

## From Policy to Praxis: Institutional Language Planning and Intercultural Engagement at the Southern Most Argentinian National University

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### Abstract

**Background:** In multilingual and peripheral higher education contexts, institutional language policies play a pivotal role in democratizing access to global knowledge and fostering intercultural dialogue. The Escuela de Idiomas (EDI) at the Universidad Nacional de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur (UNTDF) has emerged as a key actor in shaping inclusive, context-sensitive language education strategies. **Aims:** This study explores how the EDI's academic, research, and extension initiatives between 2023 and 2024 reflect a localized implementation of language policy, with a focus on communicative competence, curricular articulation, and community engagement. It examines how these practices contribute to broader goals of linguistic equity and internationalization. **Methods:** A qualitative, documentary analysis was conducted on the EDI's annual management reports, complemented by a review of institutional documents and national language policy frameworks. The study also draws on theoretical perspectives from critical sociolinguistics and intercultural communication to interpret the data. **Results:** The findings reveal a coherent institutional effort to integrate language education into diverse academic programs through extracurricular courses, bilingual diplomaturas, and virtual platforms. Simultaneously, the EDI's cultural events and interdisciplinary outreach projects promote intercultural awareness and multilingualism. However, challenges remain in formalizing these practices into a unified institutional language policy. **Implications:** The study underscores the importance of institutional language planning that is both inclusive and territorially grounded. It advocates for the consolidation of EDI's initiatives into a comprehensive policy framework that aligns with national and international standards, ensuring equitable access to language learning and fostering intercultural competence in a geopolitically strategic region.

**Keywords:** Language policy, Intercultural communication, Institutional planning, Higher education, Multilingualism, Tierra del Fuego,

### Introduction

In recent years, higher education institutions located in peripheral and multilingual regions have faced increasing pressure to align their academic offerings with global standards of communicative competence and intercultural engagement. Language policy, once considered a peripheral concern, has become central to institutional planning, particularly in contexts where access to foreign language learning opportunities is uneven and shaped by geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural factors.

This article presents a case study of the Escuela de Idiomas (EDI) at the Universidad

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Nacional de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur (UNTDF), examining its academic, research, and extension activities during 2023 and 2024. Situated at the southernmost tip of Argentina, UNTDF occupies a strategic geopolitical position that amplifies the importance of internationalization and multilingual education. The EDI's initiatives—ranging from extracurricular courses, a bilingual extension diploma on foreign languages and virtual language platforms to interdisciplinary outreach and cultural events—reflect a localized response to national and global language policy frameworks. The case of UNTDF illustrates how institutional language planning can foster intercultural engagement through multilingual and context-sensitive initiatives. Similar implications are noted by Li (2025), who argues that teaching academic English in higher education must be interdisciplinary, learner-centered, and technologically enhanced. Such approaches ensure that students acquire not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate specialized academic and professional domains, aligning language planning with the demands of globalized education.

By analyzing institutional documents and management reports, this study explores how the EDI's practices contribute to the development of communicative competence in foreign languages, particularly English and Portuguese, and how these practices intersect with broader curricular equity and intercultural dialogue goals. While the EDI demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusive language education, the absence of a unified institutional language policy raises questions about coherence, sustainability, and long-term impact.

### **Literature Review**

The growing dominance of English in higher education has been widely documented as part of broader internationalisation processes. Wilkinson and Gabriëls (2021) describe this phenomenon as the “Englishization” of European universities, where English increasingly functions as the default medium of instruction and research. While this trend facilitates global academic exchange, it also raises concerns about linguistic equity and the marginalisation of other languages.

Globalization has profoundly reshaped higher education, compelling institutions to address linguistic diversity and intercultural engagement. “Multilingualism is not only about speaking one or many languages; it is about the ways language use intersects with identity, power, and equity in different societal contexts” (Angouri & Delmas, 2025). This broader perspective highlights that language planning in universities must consider not only communicative competence but also the sociopolitical dimensions of language use. “As global interconnectedness continues to reshape education and professional landscapes, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures has become a critical skill. Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) extends beyond mere linguistic proficiency to encompass cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability” (Xu, Wang, & Mac, 2025). Recent research further demonstrates that undergraduates entering highly internationalized and multilingual contexts often exhibit significant intercultural sensitivity from the very beginning of their university studies (Pastena, Sesé, & Trenchs-Parera, 2021).

Language policy has also been increasingly framed as a matter of equity and social justice. Lía Varela (2019) conceptualizes international academic mobility as a form of qualified migration, where language proficiency functions both as a gateway and a barrier to global academic

participation. Her analysis of internal and external language policies in Argentina reveals how unequal access to foreign language education reinforces social stratification. In this context, institutional language planning must be understood not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a mechanism for democratizing access to knowledge and global opportunities. Hassan (2025) underscores the role of universities as cultural hubs, contending that institutional policies must foster inclusivity and intercultural engagement by challenging Western-centric norms and embracing diverse communicative practices. Cioè-Peña, Linares, and Kangas (2025) advance the expansive language access framework, situating language education within broader struggles against systemic oppression. Their approach stresses that language planning should not only provide linguistic resources but also dismantle barriers that marginalize multilingual learners. Taken together, these perspectives reinforce the idea that institutional language planning—such as that undertaken at the UNTDF School of Languages—must integrate intercultural engagement with commitments to equity, positioning language policies simultaneously as instruments of inclusion and catalysts for social transformation.

Graciela Baum (2021) further challenges the instrumentalist view of language in education, arguing that linguistic practices are embedded in power relations, epistemic hierarchies, and colonial legacies. From this perspective, the dominance of English in academic and technical discourse reflects global asymmetries that privilege certain forms of knowledge while marginalizing others. Language policy, therefore, must be critically examined as a site of ideological negotiation and cultural representation. As Hymes (1972) argued, communicative competence goes beyond the mastery of grammatical rules to encompass the ability to use language appropriately within social and cultural contexts. This perspective complements Varela's emphasis on the social dimension of curriculum. By situating Hymes alongside these authors, the study underscores that language education must be understood not only as a technical skill but also as a socially embedded practice that shapes participation and intercultural engagement.

Building on the work of Grundy (1987), the curriculum is understood not as a static or abstract entity but as a cultural construction—a specific way of organizing educational practices within a given institutional and social context. This view recognizes the curriculum as a dynamic space where pedagogical intentions, disciplinary traditions, and sociopolitical forces converge.

Curricular implementation is mediated by teacher praxis, which Freire (1975) defines as the dialectical unity of reflection and action. Effective teaching practice, as Serri (2024) highlights in her analysis of the evolution of public policies for continuous teacher education in Chile, requires ethical positioning, contextualized problem-solving, and the capacity to navigate complex educational environments. This view is reinforced by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017), who argue that sustained, collaborative professional development is essential for meaningful change, and by Van der Klink et al. (2015), who emphasize the importance of strengthening teacher educators themselves to ensure the success of such policies. Curriculum research in higher education demonstrates that reform and innovation are shaped by diverse pedagogical, political, and technological dimensions. Wilson, Roche, Goode, and McKenzie (2025) show that curriculum redesign through immersive block models can significantly enhance student success and engagement, underscoring the pedagogical impact of structural change. At the same time, Ramhi, Daghara, Motan, and Qassrawi (2025) highlight the political and ideological

dimensions of curriculum by examining hidden curricula in East Jerusalem, revealing how educational texts can reproduce power relations and shape student identities. Complementing these perspectives, Kakabayeva, Abibulayeva, Orazbayeva, and Naviy (2025) explore how technological innovation—such as AI-based simulations—can be embedded into curricula to strengthen professional skill development, pointing to the growing role of digital tools in higher education. Finally, Gouëdard and Pont (2020) provide a broad policy-level analysis of curriculum reform, emphasizing the challenges of effective implementation and the need for coherent strategies that align institutional goals with national and international frameworks. Taken together, these studies illustrate that curriculum reform is not only a pedagogical endeavor but also a political, technological, and policy-driven process.

The concept of interdisciplinarity is central to understanding the EDI's approach to language education. Leal Zapata and Araya-Crisóstomo (2024) emphasize how future teachers perceive interdisciplinarity as a necessary framework for integrating diverse perspectives and addressing complex educational challenges. Interdisciplinarity, in this sense, is not merely a methodological choice but a pedagogical imperative—particularly in regions like the Province of Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur where educational practices must respond to multifaceted cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical realities.

Teacher cognition—particularly social representations and beliefs—plays a critical role in shaping pedagogical decisions. Moscovici (1984) describes social representations as collective frameworks that guide action and interpretation. Woods (1996) and Cambra, Requena, & Rinaldi, (2000) conceptualize these implicit elements through constructs such as BAK (Beliefs, Assumptions, Knowledge) -CRS (Creencias, Representaciones, Saberes)-, emphasizing their evolution through professional experience. This study examines how professors at the EDI perceive language, learning, and their institutional roles, and how these representations influence the prioritization of interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches in curriculum design.

Within this framework, the EDI emerges as a case study of how institutional language planning can influence intercultural engagement. Revello Barovero's (2025) doctoral research on academic literacy practices in English as a foreign language at the UNTDF offers critical insights into the intersection of curriculum design, language policy, and educational equity. Her study reveals a persistent tension between curricular planning and the actual linguistic profiles of students, particularly in undergraduate programs such as Industrial Engineering and Tourism. One of the central findings of her work is that English-language materials are often selected based on disciplinary relevance rather than accessibility. This practice, while academically rigorous, inadvertently marginalizes students who lack prior training in English, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities in access to disciplinary knowledge. Revello Barovero (2025) argues that the absence of explicit, structured language instruction within the curriculum places an undue burden on students, expecting them to independently acquire the linguistic tools necessary for academic success. Her research advocates for the integration of foreign language development as a core component of professional formation, rather than treating it as an ancillary or optional skill. This aligns with the broader call for institutional language policies that are equity-driven, pedagogically coherent, and responsive to the sociolinguistic realities of the student population. Furthermore, Revello Barovero's work resonates with the socio-historical-cultural theory of activity,

emphasizing that language learning is not a neutral or isolated process but one deeply embedded in institutional structures, power dynamics, and cultural contexts. Her findings support the need for a unified language policy at UNTDF—one that harmonizes teaching and assessment criteria, ensures coordinated support across disciplines, and promotes multilingualism as a strategic asset for academic and professional development. In this sense, her thesis provides a foundational lens through which to analyze the EDI's initiatives as both a response to and a catalyst for institutional language planning. It reinforces the argument that language policy is not merely administrative but pedagogical and political, shaping who has access to knowledge, how that knowledge is constructed, and whose voices are legitimized in academic discourse.

Recent studies have also highlighted the role of innovative pedagogical approaches in advancing language education in higher education. Fisher, Tran, and Verezuba (2024) review the use of flipped learning in teaching English as a Foreign Language, emphasizing its capacity to foster learner autonomy, interdisciplinary connections, and active engagement. Their findings suggest that integrating such methodologies into institutional language planning can enhance intercultural competence by encouraging students to interact with diverse perspectives both inside and outside the classroom. This resonates with the UNTDF School of Languages' efforts to align language education with broader goals of intercultural engagement and institutional praxis. Recent scholarship has emphasized that language policy in higher education must be understood not only as formal documentation but also as discourse and practice. Bonacina-Pugh, Barakos, and Chen (2022) argue that in the context of internationalisation, language policies operate simultaneously as texts that codify institutional intentions, as discourses that shape ideological positions, and as practices enacted in everyday academic life. This tripartite perspective highlights the complexity of institutional language planning and resonates with the case of the EDI, where policy documents, intercultural discourse, and classroom practices intersect to foster multilingual engagement.

Some scholars emphasize that language policies are far from neutral instruments; rather, they are interpreted and enacted differently depending on the institutional and social actors involved. Strunc, Berg, and Godwin (2023), through an interpretive policy analysis of bilingual education in Texas, demonstrate how legislators, state agencies, and advocacy groups construct divergent understandings of bilingual education. Their study reveals persistent tensions between subtractive models, which privilege English dominance, and additive approaches that promote biliteracy and intercultural equity. This perspective highlights the need to examine language planning not only as formal policy but also as lived practice—a framework that resonates with the case of the UNTDF School of Languages, where institutional initiatives seek to balance multilingual realities with intercultural engagement.

## **Method**

This study employs a qualitative, documentary analysis approach to investigate the institutional language planning and pedagogical practices of the EDI at the UNTDF during the 2023–2024 academic period. Framed within a socio-critical paradigm, the research emphasizes the contextualized interpretation of educational practices and their alignment with broader language policy frameworks, particularly in peripheral and multilingual higher education settings.

The analysis draws upon a diverse set of documentary sources, including the annual management

reports produced by the Coordinación Académica de la EDI for 2023 and 2024. These reports provide detailed accounts of academic programming, research activities, extension initiatives, and administrative developments. Complementary institutional documents—such as UNTDF’s Estatuto Provisorio, curricular plans, and internal resolutions related to language education—offer further insight into the university’s regulatory and pedagogical orientations. National policy frameworks, including CONFEDI’s Libro Rojo (2018) and ministerial guidelines on foreign language instruction and internationalization, were also reviewed to situate the EDI’s practices within a broader normative context. Additionally, Revello Barovero’s doctoral thesis (2025) served as a key reference, offering an in-depth analysis of academic literacy practices in English at UNTDF and highlighting tensions between curricular design and student linguistic profiles.

To deepen the analysis, elements of critical discourse analysis were incorporated to examine both implicit and explicit representations of language, multilingualism, and interculturality in institutional texts. This was complemented by a review of teacher praxis and social representations, drawing on the constructs of BAK (beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge) as theorized by Woods (1996) to interpret how educators perceive and enact language policies in practice.

Although the study focuses specifically on the EDI as a case within UNTDF, its findings offer broader insights into the challenges and possibilities of language policy implementation in peripheral university contexts. The absence of direct interviews or ethnographic observation is acknowledged as a methodological limitation; however, the richness of the documentary sources and the triangulation with theoretical literature provide a robust and reliable foundation for analysis.

## **Results**

The analysis of the 2023 and 2024 management reports from the Coordinación Académica de la Escuela de Idiomas (EDI) at UNTDF reveals a consistent and evolving institutional commitment to multilingual education, curricular integration, and intercultural engagement. These efforts are not isolated; they reflect a broader enactment of language policy shaped by UNTDF’s unique geopolitical location and its foundational mission to democratize access to higher education. The EDI’s initiatives—such as a bilingual extension diploma on English and Portuguese, accessible hybrid and asynchronous extracurricular courses tailored to disciplinary needs, and the virtualization of language support through Moodle—demonstrate a strategic response to regional demands and student diversity. These actions promote curricular equity and expand opportunities for students who might otherwise lack access to formal foreign language instruction.

Although UNTDF does not yet have a unified institutional language policy, the EDI’s practices function as implicit policy enactments. The integration of English-language bibliographies into disciplinary courses, the coordination of proficiency exams, and the development of support materials all suggest an institutional recognition of communicative competence as a core academic and professional skill. However, the absence of formal policy coherence—such as standardized assessment criteria, curricular integration across programs, and structured faculty collaboration—limits the systemic impact of these efforts. This gap highlights the need for a strategic framework that aligns language education with institutional goals and national standards, ensuring consistency and sustainability.

The EDI’s extension activities further illustrate its commitment to interdisciplinarity and

intercultural dialogue. Events such as *Celebrando las Lenguas -Celebrating Languages-*, *La UNTDF abre las puertas de lo fantástico -a Reading Programme: UNTDF opens the doors to the fantastic-*, and participation in *CIU -similar to Foundation Course- 2023* fostered multilingual awareness and community engagement. Collaborative projects with schools and cultural institutions promotes bilingualism and intercultural literacy, positioning the EDI as a regional hub for language and culture. These initiatives embody the principles of complexity and interdisciplinarity, demonstrating how language education can serve as a bridge across academic disciplines and social contexts.

Professor praxis played a central role in the implementation of these initiatives. Faculty members exhibit a strong ethical and pedagogical commitment to inclusive language education, even in the absence of formal institutional coordination. Their beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge—what Woods (1996) conceptualizes as BAK—shaped their engagement with students and curricular design. These social representations of language as a tool for empowerment and access guided their practices and reinforced the importance of educator agency in translating policy into meaningful action.

To synthesize these findings, Table 1 offers a comparative overview of EDI initiatives in 2023 and 2024 across five key dimensions: academic offerings, extension and outreach, research, teacher praxis, and policy coherence. The transformation of the courses into university extension diploma was carried out to ensure their compliance with UNTDF’s regulatory standards and to formally integrate them into the university’s academic structure—a process that reflects the broader evolution of EDI’s initiatives, where regulatory alignment and interdisciplinary engagement have matured, even as formal policy development and faculty participation in curricular reform remain areas of ongoing challenge. This visual synthesis underscores the importance of consolidating these efforts into a coherent institutional language policy that recognizes the strategic role of language education in fostering equity, internationalization, and professional competence.

**Table 1. Comparative Overview of EDI Initiatives in 2023 and 2024**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>2023 Highlights</b>	<b>2024 Highlights</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Academic Offerings	Courses adapted into university extension diplomas in order to provide them with a regulatory framework.	Consolidation of virtual platforms; increased alignment with disciplinary needs. Enrollment in language courses through the SIU Guaraní system is accessible and visible to students -the same system used for registering in any academic course.	Shows continuity in virtual access and curricular articulation.
Extension and Outreach	Participation in CIU 2023; call for participation on part of the UNTDF Radio to deliver a speech: <i>Día de la lengua materna</i> ; <i>Celebrando las Lenguas</i> ; <i>Maratón de Lectura - Reading Marathon programme</i> .	Strengthened interdisciplinary projects with schools and cultural institutions.	Reinforces EDI’s role in intercultural engagement and regional integration.

Research	PIDUNTDF project on communicative foreign language competence in Engineering and Tourism.	Continued development of research outputs and dissemination.	Research informs curricular and policy decisions.
Professor Praxis and Collaboration	Faculty-led workshops on inclusive education; informal coordination with peers	Continued lack of formal involvement in curricular reforms.	Highlights need for institutional recognition of professor expertise.
Policy Coherence	Fragmented but proactive language planning through practice	Persistent absence of unified institutional language policy.	Underscores urgency for formal policy development and faculty consultation.

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*Note: Synthesized from EDI Management Reports (2023, 2024). CIU is a compulsory course all students have to pass to enter university. PID stands for Research Project.*

## **Discussion**

The results of this study reveal a dynamic yet fragmented landscape of language education at the UNTDF, where the EDI plays a pivotal role in advancing multilingualism, curricular equity, and intercultural engagement. These findings must be interpreted within the broader theoretical framework that positions curriculum as a cultural construction (Grundy, 1987) and language policy as a sociopolitical instrument (Varela, 2019; Baum, 2021).

The EDI's initiatives function as localized enactments of language policy. While UNTDF lacks a formally articulated institutional language policy, the EDI's actions reflect an implicit commitment to communicative competence and internationalization. This aligns with Revello Barovero's (2025) assertion that language education must be explicitly integrated into curricular design to avoid reinforcing structural inequities. Her research underscores the risks of relying on disciplinary relevance alone when selecting English-language materials, as this practice marginalizes students without prior training and undermines equitable access to academic content.

In this context, language policy is not merely administrative—it is pedagogical and political. It shapes who can participate in academic discourse, whose knowledge is legitimized, and how institutions fulfill their social functions. The EDI's work exemplifies Freire's (1975) notion of praxis as the unity of reflection and action, where educators critically engage with their context to promote inclusive and transformative learning. Language education is not confined to isolated extracurricular courses but intersects with disciplinary programs, extension activities, and community engagement. This imbrication of language with other fields—such as tourism, and engineering—demonstrates the potential of interdisciplinary approaches to address multifaceted educational challenges in peripheral regions.

However, the lack of formal integration across academic years and programs reveals a disconnect between the intended curriculum and the practical field. The EDI's efforts, while impactful, require greater articulation within UNTDF's broader educational project to ensure coherence, sustainability, and systemic impact.

The role of praxis and social representations is central to the implementation of language education. Educators at the EDI demonstrate strong ethical and pedagogical positioning, guided by

beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge (Woods, 1996; Cambra, Requena, & Rinaldi, 2000). Their commitment to inclusive language education, despite limited institutional coordination, reflects a culture of professional responsibility and innovation.

Yet, as Moscovici (1984) suggests, social representations also shape institutional norms and expectations. The absence of formal consultation with language faculty in curricular reforms—such as those in the Industrial Engineering program—highlights the need for participatory governance and recognition of linguistic expertise in decision-making processes.

Hassan (2025) argues that higher education institutions must recognize themselves as cultural hubs shaped by global interconnectedness. This requires policies that go beyond language instruction to actively foster intercultural engagement, inclusivity, and equity. Institutional language planning should therefore integrate strategies that acknowledge diverse communicative practices, challenge Western-centric norms, and promote environments where multiple cultural perspectives can coexist. From a practical standpoint, universities are encouraged to design curricula and support systems that prepare students to navigate intercultural dynamics, ensuring that language education is embedded within broader frameworks of cultural awareness and social justice.

## **Conclusion**

This study has examined the role of institutional language planning at UNTDF, with particular attention to the initiatives led by the EDI during 2023 and 2024. Through a documentary analysis of management reports and curricular practices, the research demonstrates how language education operates simultaneously as a pedagogical strategy and as a sociopolitical instrument within peripheral higher education contexts.

The findings reveal that, although UNTDF does not yet possess a formalized language policy, the EDI's actions function as de facto enactments of such a framework. These initiatives foster communicative competence, promote curricular equity, and encourage intercultural engagement, aligning with both national standards and global educational trends. Nevertheless, the absence of coordinated institutional structures constrains their systemic impact.

In reconstructing Hymes' notion of communicative competence, scholars emphasize that language education must be understood as a socially and culturally situated practice rather than a purely grammatical one. This perspective is particularly relevant for EDI, where institutional language planning intersects with intercultural engagement. By moving beyond structuralist conceptions of language, the EDI's initiatives—such as bilingual diploma programs, multilingual bibliographies, and cultural events—embody Hymes' expanded vision of competence as the ability to participate meaningfully in diverse communities.

Drawing on theoretical contributions from Varela (2019), Baum (2021), Revello Barovero (2025), and curriculum theorists such as Grundy (1987), the study underscores the urgent need for a unified, equity-driven language policy. Such a policy should integrate language education across disciplines, support praxis, and reflect the complex sociolinguistic realities of the region. In doing so, UNTDF can consolidate its commitment to inclusive, multilingual, and globally connected higher education.

### Originality Statement

The author declares that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for publication in any other published materials, except where due acknowledgment is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom the authors have worked, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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