

A Case Study on Colombian Migrants' ESL Experience in English-Speaking Countries

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Resumen

Esta investigación explora cómo los factores contextuales, personales, sociales, culturales y económicos influyen en las experiencias de aprendizaje del inglés de migrantes colombianos en países de habla inglesa. Se adoptó un enfoque cualitativo, bajo un paradigma interpretativo y un estudio de caso instrumental.

Se recogieron las voces de nueve adultos migrantes que, en algún momento, fueron estudiantes de la investigadora en el programa *The Learning Path*; mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas. Las narrativas fueron analizadas con enfoque temático.

Los hallazgos evidencian que el aprendizaje del idioma en el extranjero no es lineal ni únicamente académico; está profundamente influenciado por: la motivación migratoria y la adaptación a la vida como migrante, las estrategias de aprendizaje y la transformación personal mediante el idioma, y la interacción social y la integración lingüística en contextos interculturales.

Este estudio resalta la necesidad de comprender el aprendizaje del inglés como un proceso humano y contextual, que reconoce el papel transformador del idioma en la construcción de nuevas identidades.

Palabras clave: Migrantes colombianos · Aprendizaje del inglés · Factores contextuales · Migración · Adaptación · Identidad

Abstract

This study explores how contextual, personal, social, cultural, and economic factors influence the English language learning experiences of Colombian migrants living in English-speaking countries. A qualitative approach was adopted, framed within an interpretive paradigm and developed as an instrumental case study.

The voices of nine adult migrants, former students of the researcher in the *The Learning Path* program; were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The narratives were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings reveal that language learning abroad is neither linear nor solely academic; it is deeply shaped by migratory motivation and adaptation to life as a migrant, learning strategies and personal transformation through language, and social interaction and linguistic integration in intercultural contexts.

This study highlights the need to understand English language learning as a human and contextual process, recognizing the transformative role of language in the construction of new identities.

Keywords: Colombian migrants · English language learning · Contextual factors · Migration · Adaptation · Identity

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Contextualization

As an emerging English as a Foreign Language educator, I have often observed the diverse reasons why people pursue learning English: some aim to improve their job prospects, others prepare for English language proficiency tests, and many seek the confidence to travel or the skills necessary for migration to an English-speaking country. These motivations shape their learning journeys, making each path unique and meaningful.

In 2020, I created The Learning Path, a personalized online English program aimed at applying my knowledge and developing educational resources. What began as a venture turned into an impactful project, welcoming students from various backgrounds with diverse motivations.

In 2022, I worked with my first student who was preparing to migrate. Soon after, more students with similar journeys began to connect with me. Some were already living abroad, while others were preparing for their big move. Despite their different timelines, they all shared a common reality: English was not just a skill but a gateway to opportunities and social integration.

To meet the varied needs of my students, The Learning Path employs a personalized approach. Typically, students ranging from beginner to intermediate levels join the program through referrals. Each learning journey starts with a courtesy session to explore the student's context, motivations, and level, allowing me to provide a tailored learning experience. The program combines project-based learning (PBL) and task-based learning (TBLT) to engage students in practical tasks like text creation, video production, and conversations, encouraging immediate application of knowledge for real-world readiness. It promotes autonomous learning with tools like Liveworksheet for vocabulary and grammar, supplemented by resources from

BBC Learning English, English File, and the British Council. Grounded in communicative language teaching (CLT), it emphasizes interaction in real-life contexts, while digital tools like Google Meet and Google Drive ensure effective access to materials in the online environment.

The Learning Path's methodologies and tools are designed not only to teach language but also to accommodate each student's unique realities. The program integrates language learning with the personal, social, and professional circumstances that each student faces. This approach revealed that language acquisition is profoundly shaped by more than just online classroom interaction; the learner's broader life experience profoundly influences it.

This became even more evident as the number of Colombian migrants interested in learning English grew, becoming the focal point of my research. The recent increase in Colombian emigration supports this trend. According to official reports, Colombia experienced a record-high number of permanent emigrants in 2022, with over 500,000 people leaving the country—more than double the pre-pandemic average of 200,000 per year (Infobae, 2024; El Tiempo, 2023). Although the number slightly decreased in 2023 to approximately 446,000, it remained historically high (Migración Colombia, 2023). As of October 2024, more than 341,000 Colombians had already left the country with no registered return (Aeronáutica Civil, 2024). These figures suggest a consistent and growing pattern of migration, often motivated by the pursuit of economic opportunities, social stability, and better living conditions.

The nine students contributing to the research are aged 20 to 39 and reside in English-speaking countries such as Australia, the United States, Malta, and the Netherlands. Among them, 6 are women and 3 are men, working in diverse fields including cleaning services, construction, customer service, hospitality, childcare, and e-commerce. They migrated from cities such as Villavicencio, Medellín, Bogotá, San José del Guaviare, and Bucaramanga. Of

these participants, four have been living abroad for more than two years, three have lived abroad between one and two years, and two have been migrants for less than six months. Their educational backgrounds range from technical studies to postgraduate degrees. Despite their differences, many began their migration journey with little to no knowledge of English, which significantly shaped their early experiences abroad.

Listening to my students share their stories uncovered the deeper complexities of learning English while living in an English-speaking country. Some made rapid progress, while others encountered unexpected barriers due to various contextual factors. These stories highlighted how personal, social, and economic factors can directly impact their ability to engage with and acquire the language.

As The Learning Path continues to evolve, I am eager to delve deeper into these experiences, not as a teacher, but as a researcher. This shift in perspective allows me to step back from the instructional role and focus on analyzing the participants' narratives to understand how contextual factors influence the English learning experiences of Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries.

Research Statement

This research stems from my experiences working as an English educator with Colombian migrants who are navigating the complex process of learning a new language while building their lives in English-speaking countries. Over the past few years, I have observed how their unique circumstances—social, economic, and personal—have shaped their English learning journeys, often revealing gaps between their expectations and the realities they face upon arrival in a foreign country.

Each student shared a unique story shaped by their individual backgrounds and contexts, as revealed in our interviews and discussions during projects and classes. Despite their diverse experiences, they all encountered common challenges, including demanding work schedules, limited time for study, the emotional toll of migration, the availability of support networks, and varying levels of culture shock. These factors profoundly influenced their learning experiences and outcomes.

(Barkhuizen, 2016) highlights the role of identity in language learning, noting that it is influenced by cognitive, emotional, social, ideological, and historical factors. These dimensions are reflected in the actions and interactions of individuals within their social contexts. Similarly, Benson (2011) discusses the importance of autonomy in language learning, emphasizing how individual decisions, life experiences, and goals shape the learning process. Colombian migrants' identities are constantly in flux as they negotiate between their past lives and the new realities they encounter abroad.

This research seeks to give voice to those experiences, examining how Colombian migrants experience language learning in real-world settings. It not only seeks to understand

their challenges and triumphs but also explores how personal, social, and economic factors converge to shape their learning experiences in profound ways.

It is essential to rethink language learning as a deeply contextual process, where individual life stories reveal the complex relationship between language, identity, and migration. By analyzing these testimonies, this research will provide insights into the broader realities of learning English as a second language and how migrants adapt to and integrate into their new environments. Considering the problem described above, the following research question arises.

Research Question

How do contextual factors (social, cultural, economic, and personal) influence the English learning experience of Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries?

Research Objectives

General Objective.

To analyze how contextual factors influence the English learning experiences of Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries.

Specific Objectives

To identify the challenges Colombian migrants face in their English learning journeys and how these challenges are influenced by their personal and social contexts.

To compare the personal expectations of Colombian migrants regarding their English learning process with the realities they encounter in English-speaking countries.

Literature Review

Migration and English language learning in English-speaking countries have been extensively studied over the years from various perspectives, involving different populations, methodologies, and objectives. Migrants' experiences of learning English are not simply a practical necessity but rather a complex process shaped by numerous contextual factors, many of which are often overlooked by learners themselves. This study aims to contribute to the field by analyzing the experiences of Colombian migrants learning English within these contexts, with a focus on their challenges, opportunities, and needs.

The literature reviewed for this research is categorized into four interrelated themes: migration, intercultural relations, language learning and second language acquisition in migratory contexts.

Migration studies provide the broader context of socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors that influence migrant experiences, including the barriers they face in accessing language education, as seen *in works like* *New Migrations, New Multilingual Practices, New Identities: The Case of Post-2008 Italian Migrants in London*. (Pepe, 2022) and the study *influencia del estatus migratorio y de las experiencias de integración social en el aprendizaje/adquisición del inglés por parte de inmigrantes colombianos en Estados Unidos*" (Feo Díaz & Gómez Salamanca, 2021).

Intercultural relations literature focuses on the dynamics of cultural exchange, identity formation, and communication between migrants and the host society, as explored in *Latinyorks: Identidad Cultural y Asimilación de los (In)migrantes Latinoamericanos en Nueva York* (Narváez Gutiérrez, 2022) and the article *Reconfiguración identitaria en procesos migratorios: el*

debate teórico interdisciplinario. Realidades, impactos y desafíos (*Morales Robles, Moreno-Doña, & López Teulón, 2024*)).

Language learning research emphasizes the educational frameworks, teaching methodologies, and learner motivations that shape how migrants acquire English in these settings, as illustrated in *Language Learning of Adult Migrants in Europe: Theoretical, Empirical, and Pedagogical Issues* (Levine & Mallows, 2022) and *Language and Migration* (Capstick, 2020).

Finally, second language acquisition in migratory contexts emphasizes the complex interplay between language learning and the social, emotional, and identity-related challenges migrants face. Scholars such as Jim Cummins in *BICS and CALP: Empirical and theoretical status of the distinction* (2008), and Ofelia García in her article *Problematizing linguistic integration: The role of translanguaging in multilingual instruction* (2017) have contributed significantly to this field. Their work collectively highlights how language development among migrants is shaped not only by instructional practices but also by the migrants' emotional experiences, identity negotiations, and multilingual realities.

This literature review integrates these four themes to examine the specific case of Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries, offering insights into their language-learning journeys. It highlights how migration, cultural negotiation, education, and second language acquisition in migratory contexts intersect to shape their English acquisition experiences. The studies reviewed provide insights in the following order: how migration influences educational access and language learning, how intercultural dynamics shape language acquisition, how different educational strategies impact English learning for migrants, and how emotions, identity,

and multilingual resources influence migrants' development of academic language proficiency. The objective, participants, methods, and findings of each source are mentioned and considered to frame the analysis of the experiences of Colombian migrants learning English. Ultimately, all of them provided a solid foundation and gave validity to this research.

The first research was a study developed by Giulia Pepe (2022), which aimed to explore the dynamics between migration and linguistic practices, focusing on how migrants create new identities through language use in multicultural contexts. She emphasizes that contemporary migration is characterized by transnational flows that challenge traditional notions of identity and monolingualism. The population for this research was first-generation Italian migrants in London who arrived after 2008. This study used qualitative methods such as participatory observation and interviews, supplemented by historical data analysis and statistics, to contextualize the migratory experience of the participants.

This study is relevant as it provides a framework for analyzing how Colombian migrants adopt and adapt English while maintaining ties to their native language and culture. Her analysis emphasizes the intersection of migration, language, and identity construction, which is key to understanding English language learning in migrant contexts.

Another relevant study by Feo Díaz & Gómez Salamanca (2021) examines how migration status and social integration experiences impact English acquisition among Colombian immigrants in the U.S. The study explores the relationship between legal status, access to language education, and social inclusion/exclusion in shaping the migrants' language learning processes.

The study was based on a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews with four Colombian migrants in the U.S. with different immigration statuses (both documented and undocumented). Participants had an average stay of 2.5 years in the U.S., allowing for an in-depth exploration of their English learning journeys.

Findings indicate that immigration status significantly affects language acquisition, as migrants with irregular status face increased stress and legal restrictions, limiting their access to formal education programs. Social integration also plays a crucial role; migrants who interact with English-speaking communities demonstrate higher levels of language acquisition, while those living in Spanish-speaking enclaves experience slower progress due to reduced exposure to English. The study further highlights psychological barriers, such as migration-related stress and discrimination, which hinder the learning process.

This research is particularly relevant as it provides a direct examination of Colombian migrants' experiences in English-speaking contexts. It strengthens the understanding of how legal and social factors influence language acquisition and reinforces the need for policies that enhance migrants' access to language education and support networks.

The third research was a study developed by Narváez Gutiérrez (2024), which aimed to examine the cultural identity and assimilation processes of Latin American migrants in New York. The author focuses on how these individuals navigate the dual pressures of cultural preservation and adaptation in a multicultural urban environment.

The study draws on the experiences of Latin American migrants living in New York City, with a specific focus on diverse national backgrounds, economic conditions, and generational differences. Narváez employs a mixed-methods approach, including ethnographic observations,

in-depth interviews, and an analysis of cultural artifacts such as music, food, and literature to illustrate the dynamics of identity formation and assimilation.

This research is particularly relevant to this study because it addresses how Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries navigate cultural differences while learning English. It highlights the interplay between identity negotiation, language acquisition, and broader intercultural relations. The study identifies a spectrum of assimilation strategies among migrants, from cultural resistance to full integration, emphasizing how identity formation occurs within this process and how community networks play a crucial role in balancing identity preservation and adaptation.

The fourth study, Morales Robles, Moreno-Doña, & López Teulón (2024), explores identity reconfiguration in migratory processes from an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective. The authors aim to analyze how migration reshapes identity through symbolic, social, and cultural transformations. This research focuses on the dynamic nature of identity construction, emphasizing that migration is not only a physical movement but also a sociopolitical and emotional process that alters an individual's sense of self.

As a theoretical study, it does not involve a direct empirical population but instead synthesizes research, theories, and epistemological debates on migration and identity. The methodology follows a descriptive-analytical approach, using a bibliographic review and state-of-the-art analysis. The study integrates theories from sociocultural, political, psychological, and linguistic perspectives to offer a holistic understanding of identity reconfiguration.

Findings from this study emphasize that migrants construct and negotiate their identities through personal narratives and discursive practices. Identity is shaped by political, social, and cultural discourses, reinforcing the importance of self-perception and external recognition. Additionally, the study identifies key challenges such as discrimination, cultural barriers, and social exclusion, which impact identity negotiation. The authors advocate for inclusive policies and support systems that aid migrant adaptation without forcing identity loss.

This research complements the findings from Narváez Gutiérrez (2024) by providing a theoretical foundation for analyzing how Colombian migrants reshape their identities while learning English. The constructivist and narrative approaches align with this study's qualitative focus on lived experiences. Understanding how migrants' linguistic and cultural identities evolve offers valuable insights into their English language learning journeys and the broader processes of integration and adaptation.

In the fifth study, Mallows & Levine (2022) aim to identify, clarify, and offer insights into theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical issues related to language education for adult migrants in both formal and informal settings.

The book compiles studies analyzing diverse populations of adult migrants in Europe, particularly those who arrived during and after the 2015–2016 refugee crisis. Mixed-method research approaches, including qualitative and quantitative analyses, are employed to assess the effectiveness of national language integration systems and informal learning environments such as workplace interactions, community activities, participation in cultural events, and engagement with media and digital resources.

The compiled studies emphasize the importance of pedagogical approaches that recognize migrants' cultural and linguistic diversity, fostering more inclusive integration. This work is relevant to understanding the challenges and opportunities Colombian adult migrants in Europe face while learning the host country's language. It provides a theoretical and empirical framework to analyze how educational policies and teaching practices impact their linguistic integration process.

A similar study was developed by Tony Capstick (2020), who explores the relationship between language and migration, offering a dynamic introduction to the subject. Through case studies from different migratory contexts worldwide, the author investigates how linguistic and literacy practices can sustain, expand, or limit different migration experiences.

The analysis does not focus on a specific group. Instead, it adopts an interdisciplinary perspective on global migration, considering individual trajectories, family networks, and social policies.

Capstick argues that success in language learning is influenced by external factors, such as access to training programs and societal attitudes toward migrants, and highlights the need for inclusive educational approaches that take linguistic diversity and migrants' prior experiences into account. This text provides a global perspective that complements studies focused on specific regional contexts, such as Europe. It offers analytical tools to understand how Colombian migrants in different parts of the world manage their linguistic practices and face migration-related language learning challenges.

Although both books address the intersection of language and migration, they do so from complementary perspectives. *Language Learning of Adult Migrants in Europe* focuses on the

European context, analyzing specific policies and pedagogical practices for adult migrants, while *Language and Migration* provides a broader view, considering diverse global contexts and emphasizing the sociolinguistic and political dynamics affecting migrants. Together, these texts offer a comprehensive understanding of how educational policies, teaching practices, and sociopolitical dynamics influence language learning and the integration of Colombian migrants in different environments.

In the seventh study, Cummins (2008) discusses the empirical and theoretical distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), a framework that has become highly influential in understanding language acquisition, particularly in educational settings involving migrants. His work aims to clarify how these two dimensions of language proficiency develop differently and are influenced by learners' contexts.

The paper analyzes empirical data and critiques from various educational environments to support the argument that language proficiency is not a uniform ability. Cummins argues that while BICS, the conversational language used in everyday interactions, may develop relatively quickly in immersion contexts, CALP, language required for academic tasks, requires more time, support, and exposure to cognitively demanding content.

This distinction is particularly relevant to migrant learners who may appear fluent in English in social situations but still struggle academically due to underdeveloped academic language proficiency. Cummins emphasizes that misunderstanding this gap can lead to inappropriate assessments of migrant students' abilities, resulting in inadequate educational responses.

His work provides a critical lens for this study, highlighting how the language learning trajectories of Colombian migrants must be understood in terms of both conversational fluency and academic language development, which are shaped by access, instruction, and social integration.

Finally, García (2017) challenges traditional models of linguistic integration by proposing translanguaging as a pedagogical and theoretical alternative. In her article, she explores how multilingual instruction can better reflect and support the linguistic realities of migrant learners, whose repertoires often span multiple languages and modes of communication.

The article draws on classroom-based research and theoretical frameworks from sociolinguistics and critical pedagogy to argue that forcing linguistic separation, where only the target language (English) is used, can marginalize migrant learners' identities and suppress their full linguistic capabilities. García advocates instead for instructional approaches that allow learners to use their entire linguistic repertoire as a resource for meaning-making and language development.

This perspective is crucial for understanding the language acquisition experiences of Colombian migrants, as it recognizes the value of Spanish and other linguistic practices in their English learning process. Rather than viewing their native language as an obstacle, García frames it as a foundation. Her insights contribute to this research by offering an inclusive, equity-oriented view of second language acquisition, one that considers the emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions of learning English in migratory contexts

In conclusion, although this literature review includes a study conducted in Colombia (Feo Díaz & Gómez Salamanca, 2021), most available research on Colombian migrants' English

learning experiences still focuses on broader migration and language learning contexts rather than on their lived experiences abroad.

Although this literature review includes a study conducted in Colombia (Feo Díaz & Gómez Salamanca, 2021), most existing research on Colombian migrants focuses either on broader migratory trends or on language learning in non-specific populations. There remains a gap in studies that center the lived linguistic experiences of Colombians who migrate to English-speaking countries. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to contribute a nuanced understanding of how contextual variables mediate their English language learning processes.

To complement the thematic synthesis presented, the following table offers a comparative summary of the key studies reviewed. It includes the authors, titles, central themes, contexts, methods, and findings, offering a clear and accessible overview of how these works collectively inform the design and rationale of this research.

Table 1
Summary of Reviewed Literature

Authors (Year)	Title	Target Population	Methodologies	Main Findings
Pepe (2022)	<i>New Migrations, New Multilingual Practices, New Identities: The Case of Post-2008 Italian Migrants in London</i>	Italian migrants in London (post-2008)	Qualitative: observation, interviews, statistics	Migration reshapes language practices and identities. Offers a comparative framework for identity-language dynamics.
Feo Díaz & Gómez Salamanca (2021)	<i>Influencia del estatus migratorio y de las experiencias de integración social en el aprendizaje /adquisición del inglés por parte de inmigrantes colombianos en EE. UU.</i>	Colombian migrants in the U.S.	Semi-structured interviews (4 participants)	Legal status and integration significantly influence language learning. Emphasizes structural and emotional barriers.

Narváez Gutiérrez (2024)	<i>Latinyorks: Identidad Cultural y Asimilación de los (In)migrantes Latinoamericanos en Nueva York</i>	Latin American migrants in NYC	Mixed methods: interviews, ethnography, cultural analysis	Explores assimilation and identity strategies. Highlights cultural negotiation during language learning.
Morales Robles, Moreno-Daña & López Teulón (2024)	<i>Reconfiguración identitaria en procesos migratorios: el debate teórico interdisciplinario</i>	Theoretical interdisciplinary review	Descriptive-analytical, bibliographic review	Identity is socially and emotionally reshaped during migration. Supports constructivist analysis in this research.
Mallows & Levine (2022)	<i>Language Learning of Adult Migrants in Europe: Theoretical, Empirical, and Pedagogical Issues</i>	Adult migrants in Europe (post-2015)	Mixed methods (quantitative + qualitative)	Education systems and teaching affect integration. Offers pedagogical frameworks for inclusive language instruction.
Capstick (2020)	<i>Language and Migration</i>	Diverse global migratory contexts	Theoretical, interdisciplinary case studies	External factors (access, policy, attitudes) affect learning. Provides tools to analyze Colombian experiences in broader contexts.
Cummins (2008)	<i>BICS and CALP: Empirical and Theoretical Status of the Distinction</i>	Migrant learners (general)	Theoretical and empirical synthesis	Differentiates conversational vs. academic proficiency. Supports understanding of migrants' language development.
García (2017)	<i>Problematizing linguistic integration: The role of translanguaging in multilingual instruction</i>	Migrant learners in multilingual classrooms	Theoretical discussion	Emphasizes using all linguistic resources. Informs inclusive strategies in English teaching for migrants.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Theoretical Framework

This part of the paper presents the three main concepts that structured and supported this research from the point of view of different authors. The concepts were **Language acquisition, Contextual and Sociocultural Factors in Language Acquisition Among Migrants, Linguistic Resilience in Migratory Contexts, and Construction of hybrid cultural identity in Migrants**. They were displayed in the order they were mentioned.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to how individuals develop the ability to understand and use a language. According to Krashen (1982) in his Second Language Acquisition Theory, language acquisition differs from language learning because it occurs subconsciously through meaningful interactions rather than formal instruction. Ellis (1997) further explains that acquisition involves both implicit and explicit cognitive processes that are influenced by the learner's environment, motivation, and exposure to the language.

A key distinction in language acquisition is between learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and learning English as a Second Language (ESL).

EFL refers to learning English in a country where English is not the primary language of communication, such as Colombia. Learners in this context are exposed to English mainly in formal educational settings (Ellis, 1997).

ESL refers to learning English in a country where English is the dominant language. Colombian migrants transitioning from an EFL to an ESL context experience shifts in exposure,

necessity, and opportunities for language practice, which significantly impact their learning experiences (Norton, 2000).

Principles of Language Learning

Understanding language acquisition requires examining fundamental principles that govern the learning process. These principles, as outlined in the field of applied linguistics (Brown, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), include:

Exposure and Input: Learners need sufficient exposure to comprehensible input in the target language (Krashen, 1982).

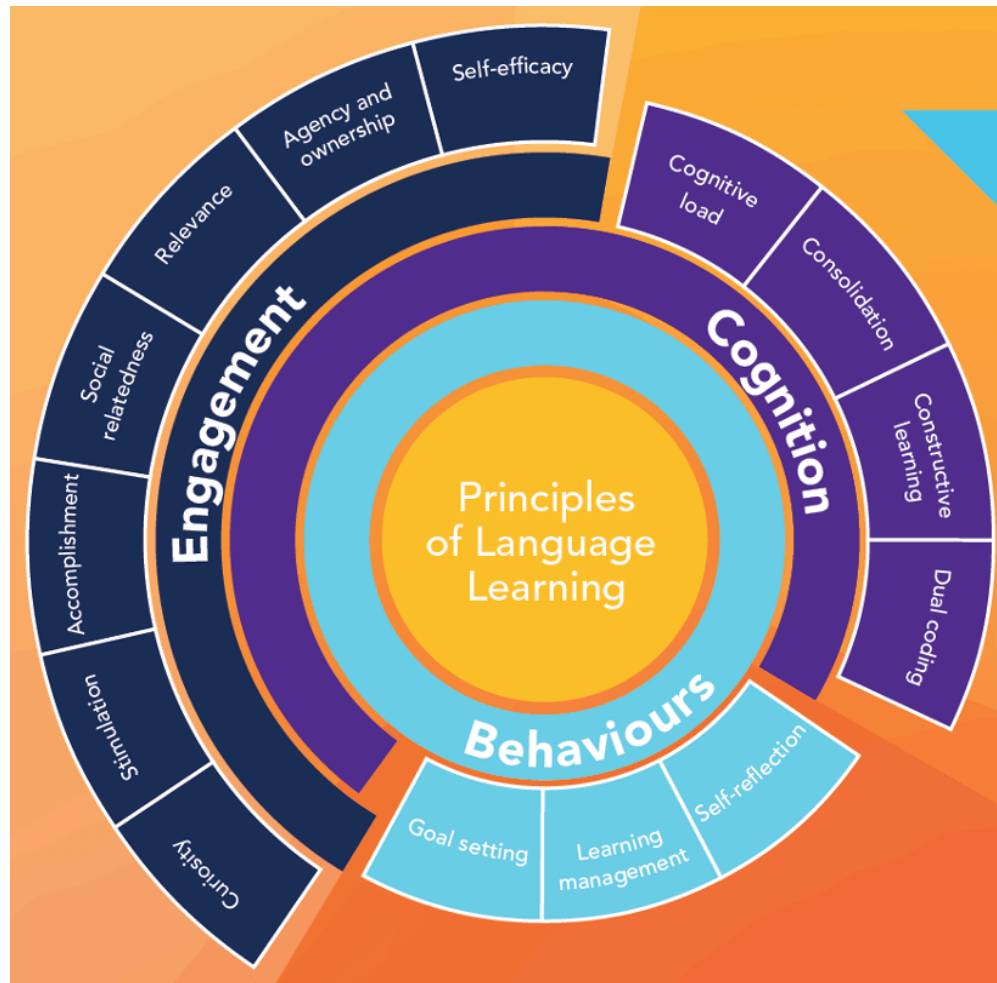
Interaction and Communication: Language is best learned through meaningful social interaction (Doughty & Long, 2005)

Motivation and Affect: Emotional and psychological factors, such as motivation and anxiety, influence language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2005)

Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies: Learners develop strategies to process and retain language (Oxford, 1990).

Sociocultural Context: Language learning is embedded within cultural and social environments (Vygotsky 1978).

The following graphic illustrates these principles, emphasizing the interconnected nature of cognitive, affective, and social factors in language learning.

Figure 1.*Principles of Language Learning*

Source: Cambridge University Press & Assessment

This framework provides a foundation for understanding how migrants acquire English and their challenges when transitioning from EFL to ESL contexts.

Contextual and Sociocultural Factors in Language Acquisition Among Migrants

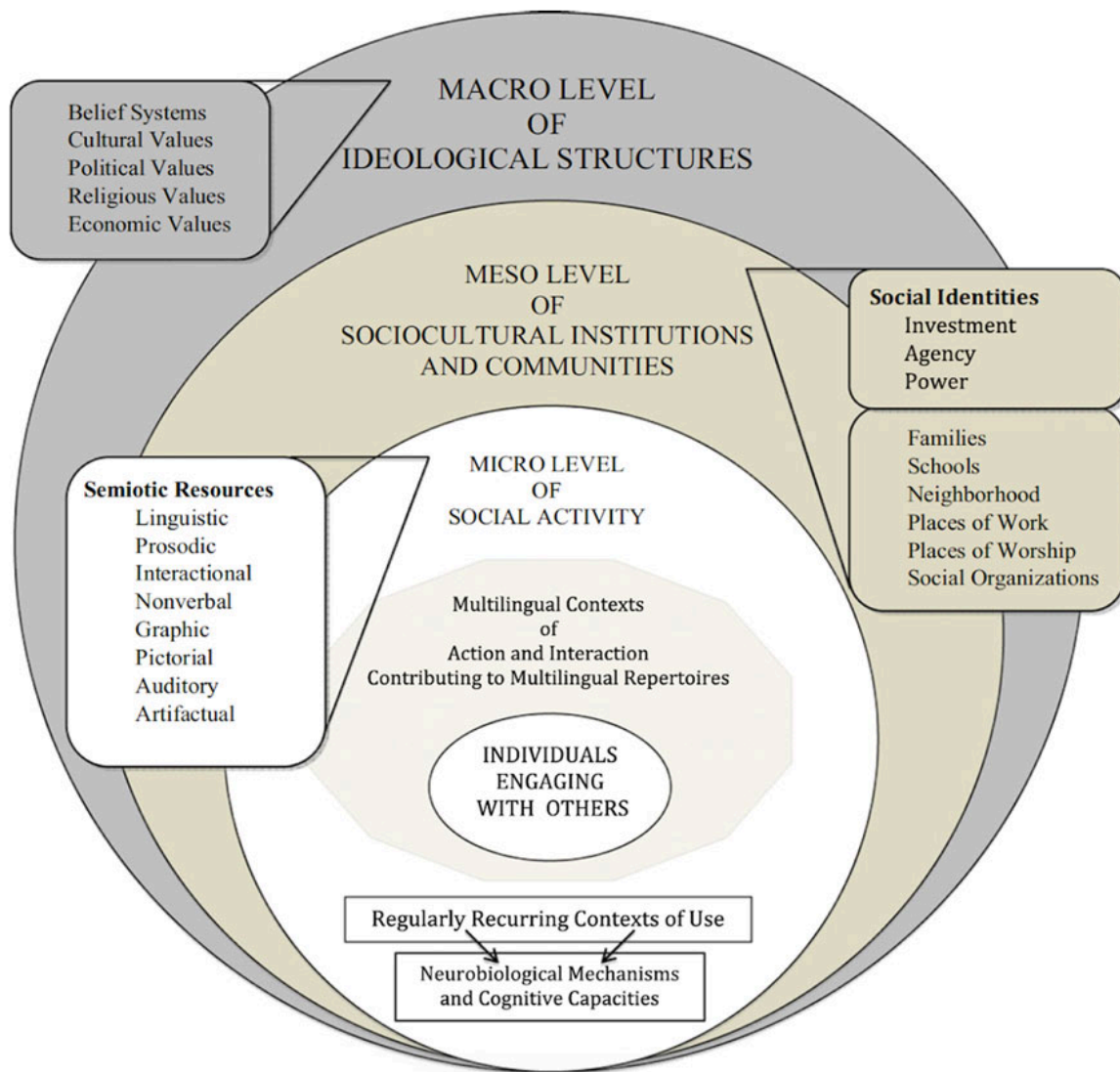
Language learning in a migratory context is shaped by multiple contextual and sociocultural factors influencing how migrants acquire and use the host country's language.

Recent studies (Capstick, 2021; Mallows & Levine, 2022) highlight that these factors include both individual and external elements, such as the learner's motivation, access to native speakers, educational opportunities, and labor market demands. Learning a second language in migration contexts often becomes an urgent necessity for social and economic integration.

From a sociocultural perspective, language acquisition is deeply connected to social interaction and cultural mediation. Studies on second language acquisition in migration contexts emphasize that access to social networks, institutional support, and inclusive language policies play a decisive role in the learning process (Capstick, 2021). Additionally, research underscores that language functions as social capital, influencing not only employment opportunities but also migrants' ability to access community networks and essential services.

Furthermore, linguistic integration is often influenced by structural barriers. Mallows & Levine (2022) argue that limited access to language education programs, restrictive language policies, and social discrimination can hinder migrants' language development. These challenges demonstrate that language learning is not an isolated process but is embedded within broader sociopolitical and economic structures that either facilitate or obstruct linguistic inclusion.

The following graphic, titled "**The Multifaceted Nature of Language Learning and Teaching**," visually represents the dynamic interplay among macro, meso, and micro-level factors that shape language acquisition in migratory settings. This graphic, originally conceptualized by the Douglas Fir Group, 2016 and elaborated in subsequent studies (Duff, 2019), underscores how ideological structures, institutional frameworks, and social interactions converge to influence language learning outcomes.

Figure 2*The Multifaceted Nature of Language Learning and Teaching*

Note. Adapted from A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), and Social dimensions of second language learning and teaching by P. A. Duff (2019).

In conclusion, acquiring a language in migratory settings is a complex process shaped by contextual and sociocultural factors. The availability of learning resources, interaction with native speakers, and the host country's sociopolitical environment all play a crucial role in determining the success of language acquisition among migrants.

Linguistic Resilience in Migratory Contexts

In the context of language acquisition among migrants, linguistic resilience refers to the individual's ability to overcome linguistic and sociocultural barriers in the host country and maintain a commitment to learning and using the target language despite adversity. This concept highlights the role of emotional, cognitive, and social resources that language learners activate when facing marginalization, limited access to formal education, or linguistic discrimination (García-Cano, 2021; Ungar, 2008).

Linguistic resilience is particularly relevant in migratory contexts where learners are immersed in a new sociolinguistic environment and may struggle with both internal and external pressures. These include limited opportunities for practice, cultural alienation, or institutional exclusion. However, resilient learners often find ways to adapt through community engagement, multilingual strategies, and emotional persistence (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). This resilience is not only a personal trait but also a relational and contextual construct shaped by supportive networks, access to linguistic resources, and recognition of learners' multilingual identities (Windle, 2011).

In this way, linguistic resilience bridges the gap between sociocultural challenges and individual agency, allowing for a deeper understanding of why some migrants persist in learning English despite unfavorable conditions, while others may disengage. Understanding this concept

contributes to a more nuanced analysis of migrant learners' trajectories and the sociopolitical structures that influence them.

Construction of Hybrid Cultural Identity in Migrants

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a specific cultural group. It is part of one's self-conception and self-perception, and it involves factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, language, gender, social class, generation, and any other social grouping that possesses a distinct culture (Maalouf, 2001; Meyer, 2008; Sysoev, 2001)

This conception underscores the multiple components that make up cultural identity, emphasizing that it is not a fixed or static attribute but one that can evolve through experience and contact with other cultures.

Identity Construction

Identity construction refers to the ongoing process through which individuals formulate and negotiate their sense of self in relation to various social, historical, and cultural contexts (Norton, 2000). This process involves both internal factors (perceptions, emotions, beliefs) and external factors (social interactions, discourses, power structures) that shape how people define themselves and project their identity in different environments. Key aspects of identity construction include:

Social Dimension: Identity is formed through interaction with others and through membership in social groups (Vygotsky, 1978).

Discursive Dimension: Language and social discourses provide interpretive frameworks that enable individuals to define and position themselves (Weedon, 1997).

Dynamic Dimension: Identity is not static but rather a constantly evolving process responding to personal and contextual changes (Norton, 2000).

Construction of Hybrid Cultural Identity in Migrants

The **construction of a hybrid cultural identity** in migrants describes how individuals blend elements of their native culture with those of the host society, forming fluid identities that go beyond a single national or cultural affiliation. This dynamic process is shaped by migrants' interactions with various linguistic and cultural environments, influencing how they perceive and express their sense of belonging.

Giulia Pepe (2020) explains that emerging multilingual practices and hybrid identities arise from the continuous interaction between languages and cultures. She emphasizes that multilingualism should not be viewed merely as a skill but rather as an evolving process influenced by social and political factors. From this perspective, migrants adapt their language use according to context, often mixing linguistic elements to create new forms of communication and self-definition.

In the same way, Narváez (2018) examines the concept of cultural hybridity, describing how migrants integrate aspects of both their native and host cultures to construct hybrid identities. A key aspect of this process is intercultural negotiation, through which migrants navigate between cultural expectations and societal pressures, adjusting their behaviors, values,

and linguistic practices accordingly. This negotiation is neither passive nor one-time; it is an active, ongoing adaptation to the social realities they face.

The concept of transnationalism further supports the idea of hybrid cultural identities. Contemporary migration studies (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) indicate that migrants maintain strong ties to their home countries while integrating into new societies, often taking part in transnational communities that transcend geographic borders. The use of digital communication, bilingual interactions, and the transmission of cultural values across generations reinforce this hybrid identity, showing that migration does not necessarily lead to cultural rupture but rather to processes of transformation and adaptation.

Constructing a hybrid cultural identity among migrants is a fluid and multidimensional process. It does not imply abandoning one's original culture or fully assimilating into the host society. Still, it involves a continuous negotiation that reshapes identity in response to personal experiences, social interactions, and structural factors.

Research Design

This section of the research project outlines the research design developed to achieve the project's objectives, the instruments used for data collection, the description of the participants, the context in which the research was developed, the validity and reliability strategies considered, the ethical considerations taken into account, and the challenges encountered during the research process.

As the research project aims to understand the learning experiences of Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries from their perspectives, this research design was organized as follows:

Interpretative Paradigm

This research is framed within the interpretative paradigm, which aims to understand social reality from the perspectives of the participants. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), the interpretative paradigm seeks to explore and comprehend how individuals construct their reality through their experiences, beliefs, and interactions. This paradigm is particularly relevant to this study because it focuses on interpreting the experiences of Colombian migrants learning English as a second language, considering their unique social, cultural, personal, and economic contexts. Unlike paradigms that seek generalizable truths, the interpretative approach emphasizes the richness and complexity of individual experiences and how they are constructed and perceived by the participants themselves.

Case Study Design

Given the purpose of this research, a case study design was adopted to provide a detailed and context-specific analysis of the English learning experiences of Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries. This study follows the approach proposed by Stake (1995), which emphasizes flexibility in case study research and allows the researcher to adapt the methodology to the nature of the phenomenon being studied.

This research follows an Instrumental Case Study design, as its focus is not solely on understanding the individual experiences of the participants but rather on using these experiences to gain insights into broader phenomena: how various contextual factors impact English learning processes in migration scenarios. The participants' experiences serve as instruments to explore this larger issue, making this approach suitable for the research objectives. Additionally, given the diversity of participants' backgrounds and migration circumstances, the study also incorporates elements of a Collective Case Study, as multiple individual cases contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. As Stake (1995) explains, Instrumental Case Studies focus on broader issues beyond the individual cases themselves, while Collective Case Studies involve the study of multiple cases to provide insights into a particular phenomenon.

Although all participants were, at some point, students of the researcher within the context of an online English program (The Learning Path), the role assumed during this study was strictly that of a researcher. No instructional or evaluative interactions took place during the research process. The relationship facilitated access and trust, but data collection and analysis were conducted from a researcher's standpoint, maintaining a clear boundary between teaching

and research roles. This is consistent with Merriam's (1998) emphasis on clarifying the researcher's position in qualitative inquiry to preserve the integrity and trustworthiness of the study. In this sense, the participants' experiences were examined not as an extension of their academic performance but as illustrative cases that contribute to understanding broader dynamics of language learning in migratory contexts.

Population

The research focuses on a specific group of Colombian migrants who were formerly enrolled or had previous learning experiences in the researcher's online English program, *The Learning Path*. Although the participants had an educational relationship with the researcher in the past, this connection was not active during the research process. For this study, the researcher adopted an investigative role, focusing solely on gathering and analyzing participants' insights rather than providing instruction.

The research focuses on a specific group of Colombian migrants who are former or current students of the researcher's online English program. The data was collected through a context survey, which will be described in more detail in the section on contextual data collection. Initially, 15 participants were contacted; however, due to scheduling conflicts, time zone differences, and connectivity issues, the final sample includes 9 individuals aged between 20 and 39 years old. These participants consisted of 3 men and 6 women. They migrated from Colombian cities including Villavicencio, Medellín, Bogotá, San José del Guaviare, and Bucaramanga, and are currently living in Australia, the United States, Malta, and the Netherlands. Their time abroad varies: 4 participants have lived abroad for more than two years, 3 participants have been migrants for one to two years, and 2 participants have been living abroad for less than six months.

The participants' educational backgrounds range from technical studies to postgraduate degrees, and they work in diverse fields such as cleaning services, construction, customer service, hospitality, childcare, and e-commerce. Despite their differences, many began their migration journey with little to no knowledge of English, which significantly influenced their early experiences in their new countries. The results of the context survey can be found in Appendix F.

Ethical Aspects

To ensure compliance with ethical principles, informed consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the data collection process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the intended use of their responses, and their right to confidentiality. They were also given the option to be quoted using either their real names or pseudonyms, according to their preference.

Specifically, participants agreed to have their first names used to reference their responses within the study, which was recorded at the start of the survey. (See Appendix A)

Additionally, the experts involved in data validation provided explicit consent for the use of their names. As part of this process, they signed a data validation consent form, which is included in Appendix B.

These measures ensure respect for the autonomy, privacy, and dignity of all participants, in accordance with the ethical standards of qualitative research.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, strategies were employed to strengthen its credibility, transferability, and dependability, following the principles outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility was addressed through methodological coherence and the triangulation of data sources. The study combined a context survey and in-depth interviews, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences. (See Appendix A and C)

Transferability was supported by providing *thick, contextualized descriptions* (Geertz, 1973) of the participants' migration journeys, educational and work backgrounds, and language learning processes. Rather than aiming for generalization, the study seeks to offer insights that other researchers and educators may find applicable in similar settings. The depth and richness of the narratives allow readers to assess the relevance of the findings to their own contexts.

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed record of the research process, including design decisions, instrument development, and analytical procedures. Additionally, the instruments were reviewed by expert validators, contributing to the internal coherence and reliability of the data collection tools. (See Appendix B)

Qualitative Research Approach

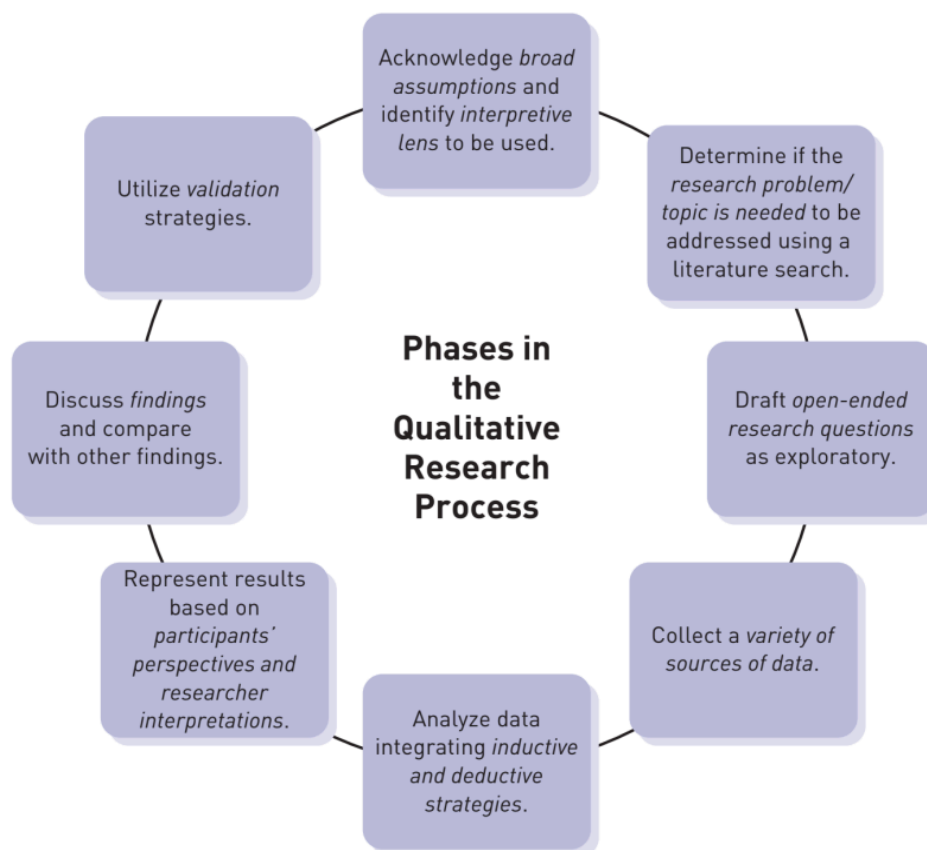
This research follows a qualitative approach, which seeks to collect descriptive data through interactions with participants, allowing the researcher to explore their perspectives and understand the meanings they construct in real-life contexts (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of Colombian migrants learning English while living in English-speaking countries. By using this approach, the research seeks to comprehend how these individuals make sense of their learning experiences within the context of their migration process.

The qualitative research process in this study follows several phases, as represented in the following figure from Creswell's *Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*:

Figure 3

Phases in the Qualitative Research Process



Note. This figure illustrates the phases of the qualitative research process. Adapted from *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed., p. [51]), by J. W. Creswell, 2013, SAGE Publications. Copyright 2013 by SAGE Publications.

Taking into account the figure, it is essential to describe each of the stages carried out in this investigation through the qualitative methodology. These stages were developed as follows:

Identification of the Research Problem and Preparation of Data Collection Instruments

The first phase of this research emerged naturally during the Online English lessons with migrant students, where the research topic began to take shape: understanding the learning experiences of Colombian migrants learning English abroad. This process started with a single Colombian student preparing to migrate, but soon, more students with similar journeys began to connect with the researcher, all of them sharing a common reality: English was not just a skill but a gateway to opportunities and social integration. As Creswell (2013) states, identifying the research problem is essential to establishing the purpose of the study and formulating research questions that guide the investigation. Observing this pattern motivated the researcher to design a contextualization survey aimed at identifying the diverse backgrounds of each student and understanding how these contexts might be impacting their individual learning processes (see Appendix A).

After conducting the contextualization survey, the research questions and objectives were formulated. To guide this process, a literature review was conducted to explore previous studies related to the topic. During this review, it became evident that the themes of Intercultural Relations, Migration, and Language Learning were recurrent and relevant to understanding the learning experiences of migrant students. Therefore, these categories were used to classify and organize the literature, which also influenced the design of the interview questions. The primary data collection instrument, a semi-structured interview, was then prepared to address these three predefined categories through a variety of questions and perspectives aimed at exploring

participants' experiences within each category in depth (See Appendix C). These instruments were previously validated by experts Lili López and Kerly Pabón, both of whom hold master's degrees in fields related to bilingualism and have several years of experience as language educators, to ensure their reliability and coherence. (See Appendix B).

Collecting Contextual and Experiential Data

The second phase involved collecting data through two instruments: a demographic survey and a semi-structured interview. The demographic survey was designed to contextualize the participants by gathering basic information such as age, gender, educational background, and migration experiences, which is essential for understanding the diversity of participants' experiences (Maxwell, 1996). This survey was conducted entirely online due to the nature of the research, as the researcher was based in Colombia while the participants, as Colombian migrants, were located across various English-speaking countries with different cities and time zones.

The demographic survey was administered through the tool *Forms.app*, which allows the creation and management of customized surveys. This platform offers various features, such as creating forms with diverse question types, easy data collection via mobile devices, real-time result visualization, and data export to Excel. Additionally, it facilitated providing descriptions, welcoming messages, and closing statements to ensure participants were fully informed about the research objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the informed consent process for academic purposes (See Appendix A). This phase involved the collection of responses from 14 participants; however, the final sample for the interviews consisted of only 9 participants due to difficulties in matching time zones and participants' commitments. (See Appendix F)

The primary instrument for data collection, however, was semi-structured interviews, which is one of the most common techniques in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This semi-structured interview was designed to address the three predefined categories of the research: Intercultural Relations, Migration, and Language Learning, through a variety of questions and perspectives that aimed to explore participants' experiences within each category in depth (See Appendix C). This phase aligns with the purpose of qualitative research to collect rich, descriptive data that reflects the participants' viewpoints (Creswell, 2013).

The interviews were conducted through *Google Meet*, recorded with participants' verbal consent, and then transcribed and analyzed using *Read AI*. This process ensured accuracy in the transcription and facilitated a thorough analysis of the data collected (See Appendix E).

Data Analysis

The third phase focused on data analysis, which was conducted using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible approach that allows researchers to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data. It involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report as reflected in Table 2.

Table 2*Phases of Thematic Analysis*

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Adapted from Using thematic analysis in psychology (p. 35), by V. Braun & V. Clarke, 2006.

Phase 1: Familiarising Yourself with the Data. The first stage involved a deep familiarization with the data collected through semi-structured interviews. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, the participants' native language. This was a deliberate decision to ensure that participants could express themselves naturally, comfortably, and authentically. This approach was especially relevant given that the interview topics dealt with personal experiences, emotions, and challenges related to migration, identity, and language learning.

As the participants were Colombian migrants living in English-speaking countries, allowing them to speak in Spanish also minimized potential linguistic barriers and encouraged richer, more honest responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who agreed to have their first names used in the study for referencing their answers at the beginning of the survey (See Appendix A).

AI was used during the Google Meet sessions to assist with the documentation. It provided full transcripts and summaries of each interview. A total of nine participants took part in the research. Their interviews were conducted in the following consistent order, which was maintained throughout the analysis phases to preserve coherence and traceability: 'Karen', 'Jose', 'Lina', 'Laura', 'Victor', 'Michael', 'Carolina', 'Alejandra', 'Jenny'.

The transcripts were downloaded and organized into individual Word documents, one per participant. Each document was structured using the validated interview questions, and the corresponding answers provided by the participants were grouped under the three overarching conceptual categories established for the interview in the following order: Migration, Language Learning, and Intercultural Relations. (See Appendix E)

This systematic organization of data allowed for a more comprehensive and focused review of each participant's contributions, and it laid the foundation for the coding and theme identification processes described in the subsequent phases.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes. Initial coding was performed manually. This study used an inductive analysis approach, meaning that categories and themes emerged from the participants' responses rather than being imposed beforehand. This approach allowed for patterns and meanings to be identified directly from the data, ensuring the analysis reflected participants'

experiences authentically. Once the transcripts were reviewed and organized, the next step was to compile the answers by interview question, rather than by participant. This meant creating a separate document for each question, with a list of responses from all participants beneath it.

For example, the document for the question '*What was the main reason that led you to migrate to an English-speaking country and What expectations did you have about the place where you currently live?*' (translated from Spanish, IQ1, personal interview, 2024).

included answers from Karen, Jose, Lina, and the remaining participants. (See Appendix F: Thematic Data Analysis).

Each document was created based on one of the predefined categories used in the interviews: Migration, Language Learning, and Intercultural Relations. The distribution of interview questions was as follows:

Migration: The first three open-ended questions from the interview are related to this category, aiming to explore participants' motives for migrating, their emotional well-being during the process, and their adaptation to work-related expectations in the host country.

Language Learning: Questions 4 to 9 are related to this category and examine prior experiences learning English, idealized expectations before migrating, the influence of social and economic context, personal learning strategies, and access to learning resources in the new environment.

Intercultural Relations: The last three questions focus on participants' interactions with local communities, emotional responses to speaking English in social settings, and perceived cultural differences in everyday life.

The full list of questions used in each category can be found in Appendix C.

Each question-specific document concluded with an analysis table that supported the initial coding process, including three columns: Recurrent Theme, Participant (First Name), and Example Quote as shown in the sample table below, which is based on the analysis of participants' responses to the previously mentioned question about their main reason for migrating to an English-speaking country, and the expectations they had about the place where they currently live.

Table 3

Example of Thematic Coding Table: Reasons for Migration and Expectations

Recurring Theme	Participants	Similar Phrases/Ideas
Learning or improving English	Jose, Lina, Laura, Victor, Michael, Jenny	<i>"aprender inglés", "practicar el idioma", "mejorar mi nivel", "estudiar inglés en otro país"</i>
Seeking better economic/employment opportunities	Victor, Carolina, Alejandra, Jenny	<i>"mejorar mi economía", "buscar un mejor futuro", "mayores oportunidades", "factor económico"</i>
Support network	Karen, Lina, Victor, Laura	<i>"mi novio", "mi hermana", "un amigo que estaba aquí"</i>
Intercultural experience / getting to know new cultures	Karen, Jose, Laura, Michael, Carolina	<i>'La razón principal fue viajar, conocer, disfrutar', 'vivir la experiencia y tener esa experiencia de vivir en el exterior' "Malta es muy multicultural"</i>
Pandemic as a catalyst for the decision	Laura, Jenny	<i>"la pandemia fue un despertar", "después de la pandemia el tema económico..."</i>

Note: This table was extracted from the actual analysis process carried out during Phase 2. It illustrates how participants' responses were organized and examined to identify recurrent themes across interviews. The table was developed by the author originally in Spanish, and later translated into English.

This format helped identify patterns across participants' responses to each question. For instance, in response to the question about reasons for migrating to an English-speaking country, a recurrent theme like "learning or improving English" appeared repeatedly, with quotes such as:

"I mainly traveled to learn English for university-related reasons."

(translated from Spanish, Jose, IQ1, personal interview, 2024).

"I had always wanted to learn English and live the experience of being abroad."

(translated from Spanish, Laura IQ1, personal interview, 2024).

It is important to note that only the answers that addressed the core aspects of each category were included in the tables used for coding.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes. After all question-specific analysis tables were completed, the next step was synthesizing the findings by category. This involved grouping together the tables related to Migration, Language Learning, and Intercultural Relations, and generating a consolidated analysis table for each category. Each table brings together the most recurrent themes identified across the participant responses to the interview questions related to that category. As can be seen in the following tables, structured in two columns: the first column presents the Grouped Themes, which summarize common ideas expressed by multiple participants; the second column provides a Tentative Subcategory Name, suggesting an initial conceptual label that could later evolve into a more defined theme or subtheme.

Table 4*Migration – Consolidated Analysis Table*

Grouped Themes	Tentative subcategory Name
Search for a better quality of life, education, family, accompanying a partner, and employment.	Migration Motivations
Difficulty communicating initially, dependence on English for opportunities, fear or discomfort.	Linguistic Barriers
Nostalgia, culture shock, frustration, fear, adaptation strategies, and resilience.	Cultural and Emotional Adaptation
Changes in work sectors, manual or low-skilled jobs, require validation of academic degrees.	Employment Trajectory
Limits access to qualified jobs, need to “survive” in initial jobs, and the importance of English.	Impact of Language on Employability
Intensive English study, positive mindset ("this is temporary"), fake it until you make it, Personal achievement, pride in accomplishments, valuing the experience despite difficulties.	Coping Strategies and Perception of Personal Growth
Immigration procedures, work permits, and impact on employment opportunities.	Legal and Documentation Factors

Note: Table developed by the author during Phase 3 of the analysis. Originally in Spanish, later translated into English.

Table 5*Language Learning – Consolidated Analysis*

Grouped Themes	Tentative subcategory Name
School classes, courses, self-learning, teaching quality, initial auditory development, time problems for studying	Previous experiences and first contact with the language
Desire to travel or migrate, social and economic need, technical/work English, external pressure	Personal, work, and migration motivations
Idealization of the process, reality shock, differences between practical and academic learning, sustained effort,	Expectations vs. Reality of learning in an English-speaking

impact of local accents/dialects	country
Environment that accelerates learning, Spanish-speaking communities, socio-cultural barriers, adaptation to informal English, need for immersion	Social, cultural, and environmental factors
Work as a practice driver, daily bilingual contact, or only in English, influence of the work environment on confidence and language skills	Economic and work factors in learning
Use of classes, books, apps, social media, audiovisual media, contextual learning (life and work), access	Formal and informal educational resources
Self-learning resources as support but not a substitute, need for guidance or a teacher, importance of real interaction	Limits and role of self-learning
Fear, frustration, insecurity, personal pride, resilience in the face of difficulties, satisfaction with progress	Emotional challenges and resilience in the process

Note: Table developed by the author during Phase 3 of the analysis. Originally in Spanish, later translated into English. It was originally developed in Spanish and later translated into English.

Table 6
Intercultural Relations – Consolidated Analysis Table

Grouped Themes	Tentative Category Name
Work as a practice environment, Everyday situations (supermarket, laundromat), Cafés or social spaces to practice, Cultural or extracurricular contexts	Social Interactions as a Driver of Learning
Anxiety/self-demand when interacting, Comparison with non-native speakers, Cultural and emotional shock	Emotional Impact: Between Anxiety and Pride
Accent and local expressions, Different social norms, Gap between what was learned and what is lived, Gradual cultural adaptation	Cultural Barriers as Both Limitation and Catalyst
Friendships and social life, Contact with students/teaching, Language use depending on the context	Language as a Reflection of Intercultural Adaptation

Note: Table developed by the author during Phase 3 of the analysis. Originally in Spanish, later translated into English. It was originally developed in Spanish and later translated into English.

These tables served as an intermediate step that helped transition from question-specific analysis to broader thematic insights. They were essential in identifying how different excerpts from participants often reflected multiple categories simultaneously. For instance, phrases from one answer could align with both emotional, linguistic, and cultural dimensions.

One example is Alejandra's response to the question *"Before migrating, how did you imagine the process of learning English in an English-speaking country?"* from the Language Learning category: *"I had the feeling that, in terms of language, I had much more control than I actually did when I arrived here. And I realized that no, my English wasn't as good as I thought. I never considered the variation in accents, which makes it much harder to understand what someone is saying, and that wasn't part of my expectations."* (translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ5, personal interview, 2024).

This excerpt illustrates the overlap between several thematic areas:

Coping Strategies and Perception of Personal Growth (Migration), Cultural Barriers as Both Limitation and Catalyst (Intercultural Relations), Previous Experiences and First Contact with the Language (Language Learning), Expectations vs. Reality of Learning in an English-Speaking Country (Language Learning), This coding exercise revealed that the data could not be fully understood if confined to the initial three categories alone. It was during this stage that the need for a transversal framework became evident. These insights laid the groundwork for the development of a more refined set of themes and subthemes.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes Based on the patterns observed in the previous phase, a new coding framework was developed. Themes were reorganized, merged, renamed, or redefined to better reflect the nuances and complexity of participants' experiences. For instance, what was initially coded separately as "Cultural and Emotional Adaptation" and "Emotional

challenges and resilience in the process” was eventually merged under the broader subtheme: ‘Linguistic resilience and coping with language barriers’.

This phase marked the transition from exploratory grouping to the creation of a structured and systematic thematic framework. A set of main categories and subcategories was finalized, encompassing the interrelated aspects of migration, language learning, and intercultural adaptation. Each category and subcategory was then assigned a distinct color to support visual organization and facilitate coding across participants' responses. As can be seen in the following tables, each theme is presented along with its corresponding subcategory, color name, and HEX code. These visual elements were essential for maintaining consistency throughout the coding process and for enabling quick identification of recurring ideas during the final analysis.

Table 7

Color Palette Category 1: Migratory Motivation and Adaptation to Life as a Migrant

Subcategory	Color	HEX
Migratory motivations and meanings associated with language learning	Old Rose	#D8A7B1
Language as a challenge in the migratory experience	Ice Blue	#87CEEB
Structural conditions of migration: employment, language, and legality	Cream Yellow	#ffe599

Note: Table developed by the author during Phase 4 of the analysis. Originally in Spanish, later translated into English. It was originally developed in Spanish and later translated into English.

Table 8

Color Palette Category 2: Learning Strategies and Personal Growth in the Migration Process: The Impact of Language Learning

Subcategory	Color	HEX
Educational strategies and resources in autonomous language learning	Soft Lavender Green	#98FB98
Linguistic resilience and coping with language barriers	Tangerine	#FF8C00
Perception of progress and transformation through language	Acid Fuchsia	#FF0090

Note: Table developed by the author during Phase 4 of the analysis. Originally in Spanish, later translated into English. It was originally developed in Spanish and later translated into English.

Table 9

Color Palette Category 3: Social Interaction and Linguistic Integration in Intercultural Contexts

Subcategory	Color	HEX
Communication barriers and linguistic mismatch in the migrant's daily life	Pastel Coral	#FFB6B3
Intercultural relationships as spaces for learning and linguistic adaptation	Soft Lavender Purple	#BA91FF

Note: Table developed by the author during Phase 4 of the analysis. Originally in Spanish, later translated into English. It was originally developed in Spanish and later translated into English.

Participants' full interview transcripts were revisited, and excerpts were color-coded according to this final framework. Many excerpts continued to align with multiple categories, highlighting the layered and intersectional nature of migrant language learning experiences. This

step was iterative and demanded multiple refinements, as some codes were adjusted to better reflect participants' answers.

Evidence of this process is available in the coded response documents with highlighted text fragments and annotations, stored in Appendix F: Thematic Data Analysis.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes. Once the structure of categories and subcategories was finalized, a definition table was created to outline the analytical scope of each category clearly. This step aimed to ensure consistency in interpretation and transparency in how the data was classified and understood.

The finalized coding framework was organized into three overarching thematic categories: Migration Motivation and Adaptation to Life as a Migrant, Learning Strategies and Personal Growth in the Migration Process: the impact of Language Learning, and Social Interaction and Linguistic Integration in Intercultural Contexts.

Each category includes a set of subcategories that reflect specific aspects of participants' experiences. These subcategories emerged from repeated patterns in the data and from the need to capture the depth and nuance in participants' answers. Naming each category and subcategory required careful consideration of their conceptual focus and relevance across multiple participants' responses.

To document and support this structure, a table was developed listing each main category, its associated subcategories, and a brief operational definition of each one. This table is annexed to this section and serves as a foundational tool for interpreting the coded data in the subsequent stages of analysis.

Table 10*Final Coding Framework: Categories, Subthemes, and Definitions*

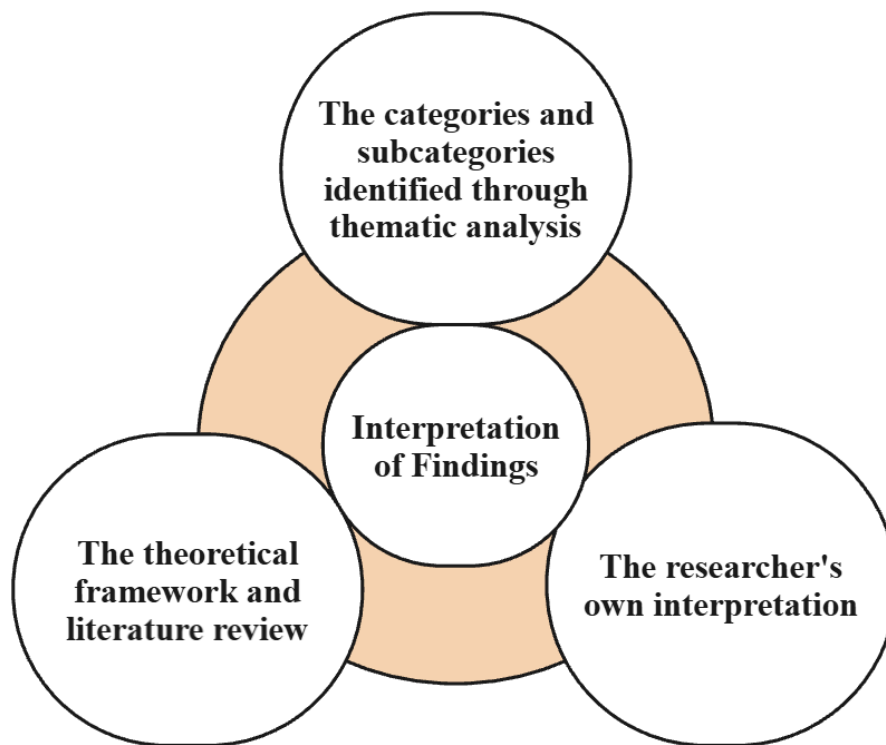
Category	Subcategories	Description
C1. Migratory Motivation and Adaptation to Life as a Migrant	Migration Motivations and Language Learning	Refers to the diverse personal, family, economic, and emotional reasons behind the decision to migrate. These motivations shape both expectations about migration and attitudes toward learning English.
	Language and Cultural Adaptation as a Migratory Challenge	Refers to migrants' expectations and beliefs about using English before migrating, as well as their initial experiences in the host country. It highlights the contrast between expectations and reality.
	Structural Conditions: Employment and Legal Barriers	It focuses on the structural challenges migrants face. It also includes cultural shock, emotional stress, and identity reconfiguration. These elements reflect how language, legal frameworks, and cultural adjustment shape the migration experience on practical and emotional levels.
C2. Learning Strategies and Personal Growth in the Migration Process: The Impact of Language Learning	Interest in the language, learning strategies, and educational resources used	This section highlights the varied strategies migrants use to learn English, from self-directed methods to formal or informal educational support. Motivation, self-confidence, and personal commitment are seen as key factors that shape learning progress.
	Linguistic Resilience and Coping with Language Barriers	This section focuses on the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral strategies migrants adopt to navigate language challenges. It covers managing anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited vocabulary or accent-related insecurities.
	Perceived Progress and Personal Transformation through Language	Explores how learning English fosters personal growth. Migrants not only gain communication skills but also strengthen autonomy, problem-solving, and life perspective. Recognizing their progress enhances self-esteem and reaffirms their adaptability.

C3. Social Interaction and Linguistic Integration in Intercultural Contexts	Communicative Barriers, Language Gaps, and Everyday Strategies	This addresses the persistent challenges migrants face when using English daily, highlighting the mismatch between formally learned language and colloquial or culturally embedded forms.
	Intercultural Relationships as Learning and Adaptation Spaces	Explores how social, work, and community interactions in the host country contribute to English learning and cultural integration. Intercultural contact offers exposure to functional language and spaces for adaptation and belonging.

***Note:** Table developed by the author during Phase 4 of the analysis. Originally in Spanish, later translated into English. It was originally developed in Spanish and later translated into English.*

Phase 6: Producing the Report. The sixth phase of this research process involved writing up the findings and interpreting the themes. The findings were analyzed using a thematic narrative style, which integrates thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with a narrative approach (Riessman, 2008). This allowed for the identification of key themes across participants while preserving the coherence and richness of individual voices. Through this approach, each theme is not only analyzed conceptually, but also contextualized within participants' lived experiences and narratives collected from the primary instrument for data collection: semi-structured interviews.

A central component of this phase was the application of triangulation to ensure the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the findings. As defined by Denzin (1978), triangulation refers to the use of multiple perspectives to cross-validate and deepen the understanding of qualitative data. The following figure illustrates the three key sources involved in the triangulation process, which guided the interpretation of findings.

Figure 4.*Triangulation Framework Used in the Interpretation of Findings*

Source: Author's own elaboration.

As shown in the figure above, methodological triangulation was carried out through the integration of three core elements. First, the categories and subcategories were identified through thematic analysis based on the participants' own interpretations. This process involved a critical reflection on how their narratives aligned with, challenged, or expanded upon the theoretical perspectives and the research questions. Second, the findings were represented through thick descriptions that aimed to capture the depth and complexity of the participants' experiences. Finally, the theoretical framework and literature review provided the conceptual lens through which the data were examined and contextualized.

This triangulated approach enhanced the analytical rigor of the study and allowed for a reinterpretation of the findings, which is in line with Creswell's (2013) emphasis on the importance of meaning-making in qualitative research. It facilitated the exploration of how the emerging themes addressed the central research questions and contributed to existing knowledge.

To communicate the richness of the participants' experiences, the findings were represented through thick descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), using direct quotes from the interviews in their original Spanish form. To ensure accessibility and clarity for all readers, interpretative translations into English were also provided where necessary. These participant voices were essential in bringing the themes to life and grounding the analysis in real lived experiences.

This phase closes the analytical process and opens the path to presenting findings per theme, offering a comprehensive and reflective interpretation of the participants' journeys.

Interpretative Findings

This section presents the study's findings organized by the main analytical categories and their respective subcategories, as defined in the previous phase. Each thematic category is explored in depth to comprehensively understand participants' lived experiences as Colombian migrants learning English in English-speaking countries.

All interviews were semi-structured and conducted by the researcher in 2024. Participants provided informed consent to participate in the study and to be quoted using either their real names or pseudonyms, according to their preference.

To ensure clarity and traceability, all quotes from interview responses are coded using the prefix IQ (Interview Question), followed by the number of the corresponding question from the interview guide—for example, *IQ3* refers to a quote derived from interview question number 3.

Since these interviews are not publicly accessible, they are treated as personal communications and therefore are not included in the reference list, in accordance with APA 7th edition guidelines.

Appendix F: Thematic Data Analysis presents the full transcriptions and thematic coding process used for the data analysis.

The interpretation of the findings follows the structure presented in the triangulation process. First, each primary category will be introduced with a definition, supported by relevant literature and general quotes that help capture its overall significance. After this initial overview, each subcategory will be presented in the following order: a clear definition, literal excerpts from the participants' narratives, and the researcher's interpretation. This interpretation involves a

critical reflection on how participants' accounts align with, challenge, or expand the theoretical framework and literature review used as a conceptual lens to examine and contextualize the data, providing a foundation to better understand the complexity of participants' learning and migration journeys.

Category 1: Migratory Motivation and Adaptation to Life as a Migrant

For adult migrants, the language acquisition experience is closely linked to the reasons that led them to migrate and to the complex process of adapting to a new life abroad. This category explores how the initial motivations for migration, whether economic, personal, or social, intertwine with the realities of adapting to a new sociocultural and linguistic environment. Both agency and constraint mark migrants' trajectories:

Norton (2013) defines agency as the people's ability to make choices and take action. In this case, many migrants choose to move to another country because they see migration as a way to improve their lives and access better opportunities.

As Block (2007) discussed, constraints refer to the structural barriers migrants face, such as insecure legal status, discrimination, difficulty entering the labor market, and limited proficiency in the local language, which restrict their access to opportunities and shape their daily lives.

Beyond individual aspirations, participants' decisions about where to migrate were influenced by their perceptions of the social, legal, and racial climates of the countries they considered. For some, the imagined destination changed over time as they evaluated the risks, possibilities, and accessibility each country offered.

Laura, for instance, initially envisioned herself migrating to the United States, but reconsidered after learning more about its social challenges: *Initially, I wanted to move to the United States, but later, the country did not appeal to me much anymore due to concerns about safety and discrimination. That affects me in some way; it was something I took into account.*" (translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). Her reflection reveals that the desire for safety and dignity weighed heavily in her decision-making process, highlighting how imagined futures are built on opportunity and the avoidance of potential harm or exclusion.

Jenny, on the other hand, made a comparative assessment between two destinations—Canada and the United States—and concluded that while both countries offered advantages, the U.S. appeared to be more accessible in practical terms: *"I chose the United States because I feel there are more opportunities for immigrants. Canada is a very good country, but I feel that immigration there is more difficult; getting residency, jobs, or study permits is more complicated."* (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). Her decision illustrates how migrants must weigh not only the overly positive image of a country but also the bureaucratic and systemic obstacles that can either enable or hinder their plans.

Likewise, Alejandra emphasized that practical considerations around immigration policy influenced her choice: *"I chose the United States because the migration process was much easier since I already had a U.S. visa. Other countries have more complex migration barriers. generally, they require stricter conditions to access student visas."* (translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). Her account reflects how prior access to a visa can significantly shape one's migratory path, mainly when other countries impose more rigid entry requirements. For many migrants, the destination is not always the most desired or idealized, but rather the one most within reach.

Language also plays a central role in this process because learning English is not merely an academic task but a means of survival, integration, and identity negotiation. The host society's language becomes a symbolic and practical barrier to participation in everyday life, access to employment, healthcare, education, and even forming social relationships. As Bourdieu (1991) argued, language is a form of capital, and migrants often find themselves at a disadvantage in linguistic marketplaces where their native language holds little value.

Adaptation, therefore, involves more than learning new words or grammar. It includes the emotional labor of adjusting to new norms, dealing with cultural misunderstandings, and reconstructing a sense of self in unfamiliar territory (Norton, 2013). The learning of English is situated in this tension between the imagined future that motivates migration and the often harsh realities of the receiving country.

Subcategory 1: Migration, Motivations, and Language Learning

The decision to migrate is rarely impulsive; rather, it stems from a complex intersection of personal aspirations, family dynamics, emotional drivers, and structural conditions. In this subcategory, participants' narratives show how these motivations not only frame the migration project but also shape their orientation toward English learning. For some, learning English is the primary purpose of migration; for others, it emerges as a practical tool. These motivations reflect overlapping dimensions of opportunity, urgency, and desire.

A significant group of participants identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a pivotal trigger for reconsidering life paths and pursuing long-held dreams of living abroad and learning English. Laura, for instance, shared: *“I had always wanted to learn English and live abroad (...) the pandemic was also a kind of awakening for me about, well, what am I doing with my life (...) the*

dreams I have had.” (translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). Her account reveals how the pandemic catalyzed a deep personal reflection, pushing her to align her migration with long-standing goals.

Jenny echoed a similar sentiment, but with a stronger emphasis on economic necessity: *“Mainly after the pandemic (...), economic issues led me to seek alternatives in other places. And second, I always wanted to study English.”* (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). For her, the post-pandemic economic crisis in her professional field forced her to look for alternatives abroad. Language learning, in this case, was both an opportunity and a continuation of a dream.

Alejandra also migrated in search of new opportunities, choosing an English-speaking country based on her previous language knowledge: *“The main reason to migrate was to look for new opportunities, but specifically to an English-speaking country because I had some knowledge of the language, so it felt more reliable to me.”* (translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). Her narrative highlights the pragmatic use of existing skills to minimize uncertainty.

Victor's story overlaps with these experiences through his dual motivation: economic improvement and English proficiency. *“My expectations were to improve my English level and also improve my finances (...) I wanted to come with a legal visa that allowed me to both work and study, and because I had a friend who had already been living here for some time, he gave me advice and told me various things about Australia, so that is why I decided to come here.”* (translated from Spanish, Victor, IQ1, personal interview, 2024)

Like Alejandra and Jenny, he pursued a legal condition that allowed him to work and study, illustrating a rational and well-planned migration strategy as well as the influence of relational support that is also presented in other narratives.

For example, Lina emphasized her sister's role in her decision: *"My main reason for migrating was my sister as well as my desire to learn English. It was a challenge."* (translated from Spanish, Lina, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). The migration, though family-motivated, opened the door to an individual challenge and language learning as a form of personal growth.

Similarly, Karen shared that her move was inspired by her partner's aspirations: *"To support my boyfriend in fulfilling a dream (...) that I would get to know new things, places, restaurants, food, and people."* (translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). While her motivation was primarily relational, her narrative reflects excitement for novelty and a willingness to embrace change, suggesting an openness to the implicit demands of adapting to a new culture and language.

José, on the other hand, migrated with a strong and personal desire to experience life abroad and to learn English: *"The main reason was to travel, explore, enjoy, and learn English. I primarily traveled to learn English because of my university aspirations."* (translated from Spanish, Jose, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). His case aligns closely with the concept of language learning as a central pillar of the migration project, a deliberate choice to immerse himself in the language and culture.

Finally, Carolina stands out for offering a contrasting view. While she, too, migrated in search of a better future, her interest in English was minimal: *"Well, actually, I was looking for a better future. I was not really interested in learning English because it did not really appeal to*

me.”

(translated from Spanish, Carolina, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). Her story reminds us that not all migrants are driven by or even interested in language learning; for some, English becomes relevant only as a necessity after arrival.

These varied motivations align with existing literature on migration and language learning. Norton's (2013) concept of imagined communities is particularly useful here: migrants envision new identities and futures that hinge on language as both a gateway and a symbol. For many participants, English represents a bridge between their current realities and aspirational lives, whether academic, economic, or emotional.

At the same time, these testimonies complicate simplified views of language learning as either a goal or a barrier. Instead, English appears as a dynamic element within broader life projects; sometimes central, sometimes peripheral, always contextual. This confirms Block's (2007) assertion that language learning is embedded in social and structural realities that shape how, why, and whether individuals engage with it.

Moreover, these narratives emphasize the emotional and subjective dimensions of migration. The decision to leave one's country is deeply personal and often tied to moments of rupture or transformation, such as the pandemic, family changes, or existential questions. These factors humanize the data and invite us to view language not just as a skill, but as part of a larger story of hope, challenge, and resilience.

Subcategory 2: Language and Cultural Adaptation as a Migratory Challenge

During the early stages of learning English in a new country, several participants recalled moments marked by emotional vulnerability and uncertainty. They spoke of frustration when they could not express themselves, of insecurity when comparing themselves to others, and of the fear that every word they said might sound wrong. Cultural misunderstandings added an extra layer of confusion, while unexpected social barriers sometimes left them feeling isolated, even when surrounded by people. These experiences, shared in deeply personal terms during the interviews, offer a glimpse into the internal struggles behind what might seem like a simple language learning process.

Karen began her experience with the belief that using English would come naturally to her. *“I thought it was going to be easier, like it was going to just flow for me”* (translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ5, personal interview, 2024). However, she quickly realized that communicating in real situations was more challenging than anticipated.

She described how nervousness affected her ability to speak: *“At the beginning, my tongue would get stuck a lot... I wanted to say something like ‘How much is it?’ but I could not speak fast. It was more like a fear of messing up”*. For her, it was not just about language knowledge—it was also about a fear of being criticized: *“it is more the fear of getting it wrong and being judged for not doing it the right way.”* (translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ11, personal interview, 2024).

This emotional tension was intensified by the cultural environment she encountered. She described the locals as *“very serious and very quiet,”* which contrasted strongly with her outgoing personality: *“I am the complete opposite”*. In her early days abroad, she would walk

down the street trying to avoid any interaction: *“I did not want anyone to look at me, talk to me, or touch me... because I felt like first, they would speak their native language and I would not understand, and second, because people here are boring, quiet. I have had a hard time adjusting to how cheerful we are in Colombia.”* Karen’s narrative shows how emotional reactions and cultural shock can restrict learners from using the language freely, even when they have the desire to communicate. (translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ12, personal interview, 2024).

Laura also arrived with high expectations. She assumed she would be speaking fluently within a few months: *“I thought I would come here and be fluent in three or six months”*. This expectation, she explained, was promoted by online content and language-learning ads: *“that is also what they sell you in English ads, on YouTube, on social media.”* When the reality did not meet those expectations, it hit her hard: *“it was a shock; it was frustrating.”* (translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ5, personal interview, 2024).

In addition to this disappointment, she struggled with adapting to the social culture in Australia: *“Australians are very closed off when it comes to letting people into their social circles”*. She found it difficult to build connections, which limited her opportunities to practice English naturally. Moreover, the local humor clashed with her own personality: *“they have a sense of humor that contrasts with mine. I am shy, reserved, introverted, and I take things very literally... so instead of helping me open up more, it just shuts me down.”* Her story highlights how social disconnection and cultural mismatches can deepen feelings of inadequacy and withdrawal in the language learning process. (translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ12, personal interview, 2024).

José experienced a sudden and overwhelming cultural shock upon arriving in the U.S.: *“I got on a plane, got off the plane, and suddenly, I do not know how to speak anymore!”*. He explained that the issue was not a lack of vocabulary, but rather the unexpected difficulty of adapting to new accents and real-time communication. *“When you are in Colombia, you always talk to the same people, the same teachers, and they get used to your accent and your mistakes.”* In contrast, his new environment required a different kind of flexibility. (translated from Spanish, José, IQ5, personal interview, 2024).

He also encountered prejudice that further complicated his experience: *“At first, I felt insecure. And then I realized something interesting here: if you speak with insecurity, people automatically assume you do not speak English, and if they see you are Latino, they just decide you do not speak English even if your English is perfect”*. His reflection sheds light on how identity and perception intertwine with linguistic performance and how social assumptions can undermine confidence regardless of actual proficiency. (translated from Spanish, José, IQ11, personal interview, 2024).

The narratives presented here reveal a shared experience of initial overconfidence or idealized expectations about English fluency, followed by the emotional reality of linguistic insecurity and cultural dissonance. Karen's experience, for instance, highlights the fear of making mistakes and social judgment, which aligns with literature on language anxiety and its impact on communicative willingness, explained by MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) in their study *Language anxiety: Its relationship to other anxieties and to processing in native and second languages*. Her perception of the local social atmosphere as “serious” and “silent” contrasts sharply with her outgoing Colombian cultural background, illustrating how cultural norms deeply affect language learning contexts.

In the same way, Laura's reflections on the closed nature of Australian social circles and the mismatch in humor styles show how cultural barriers extend beyond language proficiency to encompass social integration challenges. This supports Berry's (1997) work on the role of acculturation strategies in migrant adaptation and the psychological effects of perceived social exclusion, as presented in *Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation*.

Jose's account adds the dimension of ethnic identity and stereotype threat, where his linguistic insecurity is compounded by the biases he encounters. His experience illustrates how external perceptions of Latinos can act as barriers to communication acceptance, reinforcing the findings of Flores and Rosa (2015) regarding raciolinguistic ideologies and racialized social identities, as discussed in *Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in Education*.

Together, these accounts underscore the complexity of language learning in migration contexts, where emotional, cultural, and social factors interplay dynamically. The data expand existing theory by illustrating how migrant learners navigate not only linguistic challenges but also cultural expectations and social identities that influence their overall adaptation and learning trajectories.

Subcategory 3: Structural Conditions: Employment and Legal

For many participants, starting over in a new country involved facing structural barriers that extended far beyond language. Securing employment aligned with their skills or professional background was rarely straightforward. Several described how legal restrictions limited their options, while others expressed frustration at having their degrees or experience unrecognized. These circumstances often left them with no alternative but to accept survival jobs, roles

unrelated to their expertise but essential for economic stability. Beyond financial strain, these situations had emotional repercussions, prompting some to question their professional identity and sense of self in this unfamiliar context.

Jenny's experience illustrates this well: *“When you arrive in an unfamiliar country, especially as a professional, you are forced to take on other kinds of jobs just to survive or support your family back in Colombia. It is very frustrating when you want to move forward but can not because of legal documentation or status. Not being able to work in your field is hard, especially when you love your profession and identify strongly with it”* (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ3, personal interview, 2024).

Alejandra echoed this emotional toll of starting from scratch: *“You migrate and immediately begin learning the language, but you have fewer chances than even people living on the streets — they at least speak the language. Rebuilding your skills and making them productive again is emotionally overwhelming. You have to start over, rebuild social ties, and revalidate your education.”* (translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ1, personal interview, 2024)

Lina reflected on the barriers beyond language: *“I have had to work in areas different from my field not really because of my English, but because here, to get a decent job, they require high education levels, not just language. Very few Spanish speakers can actually access good jobs. You just can not afford to wait”* (translated from Spanish, Lina, IQ3, personal interview, 2024).

Karen offered a contrasting, yet equally revealing, perspective. Rather than entering the workforce immediately, she chose to wait until she felt both linguistically and professionally prepared: *“I decided that until I had a very good level of English where I felt comfortable. I do*

not need to work in something outside my field, so the idea is to homologate my degree here and ideally work in my area. If not, I will have to evaluate how long I can go without working, because I am not used to being inactive” (translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ3, personal interview, 2024).

Karen's decision reflects a conscious resistance to occupational downgrading and highlights how some migrants seek to preserve their professional identity by delaying economic integration. However, it also reveals the mental strain of prolonged inactivity and the tension between financial security and personal-professional alignment.

The disconnect between previous professional identity and current employment also brings psychological strain. Víctor shared: *“It is tough. You go from having a profession that once gave you confidence to doing physically demanding labor you are not used to. Mentally, it's hard to adapt. And although language is a factor, it is not the only one.”* (translated from Spanish, Víctor, IQ3, personal interview, 2024). His account points to the broader phenomenon of downward occupational mobility and the loss of status often experienced by skilled migrants.

Despite these structural challenges, some participants identified opportunities. Jenny acknowledged the presence of institutional support: *“there are many public schools and free language programs for adults... opportunities are available here”* (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ8, personal interview, 2024).

However, she also noted how migration shifted her self-perception: *“Back in Colombia, I was a surgical technologist, always surrounded by doctors and administrators, maintaining a professional posture. Here, I have discovered how social and spontaneous I am. I can be more*

authentic because no one knows me” (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ10, personal interview, 2024).

Yet this transformation is not without its emotional weight. Jenny also expressed how *“being an immigrant is hard. You feel discriminated against. We are going through a learning process, but often people do not understand that”* (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ12, personal interview, 2024).

These narratives reveal a complex interplay between structural conditions, including legal status, credential recognition, language proficiency, and individual adaptation journeys. They align with scholarship on structural constraints in migration (Bloch, 2008; Bauder, 2003), particularly the notions of deskilling and occupational downgrading experienced by highly qualified migrants. The testimonies of Jenny, Alejandra, Lina, and Víctor underscore that legal status is not merely a bureaucratic matter but a deeply embodied experience, shaping emotional well-being, professional identity, and survival strategies.

Karen’s narrative adds important nuance. Unlike others who were compelled by circumstance to accept work outside their profession, she exercised agency by postponing employment to maintain her identity as a professional. Her decision reflects resistance to deskilling, yet also exposes the psychological burden of remaining economically inactive, particularly for those used to regular employment. Her case suggests that while agency exists, it is conditioned by factors such as personal privilege, prior professional experience, and emotional resilience.

Still, participants’ accounts also move beyond narratives of victimhood. Jenny’s discovery of a more spontaneous, social version of herself illustrates how migration, while

disempowering in structural terms, can foster transformation and self-redefinition. This aligns with Norton's (2013) argument that migration and language learning are not only processes of adaptation but also of identity renegotiation and agency.

Jenny's mention of free language programs introduces yet another layer: the presence of opportunity structures. However, her and others' stories show that access to such opportunities is shaped by more than availability. Personal history, emotional capacity, and social support all influence whether and how migrants can benefit from them. Integration, then, is not simply a matter of offering services, but of understanding the conditions under which migrants are able, or unable, to access and utilize them.

Finally, these reflections highlight the emotional labor of migration. The challenge of starting over, the friction between past and present identities, and the constant pressure to "prove oneself again" all point to what Berry (1997) terms acculturative stress. This stress is not solely a product of systemic exclusion but also of internalized pressure, affecting self-worth, perceived learning capacity, and one's evolving sense of belonging. Language learning, therefore, is more than a practical necessity; it is a deeply embedded part of the power dynamics and identity negotiations that define the migration experience.

Category 2: Learning Strategies and Personal Growth in the Migration Process: The Impact of Language Learning.

Learning a language in the context of migration is not merely a technical or cognitive process; it is, above all, a deeply personal experience, shaped by emotions, difficult decisions, and acts of daily resilience. Far from the traditional classroom setting, migrants become

protagonists of their own learning journeys, developing strategies that respond both to their aspirations and the barriers imposed by their new environment.

The testimonies of the participants reveal a wide range of resources and approaches: from those who rely on digital platforms, videos, or self-directed exercises, to those who find in face-to-face courses or everyday interactions a continuous opportunity to learn. This variety of strategies reflects what Norton (2013) refers to as *investment* in language learning, not only a matter of time, but also an emotional and identity-based commitment to the possibility of a different life. Language, then, is not an end in itself, but a medium through which migrants (re)construct themselves in a new social context.

In this process, learning English also becomes a space where migrants face internal battles: fear, shame, mental blocks, and doubt. As Pavlenko (2003) suggests, migrants not only learn a new language; they also *narrate new versions of themselves* through it. From this perspective, the emotional and cognitive strategies developed to overcome language barriers are also strategies of self-affirmation. As learners gain confidence in using the language, their perceptions of what they are capable of achieving begin to shift, along with how they see themselves and how they are seen by others.

Moreover, as Bourdieu (1986) argues, acquiring the dominant language in a new country implies more than communication; it grants access to symbolic capital. Learning English becomes a tool for social legitimization, access to rights, jobs, networks, and, in many cases, a more dignified life. In this sense, language learning is also a form of resistance and empowerment in the face of systems that initially marginalize them.

From this perspective, the following three subcategories explore how language learning strategies intertwine with migrants' personal growth in contexts of mobility:

Subcategory 1: Interest in the language, learning strategies, and educational resources used

Participants' learning trajectories reflect a wide range of motivations, personal histories, and challenges. These are defined by internal factors as well as the migration experience. For many, previous experiences with learning English shape the way they approach language learning in their host countries. These trajectories are reinterpreted once participants migrate, as English shifts from being a school subject or professional asset to becoming a survival tool and key to integration.

Participants in this study reported diverse paths related to English learning before migration, often marked by inconsistent efforts or limited access to adequate resources.

Victor, who began studying English in Colombia for professional growth, admitted that although initially consistent, he eventually put his learning aside after migrating. *"I have not studied anything in a long time. In fact, I had put it aside a bit, which is another mistake we sometimes make here. We focus on working, letting the days go by, and we forget about learning."* (translated from Spanish, Victor, IQ8, personal interview, 2024).

Alejandra also studied English in Colombia mainly for professional growth, rather than with the intention of migrating. Unlike Victor, Alejandra maintained a steady habit of self-study, relying on accessible resources such as Duolingo and English-language media. She said, *"I never stopped using Duolingo, and I challenged myself to watch TV in English without subtitles."* Additionally, her early exposure to English music, even without fully understanding the lyrics,

helped her become familiar with the sounds of the language. She explained, *"Since I was little, I listened to music in English. My ear got used to the language, and that helped when I moved."*

(translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ4, personal interview, 2024).

Jose also studied English after migrating to the United States. He enrolled in an English program at the University of San José, California, but dropped out due to work obligations and a lack of foundational support. He said, *"I studied English at the University of San José. I liked it, but later the schedule did not work for me because I had to work, so I dropped out. I think you need to have some previous knowledge because they don't teach you as a beginner"* (translated from Spanish, Jose, IQ8, personal interview, 2024).

Laura experienced a shift in her relationship with the language. Initially self-taught, she began studying English through music and brief courses. Her early encounters with English were self-directed and unstructured, but this changed when she began preparing to move abroad. *"I started studying English on my own. In 2011, I took a two-month English course and learned more than ever in school... I also took some classes before moving to Australia, and by then I had made peace with the language, because I used to hate English."* (translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ4, personal interview, 2024).

Once in Australia, Laura fully immersed herself in structured learning. *"Since I arrived in Australia, I have always attended face-to-face classes... This has helped me improve my English a lot."* But she did not stop there. Her personal strategies included music and everyday challenges: *"I give myself challenges and learn words from songs. Then I see the same word in a different context and it just clicks."* (translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ8, personal interview, 2024).

Still, she recognized that *"self-taught resources alone are not enough. It's important to expose yourself to the language and interact with others... that's how you gain confidence."*

(translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ9, personal interview, 2024).

Like Laura, Lina's interest in English began before migrating, but it took on a new meaning once she was immersed in an English-speaking environment. *"I've always liked English, and I've always listened to music in English. I also always had the idea of migrating."*

(translated from Spanish, Lina, IQ4, personal interview, 2024).

Although her early learning had no clear purpose, exposure to the language in her new environment changed that. *"Before, I liked English... but I didn't have the motivation I have now. Now I'm discovering so many cool expressions, I'm starting to really enjoy speaking it."*

(translated from Spanish, Lina, IQ6, personal interview, 2024).

Unlike Lina, for whom English became a joyful experience, Carolina's journey began with resistance. She had never liked English, neither in school nor later in life. *"English was always very difficult for me."* It was not until after migrating to an English-speaking country that she was forced to engage with the language.: *"Eventually, you have no choice; one way or another, you will have to learn it."* (translated from Spanish, Carolina, IQ1, personal interview, 2024). Her case illustrates how external pressures, rather than personal interest or planning, can become the main drivers of language learning.

In contrast, both Karen and Jenny became aware of the importance of English before migrating during previous international trips. Their inability to communicate made them feel vulnerable and overly dependent on others.

Karen shared, *"I had never planned to leave the country, but when I traveled to Europe, I had to rely on my boyfriend to order food for me. I felt completely powerless."* (translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ4, personal interview, 2024). Upon returning to Colombia, she enrolled in English classes and emphasized the value of practicing with someone who could offer correction and feedback.

Another source of motivation came from seeing fellow Spanish speakers communicate effectively in English. Rather than feeling discouraged, Karen saw their progress as proof that she, too, could succeed: *"I told myself, if they can do it, why can I not That motivates me, even though it makes me anxious."* (translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ10, personal interview, 2024).

Jenny had a similar realization after visiting the U.S. for the first time. She said, *"The first time I came here on vacation, I felt so frustrated not knowing how to ask for something in a store or understand what people were saying. After that trip, I knew I had to start learning the language."* (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ4, personal interview, 2024).

Motivated by this experience, she began using apps like Quizlet and Promoa, but soon found them insufficient. *"Five minutes is not enough. If you don't dedicate one or two hours a day, it is useless. That is why I stopped paying for the apps; it was not effective for me."* (translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ8, personal interview, 2024).

The participants' narratives reveal that interest in English often originated from personal motivations such as a fascination with the language, music, or career aspirations, rather than migration plans alone. For instance, Alejandra and Laura were drawn to English early on due to music exposure, while Victor pursued it for career advancement. However, this intrinsic

motivation frequently shifted once they faced the realities of migration, such as work demands or language barriers in their new environments.

These stories reaffirm Norton's (2013) concept of investment, showing that language learners are not just acquiring linguistic skills but investing in their identities, goals, and futures. The emotional charge behind learning, such as frustration, anxiety, pride, or independence, is deeply tied to context. Encounters with language limitations during travel (as seen with Karen and Jenny) or while navigating life abroad (as in the case of Jose, Laura, or Carolina) act as catalysts for reevaluating English as a tool for empowerment.

Participants also widely acknowledged the usefulness of digital resources and autonomous learning strategies like YouTube, Duolingo, music, self-study, and apps. Yet, they consistently emphasized the limitations of self-directed learning and how they become more effective when complemented by authentic language exposure and community engagement. This convergence of personal agency and contextual necessity underscores the dynamic, nonlinear nature of language learning in migration contexts, aligning with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where guided learning in social contexts accelerates development. Participants specifically pointed out the irreplaceable role of a teacher in clarifying grammar and language nuances.

Moreover, these accounts challenge the assumption that immersion alone guarantees successful learning. Learners need structured support, meaningful interaction, and the emotional readiness to engage with the language. The sociocultural theory of language learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) helps explain this by emphasizing that learning occurs through mediated social practices, not isolated exposure. Although digital tools were helpful bridges, especially when

economic or time constraints limited access to classes, they did not fully substitute the human, interactive element necessary for communicative competence.

In summary, the participants' experiences complicate the idea of a “clean slate” upon migration and affirm the need for a balanced, multimodal approach to English learning that includes structured instruction, interactive practice, and technological supplementation. Their reflections expand the literature by situating learning strategies within lived migration experiences, where motivation is reconfigured and a constant negotiation between opportunity and constraint shapes their learning narratives. Overall, these experiences highlight the complex and evolving relationship between language learning and the lived experiences of migration, where English transforms from a distant goal to a vital means of agency, identity, and belonging.

Subcategory 2: Linguistic Resilience and Coping with Language Barriers

Learning a new language in a foreign country is rarely straightforward. It is often filled with moments of fear, frustration, courage, and small victories that may go unnoticed by others but are incredibly significant for those experiencing them. For the Colombian migrants in this study, learning English was not merely a tool for survival; it became both a challenge and a reflection of their deepest insecurities, hopes, and strengths.

For instance, Karen described how some days were more challenging than others. There were times when she felt completely drained, but she reminded herself that being abroad and learning English was something she had once wished for. “*I tell myself: I have to enjoy this and learn because this is what I wanted. This is not a punishment; many people would love to be in my place, and I can not take this for granted.*” (Translated from Spanish, Karen IQ2, personal interview, 2024).

Her perspective on mistakes revealed a grounded form of resilience. Rather than avoiding them, she accepted them as part of the process: *“If I mess it up, they will correct me, and that is it. I just deal with it.”* (Translated from Spanish, Karen, IQ10, personal interview, 2024).

This blend of acceptance and determination was echoed by Alejandra, who recounted how necessity pushed her past the fear of making mistakes :*“As adults, we often feel embarrassed to speak and make mistakes. But at some point, I thought: I either communicate or I die. I had no choice; I had to start talking, no matter how it came out.”* (Translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ11, personal interview, 2024).

At first, Alejandra pretended to be more fluent than she was, but this "performance" became a turning point: *“I was a bit like ‘fake it until you make it.’ I always said, ‘yes, of course I speak English,’ even if I did not. That lie forced me to actually speak it at work.”* (Translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ3, personal interview, 2024) What started as a survival tactic turned into a turning point.

Such shifts from fear to survival to gradual confidence were echoed by many participants. Jenny, for instance, described the mental strategies she used to stay hopeful: *“It is shocking. But mentally, you help yourself by saying: this is temporary. This will pass... This will get better.”* (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ3, personal interview, 2024).

When progress felt slow, she leaned into patience and hope: *“We want everything to happen quickly, but not everything comes when we want it to. It’s all a process... One day I will speak it fluently.”* (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ11, personal interview, 2024).

She also spoke about the painful link between language, accent, and identity: *“We will always have those moments when people discriminate against us because of our accent or*

pronunciation. But at least we speak Spanish and are trying to speak English—that matters.”

(Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ12, personal interview, 2024)

Confidence, more than grammatical accuracy, was a recurring theme. José explained how insecurity, not language skill, sometimes led to exclusion: *“It is about confidence. Whether you speak well or not, if you are insecure, they won’t understand you. That happened to me at first; they thought I did not speak, so they just ignored me.”* (Translated from Spanish, José, IQ11, personal interview, 2024)

Victor touched on the emotional toll of not being able to express oneself fully: *“Facing the language change is one of the hardest parts. Communication is everything. If you do not feel comfortable speaking and expressing what you want to say, it hits harder than anything else.”* (Translated from Spanish, Victor, IQ12, personal interview, 2024)

This discomfort often led to emotional highs and lows. For instance, Lina described the pride of having a successful conversation one day, only to feel defeated the next: *“Sometimes I have fluent conversations, and I think, wow, I am actually learning. But other times, I just feel so frustrated.”* (Translated from Spanish, Lina, IQ2, personal interview, 2024)

These testimonies reflect a dimension of linguistic resilience that goes far beyond grammar drills or vocabulary lists. While earlier in this chapter, we referred to Norton’s (2013) concept of *investment*, here we see how emotional and social commitment is often challenged by invisible forces: fear, shame, and self-doubt.

To better understand these dynamics, Krashen’s (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis* provides valuable insight. Several participants described how anxiety or lack of confidence created psychological blocks that interfered with their ability to speak, especially in unstructured

environments like casual conversations. Their words highlight how emotional states impact not only their willingness to communicate but also how language is received and processed.

At the same time, glimpses of hope and self-encouragement statements like *“this is what I wanted”* or *“one day I will speak fluently”* connect closely with Dörnyei’s (2009) *L2 Motivational Self System*. Participants were not simply reacting to the present; they were actively imagining their future selves. This forward-looking motivation helped them persevere through setbacks, silent moments, and feelings of inadequacy.

Thus, resilience in the face of linguistic barriers emerges as a fluid, evolving process shaped by emotion, identity, and imagined futures. It is not passive endurance but rather a dynamic form of agency; imperfect, fluctuating, and profoundly human.

Subcategory 3: Perceived Progress and Personal Transformation through Language

For many Colombian migrants, learning English becomes a deeply personal journey of growth, resilience, and transformation. As they navigate their new lives in English-speaking countries, language acquisition begins to shape their sense of identity, their perception of self-efficacy, and their outlook on life itself.

One of the most recurring themes among participants is the unexpected emotional impact of realizing how far they have come. Victor reflected on this transformation with nostalgia and pride: *“At first I could not even ask properly at the supermarket, I did not understand what people were saying. But now, looking back, even those small interactions have helped a lot”* (Translated from Spanish, Victor, IQ10, personal interview, 2024).

What once seemed impossible has become routine, but the memory of the struggle adds meaning to their current competence. He added, *“Sometimes it is even exciting to realize that I understood everything, or that I could say exactly what I wanted. That brings happiness”* (Translated from Spanish, Victor, IQ11, personal interview, 2024).

The journey toward autonomy in communication is also intertwined with a growing sense of confidence and self-worth. Jose described a shift in his own perception: *“Eventually I started to feel more confident, to speak louder. Now I feel very confident speaking English”* (Translated from Spanish, Jose, IQ11, personal interview, 2024).

Likewise, Laura acknowledged how her mindset changed as her English improved: *“When you realize your English is not that bad, your perspective shifts, your mood changes, your mental state gets stronger. I understood, so I was not afraid anymore to put myself out there”* (Translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ7, personal interview, 2024).

This confidence extended beyond language into her broader social life, as she described being proud when people noticed her progress: *“People I once communicated with through hand gestures now say, ‘Wow, your English has improved so much.’ This recognition moves me emotionally.”* (Translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ11, personal interview, 2024).

This sense of growth often inspires reflection and gratitude, even in the face of continuing challenges. Jenny captured this emotional duality powerfully: *“It is a beautiful growth process. You realize you have done much more than you thought possible. Even though we sometimes criticize ourselves for not achieving everything”* (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ2, personal interview, 2024).

She also acknowledged the emotional ups and downs of the journey: *“There was a moment of frustration; why am I not advancing? But then I understood that everything happens in time. Not when I want, but when life or God thinks I am ready”* (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ11, personal interview, 2024). This awareness transforms the learning process into something spiritual, not just educational.

Others, like Carolina, described a deep shift: *“I never thought I would reach this level. English was really hard for me, and I did not even like it. But it has been a journey; a forced one, because I had no choice, but beautiful”* (Translated from Spanish, Carolina, IQ6, personal interview, 2024).

For Alejandra, this personal transformation was about shedding fear: *“Speaking another language is enriching. I am now open to learning, without the fear of communicating”* (Translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ11, personal interview, 2024). Learning English, in her case, was not just about gaining a skill; it was about liberating herself from self-doubt and opening up to new experiences.

The data clearly illustrates how language learning fosters not only emotional resilience but also autonomy and empowerment. As discussed in a previous category, scholars such as Norton (2013), Dörnyei (2005), and Kramsch (2009) provide essential theoretical frameworks for understanding how second language learning can profoundly transform migrants' identities. Norton emphasizes that language learners are not passive recipients of input, but active agents who invest in the language as a way to project themselves into new identities. Each participant's narrative shows how their progress in English is directly tied to their evolving self-concept and their adaptation to life in a new cultural context.

Moreover, Dörnyei's (2005) concept of the "L2 Motivational Self System" helps explain how the participants' vision of themselves as competent English speakers became a driving force for sustained effort. This ideal L2 self-projected into the future, served as a powerful motivator; yet, as the data reveals, the emotional rewards of embodying that envisioned self are equally significant.

Complementing this, Dörnyei's "L2 Motivational Self System" explains how the vision of an ideal English-speaking self becomes a powerful driver of sustained effort. Finally, as Kramsch argues, language also represents symbolic power; for the migrants interviewed in this study, English is not merely a means of integration, but a tool to re-signify their migration story; turning vulnerability into strength, and displacement into personal agency and transformation.

Category 3: Social Interaction and Linguistic Integration in Intercultural Contexts

Language learning in migratory settings transcends the boundaries of formal instruction, unfolding in the everyday interactions and social dynamics that migrants navigate. In these intercultural contexts, language functions as both a tool and a terrain for negotiation, participation, and at times, exclusion (Norton, 2013; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). This category explores how English learning among Colombian migrants in English-speaking countries is deeply embedded in their social experiences, and how communicative challenges or opportunities are shaped by the environments in which they live and work.

Interpersonal interactions in workplaces, educational institutions, or community settings serve not only as spaces of social engagement but also as sites of linguistic development. Yet, these experiences are often mediated by a linguistic mismatch; a gap between the structured, academic English previously learned and the colloquial, context-specific English used in real-life

situations. This dissonance can create barriers to inclusion, limit autonomy, and generate feelings of vulnerability or alienation (Canagarajah, 2013; Blommaert, 2010).

At the same time, intercultural relationships emerge as vital arenas of informal learning, where language acquisition becomes a relational and adaptive process. As migrants engage in communicative exchanges, whether within English-speaking environments or within Spanish-speaking communities, they reshape their identities and negotiate their belonging in the new society (Duff, 2019; Kramsch, 1998). Thus, language learning becomes inseparable from the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of migration.

The following subcategories illustrate, through participants' narratives, how language operates both as a bridge and a barrier in their processes of settling and adapting to life abroad.

Subcategory 1: Communicative Barriers, Language Gaps, and Everyday Strategies

At first, many Colombian migrants believe that the English they studied back home will be enough to help them navigate life abroad. But once they arrive, the reality feels very different. Instead of finding communication smooth, they face unexpected obstacles: unfamiliar accents, informal expressions, cultural references, and a speed of speech they were never prepared for. These challenges go beyond simple misunderstandings; they shape how migrants interact with the world around them, sometimes making them feel frustrated, isolated, or insecure. Language, in this context, emerges not merely as a communication tool but as a social filter that conditions migrants' agency and their ability to act independently and confidently in the new society.

Jose, for instance, shared the frustration of discovering that the English he had studied back home (grammatically correct and formally structured) was not always effective in daily situations abroad. *“When I learned English, in my institute and at university, they always taught*

us that you have to ask for things a certain way,” he explained. “I got here and asked for things that way, and they did not understand me... You have to ask informally, because maybe the person on the speaker or the one serving does not understand otherwise.” For him, adapting his English to real-world registers became not only a linguistic adjustment but a necessary survival skill. (Translated from Spanish, Jose, IQ6, personal interview, 2024).

Michael echoed this struggle, noting how jarring it was to go from slow, careful speech used by teachers to the fluid, accented English of everyday encounters: *“You are used to a very slow, soft kind of English, where people try to speak so we understand. And then they speak normally, so you are completely lost. Especially, for example, with an Indian accent.”* (Translated from Spanish, Michael, IQ12, personal interview, 2024).

This sense of being “lost” in conversation often led to isolation, as he later admitted: *“If you can not make yourself understood or do not understand what they are saying, you become very isolated.”* His experience illustrates how language barriers can temporarily strip migrants of their independence and confidence, pushing them into solitude until they develop the communicative strategies to reconnect. (Translated from Spanish, Michael, IQ2, personal interview, 2024).

Jenny also spoke about the emotional toll of language gaps, recalling her initial shock upon joining a Level 1 English course in Canada: *“Everyone already spoke English, and it was a huge shock for me. I thought they were going to teach us colors, but it turned out I had to work hard to learn basic things.”* (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ4, personal interview, 2024).

Her expectations clashed with the reality of immersion. She noted how limited language skills affected her social life: *“I feel like if I had more English, I would have a much bigger social*

life, because I really like to talk and interact with people.” (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ10, personal interview, 2024).

Karen’s story added another layer to this struggle. Having studied English in school, she realized that her classroom learning had not prepared her for actual communication. *“I did not even remember the numbers—things I had learned at some point but had never practiced, so I did not retain them,”* she admitted. Her reflection points to the long-term effects of language attrition when learning is disconnected from real use. (Translated from Spanish, Karen IQ4, personal interview, 2024).

These personal accounts align with Norton’s (2013) theory that language learning is intricately tied to power and identity. The sense of not being understood or unable to express oneself entirely can undermine a person’s agency in a new society. Similarly, Darwin and Norton’s (2015) model of identity and investment helps explain the emotional impact of these experiences. Migrants often lack the symbolic capital and social networks that would ease their linguistic transition, and so they must invest emotionally and cognitively in rebuilding their communicative competence from scratch.

Ultimately, these narratives illustrate how language becomes a threshold to participation, belonging, and emotional well-being. Migrants must continuously renegotiate their linguistic resources; often through trial, improvisation, and resilience, while simultaneously navigating the psychological costs of exclusion. More than just a structural barrier, the challenge of language learning abroad is deeply personal, shaping how migrants perceive themselves and their place in a new society.

Subcategory 2: Intercultural Relationships as Learning and Adaptation Spaces

This subcategory explores how social, workplace, and community relationships in the host country influence both English language learning and the broader process of cultural adaptation. It addresses how immersion in English-speaking environments contrasts with the comfort and limitations of remaining in Spanish-speaking communities. These intercultural interactions not only create spaces for incidental language acquisition and the development of functional language use but also serve as crucial tools for adaptation, identity negotiation, and the re-signification of the migrant experience. The surrounding environment thus becomes a dynamic space that shapes access to, need for, and motivation toward language learning.

Several participants in the U.S. (Alejandra, Jose, and Jenny) reflected on the double-edged nature of residing in regions with large Hispanic populations. While these communities offer emotional and cultural comfort, they may also restrict English exposure and reduce the urgency or motivation to practice the language.

Alejandra explained: *"The environment in California gives you both sides. If you stay in Hispanic areas, you can survive without learning English, but that means you will be segregated in some way. It is your decision if you step out of your comfort zone."* (Translated from Spanish, Alejandra, IQ6, personal interview, 2024).

Jenny noted a similar contradiction: *"Half the time I practice English, but the other half I conform to my native language because it is easier."* (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ6, personal interview, 2024).

Jose added: *"In California, there are so many cultures. Some speak English well, others do not. There are Mexicans, Asians... It changes how English is used."* (Translated from Spanish, Jose, IQ6, personal interview, 2024).

Participants such as Jenny, Lina, Laura, and Carolina emphasized their workplaces as pivotal arenas for developing their English skills. Interacting with coworkers, superiors, and clients in English, even in routine or task-based exchanges, forced them to use the language regularly to become more confident over time.

"At work I interact with students, managers, and my bosses. Even if it is just work-related stuff, I dare to talk now." (Translated from Spanish, Jenny, IQ10, personal interview, 2024).

"Even if I only interacted occasionally, it helped me learn how locals asked for things, like water or beer. It was a different environment." (Translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ7, personal interview, 2024).

"I am not taking classes, but I am learning a lot at work—meetings with the CEO, store visits, interacting with suppliers. I have honestly learned much more this way." (Translated from Spanish, Carolina, IQ8, personal interview, 2024).

Many participants also agreed that participating in varied social contexts, such as going out, joining clubs, or engaging in casual conversations, is a powerful trigger for improving their English listening and speaking skills.

"To improve listening and speaking, you have to interact. There is no going back like with a video. You build confidence when you talk with different people, with different accents. English

is not just American or British; you need an ear for all the varieties." (Translated from Spanish, Laura, IQ9, personal interview, 2024).

"Being immersed in English every day makes a huge difference. I stopped speaking for a while and felt like I lost progress." (Translated from Spanish, Victor, IQ6, personal interview, 2024). *"Even going out to parties helps—it's more relaxed, and you end up having more natural conversations."* (Translated from Spanish, Victor, IQ10, personal interview, 2024).

"I learned more in daily life—trying to ask for something in a store, talking with housemates from different places, or joining weekly English coffee chats." (Translated from Spanish, Michael, IQ5, personal interview, 2024).

These accounts confirm the critical role of intercultural environments in shaping language learning trajectories, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that emphasizes learning as a socially mediated process. The narratives also resonate with Norton's (2013) concept of "investment" in language learning: migrants are more likely to invest in English when interactions promise social capital or broader inclusion in their new context.

However, participants' stories also challenge simplified models of immersion. California, where the abundance of Spanish-speaking communities can enable migrants to navigate life without English, demonstrates how contextual and community factors may reduce the necessity or urgency of learning the language. This reflects the tension between linguistic assimilation pressures and the comfort of cultural preservation, echoing findings in studies like Menard-Warwick (2009) on immigrant learners in the U.S.

Moreover, workplace English interactions emerge not merely as linguistic practice but as legitimate participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in new communities of practice. The accounts also illustrate how incidental learning in informal social spaces, such as bars or coffee chats, plays a fundamental role in dismantling fear and fostering confidence, supporting Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis, particularly in affective filter lowering.

In sum, these intercultural interactions shape linguistic competence and participants' broader sense of belonging and agency. The degree to which learners engage with these spaces, whether by choice or necessity, modulates the pace and direction of their learning. Thus, language acquisition in migration is deeply entangled with social navigation and cannot be meaningfully understood outside these relational dynamics.

Conclusions

This section outlines the main conclusions derived from the analysis of participants' experiences. As a researcher, I sought to center the voices of the migrants who participated in this study, acknowledging that their lived realities are essential to understanding the complex interplay between language learning and the migratory journey. Drawing on their narratives and the thematic categories that emerged, the following conclusions address how English language learning is intertwined with the broader realities of adaptation, identity, and opportunity in a new sociocultural context.

In line with the general objective, the findings confirmed that learning English in migratory contexts is a multifaceted and deeply personal process, shaped by the realities migrants face while building their lives abroad. Participants' narratives revealed that motivations to migrate, workplace conditions, emotional resilience, language exposure, and intercultural dynamics all converge to impact language acquisition in profound ways. Contrary to assumptions of automatic improvement through immersion, the data demonstrated that learning a language abroad is not guaranteed by location alone, but is conditioned by access to opportunities, emotional readiness, and social interaction.

For example, José, Alejandra, and Jenny, who migrated to the United States, highlighted both the opportunities and contradictions of learning English in a context where Spanish-speaking communities are highly prevalent. While they acknowledged the availability of free English courses for migrants, they also pointed out that these programs typically begin at intermediate levels, limiting access for true beginners. Additionally, their low-paying, time-consuming jobs made it difficult to attend classes, reinforcing the idea that immersion alone

is not enough; learning becomes a conscious, effortful decision shaped by structural and emotional limitations. Their experiences reaffirmed the idea that choosing to invest in English learning is a form of agency and resistance, consistent with Norton's (2013) notion of investment.

Most participants demonstrated remarkable linguistic resilience, understood as the capacity to adapt and persist in language learning despite social, emotional, or structural barriers (Todorova et al., 2021); as they often had to rely on digital tools, self-study, and social environments to supplement formal learning, structural barriers such as employment restrictions and lack of recognition of professional credentials often diverted their energy from language study. Based on this, we can conclude that the process of learning English abroad is not only academic but also deeply entangled with the socio-economic constraints of migration. This aligns with theoretical perspectives on deskilling and occupational downgrading, and particularly with Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, which helps explain how migrants' existing knowledge and qualifications are often devalued in new social fields, resulting in emotional strain and a reconfiguration of their identity and position within society.

This was especially visible in the narratives of Laura and Victor, who migrated to Australia and described their migratory process as a step backward in professional terms. Both initially felt frustrated by the time it took to learn English despite being immersed in an English-speaking country. However, over time, their enrollment in English courses and other academic programs helped them gain confidence, expand their social networks, and recover a sense of purpose. Their testimonies reflect how language acquisition in migratory settings involves a gradual process of rebuilding identity, where emotional and linguistic resilience are central to adaptation.

Another key conclusion of this study is the transformative potential of language learning. Participants not only acquired communicative skills but also experienced identity redefinition, empowerment, and personal growth. For some, English became a tool for autonomy; for others, a symbol of struggle and resilience. These experiences validate Norton's (2013) notion of "investment" and Dörnyei's (2005) "L2 Motivational Self System," as learners consistently connected their language goals with broader life projects and imagined futures.

This transformation was also evident in the experiences of Lina, Michael, and Carolina, who migrated to Malta. Despite not attending formal English courses, they adapted by engaging in spontaneous learning through multicultural environments like bars and workplaces. They acknowledged being able to communicate socially and professionally, yet also recognized limitations in their grammatical accuracy and expressed the need for professional guidance. Their stories resonate with Cummins' distinction between BICS and CALP, showing how migrants may develop surface-level fluency through immersion, but still lack the academic or professional command of English necessary for further advancement.

On the other hand, Karen, who migrated to the Netherlands without prior plans or motivation to do so, faced emotional isolation and limited social interaction due to her decision not to work outside her professional field. Although she had begun learning English before migrating, the lack of community engagement and reliance on online learning made her adaptation more difficult. Her experience illustrates how unexpected migration and limited support networks can challenge linguistic resilience, especially when motivation is externally imposed rather than internally driven.

Nevertheless, the research had certain limitations: First, although fourteen individuals responded to the initial demographic survey and expressed interest in participating, only nine were ultimately able to take part in the in-depth interviews and the research. This was primarily due to time constraints, differences in time zones, and the demanding work and study schedules of many participants, as previously discussed. Coordinating meetings was particularly challenging, and interviews were often conducted late at night or in the early morning to accommodate participants' availability.

Second, all participants had previously been students of the researcher, either before or during their time abroad. While this prior relationship may have influenced participants' openness or willingness to share sensitive experiences, it also fostered trust and depth in the narratives collected. As a teacher-researcher, I was aware of this dynamic and sought to maintain a reflexive stance throughout the study, recognizing both the ethical responsibility and the interpretive richness that emerged from these interactions.

Finally, one intended activity that could not be carried out due to logistical difficulties was a group session or collective interview, which might have offered deeper insights through shared reflection and interaction.

As a teacher-researcher in training, this study became not only an academic project but a personal and professional transformation. It allowed me to understand the sociocultural dimensions of language learning in ways that no textbook or course had offered. Through careful listening and critical reflection, I was able to witness the strength and vulnerability of learners navigating complex linguistic landscapes. This experience reaffirmed my commitment to pedagogical practices that are empathetic, inclusive, and socially responsive.

By exploring language learning in migratory contexts, this research contributes to a better understanding of the shift from teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to English as a Second Language (ESL). This transition not only shaped the focus of the study but also reaffirmed the importance of acknowledging the social realities that frame our pedagogical work. It highlights the need to adapt language education to contexts where English becomes more than an academic subject; it becomes a tool for survival, adaptation, and transformation.

Finally, future research should continue to explore how adult migrants navigate and resist linguistic marginalization, including the role of linguistic resilience as a protective factor. Educational institutions and policy-makers can draw on these insights to design programs that move beyond standardized curricula and instead prioritize flexible, culturally responsive, and emotionally supportive learning environments. Governmental initiatives could also benefit from integrating language education into broader migrant integration policies, ensuring access to language learning as a right rather than a privilege.

Additionally, expanding the participant pool to include individuals with no prior relationship to the researcher would help minimize potential biases and provide a broader, more diverse range of perspectives. Such investigations can deepen insights into the complex realities of language learning beyond the classroom and inform more equitable and responsive educational practices.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Survey Instrument*

This appendix presents the complete survey instrument used to collect demographic information from the participants. The survey includes the **Informed Consent Form** presented at the beginning to ensure participants were aware of the research objectives, their voluntary participation, and the ethical handling of their data.

Appendix B: *Interview Validation Form*

This appendix includes the interview validation form signed by the consulted experts, who provided suggestions and approval for applying the formulated questions during the data collection process.

Appendix C: *Interview Guide*

This section includes the interview guide, which was used as a qualitative instrument to gather detailed information about each participant's personal experiences.

Appendix D: *Demographic survey results*

This appendix presents the results obtained from the demographic survey conducted to gather general background information about the participants. The findings from this survey are used to provide contextual information for the qualitative analysis.

Appendix E: *Interviews (Recordings and Transcriptions)*

This appendix includes folders organized by each participant. Each folder contains the interview recording and its corresponding transcription, preserving the authenticity of their testimonies and ensuring the confidentiality of their identities.

Appendix F: Thematic Data Analysis

This appendix presents the thematic analysis of data, including the transcriptions of participants' responses organized by question to identify similarities, patterns, and themes across their experiences.