

**The recognition of social-emotional factors that can act either as barriers or bridges to
bilingual learning.**

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Abstract

This research has been useful to analyze the social-emotional factors that can act either as barriers or bridges within bilingual learning environments and in this specific case, in a rural public school in Rosas, Cauca, Colombia. The idea of making this study emerges from the recognition that learning English as a foreign language is not only a cognitive process but also a social and emotional experience shaped by factors such as anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, empathy, peer interaction, and emotional support. In rural educational contexts, where limited resources, reduced exposure to English, and large teaching responsibilities are common, these factors become especially relevant in students' learning experiences.

This study was developed through a qualitative methodological approach and implemented through a case study design. The participants were students from Madre Caridad Brader High School. Data collection was carried out through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researchers to explore students' perceptions, emotions, classroom interactions, and the role of the mother tongue during English learning processes. The information gathered was analyzed through thematic analysis, leading to the identification of three codes: comprehension, emotions, and forms of work, which at the end developed the three emerging central themes: *the students' ability to interpret, process, and make sense of the English language within the classroom*, *Emotions and how they influence the learning process of ninth-grade students*, and *Collaborative Work and Student Interaction in the English Classroom*.

The findings reveal that comprehension difficulties, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and peer reactions may function as barriers that limit students' participation and confidence in the English classroom. At the same time, collaborative work, teacher support, positive emotions, and the

strategic use of Spanish as the mother tongue can become bridges that facilitate understanding, reduce emotional tension, and promote participation. The results also demonstrate that emotions are deeply connected to students' willingness to communicate and engage in bilingual activities.

This study highlights the importance of integrating socio-emotional learning into bilingual education, especially in rural contexts where students require emotionally supportive and inclusive learning environments. The research concludes that effective bilingual education should not focus exclusively on linguistic competence, but also on the creation of safe, empathetic, and human-centered classrooms where students may feel respected, confident, and motivated to learn.

Keywords: socio-emotional factors, bilingual learning environment, English language learning, emotions, rural education, social-emotional learning, mother tongue, inclusive pedagogy.

Resumen

Esta investigación ha sido útil para analizar los factores socioemocionales que pueden actuar como barreras o puentes dentro de los ambientes bilingües de aprendizaje y, en este caso específico, en una escuela pública rural en Rosas, Cauca, Colombia. La idea de realizar este estudio surge del reconocimiento de que aprender inglés como lengua extranjera no es solamente un proceso cognitivo, sino también una experiencia social y emocional influenciada por factores como la ansiedad, la motivación, la autoconfianza, la empatía, la interacción entre compañeros y el apoyo emocional. En contextos educativos rurales, donde son comunes los recursos limitados, la poca exposición al inglés y las amplias responsabilidades docentes, estos factores adquieren una relevancia especial en las experiencias de aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

Este estudio se desarrolló mediante un enfoque metodológico cualitativo y se implementó a través de un diseño de estudio de caso. Los participantes fueron estudiantes de la Institución Educativa Madre Caridad Brader. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo mediante observaciones de clase y entrevistas semiestructuradas, las cuales permitieron a los investigadores explorar las percepciones, emociones, interacciones en el aula y el papel de la lengua materna durante los procesos de aprendizaje del inglés. La información recopilada fue analizada mediante análisis temático, lo que condujo a la identificación de tres códigos: comprensión, emociones y formas de trabajo, lo que al final desarrolló los tres temas centrales resultantes: *La habilidad de los estudiantes para interpretar, procesar y comprender el idioma inglés dentro del salón de clase, Las emociones y cómo éstas influyen en el proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes de grado noveno y El trabajo colaborativo y la interacción del estudiante en el salón de clase de inglés.*

Los hallazgos revelan que las dificultades de comprensión, el miedo a cometer errores, la ansiedad y las reacciones de los compañeros pueden funcionar como barreras que limitan la participación y la confianza de los estudiantes en el aula de inglés. Al mismo tiempo, el trabajo colaborativo, el apoyo docente, las emociones positivas y el uso estratégico del español como lengua materna pueden convertirse en puentes que facilitan la comprensión, reducen la tensión emocional y promueven la participación. Los resultados también demuestran que las emociones están profundamente relacionadas con la disposición de los estudiantes para comunicarse y participar en actividades bilingües.

Este estudio destaca la importancia de integrar el aprendizaje socioemocional en la educación bilingüe, especialmente en contextos rurales donde los estudiantes requieren ambientes de

aprendizaje inclusivos y emocionalmente seguros. La investigación concluye que una educación bilingüe efectiva no debe centrarse exclusivamente en la competencia lingüística, sino también en la creación de aulas seguras, empáticas y centradas en el ser humano, donde los estudiantes puedan sentirse respetados, seguros y motivados para aprender.

Palabras clave: factores socioemocionales, ambiente bilingüe de aprendizaje, aprendizaje del inglés, emociones, educación rural, aprendizaje socioemocional, lengua materna, pedagogía inclusiva.



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INTRODUCTION

In a surprisingly and increasingly globalized world, learning a second language has become a strong need for students' academic, professional, and personal development. However, bilingual teaching success does not depend just on the topics taught but on the environment in which the teaching-learning process goes. Teachers can achieve their class success as long as they understand that this is not measured solely by being in the largest classroom, the most technologically equipped one, the one with the highest number of students, or the one with the best infrastructure.

The Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2017) looks at concepts and principles related to learning environments in its study on "Innovative Learning Environments" (ILE's) There a learning environment is described as one which "includes the activity and outcomes of learning, rather than being just a location where learning takes place" (Araque, 2021, p. 17)

The "Learning Environments" axis is essential because it allows the analysis, design, and improvement of the conditions in which students acquire a new language, taking into account pedagogical, cultural, and contextual factors. A well-structured learning environment promotes immersion in the target language, enhances student motivation, and facilitates the meaningful acquisition of communicative skills.

According to Mercer (2016), effective second language acquisition takes place in environments that foster emotional well-being, reduce anxiety, and encourage meaningful communication. This remarks the importance of designing learning environments which not only provide appropriate linguistic resources but also promote confidence and interaction in the target language.

In a rural public school, from the experience of the researchers, where a single teacher is responsible for the entire English area, language learning relies more on personal commitment than on available resources. However, an activity carried out with 9th-grade students revealed a wide range of emotions toward the English classes: some felt motivated and satisfied, while others expressed boredom, confusion, or fatigue. Students asked for less time sitting down and for classes with more dynamism, movement, and challenging activities. They also acknowledged positive aspects such as the teacher's explanations and the use of key vocabulary, but pointed out that speaking only in English, without timely support, can cause confusion.

This situation highlights the need to strengthen the socio-emotional component in English classrooms to create a more meaningful and student-centered learning experience.

In the Colombian educational context, public schools often face resource limitations, reduced availability of materials, and large class sizes. In this institution, where a single teacher attends to multiple courses and levels, English teaching progresses thanks to the teacher's dedication rather than the material conditions of the environment. Despite these challenges, efforts are made to offer coherent and meaningful instruction within the real possibilities of the public sector.

However, learning a language is not merely a cognitive process. As Yang and Damasio (2007) state, “well feel, therefore we learn” (p.3) reminding us that emotions not only accompany learning – they make it possible. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the fears, motivations, and emotions that students experience when engaging with a new language. Academic rigor, if not balanced with emotional support, can lead to anxiety, disconnection, and a lack of interest in learning.

For these reasons, this project seeks the recognition of social-emotional factors that can act either as barriers or bridges to bilingual learning. Understanding their influence is essential to build more humane, inclusive, and effective educational environments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In bilingual learning environments, students' academic development cannot be analyzed in isolation from their emotions, relationships, and overall well-being. It is important to recognize social-emotional factors and see if they can act either as barriers or bridges to bilingual learning. Various studies have shown that while strategies to improve second language instruction have been implemented, the emotional impact on learners—such as self-esteem, motivation, and a sense of belonging—is often overlooked.

This research becomes especially relevant in the Colombian context, where educational conditions vary significantly among institutions, and many schools lack the tools and teacher training needed to address students' emotional needs. Therefore, this study emerges from the recognition of an urgent issue: social-emotional factors can act either as barriers or bridges to bilingual learning. Understanding their influence is essential to build more humane, inclusive, and effective educational environments.

Research Background

Recent investigations reinforce the importance of integrating SEL within bilingual frameworks such as Skaar & Townsley (2025) found that SEL programs significantly improve emotional competencies and academic climates when integrated into school curricula. Shi et al. (2025) confirmed through meta-analysis that well-designed SEL programs directly influence social and academic outcomes. This study offers substantial evidence of the centrality of teachers and curriculum clarity in enhancing social-emotional learning. That's why this analysis invites us

to rethink integrative SEL models that not only teach second languages but also make emotions the driving force of conscious and authentic bilingual learning.

Jones & Kahn (2017) state that schools can design experiences that foster students' holistic development, which is valid and necessary through their book *“The Evidence Base for How We Learn.”* The document emphasizes that institutional culture and climate promote the integration of SEL with academics, the idea that families and other formal actors (e.g., the community) enhance social-emotional learning resonates deeply in bilingual and multicultural contexts. However, we disagree that while there is consensus on integrating SEL, the report offers little guidance on how to do so in the curriculum, especially in bilingual classrooms. There is a lack of clarity regarding concrete examples, activity structures, or the time required for effective integration.

Candelier et al. (2023) emphasized that classroom design and inclusive practices in bilingual contexts enhance language acquisition and motivation, though often without attention to emotional variables.

Durán Martínez et al. (2024) showed how institutional support and teacher perceptions influence inclusive bilingual practices, with an urgent need to address the emotional dimension.

Nguyen and Romero (2023) explore how bilingual children develop emotional understanding within culturally diverse contexts. The authors argue that the emotional benefits of bilingualism do not emerge automatically; instead, they require intentional pedagogical strategies and teacher guidance in order to foster significant emotional growth. In the context of this study, their perspective is fundamental, as it emphasizes that bilingual learning environments should be designed not only to support language acquisition, but also to enhance children's emotional awareness. Exposure to multiple languages and cultures can promote empathy, but only when it

is accompanied by teaching practices that allow students to recognize, express, and manage their emotions. This reinforces the need for teachers to act as emotional mediators in bilingual classrooms.

Ruiz and Delgado (2022) argue that emotional intelligence must be an intentional component of bilingual education, as it plays a crucial role in increasing learner engagement and resilience in the face of linguistic challenges. Unlike authors who assume that bilingual exposure alone develops emotional intelligence, they insist that emotional skills must be explicitly taught and reinforced by educators. This approach contributes directly to the present research, since it proposes that teaching grammar and vocabulary is not enough. An effective bilingual environment must develop emotionally resilient students—learners who can manage stress, build positive relationships, and persist through frustration. In this sense, emotional intelligence strengthens not only academic performance but also the social fabric of the learning community.

Key Concepts that guide the study

Social-emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning refers to the development of skills to manage emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020). Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory (1995) further reinforces this idea, suggesting that emotional skills like empathy, self-regulation, and motivation are foundational for personal growth and academic achievement. SEL is more effective when embedded across learning environments—through

peer collaboration, adult interaction, and reflective practices (Skaar & Townsley, 2025; Shi et al., 2025).

This reinforces the idea that SEL not only improves individual well-being but also contributes to more inclusive, safe, and equitable school environments (Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In her research, she has promoted the implementation of SEL in multicultural and multilingual schools, recognizing that emotions and empathy are universal elements that can connect students regardless of language. That's why as future leaders in bilingual learning environments; we discover in Kimberly Schonert-Reichl's work a profound inspiration for building school spaces where emotional development and academic learning are coherently integrated. Her research reaffirms that teaching a second language cannot be disconnected from the emotional, cultural, and social context of students.

Bilingual Learning Environment

A bilingual classroom is not merely a space where two languages coexist; it is a pedagogical ecosystem that promotes cognitive development, cultural identity, and meaningful communication. According to Candelier et al. (2023), these environments thrive when they incorporate inclusive strategies and when teachers are adequately trained. However, realities differ across institutions. In Colombia, public and private schools exhibit disparities in access to resources, immersion practices, and teacher preparedness.

The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provide solid ground to understand how learners' social context and interactions influence bilingual and emotional development.

Social-emotional skills

Stephanie M. Jones defines social-emotional skills as a set of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral competencies that enable children to regulate their emotions, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and navigate effectively in diverse social and cultural contexts (Jones, McGarrah, & Kahn, 2019). This concept is very similar to Linda Darling-Hammond's. Besides, according to her, these skills are critical to students' academic success, educational equity, and long-term well-being (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019).

Linda Darling-Hammond's contributions allow us to understand that teaching a second language goes beyond the linguistic component. Darling-Hammond's emphasis on equity and holistic development inspires us to design learning environments that not only teach content but also develop emotionally aware and socially responsible citizens. Implementing SEL in bilingual schools can be a powerful way to recognize diversity and transform realities.

Integration of SEL and Bilingualism

Despite the proven benefits of SEL and the potential of bilingual education, research shows these areas are often treated separately. Yet, as observed by Mercer (2016), emotional well-being and language learning are deeply interconnected. When SEL is intentionally incorporated into bilingual settings, learners show improved motivation, classroom engagement, and self-identity.

Durán et al. (2024) point out that inclusive practices, when supported by institutional policies and teacher training, empower students regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. Nonetheless, socio-emotional aspects remain underexplored in the structure of bilingual

classrooms. Inclusion must be embedded from the design of the learning environment itself—through respect for mother tongues, safe spaces for expression, and adaptable teaching methods.

Emotional Intelligence

According to Petrides and Furnham (2016), emotional intelligence refers to a set of emotional perceptions and abilities that determine how individuals interpret, regulate, and respond to emotional information. This includes competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal relationship management.

In bilingual educational settings, this ability becomes especially relevant, as students face not only linguistic challenges but also emotional ones—such as fear of making mistakes, exposure to peer judgment, or pressure to meet academic expectations. Well-developed emotional intelligence enables students to handle frustration, stay motivated, and build healthy relationships in linguistically diverse contexts. Therefore, it is essential that bilingual classrooms go beyond grammar and vocabulary, promoting emotionally safe, empathetic, and respectful learning spaces where students feel valued, accompanied, and unafraid of making mistakes.

Inclusive Bilingual Pedagogy

Inclusive bilingual pedagogy, as defined by Durán Martínez et al. (2024), encompasses teaching strategies that address the diversity of students in bilingual settings, promoting equitable access to both academic content and the language of instruction, without neglecting emotional well-being.

This pedagogical approach is essential for this study, as it highlights that teaching in two languages also means creating spaces where every student—regardless of their level,

background, or prior skills—feels recognized and supported. Inclusion is not simply integration; it is adaptation: adjusting the pace, acknowledging individual learning paths, and validating mistakes as part of the process. From a socio-emotional perspective, this type of pedagogy can reduce anxiety, boost self-esteem, and foster empathy among peers. By prioritizing inclusion, we build more humane classrooms where learning a foreign language becomes not a source of frustration, but an opportunity for emotional and social growth. This concept aligns directly with the purpose of this research, which seeks to understand how socio-emotional factors influence bilingual learning environments in primary education.

Bilingual Learning Environment

According to Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2014), a bilingual learning environment is one that combines academic content with language development in an integrated way, fostering meaningful learning and authentic communication in more than one language. Candelier, Bernaus, and Frigols (2023) further define it as not only a linguistic space, but also a cultural and emotional one—where inclusion, participation, and the formation of multicultural identities are encouraged.

However, a true bilingual environment is not simply about using two languages in the classroom. Its value lies in how it facilitates interaction, respect for diversity, and the cognitive and emotional growth of students. In Colombia, where educational conditions are as diverse as its regions, this concept must be adapted to the sociocultural realities of each school. Often, students lack equal access to immersion experiences or qualified bilingual educators.

Therefore, an effective bilingual learning environment must also be emotionally safe, culturally responsive, and pedagogically flexible. It must be a space where mistakes are not

punished but embraced as part of learning; where the mother tongue is not seen as a barrier, but as a bridge; and where every student, regardless of background, can express themselves, build knowledge, and feel a sense of belonging. This concept is essential to the present study, as it connects directly to the impact that socio-emotional factors have on motivation, academic performance, and identity formation in bilingual primary classrooms.

Although both SEL and bilingual education have been widely studied, there is a lack of integrated analysis regarding how social-emotional factors shape the bilingual learning experience, especially in primary education. This research addresses that gap by investigating how emotional intelligence, social inclusion, and learning environments intertwine to influence bilingual students' performance and well-being.

The theoretical framework of this research weaves together the key concepts and scholarly perspectives that reveal a central truth: language learning cannot be separated from emotional life. Emotional intelligence, inclusive pedagogy, and the structure of bilingual environments shape not only how primary students acquire a second language, but also how they understand themselves within the learning process.

Bilingualism and emotional development do not travel parallel paths; they intersect, influence, and nourish each other. In classrooms where socio-emotional needs are ignored, students may experience anxiety, silence, and a fragile sense of belonging. Yet, when emotional well-being becomes part of the pedagogical intention—through inclusive practices, explicit SEL strategies, and environments that honor diversity—students grow with confidence, resilience, and authentic engagement.

This research seeks to explore the intersection where language, emotion, identity, and inclusion coexist within bilingual learning environments. Understanding the social-emotional dimension of bilingual education is essential to analyze how these factors influence students' experiences and learning processes in the classroom. This study focuses on how social-emotional factors shape ninth-grade students' participation and development in a bilingual learning environment.

Research Question

From this background, this study seeks to comprehend and answer the following research question: What are the social-emotional factors that can act either as barriers or bridges to bilingual learning environments?



OBJECTIVES

General objective

Determine the social-emotional factors that can act either as barriers or bridges to bilingual learning environments.

Specific Objectives

Characterize the social factors that shape the learning environment of ninth graders.

Explore the students' perceptions about emotional factors that shape the learning environment of ninth graders.

Analyze the influence of socio-emotional factors in the learning environment of ninth graders.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study was based on a qualitative methodological perspective and was framed within an interpretive paradigm (Flick, 2007). From this standpoint, reality was understood as a social construction built through the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of participants. The qualitative approach was selected because the purpose of the study was to describe and interpret the influence of socio-emotional factors within a bilingual learning environment, a phenomenon that required accessing subjective experiences and contextual dynamics rather than measuring variables quantitatively.

As Flick (2015) explains, qualitative research seeks to understand how and why social processes occur, prioritizing depth over generalization. Therefore, this approach was appropriate for exploring the ways socio-emotional factors shaped the learning environment of ninth-grade students in a public school.

Research Design

The study was developed through a case study design, which allowed for an in-depth examination of a single bounded system: a ninth-grade group from a public school. This design was chosen because socio-emotional factors emerged uniquely within the social, linguistic, and emotional dynamics of this specific group. According to Flick (2018), case studies enable researchers to understand a phenomenon holistically within its natural context.

The methodological design followed eight key components that guided the research process. First, the qualitative interpretive approach was defined and justified, as it allowed the

researchers to understand the meanings and experiences that students and the teacher attributed to socio-emotional factors in the bilingual classroom. Second, the research problem and objectives were established, based on the central question concerning the influence of these factors on ninth graders' learning environment.

Third, the case was selected and delimited, corresponding to a public-school ninth-grade group chosen intentionally due to its participation in a bilingual education process and the relevance of socio-emotional dynamics during adolescence. Following this, the research plan was designed as a flexible and adaptive process, allowing adjustments as data collection progressed. Fifth, the participants and sampling strategy were defined; a purposeful sampling approach was used to select individuals directly involved in the bilingual setting and capable of providing meaningful information.

Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were employed to obtain a broad and diverse understanding of the phenomenon. After data collection, analysis and interpretation were conducted through open, axial, and selective coding, following Flick's analytical orientation. Finally, ethical considerations were addressed throughout the entire study, ensuring the protection, confidentiality, and well-being of the participants.

Context and Participants

The target population of this study consists of the Madre Caridad Brader Educational Institution students. This is an official school administered by the Sisters of the Franciscan Community of Mary Immaculate and located in the municipality of Rosas, Cauca, Colombia. Rosas is about 40 kms south of the capital city, Popayan, on the Pan-American Highway. The institution is a co-educational school operating under the Colombian Calendar A system and is

recognized in the region for its academic quality and its emphasis on the comprehensive and commercial technical training of its students. The institution offers both primary and secondary education and maintains an articulation program with SENA (National Learning Service), which provides students with opportunities for technical and vocational development.

Nowadays, the institution has 268 enrolled students. Among them, 154 students belong to the secondary education level, including 77 girls and 77 boys. This balanced gender distribution reflects a diverse students' group and contributes to varied learning dynamics that enrich pedagogical processes within the classroom.

Regarding foreign language learning, the institution follows a basic English curriculum aligned with national educational regulations established by the Colombian Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, in 2022 the institution took part in the regional program "Cauca Bilingüe," promoted by the Government of Cauca, which aimed to strengthen English language education over a period of two years. This initiative was mainly directed toward primary school teachers and secondary school teachers interested in improving their English proficiency. The program included a basic English training course, the administration of an English proficiency test with official certification, a two-week English immersion program for both teachers and tenth-grade students, and the provision of educational materials developed by the National Ministry of Education (MEN).

English instruction at the institution follows the official time allocation established by the Ministry of Education. Primary school students get two hours of English classes per week, distributed in two 50-minute periods. At the secondary level, the distribution consists of three hours per week for grades sixth, seventh, and eighth, which are distributed in a two hours class

and an hour one. Two hours per week for grades ninth and tenth; and three hours per week for grade eleventh. The third hour assigned to grade eleventh was intended to be implemented within the extended schedule known as “Jornada Única” or “Technical Development.” However, this schedule has not been fully implemented due to logistical limitations, particularly the absence of school meal services and school transportation. Besides this, during the last four years, the current mayor has been developing a program for young people to assure a place in the public university, in this case the University of Cauca, since getting a spot there has become a very difficult possibility. This program has been developed during the academic journey, which takes at least two or three weeks per month. During that time, they focus their efforts just on one subject according to the plan, but, unfortunately, they forget about the others.

In terms of classroom participation, most students attend English classes regularly and actively engage in in-class activities. However, they tend to display a considerable degree of shyness when participating in extracurricular or out-of-class activities. As a result, such activities sometimes generate stress rather than fostering a dynamic and collaborative learning environment.

The teaching staff of the institution consists of 15 teachers in total, including six teachers responsible for primary education and nine specialized teachers responsible for secondary education. Notably, there is only one English teacher serving the entire institution, which represents an important contextual factor influencing the teaching and learning process of the foreign language.

The infrastructure of Madre Caridad Brader Educational Institution also constitutes a significant element of the learning environment. The school has small classrooms, a physical

library equipped with a collection of books provided by the National Ministry of Education, a STEAM classroom, an additional STEAM display screen, one television in each classroom, two video projectors, a computer laboratory, three sound booths, a small green area, and a central courtyard. These resources are intended to support both the well-being of the educational community and effective learning processes. However, several factors limit their optimal use, including students' limited sense of responsibility toward institutional resources, administrative restrictions regarding the use of technological equipment, unstable electricity supply, and limited internet connectivity.

For the purposes of this study, the population considered consisted of 28 ninth-grade students. For data collection and analysis, a 15% sample of this population was selected, corresponding to six students. This sample was taken randomly selected in order to ensure an adequate representation and to obtain relevant information regarding the factors influencing the teaching and learning of English within this educational context.

Instruments

For this study, two instruments were designed and applied for data collection and are described below, in accordance with the objectives previously established.

Classroom observation

The first, an observation format ([Appendix 1.](#)) was the main qualitative research instrument used in this study. According to Flick (2018), observation is an essential technique in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to access the participants' natural environment and to understand the meanings they construct through their actions and

interactions. This makes it particularly suitable for educational contexts, where social, emotional, and linguistic behaviors emerge naturally during classroom activities. In this study, observation was used to collect direct information about the social, emotional, and linguistic dynamics present in a bilingual learning environment with primary students. The main objective of this instrument was to characterize the social and emotional factors that shape the classroom atmosphere and influence students' participation and use of English, without interfering with the natural learning process.

To achieve this purpose, a structured observation guide was designed. This guide allowed the systematic recording of behaviors, interactions, and attitudes observed during English lessons. The structure of the instrument ensured data organization and authenticity by focusing on predefined categories relevant to bilingual learning. The observation guide included several key categories. Motivation was considered to identify students' interest and willingness to participate in activities conducted in English. Self-confidence was included to observe the level of security with which students use the foreign language, particularly during oral interactions and tasks requiring linguistic production. Empathy was also observed, understood as students' ability to demonstrate respect, understanding, and support toward their peers, contributing to a positive classroom climate.

Additionally, the category of social interaction focused on how students relate to one another, collaborate during bilingual activities, and construct shared meanings. Emotional expression was included to identify visible emotions such as enthusiasm, frustration, shyness, or joy, and to analyze how these emotions influence participation and the use of English. Communication strategies were also observed, including the use of gestures, paraphrasing, code-

switching between English and the mother tongue, or requests for assistance when facing linguistic difficulties.

Finally, teacher–student interaction was incorporated as a key category to record how the teacher guides, supports, and encourages the use of English in the classroom. This dimension was essential for understanding the teacher’s role in fostering a supportive bilingual learning environment and promoting active student participation.

Semi-Structured Interview

Secondly, a semi-structured interview format ([Appendix 2.](#)) was used as one of the qualitative research instruments in this study. The participants included the English teacher and ninth-grade students. This instrument was selected because it allows the collection of in-depth information about participants’ perceptions, emotions, and personal experiences related to the English learning process. The main purpose of the interview was to explore students’ perceptions of socio-emotional dynamics in the English classroom and the role of the mother tongue (Spanish) in their learning process. Through this instrument, the researcher sought to understand how students feel during English lessons, how classroom interactions influence their learning, and when and why they integrate their mother tongue as a support strategy.

The interview was designed using a semi-structured format, which combines pre-established guiding questions with the flexibility to explore emerging ideas in greater depth. This format allowed the researcher to maintain coherence with the research objectives while also encouraging students to freely express their thoughts and emotions. Sample questions included: “*How do you feel in the English class?*” and “*When and why do you integrate the mother tongue into your English learning process?*”

The questions were organized around three main dimensions of the study. First, questions related to students' emotional responses to learning English were included, focusing on feelings such as confidence, nervousness, frustration, or motivation during classroom activities. Second, a set of questions addressed classroom dynamics, particularly students' perceptions of teacher support when facing difficulties or making mistakes. Finally, a third group of questions explored the role of the mother tongue as a pedagogical and socio-emotional resource that may facilitate comprehension and emotional security in the English classroom.

This instrument is supported by qualitative research principles, as semi-structured interviews allow participants to assign meaning to their experiences using their own words. As a result, the interview provided rich qualitative data that contributed to the analysis of the socio-emotional component of the learning environment and the potential role of the mother tongue in fostering inclusive and emotionally supportive English classrooms.

Data collection methods

To carry out the data collection for this research project, the students were informed about this study and about the need to select a sample from among them. They knew that the selection of the sample would be like a lottery. Actually, to make the selection, what the researcher had into account was the place where they live. So, the nearer they lived to the school, the better candidates would be to answer the interview. They were also asked to inform their parents to obtain their signatures on the informed consent forms. ([Annex 2.](#)) They were given two days for that, but they were so motivated to be part of the process that by the next day, all of

them had handed out the consent form duly completed. They were also told that the process would involve classroom observation and an interview.

The classroom observation ([Appendix 3.](#)) was conducted one week before the scheduled period for the final assessments. The students had previously been informed about the research process; however, they were not told the exact date of the classroom observation so that they would not alter their usual behavior. From the very beginning, the research was going to be carried out in a private school in Bucaramanga, but due to the denial of permission there, we had to change not only the context but also most of the data collected for this work. For that reason, this observation was carried out at the end of the third period, which is the last part of the school year. Although the students were informed about the process, they didn't know when it would be done. That's why the students' behavior didn't change, neither their motivation nor their participation. From what has been observed of them, English is a sort of a monster, so they are very afraid of making mistakes. However, an effort has been made to create a more pleasant and comfortable environment for them to learn English in a more fluently way.

The interviews ([Appendix 4.](#)) were conducted on November 18th and 19th, 2025-., also at the end of the last academic term. As the school was in final academic year activities, the interviews were applied in a fast way in the moments when the students were free. The first three students were called one by one to a quiet place where they could be able to answer the questions in a comfortable way. As most of the classrooms were occupied, the interviews were carried out in the restaurant, the play zone, and the parking zone. There, the first explanation of the purpose and procedure of the interview was given. the researcher tried to be supportive for them and confident, so they calmed down when they learned they could speak in Spanish and that it wasn't going to be an exam. The second day of the interviews, all of them had many things to do, so the

researcher found a space in their timetable when they could join. Once in their classroom, the researcher explained again the interview purpose and the process due to them being together. So, the researcher had to ask the questions very quickly and they answered them in the same way. There were some of their classmates hanging around and one of them started kidding one of the interviewees. Because the researcher was recording the interview, she had to call his attention and make some face gestures for them to go out.



DATA ANALYSIS

For this research, a thematic analysis was conducted following the phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2016). First, the researchers carried out careful reading of the transcripts and observation format notes. Subsequently, codes were identified through an inductive process, emerging directly from the collected data. In this case, the researchers identified a total of nine codes: negative feelings or sensations, positive feelings or sensations, individual work strategies, group work, understands easily, does not understand easily, comprehension, emotion, and work strategies. These codes were constructed based on a detailed reading of the interviews, in which each researcher performed an individual coding process, allowing an initial approach from different analytical perspectives.

After this individual exercise, the researchers held a virtual meeting in which the identified codes were compared, discussed, and organized. This process made it possible to group the information, unify criteria, and strengthen the validity of the analysis, thus consolidating a more structured and coherent coding system aligned with the objectives of the study. Based on this organization, the next phase of the analysis was carried out, which consisted of identifying and constructing themes that group and give meaning to the previously established codes, allowing a deeper understanding of the influence of socioemotional factors on English learning.

In the final review, three codes were established: **Comprehension**, **Emotion**, and **Forms of work**. A different color was assigned to identify each relation. Blue for comprehension, green for emotion, and yellow for forms of work.

Comprehension

The results obtained from the observation guide are strengthened and explained through the interviews conducted with the students. In the observation guide, specifically in the category “*self-confidence*”, it was identified that “*Most of them make too many mistakes, not only in pronunciation but also in grammar*”, which limits their communicative performance in English. Complementarily, in the category “*communication strategies*”, it was evidenced that “*Most of the students use facial expressions and L1*” as strategies to try to convey their ideas, which suggests difficulties in language comprehension and production.

This classroom situation coincides with the perceptions expressed by the students during the interviews. Some of them explicitly stated difficulties in understanding English, as evidenced in expressions such as “*no le entiendo muy bien al inglés*” (Student 1, Interview 1), “*me enredo mucho*” (Student 2, Interview 2), “*me pierdo mucho*”, and “*algunas palabras no las entiendo*” (Student 1, Interview 1). These responses help explain why, during the class, students resort to alternative communication strategies that were previously observed. Likewise, several students reported feeling “*confundidos*” (Student 1, Interview 1) or considered that the contents addressed “*son muy difíciles*” (Student 6, Interview 4), especially when the class is conducted entirely in English or when new topics are introduced. This aspect helps explain the low level of confidence observed in oral participation and reinforces the findings of the “*self-confidence*” category. Similarly, both the observation and the interviews show that the use of Spanish becomes a fundamental resource to facilitate comprehension. In the observation guide, the recurrent use of L1 as support was identified, which is confirmed by students, who state that “*en español es más fácil de entender*” (Student 2, Interview 2) and that “*con la explicación en español podemos*

entender cómo hacer las cosas mejor en inglés”. This demonstrates that the mother tongue acts as a key mediator in the language learning process. In addition, strategies such as asking classmates, requesting additional explanations, or relying on the dynamics proposed by the teacher reflect an active search by students to achieve better comprehension of English.

In this sense, comprehension is not limited solely to the ability to understand words or grammatical structures but rather is configured as a complex process that involves linguistic, pedagogical, and emotional factors. In this line, Nation (2014) states that comprehension in second language learning largely depends on the student’s prior knowledge level and the clarity of the input received, which directly influences their ability to actively participate in the classroom. Thus, the Comprehension code makes it evident that difficulties in understanding English directly influence students’ learning experiences, affecting their confidence, participation, and the way they interact with the language within the educational environment.

Emotion

The second code, **Emotion**, was identified based on the multiple emotional manifestations expressed by the students, evidenced both in the observation guide and in the interviews. In the observation, within the “*Self-confidence*” category, it was found that “*Most of the students get shy when they get the turn to speak*”. Likewise, in the “*Emotional expression*” category, it was observed that “*In general, the students have an anxiety attitude*”, which reflects the presence of emotions such as shyness and anxiety in the English classroom. Similarly, in the “*Emotional expression*” category, positive emotional manifestations were also recorded, as it was evidenced that “*There are some of the students who react with joy*” and that “*most of the students who take part in the class voluntarily, show a satisfactory reaction*”. These findings make it possible to

identify that, along with negative emotions, positive emotions are also present and influence the language learning process.

Regarding the interviews, students express a wide range of emotions toward learning English. On the one hand, negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, embarrassment, and frustration are identified, reflected in expressions such as “*me siento preocupado cuando hay exámenes*”, “*me siento nervioso y frustrado*”, or “*cuando es en el tablero me siento... da un poco de vergüenza o pena*” (Student 1, Interview 1), as well as “*me estreso y como que se me acelera el corazón*” (Student 5, Interview 4). Some students even report physical reactions associated with these emotions, such as trembling or voice breaking when participating in oral activities.

On the other hand, positive emotions associated with language learning also emerge, such as joy, satisfaction, and enjoyment of the class. Some students mention “*¡Me siento bien! Es divertido*” and state that “*la mayoría del tiempo es feliz la clase*” (Student 2, Interview 2), or express that they enjoy learning a new language, which shows that the English classroom can also be configured as an emotionally positive space. In this sense, from an institutional perspective, these findings highlight the importance of promoting pedagogical practices that strengthen the socio-emotional component within the English classroom. As stated by the Ministry of National Education (MEN, 2016), the development of socio-emotional competencies contributes to students’ well-being, participation, and learning processes. Therefore, the educational institution plays a fundamental role in establishing guidelines and learning environments that foster positive emotions, motivation, and students’ confidence when interacting in a foreign language.

Based on the findings of this study, emotions play a fundamental role in the English language learning process, as they directly influence students' willingness to participate and communicate in the classroom. Based on the findings obtained from the observation guide and the interviews, it is interpreted that emotions such as anxiety, shyness, and frustration can become barriers that limit oral participation and reinforce insecurity toward the use of English. However, the presence of positive emotions such as joy, satisfaction, and enjoyment of the class suggests that an emotionally favorable environment can enhance motivation and facilitate language learning. In summary, emotions play a fundamental role in the process of learning a foreign language, as they can facilitate or hinder students' participation and performance. According to MacIntyre (2017), emotions in second language learning directly influence students' willingness to communicate, as well as their levels of anxiety and confidence when using the language. Consequently, the Emotion code makes it evident that learning English is not only a cognitive process but also a deeply emotional one, in which factors such as anxiety, motivation, and confidence directly affect the way students interact with the language and participate in the classroom.

Forms of Work

The third code, **Forms of Work**, provides insight into how students relate to one another and how these interactional dynamics influence their English learning process. Rather than focusing exclusively on what students feel or understand, this code centers on how they learn together, highlighting everyday interactions that either support or, in some cases, create tension within classroom practices.

Data from the interviews reveal that students consistently rely on peer support as a strategy to cope with difficulties related to the language. Expressions such as (Student 1, Interview 1) “*le pregunto a una compañera que más o menos entiende*” or (Student 3, Interview 3) “*hacemos grupos y trabajamos mejor*” indicate that collaborative work becomes a key resource in the English classroom. In addition, several students report feeling comfortable within these dynamics, stating that (Student 1, Interview 1) “*no me siento mal cuando estamos así en grupo*” or that they form (Student 1, Interview 1) “*muy buen equipo*”. These perceptions reflect a positive view of group work and peer support as facilitators of learning. Furthermore, the presence of group activities mediated by play and interaction is highlighted by students as particularly engaging and participatory learning experiences. Some students mention participating in (Student 2, Interview 2) “*actividades entre todos, juegos*” or (Student 3, Interview 3) “*juegos de inglés como para divertirnos más y convivir*”. These practices not only facilitate language learning but also strengthen social bonds among students, contributing to the construction of a more supportive and interactive classroom environment.

However, when these findings are contrasted with the data obtained from the observation guide, certain tensions within these forms of work become evident. Although, in the “*Motivation*” category, it was observed that “*students were willing to take part in the activities proposed*”, the “*Empathy*” category revealed that “*there is a minimum of empathy*” and that “*most of the students start laughing when listening to the others trying to speak in English*”. These behaviors, also recorded in the “*Social interaction*” category as “*nervous laughing*”, contribute to an ambiguous classroom atmosphere. In this context, peer support coexists with attitudes that may undermine students’ confidence and limit oral participation, particularly among those who experience greater difficulties when expressing themselves in English.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings invite reflection on the teacher's role as a mediator of classroom interaction and collaborative work. While group work and collaborative activities offer valuable opportunities to promote peer interaction and shared learning, these dynamics do not regulate themselves automatically. Instead, they require intentional pedagogical guidance that fosters respect, empathy, and the acceptance of error as a natural component of the learning process. Dörnyei (2020) emphasizes that the quality of social interactions and the overall classroom climate directly influence students' motivation and willingness to communicate in a foreign language.

In this sense, the teacher plays a central role not only in designing collaborative activities but also in guiding and regulating the relationships that emerge within them, establishing clear norms of coexistence and encouraging attitudes of mutual support. Teacher intervention is therefore essential to ensure that group work becomes a safe space where students feel supported when using English and where errors are understood as opportunities for learning rather than reasons for ridicule or exclusion.

From this perspective, forms of work are not neutral; instead, they are imbued with social and emotional meanings that directly shape the language learning experience. According to Dörnyei (2020), peer interaction and classroom climate are decisive factors in foreign language learning, as they influence motivation, participation, and willingness to communicate. Consequently, this code highlights that group work and peer interaction can function either as a strength or as a barrier in the English classroom, depending on how these spaces are constructed whether as networks of support where error is part of learning, or as environments in which

laughter and insecurity silence the voices of those who are still developing their communicative competence in the foreign language.

Emerging themes

This revision from the codes made it possible to identify a series of significant patterns related to the English teaching and learning process, which are grouped into three main themes: *the students' ability to interpret, process, and make sense of the English language within the classroom, Emotions and how they influence the learning process of ninth-grade students, and Collaborative Work and Student Interaction in the English Classroom.*

These themes do not appear in isolation; rather, they are constantly intertwined within the classroom, shaping students' learning experiences. In this sense, the second phase of the analysis consisted of selecting themes derived from the coding process, which allowed the organization and grouping of information into broader and more meaningful categories. Based on these categories, an interpretive analysis is developed in order to understand how socio-emotional factors influence the way students interact with the language, participate in activities, and construct their learning process.

In relation to these themes, the first one that emerges is **the students' ability to interpret, process, and make sense of the English language within the classroom**. This does not refer solely to recognizing words or grammatical structures, but to achieving a meaningful connection with the content that enables students to participate, interact, and progress in their learning process. Based on the findings obtained, the students' ability to interpret, process, and make sense of the English language within the classroom is configured as a constant challenge for students, especially when the language is presented in a fully immersive manner. In this

regard, Lightbown and Spada (2017) point out that although continuous exposure to the language can foster learning, it must be accompanied by strategies that facilitate comprehension; otherwise, it may generate confusion and limit students' participation. This situation not only affects understanding of content, but also impacts students' confidence and willingness to participate, showing that comprehension goes beyond the cognitive dimension and is directly related to emotional and social factors.

Along the same lines, Nation (2014) states that the students' ability to interpret, process, and make sense of the English language within the classroom in a foreign language is closely linked to students' prior knowledge and to the clarity of the input they receive. When this input is not appropriate, gaps are created that hinder active participation and meaningful learning. This is reflected in the strategies used by students, who resort to the use of Spanish, peer support, or repetition by the teacher as means to achieve comprehension. From the teaching perspective, these findings imply the need to design pedagogical strategies that facilitate access to meaning, such as the intentional use of the mother tongue, the implementation of dynamic activities, and the adaptation of language to students' proficiency levels. For students, interpreting, processing and making sense of the English language represents a progressive process that requires confidence, participation, and a willingness to accept error as part of learning.

Finally, from a broader perspective, interpreting, processing, and making sense of the English language also has implications for students' personal development, as it influences the way they perceive themselves within the educational process. When they manage to understand, they feel capable; when they do not, they may experience frustration or insecurity. In this sense, interpreting, processing, and making sense of the English language is not only about learning a

language, but also about building confidence and finding a space where it is possible to learn without fear.

Emotions and how they influence the learning process of ninth-grade students.

This theme shows that socio-emotional factors play a fundamental role in the learning process, as they directly influence the way students process, understand, and retain information. In this sense, Immordino-Yang (2016, p.18) states that “*we literally think with our emotions*”, which highlights the close relationship between cognition and emotion. From this perspective, learning English is configured as a space where both positive and negative feelings converge, directly affecting students’ disposition, participation, and performance.

This theme emerges from the grouping of the codes: negative feelings and sensations and positive feelings and sensations. In the first group, emotions such as fear of making mistakes, embarrassment when participating in a foreign language, frustration due to difficulties in comprehension, and insecurity when expressing oneself are identified. On the other hand, positive emotions include motivation, confidence, satisfaction when achieving communication, and enthusiasm toward meaningful activities. The coexistence of these codes allowed for the identification of a pattern of emotional ambivalence that characterizes the experience of learning English in this context.

When analyzing these findings, it becomes evident that negative emotions can act as barriers that limit students’ active participation, especially in rural contexts where access to resources and exposure to the language are limited. However, these same emotions, when

properly supported, can be transformed into learning opportunities, promoting strategies such as peer support or the use of the mother tongue as a mediator for comprehension.

At this point, the mother tongue emerges as a key element within the socio-emotional component, as it allows students to feel more secure and understood throughout the learning process. The use of Spanish facilitates the expression of ideas, reduces anxiety, and strengthens confidence, acting as a bridge between the familiar and the new. In this way, the integration of the mother tongue fulfills not only a linguistic function but also an emotional one, by fostering a more inclusive and accessible learning environment.

On the other hand, positive emotions are associated with experiences of achievement, dynamic activities, and spaces for interaction where students feel valued. These emotions enhance participation and promote a more open attitude toward learning English, highlighting the importance of designing learning environments that foster emotional well-being.

As one student expressed, "*Sí, porque con la explicación en español podemos entender cómo hacer las cosas mejor en inglés,*" which reflects how the interaction between emotions and the mother tongue directly influences the learning process.

In conclusion, this theme demonstrates that socio-emotional factors have a significant influence on the learning environment of ninth-grade students, especially in rural contexts. Recognizing the role of emotions and the mother tongue as a pedagogical ally is essential for

designing strategies that not only strengthen English learning but also promote students' confidence, participation, and overall well-being.

The third theme, **Collaborative Work and Student Interaction in the English Classroom**, refers to the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and relationships among students shape the learning process within the English classroom. Rather than focusing solely on the organization of activities, this theme allows for an understanding of how students construct knowledge collectively, negotiate meaning, and actively engage in their learning process.

Based on the findings, learning a foreign language is not an individual process, but a social experience in which students rely on one another to progress. Group work, peer support, and participation in shared activities become key elements that foster confidence and facilitate language comprehension. In this sense, collaboration functions as a bridge that connects understanding with active participation in the classroom. However, these forms of work also involve certain challenges. In some cases, interactions among students may generate discomfort or insecurity, particularly when reactions such as laughter or judgment arise in response to their classmates' performance. This highlights that the classroom environment is not always entirely safe, and that peer relationships can influence learning in both positive and negative ways. From this perspective, collaborative work and student interaction in the English classroom play a central role in the learning experience. According to Dörnyei (2020), the social dimension of foreign language learning directly influences students' motivation and their willingness to communicate. Consequently, supportive interactions can enhance participation and reduce anxiety, while negative dynamics may create barriers that limit learning. From a teaching perspective, these findings suggest the need to foster learning environments in which interaction

is not only spontaneous but also guided by respect, empathy, and cooperation. For students, these forms of work represent an opportunity not only to learn the language but also to develop social skills, strengthen confidence, and take an active role in the classroom.

Finally, from a broader perspective, collaborative work and student interaction in the English classroom invite us to understand education as a collective process in which learning also involves relating to others. In this sense, the classroom becomes a space where students not only acquire a language but also learn how to coexist, build trust, and grow together.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to address the research question: What are the social-emotional factors that can act either as barriers or bridges to bilingual learning environments? To fulfill this purpose, the analysis focused on three key themes: collaborative work and student interaction, emotions and their influence on the learning process, and students' ability to interpret, process, and make sense of the English language within the classroom.

The findings reveal that social-emotional factors do not operate as fixed or static conditions; rather, they function dynamically, acting as either barriers or bridges depending on how they are experienced and pedagogically mediated within the classroom. Elements such as peer interaction, emotional climate, self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes emerged as central factors shaping students' engagement with the English language. More specifically, collaborative dynamics and positive peer relationships functioned as bridges when they fostered trust, participation, and shared meaning-making. In contrast, negative interaction patterns such as ridicule, lack of empathy, or insufficient peer support acted as barriers that limited students' willingness to communicate and actively engage with the language. Similarly, emotions played a decisive role in learning: confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging enhanced learning opportunities, whereas anxiety, insecurity, and fear hindered both participation and comprehension. Furthermore, the ability to interpret and process the English language was closely linked to these social-emotional conditions. Students demonstrated greater cognitive engagement and meaning making when they felt emotionally safe and socially supported, reinforcing the understanding of bilingual learning as not only a cognitive process, but a socially and emotionally situated experience.

Therefore, in direct response to the research question, this study concludes that social-emotional factors function as bridges when they promote safe, collaborative, and supportive learning environments, and as barriers when they generate fear, disconnection, or negative interaction patterns. The following conclusions synthesize these findings and discuss their implications for the design of more inclusive and effective bilingual learning environments.

Regarding the first specific objective, which aimed to characterize the social factors that shape the learning environment of ninth-grade students, the findings indicate that peer interaction and collaborative work play a central role in students' bilingual learning experiences. The classroom emerges as a social space where learning is continuously mediated through relationships, shared practices, and interpersonal dynamics.

The results show that collaborative work functions as a meaningful bridge to learning when it promotes cooperation, mutual support, and shared responsibility. Group activities allowed students to rely on their peers to clarify doubts, negotiate meaning, and feel accompanied throughout the learning process. In these contexts, interaction fostered greater participation, reduced anxiety, and increased confidence when using English, supporting Dörnyei's (2020) view that positive classroom interaction and social climate enhance learners' motivation and willingness to communicate. However, the findings also reveal that social interaction can become a barrier when it is characterized by ridicule, nervous laughter, or a lack of empathy. These interactional patterns negatively affected students' emotional security and limited their willingness to participate orally, reinforcing fear of making mistakes. As Dörnyei (2020) suggests, when classroom interactions are perceived as threatening rather than supportive, they may reduce engagement and discourage active participation.

Consequently, this objective confirms that social factors shape the bilingual learning environment in dynamic and sometimes contradictory ways. Peer interaction can either support or hinder language learning depending on how relationships are guided within the classroom. This highlights the need for intentional pedagogical mediation to ensure that collaborative work becomes a space of respect, empathy, and emotional safety, rather than a source of insecurity or exclusion.

Regarding the second specific objective, which sought to explore students' perceptions about the emotional factors shaping the learning environment of ninth graders, the findings confirm that emotions play a decisive and visible role in how students experience bilingual learning. Students' perceptions reveal that learning English is strongly influenced by their emotional states, particularly in relation to confidence, anxiety, motivation, and fear of making mistakes. The study shows that negative emotions such as nervousness, embarrassment, stress, and frustration are commonly associated with oral participation, evaluation moments, and situations in which English is used without sufficient emotional or linguistic support. These students perceive such emotions as limiting their ability to express themselves freely, often leading to silence, hesitation, or avoidance of participation. This perception aligns with MacIntyre's (2017) assertion that anxiety and low emotional security significantly reduce learners' willingness to communicate in a second language.

At the same time, students also perceive positive emotions such as enjoyment, satisfaction, and motivation when they feel supported by the teacher, understood through the use of the mother tongue, or engaged in dynamic and interactive activities. These emotional experiences enhance students' confidence and promote a more positive attitude toward English learning. As Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) emphasize, emotions are not secondary to

learning but rather central to cognitive engagement, as emotional well-being enables students to process and retain new information meaningfully. Students' perceptions further highlight the importance of emotional safety in the classroom. Feeling accepted, accompanied, and free from judgment allows learners to take linguistic risks and engage more actively in the learning process. Conversely, when students perceive the environment as emotionally threatening, participation decreases regardless of their cognitive abilities. This confirms that emotions, as perceived by learners themselves, directly shape the quality of their bilingual learning experience.

In conclusion, this objective demonstrates that students are deeply aware of the emotional dimensions of their learning environment and recognize emotions as key factors that either hinder or facilitate their engagement with English. These findings reinforce the need for bilingual classrooms to intentionally incorporate socio-emotional support, ensuring that teaching practices address not only linguistic development but also students' emotional needs, perceptions, and well-being.

Regarding the third specific objective, which aimed to analyze the influence of socio-emotional factors in the learning environment of ninth-grade students, the findings demonstrate that these factors deeply shape how students participate, comprehend, and interact within the bilingual classroom. The results confirm that socio-emotional conditions influence not only students' emotional responses but also their cognitive engagement and use of the English language. The analysis revealed that comprehension, emotion, and forms of work are closely interconnected. Difficulties in interpreting and processing the English language were frequently accompanied by emotional reactions such as anxiety, insecurity, and frustration. These emotional responses, in turn, affected students' willingness to participate and take risks when

communicating in English. In this sense, comprehension cannot be understood as a purely linguistic process; rather, it is strongly mediated by students' emotional states and the social context in which learning occurs. As Nation (2014) states, meaningful comprehension in a foreign language depends not only on the clarity of input but also on learners' confidence and emotional readiness to engage with the language.

At the same time, the study showed that socio-emotional factors can positively influence the learning environment when emotional support, peer collaboration, and the use of the mother tongue are intentionally integrated into classroom practices. The strategic use of Spanish functioned as both a cognitive and emotional resource, reducing anxiety and enabling students to access meaning more effectively. Similarly, collaborative work promoted engagement when supported by empathy and respect, fostering a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. These findings align with Lightbown and Spada (2017), who argue that language learning flourishes when instructional practices are responsive to learners' emotional and social needs. However, when socio-emotional factors were neglected such as when students feared making mistakes or felt exposed to negative peer reactions, the learning environment became restrictive. In these situations, emotional insecurity limited participation, reduced confidence, and hindered students' ability to use English meaningfully. This confirms that socio-emotional factors do not operate in isolation but actively shape students' experiences and learning outcomes within the bilingual classroom.

In conclusion, this objective demonstrates that socio-emotional factors exert a significant influence on the learning environment of ninth graders by mediating comprehension, participation, and interaction. When these factors are addressed through inclusive, emotionally supportive, and socially responsive practices, they enhance students' engagement and language

development. Conversely, when ignored, they become barriers that limit learning opportunities. These findings reinforce the need to view bilingual learning environments as spaces where emotional, social, and academic dimensions must be intentionally integrated.

In relation to the general objective, which sought to determine the social-emotional factors that can act either as barriers or bridges to bilingual learning environments, this study concludes that socio-emotional dimensions are fundamental in shaping students' experiences and outcomes in English learning contexts. The findings confirm that bilingual learning environments cannot be understood solely through linguistic or methodological lenses, but must be approached as complex spaces where emotional, social, and cognitive processes interact continuously. The analysis demonstrates that factors such as emotions, peer interaction, classroom climate, self-confidence, and pedagogical mediation significantly influence how students engage with the English language. These factors function as bridges when they foster emotional safety, collaboration, empathy, and supportive relationships, enabling students to participate actively, take risks, and construct meaning in the target language. Conversely, they become barriers when they generate fear of making mistakes, anxiety, emotional disconnection, or negative interaction patterns that limit participation and reduce confidence. This study also highlights that comprehension, emotional well-being, and social interaction are deeply interconnected. Students' ability to interpret and process English is strongly influenced by how emotionally supported and socially accepted they feel in the classroom. In this sense, learning a second language emerges not as an isolated cognitive endeavor, but as a socially and emotionally situated process that requires intentional pedagogical support.

Ultimately, the achievement of the general objective reinforces the central idea that effective bilingual learning environments must intentionally integrate socio-emotional

considerations into instructional practices. Teachers play a key role as mediators who can transform emotional and social challenges into learning opportunities through inclusive strategies, respectful classroom dynamics, and the validation of students' emotional experiences. By acknowledging and addressing socio-emotional factors, bilingual education can move toward more humane, inclusive, and meaningful learning environments that support not only language development but also students' confidence, identity, and well-being.

Limitations of the Project

Despite the valuable insights generated by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted within a single educational institution and focused on a specific group of ninth-grade students, which limits the possibility of generalizing the findings to other bilingual learning environments or educational contexts. The socio-emotional dynamics observed are deeply influenced by the characteristics of this school, its rural setting, and its institutional conditions. Second, the sample size constituted a limitation. Although the qualitative case study approach prioritizes depth over representativeness, the participation of a small number of students may not fully capture the range of social-emotional experiences present in the entire ninth-grade population. As a result, some perspectives or emotional responses may not have been fully represented.

Another limitation relates to the time frame of data collection. Classroom observations and interviews were conducted toward the end of the academic year, a period marked by evaluations, academic pressure, and extracurricular obligations. These contextual factors may have influenced students' emotional states and participation, potentially affecting the data collected. A longer observation period could have allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of

how socio-emotional factors evolve over time. Additionally, logistical constraints influenced the data collection process. Interviews were conducted in different school spaces due to limited availability of private rooms, which may have affected students' comfort and openness during their responses. Although efforts were made to create a supportive atmosphere, external distractions or time constraints could have limited the depth of some answers.

Finally, the presence of a single English teacher for the entire institution represents both a contextual characteristic and a limitation. Teaching practices, emotional support strategies, and classroom dynamics were shaped by the pedagogical style of one teacher, making it difficult to compare different instructional approaches within the same context.

Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several directions for future research can be proposed. First, further studies could expand the sample size and include multiple educational institutions, both rural and urban, public and private, in order to compare socio-emotional dynamics across diverse bilingual learning environments. This would allow researchers to identify similarities and differences in how social-emotional factors influence bilingual learning under varied contextual conditions.

Longitudinal research is also recommended to examine how socio-emotional factors evolve over time and how they impact students' language development throughout different stages of schooling. Observing students across multiple academic periods would provide deeper insight into the long-term effects of emotional well-being, peer interaction, and classroom climate on bilingual learning processes. Future research could additionally explore the role of teachers' socio-emotional competencies in greater depth. Investigating how teacher training in

social-emotional learning influences classroom practices, student participation, and emotional safety may contribute to the design of more effective professional development programs for bilingual educators. Another promising line of research involves examining the intentional integration of the mother tongue as a socio-emotional and pedagogical resource in bilingual classrooms. Experimental or action research studies could analyze how strategic use of the first language supports emotional security, comprehension, and confidence, particularly among learners with lower proficiency levels.

Finally, future studies may consider incorporating the perspectives of families and school administration to better understand how broader institutional and community factors shape bilingual learning environments. Including these actors could enrich the analysis of how socio-emotional support extends beyond the classroom and contributes to more inclusive and sustainable bilingual education practices.

Pedagogical Reflection and Formative Contributions from Bilingual Learning Environments

Throughout my academic trajectory in the Master's program in Bilingual Learning Environments, it has become evident that teaching a foreign language is not limited to the development of linguistic skills. On the contrary, it involves recognizing that learning takes place within relationships, emotions, and experiences that shape the ways in which students approach the language. From this perspective, learning environments must be understood as living spaces where pedagogical and human dimensions are constantly intertwined. From this standpoint, a critical position emerges toward traditional practices that persist in the teaching of English. In

many educational contexts, especially in public institutions, the emphasis continues to be placed on grammar, vocabulary, and repetition, leaving emotional conditions in which students learn in the background. This reduced vision overlooks how factors such as anxiety, motivation, and confidence directly influence participation and the construction of knowledge.

As stated by Mary Helen Immordino-Yang (2016), emotions are not a complement to learning but its foundation. When students feel afraid of making mistakes or insecure when expressing themselves, the language ceases to be a possibility and becomes a barrier. Therefore, insisting on rigid environments where error is penalized limits not only linguistic learning but also students' personal development. This reflection connects directly with classroom experiences involving ninth-grade students and with the development of the research project entitled "Social-emotional factors influence in bilingual learning environments of ninth graders", through which it was possible to identify a wide range of emotions toward English learning. Some students show interest and willingness, while others experience frustration, boredom, or confusion, especially when they lack support that facilitates comprehension. These situations make it clear that learning does not occur under neutral conditions but is deeply influenced by what students feel at every moment.

Within this scenario, it becomes necessary to rethink the role of the mother tongue in the bilingual classroom. Far from being an obstacle, the strategic use of Spanish can function as a bridge that facilitates comprehension and reduces anxiety. Completely denying its use may generate disconnection and limit participation, whereas integrating it consciously allows for more accessible and meaningful learning. Likewise, contributions from social-emotional learning highlight the importance of developing skills such as self-regulation, empathy, and motivation within the classroom. As stated by CASEL (2020), these competencies not only support

students' well-being but also directly impact their academic performance. In bilingual contexts, these skills enable learners to face language challenges with greater confidence and willingness.

Based on these understandings, it becomes necessary to think about concrete actions that transform learning environments. This implies, first, building emotionally safe spaces where error is understood as a natural part of the learning process. It also involves designing more dynamic learning experiences that respond to students' needs and interests, promoting interaction, movement, and participation. Likewise, it is essential to recognize the importance of teacher mediation, not only as a transmitter of content but as a facilitator of meaningful experiences. This requires a more conscious awareness of what occurs in the classroom, where teaching is not limited to explaining but also involves accompanying, listening, and understanding.

In line with Rodríguez et al. (2023), bilingual learning environments should be conceived as comprehensive spaces that foster not only linguistic development but also the construction of meaning, identity, and a sense of belonging. From this perspective, transforming the classroom implies going beyond the available resources and focusing on how relationships and learning experiences are configured.

From this formative experience, the need to build more humane learning environments is recognized as spaces where students do not only learn a language but also find an environment in which they feel safe, heard, and valued. Ultimately, teaching a foreign language goes beyond transmitting words; it involves opening a space where learners can inhabit the learning process without fear, with confidence, and with the possibility of making mistakes. When this occurs, language ceases to be a demand and becomes a tool to understand the world and oneself.

A reflective journey: From challenges to transformation.

This document presents a joint reflection derived from our experience in the Maestría en Ambientes Bilingües de Aprendizaje (MABA) at Universidad Santo Tomás. This work brings together our individual perspectives to explore how the master's program and our respective research projects have transformed our understanding of learning environments, as well as our views on teaching and learning processes.

The development of this work made me possible to understand that Bilingual Learning Environments must be conceived as integral spaces where socio-emotional factors play a fundamental role.

I could conclude that the teacher should act as a facilitator of learning, promoting trust, and creating safe environments where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities.

Likewise, confidence is identified as a key element in improving student participation and learning.

Finally, the importance of integrating active methodologies and the critical use of technology is recognized, adapting to the conditions of the rural context in order to develop autonomous, participative, and confident students.



Appendixes

[Appendix 1.](#)

[Appendix 2.](#)

[Appendix 3.](#)

[Appendix 4.](#)

Annexes

[Annex 1.](#)

[Annex 2.](#)

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