

**"THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS ON
BILINGUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN MEDELLÍN'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS"**

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Abstract

The implementation of bilingual education in Colombia has been shaped by national policies such as the National Bilingualism Program (PNB), which seeks to position English as a key tool for economic development and global integration (MEN, 2006). However, significant disparities persist between private and public educational institutions, particularly in socioeconomically vulnerable contexts where limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient teacher training affect language learning processes (Usma Wilches, 2009; Roldán, 2016). Beyond structural conditions, socioemotional factors play a key role in shaping students' engagement with English learning. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine how emotional and socioeconomic factors influence bilingual learning environments in two public schools in Medellín. Data were collected through student questionnaires and teacher focus groups, allowing for the triangulation of perspectives. Findings indicate that language anxiety, low perceived relevance of English, and limited access to educational resources significantly affect students' motivation and participation. These factors interact with classroom practices and teacher–student relationships, reinforcing inequalities in learning opportunities. The study highlights the need for context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that integrate socioemotional support and equitable access to resources, contributing to more inclusive and responsive bilingual learning environments in public education.

Key words: *bilingual learning environments, socioeconomic factors, emotional factors, English language acquisition, public schools, demotivation.*

Resumen

La implementación de la educación bilingüe en Colombia ha sido impulsada por políticas nacionales como el Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo (PNB), que busca posicionar el inglés como una herramienta clave para el desarrollo económico y la integración global (MEN, 2006). Sin embargo, persisten disparidades significativas entre las instituciones educativas privadas y públicas, particularmente en contextos socioeconómicamente vulnerables donde los recursos limitados, las aulas superpobladas, y la insuficiente capacitación docente afectan los procesos de aprendizaje de idiomas (Usma Wilches, 2009; Cárdenas & Hernández, 2011; Roldán, 2016 & Bonilla Díaz, 2019). Más allá de los factores estructurales, los factores socioemocionales desempeñan un papel fundamental en la configuración de los ambientes de aprendizaje del inglés. Este estudio adopta un enfoque de estudio de caso cualitativo para examinar como los factores emocionales, y socioeconómicos influyen en los ambientes bilingües de aprendizaje en dos colegios públicos de Medellín. Los datos se recopilaron a través de cuestionarios a estudiantes y grupos focales con profesores, lo que permitió la triangulación de perspectivas. Los hallazgos indican que la ansiedad lingüística, la baja relevancia percibida del inglés y el acceso limitado a recursos educativos afectan significativamente la motivación y participación de los estudiantes. Estos factores interactúan con las prácticas de aula y las relaciones profesor. Estudiante, reforzando las desigualdades en las oportunidades de aprendizaje. El estudio destaca la necesidad de estrategias pedagógicas sensibles al contexto que integren el apoyo socioemocional y el acceso equitativo a los recursos, contribuyendo a ambientes bilingües de aprendizaje más inclusivos y perceptivos en la educación pública.

Palabras clave: ambientes bilingües de aprendizaje, factores socioeconómicos, factores emocionales, adquisición del idioma inglés, colegios públicos, desmotivación.

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Introduction

English learning in Colombian public schools cannot be reduced to the acquisition of grammatical structures or isolated vocabulary. For many students, particularly those growing up in socioeconomically vulnerable communities in Medellín, learning English is deeply intertwined with their emotional experiences, personal circumstances, and the broader social conditions that shape their daily lives. Within the institutions where this study was conducted, both teachers and students described English classes as spaces where motivation, anxiety, curiosity, and frustration coexist, influencing how learners engage with the language (Gómez Sará, 2017; Bonilla & Díaz, 2019). These perspectives suggest that language learning in public educational contexts is not only a pedagogical process but also an emotional and socially situated experience.

During the initial stages of this study, many students expressed feelings of nervousness and fear when asked to participate in English-speaking activities. This apprehension was often linked to the possibility of being judged by peers or making mistakes in front of others. Such experiences are consistent with the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety, understood as the tension and emotional discomfort associated with second language use (MacIntyre, 1999, as cited in Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). However, these emotional responses were not uniform. Moments of enjoyment, laughter, and active engagement also emerged when teachers implemented interactive and supportive pedagogical strategies, suggesting that emotional safety plays a central role in fostering participation in bilingual learning environments. Nevertheless, emotional factors alone do not fully explain students' experiences. Many learners face significant socioeconomic constraints, including limited access to internet connectivity,

inadequate study spaces, and reduced academic support at home. These conditions shape not only students' opportunities to practice English outside the classroom but also their levels of confidence, motivation, and perceived relevance of the language. From a sociological perspective, these dynamics reflect broader patterns of inequality, where access to cultural and material resources influences learners' agency and expectations (Bourdieu, 1991). Local data, such as reports from the Alcaldía de Medellín (2025), further highlight the structural disparities affecting public education in vulnerable communities.

In this context, it becomes evident that teaching English in public schools requires more than methodological expertise. It demands pedagogical approaches that recognize students' emotional realities and respond to the challenges imposed by their socioeconomic environments. Teachers are not only facilitators of linguistic knowledge but also mediators of learning experiences shaped by inequality, identity, and affective conditions. Ignoring these dimensions risks perpetuating exclusion and limiting the transformative potential of bilingual education. This study emerges from the need to better understand how emotional and socioeconomic factors interact within bilingual learning environments and how they influence students' engagement with English. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research question: *How do emotional and socioeconomic factors impact the development of bilingual learning environments and influence English language acquisition in Medellín's public schools?*

To address this question, the study adopts a qualitative, inductive, and descriptive approach that prioritizes the voices of students and teachers. By examining their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, the research aims to contribute to the development of more equitable, context-sensitive, and emotionally responsive pedagogical practices in public bilingual education.

Justification

Social inequalities continue to represent a significant challenge in diverse educational contexts, particularly in public bilingual learning environments where access to resources is unevenly distributed. Socioeconomic disparities directly affect students' opportunities to engage meaningfully with English, limiting their access to technological tools, academic support, and enriched learning experiences. These conditions are further shaped by structural limitations in the implementation of public policies. For instance, National Bilingual Program has been shown to produce differentiated outcomes, as institutional funding structures and local conditions often hinder the equitable distribution of language learning opportunities (Cardona-Escobar et al., 2023).

Beyond structural constraints, socioemotional factors also play a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences. In many public-school contexts, learners face not only material limitations but also a lack of sustained emotional support, which affects their ability to build meaningful connections with teachers and engage confidently in the classroom. These conditions are closely associated with language anxiety, demotivation, and low self-esteem, all of which negatively influence participation and language development (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gao & Liu, 2022).

In this sense, bilingual education cannot be understood solely as a matter of curriculum or methodology. It must also consider the interaction between emotional wellbeing, socioeconomic conditions, and pedagogical practices. From this perspective, this study contributes to the field of bilingual education by providing context-based evidence that supports the design of inclusive and responsive pedagogical strategies. These strategies aim to strengthen students' participation,

motivation, and sense of agency, particularly in socioeconomically vulnerable public school settings (Cummins, 2017; Julien, 2023).

Objectives

General Objective:

To determine how socioeconomic and emotional factors influence the configuration of learning environments and the acquisition of English as a second language among students in public schools in the city of Medellín.

Specific Objectives:

To identify the main emotional factors that influence students' experiences within bilingual learning environments in public schools in Medellín.

To compare how the students' socioeconomic conditions affect their access, retention, and participation in English learning environments, identifying the concrete barriers, supports, and contextual factors that shape these three dimensions within the two public schools.

To propose context-sensitive pedagogical and institutional strategies that promote equitable and inclusive English learning environments, based on study findings.

Theoretical Framework

Research on English learning in vulnerable educational settings has increasingly shown that language acquisition is shaped not only by instructional practices but also by emotional, social, and structural conditions. In the Colombian context, this is particularly relevant in public schools, where bilingual education often unfolds under unequal material and institutional conditions.

A first relevant contribution is the study by Cardona-Escobar et al. (2023), which examines the enactment of the Colombian National Bilingual Program and shows that the promise of equal access to English learning is undermined by differentiated funding structures and institutional pathways. Their findings are especially important for this study because they demonstrate that public bilingual education in Colombia is not implemented uniformly, and that disparities in access to language capital are structurally produced rather than merely circumstantial.

Similarly, Gómez Sará (2017) analyzes Colombian foreign language policies and argues that top-down bilingual initiatives often fail to account for the realities of local school communities. This perspective is significant because it highlights the tension between national policy discourse and the lived conditions of teachers and students in public schools.

From a more pedagogical perspective, Bonilla and Díaz (2019) and Roldán (2016) document the challenges faced by English teachers in Colombian public schools, including overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and uneven professional preparation. These studies help frame the present research within a broader national discussion about how structural inequalities affect the possibilities of building meaningful bilingual learning environments.

In relation to socioemotional factors, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) and Gao and Liu (2022) provide key insights into the relationship between motivation, demotivation, and classroom conditions in language learning. Their work shows that learners' engagement is deeply affected by emotional experiences, perceptions of relevance, and pedagogical practices. These perspectives are useful for understanding why language learning in public schools cannot be explained solely through curriculum or methodology.

Another important line of inquiry concerns identity, agency, and participation. Norton (2013) argues that language learning is closely tied to how learners imagine themselves, how they are positioned in social interaction, and whether they perceive participation as meaningful. This perspective is relevant because students in unequal contexts may not disengage simply because they lack ability, but because they do not see English as connected to their realities, opportunities, or identities.

Taken together, these studies show that bilingual education in public schools must be understood as a situated and complex process shaped by the interaction of policy, pedagogy, inequality, and emotion. However, there is still a need for research that examines how these dimensions converge specifically in bilingual learning environments in Medellín's public schools. This study responds to that need by analyzing the interdependence between socioeconomic conditions, socioemotional experiences, and English learning participation.

This framework is organized around four central dimensions. First, it addresses the concept of the learning environment and its relevance to language education. Second, it examines bilingual learning environments as socially and culturally situated ecosystems rather than as purely linguistic spaces. Third, it explores the role of socioeconomic conditions in shaping educational opportunities and engagement. Finally, it analyzes the socioemotional dimensions of English learning, particularly anxiety, demotivation, family environment, and emotional intelligence. Together, these dimensions provide the conceptual foundation for understanding how students in Medellín's public schools experience English learning within contexts marked by both vulnerability and possibility.

Learning environments as relational and contextual spaces

A learning environment cannot be reduced to the physical classroom, or the instructional materials available to students. Rather, it includes the set of academic, social, emotional, and material conditions that shape how learning is experienced. Kiatkheeree (2018) describes the learning environment as encompassing physical, psychological, and academic dimensions, all of which contribute to the quality of students' engagement and achievement. From this perspective, learning is not simply the result of individual cognitive effort; it is shaped by the interaction between learners, teachers, resources, expectations, and institutional practices.

In the field of language education, this understanding is especially relevant because language learning is inherently social and relational. Students do not acquire a foreign language in isolation. They do so in interaction with others, within classroom climates that may either encourage participation or intensify fear, insecurity, and silence. A supportive learning environment therefore involves more than adequate infrastructure. It also requires emotional safety, inclusive pedagogical relationships, and opportunities for students to take risks without fear of humiliation or exclusion.

This broader understanding of learning environments is particularly important in public school contexts where resource limitations, overcrowding, and uneven institutional support may affect not only academic performance but also students' perceptions of themselves as language learners. In such cases, the environment becomes a mediating force that either expands or constrains students' opportunities to engage meaningfully with English.

Bilingual learning environments as socially constructed ecosystems

Within the framework of MABA, bilingual learning environments are not understood merely as spaces where two languages coexist. They are better conceived as dynamic ecosystems

in which language, identity, power, social interaction, and pedagogy continuously shape one another. Research on bilingualism has consistently shown that bilingual development depends not only on exposure to language forms, but also on the social and ideological conditions under which language use becomes possible and legitimate.

García and Li Wei (2014) argue that bilingual practices are dynamic and adaptive, reflecting the ways in which speakers draw on their full linguistic repertoires in response to contextual demands. This perspective challenges static views of bilingualism and emphasizes that language learning is embedded in lived realities. Similarly, García and Sánchez (2018) stress that bilingual education must respond to local identities and community needs rather than simply reproducing standardized models detached from students' sociocultural contexts.

This understanding is reinforced by scholars such as Shohamy (2006), who shows that language policy is never neutral but often shaped by hidden agendas, ideological assumptions, and unequal power relations. In educational contexts, these policies influence which languages are valued, who is recognized as a legitimate speaker, and what kinds of participation are encouraged or restricted. Blackledge and Creese (2010) likewise highlight that multilingual and bilingual practices are always mediated by power, identity, and institutional ideologies. From this perspective, bilingual learning environments are not only pedagogical spaces but also ideological spaces in which belonging, legitimacy, and participation are negotiated.

Baker and Wright (2017) and Ortega (2015) further support the idea that bilingual development depends on meaningful opportunities to use language in context. Students learn languages not simply by studying them as abstract systems, but by participating in communicative and socially relevant practices. This has important implications for public education, where the challenge is not only to teach English as a subject, but to create

environments in which students can perceive English as meaningful, accessible, and connected to their lives.

In this sense, bilingual learning environments in public schools should be understood as socially constructed ecosystems where emotional climate, institutional support, classroom interaction, access to resources, and sociocultural identity interact in complex ways. Cummins (2017) and Norton (2013) are particularly useful here. This perspective can be further expanded by considering how language practices may also reproduce forms of exclusion and symbolic violence within educational settings. Jönsson (2024) shows that marginalized students often experience language not only as a tool for communication but also as a mechanism through which they are positioned, judged, or silenced. This insight is particularly relevant for bilingual learning environments in unequal contexts, where students' linguistic participation may be shaped by power relations that determine whose voices are valued and whose are marginalized. Cummins emphasizes that bilingual education must validate learners' identities and promote empowerment rather than reproducing exclusionary hierarchies. Norton, in turn, demonstrates that language learning is deeply linked to questions of identity, investment, and agency. Learners participate more actively when they can imagine themselves as legitimate users of the language and when the learning environment affirms, rather than diminishes, their sense of self.

From this theoretical lens, bilingual learning environments are not fixed or neutral settings. They are relational, dynamic, and shaped by multiple interdependent dimensions. Any change in one dimension such as emotional safety, teacher-student relationships, or socioeconomic access can reconfigure the environment as a whole. This ecological view provides strong conceptual coherence for the present study, which seeks to analyze how emotional and socioeconomic factors influence English learning in public school contexts.

This broader understanding of learning environments can also be reinforced through holistic education perspectives, which emphasize the integration of cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical dimensions in the learning process. From this standpoint, education is not limited to the transmission of knowledge but involves the development of the whole person within a relational and contextual system (Miller et al., 2019). This perspective is particularly relevant in public school settings, where students' learning experiences are shaped by multiple intersecting conditions that go beyond academic instruction.

Public bilingual education and structural inequality

The implementation of bilingual education in Colombia has been strongly influenced by national policies such as the National Bilingual Program. However, multiple studies have shown that the impact of these policies has been uneven across institutions and regions. Public schools, particularly those serving economically vulnerable communities, often face structural conditions that make it difficult to fulfill the official expectations associated with bilingual education.

Cardona-Escobar et al. (2023) demonstrate that the enactment of bilingual policy in Colombia has not produced equal access to language capital. Instead, schools have followed differentiated institutional pathways, with varying levels of support, resources, and professional development. As a result, some schools receive stronger institutional backing for bilingual initiatives, while others remain under-resourced and unable to meet the same targets. This differentiated implementation reveals that the discourse of equal opportunity may conceal deeply unequal educational conditions.

Castell Britton (2024) extends this critique by showing that bilingual initiatives in Colombia frequently fail to account for the realities of under-resourced, rural, Afro-Colombian, or otherwise marginalized communities. When bilingual education is designed without

sensitivity to local contexts, it risks reproducing the very hierarchies it claims to challenge. In this sense, public bilingual education cannot be understood only as a matter of curriculum design; it must also be examined through the lens of equity, cultural responsiveness, and structural inequality.

Gómez Sará (2017) adds an important dimension to this debate by arguing that bilingual policies succeed only when teachers are recognized as contextualized professionals capable of adapting official frameworks to their students' lived realities. In public schools, where teachers often work under difficult institutional conditions, this flexibility is crucial. The classroom becomes a site where policy is not simply implemented, but interpreted, negotiated, and sometimes resisted.

Julien (2023) further emphasizes that students' achievement is influenced by the extent to which learning environments are inclusive, safe, and motivational. This insight is especially important in Medellín, where many public schools serve communities affected by poverty, social exclusion, and historical violence. In such contexts, bilingual learning environments must be understood as affective and political spaces, not merely instructional ones.

Taken together, these studies suggest that public bilingual learning environments in Medellín are shaped by a tension between policy aspirations and local realities. To analyze them adequately, it is necessary to consider both the institutional dimension of bilingual education and the unequal material and social conditions under which it is enacted.

Socioeconomic conditions and English learning

One of the most significant dimensions affecting English learning in public schools is students' socioeconomic context. Socioeconomic conditions influence not only access to

educational resources, but also students' confidence, aspirations, and opportunities to engage with learning beyond the classroom. For this reason, this study treats socioeconomic factors not as peripheral background variables but as structural dimensions of the bilingual learning environment itself.

Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to an individual's or family's social and economic position in relation to others, typically measured through indicators such as income, education, and occupation. In educational research, SES is widely used to explain disparities in access to resources, learning opportunities, and academic outcomes (Sirin, 2005; OECD, 2018).

Recent research in educational inequality has emphasized that these disparities are not only material but also relational and symbolic. Reay (2021) argues that social class continues to shape students' educational trajectories through access to resources, expectations, and institutional recognition, reinforcing patterns of advantage and disadvantage across contexts.

At the same time, inequality is reproduced in everyday classroom interactions. Jönsson (2024) shows that marginalized students may experience language as a site of symbolic violence, where they are judged, categorized, or silenced based on linguistic and social expectations.

This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding bilingual learning environments in public schools, where socioeconomic disadvantage is reflected not only in limited resources but also in how students' identities and voices are valued or marginalized within the classroom.

Thomson (2018) confirms that socioeconomic background has a substantial impact on academic performance, even in highly developed educational systems. This finding is important for the present study because it suggests that structural inequality is not incidental to learning,

but constitutive of it. In contexts such as Medellín's public schools, where many students live under conditions of economic hardship, SES may shape everything from attendance patterns and homework completion to access to digital tools and study spaces.

Recent research also emphasizes that socioeconomic inequality operates through multiple forms of capital that shape students' educational trajectories. Reay (2021) highlights that access to resources, institutional recognition, and socially valued forms of knowledge continues to influence students' opportunities and expectations within the education system. From this perspective, students who possess forms of knowledge, language practices, and dispositions aligned with school expectations are often better positioned to succeed. In contrast, students from vulnerable backgrounds may encounter institutional norms that do not reflect their lived realities, affecting both their academic performance and their self-perception as learners. This reinforces the idea that socioeconomic inequality is a key lens for understanding how access to English learning is structured and experienced.

Parents' education and family support

Parents' educational background is another important factor in students' academic outcomes. Idris et al. (2020) found that children of more highly educated parents often perform better academically, partly because these families are more likely to provide academic guidance, educational resources, and strategic support. However, this relationship should not be interpreted deterministically. The educational role of families cannot be reduced to formal schooling levels alone.

In many socioeconomically vulnerable contexts, parents with limited formal education may still provide strong forms of emotional support, discipline, and encouragement that positively shape students' learning. Therefore, while parents' educational background matters, it

should be analyzed alongside other dimensions such as family attitudes toward schooling, availability of time, emotional presence, and the value assigned to English learning within the home.

For the purposes of this study, family support is important not only as a socioeconomic variable but also as an affective one. The home is often the first environment where students develop beliefs about their academic potential, their capacity to persevere, and the relevance of learning. When family support is absent, inconsistent, or strained by economic pressure, students may experience difficulties that extend beyond academic performance and affect their emotional relationship with school.

Demographic and contextual conditions

Demographic factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, place of residence, and linguistic background may also shape educational opportunities. Thiele et al. (2016) show that school outcomes are influenced by socio-demographic variables, which often intersect with broader structural inequalities. In Medellín, these factors are particularly relevant because the student population is socially and culturally diverse, and because urban inequality is unevenly distributed across neighborhoods and institutions.

These contextual differences matter because students do not enter the classroom under the same conditions. Their experiences of bilingual education are shaped by multiple intersecting realities, including access to technology, household stability, neighborhood safety, and cultural belonging. As a result, demographic and contextual variables should not be treated as isolated descriptors, but as part of the broader social ecology in which English learning takes place.

Socioemotional dimensions of English learning

Alongside structural inequality, English learning is deeply shaped by students' emotional experiences. Socioemotional dimensions influence how learners interpret classroom interactions, respond to challenges, perceive themselves as language users, and decide whether to participate. In this study, socioemotional factors are treated as central components of the bilingual learning environment because they mediate the relationship between context and learning.

A growing body of empirical research has reinforced the importance of socioemotional factors in educational settings. A meta analysis conducted by Puertas Molero et al. (2020) found that emotional intelligence is significantly associated with academic performance, motivation, and psychological wellbeing. Their findings suggest that students with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to demonstrate better adaptive responses to academic challenges, greater engagement in learning activities, and improved interpersonal relationships. This evidence supports the argument that emotional processes are not peripheral to learning but play a central role in shaping educational outcomes.

Miranda Mangones and Arcia Enciso (2023) define socioemotional skills as abilities that allow individuals to participate actively in communities where they are heard and can contribute meaningfully. This perspective is valuable because it situates emotion within social interaction rather than treating it as a purely individual matter. In educational settings, socioemotional processes affect not only personal wellbeing but also attention, engagement, collaboration, and resilience. When students feel emotionally safe and recognized, they are more likely to participate actively and persist in learning tasks.

Recent developments in the study of emotional intelligence have further strengthened the understanding of socioemotional processes in learning. Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2025) propose updated models for measuring emotional intelligence, emphasizing its role as a set of

cognitive-emotional abilities that influence how individuals perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in complex situations. In educational contexts, these abilities are particularly relevant for language learning, as students must continuously manage uncertainty, evaluation, and social interaction. This perspective supports the idea that emotional intelligence is not merely a personal trait but a key component in shaping participation and resilience in bilingual learning environments.

Demotivation

Demotivation is one of the most visible socioemotional barriers in foreign language learning. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) argue that motivation in language learning is shaped by multiple psychological, social, and pedagogical factors. In under-resourced school settings, demotivation may emerge from repetitive methodologies, limited relevance of the content, lack of opportunities for success, and broader institutional inequities.

Gao and Liu (2022) explain that foreign language learning demotivation is closely related to poor school facilities, limited pedagogical innovation, and classroom conditions that reduce students' interest in learning. In Colombian public school settings, Bonilla and Díaz (2019) and Roldán (2016) also point to the influence of rigid curricula, resource scarcity, and unequal access to meaningful learning experiences. These conditions may cause students to perceive English as distant, unachievable, or irrelevant to their lives.

Norton's (2013) notion of investment is useful here because it helps explain why students may withdraw from language learning even when they are externally enrolled in the process. Learners invest in language when they believe that participation will offer symbolic or material returns and when they can imagine themselves as legitimate participants. When classrooms fail

to offer such possibilities, demotivation becomes more than a lack of effort; it becomes a response to exclusion, irrelevance, or diminished agency.

Family environment

The family environment plays a major role in shaping students' emotional and academic development. Zhao and Zhao (2023) define the family environment as the set of physical and psychological conditions that support the development of personality, behavior, and academic engagement. This includes family relationships, parent-child interaction, emotional harmony, and forms of supervision or support. From a family systems perspective, the quality of family functioning affects children's wellbeing, self-esteem, and academic performance.

A supportive family environment can foster emotional stability and academic confidence. However, it is important not to romanticize the family as an inherently protective space. In vulnerable contexts, families may also be affected by economic stress, emotional absence, instability, or domestic conflict. Under such conditions, the family environment may not support learning and may instead become a source of emotional overload that interferes with concentration, continuity, and confidence.

This distinction is important for the present study because it allows the family environment to be analyzed critically rather than idealistically. In Medellín's public schools, family dynamics may either reinforce students' sense of support or intensify their vulnerability. Therefore, understanding English learning requires attention not only to what happens inside the classroom, but also to the relational and emotional conditions that students bring with them into school.

Emotional intelligence and emotional regulation

Emotional intelligence is a central concept for understanding students' engagement in English learning. Originally defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions, the concept has evolved through subsequent research that has refined both its theoretical and empirical dimensions. Recent work by Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2025) has contributed to this field by proposing updated measurement models that conceptualize emotional intelligence as a set of interrelated cognitive-emotional abilities. These include the capacity to accurately perceive emotional information, use emotions to facilitate thinking, understand emotional meanings, and regulate emotions effectively.

In addition to theoretical developments, empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated the educational relevance of emotional intelligence. Puertas Molero et al. (2020), through a meta-analysis of studies in educational contexts, concluded that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with academic achievement, motivation, and social adaptation. This suggests that students' ability to understand and regulate emotions not only facilitates individual wellbeing but also enhances their capacity to engage meaningfully in learning processes. In the context of second language acquisition, this becomes particularly significant, as learners must navigate emotionally demanding situations such as oral participation, error correction, and peer evaluation.

In language learning, emotional intelligence matters because students must constantly manage uncertainty, error, exposure, and evaluation. Learners with stronger emotional regulation may be better equipped to cope with anxiety, frustration, and demotivating experiences. Coetzee and Jansen (2007) suggest that educational practices addressing emotional intelligence can positively affect students' learning processes, while López (2011) argues that emotional support helps learners deal with distractive and demotivating factors.

This is especially relevant in English classrooms, where performance anxiety and fear of making mistakes often inhibit participation. Emotional intelligence does not eliminate structural barriers, but it may mediate how students respond to them. For this reason, it is useful to consider emotional intelligence not as a purely individual trait, but as something that can be fostered within pedagogical relationships and supportive classroom climates.

Analytical articulation of the framework

Taken together, the concepts reviewed in this framework support a view of bilingual learning environments as complex, socially situated, and affectively mediated ecosystems. English learning in Medellín's public schools is shaped by the interaction of structural inequality, institutional conditions, relational dynamics, and emotional processes. Socioeconomic factors influence access to resources and opportunities, while socioemotional dimensions such as anxiety, demotivation, emotional regulation, and identity shape students' participation and engagement.

Furthermore, these processes are not neutral, as language practices may also reflect power relations that position learners differently within the classroom (Jönsson, 2024). From this perspective, bilingual learning environments must be understood not only as pedagogical spaces but also as social and ideological arenas where inclusion, exclusion, and agency are negotiated.

In this study, bilingual learning environments are therefore conceptualized as relational and holistic systems in which cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions converge (Miller et al., 2019), and where students' ability to participate meaningfully is shaped by both structural conditions and their capacity to navigate emotional challenges (Mayer et al., 2025). This integrated perspective provides the conceptual foundation for analyzing how emotional and socioeconomic factors influence English language learning in Medellín's public schools.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach aimed at understanding how emotional and socioeconomic factors shape bilingual learning environments within specific educational contexts. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for this purpose, as it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations within their natural settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than seeking statistical generalization, this approach prioritizes interpretive depth and contextualized understanding.

Methodologically, the study is framed as a qualitative case study. Case study research is defined as an empirical approach that investigates contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). This approach allows for a holistic and context-sensitive understanding of complex educational processes. In this study, the bounded systems consist of two public schools in Medellín serving socioeconomically vulnerable communities, which enables the analysis of bilingual learning environments as situated and relationally constructed spaces.

This design is particularly appropriate given the complexity inherent in bilingual learning environments. Emotional experiences, socioeconomic conditions, institutional structures, and identity processes interact dynamically rather than operating in isolation. From a contemporary qualitative perspective, such complexity requires methodological approaches that can capture interrelated processes without fragmenting them into discrete variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2020). Therefore, a case study approach enables the examination of these interactions in a holistic manner, aligning with the conceptualization of Ambientes Bilingües de Aprendizaje (MABA) presented in the theoretical framework.

Rather than pursuing statistical generalization, this study aims to generate analytically rich and context-sensitive insights that may support transferability to similar educational settings. In qualitative research, transferability refers to the extent to which findings can provide meaningful insights in contexts with comparable characteristics, based on detailed description and contextual depth (Tracy, 2020). By offering rich descriptions of the participating institutions, relational dynamics, and structural conditions, the study enables readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other public bilingual environments facing similar socioeconomic and emotional challenges.

Data were collected through two primary instruments: a student questionnaire combining open-ended and closed-ended questions, and a focus group conducted with teachers in two virtual sessions. These instruments were designed to generate complementary perspectives and allow for data triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings (Denzin, 2017; Tracy, 2020).

While this section outlines the methodological design, the epistemological foundations guiding data interpretation are discussed in the following subsection.

This study is grounded in an interpretive paradigm with a complementary sociocritical sensitivity. From an interpretive standpoint, social reality is understood as constructed through meanings, interactions, and lived experiences rather than as an objective and fixed entity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Knowledge is therefore co-constructed between researchers and participants, emerging from dialogue, context, and situated interpretation. This perspective is particularly appropriate for examining bilingual learning environments, as these are shaped not only by institutional frameworks but also by emotions, identities, and relational dynamics within specific sociocultural contexts.

At the same time, the study incorporates a sociocritical awareness that recognizes how structural inequalities influence educational experiences. While the primary objective is not to transform policy directly, the research acknowledges that socioeconomic disparities, access to resources, and institutional conditions are not neutral variables but expressions of broader power relations within society (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Walsh, 2018). In Medellín's public schools, bilingual education unfolds within contexts marked by historical inequality, economic precarity, and differentiated access to cultural capital. Thus, interpreting students' emotional experiences without examining the structural conditions that shape them would produce an incomplete analysis. The sociocritical lens allows the study to situate individual narratives within broader systems of opportunity and constraint.

Epistemologically, the study is anchored in a socioconstructivist foundation. Learning and meaning making are understood as socially mediated processes that emerge through interaction, dialogue, and cultural participation. In bilingual classrooms, students' engagement with English is shaped by how they perceive themselves, how they are positioned by others, and how they negotiate their identities within emotionally and materially constrained environments (Norton, 2013). Emotions such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence are therefore not merely internal states but socially situated experiences that reflect relational climates and structural realities. This perspective aligns with Cummins' (2017) framework of empowerment in bilingual education, which highlights the importance of validating learners' identities within equitable pedagogical spaces.

Within this epistemological positioning, the role of the researcher is interpretive, reflexive, and ethically situated. The researcher does not occupy a neutral or detached stance but engages as an instrument of interpretation, recognizing that prior professional experience in

bilingual education informs the analytical process. Reflexivity is maintained through analytic memos, triangulation of instruments, and transparent documentation of interpretive decisions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019). This reflexive posture enhances credibility while acknowledging that research is a relational and situated act.

The unit of analysis is the configuration of bilingual learning environments as socially constructed spaces where emotional and socioeconomic factors converge. More specifically, the analysis examines how students' emotional experiences (e.g., anxiety, demotivation, sense of agency) intersect with socioeconomic conditions (e.g., access to technology, family support, material resources) to shape participation and meaning making in English learning. Rather than isolating variables, the study explores the interplay among affective, relational, and structural dimensions within classroom contexts.

Finally, this epistemological positioning is coherent with the conceptual orientation of the Master's program in Ambientes Bilingües de Aprendizaje (MABA). MABA conceives bilingual learning environments as complex ecosystems where language, identity, pedagogy, and context interact dynamically. By integrating an interpretive and sociocritical lens, this study aligns with MABA's emphasis on contextualized understanding, relational depth, and ethical responsibility toward equity in bilingual education. Consequently, the methodological choices are not only procedural decisions, but epistemological commitments to understanding and critically examining how bilingual environments are shaped by both human interaction and structural inequality.

Although the researchers are professionals in the field of bilingual education, they conducted this study as external investigators to the participating institutions. This external positioning provided analytical distance from everyday institutional dynamics, allowing the

research team to approach participants' narratives without direct involvement in classroom decision-making or evaluation processes. At the same time, being external requires deliberate efforts to understand contextual subtleties, relational climates, and local institutional cultures without imposing preconceived interpretations derived from other educational settings. Recognizing that qualitative inquiry is inherently interpretive, the research team engaged in systematic reflexivity throughout the study. Rather than assuming neutrality, the researchers acknowledged that their professional backgrounds, theoretical commitments, and prior experiences in bilingual education could shape interpretive lenses. To address this, analytic memos were maintained during data coding, documenting interpretive decisions, emerging assumptions, and potential biases. This reflexive practice allowed the team to critically examine how meanings were being constructed during analysis and to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' voices rather than researcher expectations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Furthermore, the external position facilitated ethical clarity in interactions with participants. Since researchers did not hold evaluative or hierarchical roles within the institutions, students and teachers were able to share their experiences without concerns related to academic grading or professional assessment. This relational distance contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, aligning with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Within the MABA framework, this external yet professionally informed stance supports contextual sensitivity without conflating research with institutional authority. By explicitly articulating their positionality, the researchers strengthen the transparency of the study and reinforce the coherence between epistemological commitments and methodological practice.

Access to the participating institutions was formally requested through an official written authorization issued under the university's institutional format. This document, submitted to school principals and administrative leadership, outlined the objectives, methodological design, scope, and ethical safeguards of the study. The written authorization served as formal institutional endorsement and ensured procedural transparency prior to the initiation of data collection. The official authorization letter is included in Appendix B for documentation purposes.

Following administrative approval, meetings were held with school authorities to clarify logistical arrangements and confirm compliance with ethical standards. Only after receiving written institutional permission did the research team proceed to engage with teachers and students. This step reinforced the legitimacy of the research process and demonstrated adherence to university and institutional protocols.

Subsequently, preliminary visits were conducted to introduce the study to participants, explain its voluntary nature, and clarify confidentiality and data protection measures. Particular care was taken to differentiate the research process from institutional evaluation structures, ensuring that students and teachers understood that participation would not influence academic grading or professional assessment. These initial interactions were essential for building rapport and fostering a climate of trust, especially within socioeconomically vulnerable educational contexts. By securing formal written authorization and maintaining procedural transparency, the study strengthened its ethical foundation and reinforced its credibility, dependability, and institutional integrity.

Participants and context

This study was conducted in two public schools in Medellín, both institutions served socioeconomically vulnerable communities, making them appropriate contexts for examining how emotional and social conditions influenced students' learning experiences in English. These environments offered the complexity needed to analyze how bilingual learning develops in settings characterized by limited resources, diverse family backgrounds, and structural inequalities.

A sampling strategy was implemented to select participants for the study. The participant group consisted of sixteen ninth-grade students (ten of them from institution (A), and six from institution (B)) and three English teachers from both schools (2 from institution (A) and 1 from institution (B)). In the case of students, a random sampling approach was used to ensure that participants were selected without predefined criteria, allowing for a more inclusive representation of the classroom population (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Although qualitative research often relies on purposive sampling, incorporating random selection in this study helped reduce selection bias and provided access to a broader range of student perspectives within the given context (Tracy, 2020). Their voices provided valuable insights into motivation, emotional states, and contextual factors affecting their learning.

The participating teachers had several years of professional experience in public education, working closely with adolescents, and navigating emotional, social, and institutional challenges. Their contributions helped capture how emotions, school climate, and socioeconomic realities manifested in classroom interactions and shaped students' engagement with the English language.

The research focused on exploring how emotional experiences and socioeconomic conditions interact within bilingual learning environments, consistent with the conceptual

framework of MABA (Ambientes Bilingües de Aprendizaje). For this reason, the study incorporated perspectives from both students and teachers, allowing the analysis to capture multiple viewpoints regarding English learning processes in these students.

Participants and Context

Figure 1

PARTICIPANTS' CHARACTERISTICS.		
Characteristics	Institution 1	Institution 2
• Participants' • Age • Grade • Mother tongue • Second language • English level • Languages at home • Languages at school	• 10 • 14-16 • Nine grade • Spanish • English • A1 • Spanish • English	• 6 • 14-16 • Nine grade • Spanish • English • A1 • Spanish • English

Note: Created by the authors, 2026.

Traceability Matrix

This research established a clear alignment between its specific objectives and the instruments used for data collection, ensuring coherence between the study's purpose and the evidence obtained from participants. Given the qualitative and interpretive nature of the study,

this alignment enabled the integration of students' lived experiences with teachers' professional interpretations, ensuring a multidimensional understanding of bilingual learning environments in contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability.

The first specific objective, which aimed to identify the emotional factors influencing students' experiences in English learning, was addressed through both the student questionnaire and the teacher focus group. The questionnaire captured students' self-reported emotions, sources of motivation, and situations that hindered participation, while the focus group provided teachers' observations of emotional expressions and engagement patterns. Together, these perspectives contributed to a comprehensive analysis of the emotional dimension.

To address the second specific objective, which examined how socioeconomic conditions affected students' participation and learning opportunities, the analysis primarily drew on data collected through the student questionnaire and the teacher's focus group. The student questionnaire provided first-hand accounts of resource availability, family support, and contextual challenges, offering direct insight into students' lived experiences. In turn, the teacher focus group contributed a complementary perspective by illustrating how these external conditions manifested in classroom behavior and engagement.

This objective was conceptually anchored in a sociocritical understanding of education, highlighting how unequal access to resources shapes learning trajectories in bilingual contexts (De Sousa Santos, 2014; Walsh, 2018). The combination of both instruments enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by triangulating student narratives with teacher reflections, thereby strengthening the depth and credibility of the analysis (Tracy, 2020).

The third specific objective, focused on proposing inclusive pedagogical strategies that promote equity and emotional well-being, was supported primarily by the teacher focus group,

which elicited professional reflections on effective practices, institutional limitations, and responsive approaches. Students' responses also informed this objective by identifying the types of pedagogical actions that enhanced or diminished their motivation and participation. This connection aligned with Cummins' (2017) framework of empowerment and participatory engagement.

Theoretically, the alignment between objectives and instruments was guided by Norton's (2013) work on identity and agency, Bourdieu's (1991) perspectives on social capital, and Cummins' (2017) conceptualization of empowerment in bilingual education. These frameworks ensured that the traceability matrix reflected a coherent relationship between emotional experiences, socioeconomic realities, and pedagogical strategies.

The following matrix establishes explicit coherence between the research questions, theoretical framework, conceptual categories, operational definitions, instruments, and analytical strategies. The macro-categories derive from the conceptualization of Ambientes Bilingües de Aprendizaje (MABA) as complex ecosystems shaped by emotional, relational, and structural dimensions.

Socioemotional factors operationalize the affective configuration of the bilingual environment, while socioeconomic conditions operationalize its structural configuration. Learning environments integrate relational and pedagogical dynamics within this ecosystem. The matrix ensures traceability between theoretical positioning and empirical inquiry.

Instruments And Data Collection Procedures

This study employed qualitative data collection instruments designed to capture participants' perceptions, experiences, and contextual conditions related to English learning within bilingual learning environments. In accordance with the interpretive paradigm guiding the

study, the instruments sought to explore meanings and experiences rather than measure predetermined variables.

Two primary sources of qualitative data were used: an open-ended student questionnaire and a teacher focus group. The use of multiple instruments allowed the research to capture both individual student perspectives and collective professional interpretations from teachers, contributing to a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study. The selection of these instruments was aligned with the traceability matrix presented in section 5.3, ensuring that the data collected corresponded directly with the conceptual categories of Learning Environments, Socioemotional Factors, and Socioeconomic Conditions.

Timeline Of the Study

The development of this study followed a sequence of methodological phases that ensured coherence between the research objectives, the instruments applied, and the procedures implemented. Each phase was structured to allow the research team to move systematically from design to application, analysis, and reporting, ensuring both ethical compliance and methodological rigor.

The process began with the design and validation of the instruments. During this stage, the questionnaire and the focus group guide were submitted for expert review to assess their clarity, linguistic precision, contextual relevance, and ethical adequacy. This validation process was essential for refining questions, aligning them with the study's interpretive approach, and ensuring that they responded directly to specific objectives. After incorporating the experts' recommendations, the instruments were piloted in each institution to verify comprehension, flow, and estimated timing. Minor adjustments were made based on students' and teachers' feedback during the pilot phase.

Once the instruments were validated and piloted, the formal data collection phase was carried out. The student questionnaire was administered individually during scheduled class hours, guaranteeing that participation remained voluntary, anonymous, and comfortable for the students. The focus group with English teachers was conducted in a guided session lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. This session was audio-recorded, with prior consent, and accompanied by field notes documenting emotional tone, interactional patterns, and contextual details that later supported interpretation.

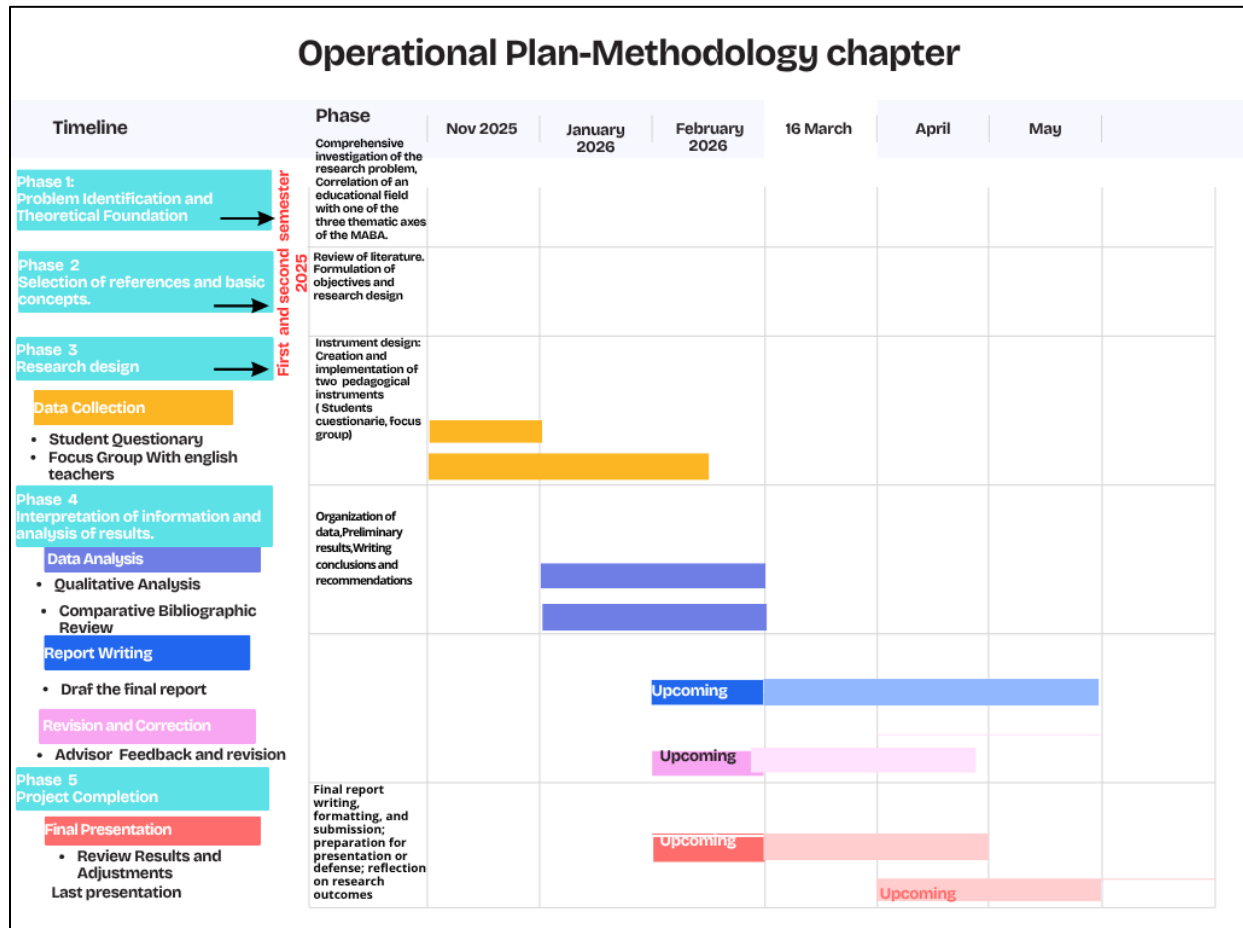
Following data collection, the analysis phase began. All questionnaire responses were reviewed, categorized, and coded, and the focus group audio was transcribed verbatim. Open and axial coding procedures were applied systematically, and the research team engaged in triangulation to compare students' emotional narratives with teachers' pedagogical reflections. This phase culminated in the development of thematic findings grounded in the theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

Finally, the reporting and dissemination stage took place. The results were organized into a coherent narrative aligned with the research questions and objectives. The report was reviewed by the research team collectively, integrating suggestions, refining interpretations, and ensuring coherence across sections. Once the final version was consolidated, the study was presented to the academic committee as part of the requirements for the master's program. This timeline ensured that each methodological step contributed meaningfully to the construction of a grounded and ethically conducted research process, respecting the dynamics of the participating institutions and the voices of the students and teachers involved.

The next figure illustrated the organization and stages of the activities along the project to guarantee a systematic coherence with the objectives, instruments, and procedures.

Figure 2

Project Calendar



Note: Created by the authors, 2026.

Ethical considerations

Data collection for this study was conducted in two phases across consecutive academic semesters. During the previous semester, the student questionnaire was administered within the framework of the master's program research activities. Prior to its implementation, written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians of participating students, in accordance with the university's institutional ethical protocols. These consent forms explicitly authorized voluntary participation in academic research processes supervised by the university.

In the current semester, the teacher focus group was conducted in two separate sessions via Microsoft Teams, due to participants' professional availability constraints. Teachers had previously signed general consent forms for participation in academic research activities within the master's program framework. At the beginning of each virtual session, informed consent was verbally reaffirmed. Participants were clearly informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality safeguards, their right to withdraw at any time, and the fact that the session would be audio-recorded for research purposes. Explicit verbal authorization to record the sessions was obtained prior to initiating the recording.

Both sessions were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analytical purposes. Audio files and transcripts were anonymized using coded identifiers and stored in password-protected digital folders accessible only to the research team. No identifying information was included in the transcription process. The use of the Microsoft Teams platform complied with institutional data protection standards and ensured secure digital storage. Throughout both phases, participation remained entirely voluntary, with no evaluative, supervisory, or institutional consequences associated with involvement in the study. All procedures adhered to Resolution 8430 of 1993 (Ministerio de Salud, 1993) minimal risk research classification, Law 1581 of 2012 on personal data protection in Colombia (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2012), and the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

Signed parental consent forms are securely archived under university supervision. For confidentiality reasons, these documents are not reproduced in the appendices but remain available for review by authorized academic or ethical committees upon request.

Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire included open-ended questions designed to explore students' emotional experiences, perceptions of English learning, and contextual conditions influencing their participation in bilingual classrooms. The instrument was administered during the previous academic semester as part of activities developed within the master's program. The use of open-ended questions allowed students to express their perspectives in their own words, facilitating the identification of meanings and experiences related to the learning process. The questionnaire focused on three thematic areas consistent with the analytical categories of the study: experiences and feelings associated with learning English, perceptions of classroom dynamics and teacher support. contextual factors affecting learning opportunities These questions provided insight into the emotional and structural conditions shaping bilingual learning environments from the students' perspective.

Figure 2

Student Questionnaire collection



Note: Taken by the authors, 2026.

Teacher Focus Group

To complement student perspectives, a focus group with English teachers from both participating institutions was conducted. Focus groups are commonly used in qualitative research to explore shared experiences and professional interpretations through collective dialogue.

Due to teachers' work schedules and availability, the focus group was conducted in two separate sessions using online meeting software. This format allowed the participation of teachers from both institutions while maintaining a collaborative discussion format.

The focus group explored topics related to students' emotional responses to English learning, classroom dynamics and participation patterns, contextual challenges affecting bilingual learning environments, teachers' perceptions of socioeconomic factors influencing learning opportunities. Both sessions were audio-recorded with participants' verbal consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was carried out in two stages. First, the student questionnaire was administered during the previous academic semester as part of the master's program activities. Students completed the instrument individually, providing written responses to open-ended questions related to their experiences learning English.

Second, the teacher focus group was conducted during the current academic semester. Teachers from both institutions participated in two online sessions organized according to their availability. The conversations were guided by semi-structured prompts that encouraged reflection on students' learning conditions, emotional experiences, and contextual realities. The focus group sessions were recorded using the Microsoft Teams platform and later transcribed to facilitate qualitative analysis.

Finally, all collected data was organized, anonymized, and stored securely. The combination of both instruments allowed the research team to triangulate emotional narratives from students with pedagogical perceptions from teachers, producing a comprehensive and

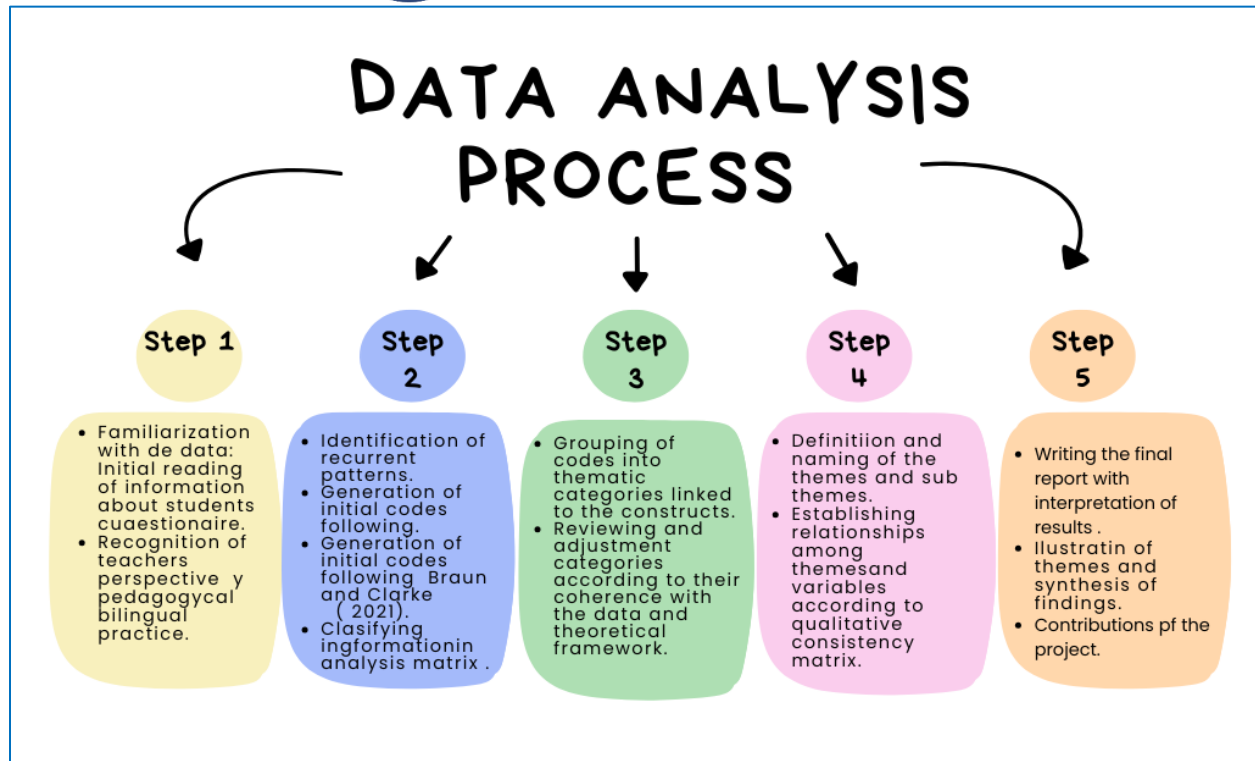
grounded understanding of how emotional, contextual, and institutional dimensions affected bilingual learning in vulnerable public-school environments.

Data Analysis

Although the study is framed as a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018), the analysis of the empirical data was conducted through thematic analysis, which served as the analytical strategy for identifying patterns across participants' narratives. In qualitative case study research, thematic analysis is frequently used to organize and interpret qualitative data within bounded contexts, allowing researchers to examine how meanings emerge from participants' experiences while still preserving the contextual complexity of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns related to socioemotional experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and classroom dynamics within the bilingual learning environments of the two participating institutions. The analytical procedures of this study were conducted within an interpretive qualitative framework, which aligned with the purpose of understanding how emotional and socioeconomic factors influenced the experiences of students and teachers in bilingual learning settings. The analysis followed an inductive logic, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing predetermined categories, consistent with the recommendations of Creswell and Poth (2018).

Figure 3

Analytical Plan



Note. Created by the authors, 2026

Once the data were gathered, the first step involved organizing and preparing the materials for analysis. Questionnaire responses were compiled and reviewed, and the teacher focus group was transcribed verbatim to preserve the richness of participants' expressions. Field notes were incorporated to capture contextual nuances and emotional details that complemented the verbal accounts. All data were anonymized using coded identifiers to ensure confidentiality.

The analytical process began with open coding. During this stage, recurrent concepts, emotional expressions, and contextual references were identified across both instruments. These initial codes reflected students' perceptions of motivation and emotional wellbeing, as well as teachers' observations of classroom dynamics, resource limitations, and institutional expectations. The coding process allowed the researchers to segment the data into meaningful units for deeper examination.

Following open coding, the team engaged in axial coding to connect related concepts and build broader analytical categories. This stage aimed to establish relationships among emotional, socioeconomic, and pedagogical dimensions, revealing how classroom practices, emotional expressions, and access to resources were interrelated. The categories were aligned with the study's specific objectives, ensuring that the analysis captured the depth and complexity of the phenomenon.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, a double-coding strategy was implemented for a subset of the data. Two researchers coded the same responses independently and later compared their interpretations. Differences were resolved through discussion, and analytic memos were used to trace the reasoning behind interpretive decisions, as recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019).

A triangulation process was then undertaken, comparing students' emotional narratives with teachers' pedagogical reflections. This step helped identify convergence, divergence, and complementarity between the two sources, reinforcing the credibility of the findings in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of trustworthiness. Triangulation provided a multidimensional perspective on the interplay between emotions, socioeconomic constraints, and instructional practices.

The final stage of analysis consisted of developing a thematic synthesis. This synthesis organized the results into overarching themes that addressed the study's specific objectives. These themes were interpreted through theoretical frameworks such as Norton's (2013) concept of identity and agency, Bourdieu's (1991) theory of capital and access, and Cummins' (2017) model of empowerment in bilingual education. These lenses guided the consolidation of findings

and supported the formulation of pedagogical recommendations grounded in equity and emotional wellbeing.

The data analysis was conducted under a qualitative descriptive approach, aimed at recognizing, interpreting, and establishing relationships between the factors that influence bilingual learning environments in Medellín's public schools. The analysis focused on the categories of learning environments, emotional factors, and socioeconomic factors, along with their corresponding subcategories derived from data collection instruments.

Data were obtained through two main instruments: a student questionnaire administered to 16 participants and a focus group conducted with three English teachers. Two of the teachers belong to Institution A and one to Institution B. Students were coded to ensure anonymity and facilitate analysis. Participants from Institution A were coded from S1A to S10A, while those from Institution B were coded from S1B to S6B. Teachers participating in the focus group were coded according to their institutional affiliation.

Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data, reducing the information through coding processes, grouping codes into themes, and finally representing the findings through narrative discussion, tables, or visual representations.

In addition, qualitative coding plays a fundamental role in the analytical process. As Saldaña (2016) states, coding involves assigning conceptual labels to segments of qualitative data to identify significant meanings, patterns, and relationships within participants' responses. Likewise, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) highlight that qualitative analysis involves processes such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, which facilitate the

systematic interpretation of complex qualitative information. Following the procedures proposed in thematic analysis, the analytical process was developed through several stages.

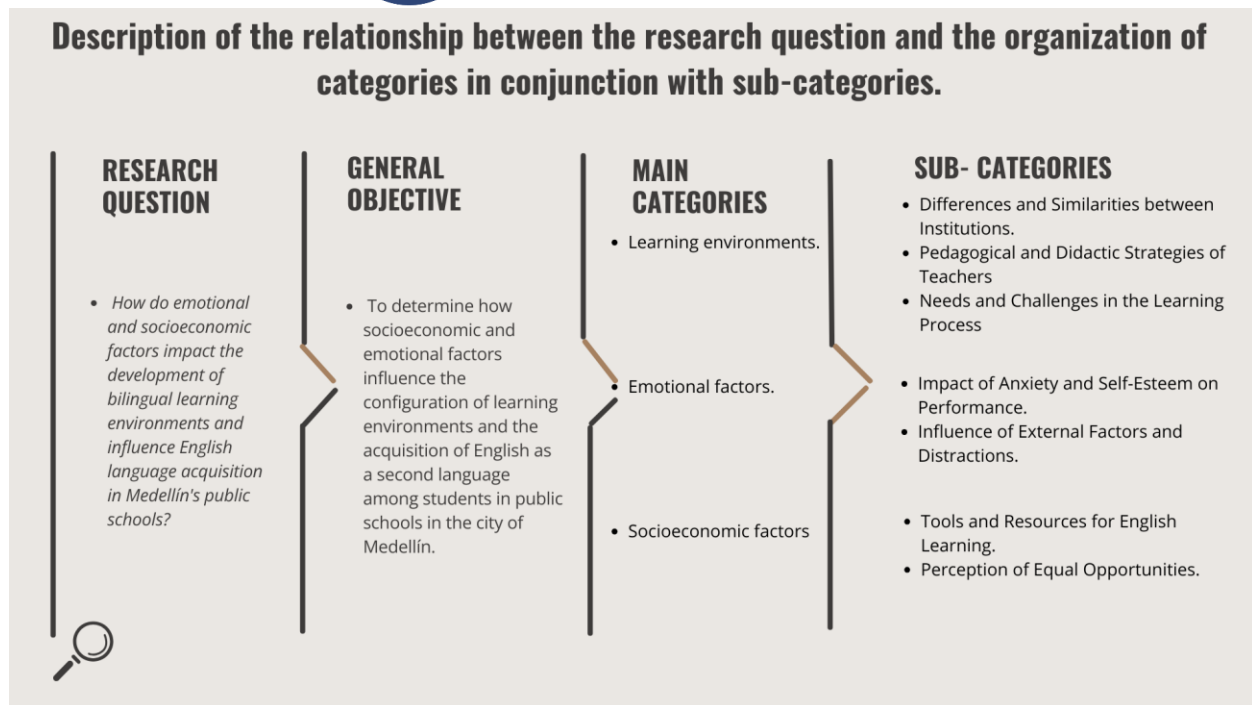
First, a data familiarization stage was conducted. During this stage, the audio recordings from the focus group and the open responses obtained from the student questionnaires were carefully reviewed and transcribed when necessary to ensure accuracy. After transcription, several careful readings of the data were carried out to become familiar with the participants' responses and to gain an overall understanding of the information collected. This stage also allowed the identification of preliminary observations related to emotional experiences, perceptions of bilingual education, and the socioeconomic contexts that influence students' learning processes.

Second, an initial coding process was carried out. During this stage, meaningful segments of text related to learning environments, emotional experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and perceptions of bilingual education were identified and labeled with preliminary codes. These codes represented key ideas expressed by participants and served as the basis for the later organization of the information. The process of open coding allowed the identification of relevant patterns and recurring elements across participants' narratives, facilitating the interpretation of how emotional and socioeconomic factors influence English language learning.

Third, the generated codes were grouped into broader analytical categories and subcategories. This categorization process enabled the organization of the data into meaningful conceptual units aligned with the theoretical framework of the study and the research objectives. The analysis was structured around three main categories:

Figure 4

Thematic organization



Note. Created by the authors, 2026

Emotional Factors, which include subcategories such as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), motivation, and teacher student relationships. These subcategories allowed the exploration of students' emotional experiences while learning English, including feelings of anxiety, confidence, frustration, and enjoyment in the classroom environment. Learning Environments, which included subcategories related to pedagogical strategies, classroom atmosphere, and the physical learning environment. This category allowed the analysis of how classroom dynamics, teaching strategies, and environmental conditions shape the bilingual learning experience. Socioeconomic Factors, which included subcategories such as family support and access to educational resources. This category explored how students' socioeconomic contexts influence their learning opportunities, availability of educational materials, and the level of support they receive from their families.

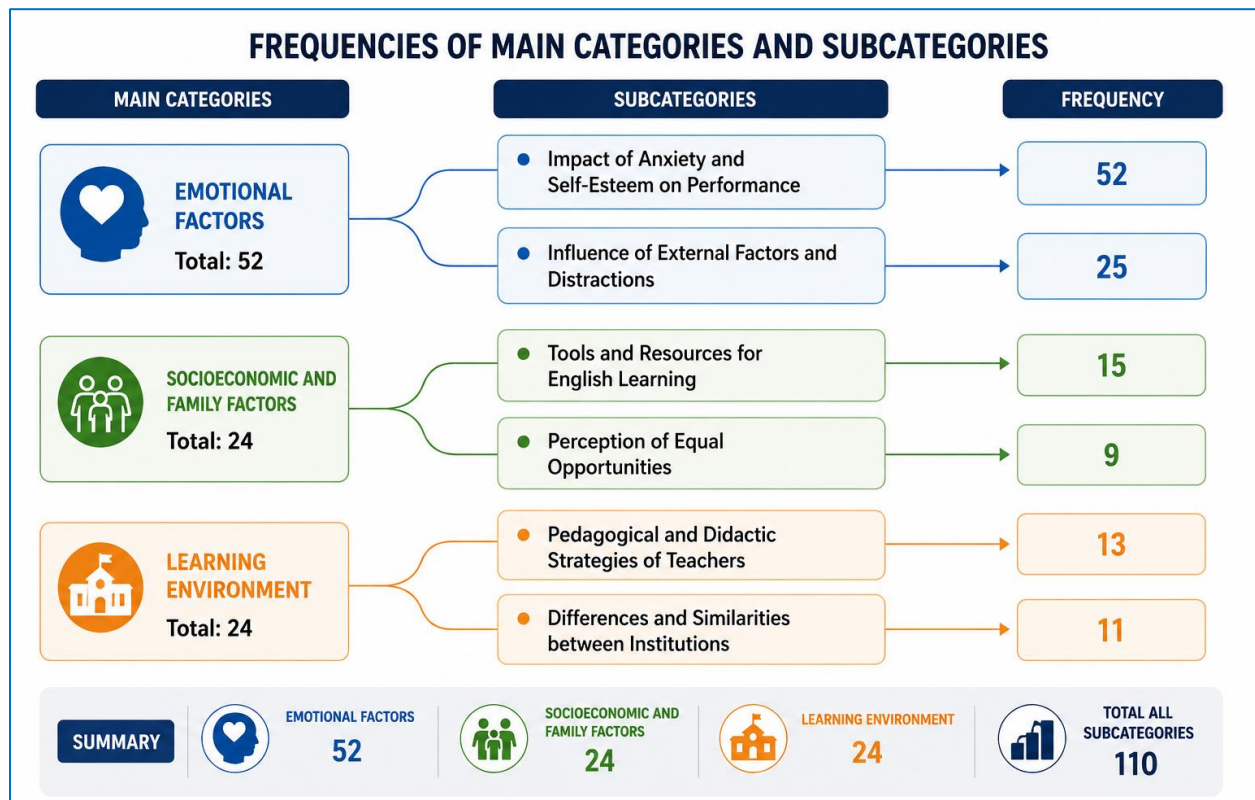
Within the category of socioeconomic factors, particular attention was given to patterns related to sociofamily conditions, perceptions of the socioeconomic environment, the influence of socioeconomic context, and students' future expectations. Narratives from participants revealed how limitations in time, financial resources, and access to technology may influence the type of academic support students receive at home and their opportunities to practice English outside the classroom.

Similarly, within the category of academic performance and learning processes, the analysis explored aspects such as educational resources, learning strategies, and family or school support. Through the responses provided by students and teachers, the analysis identified differences in access to technological resources, study materials, and academic support systems that may affect students' engagement with English learning.

Once the categories and subcategories were established, the analysis proceeded with the identification of recurring patterns, similarities, and divergences across participants' responses. This stage made it possible to examine how emotional experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and classroom environments interact in shaping students' experiences within bilingual learning contexts.

Figure 5

Categories and subcategories



Note. Created by the authors, 2026

Finally, the identified themes were interpreted and supported with representative quotations from students and teachers. These quotations served to illustrate the perspectives, experiences, and challenges described by participants regarding the process of learning English in public educational institutions. The interpretative process allowed a deeper understanding of how emotional and socioeconomic factors influence bilingual learning environments.

Additionally, the analysis facilitated the triangulation of data obtained from different instruments and participants, allowing the comparison of perspectives between students and teachers from both institutions. This triangulation process strengthened the credibility of the findings and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how socioeconomic and

emotional dynamics interact with pedagogical and environmental conditions to influence English language learning.

The implementation of these qualitative analytical techniques provided a structured and systematic framework for interpreting the complexity of the collected data, reinforcing the validity of the findings and enabling the identification of key aspects that may inform future educational strategies and interventions within bilingual learning environments in Medellín's public schools.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study problematize the assumption that bilingual learning environments operate as neutral pedagogical spaces where language acquisition unfolds primarily as a cognitive process. Instead, the data suggest that these environments function as socially situated and ideologically mediated contexts in which emotional experiences, pedagogical practices, and socioeconomic conditions intersect in complex and often contradictory ways. These interactions shape not only students' opportunities to learn, but also their positioning as legitimate or marginal participants within the classroom.

A first layer of analysis reveals that emotional experiences are central to students' engagement with English learning, yet these experiences cannot be reduced to individual psychological states. Rather, they must be understood as socially constructed responses to the conditions of participation structured within the classroom (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In Institution A, students articulate a dual emotional experience characterized by both motivation and anxiety. On the one hand, they express positive dispositions toward learning; on the other, they report intense discomfort in situations of public exposure. One student describes feeling “pena y pánico” when reading aloud (S1A), while another admits difficulty speaking in front of

peers (S7A). This is consistent with the teacher's observation that there is "un alto grado de ansiedad" associated with communicative tasks, particularly those involving pronunciation (T1A).

This convergence between student and teacher perspectives suggests that anxiety is not simply an internal deficit, but a response to normative expectations about language performance. From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with the view that affective variables in second language acquisition are shaped by social interaction (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). However, this finding can be further deepened through Norton's (2013) concept of investment, which emphasizes that learners' willingness to participate depends on whether they perceive themselves as legitimate speakers within a given context. In this sense, students' reluctance to participate is not necessarily due to lack of motivation, but to a perceived mismatch between their linguistic resources and the forms of language that are socially legitimized in the classroom. Anxiety, therefore, operates as an index of exclusion, signaling that participation is not equally accessible to all learners.

This interpretation becomes more evident when contrasted with the data from Institution B. In this context, students' emotional responses are not primarily framed in terms of internal struggle, but in relation to pedagogical mediation. Statements such as "confusión y rabia, porque los profes son muy desentendidos" (S1B) and "enojo porque nuestro profe no explica" (S2B) suggest a shift in the locus of explanation from the learner to the teaching context. This perspective is partially corroborated by teachers, who acknowledge that students experience "temor" when exposed to public speaking situations (T1B), while also highlighting the influence of contextual and institutional factors on engagement.

Rather than interpreting this difference between institutions as a variation in student attitudes, it is more analytically productive to understand it as evidence of how learning environments shape students' interpretive frameworks. In Institution A, students tend to internalize emotional barriers as personal limitations, whereas in Institution B they externalize them as consequences of pedagogical conditions. From Norton's (2013) perspective, this reflects different configurations of legitimacy and investment, revealing that emotional experiences are deeply relational and tied to how learners are positioned within classroom dynamics.

A second dimension of analysis concerns the role of socioeconomic conditions, which emerge not as peripheral variables but as structuring forces that shape both access to resources and students' perceptions of what is possible. While some students report access to digital tools and informal learning strategies, such as using applications or engaging with English through digital content (S1A; S2B), others explicitly point out that “las situaciones económicas hacen que se vuelva más difícil” (S5B), highlighting the uneven distribution of opportunities.

Teachers reinforce this perspective by emphasizing that inequality begins at the institutional level and extends into students' daily realities (T2A). From a Bourdieusian perspective, this reflects unequal access to cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), which positions students differently within the learning environment. These findings resonate with previous research in the Colombian context, which has shown that bilingual education policies often reproduce unequal access to linguistic capital (Cardona-Escobar et al., 2023; Usma Wilches, 2009).

Within this broader framework, it becomes necessary to situate these findings in relation to national language policy. The promotion of English in Colombia has been positioned as a

strategy for global integration (MEN, 2006), yet its implementation has produced uneven outcomes across public and private institutions. This tension is reflected in the data, where access to learning resources, exposure to English, and institutional support vary significantly among students.

An additional layer of complexity emerges when considering students' perceptions of inequality. While some explicitly recognize disparities, others claim that all students have the same opportunities. This contradiction suggests that inequality is not always fully visible, but may be interpreted through dominant discourses of individual effort. In line with Cummins' (2017) framework, this indicates that power operates not only through material distribution but also through ideological processes that shape how inequality is understood. In this sense, bilingual learning environments do not simply reflect inequality; they actively contribute to its normalization.

A third dimension of analysis highlights the role of pedagogical practices as mediators of participation. Students across both institutions emphasize the importance of support, clarity, and trust. In Institution A, this appears as a need for emotional validation, while in Institution B it is expressed as a demand for clearer instruction and greater patience (S1A; S1B; S6B). Teachers' accounts reinforce this interpretation, while also revealing structural constraints such as limited resources and large class sizes.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that teaching practices are not neutral techniques, but forms of mediation that shape how students are positioned within the learning environment (Giroux, 2018). When classrooms prioritize accuracy or expose students to evaluation without sufficient support, they may reinforce exclusionary dynamics. Conversely,

when pedagogical practices create conditions for interaction and experimentation, they can expand students' sense of legitimacy.

A fourth dimension concerns student agency. The data show that students actively seek opportunities to learn beyond the classroom through applications, media, and informal practices (S1A; S7A; S2B; S3B). Teachers recognize the importance of fostering this autonomy, although they also highlight the challenges involved (T1A). However, agency must be understood as a situated process shaped by structural conditions. While some students are able to expand their learning through external resources, others are constrained by their context, which raises critical questions about equity and access.

Taken together, these findings suggest that bilingual learning environments are best understood as contested spaces in which participation is negotiated rather than guaranteed. Emotional experiences, socioeconomic conditions, and pedagogical practices intersect to shape students' trajectories in complex ways.

These insights carry important pedagogical implications. First, they challenge deficit-oriented interpretations of student performance, showing that disengagement and anxiety are often responses to the learning environment rather than indicators of low ability. Second, they problematize the normalization of anxiety in language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), suggesting that emotional discomfort is produced through specific pedagogical arrangements.

From a practical standpoint, these findings demand a shift from generalized pedagogical recommendations toward context-sensitive and operational strategies. Rather than assuming that student participation will emerge from increased motivation alone, it becomes necessary to

redesign classroom interaction in ways that reduce exposure-related anxiety. For instance, initial stages of oral production should privilege low-risk interaction formats, such as pair work, guided repetition, and scaffolded dialogue, before transitioning to public performance tasks. This gradual exposure allows students to build confidence while maintaining their sense of legitimacy as language users.

Similarly, addressing socioeconomic disparities requires more than the integration of digital tools or external resources. Given that access to technology is uneven, pedagogical design must incorporate in-class opportunities for practice that do not depend on out-of-school conditions. This includes structured time for listening, speaking, and interaction within the classroom, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have meaningful access to language use.

At the institutional level, these findings suggest the need to critically revise evaluation practices. High-stakes or publicly evaluative speaking activities may unintentionally reinforce anxiety and exclusion. Therefore, alternative assessment approaches, such as formative feedback, peer-supported interaction, and process-oriented evaluation, should be prioritized.

Ultimately, these adjustments require a reconceptualization of the teacher's role, not as a transmitter of linguistic knowledge, but as a mediator of participation who actively shapes the conditions under which students can engage, take risks, and be recognized as legitimate speakers.

Finally, this suggests that bilingual learning environments must be analyzed not only at the classroom level but also in relation to broader policy frameworks that shape access and participation (Usma Wilches, 2009; Cardona-Escobar et al., 2023). Addressing inequality, therefore, requires moving beyond methodological adjustments and toward a critical rethinking

of how educational systems distribute opportunities, recognize learners, and structure participation.

In conclusion, improving bilingual learning environments requires engaging simultaneously with emotional, pedagogical, and structural dimensions. Only by addressing these interconnected factors can more equitable and contextually grounded forms of language learning be achieved.

Contributions to ABA

This study set out to explore how emotional and socioeconomic factors shape bilingual learning environments in public school contexts. However, beyond answering this question, the findings invite a deeper reconsideration of what it actually means to “learn a language” within these environments.

What emerges from the analysis is not simply a relationship between variables, but a system of conditions that defines who can participate, how they participate, and under what circumstances that participation is recognized as valid. Emotional experiences often reduced to issues of motivation or anxiety appear instead as indicators of how students are positioned within the classroom. When students express fear, frustration, or insecurity, these are not merely individual reactions; they are responses to environments where participation is unevenly supported and where legitimacy is not equally distributed.

Similarly, socioeconomic conditions do not operate as background factors but as structuring forces that shape access, continuity, and confidence in the learning process. The fact that some students can extend their learning beyond the classroom while others cannot reveals that bilingual education, even within the same institution, does not offer the same possibilities for

all learners. In this sense, the idea of a shared “learning environment” becomes problematic, as it obscures the differentiated realities experienced by students.

Perhaps the most critical insight of this study lies in the tension between persistence and constraint. Students demonstrate agency, curiosity, and willingness to learn, even in contexts marked by emotional discomfort or limited resources. Yet this agency operates within boundaries that are not always visible but are deeply consequential. Students adapt, negotiate, and persist but not necessarily under conditions of equity. This raises a fundamental question for bilingual education: Are we creating environments where students can genuinely participate, or are we expecting them to adapt to environments that were not designed for them?

From this perspective, improving bilingual learning environments cannot be reduced to methodological innovation or increased exposure to the language. It requires a critical rethinking of how these environments are structured, how participation is enabled or restricted, and how students are recognized as legitimate language users.

The study suggests that bilingual education must move beyond the assumption that learning is primarily a cognitive process. Instead, it should be understood as a socially situated practice where identity, power, and access are constantly negotiated. Emotional experiences, pedagogical practices, and socioeconomic conditions are not separate dimensions but interconnected forces that shape what is possible within the classroom.

Ultimately, the challenge is not only to teach English more effectively, but to create conditions under which learning English becomes a meaningful, equitable, and attainable experience for all students. This implies recognizing that language learning is not only about acquiring skills, but about gaining access to participation, voice, and recognition.

In conclusion, bilingual learning environments in Medellín's public schools cannot be reduced to methodological challenges or issues of student motivation. Rather, they must be understood as spaces where emotional dynamics, pedagogical practices, and structural inequalities converge to shape participation in unequal ways. This implies that improving language learning outcomes requires moving beyond technical solutions and addressing the broader conditions that define who can participate, how, and under what terms. In this sense, the challenge is not only to teach English more effectively, but to transform the environments in which learning takes place so that all students can be recognized as legitimate participants in the process.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study open several lines of inquiry that extend beyond the scope of the present research and point toward the need for deeper and more sustained exploration of bilingual learning environments in contexts marked by inequality.

First, future research could expand the scope of analysis by incorporating longitudinal designs that examine how socioemotional and socioeconomic factors evolve over time and influence students' trajectories in English learning. While this study provides a contextualized snapshot of two institutions, a longitudinal perspective would allow researchers to understand how patterns of participation, motivation, and identity development are sustained, transformed, or interrupted across different educational stages.

Second, there is a need to explore bilingual learning environments through a more explicitly intersectional lens, considering how variables such as gender, ethnicity, migration background, and urban-rural dynamics intersect with socioeconomic conditions to shape learning experiences. Although this study acknowledges demographic diversity, future research could

deepen this dimension to better understand how multiple forms of inequality converge within the classroom.

A third avenue for research involves examining the role of institutional and policy-level factors in greater depth. While this study highlights the tension between national bilingual policies and local realities, further investigation is needed to analyze how institutional leadership, school culture, and policy implementation processes influence the configuration of bilingual environments. Comparative studies across regions or institutional types could provide valuable insights into how different policy enactments produce varied outcomes.

Additionally, future studies could focus more specifically on pedagogical practices that mediate emotional experience and participation, exploring in detail how teachers negotiate issues of anxiety, legitimacy, and engagement in real classroom interactions. Classroom-based ethnographic research or micro-level discourse analysis could offer a more fine-grained understanding of how participation is enabled or constrained in everyday pedagogical encounters.

Another important direction involves the exploration of student agency beyond individual initiative, examining how institutional conditions either support or limit students' capacity to act meaningfully within bilingual environments. This would allow for a more critical understanding of agency as a relational and context-dependent process, rather than as an individual trait or disposition.

Finally, future research should continue to strengthen the connection between MABA frameworks and socioemotional and socioeconomic research, particularly in Latin American contexts. There is still a need for studies that explicitly integrate these dimensions within a

coherent theoretical and methodological framework, contributing to the development of context-sensitive models of bilingual education that respond to the realities of public schooling.

In summary, advancing research in bilingual learning environments requires moving beyond isolated variables and toward more integrated, critical, and contextually grounded approaches that recognize the complexity of learning as a socially situated process.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Students' Questionnaire

This appendix contains the [student questionnaire](#) used as a complementary instrument within the qualitative case study. The questionnaire was designed to elicit rich, experienced-based descriptions from learners regarding their perceptions, emotions, and daily interactions within the educational setting. Its items explore students' views about their learning processes, classroom dynamics, and the contextual factors that shape their participation and sense of belonging in school.

Although qualitative in nature, the questionnaire integrates structured prompts to guide students in articulating their perspectives in a clear and accessible way. The instrument supports the broader interpretative analysis by providing insight into students lived experiences, contributing to the triangulation of data with interviews, field notes, and institutional documents. Responses were collected anonymously to encourage openness and ensure ethical protection throughout the study.

Appendix 2. Focus group

The purpose of the Focus group was to collect qualitative information to make perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes visible from the selected sample (teachers from institutions A and B), in order to respond to the initial research questions from a pedagogical and didactic perspective framed within the previously selected categories, understanding deep comprehension through the understanding of the context and classroom environment in the process of learning English. It also helped capture teachers' and students' reflections about bilingual learning environments, enabling a deeper understanding of the socioemotional, motivational, and contextual factors that influence the teaching and learning of English in their institutional settings (Morgan, 1997; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015)

Focus group

Contributions (BLEs)

This section synthesizes the key academic contributions developed throughout the MABA program, particularly within the module on Contributions to Bilingual Learning Environments, establishing a direct dialogue with the theoretical and methodological foundations of the present research. Rather than functioning as a descriptive compilation, it critically integrates prior learning experiences to demonstrate how they inform and strengthen the current study.

From this perspective, Bilingual Learning Environments are conceived as complex, dynamic systems where pedagogical, sociocultural, and identity-related dimensions converge, moving beyond reductionist approaches to language learning (Rodríguez et al., 2023; Trujillo, 2023). The work developed throughout the module contributes to questioning traditional

educational practices and highlights the need to reconfigure roles, fostering more horizontal, agentive, and context-responsive learning processes (Rodríguez, 2022).

At the same time, these contributions foreground the importance of addressing structural and emotional factors that shape learning conditions, while incorporating critical perspectives such as translanguaging, understood as a socially situated and transformative practice that challenges linguistic hierarchies and promotes more inclusive forms of participation (García & Wei, 2014; García & Nuonsy, 2021).

Consequently, this section positions the research project as the result of a cumulative and reflective academic process, in which prior coursework not only provides theoretical grounding but also enhances the study's critical orientation, contextual relevance, and potential for transforming bilingual learning environments.

[Appendix 3 Contributions \(BLEs\)](#)

Additionally, an instructional booklet was designed to address the main findings of this research. It aims to support English teachers in creating learning environments that reduce anxiety, respond to socioeconomic inequalities, and promote meaningful participation. The booklet contains theoretical foundation to guide teachers in a deeper understanding of the topics addressed as well as pedagogical strategies to cope with these problematics, and an extent of links and materials to connect the information provided with innovative classroom practices.

[Pedagogical Guide for More Equitable and Inclusive Bilingual Classrooms.](#)