

## Talent And Culture: Wayuu Learning Practices and Knowledge In Inclusive Education

Maldis Liani Iguarán Magdaniel<sup>1</sup>, Alexa Senior Naveda<sup>2</sup>, Yatsira Eliuth Jaramillo Peñaloza<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad de La Guajira, Colombia, *ORCID*: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2053-3296>

<sup>2</sup> Universidad de la Costa (CUC), Barranquilla, Colombia, *ORCID*: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4768-3115>

<sup>3</sup> Universidad de La Guajira, Colombia

### Abstract

The recognition of cultural diversity constitutes a central pillar of inclusive education in multicultural societies. This qualitative study aimed to analyze the learning practices and ancestral knowledge of the Wayúu people and their contribution to the development of culturally relevant inclusive education. Using an ethnographic–interpretative design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and document analysis with Wayúu elders, community leaders, teachers, and students from educational institutions in La Guajira, Colombia. The findings reveal that Wayúu learning is based on community participation, intergenerational transmission, oral tradition, and experiential knowledge closely linked to territory and identity. These practices represent expressions of cultural talent that foster cognitive, social, and ethical development, yet remain largely undervalued within formal schooling. Persistent tensions between Western-centered curricula and indigenous epistemologies were identified, affecting students' motivation and sense of belonging. However, experiences of intercultural pedagogical integration demonstrate that inclusive education with cultural relevance enhances meaningful learning and strengthens cultural identity. The study concludes that recognizing and integrating Wayúu ancestral knowledge is essential for advancing inclusive, equitable, and culturally sustainable educational systems.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education; Intercultural education; Indigenous knowledge; Wayúu people; Cultural talent.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Context and background

In recent decades, Latin American education systems have undergone a progressive process of transformation oriented towards inclusive education, understood not only as attention to functional diversity, but also as the recognition and appreciation of the cultural, linguistic and epistemological diversity of indigenous peoples. In this framework, educational inclusion is conceived as a fundamental human right and as a strategy to guarantee equity, social justice and the preservation of cultural diversity in increasingly heterogeneous school contexts.

Colombia, as a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, is home to a wide diversity of indigenous peoples, among whom the Wayúu people constitute one of the largest and

most culturally sound ethnic groups. Located mainly in the department of La Guajira, the Wayúu people have a system of ancestral knowledge deeply linked to their worldview, social organization, relationship with nature, orality, spirituality and community practices. This knowledge is transmitted intergenerationally through its own learning mechanisms, such as observation, oral narration, community participation, the accompaniment of the elderly and daily experience.

A number of recent studies have indicated that, despite regulatory advances in bilingual intercultural education, there is still a significant gap between inclusive education policies and their actual implementation in indigenous contexts. In many cases, official curricula continue to privilege Western epistemologies, making invisible the talents, knowledge and ways of learning of native peoples, which generates processes of symbolic exclusion, cultural uprooting and low sense of school belonging among indigenous students.

### **Problem statement**

In the context of formal education, pedagogical practices are often designed from homogeneous approaches that do not sufficiently recognize cultural diversity or the ways of learning of indigenous communities such as the Wayúu. This situation translates into a limited incorporation of ancestral knowledge into the classroom, as well as the undervaluation of specific cultural talents, such as orality, collective memory, narrative thinking, symbolic weaving, and community problem-solving.

The lack of articulation between Wayúu knowledge and inclusive education approaches generates pedagogical tensions, difficulties in school adaptation and processes of cultural exclusion that affect the integral development of indigenous students. In this scenario, there is a need to deepen the understanding of the learning practices of the Wayúu people and to analyze how they can dialogue in a pertinent way with the principles of contemporary inclusive education.

### **Knowledge gap**

Although there is literature on intercultural education and educational inclusion policies, there are still few studies that address Wayuu learning practices in a deep and systematic way from a qualitative perspective, focused on local knowledge and its pedagogical potential. Likewise, a gap in academic production related to the recognition of indigenous cultural talent as a key component of inclusive education is identified, beyond compensatory or welfare-based approaches.

This research seeks to contribute to closing this gap through a comprehensive analysis of Wayuu knowledge and learning practices, making visible their epistemological value and their relevance for the design of inclusive, contextualized and culturally relevant educational proposals.

### **Rationale for the study**

From the theoretical point of view, this study contributes to the consolidation of intercultural conceptual frameworks that recognize the plurality of knowledge and epistemologies in the educational field. On the methodological level, it offers a rigorous qualitative approach for the analysis of indigenous learning practices, based on the interpretation of cultural meanings and community experiences.

In practical and social terms, the results can guide teachers, principals and educational policymakers in the construction of inclusive pedagogical strategies that integrate Wayúu knowledge, strengthening cultural identity, the sense of belonging and the development of talent in indigenous students. The study also contributes to the vindication of ancestral knowledge as legitimate sources of learning in formal education.

### **General objective**

To analyze the learning practices and ancestral knowledge of the Wayúu people, and their contribution to the construction of culturally relevant inclusive education in formal school contexts.

### **Specific objectives**

1. Describe the main traditional learning practices of the Wayúu people in their sociocultural context.
2. Identify the ancestral Wayúu knowledge that is related to the development of talent and meaningful learning.
3. To analyze the perceptions of educational actors on the integration of Wayúu knowledge in inclusive education.
4. To explore the possibilities of articulation between Wayúu educational practices and contemporary approaches to inclusive education.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Inclusive education from an intercultural perspective**

Inclusive education has evolved from approaches focused exclusively on attention to special educational needs to a broader conception that recognizes human diversity as an inherent value of the educational process. International organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD have emphasized that educational inclusion implies guaranteeing access, participation and learning for all students, considering their cultural, linguistic, social and cognitive differences. From this perspective, inclusion is not limited to curricular adaptation, but involves a profound transformation of pedagogical practices, educational policies and school cultures.

Intercultural education is closely linked to inclusive education by promoting dialogue between knowledges, respect for cultural diversity and the construction of equitable educational relationships. Various authors argue that a truly inclusive education in multi-ethnic contexts must recognize indigenous epistemologies as legitimate forms of knowledge, overcoming the hegemony of Western paradigms. In this sense, critical interculturality proposes a horizontal relationship between cultures, oriented towards cognitive justice and the recognition of native peoples as subjects of knowledge.

### **Ancestral knowledge and indigenous epistemologies**

Ancestral knowledge constitutes complex systems of knowledge historically constructed by indigenous peoples based on their interaction with the natural, social and spiritual environment. This knowledge is characterized by its holistic, relational and community character, and is transmitted mainly orally and experientially. Unlike Western scientific knowledge, ancestral knowledge does not fragment reality, but integrates ethical, spiritual, practical and symbolic dimensions of learning.

Recent literature recognizes that indigenous epistemologies offer significant contributions to contemporary education, especially in areas such as sustainability, community coexistence, peaceful conflict resolution, and situated learning. However, various studies warn that this knowledge continues to be marginalized in school curricula, which generates processes of epistemicide and progressive loss of cultural memory.

### **The Wayúu people: worldview and social organization**

The Wayúu people are distinguished by a worldview deeply linked to the territory, the desert and the sea, elements that shape their cultural identity and their forms of

knowledge. Their social organization is matrilineal, which gives women a central role in cultural and educational transmission. The extended family and the clan are fundamental spaces for socialization and learning, where children and young people acquire knowledge through observation, practice and storytelling.

The Wayuunaiki language plays an essential role in the construction of Wayuu knowledge and identity. Orality, mythical stories, dreams and ritual practices function as pedagogical mechanisms that guide the ethical, social and spiritual formation of individuals. Ethnographic research highlights that Wayúu learning is a continuous, contextualized and community process, in which error is conceived as a natural part of learning and not as a failure.

### **Wayuu Learning Practices**

Wayuu learning practices are based on direct experience, active participation in community life, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. These practices include observational learning, the accompaniment of the elderly, the use of oral narratives, teaching through rituals and collective problem solving. These forms of learning encourage the development of skills such as memory, attentive listening, community responsibility, and symbolic thinking.

Likewise, weaving, livestock, traditional medicine and conflict resolution through the figure of the palabrero are privileged learning spaces where specific cultural talents are developed. These talents, although highly valued within the Wayúu community, are often under-recognized in formal education systems, limiting their educational potential.

### **Cultural talent and meaningful learning**

The concept of talent has traditionally been associated with individual cognitive abilities measured through standardized tests. However, contemporary approaches extend this notion to a sociocultural understanding of talent, understood as the manifestation of skills and abilities valued in specific cultural contexts. From this perspective, indigenous cultural talent includes narrative competencies, artisanal skills, ecological knowledge and social mediation skills.

Meaningful learning, according to the pedagogical literature, occurs when new knowledge is substantively related to the student's previous knowledge. In indigenous contexts, the incorporation of ancestral knowledge into the school curriculum favors this type of learning, by connecting academic content with the student's cultural experience, strengthening their identity and motivation.

### **Inclusive education and indigenous peoples**

Recent studies in Latin America show that the implementation of inclusive education in indigenous contexts faces structural challenges, such as the lack of intercultural teacher training, the scarcity of contextualized educational materials, and the limited participation of communities in educational decision-making. However, successful experiences are also identified where the integration of indigenous knowledge has contributed to improving school permanence, academic performance and socio-emotional well-being of students.

The literature review suggests that an inclusive education relevant to the Wayúu people must start from the recognition of their learning practices and cultural talents, promoting a genuine intercultural dialogue between the school and the community. This approach not only favors the inclusion of indigenous students, but also enriches the education system as a whole.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Approach and Design**

The study was developed under a qualitative approach, with an ethnographic-interpretative design, adequate to understand in depth the learning practices and ancestral knowledge of the Wayúu people in their relationship with inclusive education. This design allows us to explore the meanings, perceptions and experiences of social actors from their own cultural context, recognizing epistemological diversity and avoiding reductionist interpretations.

The research is inscribed in the interpretative paradigm, which assumes that social reality is constructed by subjects through their interactions, discourses and cultural practices. From this perspective, knowledge is generated through a deep understanding of educational phenomena in their natural context, privileging the voice of the participants and respect for their knowledge.

#### **Context of the study**

The study was carried out in Wayúu communities located in rural and peri-urban areas of the department of La Guajira, Colombia, where official educational institutions operate with a majority Wayúu indigenous population. These institutions implement, at different levels, bilingual intercultural education guidelines and inclusive education policies defined by the Ministry of National Education.

The socio-cultural context is characterized by a strong presence of the Wayuunaiki language, a matrilineal social organization, strong community practices, and an economy based on livestock, handicrafts, and local trade. The selected educational institutions face challenges associated with school dropout, curricular adaptation and the articulation between school knowledge and ancestral knowledge.

#### **Participants**

The selection of participants was carried out through **intentional and theoretical sampling**, looking for key informants with extensive knowledge of Wayúu educational and cultural practices. The sample was made up of:

- 12 Wayúu wise men and women recognized by the community.
- 10 teachers of basic and secondary education who work in institutions with a Wayúu population.
- 8 Wayúu students between 12 and 17 years old.
- 5 community leaders and traditional authorities.

In total, 35 informants participated, guaranteeing diversity of voices and perspectives for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon studied.

#### **Information collection techniques and instruments**

Multiple qualitative techniques were used in order to favor methodological triangulation:

1. **In-depth semi-structured interviews**, aimed at exploring conceptions of learning, talent, ancestral knowledge and inclusive education.
2. **Participant observation**, carried out in community and school contexts, recording pedagogical practices, rituals, oral narratives and daily learning dynamics.
3. **Focus groups**, developed with teachers and students, to collectively analyze perceptions about educational inclusion and the integration of Wayúu knowledge.
4. **Documentary analysis**, institutional educational plans, ethno-educational projects, curricular guidelines and regulations on inclusive and intercultural education.

The instruments were validated through the judgment of experts in intercultural education and culturally adapted with the accompaniment of Wayúu leaders.

### **Procedure**

The fieldwork was carried out in four phases:

1. **Preparatory phase**, which included community outreach, obtaining permits and socializing the objectives of the study.
2. **Information collection phase**, for six months, combining interviews, observation and focus groups.
3. **Analysis phase**, based on a systematic process of coding and categorization of information.
4. **Validation phase**, by returning preliminary results to the community to ensure interpretative consistency.

### **Analysis of information**

The analysis was carried out using open, axial and selective coding, following the principles of grounded theory. Emerging categories related to learning practices, ancestral knowledge, cultural talent, educational inclusion and interculturality were used. The analytical process was supported by specialized software for qualitative analysis, which allowed the data to be organized, compared, and related rigorously.

### **Criteria of scientific rigour**

To guarantee the quality of the study, qualitative criteria were considered:

- **Credibility**, through triangulation of techniques and sources.
- **Transferability**, through dense descriptions of the context.
- **Dependability**, ensuring methodological coherence.
- **Confirmability**, through audit of the analytical process.

### **Ethical considerations**

The research respected the ethical principles of social research, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for the cultural autonomy of the Wayuu people. It was guaranteed that the results of the study contribute to the cultural and educational strengthening of the participating community.

## **5. RESULTS**

The results are organized into emergent categories derived from the open, axial and selective coding process. These categories reflect learning practices, ancestral Wayúu knowledge and their articulation with inclusive education, supported by textual quotations representative of the participants' discourses. 3 tables and 2 figures are included, consistent with the qualitative design of the study.

### **Category 1. Community Learning and Intergenerational Transmission**

Participants described Wayuu learning as a collective, experiential, and situated process, occurring primarily within the extended family and clan. Daily observation, the accompaniment of the elderly and participation in community activities are the main mechanisms for acquiring knowledge.

The experts emphasized that learning is not separated from daily life or the territory, and that error is understood as a natural part of the training process. This logic contrasts with formal school practices focused on standardized assessment.

*Quote:*

"We learn by watching and doing, not sitting around just listening. The child learns when he accompanies the elder and lives what is taught" (Wayúu Knower, S3).

**Category 2. Ancestral knowledge as an expression of cultural talent**

The results show that Wayúu knowledge is a form of cultural talent that is highly valued in the community, although it is scarcely recognized in school. Among this knowledge, traditional weaving, narrative orality, knowledge of the territory, ancestral medicine and conflict mediation stand out.

Teachers and community leaders agreed that these talents favor cognitive and socio-emotional skills such as memory, creativity, active listening, symbolic thinking and community responsibility.

*Quote:*

"Weaving is not only craftsmanship, there is the mathematics, history and thought of the Wayúu woman" (Community leader, L2).

**Category 3. Tensions between formal school and Wayúu knowledge**

The participants pointed out the existence of tensions derived from homogeneous curricula that do not dialogue with the local culture. These tensions are manifested in the undervaluation of Wayuunaiki, the scarce contextualization of the contents and the limited participation of the community in pedagogical decision-making.

The students expressed that, when the school ignores their culture, their motivation and sense of belonging decreases, affecting their educational trajectory.

*Quote:*

"Sometimes we feel that what we know at home is useless at school, as if they were two separate worlds" (Wayúu Student, E5).

**Category 4. Culturally relevant inclusive education**

Despite the difficulties, inclusive pedagogical experiences were identified where teachers integrate oral stories, community activities and ancestral knowledge in the classroom. These practices favor meaningful learning, active participation and identity recognition of Wayúu students.

Teachers who implement intercultural approaches reported improvements in school coexistence and in the willingness to learn, both for indigenous and non-indigenous students.

**Table 1. Categories and subcategories emerging from qualitative analysis**

Main Category	Subcategories	Description
Community Learning	Observation, accompaniment, experience	Learning situated in everyday life
Cultural talent	Weaving, orality, mediation	Culturally Valued Skills
School-culture tensions	Homogeneous curriculum, language, assessment	Disarticulation between knowledge
Educational inclusion	Cultural relevance, participation	Intercultural pedagogical practices

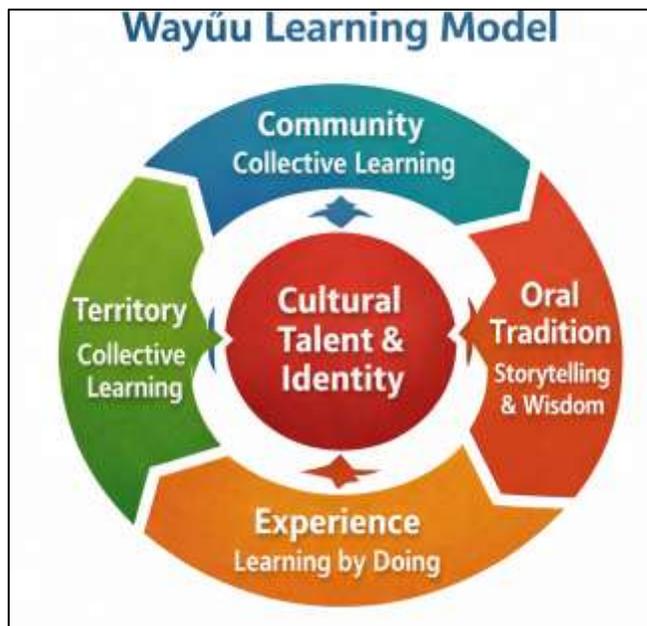
**Table 2. Wayuu learning practices identified**

Practice	Learning space	Talent developed
Oral narration	Family and community	Memory and narrative thinking

Traditional weaving	Home and Community	Creativity and logical thinking
Ritual learning	Ceremonial spaces	Cultural identity and values
Community mediation	Assembly and clan	Peaceful conflict resolution

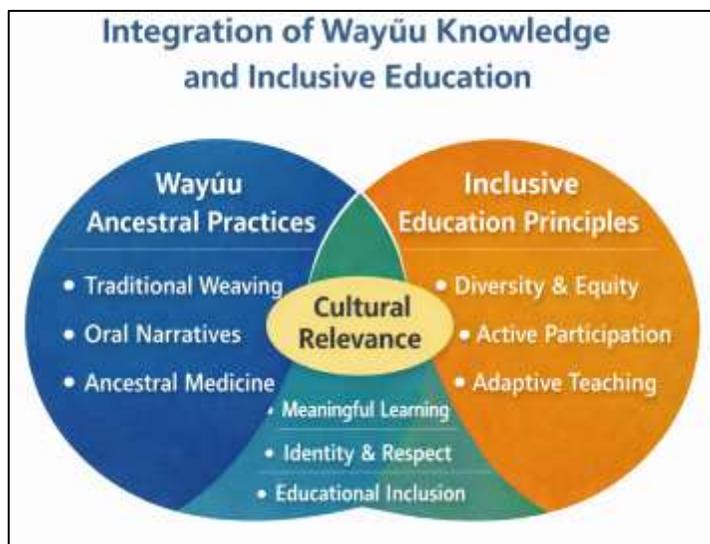
**Table 3. Perceptions of educational actors on inclusion**

Actor	Dominant perception	Educational involvement
Knowers	The school must listen to the community	Contextualized curriculum
Teachers	Lack of intercultural training	Pedagogical training
Students	Need for cultural recognition	Increased school motivation



**Figure 1. Conceptual model of Wayuu learning**

The figure represents Wayü learning as a circular system where territory, community, orality and experience interact dynamically, configuring the development of cultural talent and identity.



**Figure 2. Articulation between Wayü knowledge and inclusive education**

The diagram shows the convergence between ancestral practices and principles of inclusive education, highlighting cultural relevance as a transversal axis of meaningful learning.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results of the study allow for a deep understanding of the learning practices and ancestral knowledge of the Wayúu people, evidencing their relevance for the construction of an inclusive education with cultural relevance. In this section, the findings are discussed in the light of the theoretical framework and recent studies, maintaining coherence with the objectives set.

### **Wayúu community learning and inclusive education**

The findings confirm that Wayuu learning is based on community, experiential, and situated processes, which coincides with contemporary pedagogical approaches that highlight the value of contextualized and social learning. The observation and accompaniment of the elderly, identified as central practices, dialogue with sociocultural theories of learning that emphasize social mediation and the collective construction of knowledge.

From the perspective of inclusive education, these practices represent an opportunity to rethink the classroom as a space open to the territory and the community. However, the rigidity of traditional school models makes it difficult to incorporate these dynamics, reproducing forms of cultural exclusion. In this sense, inclusion cannot be limited to the physical presence of the indigenous student in school, but must guarantee the recognition of their own ways of learning.

### **Ancestral knowledge as a cultural talent**

The study provides empirical evidence that supports an expanded conception of talent, understood as a sociocultural construction and not exclusively cognitive. The Wayuu knowledge identified—such as weaving, orality, and community mediation—constitute expressions of cultural talent that favor the development of complex skills, often invisible in school evaluation systems.

These results coincide with recent research that questions the hegemony of talent models based on standardized tests and advocates the recognition of culturally situated capabilities. The lack of appreciation of these talents in school not only limits the educational potential of Wayúu students, but also contributes to processes of identity uprooting.

### **Curricular and epistemological tensions**

The tensions identified between formal school and Wayuu knowledge reflect a persistent epistemological gap. The subordination of indigenous knowledge to Western knowledge is evidence of a structural problem in educational systems, where epistemological diversity has not yet been translated into concrete pedagogical practices.

The literature indicates that these tensions can generate negative school experiences, characterized by the loss of meaning of learning and the weakening of the bond between the student and the educational institution. In the case of the Wayuuu people, the symbolic exclusion of the Wayuunaiki and ancestral knowledge reinforces this problem, affecting school permanence and well-being.

### **Culturally relevant inclusive education**

The inclusive pedagogical experiences identified in the study show that it is possible to articulate Wayúu knowledge with the school curriculum, as long as there is institutional will, intercultural teacher training, and community participation. These practices confirm that inclusive education is not incompatible with intercultural education, but that both are mutually reinforcing.

The discussion suggests that cultural relevance should be considered a cross-cutting axis of educational inclusion, especially in indigenous contexts. Integrating oral stories, community activities, and territorial knowledge not only benefits Wayúu students, but also enriches the learning of the entire educational community, promoting respect for diversity and intercultural dialogue.

### **Theoretical and educational implications**

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the consolidation of critical intercultural approaches that recognize the plurality of knowledge and talents. In the field of education, the results underscore the need to rethink teacher training, curriculum design and evaluation strategies, incorporating criteria of cultural relevance and inclusion. In summary, the discussion reaffirms that inclusive education in Wayúu contexts requires a profound transformation of pedagogical practices and power relations in the educational field, aimed at the recognition of cultural talent and ancestral knowledge as pillars of meaningful learning.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the learning practices and ancestral knowledge of the Wayúu people, and their contribution to the construction of an inclusive culturally relevant education. From a qualitative approach with an ethnographic-interpretative design, the findings allow us to draw relevant conclusions at the theoretical, educational and sociocultural levels, in coherence with the objectives set.

### **Key findings**

First, it is concluded that Wayuu learning practices are based on a community, experiential and situated logic, where knowledge is built from interaction with the territory, the extended family and the elderly. These practices, based on observation, orality and active participation, constitute legitimate and complex forms of learning that challenge the prevailing homogeneous school models.

Secondly, Wayúu ancestral knowledge is configured as expressions of cultural talent that favor the development of cognitive, social and ethical skills, such as memory, narrative thinking, creativity, conflict mediation and community responsibility. The research shows that the low valuation of these talents in formal education limits meaningful learning and contributes to processes of symbolic exclusion of indigenous students.

Likewise, it is concluded that structural tensions persist between the school curriculum and Wayuu knowledge, derived from the hegemony of Western epistemologies and the limited incorporation of the intercultural approach in pedagogical practices. These tensions affect the motivation, sense of belonging, and educational trajectory of Wayúu students, evidencing that educational inclusion cannot be reduced to mere schooling.

On the other hand, the study demonstrates that inclusive education with cultural relevance is possible when genuine intercultural dialogue between the school and the community is promoted. The pedagogical experiences identified show that the

integration of oral stories, community practices and territorial knowledge favors meaningful learning, strengthens cultural identity and improves school coexistence.

### **Contributions of the study**

From an academic point of view, the research contributes to broadening the understanding of talent from a sociocultural and intercultural perspective, incorporating indigenous knowledge as legitimate sources of educational knowledge. In the practical field, the results offer guidelines for the design of inclusive pedagogical proposals that recognize the cultural and epistemological diversity of the Wayúu people.

### **Limitations and projections**

Among the main limitations is the contextual nature of the study, focused on specific communities in La Guajira, which suggests caution in the generalization of the results. However, the findings open up future lines of research aimed at comparative studies with other indigenous peoples, as well as mixed research that integrates qualitative and quantitative indicators.

In conclusion, inclusive education in Wayúu contexts requires a profound transformation of educational practices, aimed at the recognition of cultural talent and ancestral knowledge as fundamental pillars of learning. This approach not only benefits indigenous students, but contributes to the construction of fairer, more diverse and culturally sustainable education systems.

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