitivity regarding gender diversity. They are not against it. But they feel ill-equipped, and this feeling manifests in two significant ways. First, there is the perception that cultural topics, and gender is often framed as cultural, should be left exclusively for courses about culture, compartmentalizing gender as something niche instead of a cross-cutting dimension of language and society. Second, there is the more profound perception that topics like gender diversity should be left entirely to mental health professionals, because teachers are afraid of causing harm or saying the wrong thing. As Bosco explains, this leads to a passive approach where the safest option seems to be leaving the topic untouched unless a student brings it up, directly reinforcing the model of regulated autonomy.

This professional uncertainty has tangible consequences for students, and Layra's experience confirms this. When she describes the pedagogical lack of a more active intervention, she is describing the direct result of teachers not knowing how to intervene. When the only safe strategy a teacher can think of is to say “you all choose what you want to talk about,” that is not pedagogical freedom, it is a sign that the educator lacks the didactic tools, methodological confidence, and foundational knowledge to lead those discussions. Additionally, the training gap is institutionally enabled by the lack of time teachers have for professional development. As Bosco notes, faculty workloads are not structured to prioritize this kind of learning, so even when workshops are available, teachers cannot access them. Well-intentioned policies remain abstract because teachers are given neither the time nor the practical frameworks to translate them into classroom practice.

This local evidence corroborates global patterns identified in the literature. The finding echoes what Gray (2024) documented, where lack of teacher preparation is a primary driver of the systematic erasure of trans content in ELT across multiple contexts. It also mirrors

what Coghill-Behrends (2019) identified in U.S. contexts, where teachers cited lack of training and institutional support as major barriers to LGBTQ+ inclusion. This study contextualizes these global issues within a Colombian public university, revealing that the structural impediments are not so different.

Now, the implications of this training deficit extend into the theoretical core of education. From a queer theory perspective, following flores, the lack of training ensures the heteronorm remains pedagogically undisturbed. Without tools to critique normative categories, teachers reproduce them through silence and avoidance. From the perspective of investment, following Norton (2013), this gap threatens the learning contract. When teachers avoid topics central to a student's identity, they send a message that the institution does not consider that identity legitimate. For a trans student, this can severely diminish her investment, her belief that engaging fully in the academic process will yield social recognition or personal affirmation. The classroom, which should be emancipatory, risks becoming another site of symbolic erasure.

In conclusion, the need for proper teacher training is not a supplementary recommendation but a non-negotiable prerequisite for meaningful progress toward inclusion. It is the essential bridge between passive institutional policies and active, affirming classroom practice. Addressing this requires moving beyond one-off workshops to sustained, mandatory, and practical professional development programs integrated into faculty work. These programs must equip teachers not only with theoretical knowledge but with concrete didactic strategies, inclusive classroom management techniques, and the confidence to facilitate complex dialogues. Without this foundational support, the program's emancipatory mission and commitment to diversity will remain unrealized aspirations trapped in a cycle of good intentions and inadequate preparation.

6.5 Campus Diverso and its importance

While the document analysis revealed a framework of silence and the interviews exposed gaps in teacher preparation and curriculum, another force emerged from the findings that acts as a counterweight to all of this, the transformative role of Campus Diverso and the

student-led cultural activism it represents. What becomes clear here is a fundamental distinction between inclusion that exists only on paper, in documents and policies, and inclusion that is actually lived, experienced in the body, made real in the daily life of the university. The evidence shows that the biggest steps forward toward a safer and more affirming campus for trans people have not come from top-down institutional decrees, but from collective work that makes diversity visible, tangible, and human.

In her interview, Layra makes this distinction very clearly. For her, institutional signs and documents held little weight compared to the energy of cultural events like the Ballroom scene. She contrasts a sign that says trans people exist, which can be ignored or scratched, with the undeniable presence created by Kiki sessions and diversity fairs where trans people are seen inhabiting the campus, studying, living their lives. This shift from abstract statement to embodied community changed the campus atmosphere in a fundamental way. These activities, organized under Campus Diverso, performed the essential work of humanization, moving trans people from being a marginalized concept to being peers, classmates, complex individuals.

Bosco's longitudinal perspective reinforces this. He credits the safer climate today to the educational work of collectives that used political movements, cultural exhibitions, and personal testimony to dismantle stereotypes. This process of collective self-representation allowed the university community to see gender diversity as one facet of a person's life, not the whole of it. The tangible outcomes he mentions, gender-neutral bathrooms won by collectives, not given by administration, and the normalization of students transitioning during their studies without having to hide, are changes forged through persistent advocacy and heightened visibility.

This local phenomenon resonates with broader literature like how Ellis (2019) demonstrates the power of LGBTQ+-inclusive cultural content, like drag culture, to foster belonging and empower students. Campus Diverso operates on a similar principle but at a community-organizing level, functioning as a form of participatory pedagogy where students become educators, using cultural production to challenge the normative aesthetic of the campus.

This dynamic reflects what Preciado (2022) says about aesthetics as the shared sensorial world that governs visibility and what Butler (1990) says about performativity. For decades, the university's sensorium was predominantly cisheteronormative, rendering other identities invisible. The ballroom events, talks, and campaigns organized by Campus Diverso actively worked to reconfigure this shared sensorial world, making diverse genders and sexualities audible, visible, and legible. These collective actions exemplify counter-performativity, through repeated public performances of non-normative identities, the community disrupts the regulated repetition of gender norms, exposes their constructed nature, and creates new possibilities for belonging.

In summary, the importance of Campus Diverso cannot be overstated. It represents the vital dimension of inclusion that exists beyond policy documents, the process through which abstract principles like diversity and respect are translated into shared experience and political reality. While documents like the PEI and PEP provide the formal structure, it is this embodied, collective work that brings the ideal of an inclusive university to life. A safe and affirming environment is not ratified by administration, it is built day by day through the courageous inhabitation of space by marginalized communities and their allies. For this reason, any sustainable inclusion strategy must actively support and resource this kind of student-led cultural and political work, recognizing it as essential to institutional reform. Furthermore, as the findings suggest, it is fundamental that students from the very first semester and teachers are made aware of what Campus Diverso is and what its aims are, so that this work can be understood, valued, and sustained from the beginning of everyone's journey through the university.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Chapter overview

This final chapter presents the main conclusions of the study. It summarizes the key findings that emerged from the documents and the interviews. First, the strategic silence in the PEP and the PEI, where trans identities are erased because the documents never name them explicitly. Second, the model of regulated autonomy, which on the surface looks like pedagogical freedom but actually places the burden of inclusion on students, making it passive and optional. Third, the critical gap in teacher preparation, where educators lack the training and tools to integrate gender diversity confidently. In contrast, the chapter also highlights how the real progress on campus, like gender-neutral bathrooms and students transitioning openly, came from student activism, not from institutional policy. Using queer theory and intersectionality, the chapter concludes that the program fails its emancipatory mission by upholding cisheteronormative structures. The problems trans women face are systemic, but hope comes from the student community. For real change, the program needs a dual approach: top-down reform of documents and teacher training, and bottom-up support for the work students are already doing.

7.2 Main findings and conclusions

This study set out to understand the realities of a trans woman studying in the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program at Universidad del Valle. Through the voices of a trans student and a professor, and through analysis of institutional documents, the research found a deep contradiction. The program, part of a university with an emancipatory mission, sustains barriers to inclusion through its structures, even as student activism pushes for change from within.

The first finding is the strategic silence in the PEP and the PEI. These documents use broad language about diversity but never explicitly name or mandate anything related to trans identities. This silence is not neutral, it establishes cisheteronormativity as the default and

frames gender diversity as peripheral to the academic project.

From this silence comes the model of regulated autonomy, officially endorsed in the PEP as a teaching strategy. This model delegates the work of inclusion to students and to the discretion of teachers. While framed as pedagogical freedom, it actually makes inclusion optional and inconsistent, placing the burden on the students who are already marginalized. This explains why Layra experienced a passive approach where topics only came up if a diverse student was present and chose to share.

A direct consequence is the gap in teacher preparedness. Both interviewees agreed that educators, even when personally sensitive, lack the training and institutional support to integrate gender diversity into their teaching. This leads to avoidance and misconceptions, like the belief that these topics belong only in culture classes or should be left to mental health professionals. So the program's potential to support trans students is undermined by its failure to equip teachers.

But against this, the research found a transformative force in student collectives like Campus Diverso. The most tangible advances, gender-neutral bathrooms and the normalization of transitioning during studies, came from activist pressure and cultural organizing, not from institutional policy. Through ballroom events and visibility work, these groups performed the work of humanization, making trans identities a lived part of the university. This shows that authentic inclusion is built through collective action, not declared in documents.

Synthesizing these findings through queer theory and intersectionality, the study concludes that the program represents a failure of its emancipatory mission. Institutional silence, pedagogical passivity, and lack of teacher formation work together to uphold cisheteronormative structures, risking disinvestment among trans students and failing to prepare future educators for a diverse society.

In answer to the research question, the challenges for trans women are systemic, rooted in institutional erasure, a non-committal pedagogical model, and inadequate teacher formation. The opportunities are agentive and communal, residing in student-led activism and solidarity. For the program to align with its values, a dual transformation is needed. On one side, top-down revision of documents and professional development to mandate inclusive practice. On the other, bottom-up institutional commitment to resource and

sustain the work students are already pioneering. Only through this integrated approach can the program move from conditional tolerance to genuine affirmation.

7.3 Personal reflections regarding the pedagogical process

Doing this research has solidified for me that education must be about recognizing the whole person in the classroom. When we ignore the complex identities students carry, we work against the emancipatory mission universities claim to uphold. How can we speak of freeing minds if we ask students to leave crucial parts of themselves at the door?

This study showed me what happens when this recognition is absent. A curriculum that does not make space for diverse gender identities sends a message that some realities are academic and others are merely personal. This divides the student's experience and undermines their investment. In contrast, the most meaningful moments for Layra came when her identity could be engaged, through supportive teachers, open assignments, or peer solidarity.

Also, this process also deepened my understanding of intersectionality as a practical lens. A student is never just a trans woman. She also navigates race, class, migration status, all of which intersect in the educational space. A pedagogy that claims to be inclusive cannot view identity in fragments.

Finally, this research has been a lesson in the difference between meaning well and doing well. It is not enough to avoid being openly discriminatory. The real work is in the active choices, designing activities that question stereotypes, selecting texts that reflect multiplicity, creating a classroom where asking for a student's chosen name is as routine as correcting grammar. To teach language is to teach about worlds and identities. If I am not intentionally including trans realities and other marginalized perspectives, I am upholding a narrow story about who gets to be seen and heard. That is not the kind of teacher I want to be.

7.4 Limitations and further research

As with any study, this study had certain limitations that should be acknowledged, as they point toward necessary directions for future research. In the first place, the original intended scope was constrained by practical factors of time and financial resources, since conducting a more expansive project that included trans women in contexts outside of higher education was not feasible. However, precisely that is something that could be explored in future investigations, as we feel that there is a need to give spaces to the voices of trans women who have not had the opportunities to enter a higher education major. It is true that while this study offers an in-depth look at one specific academic program, its findings cannot be generalized to the broader and diverse experiences of all trans women in the city of Cali, and much less to Colombia, so a wider study that covers not only trans people inside higher education would be something very valuable for the community.

A more serious consideration is the fact and challenge that comes with studying and researching a community of which the researcher is not a member. From the start, I was aware that researching the transgender experience required a significant investment in self-education to understand their specific contexts without judgement or prejudices, in order to avoid potentially pathologizing the participants' experiences or misrepresenting their words. This awareness was further emphasized by the students I spoke with, who rightly highlighted the problematic nature of having their experiences interpreted through an external lens who is not trans themselves, however, once they understood my position and purpose within the research, both of the students felt satisfied with my knowledge and approach surrounding the research topic. So, although I approached this work with respect, previous knowledge, and a commitment to centering their voices, this dynamic remains an inherent limitation of the study's position and it is something to keep in mind for future researchers who are interested in working with marginalized communities.

Based on these conclusions, several paths for further research are recommended. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the educational trajectory, future studies could interview a larger number of trans students, including those who have already graduated in order to gather their perspectives on how the program prepared them (or failed to prepare

them) for professional life. Furthermore, this case study's focus could be productively widened as a logical next step would be to expand the research to other programs across Universidad del Valle to examine whether the dynamics of "regulated autonomy" and institutional silence are unique to the Foreign Languages program or represent a broader institutional pattern.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Participants' consent form for teachers

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Titulo tentativo:

Challenges and opportunities for trans women in a foreign language teacher education program:
A case study at a Colombian Public University

Código del participante:	Docente 1
Seudónimo:	Bosco

Invitación a participar

Estimado profesor:

Le invitamos cordialmente a participar en este estudio, cuyo propósito es identificar las oportunidades y desafíos que enfrentan estudiantes mujeres trans en el Programa de Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad del Valle. Con esto se busca dar visibilidad a experiencias, tanto positivas como negativas, de estudiantes mujeres trans para así informar el programa sobre qué acciones deberían tomarse en el futuro.

Queremos asegurarle que su identidad estará protegida: su nombre y datos personales no serán divulgados, y se utilizará únicamente el código o seudónimo asignado.

Su participación consiste en:

- Aceptar ser entrevistada en persona o de manera virtual (Google Meet, Zoom u otra plataforma).

- Recibir información clara y completa sobre el proyecto, sus objetivos y alcances. - Firmar este consentimiento informado.
- Participar en una entrevista de máximo una (1) hora
- Obtener, si lo desea, una copia de la entrevista (audio o transcripción).
- Recibir las preguntas que se realizarán previamente a la entrevista.
- Reunirse posteriormente con el investigador para comentar y validar el análisis realizado a partir de su entrevista (Verificación de participantes o pares).

Derechos y voluntariedad

- Su participación es voluntaria. Puede retirarse en cualquier momento sin ninguna consecuencia ni afectación.
- No recibirá compensación económica por participar, pero sí acceso a los resultados y productos del estudio.
- El retiro del estudio no tendrá ninguna repercusión en su vida académica ni personal, ni laboral.

Riesgos y beneficios

- Esta investigación al centrarse en una población históricamente marginalizada, presenta riesgos sociales en cuanto a la representación que se le va a dar a los datos obtenidos. Para solventar este riesgo, pasos como la Verificación de Participantes y el Pilotaje de Entrevistas son puestos en práctica en el estudio.
- Los beneficios son de carácter académico y social: se espera que los resultados contribuyan a la reflexión y transformación curricular de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras para reconocer y atender la diversidad en el aula.

Manejo de la información

- Sus datos serán codificados y protegidos.
- En los informes no se incluirán detalles que permitan identificarle (como nombre, apariencia, lugar específico de residencia, etc.). De ser necesario, detalles mínimos se cambiarán para evitar identificación.
- La información solo será usada con fines académicos y de investigación, previa su autorización.

Contacto

En caso de dudas o solicitudes adicionales puede comunicarse con:

- Profesor responsable: Hugo Nelson Areiza – Correo: hugo.areiza@correounivalle.edu.co

- Estudiante coinvestigador: Alejandro Gil Hernández – Correo:

gil.alejandro@correounivalle.edu.co

Autorizaciones

Autorizo que mis datos y testimonios sean utilizados de forma confidencial en los siguientes procesos (marque con una X):

Uso en actividades con fines académicos: SÍ ☒ NO ☐

Uso en futuros estudios relacionados: SÍ ☒ NO ☐

Declaración de consentimiento

He leído la información anterior, he recibido respuesta a mis preguntas y acepto participar libre y voluntariamente en este estudio.

Nombre del participante: Alexánder Ramírez Espinosa

CC: 6548737

Firma:



Persona que presentó el consentimiento informado:

Nombre: Alejandro Gil Hernández

CC: 1006054733

Firma: _____

Relación con la investigación: Estudiante coinvestigador

Santiago de Cali, a los 4 días del mes de Diciembre de 2025.

Appendix 2. Participants' consent form for students

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Titulo tentativo:

Experiencias educativas de mujeres trans en Cali, Colombia como base de transformación curricular en el Programa de Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras en la Universidad del Valle: Un estudio de caso.

Código del participante:	_____01
Seudónimo:	_____Layra

Invitación a participar

Estimada participante:

La invitamos cordialmente a participar en este estudio, cuyo propósito es identificar las oportunidades y desafíos que enfrentan estudiantes mujeres trans en el Programa de Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad del Valle. Con esto se busca dar visibilidad a experiencias, tanto positivas como negativas, de estudiantes mujeres trans para así informar el programa sobre qué acciones deberían tomarse en el futuro.

Queremos asegurarle que su identidad estará protegida: su nombre y datos personales no serán divulgados, y se utilizará únicamente el código o seudónimo asignado.

Su participación consiste en:

- Aceptar ser entrevistada en persona o de manera virtual (Google Meet, Zoom u otra plataforma).
- Recibir información clara y completa sobre el proyecto, sus objetivos y alcances.
- Firmar este consentimiento informado.
- Participar en una entrevista de máximo una (1) hora y media (0.5)
- Obtener, si lo desea, una copia de la entrevista (audio o transcripción).
- Recibir las preguntas que se realizarán previamente a la entrevista.
- Reunirse posteriormente con el investigador para comentar y validar el análisis realizado a partir de su entrevista (Verificación de participantes).

Derechos y voluntariedad

- Su participación es voluntaria. Puede retirarse en cualquier momento sin ninguna consecuencia ni afectación.

- No recibirá compensación económica por participar, pero sí acceso a los resultados y productos del estudio.
- El retiro del estudio no tendrá ninguna repercusión en su vida académica ni personal.

Riesgos y beneficios

- Esta investigación al centrarse en una población históricamente marginalizada, presenta riesgos sociales en cuanto a la representación que se le va a dar a los datos obtenidos. Para solventar este riesgo, pasos como la Verificación de Participantes son puestos en práctica en el estudio.
- Los beneficios son de carácter académico y social: se espera que los resultados contribuyan a la reflexión y transformación curricular de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras para reconocer y atender la diversidad en el aula.

Manejo de la información

- Sus datos serán codificados y protegidos.
- En los informes no se incluirán detalles que permitan identificarle (como nombre, profesión, lugar específico de residencia, etc.). De ser necesario, detalles mínimos se cambiarán para evitar identificación.
- La información solo será usada con fines académicos y de investigación, previa su autorización.

Contacto

En caso de dudas o solicitudes adicionales puede comunicarse con:

- Profesor responsable: Hugo Nelson Areiza – Correo: hugo.areiza@correounivalle.edu.co
- Estudiante coinvestigador: Alejandro Gil Hernández – Correo: gil.alejandro@correounivalle.edu.co

Autorizaciones

Autorizo que mis datos y testimonios sean utilizados de forma confidencial en los siguientes procesos (marque con una X):

Uso en actividades con fines académicos: SÍ ☒ NO ☐

Uso en futuros estudios relacionados: SÍ ☒ NO ☐

Declaración de consentimiento

He leído la información anterior, he recibido respuesta a mis preguntas y acepto participar libre y voluntariamente en este estudio.

Nombre del participante: Amatista Hurtado

CC: 1193479688



Firma:

Persona que presentó el consentimiento informado:

Nombre: Alejandro Gil Hernández

CC: 1006054733



Firma:

Relación con la investigación: Estudiante investigador

Santiago de Cali, a los 27 días del mes de Octubre de 2025.

Appendix 3. Semi-structured interview protocol for students

Interview Protocol for Trans Women Students

Research Project Title: Educational Experiences of Trans Women as a Basis for Curricular Transformation in the Foreign Language Teacher Education Program at Universidad del Valle

Purpose of the Interview: To understand the lived educational experiences of trans women students within the Program, focusing on the challenges and opportunities they face in performing their gender identities. The goal is to gather insights that may inform inclusive curricular and institutional practices.

Ethical Commitments:

- **Informed Consent:** Verbal consent will be obtained at the start of the audio recording. Participants will be reminded of the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to skip any question or withdraw at any time.
- **Confidentiality:** All identifying information will be removed from the final data. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym that they can choose themselves.
- **Respect and Sensitivity:** The interview will be conducted in a non-judgmental manner. The researcher will respect the participant's name and pronouns without question, and avoid invasive questions about medical history or transition details that are not relevant to the educational focus

Interview Structure and Question Modules

The interview is semi-structured, meaning the following questions are a guide. The conversation may flow naturally, and follow-up questions will be asked to probe deeper into participants' responses.

Module 1: Pre-Interview Introduction & Consent (Approx. 5 minutes)

- **Researcher's Introduction:** “Thank you for your time. My name is Alejandro Gil, and I am conducting research for my thesis on making the Foreign Languages Program more inclusive for trans students. The aim of this conversation is to learn from your experiences to help improve the program.”
- **Confirmation of Consent:** “As we agreed in the written consent form, this interview will be audio-recorded to ensure I accurately capture what you share. Your name and any identifying details will be kept confidential. You can choose to pause or stop the recording at any time, or skip any question you don't wish to answer. Are you comfortable proceeding with the recording now?”
- **Pseudonym Selection:** “To protect your privacy, I will use a pseudonym (a fake name) in my research. Would you like to choose a pseudonym for yourself now, or would you prefer I assign one?”
- **Module 2: Sociodemographic Context (Approx. 5 minutes)**
- **Purpose:** To understand the participant's background without reducing their identity to demographic categories.

- **Questions:**

1. “To help me understand your perspective, could you tell me a little about yourself? For example, your academic year, your language interests, and how you like to spend your time?”
2. “Is there any other aspect of your identity (e.g., related to your background, culture, or experiences) that you feel is important for understanding your journey in the program?”

Module 3: Personal Educational Journey & Identity in the Program (Approx. 25 minutes)

- **Purpose:** To explore the participant's overall experience of being a trans woman in the academic environment.
- **Guiding Question:** “I'd like to start by hearing about your experience as a student in the Foreign Languages Program. Could you tell me a story or describe a specific moment that stands out to you, whether positive or negative, that relates to being a trans woman in this space?”
- **Probes and Follow-ups:**



Curriculum & Materials: “How, if at all, do you see your experiences as a trans

woman reflected in the courses, topics, or materials you study? Are there times you feel included or excluded by the content?”

Classroom Dynamics: “Can you describe the general atmosphere in your classes regarding gender diversity? How do professors and peers handle the use of names, pronouns, or inclusive language?”

Social Integration: “What has your experience been with other students? Have you found solidarity or faced challenges from peers in your classes or in student life?”

Institutional Interaction: “Have you had any experiences with program administration, academic advisors, or other university services that were particularly supportive or challenging regarding your gender identity?”

Module 4: Challenges, Opportunities, and Institutional Support (Approx. 15 minutes)

- **Purpose:** To identify specific barriers and facilitators to inclusion and success.
- **Questions:**
 1. “Thinking about your time in the program, what would you say have been the biggest challenges for you as a trans woman?”
 1. “In your opinion, how does the program's structure or curriculum currently strengthen or constrain your ability to express your gender identity freely?”

Module 5: Visions for Change and Recommendations (Approx. 10 minutes)

- **Purpose:** To gather concrete, actionable suggestions for improvement.
- **Questions:**
 1. “If you had the power to change three things about the program to better support trans students, what would they be?” (Probe: curriculum content, teacher training, institutional policies, classroom practices).
 2. “What specific advice would you give to a professor in this program who wants to create a more gender-inclusive classroom?”
 3. “Is there anything you were hoping I would ask about, or a final thought you'd like to share that we haven't covered?”

Module 6: Post-Interview Debrief (Approx. 5 minutes)

- **Closing:** “Those are all the questions I have. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and insights with me; it is incredibly valuable for my research.”
- **Next Steps:** “The next step for me is to transcribe this interview. As part of our ethical process, I would like to offer you the opportunity to review the transcript of our conversation. This is to ensure I have understood your words correctly. Would you be interested in doing that?”
- **Gratitude and Resources:** “Thank you again for your time and courage. Please remember that you can contact me or my director if you have any questions later. Are you aware of the university's support resources for LGBTQ+ students? I can share some links if that would be helpful.”
- “Conversely, have there been any spaces, practices, or individuals within the program that have made you feel supported, valued, or able to fully be yourself? What did they do that was effective?”

Appendix 4. Semi-structured interview protocol for teachers

Interview Protocol for Teachers' Interview

A. Demographic information

1. Initial questions about demographic and professional information:
 - a. Name:
 - b. Age:
 - c. Teaching experience in UV, how much time, in what area do you work?:
 - d. Knowledge, proximity, or experience regarding the topic of Gender Diversity in Language Learning classroom:

B. Teacher Observations and Current Practices

2. Do you consider that it is pertinent to approach topics like Gender Diversity in the foreign languages bachelor's degree?
3. According to its PEP (Proyecto Educativo de Programas), the bachelor's degree seeks to promote interculturality, democracy, and equity. What are some practices that you do to achieve this in your classes?
4. The program's approach to diversity is "passive," meaning it relies on students themselves to bring up these topics. (Autonomia Regulada) What is your view on this characterization? Could you share an example of how topics of gender diversity are typically integrated into your classes?
5. In your view, what are the main barriers to implementing a kind of more explicit, proactive approach regarding gender diversity across more courses in the curriculum, especially in the early semesters?
6. In your view as a graduate from the program, how would you say that the program's inclusion and diversity, more specifically regarding trans and gender diversity, has changed from then to now?

Any final comments or thoughts?