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## Evaluation of the Teacher's Role in Promoting the Sense of Family Belonging: A Comparative Study between Contexts in Colombia and Spain

Begoña Galián 

Universidad Politécnica de Madrid,  
SPAIN

María Ángeles

Hernández-Prados\* 

Universidad de Murcia, SPAIN

María Luisa Belmonte 

Universidad de Murcia, SPAIN

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**Abstract:** The sense of belonging is a human need that educational systems must foster to achieve student success. In the school setting, this feeling strengthens the bond between members of the institution and motivates families to become more involved with the school, improving the overall school climate. Teachers play a crucial role in promoting this sense of belonging by influencing the connection between families and the educational community. This study aims to understand how teachers from different contexts, one Colombian and the other Spanish, promote families' sense of belonging to the school. To this end, an evaluative, comparative, quantitative, and non-experimental study was conducted using a validated questionnaire applied to a significant sample in both contexts. The results show that, for teachers in both contexts, it is very important for families to feel satisfied with the education their children receive, which is why they strive to build trust in the teaching staff. The sense of belonging is more strongly promoted by teachers in charter schools and those with more years of experience in schools in the Spanish context. In the Colombian context, women are the ones who most actively promote it, thereby perpetuating gender roles. There is a need to provide specific training for teachers to help them develop this capacity in families, as well as to conduct further research to explore the differences that may influence the promotion of a sense of belonging.

**Keywords:** *Comparative study, education policies, educational participation, needs assessment, sense of belonging.*

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### Introduction

#### Contextualization

A sense of belonging is a fundamental need for human beings. It directly influences their well-being and satisfaction, especially within groups or communities. The Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy, n.d.) defines belonging as "the fact or circumstance of being part of a group, such as a class, group, community or institution." This feeling promotes collaboration and individual-collective participation and influences the general well-being of the group (Allen, 2020). In the educational field, this sense of community impacts school relationships and the academic and emotional results of students (Carabaña Morales & Fernández Enguita, 2019).

According to Gomariz Vicente et al. (2020), the sense of belonging in school involves a psychological and emotional connection between the different members of the educational community. While, Quispe Cayahuallpa et al. (2022) and Salas Cardona (2022) associate it with both individual and collective identification, where actions are oriented towards the common welfare. In addition, Delahunty et al. (2014) underline the relationship between this feeling and identity and emphasize the importance of interaction and connection with the community for the formation of the self. Montero (2004) adds that, for a person to develop their personal identity within society, it is essential that they feel supported, included, and part of that community. Thus, belonging and identity are inseparable constructs (Avanza & Laferté, 2017).

However, the feeling of belonging is not uniform or static; It is conditioned by the context and interpersonal relationships (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022). Ruiz (2016) suggests that educators, from an ethical perspective, should recognize the vulnerability of the student and avoid their instrumentalization, providing an adequate welcome. Equally, Hernández

\* Corresponding author:

María Ángeles Hernández-Prados, Universidad de Murcia, Spain. ✉ [mangeles@um.es](mailto:mangeles@um.es)



Prados (2014) highlights that the family is also a key space for the education of all its members, which means that teachers must attend to their educational needs.

It is a common mistake to assume that the feeling of belonging develops automatically without educational intervention. Taylor (1998) asserts that the self is constructed and compared in relation to others within a community. Therefore, coexistence and the sense of belonging improve as teachers and families receive training on their educational role (Akar Vural et al., 2013).

This leads to educational participation, which has a high impact on educational success (Nguyen et al., 2022) and is closely linked to a sense of belonging. Parra Martínez et al. (2014) suggest that, without a sense of belonging, it is difficult for a person to show interest or willingness to actively participate in the improvement of the community.

### *Relevance of the Problem*

However, the participation of families in the school community remains an area with significant room for improvement in countries such as Spain and Colombia. Although parents understand the importance of their educational role, authors such as Galián Nicolás et al. (2018) and Hernández Prados (2019) find that current efforts are insufficient, with families showing a low sense of belonging to educational institutions. This happens because they do not identify with "the school's pedagogical project (the values expressed in the Educational Project, its teaching approach, its ability to include the entire educational community, etc.)" (Torrego Seijo et al., 2019, p. 23). Furthermore, in Spain, while family satisfaction with educational institutions is acceptable, there is room for improvement (Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes [Ministry of Education, Vocational Training, and Sports], 2023). A similar situation occurs in Colombia (Di Giunta & Uribe Tirado, 2019), where, although public policies promote the participation of families (Ripoll-Núñez & Carrillo, 2018). There is a lot of difference between the social classes of families since it was observed that low-income families tend to have more limited participation due to factors such as lack of time and resources, which negatively impacts school support at home (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016; Vázquez & Greenfield, 2021).

It is clear that the current strategies used by teachers are insufficient to strengthen this connection with families. However, the fact remains that teachers in Spain receive very little or no training on how to engage with families during their university education (Bernad & Llvot, 2016; Weiss et al., 2014). As a result, teachers who do receive training often do so voluntarily during their professional careers (Galián & Hernández-Prados, 2024).

Based on this, there is a need for a cultural change that goes beyond mere norms and is rooted in ethical principles of welcome and unconditional respect (Gomariz Vicente et al., 2020). It focuses on the school's culture and how responsibilities are distributed, breaking the hierarchical structure and distributing management areas among the different educational agents in order to encourage their involvement (Navaridas & Raya, 2012). Although Sulimani-Aidan et al. (2021) propose that both teachers and families should be trained to strengthen the child's sense of belonging through specific plans and strategies. Teachers, as agents of change, must take the initiative to integrate families into the process, as this is key to establishing connections that strengthen learning (Gomariz Vicente et al., 2020). In other words, the sense of belonging is an important factor for family participation, as both are closely linked in a cause-and-effect relationship.

### *Current Status*

Regarding the state of research on this topic, although there are a variety of studies focused on identifying the level of family participation (Carmona Sáez et al., 2021; Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte [Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport], 2014), very few of them investigate the figure of the teacher as a promoter of participation (Galián et al., 2024; Gomariz Vicente et al., 2020; Rubio Juárez, 2016), despite recognizing as one of the main obstacles the non-openness and welcome from teachers towards families, often conditioned by prejudices (Cheung & Kam, 2019). Similarly, there is a scarcity of studies on family participation that incorporate the dimension of the sense of belonging (Carmona Sáez et al., 2021; Torrego Seijo et al., 2019). More specifically, a considerable volume of previous studies has been identified concerning the sense of belonging among teachers (Berrera et al., 2019; Ros Martínez de Lahidalga, 2014) and students (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022; Sarkhosh et al., 2021), but studies referring to families are limited, with the exception of a few recent ones like that of Lim et al. (2024).

As seen in the previous paragraph, progress has been made in recent years in the study of the sense of belonging, but few studies have examined how teachers promote this connection between families and the school. This study aims to address this issue by exploring the methods and strategies implemented by teachers in Spanish and Colombian contexts to strengthen family engagement with the institution. Taking into account that the sense of belonging does not develop in the same way for students, teachers, and families, teachers must know how to implement specific strategies aimed at families. That is why we want to know if they are truly capable. (Parra et al., 2017).

In this context, teachers have the responsibility to motivate families to participate actively, creating an environment with clear rules and a shared educational project that benefits the school climate (Hernández Prados et al., 2015; Lines &

Selart, 2013). Human beings are social creatures who act for the benefit of the community in which we live (Agudelo Zorrilla & Román Negroni, 2018); therefore, when families feel included, their participation increases.

In this task, teachers must empathize with families, recognizing the multiple responsibilities they face. Collaborative activities offered by the school should be designed by teachers to be attractive, relevant, and responsive to the interests of parents (Gomariz Vicente et al., 2020). However, misconceptions persist that limit the participation of families in the domestic sphere and in specific interventions (Giró Miranda & Andrés Cabello, 2016). This makes the whole process difficult for families to be an active part of the educational community.

Despite the difficulties that exist on the part of teachers and families, the key is for teachers to foster a strong and solid socio-community environment, where group cohesion, trust, respect, and a sense of community are fundamental pillars (Delahunty et al., 2014). In addition, as Sulimani-Aidan et al. (2021) highlight, fluid, open, and continuous communication between teachers and families improves both the commitment to children's education and the sense of belonging to the school.

In conclusion, the sense of belonging has a positive impact on several key factors that contribute to the well-being of individuals in society (Allen, 2020). Throughout this introduction, studies have been presented that substantiate the positive effects of a sense of belonging among teachers (Gil-Flores, 2017), families (Meehan & Howells, 2019), students (Islam & Shapla, 2021), and school climate (Hernández Prados et al., 2015). Based on this information, it is considered important to understand the extent to which teachers foster a sense of belonging among families within the school and to determine if differences exist across contexts. The specific objectives of the research are to evaluate and analyze how teachers in Spanish and Colombian contexts promote families' sense of belonging to the school, taking into account the socio-demographic characteristics of teachers, and to compare these strategies independently and collectively between both contexts to identify similarities and differences.

## Methodology

### *Study Design*

This research is framed within the Socio-Educational Intervention Cycle (García-Sanz, 2012). Specifically, it focuses on evaluating teachers' training needs regarding the promotion of families' sense of belonging to educational institutions. The study falls within quantitative research, with a non-experimental design, and follows a comparative approach.

### *Sample and Data Collection*

This research was developed in two contexts, and the participants were teachers of compulsory education in Torre Pacheco, a municipality in Murcia (Spain) and Manizales (Colombia). The choice of these contexts is justified because both are rural and showed interest in collaborating. In addition, Manizales already has experience in promoting family participation in schools, while Torre Pacheco does not. Therefore, it is interesting to make a comparison in order to know the aspects that can be improved.

Manizales is a Colombian city that is part of the coffee-growing region. Much of its population is engaged in coffee cultivation or cattle ranching. A cluster sampling method was used to collect information in this city, ensuring an equitable distribution between rural and urban areas, communes, and corregimientos, as well as among educational institutions to ensure the representativeness of the population. From an initial population of 1699 teachers, a sample size was determined to achieve a 5% margin of error with a 95% confidence level, requiring a minimum of 313 participants for representativeness. To ensure this, 707 teachers from 45 educational institutions were invited, and 570 responses were obtained, achieving the objective. The distribution of the population based on sociodemographic aspects is shown in Table 3.

In Spain, the research was conducted in the municipality of Torre Pacheco. It is a rural environment with a high percentage of immigration, and family work is primarily in the primary sector. In this environment, all teachers from the 14 schools and high schools were invited. Finally, out of a total population of 542, 225 teachers agreed to participate, thus achieving a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. The achieved sample is shown distributed based on the characteristics of the teachers in Table 2.

### *Information Collection Instrument*

For data collection, a questionnaire developed and validated by the "Research Group Compartimos Educación" titled "Teaching Facilitation of Family Participation in Educational Institutions" (Gomariz et al., 2022) was used. This instrument comprises seven dimensions with a total of 74 items that address different forms of fostering family participation in the school. However, the present study focuses on the sense of belonging that families have with the school. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants answer seven sociodemographic questions about gender, age, years of experience, employment status, years of experience at the current school, the educational stage they teach, and whether they hold a position in the educational institution. Following this, there are 11 items related to what teachers do to foster a sense of belonging in their school (Table 1). Responses are provided on a 5-level Likert scale where 1 indicates

total disagreement and 5 indicates total agreement. To ensure validation in both contexts in Manizales, the questionnaire was reviewed with 2 professors from the University of Caldas and 2 school teachers. In this case, it was not necessary to modify any item. This questionnaire has demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha = .915$  in Torre Pacheco and .950 in Manizales.

### Procedure

This study is part of a larger project titled We Share Education: Program for Promoting Family Participation in Educational Centers (EDU2016-77035-R). This project was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, awarded the project to the "Compartimos Educación Research Group", and motivated by the Federation of Parents' Associations of the municipality of Torre Pacheco to solve the lack of attachment of families to children's educational centers. To carry out the research, meetings were initially held with the directors of the schools and high schools. After showing interest in participating, the collaboration of all teachers was requested, who agreed to collaborate by completing the questionnaire digitally within a period of one month.

To carry out this research in Manizales, the collaboration of the University of Caldas and the Mayor's Office of Manizales was required, which facilitated access to the sample. The Mayor's Office of Manizales called the principals of the educational institutions to motivate them to collaborate by having the teachers answer the questionnaire. The teachers had two weeks to respond, and then the questionnaires were collected in the same centers.

Upon completion of data collection, all participating centers received a report detailing their situation compared to the overall average of centers in their context, enabling them to identify weaknesses or potential strengths.

### Analyzing of Data

The obtained data were entered into an IBM SPSS Statistics 24. After normality tests, it was determined that the data did not meet the criteria for parametric statistics application (Siegel, 1990). Therefore, descriptive and non-parametric statistics were applied, considering an  $\alpha=.05$  for establishing statistically significant differences. Once identified, Cohen's "d" statistic was used to determine the effect size of these differences (Cohen, 1988), with a threshold of "d"  $\pm .50$ .

## Findings/Results

The sense of belonging is significantly promoted by the teachers of Torre Pacheco (Spain) globally ( $\bar{X}_{Global}= 4.19$ ), as shown in Table 1. Although all items exceed the standard value of the scale, set at 3, the aspect of the feeling of belonging that is least promoted is encouraging families to feel that when a sports, artistic, or cultural team from the center participates in a championship, contest or exhibition, it is their own ( $\bar{X}_{P3}= 3.69$ ). Conversely, teachers strongly agree that they do everything possible to ensure families are satisfied with the education students receive ( $\bar{X}_{P8}= 4.57$ ). They agree that they communicate with families to trust the educational work being done with their children and support the decisions made by the teaching staff ( $\bar{X}_{P4}= 4.36$ ). They also agree that they promote families feeling welcomed and integrated into the educational community from the start of their children's schooling ( $\bar{X}_{P7}= 4.31$ ) and guide them to feel free to express their ideas, concerns, suggestions, complaints, etc., at the school ( $\bar{X}_{P9}= 4.25$ ). Additionally, the teaching staff agrees that the center facilitates families feeling connected to it ( $\bar{X}_{P11}= 4.29$ ).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Teacher Facilitation for Family Sense of Belonging with the Educational Institution

| Items                                                                                                                                                                        | Spanish Context |          | Colombian Context |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
|                                                                                                                                                                              | $\bar{X}$       | $\sigma$ | $\bar{X}$         | $\sigma$ |
| 1. I strive for families to identify with the values, ideas, attitudes, goals, etc. of the center.                                                                           | 4.2             | 0.769    | 4.51              | 0.756    |
| 2. I encourage families to feel like members of the center and to consider it as their own.                                                                                  | 4.21            | 0.779    | 4.53              | 0.747    |
| 3. I foster in families the feeling that when a sports, artistic, or cultural team from the center participates in a championship, contest, or exhibition, it is their team. | 3.69            | 1.026    | 4.11              | 0.905    |
| 4. I talk to families to ensure they trust the educational work we do with their children, insisting on their support for our decisions.                                     | 4.36            | 0.779    | 4.63              | 0.729    |
| 5. I promote that families feel attracted to the activities or collaborative experiences offered by the center.                                                              | 4.2             | 0.828    | 4.46              | 0.798    |
| 6. I facilitate that families perceive that participating in the educational center makes them a part of it.                                                                 | 4.16            | 0.853    | 4.38              | 0.779    |
| 7. I promote that families feel welcomed and integrated by the educational community from the beginning of their children's schooling.                                       | 4.31            | 0.768    | 4.56              | 0.716    |

Table 1. Continued

| Items                                                                                                            | Spanish Context |          | Colombian Context |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
|                                                                                                                  | $\bar{X}$       | $\sigma$ | $\bar{X}$         | $\sigma$ |
| 8. I do everything possible to ensure families are satisfied with the education that students receive.           | 4.57            | 0.678    | 4.64              | 0.678    |
| 9. I guide families to feel free to express their ideas, concerns, suggestions, complaints, etc., at the center. | 4.25            | 0.809    | 4.52              | 0.718    |
| 10. I encourage families to recommend this educational center to other people with school-aged children.         | 3.97            | 0.961    | 4.53              | 0.752    |
| Overall promotion of the sense of belonging.                                                                     | 4.19            | 0.625    | 4.49              | 0.628    |
| 11. In general, the center facilitates that families feel connected to it.                                       | 4.29            | 0.8      | 4.53              | 0.721    |

Source: own elaboration

The sense of belonging is significantly promoted by the teachers in Manizales (Colombia) globally ( $\bar{X}_{\text{Global}} = 4.49$ ), as shown in Table 1. Although all items exceeded the standard value of the scale, the aspect that teachers facilitate the least is encouraging families to feel that when a sports, artistic, or cultural team from the center participates in a championship, contest, or exhibition, it is their own ( $\bar{X}_{P3} = 4.11$ ). Conversely, teachers strongly agree that they do everything possible to ensure families are satisfied with the education students receive ( $\bar{X}_{P8} = 4.64$ ). They also agree that they communicate with families to trust the educational work being done with their children and support the decisions made by the teaching staff ( $\bar{X}_{P4} = 4.63$ ), and they promote that families feel welcomed and integrated into the educational community from the start of their children's schooling ( $\bar{X}_{P7} = 4.56$ ).

In addition, Colombian teachers strongly agree that the center facilitates, on a global level, that families feel connected to it ( $\bar{X}_{P11} = 4.53$ ). Figure 1 is provided for a more visual representation:

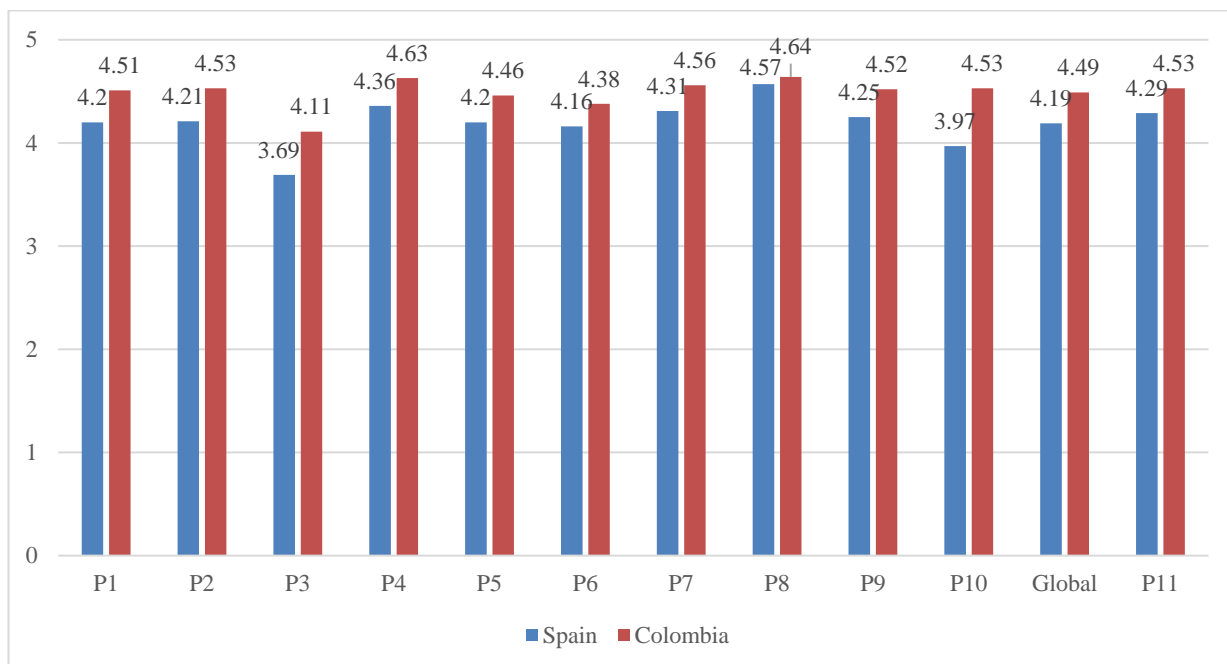


Figure 1. Comparison of Means of Teacher Facilitation of The Family's Sense of Belonging to the Educational Institution in Two Contexts

Regarding the comparison between cities, considering the promotion of the sense of belonging by Colombian teachers, in Manizales ( $\bar{X} = 4.49$ ) this sense is significantly more promoted ( $p = .000$ ) than in Torre Pacheco ( $\bar{X} = 4.19$ ). By approximation, it can be stated that, in this case, the magnitude of the effect provided by Cohen's  $d$  ( $d = .480$ ) reached the threshold of acceptable determined by the author, which corresponds to  $d \geq .50$ .

Next, the existence of differences based on sociodemographic variables in both studied contexts is analyzed. Starting with Torre Pacheco, Table 2 shows that the promotion of the sense of belonging does not significantly depend on the teacher's gender ( $p = .695$ ), age ( $p = .455$ ), years of experience ( $p = .407$ ), employment status ( $p = .822$ ), educational stage they teach ( $p = .138$ ), specialty ( $p = .154$ ), position held in the center ( $p = .392$ ), or qualifications ( $p = .447$ ). On the contrary, there are significant differences when considering the type of school ( $p = .024$ ), as it is evident that teachers in charter schools make a greater effort to promote a sense of belonging than those in public schools. The years of experience of the

teachers in the educational institution also influence ( $p = .018$ ), with those having between 21 and 30 years of experience at the center fostering a sense of belonging among families more than those with less than 10 years of experience at the institution ( $p = .006$  [for experience <5];  $p = .027$  [for experience 5-10]).

Table 2. Significant Differences in the Facilitation of the Sense of Belonging Based on Sociodemographic Variables in Torre Pacheco. Spanish context

| Items                    | Category                       | Sample Distribution | Average Range | $\bar{X}$ | $\sigma$ | $p$   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------|----------|-------|
| Sex                      | Man                            | 32.40%              | 113.99        | 4.2       | 0.68     | 0.695 |
|                          | Woman                          | 67.60%              | 111.79        | 4.19      | 0.599    |       |
| Age                      | 20-30                          | 12.40%              | 124.82        | 4.35      | 0.427    | 0.455 |
|                          | 31-40                          | 43.60%              | 107.61        | 4.16      | 0.61     |       |
|                          | 41-50                          | 27.60%              | 108.13        | 4.11      | 0.71     |       |
|                          | 51-60                          | 14.20%              | 125.19        | 4.31      | 0.503    |       |
|                          | >60                            | 2.20%               | 134.9         | 4.16      | 1.238    |       |
| Years of Experience      | <5                             | 17.30%              | 113           | 4.24      | 0.5      | 0.407 |
|                          | 11-20                          | 27.10%              | 105.22        | 4.14      | 0.608    |       |
|                          | 21-30                          | 35.60%              | 109.66        | 4.15      | 0.658    |       |
|                          | 21-30                          | 17.80%              | 129.45        | 4.32      | 0.625    |       |
|                          | >30                            | 2.20%               | 129.8         | 4.1       | 1.153    |       |
| Employment Status        | Temporary contract             | 30.20%              | 114.48        | 4.2       | 0.669    | 0.822 |
|                          | Permanent contract             | 69.80%              | 112.36        | 4.19      | 0.607    |       |
| Type of School           | Public                         | 87.40%              | 109.23        | 4.16      | 0.635    | 0.024 |
|                          | Charter                        | 12.90%              | 138.47        | 4.44      | 0.493    |       |
| Experience at the Center | <5                             | 48.40%              | 103.83        | 4.12      | 0.635    | 0.018 |
|                          | 5-11                           | 27.10%              | 113.52        | 4.23      | 0.508    |       |
|                          | 11-20                          | 17.80%              | 125.94        | 4.27      | 0.711    |       |
|                          | 21-30                          | 6.20%               | 152.96        | 4.54      | 0.352    |       |
|                          | >30                            | 0.40%               | 3             | 2.1       | .        |       |
| Educational Stage        | Early Childhood Education      | 14.20%              | 121.55        | 4.29      | 0.474    | 0.138 |
|                          | Primary Education              | 46.20%              | 119.96        | 4.25      | 0.626    |       |
|                          | Both                           | 9.30%               | 108.79        | 4.24      | 0.435    |       |
|                          | Compulsory Secondary Education | 13.80%              | 112.18        | 4.2       | 0.58     |       |
|                          | Baccalaureate                  | 0.40%               | 3             | 2.1       | .        |       |
|                          | Both (EB)                      | 13.30%              | 96.47         | 4.01      | 0.749    |       |
|                          | Other                          | 13.80%              | 66.83         | 3.7       | 0.693    |       |
| Position Held            | None                           | 30.70%              | 112.46        | 4.21      | 0.566    | 0.392 |
|                          | Tutor                          | 45.30%              | 115.77        | 4.19      | 0.685    |       |
|                          | Program Coordinator            | 5.80%               | 97.23         | 4.14      | 0.437    |       |
|                          | Management Team                | 9.30%               | 128.19        | 4.36      | 0.507    |       |
|                          | Department Head                | 8.40%               | 90.87         | 3.97      | 0.708    |       |
|                          | Counselor                      | 0.40%               | 174           | 4.7       | .        |       |
| Academic Qualification   | Diploma                        | 45.80%              | 117.5         | 4.23      | 0.616    | 0.447 |
|                          | Degree/Licensure               | 41.80%              | 112.74        | 4.17      | 0.679    |       |
|                          | Master's                       | 10.20%              | 101.52        | 4.16      | 0.462    |       |
|                          | Doctorate                      | 2.20%               | 78.1          | 3.98      | 0.432    |       |

Taking into account the sociodemographic variables that show statistically significant differences in the context of Torre Pacheco, Cohen's " $d$ " values were calculated to determine the magnitude of these differences. The results indicate that, based on the type of school, the Cohen's standard is approximately reached ( $d = .493$ ). Considering the years of teaching experience at the center, the typical value is exceeded when comparing teachers with 21 to 30 years of experience and those with less than 5 years ( $d = .818$ ), as well as between the former and those with 5 to 10 years in the institution ( $d = .709$ ).

Continuing with the context of Manizales, Table 3 shows that, although there are groups that promote the sense of belonging of families to the center to a greater extent, this difference is only significant when considering the teacher's

gender, with female teachers placing more importance on it ( $p = .004$ ). After calculating Cohen's "d" for the gender variable, the results show that, despite the existence of statistically significant differences, their magnitude does not exceed Cohen's standard ( $d = .220$ ).

*Table 3. Significant Differences in the Facilitation of the Sense of Belonging Based on Sociodemographic Variables in Manizales (Colombian Context)*

| Items                    | Category                  | Sample Distribution | Average Range | $\bar{X}$ | $\sigma$ | $p$   |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------|----------|-------|
| Sex                      | Man                       | 35.90%              | 256.47        | 4.4       | 0.676    | 0.004 |
|                          | Woman                     | 64.10%              | 297.76        | 4.54      | 0.595    |       |
| Age                      | 20-30                     | 4.60%               | 300.73        | 4.58      | 0.418    | 0.349 |
|                          | 31-40                     | 25%                 | 279.02        | 4.52      | 0.51     |       |
|                          | 41-50                     | 23.60%              | 298.73        | 4.55      | 0.531    |       |
|                          | 51-60                     | 32.60%              | 285.36        | 4.48      | 0.689    |       |
|                          | >60                       | 14.30%              | 253.05        | 4.33      | 0.832    |       |
| Years of Experience      | <5                        | 6.20%               | 299.73        | 4.58      | 0.431    | 0.142 |
|                          | 5-11                      | 17.10%              | 258.5         | 4.46      | 0.501    |       |
|                          | 11-20                     | 21.40%              | 298.25        | 4.61      | 0.37     |       |
|                          | 21-30                     | 26.90%              | 292.5         | 4.51      | 0.673    |       |
|                          | >30                       | 28.30%              | 261.26        | 4.37      | 0.815    |       |
| Employment Status        | Provisional               | 10.70%              | 281.5         | 4.48      | 0.65     | 0.831 |
|                          | In plant (permanent)      | 89.30%              | 276.76        | 4.53      | 0.417    |       |
| Experience at the Center | <5                        | 42.00%              | 265.15        | 4.48      | 0.512    | 0.274 |
|                          | 5-11                      | 25.90%              | 294.7         | 4.55      | 0.555    |       |
|                          | 11-20                     | 56.40%              | 294.39        | 4.49      | 0.702    |       |
|                          | 21-30                     | 1.30%               | 285.43        | 4.44      | 0.763    |       |
|                          | >30                       | 33.50%              | 310           | 4.38      | 1.075    |       |
| Educational Stage        | Early Childhood Education | 5.30%               | 312.59        | 4.71      | 0.286    | 0.196 |
|                          | Primary Education         | 36.90%              | 271.08        | 4.56      | 0.516    |       |
|                          | Secondary school          | 56.40%              | 253.78        | 4.46      | 0.664    |       |
|                          | High School               | 1.30%               | 269.36        | 4.49      | 0.628    |       |
| Position Held            | Teacher                   | 42.90%              | 270.84        | 4.43      | 0.725    | 0.14  |
|                          | Group Manager             | 57.10%              | 291.2         | 4.54      | 0.543    |       |
| Academic Qualification   | Normalista                | 2.50%               | 256.96        | 4.52      | 0.33     | 0.493 |
|                          | Licentiate                | 21.10%              | 288.13        | 4.53      | 0.52     |       |
|                          | Specialization            | 42.4                | 275.47        | 4.42      | 0.779    |       |
|                          | Master's                  | 32.50%              | 289.13        | 4.55      | 0.475    |       |
|                          | Doctorate                 | 1.60%               | 362.44        | 4.73      | 0.366    |       |

## Discussion

The purpose of this article has been to analyze and compare how teachers from two cities in two different contexts, Spain and Colombia, foster a sense of belonging among families in their respective schools and high schools. Based on the reviewed literature, it appears that the sense of belonging is considered an emotional and abstract socio-educational aspect, inherent to the relationships established among members of the educational community. Consequently, it is scarcely addressed and frequently forgotten in school interventions carried out by teachers, as highlighted in various previous works (Carabaña Morales & Fernández Enguita, 2019; Gravett & Ajawi, 2022). However, the results obtained in the present research provide at least two pieces of evidence worth emphasizing. On one hand, there is a high commitment among teachers in the studied contexts, both Spanish and Colombian, but especially the latter, to promote the sense of belonging of families to the educational centers where they work. Correspondingly, previous studies support that the sense of belonging among parents is something that teachers frequently foster (Gomariz Vicente et al., 2017; Torrego Seijo et al., 2019). Although individual responsibility should not be undermined, this function cannot solely fall on the teaching staff; rather, it is a collective matter that penetrates the microculture and identity of the school (Hidalgo Karim, 2018). On the other hand, the influence of years of experience and the type of school ownership in fostering family belonging among Spanish teachers, while gender differences are noted among Colombian teachers.

Specifically, it is observed that the sense of belonging is significantly more enhanced in Colombia than in Spain, albeit with different nuances. This indicates that the family-school relationship has cultural connotations that may condition

the greater or lesser sense of belonging among different members of the educational community. Indeed, performance, motivation, and relevance are reduced depending on the cultural and socioeconomic capital of families and their commitment to the school (Sarkhosh et al., 2021), establishing a parallel between the child and their family that the teacher cannot ignore. Moreover, according to Allen (2020), families are the first place where we learn to belong. In this sense, Gravett and Ajjawi (2022) emphasize the contextualized, situated, and space-and-time-dependent aspects, so the obtained differentiation is not surprising. In Manizales, Colombia, the sense of belonging among the population (Castillo Sanabria, 2021) is emphasized over a sense of alienation, achieved through cooperation and solidarity, convivial encounters, encouraging everyone to ask for and offer help, when necessary, support, and affection for members of the school community (Acevedo & Mondragón Ochoa, 2005). It should also be noted that educational centers in geographical contexts marked by violence present a pronounced community character and a great sensitivity towards vulnerable children, silenced both by their families' fear of rejection and by the institutions that homogenize and anonymize the figures of those displaced by conflict (Doncel Abad et al., 2020). Thus, the importance of the family-school relationship, especially when the former is marked by dysfunctionality, is crucial for the development of the child, who is constantly exposed to the dangers of gangs, among other issues (Paternina González & Pereira Peñate, 2017). There is no doubt that the joint fight for children's rights is a powerful element that unites the masses and generates a sense of belonging. As Avanza and Laferté (2017) and Allen (2020), among others, highlight, participation toward a common goal serves as a feedback loop that reinforces the sense of unity and cohesively integrates individuals into a group, ultimately forming a community.

Both Spanish and Colombian teachers agree that the key elements for fostering families' sense of belonging to the school include, on the one hand, family satisfaction with the teacher's educational work, as noted in previous studies (Lim et al., 2024; Torrego Seijo et al., 2019). On the other hand, they highlight well-being, trust, and communication as the most promoted aspects. Various studies confirm the relationship between a sense of belonging and communication with families (Gomariz Vicente et al., 2020; Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2021), in addition to being supported by educational rights. Similarly, a new agreement is shown among teachers in both contexts by indicating the identification of families with the school's team as the least fostered action. Finally, the most significant discrepancy between Spanish and Colombian teachers regarding the enhancement of the sense of belonging among families lies in encouraging them to recommend the school to other people with school-aged children. Carmona Sáez (2022) highlights the importance of families feeling so connected to the school that they recommend it to others, which denotes a good school climate and satisfaction with the institution's work that teachers should continue to foster.

Regarding the sociodemographic variables that significantly influence the educational work teachers perform to develop a sense of belonging among families, contextual versatility has also been observed. Specifically, in Spain, the type of school is a significant variable, with charter schools fostering the sense of belonging among families the most. This might be influenced by the increase in such schools and the possible generalization of the clientelist model, following Vogels (2002) terminology. Regarding years of experience in the school, those with 21 to 30 years foster a sense of belonging significantly more than those with 0 to 10 years, highlighting the importance of staff stability in educational institutions for generating identity.

In Latin America, gender inequality is a reality that assigns women roles limited to caregiving and emotional tasks (Lupien, 2022). This research shows that these roles are perpetuated among the teaching staff, with female teachers paying more attention to the sense of belonging of families to the school than their male counterparts. This aligns with Araya Umaña (2004), who warns that male teachers assume a passive role limited to academic aspects, while female teachers approach their educational work from a more holistic perspective, emphasizing emotional aspects. This indicates that, from initial training, teachers adopt different perspectives based on gender with regard to their roles, a dynamic that is conveyed to students through the hidden curriculum (Miralles-Cardona et al., 2020).

### Conclusion

The sense of belonging is considered a socio-educational, emotional, and abstract aspect inherent to the relationships established among members of the educational community. In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that teachers are highly committed to promoting a sense of belonging among families within educational institutions in both contexts, but especially in the Colombian context. This suggests that the family-school relationship has cultural connotations that affect this sentiment.

The results show that sociodemographic characteristics influence how teachers foster the sense of belonging of families in educational centers. Specifically, in the Spanish context, it is observed that years of experience and the type of school ownership significantly influence the promotion of family belonging. In Torre Pacheco, charter schools stand out for fostering this sense more than public schools, and teachers with 21 to 30 years of experience promote it more than those with 0 to 10 years of experience. Meanwhile, in the Colombian context, gender differences are observed in the promotion of a sense of belonging, with female teachers paying more attention to this aspect than their male counterparts, reflecting gender inequality in Latin America.



Although the identification of families with the school sports team is the least promoted action, in both contexts, teachers agree that family satisfaction with the teacher's educational work, well-being, trust, and communication are essential aspects for fostering the sense of belonging of families to educational centers.

### **Recommendations**

The authors believe that this research generates several recommendations for teachers, school administrators, and those responsible for educational policies. Teachers should focus on welcoming and integrating families from the outset, ensuring that they feel part of the educational project and that their diversity is recognized. They should foster an atmosphere of mutual trust through open and respectful communication, thereby encouraging families to identify with the institution's values and objectives. Undoubtedly, acknowledging families as active participants in school life increases their engagement and satisfaction, which highlights the need for teacher training in this area. Regarding gender differences, female teachers tend to place greater emphasis on emotional aspects, suggesting that the professional development of male teachers should include tools to better manage this relational dimension of their educational work.

School principals and policymakers should promote a culture of participation and collaboration that actively includes families in the school's educational project. It is recommended to create open dialogue spaces where families can express their concerns and feel part of the process. Given that one of the identified needs is the stability of the teaching staff, it is crucial to support continuity and teacher commitment to the school. Lastly, an inclusive leadership approach is recommended, one that fosters democratic management in which responsibilities within the school are shared, thus encouraging a common identity and cohesion within the school community. To this end, it is proposed, for example, to implement models such as those designed by Gizir (2019) to improve the sense of belonging of the entire educational community.

The present study proposes new lines of research that are especially focused on finding out the reasons why these differences occur. To this end, we will work in each context by means of interviews with teachers and families. In addition, training will be designed and implemented based on the needs detected in each context, and the impact on the educational community will be studied.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study include several important aspects. Firstly, it is a comparative study between two specific contexts, geographical areas of Spain and Colombia, which limits the generalization of the results to other countries or regions with different socio-educational characteristics. Furthermore, the research was based on a quantitative approach, which, while allowing for the identification of general patterns, did not delve into the qualitative perspective that could have provided a more detailed understanding of the experiences of teachers and families. Lastly, the study did not explore in depth other factors that could influence the sense of belonging, such as the socioeconomic conditions of families or the specific educational policies of each country, leaving room for future research to explore these variables in a more comprehensive manner.

### **Ethics Statements**

This research is part of a project that was authorized by the ethics committee of the University of Murcia. All participants in both contexts are adults. Before answering the questionnaire, they were informed of the objectives of the research and the dissemination of the results anonymously.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors of this article have no conflict of interest.

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### Authorship Contribution Statement

Galián: Concept and design, data acquisition, data analysis / interpretation, drafting manuscript, statistical analysis, final approval. Hernández-Prados: Concept and design, drafting manuscript, critical revision of manuscript, securing funding, supervision. Belmonte: Data acquisition, data analysis / interpretation, critical revision of manuscript, statistical analysis, supervision, final approval

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