

Characterizing Communicative Learning Environments in Primary School

Nayla Ariadna Contreras Leal, Diana Marcela Martínez Gutiérrez and Karen Dayana Villa
Giraldo

Facultad de Educación, Universidad Santo Tomás

Maestría en Ambientes Bilingües de Aprendizaje

Directora

Jenny Catalina Loaiza Fuquén

Author Note

Nayla Ariadna Contreras Leal

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7496-4180>
nayla.lealcon@usantotomas.edu.co

Diana Marcela Martínez Gutiérrez

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7040-9521>
diana.gutierrezmar@usantotomas.edu.co

Karen Dayana Villa Giraldo

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2689-4510>
karen.giraldovil@usantotomas.edu.co

11 de mayo

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose



Table of Content

Literature Review.....	9
Research Question	19
Objectives	20
General Objective	20
Specific Objectives	20
Methodology	21
Approach.....	21
Type of approach	21
Context and Participants	23
Instruments.....	26
Data Collection	30
Data Analysis	34
Findings.....	50
Contributions to the field	56
Conclusions.....	62
References	67
Annexes.....	75

Abstract

This qualitative exploratory study aimed to determine the effective characteristics of learning environments that contribute to the development of communicative competences in English as a foreign language among primary school students. The research was conducted in two Colombian public schools located in Calarcá, Quindío, and Alpujarra, Tolima, which presented different technological and pedagogical conditions. A total of 38 fourth-grade students participated in the study, and data were collected through classroom observations, student surveys, and an analysis matrix. The information was analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), which allowed the identification of patterns and emerging themes related to the learning environment. The findings revealed that interactive teaching strategies, positive emotional climates, collaborative work, and the use of dynamic resources such as games, songs, and visual materials positively influence students' motivation, participation, and communicative interaction. However, the study also identified limitations regarding the consistency of communicative practices, the authenticity of materials, and the integration of technology for meaningful language use. Three main themes emerged from the analysis: the impact of teaching strategies on student engagement, the influence of emotions on learning interaction, and the learning environment as a multidimensional element. The study concludes that effective communicative learning environments require the integration of emotional, pedagogical, physical, and contextual factors to promote meaningful English language learning experiences in primary education.

Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo de carácter exploratorio tuvo como objetivo determinar las características efectivas de los ambientes de aprendizaje que contribuyen al desarrollo de las competencias comunicativas en inglés como lengua extranjera en estudiantes de primaria. La investigación se llevó a cabo en dos instituciones educativas públicas colombianas ubicadas en Calarcá, Quindío, y Alpujarra, Tolima, las cuales presentaban diferentes condiciones tecnológicas y pedagógicas. Participaron 38 estudiantes de cuarto grado, y la información fue recolectada mediante observaciones de clase, encuestas a estudiantes y una matriz de análisis. Los datos fueron analizados a través del Análisis Temático Reflexivo (RTA), lo que permitió identificar patrones y temas emergentes relacionados con el ambiente de aprendizaje. Los hallazgos evidenciaron que las estrategias de enseñanza interactivas, los climas emocionales positivos, el trabajo colaborativo y el uso de recursos dinámicos como juegos, canciones y materiales visuales influyen positivamente en la motivación, participación e interacción comunicativa de los estudiantes. Sin embargo, el estudio también identificó limitaciones relacionadas con la consistencia de las prácticas comunicativas, la autenticidad de los materiales y la integración de la tecnología para promover un uso significativo del lenguaje. Del análisis emergieron tres temas principales: el impacto de las estrategias pedagógicas en el compromiso estudiantil, la influencia de las emociones en la interacción de aprendizaje y el ambiente de aprendizaje como un elemento multidimensional. El estudio concluye que los ambientes comunicativos efectivos requieren la integración de factores emocionales, pedagógicos, físicos y contextuales para promover experiencias significativas de aprendizaje del inglés en educación primaria.

Key words

Learning environments, communicative competence, English as a foreign language, primary education and teaching strategies.

Introduction

In diverse learning environments are appreciated and lived interaction moments which facilitate education, moreover, it can happen in the social environment of each individual. From this epistemological approach, the goal is to go deeper into the relationship between the environment and the educational process where their factors are in constant evolution, modification and transformation. According to Espinoza and Rodríguez (2017) “*ambiente de aprendizaje se entiende como el entorno o el contexto natural al interior del cual se producen relaciones humanas que forman parte del hecho educativo*” (p. 7). Similarly, it must be included other elements or dimensions such as technology, social and emotional aspects which are immersed in human interaction. The context and spaces where learning environments are created to give opportunities for the involved participants to grow and develop mutually, thereby obtaining a meaningful and beneficial learning in the development of communicative competences which contribute to the acquisition of a foreign language. However, challenges often appear in these learning environments where decisions are made and led to choose an adaptive teaching where some factors (student differences, personalized learning, etc.) intervene and must be integrated to meet the needs of everyone/everything immersed in these spaces. (Paniagua & Istance, 2018)

In the Colombian context, language learning faces multiple challenges that affect educational quality and the effectiveness of learning environments. Despite the implementation of programs such as “*Colombia Bilingüe*,” which aim to improve linguistic competencies (Ministry of National Education, 2016), it is observed that many students lack a conducive environment for learning a foreign language. According to Loja and González (2022), factors such as the scarcity of adequate teaching resources, the lack of ongoing training for teachers, and

limited exposure to native speakers significantly hinder the development of communicative skills in support of foreign language learning. Furthermore, the sociocultural context in which Colombian students find themselves influences their motivation and willingness to learn a foreign language (Cárdenas, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to create more inclusive and interactive learning environments that promote not only language acquisition but also interest in its practical use in real situations.

Various studies in foreign language learning have shown that technology is an essential tool for the development of continuous learning activities (Muñoz et al, 2025). Nowadays, in many classrooms in Colombia can be found diverse didactic and technological resources for the development of different pedagogical activities. However, there are many places in this country that still do not have such resources. For this reason, it is often observed that students show different levels of interest in classes depending on the material and resources used because some of them tend to capture the students' attention more and thus help to construct a more meaningful learning experience. As Ospina et, al. (2016) indicate that the use of computing and the digital world both inside and outside the classroom motivate 100% of students to engage in autonomous, meaningful learning. This suggests that the more didactic and technological resources, the more motivation and interest from the students. Jiménez et al (2020) propose using pedagogical tools that include technology and multimedia are opportunities to make the methodology more varied and attractive which allows learning to have a greater impact where students take the principal role, more motivated and develop the communicative competencies in the teaching-learning process.

According to this, the research is conducted in fourth grade at two public schools in Colombia: one in Alpujarra, Tolima and the other in Calarcá, Quindío. Both institutions have

classrooms with 20 to 30 students, but their resources differ. In the school in Tolima, access to technology is limited, but they have access to green areas within the school and a library as an alternative learning space. In contrast, the school in Calarcá has more technological tools, like three STEM classrooms, and the Quindío Bilingüe books, although these are not fully used due to a lack of alignment with the current curriculum. Despite these differences, in both contexts, learning a foreign language, in this case English, is not widely accessible outside the classroom and it influence in students' engagement, highlighting the need for innovative teaching strategies adapted to their resources and realities which leads to a low acquisition of communicative skills in this second language.

To improve foreign language teaching in those contexts and in Colombia, it is essential to create more inclusive learning environments that integrate technology and diverse pedagogical resources. Despite differences in access to these resources, what matters is adapting teaching strategies to local realities, prioritizing motivation and active student participation. The implementation of adaptative approaches, aligned with students' needs, could be key to overcoming current obstacles and enhancing the development of communicative competencies in English, fostering a more meaningful and accessible learning experience for everybody.

Literature Review

Improving English language skills in young learners requires both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies. This section outlines the background literature and previous studies that highlight effective approaches and learning environments to a foreign language teaching in primary school. The creation of appropriate learning environments plays a crucial role in the successful acquisition of a foreign language. These environments go beyond physical spaces and include emotional, cognitive, social, and technological aspects that support student engagement and motivation. “If a student is given harmonious and positive environment, he will not only excel in studies, but it will also help him in overall well-being.” (Devi, 2024, p. 33). Devi in her study *Conducive Language Learning Environment to Develop ESL Learners’ Communication Skills: Proposing a Critical Framework* expresses the importance of an adequate learning environment where students feel comfortable and safe, in this way the acquisition of a second or foreign language is easier. The main approach in this research is the Conducive Learning Environment; an approach that offers to students an environment where they feel psychologically safe and supported, they are not afraid of making mistakes, they are more likely to engage in meaningful interaction and take communicative risks since the different activities are interactive tasks, peer collaboration, they usually include the use of technology.

Thu (2020) mentioned in her research *Communication Skills and Reflection Practice in Smart English Teaching and Learning Environment*, learners have become active participants, taking responsibility for their own learning through knowledge acquisition, skill practice, and reflection. In this research, the author mentions two specific ways to develop communicative competences and improve students and teachers’ performance. Integrating technology into the learning process fosters dynamic and active environments, which contributed to the enhancement

of students' speaking abilities, and the use of this technology help students and teachers reflect about their learning and teaching process and include more dynamic and didactic activities that motivates students. As mentioned in the same research by Thu (2020), by reflecting, teachers can gain deeper insight into their teaching style and make meaningful improvements in their practice. When students feel safe, valued, and interested, they are more likely to take risks and use the target language in authentic ways. Therefore, the learning environment becomes a foundation for communicative growth.

Within such enriched environments, communicative skills in a foreign language can flourish more effectively. Developing communicative skills in a foreign language is essential, and it happens most effectively when students are regularly engaged in meaningful interactions. As stated by Sevarakhon (2024) in her research *The Impacts of Communicative Competence on Second Language Acquisition and Employing Certain Methods to Improve Speaking Skills*, the main objective of second and foreign language education is now to develop communicative competence. The author states that the study emphasizes the significance of communicative competence in second language acquisition and recommends adopting teaching methods that foster interactive and meaningful language use to improve speaking skills. The research highlights the use of the Effortless English method, which encourages natural language acquisition through listening and speaking activities. This approach aims to reduce learners' anxiety and to promote a more engaging and effective learning environment. To further support the development of communicative skills, classrooms can implement approaches like pair and group work, project-based learning, and role-playing, which provide opportunities for real-life communication. Feedback and scaffolding also play a key role, helping students improve while feeling supported. As Devi (2024) points out, from a pedagogical perspective, the teacher moves

away from simply delivering content and instead becomes a facilitator who creates communicative tasks, offers scaffolder, and encourages students to take control of their learning. In such effective learning environments, language becomes a tool for communication, not just a subject to study.

These communicative and interactive approaches are not only effective in general language education but become especially meaningful in the context of primary education, where learners' cognitive and emotional development requires strategies that align with their age and learning style. Their communicative skills benefit from routines, songs, storytelling, and visual aids, which match their developmental stage and learning preferences. “The fact of creating learning environments with creative and interactive activities such as games may have a positive impact on the development of linguistic skills.” (Portilla & Lozada, 2024, p. 19). In this study, *Didactic Strategy of Game-Based Learning for the Development of Linguistic-Communicative Competences in Teaching a Foreign Language at the Elementary Education Level*, the authors explore the implementation of game-based learning (GBL) as a pedagogical strategy to improve linguistic and communicative competencies in foreign language in elementary school students. The authors focus on the importance of incorporating digital games into the curriculum, students are engaged in fun and interactive activities that help them improve their language skills. Moreover, ensuring that the learning environment in primary school is dynamic and communicative can lead to long-term language competence and positive attitudes toward multilingualism. According to Sotehi and Boukredera (2023) in their study *A Comparative Study of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Primary Schools versus Middle Schools*, incorporating authentic materials in EFL classrooms allows students to engage with language as it is used in real-life situations. These resources also offer valuable cultural insights and

contextual understanding. Additionally, they can promote student motivation by highlighting the practical relevance of learning English beyond the classroom setting. This research investigates the optimal stage for introducing English as a foreign language (EFL) in Algerian schools. It evaluates the recent policy of introducing English instruction in primary schools alongside French. It also compares the effectiveness and challenges of teaching English at the primary and middle school levels. The conclusion is that they have insufficient teaching materials and limited access to technology in classrooms that change motivation levels in the two stages of school.

The previously reviewed research papers have been essential in shaping the theoretical foundation of our research, offering a practical direction for improving communicative competences in primary school learners. The various studies analyzed emphasize that fostering language development goes beyond teaching vocabulary and grammar. It requires the creation of emotionally supportive, cognitively stimulating, and socially engaging learning environments. Approaches such as Conducive Learning Environments, game-based learning, the use of authentic materials, and technology integration have demonstrated their effectiveness in encouraging meaningful interaction, reducing anxiety, and motivating young learners to participate actively in the learning process.

Moreover, these studies highlight the importance of teacher roles shifting from traditional content delivery to facilitation and scaffolding, enabling students to take control of their learning. This is particularly relevant in primary education, where learners benefit from routines, visual aids, songs, and interactive activities aligned with their developmental stages. The evidence suggests that when students feel safe, valued, and interested, they are more likely to engage in authentic communication, which is essential for language acquisition.

For the development of this investigation, the learning environment is understood as a space where certain principles must take place to ensure success in the learning process. Merrill (2002) suggests the following principles for creating an effective learning environment: present learners with real-world problems to solve, activate learners' existing knowledge as a foundation for new learning, demonstrate new knowledge and skills in context, provide opportunities for learners to apply new knowledge and encourage learners to integrate new knowledge into their daily lives.

These principles reinforce the idea of education should be more than just the delivery of content; it should involve creating and designing spaces where students feel encouraged to explore, think critically, investigate, grow, and reflect. A well-designed environment helps learners stay motivated, feel safe to make mistakes, and build knowledge through real interaction. These propositions make learning more meaningful and prepare students to adapt, solve problems, and remain curious throughout life.

However, one key component missing from Merrill's perspective is the integration of technology, which has become essential in making learning environments more engaging, inclusive, and innovative. In a globalized and constantly evolving digital world, technology plays a vital role in our daily lives and has become a central element in shaping how we interact, learn, and teach. The book *Learning Environment and Design: Current and Future Impacts* (2020) by Ma et al emphasizes and analyzes the nature of today's learning environments and what they are expected to become in the future. Ma et al (2020) highlight the complexity and diversity present in modern educational settings. With the integration of technology, these environments have the potential to offer adaptive and personalized learning experiences for all students. Nevertheless,

this progress presents a significant challenge in the Colombian public education system due to the lack of ICT resources in many regions. Some areas still lack even the most basic infrastructure, such as electricity or television. According to DANE (2024), 95.9% of public schools have access to electricity, and only 56.2% have an internet connection. This means there are still considerable limitations that inhibit the use of technology in learning environments to develop certain digital skills. For this reason, it is imperative to adjust pedagogical strategies and work with the available resources in the immediate environment.

In contrast, while Merrill's instructional principles provide a strong foundation for effective learning, they do not fully address the evolving demands of digital education. His instructional design framework focuses on problem-centered learning and the structured application of knowledge, but it does not explicitly consider the role of technology in reshaping how learning environments operate today. However, it remains crucial to retain elements of Merrill's vision, particularly his emphasis on the development of an essential skill such as problem-solving, which continues to be vital in current society. While technology can personalize learning experiences, the core competencies that Merrill advocates for, such as critical thinking and adaptability, are still necessary for students to succeed in this complex world.

As the learning environment encourages exploration and interaction, it sets the stage for acquiring a foreign language, where students are able to engage with the language in dynamic, real-life situations. Brown (2001) defined a foreign language as one that is not commonly spoken in the learner's immediate social context and must be taught explicitly through instruction. This implies that language learning is not only a cognitive process but also an affective one,

combining insights from linguistics, psychology, and education to provide a holistic perspective on second or foreign language acquisition. Therefore, it becomes essential to emphasize authentic communication, task-based learning, real-world contexts and group work in the classroom or learning environment. These strategies are critical in the context of a foreign language, where students need to use the language actively to develop their communication skills. The learning environment should foster these interactions by encouraging collaboration and providing a safe space for students to experiment with language use without the fear of making mistakes. In addition, several affective factors significantly influence language learning, including motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, and empathy. Addressing these elements within the learning environment can enhance student engagement and support more effective language acquisition.

Foreign language has been defined in various ways, each offering its own distinct perspective. In their book *Early Foreign Language Learning and Teaching: Evidence Versus Wishful Thinking* (2024), Nikolov and Letica Krevelj go beyond traditional definitions and provide valuable insights, emphasizing experiential and practical learning in the acquisition of a foreign language. The book emphasizes that children's language acquisition is closely linked to their cognitive, emotional, and social development, pointing to the necessity of employing pedagogical approaches that align with their developmental needs, ensure regular language exposure, and situate learning within meaningful, authentic contexts. It views foreign language learning as an integral part of a child's environment, facilitated through play, interaction, and immersion. These approaches provide a deeper and pedagogically grounded perspective, especially in contexts where foreign languages are introduced at the early stages of education.

Primary education plays a critical role in shaping foundational skills, both cognitive and communicative, during the early stages of a child's development. As stated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2012) "primary education, are typically designed to provide students with fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics ... and establish a solid foundation for learning and understanding core areas of knowledge, personal and social development, ... " (p. 30). This is crucial for foreign language learning, as primary education provides the ideal context for introducing language skills in an engaging, dynamic, and supportive way. By incorporating teaching methods that promote exploration, teamwork, and interaction, primary education creates a rich context for developing foreign language proficiency in a meaningful and impactful manner. In their book *Teaching Languages in the Primary School* (2015), Hood and Tobutt emphasize that learning a foreign language at the primary school level not only promotes curiosity, empathy, and intercultural understanding but also significantly contributes to a child's ability to connect with other cultures. They suggest that foreign language education at this stage plays a pivotal role in helping children engage with different cultures, enhancing their global awareness and intercultural competence. In an increasingly interconnected world, these skills are vital for cultivating open-mindedness and effective communication across cultural divides.

As language teaching evolves to meet the demands of real-world communication, the concept of communicative competence becomes essential. Richards (2006) outlines that communicative competence involves not just the knowledge of language structures but also the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts. This concept emphasizes that teaching a language should not focus only on grammatical structures but rather on the functional use of language. This includes skills such as making requests, expressing opinions, negotiating

meanings, and other aspects of communication that are necessary for real-world interactions. In this sense, a task-based approach presents a valuable alternative, as it immerses students in meaningful, real-life tasks to develop communicative skills. This approach fosters a balance between fluency, the ability to communicate without hesitation, and accuracy refers to the correct usage of language structures. Besides, it is important to highlight the role of linguistic flexibility and adaptability in diverse communicative situations.

The concept of communicative competence has evolved over time, with different perspectives, approaches, and ideas. Kanwit and Solon (2022), in their book *Communicative Competence in a Second Language Theory, Method, and Applications*, provide a multidimensional approach about communicative competence integrating Generative considerations, Sociolinguistic approaches, and Sociocultural considerations. Their perspective recognizes that effective communication requires not only linguistic proficiency, but also an awareness of social norms, cultural expectations, and strategic decision-making. This more holistic vision allows for a deeper understanding of communicative competence in the context of second language learning.

Expanding on these theoretical perspectives, it is also necessary to consider the principles that guide the design of learning environments, since they provide the foundation for meaningful and effective language learning. The design of learning environments must be guided by a set of principles that ensure students' development and communicative growth. According to Araque Torres (2021), "learning spaces design requires a purposeful and intentional process that ensures that the spaces created contribute to an engaging and collaborative student learning experience" (p. 14). This means that creating such spaces is not a random or improvised task, but rather a purposeful action in which every element of the environment is thoughtfully planned.

The principles in this research emphasize the importance of creating environments where learning becomes more meaningful for every student. As Araque Torres (2021) states, “the school environment must facilitate contact with a variety of materials and activities that cover a wide range of cognitive, affective and social learning.” (p.22). This ensures that students engage not only intellectually but also emotionally and interpersonally, fostering a more holistic learning process. In addition, it is equally important to incorporate diverse learning scenarios to make classes more appealing. Araque Torres (2021) mentions, the educational environment should embrace diversity to move beyond the notion that learning only occurs within classroom walls. It is necessary to provide a range of settings, whether constructed or natural, according to the tasks to be completed and the goals to be achieved. Such diversity allows learners to connect knowledge with real-world contexts and adapt to multiple environments, making learning more dynamic and relevant.

In summary, the theoretical foundation of this research emphasizes the vital role that conducive, engaging, and inclusive learning environments play in developing communicative competence among primary school learners of English as a foreign language. The literature reviewed provides a rich understanding of how emotional safety, interactive tasks, technological integration, and developmentally appropriate strategies all contribute to language acquisition. While challenges such as limited ICT access in Colombian public schools present barriers, they also highlight the importance of adaptive and context-sensitive teaching methods. Drawing from diverse theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this framework underlines the need for innovative, learner-centered environments that empower students to use English confidently and meaningfully. This research builds upon these insights to explore how communicative

competence can be fostered even within constrained educational contexts, ultimately aiming to inform more equitable and effective language education practices.

Research Question

As stated before, the development of communicative competences in English as a foreign language is deeply influenced by the characteristics of the learning environments where students interact. In the Colombian public education system, differences in access to technological resources create diverse classroom realities that affect language learning outcomes. This study explores how these differences shape students' communicative abilities, particularly in primary education, where early contact with English and motivation are key. By comparing two state schools with different technological conditions, it seeks to understand how context and resources impact language acquisition. The goal is to highlight the role of inclusive and interactive environments in developing meaningful language use.

What are the effective characteristics of learning environments that help to the development of communicative competences in English as a foreign language in primary students?

Objectives

General Objective

Determine the effective characteristics of learning environments to development communicative competences in English as a foreign language.

Specific Objectives

1. Characterize the learning environments components to develop communicative competences.
2. Analyze student's perceptions on the learning environments components when developing their communicative competences.
3. Propose effective characteristic of learning environments to develop communicative competences in English language learning.

Methodology

Approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach as noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018), it aims to explore educational phenomena in their real-life settings, focusing on how participants experience and interpret their environments. Qualitative research is most appropriate when the objective is to understand complex processes, actions, and meanings from the perspective of those who live them. For this study, this approach allows us to interpret the complex dynamics that influence the effectiveness of learning environment components for developing communicative competences in English as a foreign language.

Type of approach

For this study, we chose an exploratory design. This type of research design is suitable to seek, collect and discover information, variables and meaningful patterns (Vásquez Ramirez et al, 2023). This design is especially suited to explore the relationship between learning environment characteristics and the development of communicative competences in English among young learners.

According to Aithal and Aithal (2023), the phases identify a problem, develop the objectives and type of methods to analyze, compare, evaluate, and interpret it in a new way, collect the information and analyze them, and suggest the optimum solution related to the considered issue or recommend improvements were applied during this study.

This qualitative research aimed to explore and understand the elements of a learning environment that effectively contribute to the development of communicative skills. In line with

the exploratory design, the study was structured into four main phases. The first phase focused to recognize the need to investigate the characteristics of learning environments that foster communicative competence in English language learning. To achieve this, a broad conceptual review was carried out, including theoretical perspectives on learning environments, communicative competence, foreign language acquisition and primary education. This review made it possible to identify and formulate the research question that would guide the study.

The second phase established the general and specific objectives of the study and determined the most suitable methodological approach. The qualitative and exploratory design was selected which guided the selection of instruments and allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in real-life context. The instruments were created and validated to be applied in the target population. At the same time, the stratified sampling method used in this study was defined, ensuring balanced representation across the two schools.

In the third phase, data collection was carried out using three instruments: observations, surveys, and an analysis matrix. Each of these tools played a key role in addressing the specific objectives of the research. Observations provided appreciations of the learning environments dynamics, surveys captured students' perceptions, and the analysis matrix facilitated the organization and integration of the collected data for a more meaningful and comprehensive understanding. The collected information was coded, categorized, and compared to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and emerging themes that reveal the characteristics of effective learning environments. This process allowed the triangulation of information from different sources, which strengthened the reliability and validity of the findings.

Finally, in the fourth phase, the results were synthesized and discussed in relation to the existing theoretical perspectives and empirical studies reviewed in the literature. This stage aimed to draw conclusions about the effective characteristics of communicative learning environments and to propose pedagogical recommendations for English language teaching in primary education contexts with diverse resources and realities.

Context and Participants

This study took place in two public primary schools in Colombia, each representing distinct educational realities in terms of access to pedagogical and technological resources. Both institutions are located in small to mid-sized municipalities. One is Institución Educativa Román María Valencia, located in Calarcá, Quindío. It is a public school with a large and well-equipped infrastructure that supports academic, cultural, and sports activities. The school building has three floors and fifteen classrooms, distributed into two shifts: secondary education in the morning and primary education in the afternoon. Each floor is equipped with restrooms, and the institution also has a small theater for cultural events, a large coliseum for sports and institutional activities, a dance room, a music room, and a space called *media torta* used for smaller events such as flag-raising ceremonies. Additionally, it has a computer room with laptops for technology classes, a library with a wide variety of resources, from children's books for recreational reading to scientific texts for research, and a mathematics laboratory equipped with video beams and didactic materials.

Regarding technological resources, the institution offers several internet access points for teachers, surveillance cameras across different areas, televisions in each classroom, and STEM digital boards in the fifth and eleventh-grade classrooms. The school develops some institutional

projects such as PRAE-PEGIRE, the traffic project, the reading project, and the ethics and coexistence project, among others.

The socioeconomic context of the school community mostly corresponds to low-income families from strata 1 and 2. Many students come from vulnerable backgrounds, where parents usually work during the day and have limited time to support their children's academic activities. Some students are linked to welfare programs or live with relatives instead of their parents due to complex family dynamics. Nevertheless, most families show commitment and collaboration in their children's education. The community is urban, with little cultural diversity.

From the academic perspective, groups range from 30 to 35 students. In primary, the research is carried out in a fourth-grade group composed of 35 students between 9 and 10 years old. The English subject is taught three hours per week, combining theoretical lessons with dynamic activities supported by audiovisual resources, particularly the classroom television. The school occasionally uses the Come to Live workbooks provided by the Quindío Bilingüe program, although their use is limited, since the contents do not always match the institutional English curriculum.

Concerning the students' profile, fourth graders usually have the required school supplies and textbooks. They are respectful, collaborative, attentive, and willing to participate in class. Although most of them show a low level of English, they make constant efforts to improve and display motivation in learning. A small group of students, who attend private English academies, demonstrate more advanced skills. Overall, students enjoy the proposed activities, especially the ludic ones, since these break the monotony of lessons and encourage active participation.

The other institution is at Institución Educativa Felisa Suarez de Ortiz located in Alpujarra, Tolima. It is a public school with a large and modern infrastructure that supports academic, cultural, and sports activities. The school building has three blocks, each one with two floors and a total of twenty classrooms, in this school, primary and secondary take place in the morning. Each floor is equipped with a restroom. There is a large coliseum for sports and institutional activities. Furthermore, there is a computer room with 25 laptops.

Regarding technological resources, the institution does not offer internet access points for teachers nor students. There is just internet in the systems room, and it is specifically for the computers located in that room. There are certain video beams (4) that can be lent to the teachers. In the school there are two TVs, one in the library and the other in natural science lab.

The socioeconomic context of the school community mostly corresponds to low-income families from strata 1 and 2. Most students live in the rural zone and just a small quantity in the central area. The economy in Alpujarra is ran by agricultural activities, that is why most of the families live in the rural area. Some students are forced to work in the countryside collecting coffee to help with the economy of their families; and some others do it to have certain money for themselves. That dynamic affects the school since several students have preferred working instead of being in an academic process. Parents try to motivate and force their sons to study; however, students' willingness is turning into studying virtually or validating in the closest town (Dolores)

The socioeconomic reality of the school community is largely associated with families from strata 1 and 2, characterized by limited financial resources. A significant number of students come from vulnerable contexts, where parents work long hours and have little

availability to accompany their children's academic processes. In some cases, students are beneficiaries of social assistance programs or reside with relatives due to complex family circumstances. Despite these challenges, families generally demonstrate dedication and willingness to support their children's education. The institution is located in an urban setting, with a relatively low level of cultural diversity.

The participants were 38 fourth-grade students from both schools, aged between 9 and 11 years old, who are in a critical stage of cognitive and communicative development (Vygotsky, 1978). From this population, a probability sampling method, specifically a stratified simple method, was used to select a sample of 24 students, 12 girls and 12 boys, (Ahmed, 2024) to ensure representation from both educational contexts, allowing the study to capture differences and similarities in learners' experiences based on their school environments.

Instruments

To gather the necessary information, the research was carried out using three instruments. First, observations were conducted to examine various components of the learning environments. Next, a survey was applied to capture students' perceptions regarding those components in the environment and their influence on the development of communicative competences. Finally, an analysis matrix was employed to integrate and combine the data collected from both the observations and the surveys, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between environmental factors and communicative development.

Observations

Observations were utilized to document and gather information about all elements present within the environment through direct exploration. According to Creswell & Creswell, 2018, there are several types of observation: complete participant, observer as participant, participant as observer, and complete observer. For the purposes of this study, two observations formats ([Annex 1](#)) of complete observer were conducted, aiming to define and describe the complete learning environment in both schools. The observation format was designed based on principles outlined by Araque Torres (2021), which reflect the key characteristics of a 21st-century learning environment. The principles incorporated into the observation format included six aspects: resources and materials, spaces and flexibility, teacher strategies, teacher–student dynamics, diversity of learning scenarios and emotional climate and identity. Each aspect had indicators to bear in mind in order to have a wide and documented description of features in the educational setting to promote communicative skills:

Resources and Materials. Availability, appropriateness, and use of materials (textbooks, digital tools, visual aids, realia, multimodal input).

Spaces and Flexibility. Physical learning environment arrangement (organization, accessibility, adaptability, inclusivity).

Teacher Strategies. Pedagogical approaches promoting communicative competence (scaffolding, questioning, modeling, interactive tasks).

Teacher–Student Dynamics. Interaction patterns, feedback, encouragement, participation opportunities.

Diversity of Learning Scenarios. Variety of contexts beyond the traditional classroom (outdoor, community, virtual, flexible).

Emotional Climate and Identity. Sense of belonging, cultural identity, and well-being within the environment.

The observation format was designed to be completed through qualitative comments that are intended to be as objective as possible. After each indicator, the observer is expected to provide descriptive notes based on what is seen during the class, focusing on the indicators already mentioned. The comments should highlight clear evidence of how these elements are used or appeared in practice, avoiding personal judgments and instead emphasizing observable actions, behaviors, and situations.

Surveys

The surveys were used to gather insights from individuals through structured questions, aiming to explore their views and experiences related to a specific area of study. This instrument ([Annex 2](#)) involved a composed of five questions, both open-ended and closed-ended questions, administered to a targeted sample of participants (Jain, 2021). In this research, surveys played a critical role in collecting participants' perceptions regarding the features of the learning environment and how these influence the development of communicative skills. The survey design combined both question types to allow for deeper reflection as well as quantifiable responses. To complete the survey, students were first asked to provide basic information such as their name, age, grade, and the date. For the closed-ended questions, participants marked their answers with an "X" in the corresponding box, choosing between options such as "Sí, siempre," "A veces," or "No," depending on their experiences. For the open-ended questions, students were asked to read carefully and write their responses in the blank spaces, expressing their personal opinions and suggestions regarding their English classes.

Analysis matrix

The analysis matrix was used as a systematic tool to organize, interpret, and triangulate the qualitative data obtained from both observations and surveys. This tool allowed for the integration of multiple sources of information under common analytical categories, facilitating the identification of patterns, contrasts, and potential connections. As Averill (2002) notes, “Matrices can be valuable agents in the search for relationships between/among categories of data or phenomena of interest, in examining how categories relate to particular theoretical concepts (e.g., group rituals, kinship patterns, perceived authority), and in the search for tentative propositions linking categories of information” (p. 856). The analysis matrix ([Annex 3](#)) was organized according to eight analytical dimensions that reflect key pedagogical and environmental aspects influencing the development of communicative competences. By grouping the information, the matrix facilitated the triangulation of evidence and the emergence of meaningful patterns across the two sources of data. The dimensions considered in the matrix were the following:

Interaction (Teacher–Students). Exchanges between teacher and students or among peers that promote communication and participation

Strategies/Activities. Pedagogical methods and classroom tasks that encourage meaningful communication and language use.

Feedback. Type and quality of responses or corrections that guide students’ learning and communicative improvement.

Material–Authenticity. Use and relevance of authentic, varied, and meaningful resources that connect language to real contexts.

Emotional Climate. Affective atmosphere in the classroom that supports motivation, confidence, and participation.

Technology. Integration and pedagogical use of digital tools to enhance communicative learning experiences.

Communication. Opportunities for students to use English purposefully to express ideas and interact meaningfully.

Spaces. Physical organization of the environment that facilitates collaboration and communication.

Data Collection

Data collection process was planned to capture meaningful insights into the learning environment to determine the effective characteristics to develop communicative competences in English as a foreign language.

The observation format was implemented using a structured template designed to analyze how the teacher used resources, physical spaces, and instructional strategies during the English lesson. The observations were carried out by two members of the research team (one assigned to each school) who entered the classroom, briefly explained the purpose of the visit, and then sat quietly at the back of the room to minimize disruptions.

In Calarcá, the first observation ([Annex 4](#)) lasted 55 minutes and it was taken in a class with 35 students. The second observation was taken at the end of the same week, it lasted 55 minutes and included 34 students. During the first observation, the students greeted the observer with great enthusiasm, showing excitement and curiosity. Many of them approached her to ask

multiple personal questions about her life, trying to learn more about who she was and why she was there. As the class progressed, the students got used to her presence; however, several continued approaching her throughout the lesson to talk or ask additional questions, while a few remained shy and barely interacted with her. In the second observation ([Annex 5](#)), students already know the observer, that is why they greeted her with enthusiasm and welcomed her to the class, this time they did not have many questions for her, but they continue interested in her presence.

In Alpujarra, the first observation ([Annex 6](#)) session lasted 55 minutes and included 23 students on average. The second observation was taken a week later, lasted 45 minutes, and included 22 students. During the first observation, the students greeted the observer with noticeable affection, many of them approaching to give a hug. Immediately afterward, several students showed curiosity and excitement; some looked repeatedly toward the observer, whispered to their classmates, smiled shyly, or quietly asked whether a special or fun activity would take place. After a few minutes, once the class began, most students adjusted naturally to the observer's presence and gradually returned to their usual level of participation. These initial reactions offered valuable insights into how an external presence can influence students' comfort and engagement during communicative tasks. In the second observation ([Annex 7](#)), the students welcomed the observer with a unified greeting from their seats and then immediately refocused on the teacher's explanation.

The survey was applied to 38 students with the purpose of analyzing their perceptions of the different components that shape their learning environment and how these elements support the development of their communicative competences in English. It was conducted in a guided

manner to ensure clarity, support comprehension, and provide opportunities for students to ask questions.

The survey ([Annex 8](#)) was applied in Calarcá to 24 students at 3 o'clock. They were very attentive and curious about the questions. It was carried out in a guided manner to ensure students' comprehension. Initially, the researcher explained the number of questions, asked to write their names, age, and date. Then, the researcher read the questions along with the students, and they answer the questions according to their perceptions. During the application, many students showed curiosity and willingness to participate, especially when questions referred to activities they enjoyed, such as games, group work, or the use of visual materials. Some students also expressed, verbally or through their body language, that they felt more confident in classes where the atmosphere was friendly and supportive; one in which they are not constantly scolded by the teacher.

The survey ([Annex 9](#)) was applied to 14 students in Alpujarra at 10:50 a.m., during their homeroom teacher's class while they were coloring math figures. The process lasted approximately 40 minutes and was conducted in a guided manner to ensure comprehension and to provide support when interpreting the questions. Before beginning, the researcher explained that students would complete the survey step by step, waiting for all classmates to finish each item before moving on to the next. This structure helped maintain order and allowed students time to reflect on their responses.

Throughout the process, the researcher offered examples of possible answers when students seemed unsure, clarifying that the activity was not graded and that their teacher would not be informed about individual responses. This clarification was necessary, as several students initially expressed concern that their comments might be shared with the teacher. Once this fear

was addressed, many students felt more comfortable and became increasingly willing to participate.

Their reactions offered valuable insights into the emotional dimension of the learning environment. Some students mentioned quietly that they did not like when the teacher was “too strict” or “*regañona*,” while others commented aloud that they wished some classmates behaved better. In general, students showed curiosity, openness, and a genuine interest in sharing their perceptions, especially when questions referred to activities they enjoyed such as games, drawing, or working in teams.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the information collected through the observations and surveys, a thematic analysis (TA) method was a reference to interpret the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA is a broad family of methods that involves coding and identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative data. Within this family, there are more descriptive approaches that aim to summarise the data as objectively as possible, and more interpretive approaches that recognize the researcher's role in making sense of the data (Braun et al, 2023). For this study, the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) proposed by Braun et al (2023) was adopted. This approach assumes that themes are not simply found in the data but are constructed through the researcher's reflective engagement.

After collecting the data from both research instruments observations and surveys, the project members engaged in a thorough familiarization phase by reading and re-reading the survey responses and observation notes several times. We implemented the Matrix ([Annex 10](#)) to identify and classify the most relevant information from both instruments into eight dimensions. Each dimension was highlighted in different colors to organize the data; green for Interaction (teacher- students), orange for Strategies/Activities, blue for Feedback, light blue for Material – Authenticity, purple for Emotional Climate, pink for Technology, red for Communication and yellow for Spaces. The researchers made notes in a document ([Annex 11](#)) to deepen their understanding of the data collected. For the coding phase, the researchers focused on interpreting and explaining each of the eight dimensions. This process involved analyzing patterns, identifying relationships, and providing a deeper understanding of how each dimension contributed to the overall findings of the study.

The first dimension was **Interaction between teacher and students**. In this dimension, we identified the ideas that show how teacher and students promote communication and participation in the learning environment. From the observation instrument, we observed moments where teachers made jokes, moved around the classroom, and facilitated interaction among students. For example, it was noted in the observation 1, school B (O1SB) that “*Students participated by singing and presenting their task... several students that were seated talked with their peers*”, in the observation 2, school A (O2SA), “*all students participate and have access to the tv.... students felt more confident, and socialized more with their classmates and the class.*” and in the observation 1, school A (O1SA), “*The class activities allow them to work in groups and to participate actively*”. Interaction was mainly observed through listening, presenting, asking, and answering questions. These behaviours showed an active interaction and communicative exchange. From the survey data, we identified students’ responses that highlighted high levels of interaction in class, mainly due to frequent group activities. For example, students mentioned, student survey 2, school B (S2SB), “*...las actividades en grupo ...*” and student survey 10, school B (S10SB), “*... podemos participar y trabajamos en equipo,*” which indicate that collaborative tasks encourage participation and communication among peers.

When comparing both instruments, the similarity we identified was the emphasis on group work as a key element that supports interaction and enhances the learning environment. Both the observations and students’ responses reflected this pattern. No significant differences were identified in this dimension. Based in the findings, teamwork or group activities emerge as crucial component because it cannot only shape the interaction between teacher and students, but it can enrich the learning environment. It works a supporting tool where students can develop another abilities or skills such as negotiating meaning, sharing ideas, practicing and learning

from others. The consistent presence of group activities suggests that collaborative work functions as a key mechanism through which students engage with the language and with each other. According to Johnson and Johnson (2018) cooperative learning “promotes students to engage cognitively and emotionally with other students, the task assigned, and the materials or resources used to complete the task. Doing so allows students to construct, discover, and transform their own knowledge” (p.10)

To conclude this first dimension, active interaction facilitates students’ confidence to express themselves and enhances their ability to reproduce and apply their knowledge and skills when learning another language. As Saad states (2023),

Studies have highlighted that those interactive classroom environments, characterized by frequent and meaningful interactions between teachers and students, positively impact students' language skills. These interactions provide opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback on their language use, leading to improved proficiency levels.
(p.27)

The second dimension, **Strategies/Activities**, was linked to the pedagogical methods and classroom tasks that encourage meaningful communication and language use. From the observations, several instructional strategies and activities were documented and identified, such as providing explanations step by step, using audio or songs, writing key words on the board and showing pictures. For instance, it was observed in the observation 2, school B (O2SB) that *“Teacher used a speaker to play an animal song. Students sang along with the audio”, “she was wearing the apron and the students who voluntarily came to the front to name the elements....*

receive extra points.” and in O1SA “*The teacher used the board effectively, she used to write key words, examples, and short explanations, organizing the information step by step...*”.

Additional strategies included the use of textbooks, questioning, modelling language and implementing games. For example, it was seen in O2SA “*The teacher used some text books "com to live" ... students carried out different activities related to the topic. play a game on the website*”. These procedures function as instructional strategies that support communication, as they represent concrete practices used by the teacher to facilitate language use and promote students’ understanding.

In the surveys, students expressed their preference for games and music in class, as these activities create a space that inspires language use in a dynamic and engaging way. For instance, students stated, student survey 1, school B (S1SB) “*me gusta los juegos ... y la música porque puedo jugar, cantar y aprender*”, student survey 12, school B (S12SB) “*Me gustan los juegos, la musica, las pronunciación y las imagenes.*”, student survey 13, school B (S13SB) “*Me gustan los juegos porque son muy divertidos*” and student survey 9, school B (S9SB) “*Me gustan las actividades ludicas me gusta la musica ...*”. Other students highlighted activities such as reading, singing, and drawing as tasks that support their learning process. For example, students expressed, student survey 2, school B (S2SB) “*leer, las actividades en grupo, escuchar musica y cantar*” and student survey 11, school B (S11SB) “*me gusta cantar y bailar y leer en inglés*”. These preferences suggest that students value instructional strategies that combine creativity, participation, and opportunities to practice the language during class. Furthermore, some students showed interest in the topics addressed in class, such as animals, the verb *to be*, or the alphabet, indicating that engaging themes also contribute to their motivation to participate in classroom activities and learn new vocabulary.

A comparison of both instruments showed a clear similarity regarding the importance of dynamic activities that support the learning environment. They displayed the use of music and games in class. For instance, 9 of students' responses stated their interest in using music, songs and games in the English class. Similarly, during observations, the teacher implemented activities such as songs and games to introduce or practice. For example, in O2SA *"The teacher started the class using the board to play "hang-man", there she wrote the letters, students said to guess the word and reviewed the vocabulary."* This data reveals that using different strategies and activities contribute to creating a more engaging learning environment for the students. "Students need opportunities to practise language in real, meaningful ways, and task-based activities allow for that kind of practice." (Xin et al, 2025, p.54).

However, a difference was found concerning the frequency of activities. In observations notes, the teacher tried to implement a variety of strategies during some classes. As an example, in O2SB *"Teacher played the animal song using the speaker..."*, *"She stood in front of the group and showed the pictures to the students."* and O1SA *"she also included different activities that involved students walking and moving around the classroom, and working in groups."* In contrast, students suggested including more activities and dynamics when they are learning. For example, 14 students mentioned clearly to have more combined activities and fewer written assignments. This indicates that although dynamic strategies are present in the classroom, students would like them to be implemented more frequently. Likewise, Harmer (2015) highlights the importance of having a variety of activities in a class to keep students' motivation and their learning styles. Therefore, increasing the intentional use of collaborative and dynamic strategies could strengthen both student engagement and the development of communicative competence.

The third dimension is **Feedback** refers to the type and quality of responses or corrections that guide students' learning and communicative improvement. From the observations, feedback was not consistently explicit across the sessions. In some cases, the teacher primarily adopted a passive role, as it was noted in O1SB that *"the teacher listened carefully to some students while they were singing,"* and that *"...no praise, rewards, or corrective language were observed during the session."* Similarly, it was observed in O2SB that *"some students made mistakes while naming the elements, and the teacher did not correct the mistakes verbally."* However, in other instances, feedback was provided in a more supportive and constructive manner. For example, it was noted in O1SA that *"when students made mistakes, the teacher corrected them in a gentle way making them feel safe in class,"* and that students *"...were not afraid of making mistakes since the teacher responded with patience and support."* These contrasting observations suggest that while feedback was sometimes implicit or absent, when it was provided, it contributed positively to students' confidence and willingness to participate.

From the survey data, no explicit references to feedback practices were identified. Students did not directly mention aspects such as correction, praise, or teacher responses to their performance. This may be related to the design of the survey, as the questions did not specifically guide students to reflect on feedback or teacher responses. However, some of their answers related to motivation, participation, and perceived improvement may indirectly reflect how feedback is experienced in the classroom. For instance, students' perceptions of learning progress and their willingness to participate suggest that, even if not explicitly recognized, feedback may play a role in shaping their learning experience.

A comparison of both instruments revealed limited similarities and some differences regarding feedback practices. A partial similarity lies in the implicit role of feedback in supporting students' learning and participation, as observations showed that, although not always explicit, the teacher occasionally provided gentle and supportive corrections. However, a clear difference was identified in the explicit presence of feedback. While observations indicated that feedback was sometimes absent or not clearly articulated, survey responses did not provide direct evidence of students' awareness of feedback practices. This may be related to the design of the survey, as it did not specifically address this aspect. Therefore, feedback appears to be inconsistent and not always clearly recognized by students.

“In both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy” (Ellis, 2009, p. 3). This perspective emphasizes the importance of feedback as a key element in supporting both students' confidence and language development. Moreover, when teachers initiate corrections but encourage students to self-correct, this prompting strategy effectively promotes language acquisition (Ellis, 2009). In this sense, prompts enhance learners' self-regulation by encouraging active participation in the correction process, whereas explicit corrections and recasts may limit learners' involvement by providing immediate answers. (Nakata et al, 2025) Therefore, feedback should not only be present but also intentionally structured to guide learning and enhance communicative competence. These principles highlight the importance of providing consistent and supportive feedback to strengthen students' confidence and promote more effective language development.

The fourth dimension is **Material/Authenticity**. In this dimension, the aim was to identify the use and significance of authentic and varied resources that connect language with

real-world situations. In the observations carried out, it was possible to identify that teachers used different activities and materials that are meaningful and appealing for students. Example, in O2SB *“The teacher was wearing an apron with pictures of fruits and animals attached to it.”* Moreover, it was observed that the teacher applied listening activities by using songs related to the class's topic that were fun for students. For example, in O2SB *“The teacher used a speaker to play an animal song. Students sang along with the audio.”* The activities that were observed allow to check the importance of interested activities to get students involved in class, and to get them closed to their real context activities. For example, in O1SA *“She started the class showing a picture of daily activities.”*

In terms of surveys, this dimension was identified in different students' opinions. It was found that students enjoy the class's activities because they can explore their abilities in English. For example, in S11SB *“Porque me gusta cantar y bailar y leer en inglés.”* Besides, students point out that the material used in class is varied and is really meaningful for them. For example, S12SB *“Me gustan los juegos, la música, la pronunciación y las imágenes.”* Even though the material used is appealing for students, it was recognized that it is not as authentic as it should be to achieve the class's objective. For example, S1SB *“Cuando hacen juegos me divierto, pero no hacen muchos juegos.”* These comments state that students expect to have entertaining activities in class that motivate them to participate and stay focused, including fun, and making the class a space for learning in different ways. As it is stated by Alamri (2025), “These materials highly motivate learners because they represent interesting topics from the culture of the target language that students can use in their daily lives.” (p.7)

When comparing this dimension in the two instruments, it was recognized that the material used in class is not enough and authentic. Although one of the observations highlights

that the teacher used an apron with pictures, and in another observation, she used pictures of daily activities, most of the material is audiovisual resources. It is evident that the use of technological devices to appeal to students' attention is prioritized in class. As is it mentioned in the O1SA *"In this lesson she did not use textbooks, but she used digital tools to show pictures at the beginning of the lesson to introduce the topic"* and in the S10SB *"Que fuera más divertida la clase."* This demonstrates that the use of technology in class does not ensure an entertaining class for students. This situation reflects what Alamri (2025) highlights, emphasizing that teachers should not only depend on the wide availability of materials as an advantage. Instead, they must make sure that the materials they select and use are appropriate for students' language level, cultural context, and learning objectives.

The fifth dimension, **Emotional Climate**, relates to the affective atmosphere in the classroom that supports students' motivation, confidence, and participation. From the observations, a generally positive emotional climate was identified, characterized by a supportive and respectful environment. The teacher was constantly attentive to students' performance, as it was noted in O1SB that *"the teacher moved slightly in the front area of the classroom while observing the students"* and *"remained positioned near the front of the classroom and continued observing the presenters."* Additionally, the teacher encouraged participation by allowing students to volunteer and move during activities. For instance, O2SB *"students were allowed to move while singing. Some students moved their bodies energetically during the song."*, which reflects a relaxed and engaging atmosphere. It was also observed in O1SA that *"All students worked in the activity and looked motivated, some students were a little shy but they participate."*

Furthermore, the classroom environment was described as warm and supportive, where in O1SA *"There was a positive interaction between the teacher and students. The teacher listened to students and tried to encourage them to participate."* and *"Also, students support each other, they helped their classmates when they needed"*. Likewise O2SA *"The emotional climate was very good due to the good interaction between the teacher and students.... they showed themselves interested to learn and practice."* These elements indicate that the emotional climate fostered confidence, respect, and active participation among students.

From the survey data, students revealed a positive perception of the affective atmosphere in the classroom, with 19 out of 24 students reporting that they feel motivated to learn English. And 4 students indicated that this motivation is present only in certain cases. Similarly, participation levels were perceived as high in the activities proposed by the teacher in 12 students out of 24 respondents. Regarding their learning process, 15 students pointed out that they experience improvement during the classes. These findings suggest that while most students perceive a positive and motivating classroom environment that supports their learning, variations in participation and motivation levels indicate the need for more consistent and inclusive strategies to engage all learners effectively. This aligns with the idea that effective teaching requires the use of varied instructional approaches that respond to students' different readiness levels, interests, and learning needs, allowing all learners to participate meaningfully in the classroom. (Tomlinson, 2017)

At the moment of comparison, a key similarity was the presence of a positive and supportive environment that fosters students' motivation and participation. In the observations, it was evident that the teacher promoted a warm atmosphere by encouraging students, allowing

participation, and maintaining respectful interactions. For example, O2SA "*..teacher and students have a very well interaction. The joked during the class but continued with respect to the class and the teacher.*" Similarly, in the survey responses, students reported feeling motivated, participating actively, and perceiving improvement in their learning process. It suggests that teachers should actively work to foster an environment that encourages motivation, engagement, and a sense of belonging among students. This can be achieved through strategies such as promoting mutual respect, providing positive reinforcement, and creating a supportive and inclusive learning space. (Dörnyei, 2001)

The sixth dimension explored in this study is **Technology**, understood as the integration and pedagogical use of digital tools and technological resources to support and enrich English learning experiences. The use of technology in the classroom facilitates access to different materials, promotes student engagement, and creates opportunities for more dynamic and interactive learning environments. "These elements encourage learners to complete lessons, practice regularly, and achieve higher levels of proficiency. By transforming language learning into a game, learners are more likely to stay motivated and committed." (Urbaite, 2024, p.6)

According to the data collected in the classroom observations, it was possible to identify the use of some technological resources during English classes. Teachers integrated tools such as speakers and televisions to support different classroom activities. These resources were mainly used to play songs, allow students to sing and dance, and implement interactive games through educational websites related to the topics studied in class. As it is evident in (O2SB) "*The teacher used a speaker to play an animal song. Students sang along with the audio. Students listen to the audio and sang along*" These activities appeared to generate enthusiasm among students and created moments of active participation. The use of songs and online games

contributed to a more dynamic learning environment and allowed students to practice vocabulary and concepts in an engaging way. However, the observations also suggested that the use of these technological resources was occasional rather than frequent during the lessons.

The survey responses provided students' perceptions of classroom activities. Although students did not explicitly mention the use of technological tools, their answers reflected a positive attitude toward activities that involve movement, music, and dynamic participation. Several students indicated that they enjoy activities that are fun and interactive, such as singing, dancing, or playing games during the English class. As it is indicated in the responses S12SB *"La música porque aprendemos a pronunciar"* and in S9SB *"también me gusta la música porque me gusta oír palabras nuevas"*. In addition, some responses suggested that students would like to have more engaging and dynamic activities as part of their learning experience.

When comparing the information gathered from the classroom observations and the survey responses, it shows both similarities and differences in the role of technology in English classes. While observations revealed that teachers use tools such as speakers and televisions to support activities like songs and online games, these activities appeared to motivate students and increase their participation. In the surveys, students did not explicitly identify technology as a key aspect of learning. This suggests they perceive these activities more as enjoyable than technological, and possibly, increasing the frequency of such activities could further enhance students' motivation and participation in English learning. This idea is supported by the notion that the use of interactive and immersive technologies has made learning more functional and enjoyable, helping to connect theoretical knowledge with real-life application. (Urbaite, 2024)

The seventh dimension, **Communication**, refers to the opportunities students have to use English purposefully to express their ideas and interact meaningfully during the learning process. Communication plays a key role in language learning, as it allows students to practice the target language, share ideas, and participate actively in classroom activities.

Based on the classroom observations, several activities promoted communicative interaction. For example, in O1SB it was observed that “*students presented a short task in front of the class*,” which allowed them to share their work orally with their classmates. In another moment, “*students named the elements from an apron*,” although “*a small number of students participated actively by going to the front*” (O2SB). Likewise, during another activity “*students said to guess the word and reviewed vocabulary*” (O2SA), which encouraged participation and oral interaction. Additionally, the teacher implemented activities such as the game “hot potato” to practice vocabulary and asked different questions so students had the opportunity to share their ideas. During this activity, it was noted that “*some students answered in English and others in Spanish*” (O1SA).

The survey responses also highlighted the importance of communication in learning English. For instance, one student expressed the need for “*more conversations in English*” (S1SA), while another indicated that learning English is important to “*communicate with people who speak English*” (S9SA). Other students mentioned goals related to language development, such as “*learning new words and improving my English*” (S13SA). Additionally, one participant explained that learning English could be useful “*to go to the United States*” (S11SA), which reflects broader personal motivations connected to communication in the language.

A comparison between the information gathered from the observations and the survey responses shows both similarities and differences regarding communication in the classroom. One similarity is that both instruments highlight the relevance of communication as part of the learning process. The observations show that the teacher created opportunities for interaction through activities such as presentations, vocabulary games, and guessing tasks, while the survey responses reveal that students value communication and express interest in having more opportunities to practice English. However, some differences can also be identified. While students expressed motivation to communicate in English, the observations revealed that the use of the target language was not always consistent. For example, it was noted that “*some students answered in English and others in Spanish*” (O1SA), and that “*a small number of students participated actively by going to the front*” (O2SB). This suggests that although communication is recognized as important, students may still need more support and structured opportunities to use English confidently during classroom interactions. In this sense, communication should not only be promoted through activities, but also reinforced as the main medium of interaction in the classroom. As Thornbury (2017) explains, the development of speaking skills depends on providing learners with meaningful opportunities to use the language in authentic contexts, allowing them to move from controlled practice to more spontaneous communication.

To conclude this dimension, communication plays a fundamental role in the learning environment, as it allows students to express their ideas, interact with others, and actively participate in the learning process. Strengthening communicative practices in the classroom can contribute to increasing students’ confidence and their willingness to use English more consistently. In line with this, Burns (2019) highlights that promoting authentic communication

in the classroom supports language development by creating meaningful opportunities for students to use English in real and purposeful contexts.

The last dimension, **Spaces**, refers to the physical organization of the learning environment and how it can facilitate collaboration, interaction, and communication among students during classroom activities. The use and arrangement of physical spaces play an important role in shaping students' participation and engagement within the learning process.

Based on the observations, the classes were mainly conducted inside the classroom and the seating arrangements varied slightly depending on the session. For example, in O1SB it was observed that *“students were seated in lines in front of the classroom and the seating arrangement remained the same throughout the session,”* while the activities were carried out inside the classroom. Similarly, in O1SA *“the lesson was carried out in the classroom”* and *“students were sitting in rows.”* In another session, the arrangement changed slightly; in O2CB *“students were seated in a semicircle facing the teacher,”* and in O2SA the desks were organized *“in a round table.”* Although these seating arrangements varied, all the observed activities took place inside the classroom.

The survey responses revealed that students suggested the use of different school spaces to carry out learning activities. Several participants expressed interest in having lessons outside the traditional classroom environment. For instance, one student suggested doing *“actividades en el area de juegos”* (S12CB), while another proposed *“hacer clases en el coliseo”* (S11SA). Likewise, other students mentioned the possibility of developing *“actividades afuera del salón”* (S5SA), *“actividades fuera del salon”* (S12SA; S13SA), or simply *“sacar mas del salon”*

(S6SA; S8SA). These responses show that students perceive other school spaces as potential environments that could support their learning experience.

A comparison between both instruments shows some similarities and differences regarding the use of spaces in the learning process. One similarity is that both sources highlight the relevance of the physical environment in supporting classroom activities. The observations show that the teacher organized the classroom in different ways, such as seating students “*in lines,*” “*in a semicircle,*” or “*in a round table,*” which may facilitate different types of interaction. However, an important difference emerges when considering the location of the activities. While the observations indicate that all the lessons were conducted inside the classroom, the survey responses suggest that students would like to have more activities in other spaces around the school, such as the playground or the coliseum. This difference suggests that although the classroom organization supports the development of the lesson, students perceive that using other spaces could create more dynamic and engaging learning experiences. From the researchers’ perspective, incorporating a greater variety of physical spaces could enhance students’ participation and motivation, as well as provide more contextualized opportunities for language use. As Barrett et al (2019) suggest, the physical learning environment, including classroom design and use of space, has a significant impact on students’ engagement and learning outcomes.

To conclude this dimension, the organization and use of physical spaces play a significant role in shaping the learning environment and students’ experiences. Expanding learning beyond the traditional classroom setting could foster more dynamic interactions and increase students’ engagement in the learning process. According to Imms et al (2017), flexible and diverse

learning environments support collaboration, interaction, and more meaningful learning experiences, allowing students to engage more actively with the content and with their peers.

Findings

Based on the previous analysis of the similarities and differences identified across the different dimensions, a deeper interpretative process was conducted to examine patterns and connections between the data collected from observations, surveys and the matrix. This analysis allowed for the identification of recurring relationships between pedagogical practices, students' perceptions, and classroom dynamics. As a result, some themes emerged that go beyond individual dimensions and reflect more complex aspects of the learning environment. These themes highlight how teaching strategies influence student engagement, motivation, and participation; how emotional factors shape interaction and how the learning environment operates/works as a multidimensional element where emotional, physical, and pedagogical components intersect. Together, these themes provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect students' learning experiences in English language classrooms.

Impact of teaching strategies on student engagement, motivation, and participation

The findings of this study show that teaching strategies have a significant influence on students' engagement, motivation, and participation in the English classroom. It was evident that students respond more positively to interactive and dynamic strategies such as games, songs, group work, and the use of visual or audiovisual materials. These types of activities create a more enjoyable learning environment and encourage students to participate more actively during the lessons. In fact, most students reported feeling motivated in class, which reflects that teachers are making efforts to include strategies that capture their attention. However, the analysis also

reveals that these strategies are not always implemented in a consistent or intentional way.

Although students enjoy these activities, they also expressed the need for more frequent dynamic tasks and fewer traditional written exercises. In this sense, Cárdenas (2021) highlights that “deberá producirse una actualización constante de métodos y didácticas, y, para el caso de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, una reconfiguración estructural en el modelo de enseñanza, aprendizaje y evaluación” (p. 62), which reinforces the idea that teaching practices need to evolve continuously. This suggests that interactive strategies are sometimes used as occasional moments rather than as a central part of the teaching process. In addition, participation is not equally distributed among all students, which indicates that current strategies may not be addressing different learning styles or student needs effectively.

Another important aspect is that many of these strategies focus more on keeping students entertained than on promoting meaningful communication in English. For example, while songs and games generate enthusiasm, they are not always connected to clear language objectives. As a result, students may be engaged and motivated, but they are not necessarily developing their communicative skills. As stated by Cárdenas (2021), “Es importante considerar que de nada serviría innovar con tecnología, crear grandes proyectos e implementar enfoques didácticos, sino existe beneficio para la sociedad” (p.66)

In a broader situation, taking in mind the Colombian educational system, national policies promote the development of communicative competence in English, even though, there is still a gap between these expectations and what happens in the classroom. Many teaching strategies focus on participation and motivation, but not necessarily on helping students use the language in real or meaningful ways. This creates a situation where students are active and interested, but

their level of English does not improve as much as expected. This situation is aligned with the perspective of Paniagua and Istance (2018), who argue that,

Research on the general principles of good teaching has shown that effectiveness is not determined primarily by the “surface level” of specific teaching methods or ways of organising classrooms, but rather by the “deep level” of instruction, i.e. the quality of interactions between teachers and students around meaningful content. (p.22)

This situation is also influenced by other factors such as limited hours of English instruction, low exposure to the language outside the classroom, and unequal access to resources in different regions. These conditions make it more difficult for teaching strategies to have a strong impact on students’ language development.

Influence of emotions on learning interaction

The findings indicate that emotions play a fundamental role in shaping students’ interaction within the English language classroom. Rather than being peripheral, emotional experiences influence how learners engage with activities, peers, and the target language itself. In this sense, interaction emerges not only from instructional design but also from the affective conditions that enable or constrain participation. This perspective aligns with research in second language acquisition, which highlights that emotions are central to learners’ willingness to communicate and actively use the language (MacIntyre et al, 2011).

Classroom observations and student responses suggest that when learners perceive the environment as supportive and respectful, they are more willing to participate in communicative activities. Students reported feeling more motivated and confident in classes where they were allowed to express themselves without fear of constant correction, which encouraged them to take risks when speaking or interacting with others. This reflects what MacIntyre et al (2011)

describe as the dynamic relationship between affective variables such as anxiety and confidence and communicative behavior. Emotional safety, in this sense, becomes a key condition for participation, as it reduces anxiety and fosters a sense of confidence that is essential for language use. Consequently, interaction cannot be understood solely as a cognitive process, but as one that is deeply influenced by students' emotional states.

At the same time, the data reveal that these emotional responses are closely linked to the pedagogical practices implemented in the classroom. The use of dynamic activities such as songs, games, and collaborative tasks appears to generate positive emotional engagement, increasing students' motivation and involvement. These findings are consistent with Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), who emphasize the role of enjoyment in enhancing classroom participation, and with Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018), who argue that positive emotions can have a stronger impact on language performance than negative ones such as anxiety. However, some learners expressed the need for greater variety in classroom activities, suggesting that emotional engagement is not automatically sustained but depends on the continuous design of meaningful and stimulating learning experiences. This reinforces the idea that emotions are not fixed traits but are shaped by classroom dynamics and teaching practices.

Furthermore, the influence of emotions on interaction is also shaped by contextual conditions beyond the immediate classroom. In settings where students have limited exposure to English outside school, the classroom becomes the primary space for engaging with the language. Under these circumstances, emotional factors such as motivation, confidence, and enjoyment acquire greater significance, as they directly affect students' willingness to participate in the few opportunities they have to use English. This reinforces the importance of creating

inclusive and emotionally supportive environments that can compensate for contextual constraints.

The findings suggest that emotions are not merely individual reactions but integral components of the learning process that mediate interaction. A positive emotional climate enhances students' confidence, motivation, and participation, while a lack of emotional support may limit their engagement. Therefore, fostering meaningful interaction in the language classroom requires not only well-structured activities but also a deliberate focus on the emotional dimensions of learning, recognizing that students' willingness to communicate is deeply connected to how they experience the classroom environment.

The learning environment as a multidimensional element

The last emerging theme identified in this study is the learning environment as a multidimensional element which can be shaped by emotional, physical, and pedagogical factors, including the use of resources, materials, authenticity, etc. The findings suggest that, although the classes in the classrooms incorporate a variety of resources such as songs, images, and technological tools that promote students' engagement and motivation, these elements are not always coherently integrated to support meaningful language learning. In that way, this reveals a critical tension between engagement, mediation, and authenticity. Stathopoulou et al (2024) point out, mediation means creating learning environments where teachers help learners build mediation strategies and make use of their heritage or home languages to interact in meaningful and appropriated context ways. Therefore, rethinking the learning environment as multidimensional opens the possibility for more holistic, inclusive, and genuinely transformative language learning experiences to see how all the involved elements in a classroom can converge to go beyond the walls.

In Colombian educational context emphasizes communicative competence and the importance of contextualized language use (MEN, 2014). Initiatives such as the *Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo (2004)* and *Colombia Bilingüe (2016)* have promoted the idea of English as a tool for participation in global and local contexts. However, despite the policy efforts, the findings reveal a gap between these principles and their implementation in classroom practices, where resources and activities are often used to increase engagement rather than to foster meaningful, mediated and authentic communication. National assessment results, particularly from standardized tests such as Saber 11, consistently show low levels of English proficiency among students in public education, especially in rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. This situation reflects structural challenges that limit the realization of communicative and culturally sensitive approaches in real teaching and learning environments.

The institutional conditions influence how resources are selected and used, often prioritizing availability over pedagogical purposes, which limits the potential of materials to foster authentic communication. Schools often face constraints such as limited access to updated materials, unstable internet connectivity, large class sizes (over 35–40 students in public schools), and rigid curricular structures tied to textbooks or institutional planning formats. In rural settings, for example, English instruction may rely on photocopied worksheets or outdated textbooks, while in urban schools, although there may be greater access to digital tools, their use is often limited to projection or passive consumption rather than interactive or communicative purposes. Additionally, institutional priorities such as preparing students for standardized tests can lead teachers to focus on grammar instruction over authentic communicative practices.

There is a lack of articulation between emotional engagement, material use, and communicative purpose, indicating that the learning environment, although dynamic, remains limited in its capacity to promote deeper and more contextualized language learning experiences. This limitation is closely related to the underdeveloped role of the teacher as a mediator. From a mediation perspective (Stathopoulou et al, 2024), teachers are not neutral facilitators of content, but social actors who actively shape the construction and negotiation of meaning by guiding how information is selected, transformed, and shared (Piccardo & North, 2019). In this sense, mediation goes beyond individual expression or interaction, involving the collaborative co-construction of meaning and the facilitation of others' access to new understandings. However, the findings suggest that this mediational role is only superficially enacted in practice. Resources are often implemented in a fragmented way, without clear connections to broader communicative goals or to students' sociocultural realities. For instance, a song may be used to introduce vocabulary without linking it to students' lived experiences or creating opportunities for meaningful interaction. Similarly, technological tools tend to support content delivery rather than enabling collaborative tasks, problem-solving, or multilingual mediation practices.

Contributions to the field

Building on the analysis developed in the previous sections, this chapter proposes a set of characteristics that may contribute to the development of effective learning environments for fostering communicative competence in English language learning. These proposals emerge not only from the interpretation of the findings but also from the researchers' pedagogical experience and reflection throughout the research process. In this sense, the characteristics presented here are grounded in both the analytical insights derived from the study and the practical understanding of language teaching contexts. By articulating these elements, the chapter seeks to

outline key conditions that can support meaningful interaction, contextualized language use, and opportunities for authentic communication, all of which are essential for strengthening learners' communicative competence in English.

Coherence between resources and communicative goals

An important characteristic of effective learning environments is the alignment between the use of classroom resources and clearly defined communicative goals. While materials such as songs, images, and technological tools are widely used to capture students' attention, their pedagogical value depends on how they are integrated into the learning process. When resources are used without a clear purpose, they tend to promote engagement at a superficial level rather than supporting meaningful language use.

To strengthen this alignment, teachers can begin by asking what communicative purpose each activity serves. For instance, instead of using images only to introduce vocabulary, students can describe, compare, or interpret them in ways that require interaction. Similarly, a video can move beyond passive viewing if it becomes the basis for discussion, opinion sharing, or problem-solving tasks. In this way, resources become tools for communication rather than isolated teaching aids.

Likewise, it is crucial to design activities with clear sequences to see the connections and understand the language as essential tool for expressing meaning.

Resources adaptation to the learning environment

Another key characteristic is the ability to design learning environments that respond to institutional realities rather than idealized conditions. In many educational contexts, factors such as limited access to materials, large class sizes, and restricted technological resources shape what

is possible in the classroom. Recognizing these conditions is essential for developing meaningful and sustainable pedagogical practices.

Instead of depending on ideal resources, teachers can work with what is available and adapt it to communicative purposes. For example, the use of realia, simple strategies such as pair work, group discussions, or role-playing activities can create opportunities for interaction. For example, students can bring food packaging from local products, simulate conversations based on situations from neighbourhood stores or street markets, or recreate everyday interactions such as asking for prices, giving directions, or using public transportation. These types of activities allow learners to connect language use with familiar contexts, making communication more relevant and authentic.

Connecting Real-Life Contexts with meaningful learning

Another significant contribution is the need to connect classroom activities with students' real-life contexts in order to promote authentic language use. Instead of engaging in decontextualized exercises, learners should be encouraged to use English as a meaningful tool to express their own experiences, ideas, and realities. This involves designing tasks that reflect familiar situations, such as describing their daily routines, interacting with peers, or discussing aspects of their community. By connecting language learning in students' lived experiences, participation becomes more purposeful and relevant, which can enhance both motivation and communicative competence.

Moreover, in contexts where exposure to English is limited, bringing real-life situations into the classroom becomes essential, as it allows students to maximize their opportunities to use

the language in meaningful ways. In this way, contextualized learning not only helps students improve their English, but also creates a more inclusive and engaging classroom.

Teacher as mediator

A key characteristic of effective learning environments is the role of the teacher as a mediator of meaning. Acting as an active role to guide, interpret and help students to construct meaning through language interaction. Teachers can create opportunities for students to explain, reformulate, and respond to each other's ideas. For example, after a student contribution, the teacher might ask others to expand, clarify, or relate it to their own experiences. These interactions help learners move beyond isolated responses and engage in the co-construction of meaning.

Additionally, teachers can support mediation by encouraging the use of students' existing knowledge and linguistic resources. Allowing learners to draw on their experiences or prior understanding can make communication more accessible and meaningful. Through this approach, the classroom becomes a space where knowledge is not simply delivered, but actively built through interaction.

Turning the Classroom into a Communicative Space

One key proposal for fostering communicative competence in English is to gradually transform the classroom into a space where communication becomes the central experience of learning. Instead of focusing exclusively on explaining grammar or completing isolated exercises, the learning environment should invite students to use the language to express ideas, share opinions, and interact with others. In this type of environment, English is not treated only as a subject to be studied, but as a tool for meaningful communication.

To move in this direction, teachers can begin by designing activities that naturally require interaction. For example, short discussions, collaborative tasks, role-plays, or problem-solving situations can encourage students to exchange information and negotiate meaning with their peers. When learners see that English helps them accomplish a task or express something relevant to them, participation tends to increase and communication becomes more spontaneous.

Another useful strategy is to create moments where students feel safe experimenting with the language. Communicative environments work best when learners understand that making mistakes is part of the process. Teachers can therefore emphasize participation and clarity of meaning rather than immediate grammatical perfection. Small changes such as encouraging students to ask each other questions, react to their classmates' ideas, or work in pairs and small groups can significantly increase opportunities for language use.

Finally, teachers can think of themselves as facilitators of communicative experiences rather than the sole source of knowledge. By organizing tasks, guiding interaction, and creating contexts where English is genuinely needed, the classroom gradually becomes a dynamic communicative space. In such environments, students not only practice vocabulary and grammar, but also develop confidence, fluency, and the ability to use English meaningfully in diverse situations.

Turning Technology into a Communicative Learning Tool

One important contribution of this study to English language classrooms lies in the pedagogical use of technology to promote meaningful and contextualized communication, rather than as a tool for passive content delivery. Considering the limitations of the Colombian educational context, such as limited resources, large class sizes, and reduced exposure to

English, this research suggests the implementation of low-tech or blended digital tasks that foster active language production and interaction. These tasks may include short audio recordings, collaborative video creation, or guided speaking activities using accessible tools, allowing students to use English in authentic and personally relevant ways.

This approach not only enhances communicative competence but also aligns with students' emotional needs by creating a supportive and low-anxiety environment where they can express themselves confidently. In this sense, technology becomes a mediational tool that connects pedagogical, emotional, and contextual dimensions of the learning environment. By prioritizing interactive and student-centered uses of technology, this contribution helps bridge the gap between engagement and actual language development, promoting more equitable and meaningful learning opportunities in public school settings.

Conclusions

This study aimed to determine the effective characteristics of learning environments that support the development of communicative competence in English as a foreign language among primary school students. The results show that communicative competence is not only influenced by the presence of resources, but by how emotional, pedagogical, and physical elements interact within the learning environment. It became evident that students require spaces where they feel safe, motivated, and actively involved in meaningful communication in order to develop their language skills effectively.

The findings indicate that learning environments that promote interaction, meaningful language use, and supportive classroom dynamics play a meaningful role in promoting communicative competence. Elements such as group work, dynamic activities, and positive teacher-student relationships contribute to increasing students' motivation and participation. However, these elements must be intentionally connected to communicative objectives.

Regarding the general objective of determining the effective characteristics of learning environments for the development of communicative competence, the analysis suggests that effective environments are those that integrate interaction, emotional support, varied strategies, and opportunities for authentic communication. Additionally, these environments should move beyond traditional practices and ensure that students actively use the language in meaningful contexts rather than focusing only on isolated activities or content.

In relation to the first specific objective, which is focused on characterizing the components of learning environments that contribute to communicative competence development, the analysis revealed some key elements. Interactive teaching strategies such as

games, songs, and collaborative tasks, along with the use of varied and meaningful materials, a positive emotional climate that promotes confidence, and the flexible use of physical and technological resources, were identified as essential factors supporting communicative competence development, as they promote active participation and meaningful language use. Nevertheless, it was also found that some components, such as consistent feedback, the authenticity of materials, and the use of diverse learning spaces, are not correctly implemented, which limits their potential impact on students' communicative development.

The second specific objective is focused on the analysis of students' perceptions of the learning environment components involved in the development of their communicative competence. The findings show that students value dynamic, interactivity, and enjoyable activities, particularly those involving music, games, and teamwork. They also expressed the need for more opportunities to communicate in English, more varied activities, and the use of different learning spaces beyond the classroom. These perceptions highlight that students are aware of what motivates them and what supports their learning, reinforcing the importance of implementing environments that respond to their interests and needs.

Finally, the themes identified in the analysis show important ideas to the proposals to improve learning environments and support the development of communicative competence. First, teaching strategies should be intentionally designed to promote meaningful communication, not only engagement, ensuring that activities are aligned with clear linguistic objectives. Second, the emotional dimension must be prioritized, as students' confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate are influenced by a supportive and respectful environment. Third, learning environments should be understood as multidimensional, where pedagogical practices, emotional factors, physical spaces, and resources are coherently integrated

to create more holistic and effective learning experiences. These proposals emphasize the need to rethink classroom practices in order to reduce the gap between policy expectations and actual language learning outcomes in primary education contexts.

Despite the contributions of this study to understanding the dynamics of English language classrooms, several limitations must be critically acknowledged, as they shape both the scope and the interpretation of the findings.

First, the study was conducted with a relatively small and context-specific sample drawn from two educational settings. While these contexts provided rich, situated insights, they also limit the transferability of the findings. The realities observed in these classrooms are influenced by particular social, institutional, and pedagogical conditions that may not be representative of other educational environments. Consequently, any attempt to generalize the results should be approached with caution.

Second, the design of the data collection instruments presents important constraints. Although the combination of observations and surveys allowed for a multidimensional analysis, the lack of explicit questions addressing certain key aspects—particularly feedback—reveals a methodological gap. This omission not only restricted the visibility of this dimension in the data but also highlights how research design decisions can unintentionally shape what becomes “visible” or “invisible” in the analysis. In this sense, the findings may reflect not only classroom realities but also the limitations embedded in the instruments themselves.

Furthermore, the observational component of the study was limited to specific class sessions, which raises questions about the representativeness of the data. Classroom practices are inherently dynamic and influenced by fluctuating factors such as lesson objectives, student

engagement, time constraints, and contextual pressures. Therefore, the observations should be understood as partial representations rather than comprehensive accounts of teaching practices.

Another critical limitation lies in the interpretative nature of the analytical approach. By adopting Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the study assumes that meaning is actively constructed by the researchers rather than passively discovered in the data. While this perspective allows for a deeper and more nuanced interpretation, it also implies that the findings are inevitably shaped by the researchers' subjectivities, theoretical positions, and analytical decisions. As such, alternative readings of the data are not only possible but expected.

Finally, broader contextual factors such as resource availability, institutional expectations, and classroom conditions were not systematically examined, despite their evident influence on both teaching practices and student experiences. The absence of a more explicit analysis of these structural elements may limit the depth of understanding regarding how the learning environment is configured and constrained.

Taken together, these limitations do not invalidate the study; rather, they highlight the complexity of researching educational environments and underscore the need for cautious, situated interpretations. They also point to important directions for future research, particularly in terms of expanding sample diversity, refining data collection instruments, and incorporating a more critical examination of contextual variables.

Future research could expand this line of inquiry by applying similar analyses in different educational contexts, particularly to examine how the multidimensional nature of learning environments is shaped by diverse institutional, social, and cultural conditions. It would be useful to explore how mediation is actually developed in the classroom, especially how teachers

help students build meaning and use their own linguistic resources. Future studies could also examine how classroom activities can move beyond simple engagement toward more meaningful communication. In addition, comparing rural and urban contexts could provide a better understanding of how different conditions affect the use of resources and language learning. These directions can help improve the design of learning environments that support more authentic and meaningful use of English.

References

- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). How to choose a sampling technique and determine sample size for research: A simplified guide for researchers. *Oral Oncology Reports*, 12, 100662.
- Aithal, S., & Aithal, S. (2023). *New research models under exploratory research method* (pp. 109–140). In *Book with ISBN 978-81-19006-34-2*. Zenodo.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8078719>
- Alamri, W. (2025). Evaluating the benefits and challenges of using authentic materials in EFL context for listening purpose. *Front. Educ.* 10:1611308.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2025.1611308>
- Araque Torres, D.M. (2021). Learning Module 2. Shaping Ecosystem for Learning: Principles and affordances. <https://fliphtml5.com/afqfp/rzpp>
- Averill J. B. (2002). Matrix analysis as a complementary analytic strategy in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative health research*, 12(6), 855–866.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/104973230201200611>
- Barrett, P., Treves, A., Shmis, T., Ambasz, D., & Ustinova, M. (2019). *The impact of school infrastructure on learning: A synthesis of the evidence*. The World Bank.
<https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1378-8>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Davey, L., & Jenkinson, E. (2023). Doing reflexive thematic analysis (pp. 19–38). In S. Bager-Charleson & A. McBeath (Eds.), *Supporting research in counselling and psychotherapy: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13942-0_2

- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education. <https://octovany.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ok-teaching-by-principles-h-douglas-brown.pdf>
- Burns, A. (2019). Concepts for teaching speaking in the English language classroom. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 12(1), 1–11. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/article/view/168564>
- Cárdenas Reyes, Y. M. (2021). Innovación en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras: una perspectiva que va de lo tecnológico a lo humano. *Revista de la Universidad de La Salle*, 1(85), 61-78. <https://revistauls.lasalle.edu.co/article/view/1924>
- Coccia, M., & Benati, I. (2023). Comparative studies. En A. Farazmand (Ed.), *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance* (pp. 2207–2213). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3_1197
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (5th ed.). SAGE Publications. https://spada.uns.ac.id/pluginfile.php/510378/mod_resource/content/1/creswell.pdf
- DANE. (2024). *Boletín técnico - Educación Formal (EDUC) Año 2023*. <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/operaciones/EDUC/bol-EDUC-2023.pdf>
- Devi, S. (2024). Conducive Language Learning Environment to Develop ESL Learners' Communication Skills: Proposing a Critical Framework. *S3R Academia*, 1(1), 33-40. <https://doi.org/10.70682/s3r.2024.04>

- Dewaele, J.-M., & Alfawzan, M. (2018). Does the effect of enjoyment outweigh that of anxiety in foreign language performance? *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(1), 21–45. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2018.8.1.2>
- Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 237–274. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.2.5>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Elizondo Moreno, A., Rodríguez Rodríguez, J. V., & Rodríguez Rodríguez, I. (2018). La importancia de la emoción en el aprendizaje: Propuestas para mejorar la motivación de los estudiantes. *Cuaderno de Pedagogía Universitaria*, 15(29), 3-11.
- Ellis, R. (2009). Corrective feedback and teacher development. *L2 Journal*, 1(1), 3-18.
- Espinoza Nuñez, L. A., & Rodríguez Zamora, R. (2017). La generación de ambientes de aprendizaje: un análisis de la percepción juvenil. *RIDE Revista Iberoamericana para la Investigación y el Desarrollo Educativo*, 7(14), 110-132. <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=498153999007>
- Harmer, J. (2015). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. United Kingdom: Pearson Education ESL.
- Hood, P., & Tobutt, K. (2015). *Teaching languages in the primary school* (2.^a ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Imms, W., Cleveland, B., & Fisher, K. (2017). *Evaluating learning environments: Snapshots of emerging issues, methods and knowledge*. Sense Publishers.

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-6300-537-1>

Jain, N. (2021). Survey versus interviews: Comparing data collection tools for exploratory research. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(2), 541–554. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4492>

Jiménez Álvarez, L., Fierro Jaramillo, N., Quichimbo Miguitama, P., Ortiz León, C., Maldonado Vicanco, J.C., & Capa-Mora, D. (2020). Incremento de la motivación a partir de la creación de recursos multimedia en un curso de la Ciencia del Suelo.

Cuaderno de Pedagogía Universitaria, 17(33), 71-83.

<https://cuaderno.pucmm.edu.do/index.php/cuadernodepedagogia/article/view/379/382>

Johnson, D., & Johnson, R. (2018). *Cooperative Learning: The Foundation for Active Learning*. Active Learning - Beyond the Future.

Kanwit, M., & Solon, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Communicative competence in a second language:*

Theory, method, and applications. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003160779>

Loja, Carmen & González, Lourdes. (2022). Retos y desafíos en el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés: reflexiones y perspectivas. *Revista Scientific*, 7(24), 255-271.

10.29394/Scientific.issn.2542-2987.2022.7.24.13.255-271.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369320918_Retos_y_desafios_en_el_proceso_de_aprendizaje_del_ingles_reflexiones_y_perspectivas

Ma, W. W. K., Tong, K., & Tso, A. (2020). *Learning Environment and Design: Current and Future Impacts*. (Educational Communications and Technology Yearbook).

Springer, Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-8167-0>

MacIntyre, P. D., Burns, C., & Jessome, A. (2011). Ambivalence about communicating in a second language: A qualitative study of French immersion students' willingness to communicate. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(1), 81–96.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01141.x>

Merrill, D. (2002). First Principles of Instruction. *Educational Technology Research and Development*. 50(3), 43-59. DOI:[10.1007/BF02505024](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02505024)

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2004). Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo. Bogotá, Colombia: Ministerio de Educación Nacional.

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2014). Colombia very well! Programa Nacional de inglés 2015-2025. Bogotá, CO: Author.

Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2016). Política pública "Colombia Bilingüe". Bogotá: Autor.

Muñoz Ponce, H. J., Mantilla Vivas, A. M., Barreiro Vera, B. A., & Briones Mera, J. A. (2025) Los recursos didácticos y tecnológicos como herramientas esenciales para la mejora educativa universitaria. *Journal Scientific MQRInvestigar*, 9(1), 1-15.
<https://doi.org/10.56048/MQR20225.9.1.2025.e126>

Nakata, Y., Oga-Baldwin, W. L. Q., & Tsuda, A. (2025). Student perceptions of feedback and self-regulated language learning: A mixed-methods investigation. *System*, 131, 103654.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103654>

Nikolov, M. & Letica Krevelj, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Early Foreign Language Learning and Teaching: Evidence Versus Wishful Thinking*. Multilingual Matters.

<https://www.multilingual-matters.com/page/detail/?K=9781800418691Barnes & Noble+11>

Ospina Hernández, M. C., Suarez, A. M., Espinosa Morales, G. P., & Smith Jaimes

Sandoval, N. (2016). Uso de las TIC despierta una mayor motivación que con la no inclusión de las mismas en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje. *INGENIO UFPSO*, 09, 69-87.

<https://revistas.ufps.edu.co/index.php/ingenio/article/view/2071/2021>

Paniagua, A. & D. Istance (2018), *Teachers as Designers of Learning Environments: The Importance of Innovative Pedagogies, Educational Research and Innovation*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264085374-en>

Piccardo E. & North B. (2019), *The action-oriented approach: a dynamic vision of language education*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol.

Portilla Quintero, Y. B. & Lozada Espinel, E. M. (2024). *Didactic Strategy of Game-Based Learning for the Development of Linguistic-Communicative Competences in Teaching a Foreign Language at the Elementary Education Level*. [Trabajo de Maestría, Universidad de Santo Tomás]. Repositorio Institucional.

Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/Richards-Communicative-Language.pdf>

- Saad, A. (2023). Exploring the Relationship between Teacher-student Interaction Patterns and Language Learning Outcomes in TESOL Classrooms. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 5(3), 2534. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2023.5.3.3>
- Sevarakhon, A. (2024). The impacts of communicative competence on second language acquisition and employing certain methods to improve speaking skills. *University Research Base*, 47–53. Retrieved from <https://scholar.kokanduni.uz/index.php/rb/article/view/286>
- Sotehi, R & Boukredera, T. (2023). A Comparative Study of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Primary Schools versus Middle Schools. [Master's thesis, University Center of Abdalhafid Boussouf – MILA] Digital Repository.
- Stathopoulou, M., Gauci, P., Liontou, M., & Melo-Pfeifer, S. (2024). *Mediation in teaching, learning & assessment (METLA): A teaching guide for language educators*. Council of Europe.
- Suter, L. E., Smith, E., & Denman, B. D. (Eds.). (2019). *The SAGE handbook of comparative studies in education*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Thornbury, S. (2017). *How to teach speaking*. Pearson Education.
- Thu, N. T. H. (2020). Communication Skills and Reflection Practice in Smart English Teaching and Learning Environment: A Case Study. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 15(17), pp. 221–237. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i17.15235>

Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). *How to differentiate instruction in academically diverse classrooms* (3rd ed.). ASCD.

UNESCO. (2012). *International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 2011*. Primary education. <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

Urbaite, G. (2024). The role of technology in modern language education. *EuroGlobal Journal of Linguistics and Language Education*, 1(1), 3–10. <https://doi.org/10.69760/w00r1v81>

Vásquez Ramírez, A. A., Guanuchi Orellana, L. M., Cahuana Tapia, R. D., Vera Teves, R. M., & Holgado Tisoc, J. (2023). *Métodos de investigación científica* (1.^a ed.). Instituto Universitario de Innovación Ciencia y Tecnología Inudi Perú.
<https://doi.org/10.35622/inudi.b.094>

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Xin, W., Zhang, Q., & Luo, X. (2024). Promoting Language Acquisition and Cross-Cultural Competence in Multilingual Environments: Effective Teaching Strategies and Educational Support. *Advances in Humanities Research*, 9, 50-54.



Annexes

[Annex 1](#)

Observation Instrument

[Annex 2](#)

Survey Instrument

[Annex 3](#)

Analysis Matrix Instrument

[Annex 4](#)

Observation 1 Data Collection (CA)

[Annex 5](#)

Observation 2 Data Collection (CA)

[Annex 6](#)

Observation 1 Data Collection (CB)

[Annex 7](#)

Observation 2 Data Collection (CB)

[Annex 8](#)

Survey Data Collection (CA)

[Annex 9](#)

Survey Data Collection (CB)

[Annex 10](#)

Analysis Matrix

[Annex 11](#)

Researchers' Notes