

Proposal of Bilingual Strategies Based on Socio-Emotional Skills in a Learning Environment in a Social Outreach Center in Villavicencio.

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Abstract

This research project presents a qualitative case study on the integration of social-emotional skills into a bilingual learning environment in a Social Outreach center. The aim of the research was to propose bilingual strategies based on socio emotional skills for the implementation in English teaching processes, as well as to explore students' and teachers' perspectives regarding these skills. Data were collected from 17 students and 4 teachers through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. The data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. Results evidenced that socio-emotional practices such as activities oriented to the recognition of emotions, supportive interactions, and collaborative tasks were present in the classroom; however, these were applied unintentionally. The findings also revealed the presence of emotional and linguistic barriers, including anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-esteem, which limited students' participation and interaction. Furthermore, although teachers demonstrated a general understanding of social-emotional learning, they faced difficulties in integrating these practices into their teaching. In conclusion, the integration of socio-emotional skills into bilingual learning environments highlighted the need to design and implement structured bilingual strategies that address both socio emotional and linguistic challenges in the classroom.

Keywords: socio emotional learning (SEL), learning environment, socio emotional bilingual strategy.

Resumen

Este proyecto de investigación presenta un estudio de caso cualitativo, basado en la integración de habilidades socioemocionales en un ambiente bilingüe de aprendizaje de un centro de proyección social. El objetivo de la investigación fue la propuesta de estrategias bilingües orientadas en las habilidades socioemocionales para su implementación en los procesos de enseñanza del inglés, así como la exploración de las perspectivas de estudiantes y docentes con respecto a dichas habilidades. Los datos fueron recolectados con 17 estudiantes y 4 docentes mediante observación no participante, entrevistas semiestructuradas y cuestionarios. El análisis de los datos se realizó a través de un enfoque de análisis temático inductivo. Los resultados evidenciaron la presencia de actividades encaminadas al reconocimiento de emociones, interacciones de acompañamiento y tareas colaborativas, las cuales estaban presentes en el aula; sin embargo, estas se aplicaban de manera no intencional. Los hallazgos también revelaron la presencia de barreras emocionales y lingüísticas, incluyendo ansiedad, miedo a cometer errores y baja autoestima, las cuales limitaron la participación e interacción de los estudiantes. Asimismo, aunque los docentes demostraron una comprensión general del aprendizaje socioemocional, enfrentaron dificultades para integrar estas prácticas de manera constante en su enseñanza. En conclusión, la integración de habilidades socioemocionales en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés evidenció la necesidad de diseñar e implementar estrategias bilingües estructuradas que aborden de forma efectiva tanto los desafíos emocionales como los lingüísticos dentro del aula.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje socio emocional, ambiente de aprendizaje, estrategia socioemocional bilingüe.

Introduction

In Colombia, the integration of socio-emotional skills has been increasingly prioritized through legislation, including Law 2383 from July 2024, which promotes socio-emotional education for children and adolescents in preschool, primary, and secondary schools, and Law 2491 from July 2025, which incorporates socio-emotional competencies into Institutional Educational Projects (PEI). Together, these perspectives highlight the urgent need to design learning spaces that not only facilitate academic achievement but also nurture the emotional and social capacities of children in the Colombian territory, including communities affected by manifestations of violence.

Moreover, focusing on socioemotional skills becomes a major priority, as students' emotional experiences may shape how they engage with learning processes. Developing competencies such as empathy, anger management, and conflict resolution can help prevent aggression and promote more peaceful interactions among students (Chaux, 2012). What is more, addressing these environments requires approaches that support students' socio-emotional development. Ávila et al. (2024) argue that pedagogies must prioritize students' socio-emotional growth, moving away from traditional teaching models toward spaces that foster autonomy, participation, and holistic well-being. Similarly, social and emotional competence has been shown to support young children's social relationships and school success while enhancing

resilience in the face of uncertain and emotionally challenging circumstances (Denham & Bassett, 2019, as cited in Mortimore, 2023).

Considering that socioemotional development is outlined by students' interactions and relationships as well as classroom dynamics, it is essential to reflect on learning environments. Learning environments are understood not only as physical spaces but also as the set of conditions, interactions, and strategies that facilitate the construction of knowledge (Woolner, 2010). These environments encompass teacher-student relationships and the integration of resources that promote meaningful learning. In urban communities marked by vulnerability, learning environments are deeply shaped by collective identity and shared community experiences. Children in these contexts are frequently exposed to violence in their daily environments, whether in neighborhoods, schools, or even within their own households, which can significantly affect their social development (Chaux, 2012).

Building on this understanding of learning environments, English becomes a fundamental element in shaping bilingual learning environments, which emerge as inclusive spaces integrating cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions, bridging formal and non-formal education, and promoting reflection, collaboration, and intercultural understanding (Rodríguez et al., 2024). In these contexts, English language learning represents not only an academic goal but also an opportunity to foster motivation, confidence, and a positive self-image, key socio-emotional components that facilitate engagement and meaningful learning (Majid, Muhammad, Puteh, & Bunari, 2008, as cited in Shan & Abdul, 2022). As Ramos and Aguirre

(2016) point out, English in Colombia may feel distant from students' realities; therefore, integrating it into emotionally supportive and contextually relevant environments can empower learners to view the language as a means of inclusion, self-expression, and community transformation (Shan & Abdul, 2022).

In line with the priority of bearing in mind the development of socioemotional skills, this research project is framed within a Social Outreach Center located in Villavicencio, which is operated by Santo Tomás University. Particularly, this center serves the Commune 8 population, a context that has historically been marked by social challenges, including urban and domestic violence. Within this setting, the center provides educational services to children and adolescents from the surrounding communities in areas such as arts and English. As a result, the educational activities carried out in the center are linked to the social realities experienced by students, which consequently shape their learning environment.

Thus, proposing bilingual educational strategies that incorporate socio-emotional skills becomes relevant in educational programs focused on communities, where students' emotional and social experiences play a key role in shaping their learning processes. This project is also aligned with the Learning Environments research line of the Master's in Bilingual Learning Environments at Universidad Santo Tomás, as it explores how educational conditions, interactions, and strategies can inform emotional and social well-being in extension programs oriented to communities' well-being and development. Framed within this specific context, Cruz (2017) highlights that "learning English [...] has been put forward as an important strategy

contributing to social equality, social development and peacebuilding” (p. 13). Moreover, as Mortimore (2023) notes, the widespread implementation of early bilingual education “creates the need to consider how teaching methodologies for young children can encompass SEL (Socio-emotional learning) when teaching takes place in an additional language.” By integrating socio-emotional learning into bilingual education, these learning environments can support students’ emotional development while fostering meaningful learning experiences that respond to the social realities of the communities where these programs take place.

Research Question

What bilingual strategies can be implemented based on socio-emotional skills in students from a learning environment in a Social Outreach community in Villavicencio?

General objective

To propose bilingual strategies based on socio-emotional skills in students from a learning environment in a Social Outreach Center.

Specific objectives

To identify students' perceptions about socio-emotional skills in a bilingual learning environment.

To analyze teachers' perceptions regarding the pedagogical factors that influence socio-emotional skills in a bilingual learning environment.

Literature Review

To develop a deeper understanding of the key components that guide this project, it is essential to define the core constructs that frame the study. This review begins by outlining theoretical perspectives on socio-emotional skills and socio-emotional learning (SEL), with particular attention to self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills. Additionally, this section examines the definition of bilingual learning environments, as well as concepts related to Social Outreach, principles of community development, and the conceptualization of a bilingual strategy. The discussion of these constructs is supported by recent research on socio-emotional learning integrated into classroom practices, which provides valuable insights and comparative perspectives for the present study.

Social Outreach and Community Development.

Higher education institutions have assumed an active role in addressing social challenges faced by contemporary societies. In this sense, universities are not solely conceived as centers for knowledge production but also as institutions responsible for contributing to social development with their surrounding communities. In the Colombian context, this responsibility is framed through extension and social outreach processes. According to Gómez and Hoyos (2025), social outreach in higher education represents a strategic tool that allows universities to contribute to sustainable social transformation by connecting academic knowledge with the needs and realities of local communities. Particularly, this role is formally recognized in *Ley 30 de 1992*, from

Colombian legislation, which regulates higher education and establishes extension as one of the fundamental purposes of universities alongside teaching and research.

Moving to the educational dimension, these institutions respond to this goal through the development of outreach education programs. These projects aim to provide educational opportunities and academic support for communities that may face barriers to accessing traditional higher education pathways. Ruggs and Hebl (2012) express that outreach education programs have demonstrated significant capacity in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds by preparing them for future academic experiences and exposing them to new areas of knowledge.

What is more, during these scenarios, it is introduced the idea that educational outreach initiatives are developed under the concept of Community Development, as it is the case of Santo Tomás University. According to Frank and Smith (1999), community development can be defined as “a process whereby community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.” (p, 9). In this sense, “the primary outcome of community development is improved quality of life” (p.6), highlighting that the objective of these actions is to enhance individuals’ well-being.

Additionally, some principles guide the understanding of community development. Colombo (2011), drawing on the contributions of Wilkinson (1991) and Theodori (2005), shows that community development involves purposive, positive, and structure-oriented actions. To this extent, these actions reflect collective efforts that strengthen relationships and reinforce

cooperation structures in the community. From this perspective, “the community is both the means and the end of community development.” (Cavaye, 2006). In other words, communities build themselves while shaping their own development.

Bilingual Learning Environment

The concept of a learning environment refers to the setting in which learning takes place, going beyond the idea of physical spaces such as traditional classrooms. In this sense, Araque (2021) outlines these environments as part of everyday life, where people create connections and shape their own experiences. Moreover, learning environments enable the development of a sense of belonging while fostering growth as individuals and communities.

From this understanding, learning environments that integrate more than one language acquire value, as they allow learners to connect linguistic and emotional experiences within what is known as a bilingual learning environment. According to García and Wei (2014), bilingual environments function as dynamic ecosystems in which language practices intertwine with identity, emotion, and social interaction, fostering both cognitive and human development.

Authors such as García (2009) and Cummins (2001) also perceive bilingual environments as dynamic settings where languages coexist and complement one another, allowing students to construct meaning through the interaction between cultures and knowledge. In line with this, Orozco (2011) suggests that bilingual environments contribute to learners’ emotional

management, cooperative learning, and cognitive growth, key aspects for education in vulnerable contexts.

In Colombia, the creation of bilingual learning environments is supported by national policies such as *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN], 2004) and *Colombia Very Well* program (MEN, 2015-2025), which have aimed to promote communicative competence in English and ,therefore, access to quality education. These initiatives recognize bilingualism as a means of enhancing both competitiveness and intercultural understanding.

Socio-emotional Learning and Skills

Socio-emotional skills refer to the abilities that allow individuals to understand and manage their emotions while building positive relationships and making responsible decisions within their environment. From this perspective, these skills are defined as

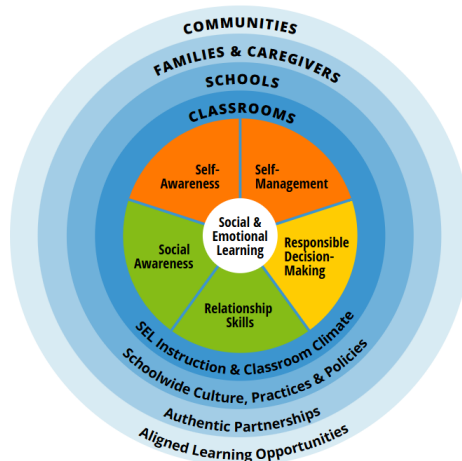
the abilities to interact and communicate with others; form and sustain relationships; manage conflicts; take others' perspectives and empathize; manage one's own responses, especially affective responses, in social situations; and understand one's own emotional experiences (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. [OECD], 2019, p.103).

Similarly, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] (2020) expands this definition through its Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework,

which addresses students' social, emotional, and academic growth. CASEL emphasizes five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, and highlights the importance of supporting authentic school-family-community partnerships, “where young people, families, educators, and community partners work together to plan, implement, and continuously improve strategies and programs to best serve all students in their local context” (CASEL, 2020). As shown in Figure 1, these five interrelated competencies form the foundation of the SEL framework, promoting holistic development within and beyond the classroom.

Figure 1

CASEL’s Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning.



Note. From “CASEL’s SEL Framework,” by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020, <https://casel.org/casel-sel-framework-11-2020/?view=1>.

Considering the SEL framework and the specific characteristics of the target community,

this research concentrates on three core competencies, self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills, which are central to understanding students' social-emotional learning. The definitions of these dimensions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

CASEL's competences definitions

Competence	Definition
Self-awareness	The ability to recognize and understand one's emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior in diverse contexts. It includes identifying strengths and limitations, linking emotions with values and thoughts, and integrating personal, cultural, and linguistic identities.
Self- management	The ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors to achieve personal and collective goals, including stress management, perseverance, motivation, and agency.
Relationship skills	The capacity to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships with diverse individuals and groups through communication, collaboration, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Note. Adapted from *CASEL's Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning* (CASEL, 2020) and *Social Emotional Learning in Elementary School: Preparation for Success*

by Dusenbury and Weissberg (2017), Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University.

CASEL emphasizes that SEL can be applied across developmental stages, “from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts” (CASEL, 2020), highlighting early childhood as a critical period for establishing solid socio-emotional foundations. Indeed, research by Bridgeland, Bruce, and Hariharan (2013) indicates that engaging young children [...], in preschool programs that integrate SEL principles positively supports their academic achievement, social development, and long-term well-being, while also contributing to societal outcomes such as crime prevention and economic participation.

The theoretical framework provided by CASEL has also been applied in the Colombian context. According to a report by the Inter-American Development Bank, Colombia presents one of the most active SEL ecosystems aligned with CASEL’s five competencies (Schlinger et al., 2025). Through *Alianza para el Fomento del Aprendizaje Socioemocional* (AFSEC), several organizations have incorporated this model into their educational programs, fostering supportive learning environments and strengthening students’ socio-emotional skills.

Moreover, the significance of socio-emotional learning in Colombia is reflected in the national educational policy. Some socio-emotional domains outlined by CASEL align with *Estándares Básicos de Competencias Ciudadanas* issued by the Ministry of Education. As noted by Chaux, Lleras, and Velásquez (2020), many of the competencies included in the Colombian standards, such as recognizing and managing emotions, developing empathy, taking others’

perspectives, and resolving conflicts constructively, correspond closely to CASEL's core competencies.

Building on this national perspective, socio-emotional education has been formally recognized in legislation. In this sense, socio-emotional skills are defined as the set of cognitive, social, emotional, and other non-cognitive skills that individuals can learn and develop to effectively manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (Law 2383 of 2024). Recent laws have reinforced both the visibility and obligatoriness of socio-emotional education in schools, establishing a strong precedent for its integration. For example, Law 2383 of July 19, 2024, promotes socio-emotional education for children and adolescents in preschool, primary, and secondary schools, while Law 2491 of July 23, 2025, incorporates socio-emotional competencies into Institutional Educational Projects (PEI). Together, these regulations underscore Colombia's commitment to embedding socio-emotional development as a core element of quality education, ensuring that students acquire the required skills for personal, social, and academic well-being.

Based on these Colombian policies and SEL framework, and to better understand the practical application and challenges of socio-emotional learning, particularly in bilingual contexts, it is essential to examine previous research that has explored teachers' perceptions, classroom integration, and the role of community support regarding these competencies.

Gómez et al. (2024) analyzed the socioemotional competencies of elementary and high school students in public institutions. Their findings showed that the development of these skills is a key concept to handle, as problems in social relationships, aggression, and disengagement

from studies are kept. The study also outlines the need to integrate socioemotional learning into school curricula and teacher training to improve students' well-being and academic development. Complementing this perspective, Basta (2020) argues that SEL should be systematically included into everyday academic instruction rather than approached as a separate or occasional activity. Her study highlights that competencies such as empathy, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making contribute simultaneously to improved behavior, stronger relationships, and academic performance.

In the Colombian context, additional studies offer evidence directly relevant to this project. Díaz et al. (2023), through an experimental evaluation of the Think Equal program, demonstrated significant outcomes in children's self-regulation, prosocial behavior, and emotional well-being, providing support for school-based SEL interventions in Colombia. Medina (2024) expands this understanding by examining teachers' perspectives on SEL implementation across diverse regional settings. Her findings reveal that, although teachers recognize the value of SEL, they face persistent challenges such as socioeconomic inequalities, limited evidence-based professional development, and insufficient institutional support, difficulties that are mainly perceived in rural and post-conflict communities. Together, these studies underscore the need for SEL approaches that are both pedagogically integrated and contextually grounded, addressing not only instructional practices but also the broader structural and social conditions that shape educational experiences in bilingual environments.

Bilingual Strategy and the Development of Socio-emotional Skills

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020), a curriculum strategy in the field of social-emotional learning is understood as a set of intentional, sequenced, and evidence-based actions designed to promote social and emotional competencies in educational contexts. These actions are articulated through the SAFE model (Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit), which ensures that learning experiences are structured, participatory, and clearly oriented toward specific outcomes. In early childhood education, Bagea et al. (2023) argue that interactive, play-based, and child-centered methodologies significantly enhance social-emotional development, aligning with the SAFE principles established by CASEL.

In a bilingual environment, SEL strategies acquire additional relevance. Billings and Walqui (2014) explain that bilingual approaches not only support language development but also foster positive self-concept, strengthen cultural identity, and deepen social connections within families and communities. Complementing this perspective, Arias, Obando, and Truscott (2012) demonstrate that the explicit instruction of socio-affective strategies in beginner EFL classes enhances self-regulation, confidence, and meaningful interaction. Similarly, Morilla (2017) found that integrating emotional intelligence strategies within bilingual instruction improves oral performance in the L2 and reduces communication anxiety. These findings collectively illustrate how emotional development and communicative competence support one another, reinforcing the value of including SEL within bilingual programs.

Considering the characteristics of the community, addressing social-emotional skills alongside language learning becomes essential for promoting student engagement, integration, and overall well-being (CASEL, 2020). Building upon the theoretical and empirical contributions above, a bilingual strategy oriented toward social-emotional development can be conceptualized as an intentional and structured pedagogical approach that integrates multilingual learning with the strengthening of emotional and social skills. Guided by the SAFE model, this approach positions languages as mediators of thought, emotional expression, and social interaction.

From this perspective, the bilingual approach extends beyond the purpose of linguistic proficiency to foster self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and relational skills, valuing cultural and linguistic diversity as a pedagogical resource. Implementing such a strategy requires inclusive curricula, teacher preparation in bilingual emotional mediation, culturally relevant materials, and comprehensive assessments that address both communicative progress and socio-emotional well-being. As Bierman and Sanders (2020) note, successful SEL implementation relies on explicit instruction supported by contextual reinforcement, in which teachers model and strengthen emotional skills through their everyday interactions. In this manner, the emotional component becomes organically integrated into the bilingual learning process, contributing to students' development and to positive school environments.

Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative approach to identify how socio-emotional skills were present in a bilingual learning environment within an urban community, providing insights for potential pedagogical strategies. The essence of qualitative research lies in understanding phenomena from participants' perspectives, such as those of teachers and students, by exploring their experiences, meanings, and worldviews (Hernández et al., 2014). From this standpoint, meaning is understood as a socially constructed process that emerges through individuals' interactions with their environment (Merriam & Grenier, 2018, p. 3). In this sense, researchers engage closely with participants to achieve a deeper and more authentic understanding of the phenomenon (Abad et al., 2021).

Framing on the nature of the qualitative approach, the study adopted a case study method, which allows an in-depth exploration of people, processes, and events in real-life contexts (Taherdoost, 2022) and is particularly suited to research that requires a detailed understanding of social or organizational dynamics (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Specifically, this research employed an exploratory case study, which “is used to develop an initial understanding of the program or phenomenon of interest” (Chopard & Przybylski, 2021, p.4). This approach emphasizes discovery and enables a detailed comprehension of the structure, dynamics, and context of the educational practices under study. In addition, the study focused on a unique case design, defined as a situation or group perceived to be different from any other, where a particular combination of people and events is found (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Hence, this research design was selected as it aligned with the exploratory purpose of understanding how socio-emotional skills manifested within a social outreach community, which constitutes a valuable scenario in the region. Ultimately, this approach ensured that the findings were grounded in authentic community realities and contributed to the development of meaningful and context-sensitive pedagogical strategies, while also generating new insights into how SEL could be implemented in these communities.

Context and Participants

Villavicencio is the capital city of Meta, Colombia. One of its largest and most populated urban areas is Commune 8, located in the southeastern part of the city. This commune integrates a combination of established residential neighborhoods and more recent urban developments, including *Porfía*, *Catumare*, and *Las Américas*, among others. Due to its size and population density, Commune 8 plays an important role in the southeastern sector of the city, connecting several residential areas and hosting diverse community dynamics.

Within this context, the community is supported by the Social Outreach Center established by the Villavicencio branch of Universidad Santo Tomás. These centers function as spaces that promote a two-way communication channel between academic programs and local communities, supporting teachers and students in projects and activities derived from academic programs. They also provide educational services through professional practices, research initiatives, academic outreach activities, and internships. In this sense, Social Outreach Centers act as knowledge hubs that facilitate the articulation of teaching and research with social

relevance and community impact (Universidad Santo Tomás, n.d.). Particularly, this center provided educational support to the community through English classes and other subjects that complemented students' formal schooling.

Considering the context, this study was conducted at the Social Outreach Center of Universidad Santo Tomás, involving the participation of both teachers and students enrolled in the program. The students, aged between 8 and 17 years old, mainly come from Commune 8 and nearby areas. Most of them belong to low- and middle-income households and come from family structures typically composed of both parents. Parents' occupations commonly include domestic work, construction, and taxi driving. Although the educational activities offered in this context may involve up to 25 participants, this study focused on a sample of 17 students who have demonstrated consistent attendance and a high level of interest in the program.

On the other hand, this study also involved four teacher trainees or full-time teachers from the Villavicencio campus of Universidad Santo Tomás, who contributed by leading the project interventions. These teachers participated voluntarily by implementing pedagogical interventions, demonstrating their commitment and knowledge of the community. Some of them already held a professional degree in Foreign Languages, while others were in the process of completing their teacher training. During their pedagogical practice at the Social Outreach Center, they applied various teaching strategies aimed at promoting meaningful learning experiences for children and adolescents in this community. In particular, the course consisted of ten sessions designed by the teachers according to the needs of the population and the learning

objectives established for their level. Teachers implemented a wide range of activities in order to address the diversity of ages involved in the program.

Selection Criteria for Participants

To select the participants, both students and teachers, the study considered their active involvement in the programs offered by the Social Outreach Center offered by Santo Tomás University. This criterion ensured the inclusion of participants who had consistently participated in the program's educational activities, allowing the research to document classroom dynamics and capture participants' perceptions and experiences related to socio-emotional skills development in a bilingual learning environment. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain, "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites [...] that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 301). By focusing on participants with consistent engagement, the study was able to obtain a significant understanding into the development of socio-emotional competencies in the determined setting.

Building on this perspective, the selection of participants in this study is not merely procedural but responds to the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry. As Durdella (2019) emphasizes, purposeful sampling is guided by the researcher's intent to understand phenomena in depth, considering the specific social, cultural, and educational contexts in which they occur. Accordingly, selecting teachers and students already immersed in the Social Outreach Center ensures that the data collected is grounded in genuine experiences from the learning community.

Besides, all the teachers involved were informed about the research project objectives by means of a consent form ([Appendix 1](#)), as well as students' parents or guardians ([Appendix 2](#))

Data Collection Instruments

This research study employed the following data collection methods: observations, surveys, and semi-structured interviews, all aligned with the objectives of case study method within a qualitative approach.

Observations

The first instrument employed in this study was observation, which allowed the researcher to systematically record and interpret behaviors, interactions, and situations as they naturally occurred within the bilingual learning environment (Abad et al., 2021). As Martínez (2007) explains, observation in social research is not limited to passive contemplation but involves a reflective and intentional act of inquiry, in which the researcher interprets reality from within.

In this study, a non-participant, direct observation approach was adopted. In this modality, the researcher remained external to the group and did not interact with participants during the sessions, capturing events in real time without influencing classroom activities (Martínez et al., 2022; Martínez et al., 2024; Rodríguez, 2022). This approach ensured that data were objective and authentic, allowing for detailed documentation of classroom dynamics, socio-emotional skills development, and interactions within the bilingual educational setting.

By combining the general purpose of observation in social research with the methodological structure of non-participant, direct observation, an observation format was designed to systematically collect the target information. This instrument was specifically constructed to capture the presence of social-emotional learning (SEL) activities and characteristics in the classroom, framed around the three core competencies selected for this study: self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills. Each competency was operationalized through three guiding questions that structured the observation process, ensuring focused and consistent data collection.

The design of this observation format ([Appendix 3](#)) and ([Appendix 4](#)) was further supported and adapted using the resource Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers (Yoder, 2014). This tool provides guidance for educators to reflect on both their teaching practices that influence student SEL and their own SEL competencies, making it a suitable framework for structuring observational data in a way that aligns with the study's focus on developing socio-emotional skills in a specific community context.

Semi-structured Interviews

As a second instrument, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers participating in the project to explore their perceptions of the pedagogical factors influencing socio-emotional skills in a bilingual learning environment. This type of interview involves a face-to-face dialogue between interviewer and interviewee, guided by pre-established questions but open to new topics that may emerge during the conversation. As Munarriz (1992) explains,

this dynamic allows the researcher to pose clarifying or follow-up questions to deepen the understanding of participants' experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were particularly suitable for this study, as they encouraged participants to express their perspectives in their own words, generating relevant and purposeful data. Beyond the content of their responses, attention was also given to the way participants expressed themselves, which could reveal underlying perceptions and attitudes (Karatsareas, 2022; Matthews & Ross, 2010).

For the implementation of the semi-structured interview, an interview protocol was designed ([Appendix 3](#)) and ([Appendix 5](#)) based on guiding questions related to the teachers' professional experiences and, more specifically, their perceptions and insights regarding socio-emotional learning (SEL). The questions aimed to explore how teachers understood SEL and how they had implemented or could implement SEL practices in their classrooms, drawing on their participation in the Outreach community. Additionally, the design of the interview protocol was informed by two key resources: *Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers* (Yoder, 2014) and the interview framework proposed in *Research on Social and Emotional Learning in the ELL Classroom: A Case Study* (Takeda Kao, 2017). Before its final application, the interview protocol went through a pilot phase with a small group of teachers not involved in the study. This process helped ensure that the questions were clear, coherent, and relevant to the research objectives.

Questionnaire

As a third instrument, a questionnaire was administered to the students participating in the project to gather information about their perceptions regarding socio-emotional skills within a bilingual learning environment. This instrument was selected due to its practicality and ease of application, allowing the collection of data from multiple participants in a short period of time, an important consideration given the time constraints of the fieldwork (Beck, 2024).

According to Matthews and Ross (2010), a questionnaire is a set of structured questions that all participants answer in the same format, enabling researchers to systematically collect data on facts, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and experiences. Questionnaires may also include open-ended items to allow respondents to elaborate more freely, thereby providing both structured and qualitative information.

In this study, the questionnaire complements the observational and interview data by offering insights directly from students' perspectives. The instrument ([Appendix 3](#)) and ([Appendix 6](#)) was constructed based on the objectives addressed in the previous instruments, specifically the identification of students' experiences concerning the presence or absence of socio-emotional learning in their environment.

The selected statements were organized using a Likert scale, which measures the degree of agreement and is particularly suitable for capturing affective constructs. This aligns with Nemoto and Beglar's (2014) argument that Likert-scale questionnaires are among the most

effective instruments for measuring variables such as motivation, attitudes, and self-efficacy, given their capacity to gather substantial and reliable data efficiently. What is more, the questionnaire was pilot tested with a group of age-related students to ensure clarity, effectiveness, and accuracy in its design.

Finally, the design of these instruments, along with the type of data collected, strengthened the understanding of socio-emotional skills within the context and informed the development of the subsequent bilingual strategy for the target learning environment.

Table 2

Data collection systematization

	N° of interventions	N° of involved participants	N° of questions	Application dates
Observation	4	17	9	February 28 th , 2026 March 7 th , 2026 March 14 th , 2026 (2 sessions)
Semi structured interview	4	4	12	December 16 th , 2025 January 27 th , 2026 February 19 th , 2026 March 7 th , 2026

Data analysis

This qualitative case study aimed to propose bilingual strategies based on socio-emotional skills for students in a learning environment within Social Outreach center, considering both teachers' and students' perceptions. Data analysis was organized according to emerging categories derived from the implementation of various data collection methods, including observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires.

Therefore, to examine the collected data, the study adopted an inductive approach to qualitative analysis, which allows patterns and categories to emerge directly from the data rather than being predetermined by theoretical assumptions. In this sense, the purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to arise from the “frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data” (Thomas, 2003). This perspective enables researchers to identify meaningful patterns that reflect participants' experiences within a specific context.

Following this logic, data were examined through inductive thematic analysis, a method used in qualitative research to identify patterns within textual data. Thematic analysis is defined as “*a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This method was considered appropriate for the study because it allows

researchers to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations in a systematic mode.

Additionally, thematic analysis is particularly useful for studies that aim to explore people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences, or values through qualitative data (McLeod, 2024). For this study, the analytical process was supported by the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, which facilitated data familiarization and helped organize and manage recurring patterns across the dataset. In this sense, the analysis followed the six phases commonly described in the literature, starting with data familiarization and the generation of initial codes, and continuing with the identification, review, and naming of themes. Finally, the process concluded with the production of the analytical report (Dawadi, 2020).

Therefore, the data analysis resulted in 29 initial codes ([Appendix 7](#)) and excerpts organized. ([Appendix 8](#)), ([Appendix 9](#)). Additionally, these codes were manually organized and grouped into five broader categories. This classification was carried out by carefully considering the nature and meaning of each code, as well as the contextual insights that emerged from participants' perspectives and the specific characteristics of the research setting. Ultimately, these categories contributed to addressing the research question, which is reintroduced below.

To ensure clarity in reporting the findings, participants and data sources were labeled using the following codes: Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, and Teacher 4. Interviews were identified as Int 1, Int 2, Int 3, and Int 4, while observations were labeled as Obs 1, Obs 2, Obs 3

and Obs 4. In the case of students, responses were generally analyzed as a whole; however, when particular answers were relevant, they were identified as Student 1 through Student 15.

Table 3 presents the resulting categorization.

Table 3

Themes' categorization

Research question		
What bilingual strategies can be implemented based on socio-emotional skills in students from a learning environment in a Social Outreach community in Villavicencio?		
Category 1	<i>Teaching practices oriented to SEL instruction.</i>	<i>Socio-emotional strategies</i> <i>Supportive response</i> <i>Games as strategies</i> <i>Student-centered strategies</i>
Category 2	<i>Students' affective and barriers to bilingual participation</i>	<i>Anxiety at speaking</i> <i>Fear of making mistakes</i> <i>Linguistic insecurity</i> <i>Production limitations</i> <i>Students' confidence</i> <i>Frustration</i> <i>Positive reinforcement and motivation</i>
Category 3	<i>Teachers' conceptualization and professional preparation for SEL</i>	<i>Teachers' training</i> <i>Socio-emotional teachers' concept</i> <i>Difficulties when implementing SEL</i>
<i>Student-teacher relationship</i>		

Category 4	<i>Supportive classroom climate and socio-emotional competences through classroom interaction</i>	<i>Peer relationships Collaborative work Respectful interactions Emotional management and self-control</i>
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Results

This section presents the findings derived from data analysis, particularly the resulting categories that were identified. The results highlight how socioemotional learning (SEL) is currently addressed in English teaching practices within these learning environments. Overall, the findings are organized into four main categories: teaching practices oriented toward SEL instruction, emotional and language barriers that affect students' performance, teachers' conceptualization and preparation for implementing SEL, and the role of the classroom environment in socio-emotional development. Together, these results provide a closer understanding of how bilingual learning spaces support or challenge students' emotional well-being and social interactions, and they serve as a basis for proposing strategies that integrate socioemotional skills into the English learning experience.

1. Teaching practices oriented to SEL instruction.

In the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), teaching practices are understood as the set of classroom strategies that teachers implement to create supportive learning environments. Specifically, Dusenbury et al. (2015) describe these practices intended to “establish positive and predictable classroom environments” and to “provide ongoing

instructional practices that support students' SEL" (p. 4). In this sense, Dusenbury et al. (2015) emphasize that evidence-based SEL implementation is not limited to explicit SEL lessons or isolated interventions. In fact, it also includes general teaching practices that create classroom and schoolwide conditions that facilitate and support students' social and emotional growth.

Furthermore, while these general teaching practices support SEL development and promotion, the concept of SEL instruction represents a more explicit and systematic approach. According to Mahoney et al. (2021), "SEL instruction occurs when students have consistent opportunities to cultivate, practice, and reflect on social and emotional competencies (SECs) that are developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive" (p. 9). In this sense, SEL instruction provides students with opportunities to contribute to their class, school, and community, allowing them to experience a sense of belonging, and enhanced motivation derived from such involvement (Hawkins et al., 2004, as cited in Durlak et al., 2011).

From this perspective, it was evident throughout the classroom observations and teacher interviews that various strategies oriented toward SEL instruction were implemented, mainly focusing on emotional recognition and motivation for active participation and engagement; which simultaneously were contrasted with the obtained results in students' questionnaires. One of the most recurrent practices identified across the data was the use of morning check-ins at the beginning of the lesson, which according to Sugishita and Dresser, promote peer interaction while practicing social and communicative skills (2019). These routines support early elementary learners in developing self-awareness by naming emotions or recalling moments in

which they experienced a specific feeling (CASEL, n.d.). Teacher 4 described how their lessons start with a greeting routine.

My class always starts with the teacher coming in and greeting everyone in English:

‘How are you?’... Then everyone starts answering... So I’ve already established a routine where the first thing I do when I arrive is say hello, and then they’ll answer that question (Int 4).

Similarly, classroom observations confirmed the presence of this practice, as “students were asked how they felt during the activity and reported feeling good” (Obs 1). Nevertheless, students’ answers in questionnaires showed discrepancies as they reported being asked about their emotions at school and acknowledged that teachers sometimes support them in understanding how they feel; their responses appeared inconsistent. This distribution suggests that the strategy may not be consistently implemented and integrated into classes. This can be interpreted considering Cipriano et al. (2023) who argue that SEL instruction is more effective when they include a connected and coordinated set of activities (Sequenced), characteristic that is outlined in the SAFE framework.

The use of games emerged as a notable classroom strategy linked to socio-emotional skills development, promoting peer interaction, participation, and positive relationships. This aligned with the proposal presented by Playworks, which highlights games as meaningful tools to foster cooperation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills in school contexts (2019). In this regard, Teacher 1 described how traditional games influenced students’ engagement and

attitudes: “Adapting traditional games for language learning can help students develop empathy, self-regulation, and confidence while learning English in a meaningful way” (Int 1). She also explained how these dynamics create space for emotional expression and immediate support: “I use games and interactive dynamics... I allow moments for reflection and emotional expression. If a student feels frustrated, I ask them what happened and I try to respond immediately to their needs” (Int 1).

Likewise, classroom observations included this practice, as students participated in activities such as Hot Potato, where learners introduced themselves and shared personal experiences through interaction (Obs 1). Questionnaire responses also reflected this tendency, as students recognized that English activities encourage interaction among peers. Hence, these findings indicate that games based on Socio-emotional skills represent a clear strength for integrating SEL into English instruction. This also aligns with Hromek and Roffey’s (2009) argument that the value of games for teaching socio-emotional skills lies precisely in their interactional nature, since playing together naturally fosters social connection and learning through shared experiences.

Finally, findings also showed strategies oriented to SEL, framed within sensory dimensions. In this extent, teachers intentionally implemented concrete activities that reflected students’ emotional understanding and regulation. Considering this, these strategies align with the principles of supportive learning environments, which highlight that students must experience psychological and emotional safety, feel cared for by adults and peers, and engage in

meaningful classroom dynamics where their well-being is recognized as part of learning (BELE Network, 2020).

For instance, Teacher 3 described how her institution provides an “emergency kit” to address moments of emotional distress based on the students' particular needs.

We have a kind of kit for dealing with all these types of emotions. It's like an emergency kit for psychological situations or conflicts of that kind, because there are students who, even if you try to calm them down and talk to them, you can't. There are children who need you to give them a piece of paper and let them scribble on it... Other children, maybe a certain scent helps them, or certain textures. You give them something anti-stress. (Int 3)

Similarly, Teacher 4 highlighted an institutional practice known as the “Calm Room,” a space used intentionally before lessons to encourage emotional awareness and preparation.

We have the Calm Room. Everyone goes to the Calm Room five minutes before class starts. That helps us become aware of how we're feeling. I play some music in the background and asks, ‘How are you feeling?’... ‘I feel really sad...’ But now that we're in class, how can we deal with that emotion? (Int 4)

Teacher 4 also described the use of essential oils as a sensory resource that supports relaxation and helps students reconnect with their emotional state, “We have a diffuser in the ...

room where we add essential oils like lavender and frankincense. It helps the body relax... so they can breathe and remain aware of the moment they're experiencing.” (Int 4)

These findings reinforced the idea of promoting caring and supportive classrooms, which mainly depend on teachers having strong SEL skills themselves and being committed to modeling emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal behaviors. As Mahoney et al. (2020) argue, teachers must actively embody SEL competencies to guide learners through processes of emotional awareness and conflict management.

Therefore, the previous findings suggest that teaching practices oriented toward SEL were evident throughout the data collection, mainly through routines and strategies that promoted emotional awareness, participation, and positive interaction. Practices such as morning check-ins indicate that teachers not only addressed learning goals, but also intentionally created supportive learning spaces where students could express themselves and participate more confidently in English learning.

Nevertheless, the data also suggest that the impact of these practices may depend on their consistency and integration into classroom instruction. While teachers reported frequent use of strategies oriented to SEL, students' questionnaire responses showed some discrepancies, which may imply that these practices are not experienced as systematic or sustained. This proposes the idea that SEL instruction is more effective when implemented through a connected and sequenced set of practices, rather than through isolated moments that may vary across lessons.

2. Emotional and language barriers to students' participation

Emotional and language barriers to students' participation refer to the interaction of affective and linguistic factors that limit students' participation and effective use of a second language in educational contexts. From a psychological standpoint, emotions play a relevant role in language learning, as stressful experiences and anxiety can interfere with students' willingness to engage with new linguistic input and use it actively in the classroom (Uysal & Güven, 2025). In this sense, emotional discomfort may operate as a mental barrier that reduces learners' confidence and prevents them from taking communicative risks. These barriers are also closely related to students' perceptions of their own abilities, since low self-efficacy can reduce their willingness to participate and engage in oral interaction (Warner & Schwarzer, 2017). As teacher 3 points out, "to give them that little bit of confidence they need to start being a little more independent and leave behind that "I can't do it" mentality, that anxiety about making mistakes, because it's very common for children to be very afraid of making mistakes". Similarly, the teacher mentions "I've seen in the group of children I've met, both in urban and rural areas, has been more internal, something personal, like the lack of confidence that children have" (Int. 3). These perspectives suggest that participation is not solely determined by students' linguistic competence, but also by their emotional disposition toward using the second language.

Evidence shows that anxiety about speaking, fear of making mistakes, and low student confidence are deeply intertwined and act as mutually reinforcing barriers. This dynamic is reflected in the classroom "Well, for the beginning it's difficult because they start to feel afraid

when they need to talk or maybe when they are making mistakes” (Int 2). As well as in situations where teacher 1 mentions that “Oh no teacher, I don’t want to present,” or “Please don’t ask me.” They do not feel confident enough, sometimes because they lack vocabulary or because of peer pressure” (Int 1). This is consistent with research on affective factors in learning, which highlights that negative emotional states can significantly hinder student engagement and performance in academic settings. In this regard, Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) argue that students’ social and emotional competencies play a fundamental role in their ability to participate and engage in classroom activities.

This is why linguistic insecurity emerges as a key issue underlying students’ reluctance to participate. As teacher 2 explains “Teacher, I don’t participate because I believe that is wrong,” but then they change their mind and they say: “Teacher, I don’t know if it’s right, but I’m going to participate.” (Int 2). This suggests that barriers to participation do not always stem from actual language deficits, but rather from students’ perceptions of their own competence. This can be linked to the concept of self-efficacy, as analyzed within the framework of social and emotional learning (SEL) (Schonert-Reichl, 2019), where students’ beliefs about their abilities influence their motivation, perseverance, and performance. In this sense, linguistic insecurity reflects not only a gap in language skills but also a lack of confidence in using those skills in communicative situations.

In this regard, it becomes important to determine whether students’ reluctance to participate is primarily linked to the use of the new language or to broader emotional factors. As

teacher 4 explains, " So the first step here is to determine whether this only happens in English that she's afraid to participate because it's not her native language or if it happens with the teacher, who's there all day" (Int 4). This distinction suggests that, in some cases, students' participation difficulties may be influenced by their perception of the second language rather than their actual communicative abilities.

In addition, frustration also emerged as a significant barrier to participation. Teacher 1 stated: "Sometimes I have to adapt activities quickly because students have different levels. Frustration can arise between high, medium, and low levels." (Int 1) This division by level can cause frustration, leading students to disengage from classroom activities. As a result, it can reinforce students' avoidance behaviors and further limit their opportunities to practice the foreign language.

Apart from these findings, classroom observations reveal that linguistic and emotional barriers are closely linked. "Through this activity, it was evident that their pronunciation and vocabulary were limited" (Obs 1). Students may avoid speaking because they feel they cannot express themselves adequately, which leads to a vicious cycle in which a lack of practice further limits their language development. This interaction between emotional and linguistic factors supports the idea that bilingual participation cannot be understood through a purely cognitive lens, but must be analyzed as a multidimensional process involving both affective and communicative components.

From a theoretical perspective, these challenges can also be associated with teachers' limited preparation to address students' social and emotional needs (Koller & Bertel, 2006; Siebert, 2005, cited in Schonert-Reichl et al.). This points out that teacher education and professional programs often provide insufficient training in identifying and managing mental health issues such as anxiety in the classroom. This limitation may affect teachers' ability to effectively respond to students' emotional barriers, particularly in bilingual contexts where anxiety related to language use is more likely to emerge. Therefore, while teachers may recognize students' difficulties, they may not always have pedagogical tools to address them in a systematic way.

Despite these challenges, teachers also reported the existence of teaching practices oriented to create emotionally supportive environments. Particularly, motivation was established as a consistent element in teaching practice oriented to SEL, which was evidenced in teachers' supportive response, positive reinforcement, and participation promotion. Teachers emphasized that keeping students' engagement in English learning requires creating learning conditions where effort is valued over accuracy. As Teacher 1 stated, "I ... value effort over accuracy and implement game-based and cooperative activities. These techniques reduce anxiety and increase motivation" (Int 1).

Similarly, Teacher 2 remarked supportive responses towards active participation and motivation: "It's not about it's good or not, it's about you participate... it doesn't matter. We are learning" (Int 2). This type of interaction was also reinforced through supportive remarks such as

“We are family, so we need to support each other, with respect” (Int 2). Likewise, Teacher 3 emphasized the role of positive language in valuing mistakes: “We shouldn’t be afraid. We are all learning; we all make mistakes” (Int 3). These perspectives were also reflected in classroom observations, where students were encouraged to participate through speaking tasks (Obs 3), and teacher guidance helped reduce frustration and sustain engagement (Obs 2). What is more, students’ perceptions also supported this finding, as some of them reported being encouraged to keep trying when making mistakes and also felt calm in the classroom, suggesting the presence of a comfortable learning environment.

These findings are consistent with Dusenbury et al. (2015), who argue that effective SEL implementation includes general classroom practices that support students’ socio-emotional development, particularly through the use of authentic feedback. Likewise, the teachers’ emphasis on encouragement and participation reflects the value of integrating SEL into ELT, as it can strengthen learners’ communication skills while also fostering well-being and emotional readiness to engage in the target language (Wicaksono & Saraswati, 2024).

Finally, these elements: anxiety, fear of making mistakes, frustration, low confidence, and linguistic challenges such as limited vocabulary and production difficulties, form a mutually reinforcing cycle that constrains students’ willingness to engage in classroom interaction. In line with the social and emotional learning framework (Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). In conclusion, this analysis suggests that participation in bilingual contexts is strongly influenced by how students perceive themselves when using a second language, rather than by

their actual abilities. This highlights the importance of considering the emotional dimension as a central component of learning, rather than a secondary factor. The relevance of these findings lies in encouraging teachers to think beyond language instruction, guiding them toward the development of strategies that foster students' confidence and willingness to participate. In this way, it becomes possible to promote more authentic and equitable participation in the classroom.

3. Teachers' conceptualization and professional preparation for SEL

Understanding the inclusion of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in educational settings requires considering teachers' concepts and preparation as central factors influencing its effectiveness. To this extent, comprehending how best to prepare teachers to be appropriate in teaching, regarding students' needs and educational conditions has become a priority in educational research and policymaking (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Similarly, teachers' perceptions of SEL are equally significant, as their beliefs about the necessity and value of SEL programs influence how effectively these initiatives are integrated into daily classroom practices (Schultz et al., 2010).

However, literature also shows a gap between expectations and reality. In the Colombian context, although some teachers express positive attitudes towards promoting students' SEL, they may face limited knowledge and evidence-based training (Medina, 2024). This scenario turns into a relevant issue considering the growing national interest in supporting holistic education that incorporates Social and Emotional skills into schools. Without adequate preparation, educators may find it difficult to connect SEL practices with instructional objectives

and to respond to students' emotional needs while still meeting curriculum expectations (Wicaksono & Saraswati, 2024).

Therefore, this section examines three key aspects that shape SEL implementation: teachers' perceptions of SEL, their professional preparation and training experiences, and the challenges they face when attempting to integrate SEL into classroom practice.

On one hand, participant teachers expressed comprehensive conceptions of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). For instance, Teacher 4 linked SEL with institutional responsibility, stating that “there’s a decree that requires all of us, more than just a requirement, it’s an obligation and a learning experience for both them and us, to focus on social-emotional learning” (Int 4). Similarly, Teacher 3 emphasized that SEL involves helping students “develop different skills to understand their emotions or what these social interactions entail” (Int 3). This view was reinforced by Teacher 1, who expressed that “Social Emotional Learning is related to empathy, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making,” and highlighted that “we have the responsibility to help students develop as people, not only in subjects like math, science, or English” (Int 1). This aligns with Medina (2024) who argues that teachers demonstrate understandings of socio-emotional skills in their own words, rather than simply copying conventional definitions of SEL. However, these perceptions may be seen as clear, implementation is not supported by unified frameworks. In the same line, Grijalba et al. (2021) outline that socio-emotional education in Colombia tends to be developed through teacher-led

initiatives, based on personal judgment, rather than through formalized school curricula. While this reflects teachers' commitment, it may also lead to inconsistent practices across classrooms.

In this regard, Wicaksono and Saraswati (2024) state that “without adequate preparation, teachers may struggle to understand SEL principles and apply them in ways that support both language learning and emotional development.” Therefore, these findings support the idea of structured SEL programs that strengthen teacher readiness. As Jennings and Greenberg (2009) suggest, teacher readiness is essential as teachers implement SEL through their own socio emotional competencies, meaning that successful SEL delivery also requires supporting teachers' personal well-being and emotional growth.

On the other hand, data analysis also indicated that teachers' preparation to implement SEL is highly outlined by teaching experience rather than by formal training. This is evidenced with Teacher 2, who expressed that she had not received formal training: “No, never. The experience gives you that” (Int 2). Similarly, teacher 1 reflected that

Sometimes we have training, but the real experience in the classroom teaches us the most. In teacher education, we learn theories and authors, such as Montessori, but real classrooms are different... We can receive many trainings, but real life teaches us how to respond to students' needs. (Int 1)

Nevertheless, some participants reported receiving institutional support, although these were directly connected to the availability of resources in each institution. Teacher 3 explained

that “the school where I work is a private institution and they have a psychologist, who provides training on what socio-emotional learning is” (Int 3). Likewise, Teacher 4 described that she “occasionally had sessions with different coaches. They’re people who really help you with that aspect, because there’s already a regulation in place, and it’s mandatory for us to teach social-emotional skills” (Int 4). These particular experiences remark that teacher preparation exists in some contexts, but it is not systematic or continuous.

In response to these gaps, teachers may assume responsibility for self-directed learning. Teacher 3 stated: “Even though they don't give us all the tools, it doesn't hurt to prepare yourself, read, look for information,” (Int 3). From this perspective, the uneven nature of teacher preparation reinforces the need for more structured and continuous professional development. In this same line, Durlak et al. (2011) highlight the importance of including systematic opportunities for teacher training and ongoing professional support. Besides, as Schonert-Reichl (2017) state, ongoing learning opportunities are essential for teachers to remain updated and equipped with effective SEL strategies, particularly in contexts where institutional support is inconsistent.

Simultaneously, these findings also raise concerns regarding pre-service education. As an example, Schonert-Reichl et al. (2017) claim that previous studies based on pre-service teacher programs “have consistently found that programs pay little attention to giving teachers the knowledge and skills they need to promote their students’ social and emotional competence and to create positive classroom environments that enhance student success” (p. 12). Similarly,

Sologuren et al. (2024) argue that socio-emotional competencies are often addressed indirectly, since they are not part of the disciplinary and didactic contents in most cases.

In the Colombian context, González (2024) states that although present tendencies show the relevance of developing emotional competencies in teachers and the Colombian government is committed to educational quality, it is necessary to contribute to the integration of social and emotional competencies alongside cognitive skills in teacher education programs, as their current integration remains insufficient. Considering these concerns, it becomes relevant to examine how the local context responds to these challenges.

At the policy level, Colombia has begun to address this issue through Law 2491 of 2025, which establishes mandatory spaces for socialization, sensibilization, and teacher training regarding the socio-emotional component (Art. 3) and requires institutions to incorporate socio emotional education into teacher training strategies (Art. 4). This is also supported by resources developed by the *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* (MEN), such as *Paso a Paso* (2017) and *Desarrollo socioemocional: Pistas para la acción* (2025), which provide pedagogical materials to strengthen teachers' classroom practice. Nevertheless, these initiatives have had limited impact, as their implementation is not systematic across schools, as evidenced in the present study, where participants report that socioemotional competencies are mostly developed through experience rather than formal training

Furthermore, it is relevant to mention that SEL training can not only be conceived as a pedagogical requirement, but also as a professional necessity. Parween and Raza (2025) argue

that SEL benefits educators themselves, since teachers who develop socio-emotional competencies may experience lower levels of burnout, improved emotional regulation, and greater job satisfaction, which ultimately strengthens their ability to support learners effectively. In this sense, these competencies become fundamental for the effective practice of teaching, as they directly influence the quality of teacher–student interactions and the learning environment (Godoy, 2021; Ortiz, 2020, as cited in González, 2024); being a key condition for sustaining teachers’ well-being and ensuring proper classroom practices.

Finally, beyond training limitations, teachers also highlighted structural concerns that make SEL difficult to implement in English Teaching context, particularly time limitations and curriculum pressures. As Teacher 2 stated,

I believe the limited time, because when you are working at school or university you have a time. So, when you try to apply emotional learning, it takes more time than usually you use for a class. (Int 2)

Which demonstrates how SEL is often perceived as an additional component that competes with instructional time. This tension becomes even more evident when teachers are expected to meet curriculum goals and show measurable academic results. In this regard, Teacher 4 expressed that “I have a curriculum to cover, topics to address, and I have to show results for the topics I covered during the year,” and admitted that under these demands, emotional needs may be pushed aside in favor of classroom control. This aligns with Wicaksono and Saraswati’s (2024) argument that “Integrating SEL in ELT faces challenges due to curriculum constraints.

Educational curricula often prioritize language learning objectives, such as grammar and vocabulary acquisition, which may leave limited room for SEL activities.” Consequently, balancing SEL with language objectives requires detailed planning and adaptation (Jones et al., 2013).

Thus, Schonert-Reichl and Weissberg (2014) point out that educational systems must redefine curriculum priorities to make space for SEL. This is particularly relevant in Colombia, where socio-emotional education is in the process of consolidation, making it necessary for institutions to diagnose and intentionally incorporate SEL into their curricula to strengthen students’ capacities to learn to be and learn to live together from early childhood (Grijalba et al., 2021).

Hence, the findings outline that teachers hold valuable conceptualizations of SEL, recognizing it as essential for students’ development and for building positive learning environments. However, SEL implementation is perceived as a personal initiative and teaching experience rather than a systematic training or unified institutional orientation. Additionally, the findings reflect a growing alignment with governmental expectations, as policies and resources increasingly promote socio-emotional education; nevertheless, their impact seems limited by irregular implementation and contextual constraints. Finally, curriculum demands and time limitations remain on central issues, highlighting the need for continuous professional development and consistent institutional support to ensure SEL becomes a permanent component of classroom practice.

4. SEL classroom environment and socio-emotional development

Within Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), the classroom environment plays a crucial role in fostering students' socio-emotional development, as it encompasses the interactions, relationships, and pedagogical strategies that shape how learners understand, express, and regulate their emotions.

In this regard, SEL is grounded in the development of core competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills, which are essential for both academic engagement and personal well-being. According to Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2017), social and emotional competencies are developed through structured classroom practices that promote emotional understanding, self-regulation, and positive interactions, highlighting the central role of the school environment in shaping students' socio-emotional development.

It became evident that the student-teacher relationship constitutes a foundational element for the development of these competencies, particularly relationship skills and self-awareness. Teachers intentionally implement strategies aimed at building trust and emotional connection through consistent routines and personalized interactions. As described by teacher 4 “So I’ve already established a routine where the first thing I do when I arrive is say hello, and then they’ll answer that question” (Int 4).

This practice not only creates a predictable and safe environment but also promotes students' self-awareness by encouraging them to identify and verbalize their emotional states.

Furthermore, affective bonds are reinforced through everyday interactions, as students seek closeness and express affection, which “starts to build the emotional connection and the interpersonal relationship”. These findings are consistent with Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015), who emphasize that caring and supportive environments are essential for fostering both emotional security and the development of social competencies. From a critical standpoint, this suggests that the teacher’s role extends beyond instruction, positioning them as a key mediator in the development of students’ relational and emotional capacities.

The finding indicated that teachers promote peer interaction by shifting classroom dynamics toward more student-centered exchanges, where learners engage with one another not only academically but also emotionally. As teacher 4 mentions, “I begin to combine the English part with the emotional and empathetic aspects, because the child is already starting to connect the question, “How are you today, Salome?” Then Salome says, “I have to answer how I feel; Jaime Andrés is asking me, not the teacher” Then they’ll start to form that bond. (Int 4).

For this reason, teacher-led interaction, as opposed to peer-mediated interaction, fosters empathy, active listening, and mutual recognition-all of which are fundamental components of relational skills. In line with this, Wicaksono and Saraswati (2024) argue that integrating SEL into English as a Foreign Language (ELT) context improves students’ communicative and interpersonal skills by incorporating emotional awareness into interaction. However, it is important to recognize that the development of these skills requires intentional scaffolding, as peer interaction alone does not guarantee positive or respectful exchanges.

Similarly, collaborative work was identified as a key pedagogical approach that supports the development of both relationship skills and self-management. Through interactive and student-centered strategies, learners are encouraged to cooperate, negotiate meaning, and regulate their behavior within group settings. As one of the classes, “Leadership roles during the miming and reading activities by helping classmates understand instructions or guess vocabulary words. These students supported their peers by encouraging participation and sharing their knowledge, which contributed to a collaborative learning environment” (Obs 2).

This highlights how collaboration creates opportunities for students to practice shared responsibility, manage frustration, and adapt to group dynamics, all of which are closely linked to self-management. According to Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2017), participatory learning environments enable students to apply socio-emotional competencies in authentic contexts. Nevertheless, from a critical perspective, the effectiveness of collaborative work depends on the teacher’s ability to structure these interactions in ways that ensure inclusion and equitable participation.

Respectful interactions also emerged as a central component of the classroom environment, directly linked to the development of relationship skills and social awareness. Teachers foster respect through both explicit dialogue and implicit modeling, creating spaces where students can express their emotions while recognizing those of others. For instance, classroom practices that involve open conversation and emotional connection such as “So, communicating with them, connecting with them, and also learning a little bit about what they

like, all of that sometimes helps a lot” (Int 3) promote a culture of empathy and mutual understanding. These findings align with Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015), who argue that respectful and supportive environments are essential for students to feel safe and engaged. However, it is important to consider that respect must be continuously reinforced, as it is constructed through ongoing interaction rather than assumed as a given condition.

Another key aspect is the promotion of emotional management and self-control, which are directly related to the competency of self-management. Teachers demonstrated an understanding of students’ diverse emotional needs by implementing differentiated strategies to support regulation, particularly in moments of distress. As teacher 3 explained, “It’s more like getting to know your students and knowing how you can help them in these situations, having a little bit of everything because you never know how children will react.” (Int 3). These practices reflect a flexible and responsive approach to emotional regulation, acknowledging that students require different tools to manage their emotions effectively. This aligns with the conceptualization of self-management proposed by CASEL (2020), which involves regulating emotions, controlling impulses, and adapting to different situations. From another perspective, while these strategies are valuable, their impact depends on consistent implementation and the teacher’s ability to recognize emotional cues in real time.

Teachers intentionally create structured opportunities for students to identify and express their feelings. As an interview, the teacher will always ask them, “How are you feeling?” “What did you eat?” and “What did you eat at the daycare the day before?” or something like that. (Int

4). These strategies are adapted to directly foster the development of self – awareness, using tools such as “I can't talk face to face with a 4-year-old, but I can use a story to explain what fear is, what anger is” (Int 1). In line with this, Wicaksono and Saraswati (2024) emphasize that SEL integration enhances emotional awareness and communicative competence. However, the effectiveness of these practices depends on their continuity, as sporadic implementation may limit their impact on students’ emotional development.

In conclusion, the findings in this category highlight that the SEL classroom environment is shaped by the ongoing interaction between relational dynamics and intentional pedagogical practices, which together foster students’ social-emotional development. More specifically, it is suggested that competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, and relational skills are not developed through isolated activities, but rather through constant opportunities for interaction, reflection, and emotional engagement within the classroom. “So, I think, the safe space is creating a supportive environment. That’s what I actually do in all my classes” (Int 2). Likewise, fostering a classroom environment conducive to social-emotional learning (SEL) requires a holistic and sustained approach in which emotional and social competencies are integrated into everyday teaching practices, contributing to students’ overall well-being, engagement, and development.

Conclusions

The findings of this research revealed several educational and contextual needs related to both second language learning and students’ socio-emotional development within the bilingual

learning environment selected for this study. Data collected through observations, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires showed that students experience difficulties in recognizing, expressing, and managing their emotions appropriately in classroom interactions. In addition, emotional and linguistic barriers such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, frustration, and low confidence were identified as factors that negatively influenced students' participation in English learning activities.

Another relevant finding of the study is that socio-emotional practices were present in the classroom; however, these practices were generally implemented in an unstructured and non-systematic manner. Although teachers demonstrated awareness of the importance of socio-emotional learning and frequently promoted supportive interactions, motivation, collaborative activities, and emotional expression, these actions often depended on personal teaching experience rather than on formal training or institutional guidance. As a result, SEL practices were not consistently integrated into the teaching process through intentional planning or clearly defined objectives.

The findings showed that teachers' professional preparation in socio-emotional learning remains limited. Most participants reported that their understanding of SEL had been developed mainly through classroom experience instead of structured professional development processes. This situation restricts teachers' ability to intentionally connect socio-emotional competencies with language learning objectives and to respond systematically to students' emotional needs within bilingual contexts. The study also highlighted the importance of the classroom

environment in fostering socio-emotional development. Teacher-student relationships, peer interaction, collaborative work, and supportive classroom routines contributed to creating learning spaces where students felt more comfortable participating and expressing themselves. These findings suggest that socio-emotional development and language learning are closely interconnected processes, particularly in vulnerable educational contexts where emotional support and positive relationships play a significant role in students' engagement and participation.

Finally, the research emphasizes the need to design and implement bilingual pedagogical strategies that intentionally integrate socio-emotional learning into English teaching practices. Such strategies should address not only linguistic development but also students' emotional well-being, confidence, and interpersonal skills to promote more meaningful, participatory, and inclusive bilingual learning environments.

Contributions to Bilingual Learning Environments

Bilingual Learning Environments are understood as educational ecosystems shaped by relationships, interactions, and community experiences. From this perspective, English teaching is framed as a socially grounded and context-responsive process. In other words, it is envisioned as a collective and meaningful practice connected to learners' sociocultural, geographical, and family realities, while promoting participation and respect for diversity (Rodríguez et al., 2024).

In this sense, this research contributed to this vision by proposing the integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into a bilingual learning environment, fostering competencies that support academic growth and holistic development. This contribution was materialized through the design of a set of bilingual strategies based on Socio Emotional skills compiled in a practical booklet for teachers ([Appendix 10](#)). These strategies were designed and selected in response to the main needs identified during data collection, including gaps in students' language participation, difficulties in socialization processes, and some manifestations of frustration. Hence, the analysis of these elements provided a structured contribution which was specifically framed in the contextual features of the Social Outreach Center, but that can also be transferable to similar educational settings as it promotes a pedagogical vision of language learning connected to emotional development, collective belonging, and community transformation. In this sense, the proposed SEL-based bilingual strategies may support the creation of learning environments that are not only linguistically oriented, but also socially and emotionally supportive, moving toward a holistic vision of language learning.

In line with the objectives of this study, the research process also contributed to promoting recognition among both teachers and students of the role that socio-emotional learning plays in shaping classroom experiences. During the research development, SEL became visible as a significant element in supporting English experiences, particularly in vulnerable communities where learners' emotional realities influence participation and learning opportunities. Similarly, this increased visibility of SEL within classroom interactions is relevant in the Colombian educational context, where socio-emotional development has been formally

recognized through national policy. In this regard, the present proposal contributed to the growing need for practical and accessible pedagogical resources that support teachers in aligning English teaching practices with socio-emotional education as an institutional priority.

Finally, for the design of the booklet, the set of strategies was compiled into different categories such as warm-ups and class activities. This structure was intentionally designed to support teachers in planning coherent sessions that integrate language practice with socio-emotional development. The strategies were purposefully selected to address the CASEL competencies identified at the beginning of the research process, namely Self-Awareness, Self-Management, and Relationship Skills. Moreover, each activity included its objective, required materials, language level and suggested topics, and a detailed procedure for implementation. Overall, this resource offers accessible and practical guidance for teachers interested in strengthening bilingual learning environments through intentional socio-emotional development and community-oriented language teaching practices.

Limitations

The development of the project presented various contextual, logistical, and student participation-related limitations, which influenced its implementation and continuity. During the initial phase in the rural context of Hato Rondón, one of the main limitations was associated with its location, as it is a Peace Community undergoing processes of social reconstruction, which entails particular social and institutional conditions. Additionally, access to this territory was restricted by the university due to safety considerations and institutional regulations, which

significantly limited the continuity of in-person interventions. Furthermore, it was a remote area with difficult access and considerable distance, which hindered mobility and the regular development of the activities.

Additionally, the lack of connectivity represented a significant challenge. In this context, there was no phone signal or internet access, which prevented the use of digital resources and limited the possibility of addressing unforeseen situations during the classes. For this reason, all materials and activities had to be previously planned and prepared, which reduced flexibility in implementation and required a higher level of organization.

The physical conditions of the space designated for the activities constituted an important limitation. The place where the classes were conducted was small, which made it difficult to organize group dynamics and affected the implementation of some pedagogical strategies. In addition, student attendance was irregular, as on several occasions they were unable to participate because they were alone at home or did not have parental authorization to leave, which impacted the continuity of the process.

Subsequently, the change of context to the Social Outreach Center in Comuna 7 in Villavicencio represented another significant limitation. This transition was carried out in alignment with the university's outreach and intervention lines, which include different social and educational projects, among them those developed in the Social Outreach Center in Comuna 7. However, this change implied the need to partially restart the research process, including data collection, the administration of surveys and interviews, and the management of consent and

assent forms. Likewise, it was necessary to adjust the instruments and strategies to the new context, which required additional time and affected the initially planned sequence of the project.

Despite these difficulties, the support of school directors, teachers, students, and parents made it possible to continue the process and meet the established requirements. However, individual-level limitations were also observed. In particular, there was a case of a student who initially showed resistance to participating in the project and in the proposed activities. Although this situation represented an obstacle, over time the student demonstrated greater willingness and interest, gradually becoming involved in the process.

Finally, these limitations highlight how contextual conditions, resource availability, and individual factors can significantly influence the implementation of educational projects, especially in diverse and changing environments.

Further Research

The findings of this study open valuable opportunities for further research, particularly considering that its final stage focused on the design of a proposal intended to contribute to Bilingual Learning Environments through the integration of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). In this regard, future studies could focus on implementing the proposed strategies in the Social Outreach Center to examine their feasibility and impact on students' learning experiences. Additionally, further research may explore how this implementation relates to elements identified in the present study, such as learners' participation, motivation, and interaction dynamics.

Long-term implementation would also be valuable to identify whether sustained use of these strategies may lead to consistent changes over time, specifically in students' gradual improvement in language performance.

Further research could also examine the role of teachers as mediators in the integration of SEL into bilingual learning environments. Although the guidebook provides structured strategies, its effectiveness may depend on teachers' beliefs, training, emotional awareness, and ability to adapt activities to specific group dynamics. Therefore, future studies could explore teachers' perceptions regarding the usability and sustainability of the guidebook, as well as the challenges they may face when attempting to integrate socio-emotional competencies into English sessions. Besides, considering the practical nature of the proposed strategies, future research may also examine the transferability of the guidebook to similar community-based educational contexts. In particular, it would be relevant to explore how adaptable the activities are across different age groups, cultural settings, and institutional dynamics.

On a broader level, further research in the Colombian context could examine how educational institutions and community learning centers interpret and respond to national policies related to socio-emotional education. Since these policies emphasize socio-emotional development as an educational priority, future studies could analyze the extent to which teachers and institutions are prepared to integrate these expectations into practice, particularly in vulnerable settings where resources and training opportunities may be limited.

Finally, future research may expand this line of inquiry by examining the connection between SEL bilingual education and processes of community transformation, peacebuilding, and social reconstruction. As Cruz (2017) suggests, English learning in vulnerable territories may contribute to social development and equality. Therefore, it would be relevant to tackle how language learning environments that intentionally promote socio-emotional competencies can support learners in developing empathy, conflict resolution skills, collaborative behaviors, and positive relationships. Research in this area could position bilingual learning environments not only as spaces for language development, but also as meaningful settings towards holistic education scenarios.

Appendices

[Appendix 1](#)

Participants' consent forms: teachers.

[Appendix 2](#)

Participants' consents forms: students.

[Appendix 3](#)

Data analysis formats

[Appendix 4](#)

Nonparticipant observation transcriptions

[Appendix 5](#)

Semi-structured teachers' interview transcriptions

[Appendix 6](#)

Filled-out students' surveys

[Appendix 7](#)

Resulting codes from the data analysis

[Appendix 8](#)

Codified segments from data analysis

[Appendix 9](#)

Students' survey analysis.

[Appendix 10](#)

Booklet proposal

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