

# Freeing Language Education



Studies on Interculturality, Communication, and Professional Rise



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# Resumen

El propósito central de este volumen es replantear el sentido de la educación superior en Lenguas Extranjeras en un mundo globalizado, intercultural y socialmente complejo. El libro busca demostrar que los salones de clase no son espacios neutros, sino escenarios dinámicos donde los estudiantes negocian identidades, establecen relaciones con los demás y proyectan su lugar en la sociedad. Desde esta perspectiva, la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras trasciende la mera transmisión de estructuras gramaticales para convertirse en una práctica crítica, humanizadora y socialmente responsable.

En cuanto a sus contenidos, la obra reúne siete capítulos que ofrecen miradas complementarias y diversas. El primero aborda la interculturalidad como un proceso de transformación interna en el aula de inglés, mientras que el segundo propone criterios para un currículo intercultural que supere visiones superficiales de la diversidad. El tercer capítulo estudia el desarrollo de habilidades de expresión oral en contextos universitarios, enfatizando las dimensiones emocionales del aprendizaje. El cuarto analiza la práctica del co-teaching entre asistentes Fulbright y docentes colombianos, destacando la importancia de la colaboración y la confianza. El quinto examina el inglés como imaginario social en la educación superior, mostrando sus tensiones entre empoderamiento y dominación. El sexto introduce la integración de la salud mental en los cursos de lengua extranjera, innovando al vincular bienestar emocional y aprendizaje. Finalmente, el séptimo expande la mirada a un contexto chino, donde se exploran estrategias de aprendizaje del español y se subraya la relevancia global de la formación intercultural.

Las contribuciones de este libro son múltiples. Ofrece rutas para transformar la enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras en un proceso que



fomente la empatía, la conciencia crítica y la solidaridad intercultural. Además, visibiliza las tensiones entre inclusión y exclusión, poder y equidad, cuidado personal y desarrollo académico. Con ello, invita a docentes, investigadores y responsables de política educativa a concebir la educación en lenguas como una fuerza transformadora, capaz de contribuir a sociedades más justas, inclusivas y humanas.

**Palabras clave:** Interculturalidad, currículo, identidad, equidad, inclusión, co-teaching, imaginarios sociales, bienestar emocional, estrategias de aprendizaje, globalización, cultura, sociedad, políticas públicas.

# Abstract

The central purpose of this volume is to rethink the meaning and role of higher education in Foreign Languages within a globalized, intercultural, and socially complex world. The book seeks to demonstrate that classrooms are not neutral spaces but rather dynamic environments where students negotiate identities, establish relationships with others, and project their place in society. From this perspective, the teaching of foreign languages goes beyond the mere transmission of grammatical structures to become a critical, humanizing, and socially responsible practice.

Regarding its contents, the work brings together seven chapters that offer complementary and diverse perspectives. The first addresses interculturality as a process of internal transformation within the English classroom, while the second proposes criteria for an intercultural curriculum that moves beyond superficial views of diversity. The third chapter examines the development of oral communication skills in university contexts, emphasizing the emotional dimensions of learning. The fourth analyzes the practice of co-teaching between Fulbright teaching assistants and Colombian instructors, highlighting the importance of collaboration and trust. The fifth explores English as a social imaginary in higher education, revealing the tensions between empowerment and domination. The sixth introduces the integration of mental health into foreign language courses, innovatively linking emotional well-being with learning. Finally, the seventh chapter broadens the perspective to a Chinese context, where strategies for learning Spanish are explored and the global relevance of intercultural education is underscored.

The contributions of this book are manifold. It offers pathways to transform the teaching of Foreign Languages into a process that fosters

empathy, critical awareness, and intercultural solidarity. Moreover, it brings visibility to tensions between inclusion and exclusion, power and equity, and personal care and academic development. In doing so, it invites teachers, researchers, and educational policymakers to conceive language education as a transformative force capable of contributing to more just, inclusive, and humane societies.

**Keywords:** Interculturality, curriculum, identity, equity, inclusion, co-teaching, social imaginaries, emotional well-being, learning strategies, globalization, culture, society, public policy.



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# Preface

*Iván Ricardo Miranda Montenegro<sup>1</sup>*

*Camilo Andrés Acevedo Gerena<sup>2</sup>*

*Freeing Language Education: Interculturality, Communication, and Professional Rise* is a book that compiles seven research studies carried out by active English language professors who are members of the Multidisciplinary Research in Foreign Cultures and Languages (MRFCL) research group at the Instituto Internacional de Idiomas, Sogamoso campus of Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC). The selection of the chapters was subject to the rigorous conditions required by MRFCL and the editorial office of the Centro de Gestión de Investigación (CIFAS) in terms of chapter structure, content, wording, plagiarism and IA checking, and a final double-blind review by external scholars.

The book presents a series of experiences in language learning and teaching, as well as reflections and recommendations. It addresses not only pedagogical and didactic practices but also the role of languages in societal construction. Firstly, the didactic approach to integrating foreign language learning, — the understanding of linguistic elements and the use of meaningful content for teachers and students — is undoubtedly necessary in today's globalized world, where multilingualism is essential. However, beyond the strictly educational, the conceptual scope of various chapters of the book invites reflection on the impact of languages on the construction, deconstruction, and

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<sup>1</sup> Doctor in Language and Culture from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia.

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reconstruction of the social and cultural as a task of understanding, purpose, and resistance to the establishment of hegemonic powers.

*Exploring Interculturality as a Process of Inner Transformation in the EFL Classroom.* Within the conceptual framework of interculturality, the author critically examines the possibilities of interrelation between the construction of diverse identities based on students' own experiences and reflections. This study integrates foreign language learning with the current global promotion of intercultural dialogue. Self-recognition and the recognition and acceptance of others as equals will surely lay the fundamental principles for alternative, critical, and proactive academic communities to establish an inclusive and equitable education agenda.

*Towards an Intercultural Foreign Language Curriculum: Fundamental Considerations.* Keeping in mind that the conception, design and implementation of an interculturality-based curriculum within a formal education context has long been a complex and challenging task, the author conducts a conceptual review of the main aspects related to interculturality, which enables its integration with the development of comprehensive communication skills in a foreign language. In today's globalized world, the design of a curriculum that highlights diverse cultural manifestations as a possibility for visibility and, above all, as a practical manifestation of intercultural recognition and acceptance, would undoubtedly be a significant step forward in promoting inclusive academic development. It would also lay the groundwork for a more equitable, inclusive, and peaceful society.

*Developing Public Speaking Skills in English as a Foreign Language Contexts: University Students' Needs and Preferences.* Through an exploratory research exercise, the authors conducted a survey of perceptions with a group of university students regarding their preferences in the development of public speaking skills. Although these skills are fundamental and necessary for professional development, they do not appear in curricular practices. Therefore, this study draws on the voices of the students themselves to identify and propose curricular activities that promote the application of these skills as an effective tool

for reducing psychological and emotional factors that usually hinder the development of these academic and professional competencies.

*Systematizing a Co-Teaching Experience between Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) and Colombian English Educators: Through the Lens of the ETAs.* After a year of co-teaching between native English-speaking teachers and Colombian English teachers in a higher education context, the authors of this chapter successfully systematized the concerns and lessons learned, mainly by the foreign teachers. The experience highlights the validity of this type of pedagogical-didactic practice as a valuable alternative that transcends technical thresholds and addresses elements of interculturality that enrich teaching and result in more effective teaching activities. This study enables institutional and teaching reflection, which clarifies the current proposals for internationalization and interculturality being promoted by national education systems.

*The Social Imaginaries of the English Language and its Academic-Professional Component.* Adopting a theoretical-practical approach, the author uses Cornelius Castoriadis's work to explain the established power relations that manifest themselves in the process of teaching and learning English at a public university. The study problematizes the social imaginary construct and its critical analysis, which extend beyond the academic criteria of the foreign language curriculum and policies to encompass elements of geopolitical power. This approach encourages ongoing reflection and analysis of the educational program proposed and implemented by the State, as well as its implementation in the local contexts of academic institutions, where the effects of supranational policies are truly felt.

*Supporting Mental Health in the University: A Shared Commitment Through Foreign Language Learning.* In a novel proposal for integrating learning and content, the author highlights the value of recognizing mental health as an essential component of students' academic development. The different connotations associated with the human emotional environment are part of the content that directly involves students

in a better understanding of themselves from their subjectivity, while promoting the learning and use of the foreign language.

*Learning Strategies for the Strengthening of Communication skills in Spanish Learners.* Finally, in a case study conducted by the author in a foreign context, the teaching and learning of Spanish as a foreign language shows the effectiveness of learning strategies for students with cultural and linguistic backgrounds that differ from the teacher's socio-cultural background. The experience presents the future challenge of intercultural training for language teachers in training, in addition to didactic preparation in the management of bilingual learning environments.

In short, the collection of chapters documented in this book allows the reader to delve into areas of understanding and analysis beyond the traditional approaches to language teaching and learning in the Colombian educational space. As the university is considered a microcosm that reflects society and its social relationships, the language classroom should become a meeting place for the participants' subjectivities—both teachers and students. In this new conception of the classroom, the participants (who are in fact social actors) in the academic training process become individual actors in search of agreements and negotiations regarding being, knowing, existing, and above all, being able to exist in different communities without feeling subordination, discrimination, segregation, rejection, and invisibility. The hope is for a new education system based on the recognition of otherness in public policies and, mainly, by the educational actors themselves, with equal learning opportunities guided by a flexible, participatory, inclusive curriculum that focuses on the essence of all social relationships: the human being.

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## Chapter I

# Exploring interculturality as a process of inner transformation in the EFL classroom

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## Introduction

The concept of interculturality has been discussed in the educational field across all areas of knowledge. Specifically in language teaching, this idea of promoting intercultural competences among students has gained more popularity, overall, in a country like Colombia, where classrooms comprised a variety of cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. Traditionally, interculturality has been addressed from the intercultural competence, in which more than just linguistic ability, it requires knowledge of one's own and also of the others' culture as a set of competencies to be taught (Byram, 1997; Byram & Risager, 1999), and also as a pedagogical tool to enhance communicative performance.

However, a previous systematic review of literature focused on visions of interculturality in ELT in Colombia (Tiria Sotelo & Prieto Wilches, 2025), revealed three main perspectives: (1) interculturality as a pedagogical tool that requires explicit operationalization, (2) interculturality as a mental process that is developed through inner transformation, and (3) interculturality as a present condition in classrooms, established in the backgrounds and knowledges of all students. The review revealed an increasing body of literature that recognizes a more complex perspective of interculturality as an internal and transformative process that involves identity negotiation, critical reflection, and openness toward others.

Current dynamics in education prompt teachers to foster in their students the development of not only linguistic abilities but also intercultural competences that allow them to interact in the real world and to be able to listen to what the others have to say about themselves, their histories, their worldviews and their way of living together. This emphasis is observed in syllabi, graduate profiles, institutional mission, learning objectives, among others. However, when it comes to teaching intercultural competence, the class cannot be limited to

the outside perspective; it is essential to encourage the understanding and recognition of own context and own ways of thinking. This initial process becomes the foundation of meaningful awareness of cultures and coexistence, and therefore the basis of this study.

This study aims to explore this vision of interculturality as a mental process, which conceptualizes interculturality not merely as something to be taught or observed, but as a process of transformation that entails a dynamic and personal development in which learners critically engage with their own cultural assumptions, develop empathy, and embrace alternative worldviews.

For this reason, the study follows an action research approach (Mertler, 2024) aiming at creating reflective spaces within the English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) classroom. These spaces will be used to observe, question, and document how the students engage with intercultural experiences and texts, and how this engagement might reflect processes of internal change. Rather than focusing on teaching culture as a static object, this research study aims at analyzing how students understand interculturality through several activities of reflection, dialogue, and critical engagement with real-life situations and activities.

Based on the above, the research question that guides this study is: How can the implementation of reflective and dialogical practices in the EFL classroom enhance the understanding of interculturality as a process of inner transformation?

## **Objectives**

### ***General Objective***

To enhance the understanding of interculturality as a process of inner transformation in EFL through reflective and dialogical practices in the classroom.

### **Specific Objectives**

- To design and implement reflective and dialogical activities focused on interculturality as inner transformation in the EFL classroom.
- To analyze the way students understand and express themselves about interculturality when being immersed in those dialogical activities.
- To examine the role of language learning activities implemented in fostering inner transformation and intercultural awareness.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Interculturality is often seen as the interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. In English Language Teaching (ELT), it has usually been connected to the idea of preparing students to communicate across cultures. One of the most popular authors is Michael Byram (1997) with his concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). This author argues that for language learners it is not only necessary to understand language structures, but also to develop attitudes of curiosity, knowledge about other cultures, and the skills to interpret and reflect on cultural differences present in learning materials. Additionally, Byram includes critical cultural awareness in education, which means being able to evaluate cultures, including one's own, in thoughtful and respectful ways. Byram described a model that would define the competent intercultural speaker, dividing it into some qualities or *savoirs*- knowledges. These *savoirs* were conceptualized as: a) *Savoir*: knowledge of self, others, and also social interactions. b) *Savoir être*: denoting openness and respect for other perspectives; c) *Savoir comprendre*: interpreting and connecting cultural meanings; d) *Savoir apprendre/faire*: exploring and engaging with new cultures; e) *Savoir s'engager*: critical awareness and active social participation (Byram, as cited in Hoff, 2020).

In this regard, interculturality is interested in promoting mutual respect towards the variety of cultures with an acceptance of differences.

However, in more recent years, this vision has been questioned and highly debated among Latin American scholars. Authors such as Walsh (2009) or Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) have redefined the idea of interculturality from a critical and decolonial lens through *critical interculturality*. In this advancement of the concept, the focus is not on a harmonious coexistence, but on the struggle against epistemic injustices. For Walsh, interculturality should not be only learning from others, from their traditions and their ways of living. It is also transforming how we understand ourselves and the others, especially by recognizing other ways of existing, for example indigenous communities, afro-descendant, and local knowledge systems that are often excluded from traditional education.

In the same way, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) in his concept of *ecology of knowledges* talks about how important it is to value different ways of knowing the world. In a class of English as a foreign language, this would mean creating spaces for sharing and reflecting on students' own cultural experiences that can offer a more diversified content and learning experiences, rather than simply teaching facts about English-speaking countries. There is a critique of dominant attitudes towards knowledge in which critical interculturality "denies the rational character of all forms of knowledge that are not based on their epistemological principles and on their methodological rules" (De Sousa Santos, 2010, p. 21). This quick review of the evolution of interculturality leads this research study to consider interculturality as something that is not only learnt, but also experienced, transformed, and constantly evolving

### **Interculturality as a Process of Inner Transformation**

Now, if interculturality is understood as a process of inner transformation, then its focus needs to be changed from external exchanges of cultural information, where students are constantly exposed to content and learning materials that represent culture as only present in the outside, to deeper personal information and experiences that can be explored inside the classroom. It would mean that the promotion of intercultural

activities provided mainly by teachers is not only about learning facts or customs of other cultures as it is already stated above, but about questioning one's own beliefs, values, and identities that account more for the pillars of critical interculturality (Tubino, 2004, 2005; Walsh, 2005, 2012). It is clear that including activities in which students are encouraged to share and reflect about their own backgrounds, opinions and feelings might bring moments of discomfort or rejection, but at the same time it is a good chance for reflection and growth where learners can redefine the way they see themselves and others in the world. The classroom, therefore, becomes a space not only for communication but for personal reconfiguration and ethical development, being the latter a current need in curricular adjustments in the context where this study took place.

This vision of inner transformation is strongly connected to poststructuralism because meaning is not fixed but fluid, and it is co-constructed by contributing factors such as language and contexts. This dynamic conceptualization of interculturality assumes that there are no fixed boundaries between individuals or cultures (Walsh, 2005). For this study, an understanding of the intercultural as an inner transformation entails a conception of meaning as neither stable nor predictable. It means that students would not become interculturally competent by just consuming information; instead, many strategies come into action for achieving this goal. As it is stated by Norton (2014), "Poststructuralists such as Gunther Kress explore in persuasive terms how meanings become destabilized in the context of different social occasions" (p. 68). In this destabilization, students are able to open the possibility of getting new understandings and subjectivities, and as teachers, we can encourage them to question their preconceptions, reflect on their assumptions, or simply develop flexibility to form new intercultural perspectives.

Although the work of Norton emphasizes on identity, his analysis on poststructuralist theory provides a good comparison with intercultural learning contexts where the goal is not simply to acquire knowledge of other cultures, but to promote a resignification of the concept by

promoting alternative modes of knowing (Fandiño-Parra, 2021). Taking into account all of the above, conceiving interculturality as a process may help students become more ethical, self-aware, and reflective; unveiling another vision of the interactions that occur inside a classroom; as stated by Ortiz et al. (2022) in their study where their participants were able to have a greater awareness of intercultural relations that took place in the daily interaction between teachers and students. In English language learning contexts, this vision prompts educators to design learning experiences that invite students not just to speak another language, but to use it as a tool to participate in conversations that embrace empathy through the lens of the other. As it is stated by (Ortiz et al., 2022), for contributing to interculturality as a social project, it is necessary to start with the diversity of identities, languages and knowledge.

## Method

This study adopted an action research design based on a constructivist paradigm to explore how interculturality develops as an inner transformative process in English language learning. The study follows the constructivist paradigm, considering its notion of knowledge being co-constructed through interaction, experience, and reflection; in addition to the creation of meaning by individuals being situated and not generalized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). This epistemology is highly connected to the purpose of the study, as both students and teachers engage in the research process to understand interculturality through the dialogical and reflective activities proposed.

Action research was chosen because of its systematic, iterative stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting and because it enables teachers to study their own classrooms, practices, pedagogies, and evaluations with the objective to improve them (Mertler, 2024). The cyclical nature of action research is suitable for exploring this inner transformation by allowing a continuous analysis and examination of behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of learners before activities presented along the intervention.



Data collection instruments integrated students' artifacts, field notes, and focus groups. Students' artifacts were used as a valuable source of information because they were the physical traces that students left behind after interacting with information (Bernard, 2000). This type of data served as an accurate representation of discourses, attitudes, and beliefs of participants by representing the natural interpretations of interculturality after implementing the activities. Besides, those artifacts were used to aim at the personal construction of understanding concerning interculturality, following the conceptualization of it as an inner transformation.

Focus groups were used "to collect in-depth qualitative information about the group's ideas, perceptions, attitudes, or experiences on the defined topic" (Marelli, 2008, p. 39). In this study, focus groups served as a way to get closer to the perceptions of the students about interculturality in their contributions and presentations before the others. In this data collection instrument, as pointed by Phillips (1997) there is an additional goal of group members' simulation and thinking building. It means that when sharing new ideas, all the voices are heard, and new insights may arise from contributions that other students might not have considered.

The last instrument used was field notes. These were a valuable tool for this study as they enabled detailed observations of classroom interactions, students' expressions and reactions to be captured, which would otherwise have been forgotten or overlooked. Field notes are not simply a record of events but an interpretive act by letting the researcher document descriptive and analytic information in real time (Emerson et al., 2011) and this was essential to explore this process of inner transformation.

The participants in this study were 28 students enrolled on an English V as a foreign language at a public university. The group was mixed conformed by 18 women and ten men who belonged to different academic programs from the university, including systems engineering,

mining engineering, public accounting, finance and international trade, business management, electronic engineering, and geological engineering.

The following chart presents the organization of the whole instructional design process, which is divided into eight steps based on an action research design (Mertler, 2024), and outlines the purpose of this study.

**Table 1.** Steps followed in the action research study

| Title                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exploring interculturality as a process of inner transformation in ELT                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
| Objective                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
| To explore how interculturality can be understood as a process of inner transformation in ELT through reflective and dialogical practices in the classroom |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
| Initial exploration and problem identification                                                                                                             | Literature review on interculturality in Colombia                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Identification of interculturality as a mental process | Identification of gaps and needs. (Academic reforms, curricular adjustment, and curricular design)                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                            | Formulation of research question: How do students experience interculturality as an inner transformation process when immersed in reflective and dialogical practices in the ELT classroom?                                                                                  |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
| Planning of a Two-Tier Action Loop                                                                                                                         | Based on the purpose of the study, dialogical and reflective activities were designed (see Table 2) for prompting self-reflection on personal and cultural recognition, dialogue around intercultural reflections, and transformation of assumptions                         |                                                        | Data collection instruments were established to validate information for further analysis (students' artifacts, field notes, and focus groups) |
| Implementation of Tier 1 self-recognition                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Introduction of activities related to self- recognition and students' life trajectories.</li><li>- Facilitation of structured dialogical and reflective sessions for mutual listening and sharing.</li></ul>                         |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
| Observation and data collection                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Documentation of interactions through established data collection instruments.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                             |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |
| Preliminary analysis and reflection                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Preliminary analysis of attitudes towards the implementation of Tier 1.</li><li>- Determining which activities worked better and promoted deeper participation.</li><li>- Adjustments to Tier 2 from step 2 in this chart.</li></ul> |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Re-planning and implementation of Tier 2- integration</b> | Reflections from the previous step informed adjustments to Tier 2, which was then implemented.<br>Some activities were modified to improve dialogue, and data collection continued using established instruments. |
| <b>Final reflection</b>                                      | Use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Reporting</b>                                             | Writing and sharing results.                                                                                                                                                                                      |

**Design of Pedagogical Intervention**

The pedagogical intervention was designed as a two-tier action loop, where some interrelated activities were proposed moving from self-recognition (Tier 1) to integration (Tier 2). The first tier aimed at fostering personal awareness of background, lived experiences, and influencing factors in the formation of the self; while the second tier used this initial recognition to understand and engage with the diversified perspectives present in the classroom. Each activity incorporated reflective and dialogical components in order to support intercultural inner transformation. The following table presents the organization of the activities in the two-tier model.

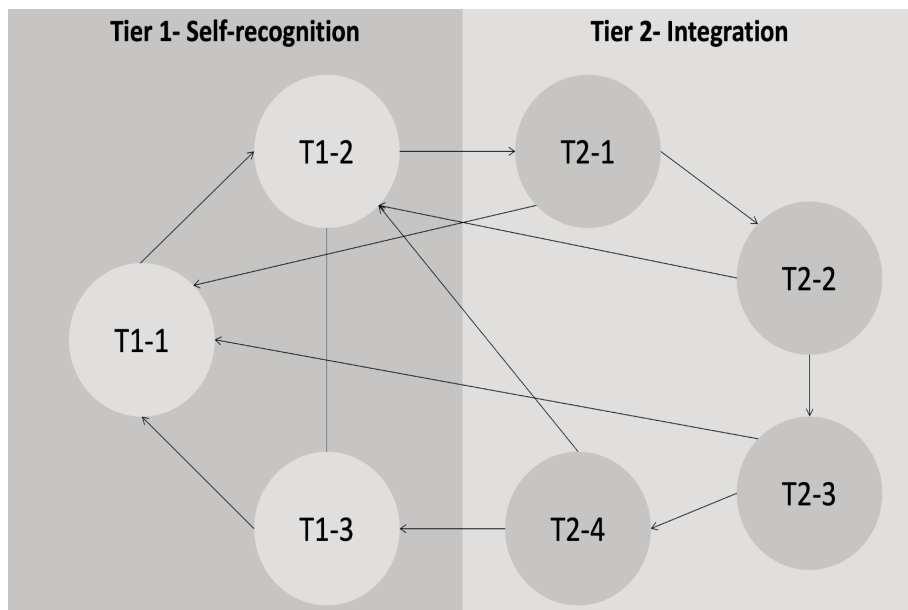
**Table 2.** Two-tier Action Loop for pedagogical design

| Tier 1- Self-Recognition |                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Label                    | Name of activity | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| T1-1                     | i-Mapping        | Purpose:<br>Encourage students to explore and represent their personal history, acknowledging the factors, experiences, and influences that have shaped who they are today.<br>Development:<br>As part of adapting the course syllabus established in step: <i>Planning of a two-tier action loop</i> , as described above, in which students created a map representing who they were and what had brought |

| Label                      | Name of activity         | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T1-1                       | i-Mapping                | them to that point during class in the second week of the semester (two in-person class hours). Due to time constraints, students were given time in the next class to complete their i-Maps illustrating the personal traits, cultural influences, lived experiences, and values that had contributed to their current selves. They then participated in a Circle of Voices activity, in which each student shared their i-Mapping insights with their group.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| T1-2                       | Handprints of experience | <p>Purpose:<br/>Facilitate recognition of significant life events that had shaped personal perspectives and decision making.</p> <p>Development:<br/>After discussing some theories of positionality and analyzing various examples, in week 4 of the semester students traced the outline of their hand and used each finger to represent a significant moment in their life and explain how it had shaped their worldview. For the next activity, they wrote a short text describing each event.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| T1-3                       | Comparative narratives   | <p>Purpose:<br/>Promote empathy and personal connection by sharing lived experiences and inviting partners to reflect on alternative responses to similar situations</p> <p>Development:<br/>Immediately after T1-2, students were organized into groups and asked to select one of the moments from their 'Handprints of Experience' activity to present as a short narrative to their peers over the next two hours of class. Then, classmates responded by aligning with their own experiences or contradicting them. The next 4 weeks of classes were developed according to the adaptation of syllabus, with topics related to culture from within, positionality and identity.</p> |
| <b>Tier 2- Integration</b> |                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| T2-1                       | Adulthood inside-out     | <p>Purpose:<br/>Examine and compare conceptions of adulthood within personal, familial, and contextual frameworks, fostering awareness of diversity and potential tensions among them.</p> <p>Development:<br/>In week 10, students first reflected on their own definition of adulthood and how it aligned with or diverged from that of their families. They also read about different cultural perspectives on adulthood, discussing similarities, differences, tensions, and points of convergence. This activity took two 2-hour sessions.</p>                                                                                                                                      |

| Label | Name of activity           | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T2-2  | Ideas on gender roles      | <p>Purpose:<br/>Explore and analyze personal and familial conceptions of gender roles, connecting them to former experiences and partners' conceptions.</p> <p>Development:<br/>In week 11, students reflect individually on their own views of gender roles and those of their family, making explicit references to events from their <i>Handprints of Experience</i> where gender expectations played a role. They then engage in small-group dialogue comparing these perspectives with cultural depictions from selected readings or media, discussing the impact of such roles on personal and social life.</p> |
| T2-3  | Role-reversal dialogue     | <p>Purpose:<br/>Promote empathy and flexibility by considering how others might act on one's place, based on differing personalities, backgrounds and values.</p> <p>Development:<br/>Weeks 12 and 13 were dedicated to autonomous learning and group presentations. Students received a case study based on preliminary analysis in Tier 1. In pairs or small groups, peers discussed how they would have approached the situation, taking into account their own personality, cultural background, and life experiences, and share in a Circle of Voices.</p>                                                       |
| T2-4  | Writing to the future self | <p>Purpose:<br/>Promote reflection on inner transformation as a result of all the interventions by envisioning personal growth and decision-making in the future.</p> <p>Development:<br/>In their final task of week 15, students wrote a coherent text addressed to their future self, five years from now. They were prompted to consider the ways in which their current selves have been influenced by factors that are still changing and will continue to do so.</p>                                                                                                                                           |

This integration of dialogical and reflective activities, designed as a Two-Tier Action Loop, can be visualized in the following figure, in which there is an illustration of the connection from Tier 1 to Tier 2 that allowed the insights from each activity to reflect about the others subsequently. The arrows indicate the sequential flow and the cross-references within the cycle.

**Figure 1.** Connection of activities in the Two-Tier Action Loop

**Source:** Own creation from Table 2.

## Findings and Discussion

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) in order to organize and structure in an efficient way all the information obtained from data collection instruments. Through this approach, it was possible to systematically identify, analyze, and establish patterns as significant codes inside the data. Additionally, this approach offers methodological flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to integrate qualitative results into the instruments that were interrelated, thereby getting an accurate interpretation of data. This interpretation revealed similarities, contradictions, and trends in the students' contributions in every single activity. The reporting of findings is presented as follows:

### Trends and Tensions of Interculturality as Inner Transformation

The preliminary data analysis conducted at the end of Tier 1 generated some initial findings that were corroborated by the stage of final

reflections and synthesis in the data analysis. The first overarching theme to be analyzed is the interplay found between the trends and tensions in how the students engaged with interculturality as a process of inner transformation. Across the whole implementation of the pedagogical design, students shared personal narratives and were also confronted with others' perspectives. The trends identified illustrated moments in which students demonstrated curiosity, connection, and willingness to participate, while the tensions represent some challenges not only in the classroom, but also in the process of rethinking and challenging their own perspectives that may have been taken as natural.

### **Connection of Lived Experiences with Current Conceptions**

One of the most prominent trends in the data was the clear recognition that past moments human beings encountered in their lives shape the adoption and reproduction of ideals generally taken as accurate. It was observed in many of the students' contributions in which they initially had to map themselves in T1-1 reflecting on the particularities that had brought them until the moment they were, specifically a classroom in a public university studying a major they had chosen. The general insights included in this first subtheme can be summarized in two topics: context and idealization.

Context entails stances in which students expressed how aspects such as the geographical location where they came from, their economic background, or familial size had influenced their processes of decision-making and their worldviews. For example, as part of students' artifacts (T1-1 #7, #12, and #14) in which students drew about their backgrounds, it was possible to observe that many of them came from different cities and expressed how valuable their hometowns were by using adjectives as 'calm', 'friendly people', 'beautiful', 'peaceful'. Those drawings showed that some students were interested in pursuing a career that would allow them to feel a sense of belonging and, secondly, enable them to return to their places of origin and work there. Aspects such as living in the countryside, growing up next to a volcano, having their entire

family in Sogamoso, or finishing school in the same city appeared to be important for determining the future and deciding on a career. As it is stated in the following excerpt:

"Well, as I wrote here, I grew up playing video games and developed an interest in computers when I was about 7 or 8... I ended up playing video games and dreaming about making my own, and you see, now I want to finish my career and become a software engineer" (T1-3, focus groups).

Growing up in a specific context and being familiar with its situations, forms of entertainment, nature, or spaces planted a seed in students' minds to be present at that moment. Context, in this sense, was an essential factor among the particularities that led individuals to recount a story that could be told and understood. During dialogical tasks, students frequently shared episodes that positioned the place of origin as a supportive tool for their arguments. Expressions such as: "ah, but it is because you are from here, in my town no...", "that's weird in Yopal," or "I will invite you there to see it," represent a diversification of background that comes into play in the language classroom and therefore becomes a chance for intercultural growth.

Idealization was present in the data as another influencing factor that students displayed in their contributions when reflecting upon their decisions and the plurality of their thoughts. This idealization includes the role of family, friends, professors, inherited conceptions, and social learnt values that surround individuals and are held in high regard. Expressions such as "I chose this career thanks to a school teacher," "I grew up seeing my family always excelling in what they did, always inspired by them," "my brother and my sister are engineers so I decided to be systems engineer," or "my brother was the one who suggested that I studied business management", offer a clear vision that recognizing the self also involves acknowledging the role others have played in shaping it.

Throughout activities implemented in Tier 1, students were able to recall and reconstruct personal narratives to recognize that their own particularities shaped their current perspectives. This aspect offered a



way to change implicit backgrounds into an explicit tool for enhancing communication and the recognition of diversity within the classroom. This initial insight aligned well with Tier 2, where students contrasted their personal and familial conceptions with those from other cultural contexts. Once they had recognized how different each student was, and the reasons behind those differences, their arguments became more elaborated as they used of their own and others' backgrounds to support their views. For example, one student expressed the idea that adulthood might be different for his partners because they were studying in the same city. In contrast, for her, everything was different due to moving to another city and developed a sense of independence.

Overall, the construction of conceptions through lived experience emerged as a dynamic and useful tool for the class of language and for the initial discovery of the intercultural being and recognizing the diversity of perspectives grounded on individuals' backgrounds.

### **Openness to Navigate the Self and the Others**

Another way in which students experienced interculturality as a process of inner transformation in the language classroom was through an observed attitude of openness to share and to listen to the stories of their peers. Byram (1997) had already stated that curiosity, being part of *savoir être*, was essential to be able to see the world from different perspectives, moreover this curiosity takes place because of the nature of daily interactions in a classroom (Ortiz et al., 2021). In this case, students portrayed an attitude of willingness to listen, to share, and engage in the personal narratives of others. Initially, there was reluctance to participate in the sessions, and contributions were brief and general. This may have been due to shyness, given that the class comprises a variety of career backgrounds. Another challenging factor, common in language courses, was the limited knowledge of the foreign language by some students. However, data collection instruments evidenced a bigger number of participations following the prompts provided, lessons had to be more flexible for translation and the use of technological tools to express ideas. After gaining confidence and

no longer worrying about grammar mistakes, students began offering richer personal accounts and responses to peers' stories, manifested through more questions, laughter, and relatability.

This openness is not understood as a limitation in acquiring information about cultures; rather, it involves an inclination to explore areas of understanding, contrast, comparison and mutual transformation. The following excerpt is an intervention by a student giving her point of view regarding activity on gender roles:

"- After explaining the question in Spanish, the student stated - ... yes, teacher, it is interesting to see the way her family is organized, but I don't know, for me it's weird because my family is different. Of course, I respect it, but I wouldn't know how to do that all the time... - everyone laughs -" (T2-2, focus groups).

In discussions that promoted daily life topics, such as gender roles that individuals have attributed and socially accepted, students manifested feelings of agreement and also discomfort regarding other points of view. However, by observing their attitudes, most of them did not show an immediate acceptance or rejection but a desire to stay in the conversation.

### **Negotiation of Attachment to Beliefs**

A tension that arose in the data displayed stances where students encountered ambiguity between the worldviews they had constructed up to that point in their lives and the reinterpretation of these worldviews in light of new perspectives. An example of this is the following excerpt:

"I was born in Sogamoso on 15 April 2003. Growing up, I was inspired by my family's constant excellence in all that they did. I graduated with two technical degrees but was not admitted to university. I therefore decided to study technology in systems analysis. However, the unexpected happened and the following month, I was admitted on a systems engineering course. I was now studying two subjects simultaneously. Despite the fear, I persevered, but my family said I wouldn't be able to. I finished my technology degree, completed my

placements and advanced in systems engineering, and that's how I got here." (T2-3, students' artifacts #17).

The previous excerpt presents a combination of the first trend described in this analysis called idealization being contrasted with an experience in which the student had to detach prior conceptions he had naturalized in his mind because of an admiration to influencing structures, in his case, his family. This phenomenon was present in various occasions in the data where students expressed "I had not seen it in that way," "it can be true," "it is interesting to think about that" or "I had to change my mind." This negotiation of attachment to prior beliefs is one relevant sign that interculturality starts from within. When students can challenge their assumed certainties, they are pushed into a moment in which the coherence of their established worldviews is measured against other ways of seeing the world.

This tension is considered not only in terms of changing positions, but also when there is a reluctance to detach from them. This situation was particularly observed in discussions revolving around religion or gender roles. This demonstrates that transformation is not manifested by agreement with all the perspectives present in the classroom, but through individuals finding a balance between old and new beliefs formed via experience, instead of uncritically adopt or reject external perspectives. This understanding represents interculturality as a dynamic process with no fixed delimitations in which it is necessary to establish positive and equitable exchanges with the others (Walsh, 2005).

### **The Language Classroom Becoming a Space of Mutual Recognition**

Classrooms are powerful spaces where several learning methods come into action. Language, being an integral part of every field of life, has the ability to be adapted in countless ways to serve many purposes. In this case, the integration of language and intercultural discussions, focused on unveiling the inner diversity of the class, offered a valuable opportunity to recognize the diversity of students' thoughts, affiliations, and beliefs (Ortiz et al., 2021), while developing language skills and

fostering other relevant values such as empathy, reflection, and cultural awareness. In this study, students' writings initially expressed feelings of confusion and frustration for not understanding the purpose of the course and being unable to cope with activities that primarily required speaking skills.

It means that preconceptions about a language classroom are brought by teachers and students; it was observed that coming to class for students was an exercise of pronouncing perfectly, following the teacher, and constructing well-structured sentences. Students expressed that the first thing that came to their minds when thinking of English language was grammar, difficulties for interacting with native speakers, frustrations in pronunciation, or the lack of skills for learning known as 'negado'. These reactions are understood as well from past experiences with language and also the influence that idealization plays in the formation of values, as discussed in these findings. In that sense, negotiation of attachment comes into action again not only in terms of culture but also in language by shifting the focus of traditional expectations with the inclusion of personal experiences and cultural perspectives by using the language.

The English language has been shown to facilitate discussions in the classroom and in other university courses where topics such as social realities, community issues or sense of belonging are taught. A student stated: "Ah yeah, we studied that in humanistic sociology, but it is easier in Spanish" [translated by the author]. In this statement, the student recognizes the familiarity with questions related to the self in other courses but also notes how challenging it is to express his ideas in another language. A summary of the activity in T2-3, where students had to present their insights about their reactions to case studies and the way they felt in the activity, stated:

"We concluded that you should place yourself in the others' shoes because you never know what the person is going through, and in our group we had a lot of opinions but not a single solution (...) so we felt the activity was a little difficult because vocabulary was not easy, and we did not know the words but we could 'hacernos entender' [make ourselves understood]" (T2-3, students' artifacts # 19)

"In this activity we learnt that we would behave differently according to our personalities, so we had to give a lot of explanations for the others to understand the opinions (...) regarding the way we felt developing the activity in English, we learnt new vocabulary and although we struggled, we finally did it" (T2-3, students' artifacts #21).

In the statements, the students reflected two relevant insights: a process of reflection for understanding perspectives and the construction of learning as a group. They expressed that using the foreign language might not always be an easy process, but they finally succeeded in the task. Language emerged both as a vehicle for intercultural interaction and as a learning challenge. Ultimately, integrating language learning with intercultural interactions arising from within the classroom not only provides linguistic skill development but also expand students' perspectives and reinforces the notion that language is intrinsically linked to human experience, highlighting the close connection between the recognition of identities and the construction of egalitarian relationships (Walsh, 2005), all of this facilitated by a classroom that values the teacher-students and students-students mutual recognition.

The findings described here corroborated the idea that curiosity is important for raising intercultural awareness in language classroom (Byram, 1997), even more so when interculturality is approached from within the students' own cultural and personal frameworks as a process of inner transformation. Several factors come into play in a classroom; the contexts that interact, the idealization that even teachers themselves promote through their activities and discourse, the tensions that might arise when individuals are confronted with their own perspectives in light of others', and the emotional, cognitive, and very individual sociocultural processes that shape the way in which students make sense of diversity.

## Conclusions

The results from the present study demonstrated that the implementation of dialogical and reflective activities in an ELT classroom enhances the understanding of interculturality as a process of inner transformation by encouraging and unveiling the dynamics inherent to classroom interaction. Starting with the recognition of the self, activities that make use of language for students to reflect on who they are, their backgrounds, formation of beliefs and influence of their contexts demonstrate that acknowledging the own identity is fundamental to recognizing that of others, as stated by Walsh (2025). It is an initial step to nourish the openness and curiosity of students to discover other ways of knowing, understanding, and seeing the world.

By valuing the stories that each student could tell, they were able to observe themselves in relation to their own sense of belonging, which was rooted in social expectations, contexts, community and family affiliations. Promoting students to be immersed in pedagogical encounters where they can confront their own perspectives with those of others leads to moments of mutual understanding but also tensions among students and their inner selves when some assumptions bring uncertainty and discomfort. However, those tensions that might arise evidence the complex yet rich intercultural development and the relevance of identities from teachers and students in such development (Díaz et al., 2019; Dimas, 2016).

The negotiation of attachment to beliefs in this study arose as a pivotal sign of inner transformation because it made clear the fact that thoughts evolve and change. While some students demonstrated willingness to reinterpret and adapt their points of view, others reaffirmed their prior positions. The role of teachers is still highly relevant for proposing pedagogies that give relevance to other knowledges, in this case, the knowledge of students. There is an implicit interculturality in the

classroom conformed by students' backgrounds, particularities, and ways of thinking. The teachers' power lies in their ability to bring that interculturality to the surface and use it as a tool that promotes communication, empathy, and learning. Languages also play a relevant role, as stated by García and García (2014), they become an element of mediation between the worlds of people who dialogue to construct and determine their realities. In that way, a learning space such an ELT classroom serves as a scenario for reflection and dialogue for understanding interculturality as a process of inner transformation and not merely an introduction of external information.

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## Chapter II

# Towards an intercultural FL curriculum: fundamental considerations

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## Introduction

Today, concepts associated with culture are being debated more widely in social contexts, not only in academic circles but also among political figures and in their proposals for inclusion, revalorization, and protection of the cultural manifestations of "other" communities. Multiculturalism, as a social phenomenon, and respect for diversity and the coexistence of more than one culture in the same territory, along with interculturalism as a concept of socio-political activism, have been transcending the discourses associated with the relationship between culture and society.

One of the instruments that has been erected as a political banner to comply with international and national guidelines on the recognition and defense of minority cultures is the educational systems of nation-states. It is through the curriculum that the guidelines for the integration of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, primarily, are intended to counter the homogenizing provisions promulgated by governments in power.

In fact, Colombia has spent more than two decades implementing a series of initiatives aimed at achieving constitutional recognition (Political Constitution of the Republic of Colombia, 1991) of being a multilingual and multicultural country. For example, the General Education Law (Law 115 of 1994); Curriculum Guidelines for Foreign Languages (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1999); the National Bilingual Program (2004); the Basic Standards for Foreign Language Competence (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006); the National English Program 2015-2025 "Colombia Very Well" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013); Law 1651, known as the Bilingual Law (2013); Project to Strengthen the Development of Foreign Language Skills (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013); Colombia the Best Educated in 2025 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015); Basic Rights of English Learning (2016),

Strengthening the Development of Foreign Language Skills Project (2013); Colombia the Best Educated in 2025 (2015); Basic Rights to Learning English (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016), Decennial Plan for Native Languages of Colombia 2022-2032 (Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia, 2022), among other government proposals. However, the decision to implement a bilingualism made up of majority languages has left out the diversity of many peoples, languages, and cultures that also exist in our nation, despite some attempts at inclusion and recognition of minority cultures, from an integrationist perspective. For this reason, the design of an interculturality-based and a wide-ranging conceptual framework curricular proposal which considers, as the key commencement, an array of cosmovisions, multicultural practices and actions become more than a need whether we decide to seriously move towards an inclusive and healthier coexistence.

### **Problem Statement**

In the framework of a natural exchange of linguistic and cultural interaction, the apprehension of a shared code of communication necessarily involves cultural elements of each of the communities in contact, which will be recognized, accepted, or rejected and internalized by the social actors involved, thus achieving intercultural integration, together with the linguistic assimilation necessary to achieve a balanced social performance. However, what happens when encounters between languages and cultures occur in formal instructional environments? The answer may be the conception and implementation of a curriculum based on some identity elements of a culture that will probably reach an institutionalized dynamic of (restricted) cultural information on some aspects related to customs, habits, history, beliefs, etc., which in some way will be reflected in and from the structure of the source language. However, in contexts of coexistence that involve multicultural encounters (arising for multiple reasons), the contact of languages and cultures could have cultural apprehension effects due to the possibilities of extracurricular experiences and interactions.

Within the multilingual and multicultural Colombian context, oriented by a national curriculum that encourages the contact of two majority

languages (while ignoring the linguistic and cultural variety of minority communities), the teaching and learning of foreign cultures can become complex if we take into account the social, economic, political, social, identity, cultural and historical aspects that must be considered in the design of a language curriculum that addresses intercultural interests. Currently, the national design can be interpreted, from the top-down model, as a post-colonizing or neo-colonizing model that, while enhancing the potential of a foreign language, minimizes the variety of the native languages of our territories.

Given the social context in which the country is debating between tradition and educational innovation, it is essential for public education to generate academic discussions in order to advance more equitable and inclusive curricular proposals that promote spaces for renewal and peaceful coexistence in our territories and communities, as well as in foreign communities.

The Ministry of National Education (s. d.) considers that the curriculum

is the set of criteria, study plans, programs, methodologies and processes that contribute not only to comprehensive education and to the construction of national, regional and local cultural identity, but also includes human, academic and physical resources to implement policies and carry out the institutional educational project.

This definition outlines profound criteria for culture and multiculturalism, as well as constructs such as the integral formation of individuals for whom a given curriculum is designed. However, the general state normative, oriented, and put into action by the Ministry of National Education, implies the homogenization of a curriculum that considers a homogeneous target population. In fact, the trend of interculturality as a predominant pedagogical proposal adheres to traditional positivist models, which view the cultural diversity of the country as another community that must be adopted and adapted to the majority community (Ibáñez-Salgado et al., 2012). It cannot be ignored, moreover, that the supranational curriculum has largely influenced the Colombian curriculum and has undergone different

approaches throughout history, just to cite a couple of examples, the rise of the industrial revolution that generated drastic changes in the economy, politics and society in general, and more recently, the advance of information and communication technologies in all fields of social apprehension and behavior.

The curriculum for teaching and learning foreign languages has not been immune to various foreign conceptions and designs, ranging from mostly structuralist approaches to the communicative approach. However, in the Colombian context, these initiatives have focused primarily on the foreign language as an object of study rather than as a means of communicative interaction and with little intercultural focus. It is also evident that the Colombian curriculum conceives of English as a foreign language and has overlooked the immense linguistic and cultural diversity of our country, with some exceptions, notably in the promotion of the ethno-education model.

The aforementioned considerations underscore the need for a reformulation of the criteria for inclusion and equity in the Colombian curriculum, to establish pathways for reflection and action that aim to reorganize a social order of coexistence, equity, justice, and peace for Colombian society. In this vein, it is believed that more research initiatives should be proposed as an initial stage for recognizing the current state of the question in relation to the integration of intercultural elements within the national curriculum, particularly in the foreign language curriculum.

### **Conceptual Insights**

To theoretically support an informed interculturality-based curriculum proposal, the concepts of culture, curriculum, multiculturalism, interculturality, critical interculturality, and critical discourse analysis will be examined.



## Culture

Culture is everything created by human beings. Their beliefs, habits, customs, ways of relating and communicating with others and with their environment, norms, sanctions, systems of coexistence, values, symbols, representations, goods, identity(ies), etc. Culture is generated collectively and is shared and transmitted inter- and intragenerationally.

Páez et al. (2003, p. 32) in their study of culture assert that, although there is agreement among social psychologists and anthropologists on the definition of culture as "socially acquired patterns of thought, feeling and action (Klineberg, 1954/1988; Ember & Ember, 1997; Kottak, 1994; Bodley, 1997)", culture remains a nebulous concept, so much so that about 105 definitions of this concept have been found. However, according to the authors, two large families of definitions have been identified: objective culture, understood as patterns of behavior in a habitat, and subjective culture, as shared structures of meaning. In this sense, the components of subjective culture, as stated by Triandis (1994), are classified as:

- Beliefs: what it is, how it is designated (categories, language, belief structures), and evaluated (attitudes).
- Roles: expected and proscribed behaviors for subjects who have defined positions within the social structure.
- Norms: rules and expectations that regulate desirable and undesirable behaviors, beliefs, and emotions for the members of the culture.
- Values: the relevant purposes and principles in life, with which people evaluate what is desirable, good, or beautiful, and which serve as a guide for daily behavior or as statements about how things should be (p. 3).

Within all this conceptual complexity about what culture implies, and understanding that any educational system is a product of human conception and execution, that is to say, a cultural elaboration, the question arises as to whether it is possible to teach and learn a culture. In very general terms, the family with its inter-family relations would be the first community in charge of "teaching" (meaning transmitting)

the basic characteristics and conceptions of the surrounding world with its social relations, the patterns of social coexistence, its attitudes, its beliefs and actions associated with its beliefs, etc., but undeniably consolidated by the habitual and constant interaction with its immediate environment.

However, in the traditional scheme of the school, where the normative based on a scale of reward and punishment according to the attainment of achievements preset by the education system prevails, the apprehension of culture would rebound on the system itself, and it would be socially invalid for natural cultural practices to be part of a curriculum. It is therefore necessary to discern the 'level' and 'scope' of culture in a context of language contact within the framework of educational institutions; and, above all, to reflect not only on the role of the culture of the mother tongue (CL1), that is, the one used daily by the educational actors, but also on the role of the culture of the target language (CL2).

Within the didactic encounter in the classroom, the perceptions of the language teacher (and his own conception of his own culture and the culture to be taught) and those of the students (which may be a multivariate culture) come into contact with each other. It is in this intricate context, interculturally speaking, in which, surely, the actors of the didactic fact would enter into a conflict between the native and the foreign that could generate an uncertain state similar to a 'third culture in foreign language education' as Kramsch (1993, p. 236) calls it. The author supports this construct from three different perspectives: sociological, educational, and political, which have some points of convergence and divergence.

In the first instance, it refers to the dilemma between the curricular organization determined and implemented by the dominant educational systems and the cultural particularities of the students in the didactic encounter; here, on the one hand, the traditional conception of considering the student as a 'consumer' of teaching methods that pretend to provide the language models of the native speaker, which

would be the 'ticket of entry and acceptance by the target culture' (Kramsch, 1993, p. 236); and on the other hand, the alternatives of understanding, acceptance, modification or rejection of those canons by the students and the 'affective and cognitive' contribution of the native speaker, which would be the 'affective and cognitive' contribution of the students (1993, p. 236); and on the other hand, the alternatives of understanding, acceptance, modification or rejection of those canons by the learners and the 'affective and cognitive' input of the popular culture of the language class (1993, p. 237). Secondly, regarding the educational framework of culture, the author believes that foreign language teaching should be relevant to social life; in other words, learners should learn how to act in their environment, not only being able to name it in correct statements and lexicon. Kramsh stresses that "an educational philosophy that exclusively emphasizes doing things with words runs the risk of helping to maintain the status quo and, moreover, conflicts with the teaching of culture because intercultural competence is grounded in the paradox and conflict of seeing the world in an irreducible way" (1993, p. 240). Finally, in relation to the political perspective, the author defends the variety of styles, purposes, interests, and cultural variety of students in contrast to the hegemonic tendencies of the dominant political and institutional structures, which favor national benefit and economic competitiveness.

Taking into account these brief considerations that support the conception of a third culture as a result of the various educational encounters in the context of interculturality, the dilemma persists between the ways to acculturate (channel the student into the predominant sociocultural order) and, at the same time, provide them with the tools to defend and maintain the value of their own culture.

## **Multiculturality**

The term "multiculturality" implies the existence, and sometimes the coexistence, of multiple cultures within a single national state (Barabas, 2014). However, the physical borders of states sometimes do not limit the coexistence of diverse manifestations clearly established and defined by the cultural communities in contact. The concept of multiculturalism also entails the description and characterization of the diverse cultures

that share the same territory, in order to promote acceptance and tolerance that foster peaceful and constructive coexistence.

Multiculturalism, on the other hand, also implies the recognition of cultural diversity and the right of existence and survival of minority communities. When it comes to demanding that states validate their full rights and adopt a socio-political stance, we are talking about the concept of multiculturalism.

UNESCO (2005), in Chapter III. Definitions, Article 4, defines the concept of cultural diversity as "the multiplicity of ways in which the cultures of groups and societies express themselves. These expressions are transmitted within and between groups and societies." This document also establishes a series of objectives and guiding principles to inform policies that foster relations between the diverse cultures that share the same state. In a quick reading, we can infer that the nations that are part of UNESCO are called to comply with the guidelines and responsibilities assigned in the conventions advanced by this international entity. The main guidelines focus on respect for their own cultural expressions, the safeguarding of cultures, and primarily the observance and fulfillment of human rights and fundamental freedoms associated with cultures and their manifestations. They also promote interculturality, solidarity, and the dignity of all cultures.

The latent original multiculturalism in Colombia's national territory is represented by nearly 64 aboriginal and creole communities and languages (Pineda Camacho, 2000). The exogenous multiculturalism generated by migrations and internal and external displacements has created a highly complex social and cultural landscape, particularly for the design, planning, and implementation of public policies, including education.

## **Interculturality**

The term interculturality has several meanings according to the socio-political contexts and the interests of some collectivities with power status; a fact that has led to a series of versions that make the concept of interculturality remain too general and, therefore, diffuse. Walsh

(2010), as outlined above, presents an overview from three perspectives with the purpose of providing elements of conceptualization and precision about the meaning and application of interculturality: (i) it refers to the 'relational' when it is treated as the fundamental conception of "contact and exchange between cultures, that is, between different people, practices, knowledge, values and cultural traditions, which could occur under conditions of equality or inequality" (p. 77); (ii) it refers to educational policies and their incidence and application in the educational sphere, i.e. the 'functional', in terms of adoption and adaptation to a current political model, and finally, (iii) it refers to 'critical' interculturality as a proposal in search of a better "understanding of critical interculturality as a political-social-epistemic-ethical project and as a de-colonial pedagogy (...)" (p. 76). As has been stated, the concept of interculturality fundamentally points to social interaction linked to cultural manifestations; in this sense, interculturality is descriptive, although it can also be prescriptive, i.e., when it refers to the set of norms governing social coexistence (Quichimbo Saquichagua et al., 2024).

On the other hand, from a semiotic perspective, particularly in the context of intercultural communication, interculturality refers to the use of language in the process of constructing, deconstructing, distributing, and maintaining culture. This process corresponds to the assignment of "negotiated collective meanings" (Parent et al., 2012, cited by Finol, 2017), i.e., it refers to culture as a process inherent to intercultural communicative interaction.

Interculturality can also refer to the processes of coexistence of native peoples or communities descended from former colonists; interculturality can also be related to migrations generated mainly by diverse social, political or economic causes; and interculturality can even be understood as a functional tendency of the states in which it occurs; that is, in this socio-political field, the concept of interculturality "does not question the post-colonial system in force and facilitates its reproduction", and "is rooted in the recognition of cultural diversity and difference, with the goal of its inclusion within the established social

structure” (Walsh, 2010, p. 77). In this case, it is the states that seek strategies of insertion in pursuit of cultural homogenization, which radically departs from the respect and promotion of cultures in their own essence of multivariety. In this case, interculturality as a political concern of the states, is associated with manifestations of power that seek to minimize, subalternize, attenuate and even exclude the cultural manifestations of minority communities that are in coexistence with majority cultural communities; or in the best of cases, the political determinations seek to achieve some level of acculturation of those minority communities in search of a homogeneous culture.

The concept of interculturality has also been used in most Latin American countries as a strategy of educational transversality, mainly oriented towards indigenous peoples (Quichimbo Saquichagua et al., 2024). This other form of state utilitarianism has become a positive discourse of inclusion to somehow counteract the manifestations of resistance of people traditionally subjected to regimes of exclusion, inequality, racism, domination, and inequity. In this sphere of reference, the same authors propose that:

(...) education from an intercultural approach is constituted as a counter-hegemonic educational proposal that questions positivist knowledge and avoids homogenization. Since the current disciplinary structures of Latin American universities, with their bureaucratic division of knowledge, severely hinder the approach to these issues. (p. 205)

The intercultural discourse in education, and more specifically in the different curricular proposals, has been presented as an evident demonstration of the interest of the states in safeguarding the international guidelines stamped in some organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), which watch over universal peace and coexistence. The question that arises is to what extent the curricular measures of intercultural inclusion are real and, above all, effective in a multicultural context such as the Colombian context.

## Critical Interculturality

The critique of interculturalism, or this dominant idea of interculturality, emerged with those who have experienced the weight of the colonial in their own bodies, of the racialization and genericization of relationships and people, of the externalities that condition experiences anchored in subalternity as part of their struggles to be and to act. (Basail Rodríguez, 2022, p. 16)

Interculturality has become a social issue widely addressed in political proposals in Latin America since the 1990s (Walsh, 2010; Basail Rodríguez, 2022); an irruption that can be attributed, to a certain extent, to the claims and mobilization of native peoples in search of the vindication of their fundamental rights which have been, for a long time, ignored if not disdained, in terms of their lands, cultures and languages (De Sousa Santos, 2013; Miranda, 2020). This vision implies recognizing the existence of elements of "power, capital, and market" (Walsh, 2010, p. 76), with which the social dichotomy of domination and subordination that has been traditionally exercised in recent times has been established.

Critical interculturality, according to Basail Rodríguez (2022), is established as

(...) a theoretical-political exercise, situated and permanent, of criticism of (multi/inter) culturalism under the critique of the sense and meaning of the terms with which the debates on differences, inequalities and diversity operate, as well as the logics of historical processes and the cultural transformations that they bring with them and that are confronted. (p. 19)

From these postulates, it can be inferred that critical interculturality transcends the epistemic limits imposed by a political-cultural proposal, which apparently aims to reconcile the establishment and the social demands of the "others" within the framework of the state's official regulation. In this vein, Walsh (2010) argues that "the approach and practice that emerge from critical interculturalism are not functional to the current societal model, but serious questioners of it" (p. 88), i.e.,

it controverts its manifestation and state-controlled power relations 'from above', from subalternating functions. In sum, "Functional interculturalism responds to and is part of the interests and needs of the dominant social institutions; critical interculturalism, on the other hand, is a construction of and from the people who have suffered historical subjugation and subalternization" (Walsh, 2010, p. 88).

Critical interculturality is based on a theoretical framework that addresses structural, colonial, and racial issues and focuses on the examination of structures, power relations, and social dynamics. It encompasses the political, as well as its social and cultural policies, and addresses conceptions related to knowledge, being, and life itself (Walsh, 2010). In other words, it seeks to rescue the ancestral, its relations with nature, and the respect and understanding for the original cosmovisions, as well as the social relations of equity, equality, and inclusion, from an emancipatory perspective that challenges the colonially imposed and naturalized.

## **Culture and Curriculum**

The traditional trend in foreign language education "has limited the teaching of culture to the transmission of information about the people of the [FL] country of origin, and, above all, about their attitudes and worldview" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 205). This pedagogical and didactic constraint, which, it is worth mentioning, has its roots in the historical focus of FL teaching oriented mainly to its forms and functions, and in the scope of developing a 'skill' devoid of any intellectual value. In fact, even today, in the educational system, the effectiveness of teaching is valued in terms of the practical operationalization of the FL. In this vein, "it is believed that the sole responsibility of the language teacher is to make his or her students speak and write as well and as fluently as possible. Depth and breadth of thought belong to other disciplines" (Freed & Bernhardt, 1992, cited by Kramsch, 1993, p. 4). The authors argue that this trend has trivialized the teaching of foreign languages and, in turn, has made the teaching of culture a particularly contentious issue.



It cannot be denied that language involves much more than the ability to decipher a linguistic code; however, it also has the potential to be the vehicle for acquiring a particular way of experiencing the realities in which an individual acts and interacts. In this scenario, the apprehension of culture should be one of the core elements of a FL curriculum and that of the teaching of any foreign language. However, the question is, which culture: that of the language teacher, who probably shares the culture of their students, or the culture of the target language? In any case, ideally, when going beyond learning the structural patterns of the target language (TL), the learner will necessarily enter the communicative space, that is, the 'real' use of a language, which implies recognizing and understanding, as well as adapting or adopting foreign cultural models. This consideration leads us to the dichotomy of whether it is necessary to first 'handle' the structure of the TL before beginning the study of the sociocultural use of the language, or, conversely, whether it is more convenient to start with the structure and culture simultaneously.

Kramersch (1993) states that traditionally culture has been viewed as simply information conveyed through language, rather than an inherent attribute of language itself. However, if language is considered a social practice, then culture should become the core of language teaching. The author emphasizes that "the cultural awareness must then be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection of language proficiency" (p. 8). This implies that in the process of teaching and learning a FL, the development of 'cultural awareness', understood as the discernment of the social contexts in which the language is used, must be considered. In other words, it is necessary to approach language as text and language as context, that is, to understand "language as an expression of the thoughts and intentions of an individual and language as an expression of the knowledge and expectations of a community" (Kramersch, 1993, p. 10).

Halliday (1982) and Halliday and Hasan (1989) argue that both language, understood as a form of expression of personal meaning, and language as a reflection of the social order, correspond to two sides of the same coin that are complementary rather than opposites. In this vein, the occurrence of a text in a specific context implies the significant

interaction not only of what is expressed adequately with the structural and semantic selection of the language but also in the intentionality and purpose of a text, as it is emitted and as it is received and interpreted; in this case of interaction, we talk about the text as discourse, which implies the realization of a text in a particular situation by the social man who expresses it and who attends to it. Halliday (1982) even emphasizes that language not only "expresses" the social structure and system, but also actively symbolizes the social system (p. 11), that is, it both determines and is determined by culture.

### **Multiculturalism in the Curriculum**

At a global level, the multicultural movement has focused on vindicating marginalized peoples and protecting their human and civil rights. This is achieved through democratic participation, which guarantees their independence from traditional dominant groups. Soriano (2002), quoted by Castro Suárez (2019), rescues some ways of being and doing in multicultural education:

- Technological or positivist model. It addresses the challenges posed by interculturality in the educational system and is based on the acquisition of skills by students, which educational experts design and implement. Its orientation is fundamentally technical and compensatory, as the objective of multicultural education is to compensate for the deficits of cultures other than the majority one, whether these deficits are real or perceived.
- Hermeneutic or interpretative model. This suggests that intercultural education should focus its projects on improving self-knowledge, as all students should be encouraged to foster the development of intercultural cooperation and reduce prejudice and discrimination. The moral perspective is evident in this model, which aims to enhance the subjects' abilities to achieve a deeper self-understanding, thereby stimulating intergroup cooperation.
- Critical or sociopolitical model. The proposal for multicultural education focuses fundamentally on modifying the curriculum

to adapt it to the demands posed by moral democracy, which are incompatible with the cultural domination of some human groups over others. In this sense, intercultural education aims to engage teachers and students in modifying both the social situations and the ideological supports that lead to social and cultural discrimination.

The above models have been implemented (except the critical model) to a certain extent, independently or in a complementary manner in the Colombian curriculum, but with the particularity that the cultural and linguistic variety of the country has been ignored, except in the designs of some curricula of a few institutions. It follows that it is imperative to approach the critical model that rescues the segregation and subalternization to which minority communities have been subjected since the times of colonization.

As for the foreign language curriculum, cultural references have traditionally focused on contemporary Anglo-Saxon cultures as a subtle way of sustaining and even reproducing such foreign cultural characteristics. In this sense, national educational models and systems continue to contribute to promoting neocolonial paradigms that have delegitimized the undeniable reality of the existence and multicultural coexistence, as well as the latent intercultural practices in Colombia.

### **Interculturality in Colombia**

Article 5 of Law 115 of 1994 (also known as the Education Law) outlines the purposes of education in accordance with Article 67 of the Political Constitution. Among these purposes we highlight paragraph 2, which reads: "Training in respect for life and other human rights, peace, democratic principles, coexistence, pluralism, justice, solidarity and equity, as well as in the exercise of tolerance and freedom." Explicitly, the Political Constitution of Colombia has determined that education throughout the Colombian territory must foster the essential principles of human existence and their relationships of coexistence with their environment, in a fair, supportive, and equitable manner. In

other words, it is understood that the general rule does not permit any type of marginalization, subalternation, subordination, or exclusion for any Colombian citizen in terms of their educational development and training.

For its part, numeral 6 establishes that "The study and critical understanding of the national culture and of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country, as the foundation of national unity and identity" (Ministerio de Educación nacional [MEN], 1994, p. 2). However, the same official orientation proposes a differentiated education for "some", the majority, and for "others", the minority, under the designation of ethno-education.

### **Ethno-Education**

Colombian Law 115 of 1994, in its Chapter 3, corresponding to education for ethnic groups, and more precisely in its Article 55, refers to the definition of ethno-education as "(...) education for ethnic groups that is offered to groups or communities that make up the nationality and that have their own culture, language, traditions, and indigenous jurisdiction and privileges. This education must be linked to the environment, to the productive process, to the social and cultural process, with due respect for their beliefs and traditions." Declaratively, education for ethnic groups promotes a codification that explicitly projects a category of exclusion towards these groups with "their own culture, language, and traditions." There is also an allusion to "respect for their beliefs and traditions" in an evident manifestation of compartmentalization in relation to the homogenized dispositions towards the generality of the nation.

More recently, Law 1381 of 2010 provides rules on the recognition, promotion, protection, use, preservation, and strengthening of the languages of Colombia's ethnic groups, as well as their linguistic rights and those of their speakers. According to Article 20 of this law, education is decreed that:

The national, departmental, district, and municipal education authorities, as well as those of the peoples and communities where native languages are spoken, shall ensure that the teaching of these languages is compulsory in the schools of those communities. The intensity and modalities of teaching the native language or languages, as opposed to the teaching of Spanish, will be determined by agreement between the State educational authorities and the authorities of the communities, within the framework of ethno-educational processes, when these are designed.

Despite these official initiatives of protectionist regulation, the inclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant minority peoples seems to be a functional action of complacency of the state in the face of the growing demands of those communities, rather than a real and effective recognition of the value of the cultures that demand integration instead of an obligatory inclusion in the majority cultures. In this sense, the tension between the functional and homogenizing vision of the state and the vindicatory claim of the peoples in the social and educational contexts remains latent (Miranda, 2020).

### **Conceptual Trends in Intercultural Curricula**

In an exhaustive study of the literature on critical intercultural pedagogy and curriculum, Blanchar and Arbeláez (2023) identified conceptual tendencies that can be summarized in three broad trends: i) critical and intercultural pedagogies and education; ii) critical and intercultural curricula, and iii) participatory action research (PAR).

The first category argues that critical and intercultural pedagogies can be understood as concepts that validate pluralism, diversity, and the social and cultural complexity of society, both within and outside the school environment. Likewise, it theorizes that these can determine pedagogy and education as challenges that seek to promote various ways of life, seeking not only to improve coexistence, but also to develop community and overcome educational, social, and cultural gaps, which are especially evident in socially and culturally deprived contexts (Blanchar & Arbeláez, 2023, p. 11). In other words, this category

emphasizes that education must be understood from an eminently socio-historical perspective and propagated beyond the limits of the school as a social construct. However, it is also limited by dominant socio-cultural conceptions.

Related to this same category, the authors find how proposals materialize according to the actors who conceive and execute them; on the one hand, top-down initiatives in which institutionalized actors exert influence from the hegemonic toward communities; and on the other hand, bottom-up actions, which attempt to emerge from communities seeking to rescue their social and cultural roots in opposition to state trends.

In short, this category includes proposals for inclusive, pluralistic, and critical education that rescues the feelings and worldviews of indigenous communities in the design of public policies for educational spaces. It is therefore a question of influencing, from the community base, a critical intercultural education of Eurocentric references that opens up the possibility of thinking of ourselves as social actors of our own destinies and future projects of a plural, multi- and intercultural society, capable of coexisting and progressing within frameworks of equity, equality, respect, solidarity, and real democracy.

With regard to the category related to critical and intercultural curricula, the literature reviewed points to the crystallization of micro-curriculum design initiatives that respond to critical, intercultural, and decolonizing educational parameters. Furthermore, it is emphasized that proposals must include the direct and effective participation of the communities to which they relate, so that these communities' views are reflected in these proposals.

The authors Blanchar and Arbeláez (2023) understand a critical and intercultural curriculum as "the set of perspectives, actions, programs, projects, or any social, cultural, and environmental efforts, inside and outside of school, that are self-managed to advance forms of recognition, growth, and collective development of diverse populations

and their forms of community life" (p. 13). Clearly, this perception of the curriculum encompasses an inclusive and participatory conception because it covers community actors themselves and the social contexts involved. Furthermore, the projection of the curriculum beyond the boundaries of institutions links the formal aspects of a traditional curriculum with the objective and subjective realities of the territories and their historical and everyday interrelationships.

A review of the existing literature on this subject enables trends to be classified into two interconnected groups: firstly, on the one hand, there is the recognition of multicultural existence, which has classrooms as its meeting point, and on the other hand, the recognition of the presence of numerous social environments outside them, which need to be added to curriculum projects by institutionalized actors in the education system. In the second group, the critical and intercultural curriculum must incorporate elements of "self-recognition and external recognition through concrete actions that transcend the officially established international discourse" (Blanchar & Arbeláez, 2023, p. 14) into its design for implementation. From these perspectives, it is assumed that the traditional top-down curriculum is no longer relevant in an intercultural context. On the contrary, the participation of all actors involved in the process of inclusive, participatory, and democratic citizen training is highlighted in its development, design, regulation, and implementation, with the aim of promoting coexistence and individual and collective improvement.

Finally, studies related to participatory action research and documentary exploration are moving towards a methodological strategy focused on sociocultural factors and community participation, which can be adapted to action research, and in particular participatory action research, as a legitimate alternative for the incubation and production of knowledge in the development and construction of intercultural curricula (Arroyo et al., 2020, cited by Blanchar & Arbeláez, 2023).

In conclusion, the documentary review proposes to identify and, in some way, limit or minimize the hegemony of pedagogies and

their homogenizing curriculum designers, who ignore the immense sociocultural variety of a territory such as Colombia, thereby seeking to maintain and reproduce the neocolonial curricula proposed by the government elite. It is therefore imperative that an alternative curriculum make visible and empower the 'other' knowledge of minority communities as valid options in the construction of curricula on equal epistemological terms.

### **Pivotal Guidelines for a Multicultural Design of a Foreign Language (FL) Curriculum**

In the context of formal education, for example, learning a foreign language remains a challenge for students, teachers and the administrative staff. In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in languages, likely prompted by the phenomenon of globalization, which drives academic reforms, primarily in curriculum and internationalization. Learning a foreign language for social purposes remains a goal to be achieved, and the appropriation and recognition of foreign cultures' characteristics have not been part of the state curricular agenda. Of course, the internalization of Colombian native cultures through the curriculum has been largely ruled out in recent decades.

In an attempt to incorporate some samples and manifestations of Colombian culture into the curriculum of LE, some guidelines are suggested that can enhance cultural inclusion in the syllabi of the different levels envisioned in the curricular organization of educational institutions. Table 1 shows the activities, strategies, content, and methodology that will be determined by the language teachers, policymakers, and administrative staff in accordance with the institution's mission and interests. However, some themes are identified (many of them in the form of questions that can be translated into more precise names) while attempting to implement the proposed guidelines, and in addition, a series of learning strategies is suggested, which are by no means intended as definitive prescriptions.



The primary objective should be to construct a learning environment that stimulates respect, understanding, and diverse cultural awareness; such a curriculum should consider:

**Table 1.** Some fundamental insights for the FL curriculum design

|   | Guidelines                                                                                                                                                                             | Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Learning activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Promotion of self-reflection that helps students (and teachers) to recognize and understand their own conceptions and limitations (biases) about their own culture and other cultures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Society and culture</li> <li>- What is culture?</li> <li>- What is the use of culture?</li> <li>- Who created the culture?</li> </ul>                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Roleplay</li> <li>- Debates</li> <li>- Lectures</li> <li>- Analytical readings (mindmaps)</li> </ul>                                                                                         |
| 2 | Motivation of acceptance, via understanding, which stimulates the development of empathy in order to understand the otherness of others.                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who am I?</li> <li>- Why am I like this?</li> <li>- What am I here for?</li> <li>- Why are they like that?</li> </ul>                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mini projects</li> <li>- Lectures</li> <li>- Interviews (indigenous communities)</li> <li>- Comparative intercultural analysis</li> </ul>                                                    |
| 3 | Recognition of the real and symbolic systems of current and historical power relations that have generated enormous social and economic differences.                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State, government, and culture</li> <li>- Economic power</li> <li>- Institutional power</li> <li>- Western and ancestral democracy</li> <li>- What is the meaning of spirituality for us?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exhibition of posters on symbols and images</li> <li>- Design of conceptual maps and supports</li> <li>- Western and ancestral justice systems</li> <li>- Guided tours of museums</li> </ul> |
| 4 | Inclusion of non-Western perspectives and promotion of ancestral systems and their relationships with their environment and alien communities.                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where did we come from?</li> <li>- Where are we going?</li> <li>- We are who we think we are?</li> <li>- Why are we different?</li> </ul>                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Activation of exchanges (incoming and outgoing mobility) with people from native cultures and languages.</li> <li>- Conversations with intercultural guests</li> </ul>                       |

|   | Guidelines                                                                                                                                                                           | Content                                                                                                                                                                           | Learning activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | Fostering the development of critical thinking that drives analysis and questions about cultural representations, prejudices, and stereotypes.                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does it mean to think critically?</li> <li>- How is thought constructed?</li> </ul>                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of socio-cultural research practices of education actors in order to establish points of encounter and disagreement that allow the understanding and acceptance of the other for a better coexistence, peace, and democracy.</li> <li>- Surveys and analysis</li> </ul> |
| 6 | Promotion of the acceptance and understanding of ancestral cultures in respect for and harmony with the environment.                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do we relate to nature?</li> <li>- How do we relate to each other?</li> <li>- Do we all relate in the same way?</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guided ancestral practices</li> <li>- Archaeological visits</li> <li>- Visits to mining sites</li> <li>- Discussions and debates</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                         |
| 7 | Reflection on technologies (internet, social networks, devices) and their impact on native cultures.                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technology and cultures</li> <li>- Cross-cultural economy</li> <li>- Globalization and multiculturalism</li> </ul>                       | Intercultural research projects                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 8 | Stimulate reflection on the cultural dynamics that may involve some risks in a process of meeting cultures (acculturation, transculturation, deculturalization, cultural alienation) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What would happen if...?</li> <li>- Forced displacement</li> <li>- Migration, culture, and language</li> <li>- Ethnoeducation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analysis of own and foreign experiences (Canada, Spain, Chile, Paraguay, Colombian borders, resguardos, San Andrés, San Basilio de Palenque, Sierra Nevada, etc.)</li> </ul>                                                                                                        |

## Conclusion

The aim of presenting these considerations from a conceptual perspective is to raise interest in the ongoing worldwide concern about interculturality awareness and its role in curriculum design while challenging the different possibilities of integrating cultural content into the foreign language curriculum. There will certainly be many other guidelines that will emerge from the discussion raised in this chapter, which somehow complement a more robust proposal adjusted to the particular needs of any academic population.

First, it is convenient to remember that the concepts associated with intercultural education and that of intercultural curriculum, though interwoven, are different. According to Mara (2021), intercultural education refers to "an inclusive teaching-learning process, which involves all students in consolidating a strong sense of self-confidence, strengthening empathic perceptions of people from different cultural backgrounds and promoting equal opportunities to reach their full potential" (p. 1). Clearly, this definition encompasses the broader sense of the educative panorama, which may be the national purpose of a public policy, and that may include a partial or total integrative approach for all-subjects curricula, whereas the intercultural curriculum becomes the instrument through which the state will hopefully put into practice in order for the students to gain intercultural competences.

It is also important to note that a curriculum based on considerations of interculturality must respect the ways of feeling and thinking of the communities that should become the main actors in the design of a curricular proposal of this type. In other words, it is not a question of 'adding' to a traditionally conceived and applied curriculum some particular elements of other cultures which distort the true essence of an intercultural curriculum. In addition, intercultural pedagogy should be crystallized into a curriculum that addresses non-Western

knowledge and promotes its understanding, recognition, revitalization, and propagation in their peoples and communities, while promoting critical thinking as a fundamental element towards a true peaceful coexistence, acceptance of the otherness, respect, integration, equality, and social equity.

On the other hand, a curriculum designed to develop and appropriate the phenomenon of interculturality within communities and wider society must encourage emancipatory and decolonizing approaches, rather than the traditional homogenizing and hegemonic methods that have been used for decades in culturally diverse societies. This is undoubtedly an official contravention of the very existence of minority peoples and a political strategy to minimize, disregard, diminish, and even eliminate entire communities through the education system.

Finally, when rethinking the intercultural curriculum, we must also consider the potential challenges that could influence its conception, design, and implementation. For example, one might ask: to what extent are communities willing to be included in a curriculum beyond their own territories? How to involve the school outsiders (community's families, authorities, etc.) both in the process of construction and in the process of implementation within their territories? Should a curriculum based on the interculturality of minority communities be subject to majority cultures? Should intercultural curriculum design be based on major national regulations? What would the real participation of communities in this endeavor look like? What conditions and parameters will ensure the traceability and effectiveness of implementing an intercultural curriculum? What will the training process for stakeholders in critical and intercultural curriculum design look like? What will be the role of indigenous languages in this process? Who will be in charge of 'teaching'? What would be the criteria to select teachers? Is the state capable of making the necessary and sufficient budgetary investment?

These and other concerns must be addressed by the actors who will make decisions and be part of intercultural curriculum design in order to somehow guarantee factors of inclusion, equity, and democracy in

its construction. Perhaps some of the answers will come from a series of grounded and/or action investigations that must be undertaken before, during, and after the development of the interculturality-based curriculum.

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## Chapter III

# Developing public speaking skills in EFL contexts: university students' needs and preferences

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## Introduction

As social beings, talking in public is a common activity that people should know how to do properly. Family gatherings, reunions with friends, festivities, and so on, are typical situations that require the development of public speaking skills. Furthermore, students need to be proficient as they can meet the demands of the labor world, as well as the requirements that trade makes of them. The ability to converse with colleagues, employees or anyone else connected with work is a natural necessity that must also be cultivated in order to establish professional relationships and ensure that business organizations operate to their benefit.

The academic field is an important part of public speaking skills; university students' daily lives involve public presentations and educational activities in which they showcase their knowledge, projects, research, and creations. Public performance is not as simple as it seems, and not all students are prepared to face an audience of onlookers, whether they are asking questions or offering criticism. This is why public speaking should be integrated into the university curriculum, as a lack of this skill can cause a gap among students.

Speaking is the most challenging aspect of communicative English skills for learners of the language. Therefore, more attention should be given to communicative skills in English teaching. While many studies deal with language acquisition in general, relatively few have focused explicitly on the difficulties faced by EFL learners on their journey to achieving proficiency in public speaking for academic and professional purposes. This is particularly true when it comes to combining linguistic competence with presentation techniques and affective factors such as anxiety management. (Rahman et al., 2024)

In the context of a public university, the current study found that students experienced anxiety and stress during oral public presentations in an

English course taught as a foreign language, which led some of them to withdraw from the course. The main reason reported was anxiety and fear of speaking in English. Many pupils refuse to do this speaking work, instead asking for personal talks with their teacher, written themes or some other way of working that doesn't involve speaking in front of the class. These students' reactions, behaviors, and attitudes during oral public speaking activities in English prompted the researchers of this study to question how they might reduce students' adverse reactions to public speaking in a foreign language and motivate students to reduce the number of English course dropouts.

Dahana (2020) highlights the importance of public speaking in English language learning, which has not traditionally been considered an essential component of professional program preparation. In some areas of countries like Colombia, the language does not necessarily include the teaching of public speaking as an independent skill, e.g., only a few oral presentation chances are offered in connection with general language courses without teaching the specific techniques, strategies, and mental factors which affect the success of public communication (Puluhulawa et al., 2022).

Consequently, a revision of the curriculum design of English Foreign Courses at the university where the current study was conducted showed that public speaking skills are mentioned only as part of the learning outcomes and as isolated tasks in the English courses. These public speaking activities offered at each level do not provide the students with enough tools, strategies, and linguistic resources to prepare them to give a public oral presentation.

**Table 1.** Content and Public Speaking Activities in Current EFL Courses

| English Level Course | Course Content                    | Linguistic Aspects                     | Public Speaking Activities                   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Foreign Language I   | Basic grammar and everyday topics | Verb to be, present simple             | Forum intro, oral report, poster             |
| Foreign Language II  | Social and daily life contexts    | Past, future, passive                  | Debates, discussions, presentations          |
| Foreign Language III | Cultural identity                 | Wh questions                           | Cultural debates                             |
| Foreign Language IV  | Fashion history                   | Complex tenses, specialized vocabulary | Analysis discussions, workshop presentations |
| Foreign Language V   | Sustainability and agriculture    | Technical vocabulary                   | Project presentation, group discussion       |
| Foreign Language VI  | EILTS Prep                        | General training in all skills         | Interviews, oral group presentations         |

**Note:** this table includes the course content proposed for each English Level and the activities related to public speaking.

On the other hand, the study participants were surveyed about thematic areas that were identified through an analysis of university academic programs and that serve as a complement to their comprehensive academic training (Arts and Language Culture, Public Speaking Skills, Research and Innovation Skills, Social Responsibility and Professional Ethics, and Global Digital Citizenship). Results indicated that Public Speaking Skills are their primary interest and a need for improvement in their academic and professional performance. It is important to note the students' perception of the need for these skills, which may not fully

align with the teaching methods developed to support them over the years.

Therefore, this chapter reports an exploratory descriptive study that conducted the first phase of a research project to design and implement an innovative curriculum proposal for public speaking in English. The first phase involved identifying students' needs, feelings, and preferences regarding public speaking in English. This information was then used to identify the design of a curriculum for the teaching of public speaking skills in higher education. In addition, this study contributes to the field of language education by addressing the area of students' preferences and needs in the context of researching effective teaching methods in university EFL settings, an area which has received limited research attention to date.

### **Relevant Literature on Public Speaking in EFL Contexts**

Research consistently identifies psychological barriers as significant obstacles to effective public speaking performance in EFL contexts. Fong et al. (2024) reported that 49.3% of Malaysian medical students had PSA (public speaking anxiety) at a moderate to high level establishing this issue as a symptom of inexperience, little proficiency when speaking in public. In addition, authors such as Fong et al. (2024), who investigated the Bangladeshi population in their qualitative study, identified fear of the public evaluative processes as the key cause of anxieties in various forms of learning. All of this shows that rapid treatment and public speaking training for students is necessary in order to overcome these learning and emotional issues.

The affective dimension in public speaking is further investigated by Madzlan et al. (2020) whose study showed that the context is an important factor in increasing anxiety levels, with students revealing that they felt less stressed when speaking through online platforms rather than live audiences. This suggests that, with the help of communication technology, one can gradually build up the necessary confidence to move on to in-person presentations. Zhussupova and Shadiev (2023)

explored how digital storytelling could be used to foster supportive and nurturing environments that address the socioemotional challenges faced by non-native English speakers, as well as the technical aspects of public speaking.

At the same time, research has been done on effective ways to carry out writing activities. Nevertheless, the effective methodological procedures for the achievement of oral behavior in EFL contexts, namely, public speaking skills development have been examined. Zhussupova and Shadiev (2023) employed the flipped classroom method. Students from this post study were said to have exceeded significantly in their voice control, body language, and effectiveness than those not taught with the conventional method. The authors noted that flipped-type delivery provided an opportunity for students to practice lower-order thinking skills on their own time outside the classroom. In contrast, more of the instructors' in-class time could be devoted to higher-order thinking and skills. This finding is particularly influential for curriculum design.

Realia and models are also beneficial for the development of public speaking since they provide real workplace situations. In a study by Sukrutrit (2025) which explored the development of public speaking skills in English of Thai tertiary EFL students through selective imitation of TED Talks, it was found that they had made significant progress in language control, non-verbal communication, and their body language, as well as speech organization. In a similar line of reasoning, Okada et al. (2018) showed that the order in which models of speech were presented has significance, and that students made greater progress when they observed less proficient models first than when they were confronted with more proficient speakers. These investigations indicate that carefully structured observational learning segments are necessary for enhancing EFL students' public speaking skills.

Furthermore, project-based learning models show good potential in incorporating public speaking with discipline-specific content knowledge. The Digital Video Feature Project (DVFP) research by Apriyanti et al. (2021) proved that video assignments helped vocational

students to develop their professional knowledge and public speaking skills simultaneously. This strategy addresses a significant shortcoming in ESP teaching methods by shifting the focus from language as a means of communication to language in real-life contexts.

Latest studies have also agreed that technology fosters public speaking in EFL contexts. Mei et al. (2024) analyzed Speeko, an artificial intelligence-powered coach designed for public speaking, and identified three of its key strengths: instantaneous modified feedback to listening scores, a practice environment that is not stressful and can relieve anxiety, and access to well-organized learning materials. In the same line, Isotalus et al. (2025) explored an AI-powered platform that provided a service in reflecting feedback on intonation, facial expressions, and content complexity. The study found that students felt more comfortable using such equipment than participating in an assessment from peers.

Research has widely identified discrepancies between the skills acquired through academic public speaking instruction and those necessary to achieve effective communication in the workplace. A comparative analysis by Johnson & Szczupakiewicz (1987) revealed that while both faculty and practitioners valued many of the same basic skills (informative speaking, persuasive speaking), alumni reported much greater utilization of those skills which earned relatively little mention in the academic field. These skills involved handling questions and answers, leading group discussions, and speaking for entertainment purposes. This historical finding continues to be significant today. Dahana (2020) also evaluated a public speaking program in Jakarta, finding that 70% of students reported that there were inadequate entrepreneurial communications skills taught in the college curriculum, despite its professional orientation.

This disconnection between the training received at school and that called for in the business world highlights the importance of conducting needs assessments when designing curriculum. Gorg and Wilson (1983) explain that the requirements for effective informative speeches include not only delivery skills but also a large share of research ability.



By this they show the nature of the subject matter (interdisciplinary) of the public speaking competence. Most recently, Kartal's (2021) study of Model United Nations simulations indicated essential improvements in negotiation and public speaking skills, as indicated by students' producing an average improvement of nearly 14% over the course of a semester, thus attesting to the value of practical applications for developing transferable communication skills. The theoretical framework for this study includes two major factors influencing the individual development of public speaking competency within EFL environments: first, the factors of the socio-affective component of the environment, and second, the student's strategic competence.

### **Socio-Affective Factors**

The psychological, emotional, and social factors constitute the main variables influencing the students' public speaking performance. According to Vanniarajan (1990), social affective factors, such as motivation, emotion, self-esteem, attitudes, and relationships, influence students' learning outcomes. This groundwork explains the difficulties some upper-intermediate and advanced English students experience when delivering public speeches in English. This claim is also enlarged upon by Rahman et al. (2024) who identified socio-cultural, such background, family support, education, and psycholinguistics such as self-image and anxiety, identified by them, as factors influencing the learners' apprenticeship process. Fong et al. (2024) likewise found psychological flexibility to be a significant predictor variable of their students' speaking anxiety. Therefore, self-regulation and flexible cognitive strategies are identified as variables affecting students public speaking performance in English.

The socio-cognitive framework also indicates a relationship with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis where emotional barriers may inhibit the learning of language regardless of the comprehensible input (Sukrutrit, 2025). This accounts for the success of anxiety reducing strategies such as those found in technology mediated environments studied by Madzlan et al. (2020) and Zhussupova and Shadiev (2023)

## Self-Regulation Strategies

The second theoretical aspect aims at students' strategic approach to the development and delivery of effective public speaking. Zimmerman (2000) describes self-regulation as "the self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that are systematically oriented to the attainment of one's goals" (p. 14) with self-regulated learners having the ability to set learning goals, plan learning strategies, monitor one's performance, and modify one's learning independently. As a result, the success of these strategies in developing performance is on the basis of their removal of the affective cognitive blocks to communication. The framework is particularly applicable to the development of public performance skills since there is a high degree of self-reflection and preparation of self-involved. Puluhalawa et al. (2022) utilized a teaching of public performance skills through this construct and noted that those high achievers used a lesser assortment of strategies but were more adaptive and more consistent in their use, generally, than their low achieving peers. The conclusion thus challenges the quantitative approaches to how strategies are taught. It suggests that the quality and consistency of the application of the strategies produces the effects, and that pedagogical design must take account of this with significant consequences for teaching.

The strategic dimension also includes Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which considers what students can achieve with help in succeeding, as opposed to what they can do independently (Sukrutrit, 2025). In addition, authors such as Okada et al. (2018) utilize the Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development Theory. This has to do with the differentiation in what the students can achieve with assistance, as opposed to what they can do at the same point. This view provides an explanation for the effectiveness of observational learning techniques, such as those employed by Okada et al. (2017), in which related models are placed as scaffolds to develop skills.

Miles' (2021) deconstruction of devices for persuasive discursive practice also fits into this framework, as it highlights rhetorical strategies

that L2 speakers can exploit to their advantage. These strategies use message framing techniques that do not depend on lexicon complexity. Also, Chakhachiro (2016), in his study on paralinguistic features, claims that active speech communication relies on the linguistic messages, attitudes, and intentions, which are elements that could be improved through guidance or instruction.

Socio-affective factors and strategic competence are key elements that provide a comprehensive framework of possible interactions that determine the development of public speaking competence in EFL contexts. This theoretical underpinning has led to the present investigation into the needs and preferences of the students involved, with the aim of discovering instructional approaches that are likely to effectively address both the emotional and strategic aspects of public speaking competence.

In the theoretical foundations mentioned before, this research's conceptual framework focuses on the convergence of student needs, learning preferences, and public speaking skills in EFL contexts. The framework situates the research question around the two central concepts: learning needs and learning preferences for public speaking in English.

### **Public Speaking as a Professional Skill**

Public speaking is a complex professional skill which is much more than the mere mastery of language. As stated by Dahana (2020), "the students need public speaking learning to prepare themselves before entering higher education level or the workplace " (p.120). A knowledge of spoken English today brings about self-confidence, communicative ability and thus an increased opportunity of getting employment. This statement is very closely supported by the assertion of Johnson and Szczupakiewicz (1987) that there is a discrepancy between the educational need for the communication in the classroom and the reality of the working experience, in which the place of specific practical speaking skills (question breathing, impromptu speaking) are

of utmost importance in business but do not find sufficient emphasis in education.

The current investigation regards public speaking as a professional skill set. This includes both technical skills such as (structure, performance and use of language), as well as psychological readiness (self-regulation, confidence and anxiety). Supporting this characterization, research by Miles (2021) endorses that effective public speaking is message framing and a use of persuasive techniques that may easily be acquired by native speakers and are not necessarily a complex linguistic procedure. Also, in his paper "Resolution of Communication," Chakhachiro (2016) reported that the paralinguistic features of the content were an important factor in the interpretation of its content meaning by the audience, giving suggestions for teaching of good results public speaking as needing to relationship with both verbal and non-verbal factors.

### **Learning Needs of Public Speaking Skills in English**

Teaching foundations in public Speaking skills is not an easy task, considering the target population's needs are mostly centered on contextual factors such as education settings, and individuals' motivation, goals, and even barriers. Madzlan et al. (2020) found that environmental factors affect students' speaking skills, one of the most common effects is anxiety, a fear symptom of response to stressful situations. Rahman et al. (2024) included a part on hindrances in the structure and layout of their paper, which limits the opportunity to acquire public speaking techniques in students at the degree level. The interferences were treated as well as including psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and structures to obviate, as was induced, encourage the teaching in undergraduate students.

At the same time, however, Fong et al. (2024) demonstrate that anxiety factors present affecting speaking performance. Training experience, age and psychological flexibility are factors that should be considered in terms of training and technique. Also then, therefore, the merit of recognizing the learner's needs as given in their public speaking

capacity is the foundation for the design of public speaking training courses which will more fully meet students' needs in respect to their public speaking.

### **Learning Preferences for Public Speaking in English**

Preferences in the learning process are another essential field in building a strong basis for instruction design of public speaking skills. When a teacher or instructor can identify this preliminary information before applying any teaching strategy, students' learning success is more notable, and learning outcomes are easier to meet. Setting students' learning preferences is related to the teaching advantages, on student's behavior and assessment, it also helps to design teaching material and aids between to achieve the required results. Puluhalawa et al. (2022) conducted a study that examined undergraduates' learning strategies in a public speaking course in English. The study findings were centered on three types of learning strategies used by the students: "cognitive, socio-affective, and meta-cognitive strategies" (p.16), and identified frequent language exposure as one of the essential factors for improving public speaking performances.

The study by Okada et al. (2018) is also another important outcome for learning preferences; video-based observational learning constituted a model for fostering EFL students' public speaking skills. The flipped classroom methodology implemented by Irianti et al. (2024) in their study was also another successful strategy that allowed students to prepare their public presentations before their performances. New studies emphasize the importance of observation and modelling in building learners' confidence in public situations. The studies of Sukrutrit (2025) show that TED Talks are a useful means utilized by public speaking pupils to learn speech patterns and planning from more experienced speakers.

### **Technology Integrating**

Technology is not only an important exterior essential of social life and development of life on a continuous basis but is a basic element of

education. Technology is also convenient as a means of the learning-teaching process, transforming the concept of instruction into mediation and creating new learning pathways. Teaching strategies are based on the innovations afforded using technology available as educational digital resources. In this sense, Apriyanti et al. (2021) focus on integrating video-based projects as digital tools that support students' speaking skills, specific knowledge and the establishment of disciplinary boundaries.

Another digital tool that has been integrated into public speaking skills development was tackled in Zhussupova and Shadiev (2023) study. Digital storytelling (DC) was perceived in this study as a technique for developing public speaking skills in an EFL classroom. The results were positive, especially with regard to improvement of children's public speaking techniques and their use of spoken English, academic vocabulary and grammatical structures. Therefore, technology proves to be a staunch ally for public speaking skills mediation, whose integration depends on teachers' knowledge and the purpose of digital tools.

### **Interdisciplinary Curriculum Design**

Interdisciplinary curriculum is a concept that has become stronger in education, especially in tertiary settings, where academic programs require the integration of disciplines to provide undergraduates with more professional skills and prepare them to face the labor world. Developing public speaking skills goes further than an isolated course or instruction by itself; it transcends academic boundaries, as speaking skills are a need in any subject, course, or university program. On this basis, Gorg and Wilson (1983), as pioneers of public speaking research, established the importance of integrating public speaking instruction into research academic courses.

Research literature also includes Kartal's (2021) study, which displays essential positive findings in public speaking, decision-making, research, and collaborative work skills in a Model United Nations (MUN) course.

The last studies are examples of interdisciplinary curriculum designs with public speaking skills as a key element that develops students' professional skills across disciplines.

## **Methodology**

This chapter incorporates a qualitative methodology in response to the need to identify and describe students' needs and preferences in public discourse in English. Creswell and Creswell (2023) say that the qualitative research approach studies and interprets the meaning that individuals or a group of individuals give to a certain social problem, and the research process is based on inductive data analysis according to the meaning and significance that the individuals give to the problem studied. In view of the above, the methodology used here focuses on inductive analysis through an exploratory design and the description of collected data, as explained in the following subsection.

### **Research Design**

This is an exploratory descriptive study that aimed at identifying students' needs and preferences regarding Public Speaking Skills in EFL. This exploratory approach was adopted in this study to obtain preliminary findings that helped researchers in conducting in more in-depth research on curricula design. Exploratory studies were conducted to clarify the topic and the problem to be solved, and were a flexible technique that provided reliable results, considered for the next stages of the research (Edgar & Manz, 2017).

### **Research Context and Participants**

The study was conducted with public university students from Earth Sciences, Business, and Technology programs who were taking English as a foreign language as a graduate requirement. Of these, 35 were male and 59 were female, with ages ranging from 15 to 30. Most of the participants were from A2 and B1 levels of English proficiency levels according to the Council of Europe (2021) as shown in Table 1. Most

of the participants expressed an interest in developing their public speaking skills for academic and professional purposes, as they had experienced limitations when delivering speeches in formal scenarios.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The instruments for data collection were used to identify students' needs and preferences in Public Speaking Skills in English as a Foreign Language. The data collection process begins by characterizing the target population with a demographic survey. Students also participated in different speaking skills activities made to assess their speaking skill. Taking into account that this is an exploratory-descriptive study, instruments are categorized according to three stages for data collection.

**Stage 1. Demographic Survey.** The instruments used for the first stage to collect data consisted of a demographic and diagnostic survey. The survey provided information about the target population and gathered data on students' English proficiency levels according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2021). Students were asked about age, gender, academic program, semester, and the results from an English placement test they took face-to-face through EF Set Certificate. They were also questioned about the interest content areas they consider meaningful and necessary in their academic and professional fields that could be integrated into English courses.

**Stage 2. Students' Needs Questionnaire.** The instrument for the second data collection stage was a validated needs assessment questionnaire used in Ashraf's (2005) study, with 19 Likert-scale items for students (agree, neutral, disagree). This instrument had previously been piloted to ensure reliability. Observations of preliminary presentations and speech activities were also considered as exploratory data to identify students' public-speaking needs.

**Stage 3. Semi-Structured Interview.** The third stage framed a semi-structured interview that was applied to the participants in order



to validate and expand the findings from the previous stages. This interview was semi-structured with eight open-ended questions and one-on-one meetings to explore students’ personal experiences, perceptions, and expectations related to public speaking training in English. The interviews were conducted individually in Spanish to give students the opportunity to express freely, audio recorded for 20–30 minutes, and analyzed qualitatively to compare and contrast the data to obtain a comprehensible understanding of participants’ learning preferences and needs in developing English public speaking skills in a variety of programs for university students in an EFL context.

## Results

### Stage 1 Results: Demographic Survey as Diagnosis

The results from the characterization survey show that the students’ English proficiency levels ranged between A2 and B1, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages, based on an online assessment. The Table 2 summarizes the demographic features of the participants in this study.

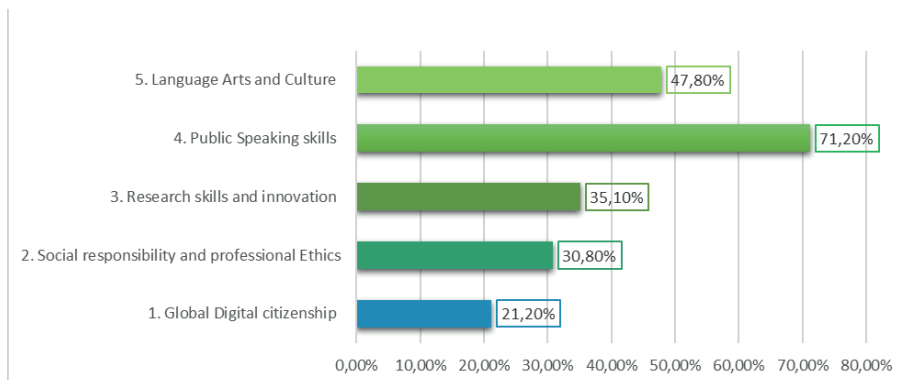
**Table 2.** Demographic Features

| Feature        | Rate | Distributional Breakdown |
|----------------|------|--------------------------|
| Age Group      |      |                          |
| 15-20 years    | 36   | 38.2 %                   |
| 20-30 years    | 58   | 61.7%                    |
| Gender         |      |                          |
| Male           | 35   | 37.2%                    |
| Female         | 59   | 62.7%                    |
| Academic Major |      |                          |
| Mining Eng.    | 8    | 8.5%                     |

| Feature                             | Rate | Distributional Breakdown |
|-------------------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| Finance and International Trade     | 3    | 8.5%                     |
| Electronic Eng.                     | 8    | 3.1%                     |
| Business Adm.                       | 20   | 21.2%                    |
| Industrial Engineering              | 10   | 10.6                     |
| Systems and Computer Eng.           | 8    | 8.5%                     |
| Geological Eng.                     | 4    | 4.2%                     |
| Public Accounting                   | 33   | 35.1%                    |
| Semester                            |      |                          |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> to 2 <sup>nd</sup>  | 4    | 4.2 %                    |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> to 7 <sup>th</sup>  | 65   | 69.1%                    |
| 8 <sup>th</sup> to 10 <sup>th</sup> | 25   | 26.5%                    |
| English Level Placement (CEFR)      |      |                          |
| A1                                  | 11   | 11.7%                    |
| A2                                  | 76   | 80.5%                    |
| B1                                  | 5    | 5.3%                     |
| B2                                  | 2    | 2.1%                     |

Note: features listed in this table characterize the convenience sample (n=94) from a public university in Colombia.

Participants were surveyed about the interest content areas they consider meaningful and necessary in their academic and professional fields that could be integrated into English courses. They were asked to choose two options to indicate their preferences. The results are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Core Content Areas in English Most Relevant for Students

**Note:** the core of Public Speaking Skills was the most attractive category for the participants in the sample ( $n = 94$ ).

Once the category of Public Speaking Skills was identified as the most important area of content for the participants, it became essential to understand their perceptions of their future professional needs in this area.

## Stage 2 Results: Needs Assessment Questionnaire

The results from the second questionnaire were divided into two parts as shown in Table 3. The first part (questions 1-7) collected information on the participants' self-perceived needs and the objectives they believe should be addressed in relation to public speaking skills. The second part (questions 13-19) explored the students' preferences regarding their learning styles for developing these skills.

**Table 3.** Student Perception Needs

| Questionnaire-Students' Needs                           | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|----------|
| 1. The ability to speak with competence and confidence. | 23.8% | 57%     | 19%      |
| 2. To present a well-organized, dynamic speech.         | 15%   | 40.5%   | 23.8%    |
| 3. To be able to participate in an oral dissertation.   | 33%   | 35.3%   | 31%      |

| Questionnaire-Students' Needs                                            | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|----------|
| 4. Public speaking skills to get a job.                                  | 61.9% | 21.4%   | 16.7%    |
| 5. To be able to take part in group discussions.                         | 40.5% | 38.1%   | 21.4%    |
| 6. To be able to speak in public.                                        | 97.6% | 2.4%    | 0%       |
| 7. Public speaking skills to participate in educational decision-making. | 85.7% | 11.9%   | 2.4%     |
| 8. Less emphasis on oral presentations.                                  | 14.3% | 33.3%   | 52.4%    |
| 9. More small group work.                                                | 83.3% | 9.5%    | 7.1%     |
| 10. More individualized teaching.                                        | 66.7% | 23.8%   | 9.5%     |
| 11. Less emphasis on the textbook.                                       | 45.2% | 31%     | 23.8%    |
| 12. Clear course objectives.                                             | 81%   | 11.9%   | 7.1%     |
| 13. Involvement in assessment.                                           | 50%   | 40.5%   | 9.5%     |
| 14. Variety of assessment methods.                                       | 90.5% | 2%      | 2%       |
| 15. To know the relevant subject material for their chosen profession.   | 76.2% | 16.7%   | 2%       |
| 16. To talk to their teachers.                                           | 71.4% | 28%     | 0%       |
| 17. To know about their progress.                                        | 90%   | 9.5%    | 0%       |
| 18. Enough time to do good quality work                                  | 23.8% | 52.4%   | 23.8%    |
| 19. Direction from teachers.                                             | 40.5% | 31%     | 28.6%    |

**Note:** students' learning preferences and needs scale from Ashraf (2005)

The results of the questionnaire indicate students' views on their own capacity to speak in public and the effect it has on the learning process. Some of the more important facts of these results are:

- *Most of the students feel competent to speak in public in English; yet a large percentage fall into the neutral class, therefore are not quite sure of their ability.*
- *Categories on the course structure, dynamic speech, assessment, and good quality work present the highest neutral students' perception.*
  - *Half of the students are unsure about their ability to speak orally in the course, and the same proportion has doubts.*

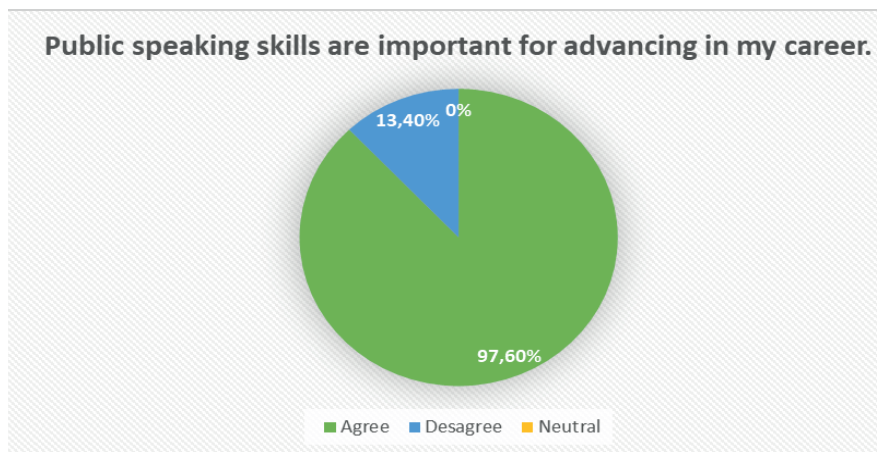
- *Most of the students feel that the ability to speak in public is helpful in getting a good job and note the importance of developing these skills to face the labor field.*
- *Students differ to some extent in their opinions of their ability to prepare a public performance in a group, showing that while some proportion feel comfortable working in a group, others prefer to work individually.*
- *Most of the students feel that the ability to speak in public will help them in their careers, and they also have a positive perception about how developing these skills will strengthen their profession.*
- *Students realize the importance of being able to speak in public, especially in their field of education, where they are key figures in debates and decision-making processes.*
- *Most of the students show a predisposition towards the time spent in oral presentation activities; they are concerned about other teaching methods to improve public speaking.*
- *More students point out the importance of small-group work and the teachers' support for personal instruction and guidance.*
- *Students realize that one of the most effective things bearing upon the success of the oral presentation is the time spent in rehearsing, organizing, and presentation design.*

Data and responses from the students' questionnaire on public speaking skills and preferences, and their academic experience perceptions, were grouped into eight preliminary student needs:

1. *Speaking in Public in English with Competence and Confidence.* This first specific need was identified with 23.8% of students agreeing, and 53% being neutral about it. It suggests that students require training to develop their confidence and public speaking skills.
2. *Effective Presentations.* This need was inferred from the 40.5% of students who manifest no ability to deliver well-organized and dynamic presentations.

3. *Ability to Participate in Oral Dissertations.* The level of experience and confidence debating academic subjects with the audience revealed a low rate of performance, with 31% of students disagreeing, and 35% who are neutral.
4. *Professional Public Speaking Skills.* Students' awareness of the need to develop public speaking skills to get a job suggests that English courses must be designed with content and activities that enhance professional public speaking skills, with about 62% agreeing.
5. *Cooperative Participative Discussions.* Most students perceive the value of developing aptitudes toward cooperative work, with 83% agreeing.
6. *Fostering Public Speaking Skills.* Generally, students are fully conscious of developing public speaking skills, with 97% specifying agreement.
7. *Academic Public Speaking Skills.* Students reveal agreement with the need to develop skills that help them to actively participate in decision-making for academic processes, with 85% agreeing.
8. *Public Speaking Learning Preferences.* Among the students' preferences to learn, the following were identified as the highest proportions: oral presentations, small groups, clear course objectives, variety of assessment methods, frequent teachers' communication, instruction, and feedback.

Students made thoughtful suggestions for improving the curriculum. They recommended that English classes should go beyond expected grammatical exercises and include authentic work simulations, such as project pitches, structured debates, and workplace presentations, to reflect what they anticipate in their future professional lives (Table 3). They explained how effective public speaking would enable them to motivate teams, persuasively present, and advocate for themselves and professional skills and demands that they view as linked to their careers, as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Public Speaking Skills in the Professional Field

### Stage 3 Results: Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were key qualitative steps necessary to uncover depths of students' experiences with public speaking in English as a foreign language. Semi-structured interviews were held individually in Spanish to provide students with a friendly environment to express themselves and offer an authentic and reliable communication as a channel for complex emotional and strategic components of the phenomena. The information gathered in interviews, following thematic analysis, revealed four principal categories, namely: socio-affective impact, self-regulation strategies, preferences of technology and curriculum expectations. Each of these was generated out of the themes emerging as students narrated the stories of their difficulties with linguistic competence, anxiety management and needs for professional preparation.

One striking thing was the almost invariable phenomenon of physical and emotional manifestations of stress experienced by participants and which about 30% of them included in their descriptions. They immediately identified with the somatic symptoms, such as trembling hands and emotional overwhelm, experienced when they were unable to

recall English vocabulary in front of others during their presentations. The qualitative evidence established supports the accent placed by the theoretical framework on the socio-affective factors involved as being responsible for public speaking performance. It was also revealing that students had developed sophisticated self-regulation mechanisms to cope with these difficulties.

Table 4 gives a complete picture of the students' experience of public speaking in English. The socio-affective impact category contains evidence of the students' emotional burden in presenting in English, expressed through anxiety, lack of confidence, and the cognitive strain of having to translate simultaneously from Spanish to English a fact that most of interviewees said was a major problem. The category of self-regulated strategies gives evidence of the various compensatory strategies employed by students, ranging from total memorization of the script to flexible synthesis of it, together with non-verbal techniques such as purposeful gesture and the use of visual aids.

The technological integration preferences category indicates students' preferences for using ubiquitous, technology-based communication tools to reduce anxiety and develop skills. The interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum expectations indicates that students are aware of the fact that communication competencies include professional readiness, which rather suggests that these competencies span the linguistic borders into professional becoming.



**Table 4.** Excerpts from Students' Interviews and Categories

| Category                            | Description (from students' interviews)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Excerpts from the interviews                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Social Affective Impact             | Presentations in English can trigger students' feelings and emotions such as stress, anxiety, insecurity, fear of making mistakes, pressure to perform, and nervousness due to language factors, factors as translation from Spanish to English, fluency, and pronunciation. | Sometimes I shake or want to cry when I forget a word in English." (Interview 2)<br>"In Spanish... At the beginning I felt nervous, but after I calmed down. In English the nerves are all the time." (Interview 4)                                                              |
| Self-Regulated Strategies           | Preparation involves memorization, writing key points, reviewing the topic, and using gestures; English preparation focuses more on pronunciation and repetition.                                                                                                            | "I read the whole topic and rehearse in front of a mirror... I move my hands to feel more confident." (Interview 3)<br>"In English, I practice pronunciation a lot and repeat my presentation many times; sometimes I ask someone who knows English for feedback." (Interview 4) |
| Challenges of Presenting in English | Presenting in English is more difficult due to language barriers; forgetting vocabulary may cause speech blocks and avoidance of complex ideas.                                                                                                                              | "If I forget a word, I try to paraphrase or repeat something... sometimes I just avoid complicated words, so I don't make mistakes." (Interview 1)<br>"It's hard to think in Spanish, translate, and speak at the same time." (Interview 1)                                      |
| Professional Relevance              | Public speaking in English is considered essential for employability, leadership, and professional communication. Students request more authentic, professional scenarios in class.                                                                                          | "English is a universal language... it's important to lose the fear in both Spanish and English to grow professionally." (Interview 1)<br>"It would be better if classes included presentations like project pitches or debates that happen in real jobs." (Interview 1)         |

**Note:** the data in the Supporting Excerpts from Interviews column in this table were transcribed and translated to English from the recordings of the students' interviews.

## Discussion

### Interpretation of the Results

The results of the present study show a complicated picture of public speaking skills in English, as many interdependent factors affect students' experience. The three areas of Language Anxiety, Language Proficiency, and Self-regulated Strategies provide a proper frame of reference for understanding the study question. In this sense, language anxiety as an issue is consistent with and is an extension of what we know of foreign language anxiety as noted in academic contexts.

While most of the participants stated they felt confident in presenting academic material, the qualitative data reveal a subtler state of affairs in which this confidence was more than frequently undermined by the immediate triggers of the thresholding anxiety involved. Thus, the awareness of certain manifestations of anxiety, such as physiological manifestations (shaky voice) and mental blocks, associated with the real fear of public evaluation by fellow students, seems to suggest that the phenomenon of speaking before audiences in foreign language contexts operates at many levels at once, involving many of the physiological and psychological aspects of the performance.

The connection between language proficiency and effective public speaking is more complicated than a simple linear one, as language learners' problems with translation processes and code-switching between Spanish and English are specific mistakes that change into cognitive demands. Therefore, traditional means of public speaking based on «linguistic competence» are not necessarily helpful incomes. The programs and English as a Foreign Language Courses must take into consideration the cognitive biases imposed by real-time language processing during high-stakes speeches and presentations. Besides the language, students have to deal with different communication patterns and expectations between the L1 and L2.

## **Theoretical Implications**

The results confirm and contradict existing research at the same time, as the prominence of anxiety corroborates Oxford's (1990) mention of psychological and social factors in language acquisition; this study's data uncover anxiety patterns relevant to public speaking contexts specifically, which go beyond general language anxiety. Previous research such as Rahman et al. (2024) study, has documented foreign language anxiety in broad terms, which makes a big difference in these findings, describing the changes and transformation of this anxiety.

On the other hand, the self-regulatory methodology employed by students matches up with Zimmerman's (2000) concept of self-regulated learning, with adaptations clearly required for the EFL public speaking context. The tension between the domains of memorization and paraphrasing points to another position that has not been fully addressed in the current literature: that of linguistic accuracy versus communicative fluency. This finding also inquiries into traditional communicative language teaching methodologies, which emphasize fluency over accuracy, as it describes students' need for different strategies.

Dahana's (2020) observations also have particular importance for this study's findings as they show the absence of public speaking in EFL courses. While Dahana says that public speaking is ignored as a separate process, the results here indicate that the student develops compensatory strategies that may be either inefficient or counterproductive. It means that when a student writes and memorizes their discourse can increase their anxiety and low their effective communication in a public speaking if memory fails.

## **Professional Development**

Important implications for professional education are portrayed by the gap between students' perceptions of competence and their performance representation. The need for public speaking competence

for professional success is growing in today's world of globalization, as well as the lack of graduates with English-language competencies and a high level of public communication skills. Hence, current English teaching approaches train undergraduates in linguistic skills but not profession-ready graduates to perform well in international settings and to cope with the requirements of international communication. In this way, English professionals need to update their teaching methodologies to guide and prepare undergrads to face workplace challenges. They require also sensitization to problems of student performance anxiety on the part of students and development of techniques of public speaking and establishment of psychologically safe environments for students to practice public speaking skills.

### **Curriculum Design**

English as a Foreign Language Curriculum design must be reconceptualized under the study's findings. Institutions need to develop course chapters that systematically teach the interrelationships among language skills, presentation skills, and anxiety reduction, rather than addressing public speaking as a shorthand evaluation technique or an independent exercise in general language courses. In this way, public speaking will be regarded as a complex skill that requires attention on the pedagogical level. In reference to the preference for small-group interaction and individualization, this would mean that traditional large classes would not lend themselves to the development of public speaking skills. Universities need to promote public speaking courses with limited enrollment the offering several opportunities for practice and individual feedback. Changes in such a structure demand institutional involvement, but the advantages might be great in student performance and lessen the rate of dropouts.

### **Research Boundaries**

The exploratory nature of the study imposes some limitations on generalization of data collection within a single public institution, where the results are valuable for the initial phase of the research,

but do not bring results of other settings, such as private institutions or institutions with differing environments. The survey's self-report nature of students' self-perceptions may also prompt social desirability bias in their responses, due to subjective perceptions of ability or a lack of an adequate reference standard with which to compare them.

Future research should use performance criteria or independent evaluations to strengthen the self-reported determinants of competency. The cross-sectional study has the limitation that the data would give a picture of students' experiences in public speaking at a given time. This means that it does not show how students' experiences of public speaking develop over time. It would be helpful for future researchers to consider conducting longitudinal studies of students in the area of public speaking development throughout their undergraduate studies, in order to collect data on the efficiency of skill and anxiety development over time and across educational experiences.

### **Future Research**

This exploratory phase opens up several interesting areas for future research. Experimental studies are needed to test various pedagogical methods for teaching public speaking in EFL contexts to establish best practices. In particular, these studies should examine the effectiveness of integrated versus discrete public speaking courses, and how the effects of anxiety-conquering interventions, self-practice, and professors and technology can affect the process.

In addition, future research requires a more in-depth analysis of the cultural aspects of the area that will inform future research. How do the various cultural communication norms present in the cultural ethos of their backgrounds affect students' own attitudes to public speaking in English? Knowledge of such cultural dimensions ought to offer a greater insight into pedagogical practices which are more sensitive to the cultural factor.

Along the same lines, technology intervention in public speaking education also requires further investigation. The design and use of the

natural communicative tools proposed by Isotalus et al. (2025) and Mei et al. (2024) through the gateway of artificial intelligence offer opportunities to address many of the challenges of providing individualized feedback and practice. Keeping the human communication dimension involved, this research should not only study how the tools mentioned above can assist in individualizing the teaching method, but also individuals' lifestyles and communication patterns to enable them to feel at ease with the procedure.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies examining the long-term professional outcomes of students who participate in Public Speaking in English courses will provide strong evidence and data to build well-founded course syllabi. Have those students who have received a thorough grounding in public speaking in EFL situations shown better professional outcomes? Researching this target question would greatly bolster the case for, among other things, increased institutional funding for syllabus and academic programs development.

In summary, the studies of EFL communication in different countries, institutions and age-groups will indicate both the universality of the difficulties and the peculiar aspects of each given situation. This larger view would lead to the gradual evolution of techniques that can be adapted into various requisite patterns, careful to ensure their essential effectiveness.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this chapter describes a study that provides an essential perspective on freeing language education, particularly the teaching of English as a foreign language in Colombia. Here, English is mostly taught in universities as a complementary requirement of language proficiency and is not integrated into the programs' curriculum. The findings here tackle traditional linguistic teaching approaches based on the real university students' needs and the objective of learning and speaking a language that is not their mother tongue.

On the other hand, the process that has been addressed in this chapter provides a valuable description of students' needs in public speaking. This is useful for university educators, curriculum designers, and program leaders who want to incorporate professional-level communication skills into their programs, as well as English as a Foreign Language teachers who believe in innovation and new methodologies for language instruction. The study findings are also essential for students who are in the process of developing and improving their public speaking skills, and recognizing their importance in the academic and professional fields. Besides the nature of the exploratory study, limitations rely on the number of participants and the specific features of the population.

Finally, these preliminary study findings provide a framework for the next steps in the design and implementation of a public speaking skills syllabus that meets the needs and preferences of the target population. The exploratory and descriptive phase confirms and validates the topic and problem addressed here: the lack of preparation of undergraduate students for public dissertations. English as a foreign language should be a multidisciplinary course in university programs' curricula, preparing students to face professional and global labor challenges and experiences, not just a linguistic course or a student requirement to graduate.

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## Chapter IV

# Systematizing a co-teaching experience between Fulbright ETAs and Colombian English educators: through the lens of the ETAs

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## Introduction

Co-teaching is widely used in a variety of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts around the world. It is a collaborative process in which two teachers work together in planning, implementation, and assessment. Through this approach, both teachers can share their knowledge, experiences, and cultural backgrounds with one another. Students benefit by improving their English skills as they interact with both types of teachers, feel free to ask questions, and participate actively. This dynamic allows them to learn the language within their own context, guided by both a native and a non-native speaker, whose contributions complement each other.

In the Colombian context, co-teaching has been implemented to some extent, most often through the One Teaches, One Assists Model, in which one teacher instructs while the other assists. This approach allows both teachers to plan and organize classes by considering the roles of teacher and teaching assistant, which can be alternated during implementation. It can also help the assistant feel more comfortable while adapting to a new context, enabling meaningful engagement, fostering cultural understanding, and serving as ambassadors of their own cultures.

At the university level, curricula for co-teaching experiences are often planned months in advance. However, it is essential to consult both teachers during the evaluation stage to develop and apply new strategies, materials, and methodologies that benefit students and teachers alike. In this sense, the objective of this study is to systematize an experience related to co-teaching in an EFL context, following the model of “one teaches, one assists,” where the participants were native and non-native English teachers, even though this research project only portrays the insights described by the English Teaching Assistants (ETAs). Besides, it shows how co-teaching is an opportunity for both

teachers to share knowledge and create more meaningful classes for their students.

On the other hand, it is also important to reduce or eliminate the perceived divide between native and non-native English teachers by creating an environment where students appreciate the contributions of both, regardless of differences, and understand what each co-teacher offers to the EFL classroom. In this context, this research project explores a co-teaching experience through the systematization of experiences conducted at a private university in Tunja, involving American English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) who shared their perspectives on co-teaching in this setting. These experiences offer some insights to consider when implementing this teaching model, such as the importance of cooperative planning and collaboration during the application of co-teaching in the EFL classroom.

In the field of education, co-teaching is a model that promotes the participation of both native and non-native English speakers in EFL settings, where each group has different cultural backgrounds. They can share their knowledge and experiences through planning and implementing methodologies that help students understand not only how a language functions but also develop intercultural competence, which broadens their perspectives. Additionally, this co-teaching model creates environments where teachers can try different dynamics; for example, one teacher teaches while the other assists, enabling interaction with students, strategies, activities, and materials.

## Theoretical Framework

**Co-teaching** Co-teaching is two or more teachers teaching together, sharing responsibility for meeting the learning needs of students and, at the same time, learning from each other. Co-teachers plan, teach, and evaluate lessons together, working as collaborators on every aspect of instruction. (Murphy & Scantlebury, 2010, p. 34)

Thus, co-teaching has been one of the EFL classroom models that has provided teachers with multiple tools to explore in diverse

educational contexts. Among the opportunities offered by this model, both participating teachers can learn from each other. They need to plan lessons, or parts of them, together; implement classes as a team according to the chosen co-teaching model; assess students; and provide feedback. When teachers work as peers, the teaching-learning process can become more meaningful and successful, as it integrates each teacher's language knowledge and educational background.

Over the past decade, co-teaching has been widely examined in general education practices worldwide and defined as a collaborative method of instruction (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, as cited in Pérez & Pérez, 2022, p. 3), in which decisions and accountability for students' learning are shared (Shumway et al., 2011). However, "each term has different implications on how this teaching methodology is implemented. Team teaching values the contribution of every participant and all the participants enjoy the same status" (Liu, 2008, p. 105). This aspect is highly relevant in co-teaching, as both teachers can switch roles— for example, between teacher and assistant — and work with all students, offering peer feedback and fostering an environment in which different educational backgrounds are acknowledged. This approach also supports the creation of more engaging materials and lessons for students.

In this way, collaborative and cooperative teaching emphasizes the process of collaboration, and the degree to which each participant's function may be different. Co-teaching is a general term with broader implications and has been adopted to name different approaches to improve teaching through collaboration. (Liu, 2008, p. 105)

In that sense, "clearly, approaches to co-teaching should be selected on the basis of student characteristics and needs, teacher preferences, curricular demands, and pragmatics such as the amount of teaching space available" (Cook & Friend, 1995, as cited in Aliakbari & Mansoori, 2010, p. 7). Likewise, co-teaching was known in the 1970s as team teaching and is also referred to as collaborative teaching or cooperative teaching (Reinhiller, 1996, as cited in Aliakbari & Mansory, 2010, p. 10).

Therefore, co-teaching extends beyond the EFL classroom and has been implemented not only for English instruction but also for various other purposes. It has been applied in classrooms with special needs, where a general education teacher and a special needs-trained teacher work together to support students, meet their expectations, and, in some cases, teach other subjects collaboratively to achieve shared goals. In the EFL classroom, co-teaching can take different forms, one of the most common being the One Teaches, One Assists Model, in which participants can switch roles during the implementation stage. Thus, both teachers can experience both roles. Even when institutions define specific roles – for example, assigning one teacher as the general teacher responsible for overseeing the entire process, and the other as an assistant – both are expected to participate actively in planning, implementation, and assessment.

Research has also identified key elements necessary for effective co-teaching (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2002; Murawski, 2006). These include: (a) cooperative presence, where both teachers are physically present in the co-taught classrooms; (b) cooperative planning, where both contribute to planning and meet regularly to design lessons; (c) cooperative presenting, where both actively participate in classroom instruction; (d) cooperative processing, where both possess content knowledge to monitor and evaluate student responsiveness; and (e) cooperative problem solving, where both share responsibility for classroom management and seating arrangements (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2002, as cited in Sinclair et al., 2018).

In the EFL context, several key aspects are worth considering, as follows: co-teaching between NETs (Native English Teachers) and NNETs (Non-native English teachers) may begin with the One Teaches, One Assists model, where NNETs take the lead and NETs serve as supportive teachers. NETs, who have limited teaching experience, would likely feel comfortable with this approach to co-teaching and gain more experience in classroom management. These local initiatives can help both teachers as they go through the developmental stages of co-teaching: the beginning stage, the compromise stage, and the collaborative stage. (Gately & Gately, 2001, p. 43)



Thus, teachers or professionals involved in co-teaching processes who have less training in teaching may feel more comfortable working hand in hand with those who have more experience in the field of education. Besides, they can provide the NNET with opportunities to learn more about the linguistic and pragmatic aspects of the language, as well as the vast cultural background that NETs bring to the EFL classrooms.

In classroom practice, NNETs are responsible for lesson plan preparation, instructional presentation, and classroom management, while NETs will conduct pronunciation demonstrations, participate in learning activities, and provide individual student assistance. In this model of co-teaching, the NNET acts as a head teacher, director, interpreter, and behavioral manager, while the NET functions as a co-teacher, model, authentic English linguistic knowledge provider, and activity participant. Both take different responsibilities but perform collaboratively to achieve the same goal. (Liu, 2008, p. 109)

Given the above, both roles are essential to creating an appropriate learning environment within the co-teaching model. Neither role is considered superior; instead, both are professionals working toward the shared goal of teaching a group of learners about EFL. However, lesson planning must be carried out thoughtfully, addressing not only the language itself but also the cultural backgrounds involved in the process.

During the implementation of a co-teaching model, several questions may arise: what model of co-teaching should be followed?, what is the most effective way to co-teach?, what if my co-teacher is not willing to collaborate?, who is responsible for assessment and grading?, how can we share the classroom space when I feel I am in another teacher's territory?, how can administrators and stakeholders be involved in the process?, how can both teachers address curricular assumptions? Santana et al. (2012) identified several non-negotiables for administrators, such as:

Developed and piloted a tool called the CO-Teaching Observation Protocol (CO-TOP). The ten dimensions of the tool were designed

to collect evidence on: (a) common planning and collaboration, (b) mutual, collegial, and professional respect, (c) in-depth familiarity with students' content and language needs, (d) clear, unambiguous language and content objectives, (e) appropriate scaffolds, (f) advocacy for ELLs (English Language Learners), (g) authentic student participation and engagement, (h) differentiation for assessing learning, (i) learning as demonstrated by student work, (j) planned extension and reinforcement activities to practice material presented during lesson. (p. 62)

Administrators play an essential role in ensuring that these elements characterize co-teaching in their schools. Research on co-teaching is limited, with data available regarding how co-teaching is viewed by teachers and on its effectiveness in enhancing student outcomes. Research has suggested that teachers perceive benefits to co-teaching, including collaboration between general and SETs, an increased ability to provide support to all students, and the increased availability of peer models of appropriate behavior. (Cook et al., 2011b, p. 190)

Nonetheless, teachers and researchers still need to carry out more studies on co-teaching in the Colombian context, keeping in mind the different agreements among countries in order to take advantage of having the knowledge and/or expertise of both teachers, NETs, and NNETs, and providing peer feedback and evaluation of the co-teaching processes in different contexts. Moreover, there is a need to implement co-teaching in contexts involving students with special needs, as well as in relation to the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) component and the subjects taught in bilingual schools in Colombia.

### **Brief History of Co-Teaching in International and National Contexts**

On the one hand, at the international level, Davison (2006) conducted extensive research on collaboration among ESL and content area teachers, with a special emphasis on the nature and challenges of developing collaborative and co-teaching relationships. In her developmental model of co-teaching, she introduced the term partnership teaching. She emphasized some critical, observable characteristics of such teaching:

Cooperative teaching is where a language support teacher and a class or subject teacher plan together a curriculum and teaching strategies that take into account the learning needs of all pupils, adjusting the learning situation to fit the pupils (p. 112). Most recently, Van den Akker (2013) adapted a co-teaching rating scale by Gately and Gately (2001) to help identify ESL and mainstream teachers' strengths and weaknesses in the co-taught classroom. Key dimensions of her tool include items that may be clustered around (a) verbal and nonverbal communication skills, (b) understanding of the curriculum and students' instructional needs, (c) co-planning including language modifications, (d) methods and materials used in the lesson, (e) student-centered lesson delivery showing flexibility and a variety of classroom management, and (f) reflection on the practice. (Van den Akker, 2013, as cited in Honigsfeld & Dove, 2014, p. 8)

On the other hand, Centro Colombo Americano, which has been implementing collaborative teaching since approximately 2000, provides training and support to what the institution refers to as junior teachers. They are practicing the One-Teach, One-Assist method. Following the co-teaching path in Colombia, the first official attempts from the government to foster co-teaching experiences date back to the year 2009, when the program called English for Opportunities and Competitiveness (EFOC), as part of the alliance between the Ministry of Colombian Education [MEN] and Volunteers Colombia, was launched. As reported by MEN (2016), between 2009 and 2011, Volunteers Colombia hired 63 native English speakers to provide students with cultural background and communicative experiences. In 2013, Volunteers Colombia and the [MEN] agreed to strengthen the teaching of [EFL] in Escuelas Normales Superiores. (Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana [UNICA], 2022, p. 1)

Following this approach to co-teaching, Gutiérrez and Patiño (2012) conducted research into a collaborative teaching project to instruct English to a group of adult learners with special needs at a Special Education Institute in Pereira, Colombia. According to the authors, they were assisted by three teachers who were professionals in special education, whose primary role was to provide psychological, pedagogical, and professional support in the classroom under the specified requirements. Thus, the researchers found that students improved their ability to express their ideas by receiving feedback and support from both teachers in a more enjoyable manner, which

increased their motivation to learn English and encouraged other students to join the program.

Previous studies represent different purposes for applying co-teaching in the classroom. Thus, they indicate that further research is needed in this field, particularly regarding the various models of co-teaching and their potential benefits for both teachers and students. Nonetheless, it is essential to plan this type of teaching systematically, gathering valuable feedback from the various participants involved in the process. To continue implementing co-teaching, teachers must analyze students' needs, expectations, and cultural backgrounds, making them aware of the vast knowledge and enriching experiences they can have in the EFL classroom by having both types of teachers (NETs and NNETs). Besides, it is also necessary for teachers to be willing to participate in the process of co-teaching, integrating others' cultural and professional knowledge and worldviews.

### Models of Co-Teaching

Currently, there are six co-teaching models that could be implemented in the EFL classroom, depending on the context.

**Figure 1.** The 6 Models of Co-teaching



**Source:** Adapted from Gemini (2025).

## Co-Teaching Models

Lerner and Beverly (2014) explain that

Co-teaching involves professionals who plan and implement education using six methods. First, One Teach, One Observe model: in this method, the first teacher leads instruction and has primary responsibility for designing and delivering a particular learning process to the whole class. The second teacher observes and collects academic, behavioral, or social data relating to a single student, a small group of students, or the whole class. Second, station teaching: the two teachers divide teaching content, each taking responsibility for planning and teaching part of it. Teaching here is divided into three non-consecutive parts, in which the students are divided into three groups, and they move from station to station. (p. 161)

In the third place, there is parallel teaching, which reduces the teacher-student ratio. In this type of co-teaching, teachers plan together but each delivers content to two groups that differ in their characteristics. In the fourth place, there is alternative teaching, where the first teacher works with most students, while the second works with a small group of students for treatment, enrichment, assessment, pre-education, or any other objective (Lerner & Beverly, 2014). In the fifth place, there is teaming, where teachers lead their instruction with the whole group through lessons, lectures and/or discussion, each representing a different opinion, thereby presenting, explaining and clarifying two perspectives or two solutions to problems; also, teachers are responsible for instructing all students, whether addressing large groups, monitoring students working independently, or facilitating groups of students collaborating on joint projects. In the sixth place, there is the One Teaches, One Assists Model, where the first teacher leads the instruction, while the second walks among students, providing individual support and assistance; that is, one teacher retains the primary role of managing and leading the teaching process, while the other walks around the classroom helping students who need redirection or who have questions about their coursework (Lerner & Beverly, 2014).

## Method

The methodology for systematizing this experience was based on Jara (2022) framework. This approach contextualizes the meaning of an educational practice as a primary source of knowledge, emphasizing the lived experiences of the ETAs in this Colombian context, who are regarded as reflective agents of their own professional role. Furthermore, systematization provides a critical perspective that enhances the transformation of future intercultural co-teaching experiences into diverse contexts. The systematization of experiences is useful because it enables researchers to critically reflect on teaching practices, identify patterns, and highlight learning outcomes. In the context of co-teaching with ETAs, it contributes to understanding collaborative processes, challenges, and impacts on teachers' professional growth and development. This approach re-signifies lived experiences into valuable knowledge that can be shared, replicated, and improved in similar educational contexts. For that matter, we selected this approach to analyze data. The methodological process was organized into five phases outlined by Jara (2022):

1. Point of departure: experience.
2. Designing a systematization plan.
3. Reconstructing the lived process.
4. Deep reflections.
5. Points of arrival.

These phases prioritize the meaning and intentionality of the experience as lived by the participants, highlighting the richness and complexity of their voices. Also, the intercultural nature of this co-teaching experience (between Colombian English educators and American assistants of language) within a Global South educational context aligns with the Latin American epistemological stance proposed by Jara (2022). This perspective affirms the value of situated practices and the knowledge they produced as a result of this educational experience.

## Data Collection Instruments

In that sense, data were gathered through surveys: interviews and questionnaires conducted with the ETAs, who expressed their views, challenges, learning experiences, and both individual and professional changes during the co-teaching process. The interviews were conducted on May 2nd, 2019. The questionnaires were applied in April 2019.

**Table 1.** Data Collection Instruments

| Technique | Mechanism     | Instrument                                             |
|-----------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Survey    | Interview     | 8 open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview. |
| Survey    | Questionnaire | 12 qualitative open-ended questions – questionnaire.   |

## Participants

The systematization of this experience involved five native English-speaking participants from the United States, who were enrolled in the Fulbright Program and worked at a private university in Colombia between June 2018 and June 2019. A purposive sampling approach was applied to select participants who had direct experience with the co-teaching process between ETAs and Colombian English teachers. This type of sampling was chosen because it allows the researchers to gather in-depth insights related to the lived experience. The sample was four women and one man aged between 20 to 24 years. They came from New Jersey, Washington, Virginia, Boston, and California. Besides, all of them were professionals in areas such as human rights, management, and politics. Then, the co-teaching experience was carried out in collaboration with Colombian English teachers over the course of one year, and this was their first approach to teaching matters. It should be noted that each one was assigned a Colombian tutor who helped them in their process of adaptation to the context.

## **Systematization of the Experience**

### **1. Point of Departure: Experience**

This systematization documents and analyzes the co-teaching experience between Colombian English teachers and United States Fulbright ETAs at a Colombian university. Although the process involved collaboration, this reconstruction focuses exclusively on the perspectives of the ETAs, who shared their experiences through interviews and surveys.

The purpose is to understand how the ETAs lived this process, the tensions that might emerge, the learning insights as a result of this practice, and their perceptions about their roles as English teaching assistants in Colombia. The aim is to reconstruct the experience from their viewpoints, considering their active participation in joint planning, instruction, and assessment with Colombian English educators, in order to identify key lessons, tensions, and opportunities for improvement and collaboration between teachers and American language assistants.

From a critical and reflective perspective, this systematization of the participants' experiences is a primary source of knowledge, analyzed under a systematization approach proposed by Jara. This approach allows not only for the sharing of results regarding the professional experiences of ETAs, but also for their re-signification through the voices of those who lived them. In that sense, the guiding question of this systematization is the following: What learnings, tensions, and transformations emerged for the ETAs through their co-teaching experience with Colombian English teachers?

### **2. Designing a Systematization Plan**

The co-teaching experience took place at a Colombian university as part of an agreement between the MEN (Ministerio de Educación Nacional) and the Fulbright Program. Over the course of two years, approximately



five English teachers from the United States collaborated with Colombian teachers. The co-teaching model implemented was “One Teaches, One Assists”, and the content followed the English curriculum suggested by a private university. The curriculum was based on levels from A1 to B1, in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and adapted to the Institutional regulations.

Although all ETAs participants of this study were assigned to the same institution, their experiences were influenced by the diversity of the teaching methods and the varied pedagogical approaches each educator brought to the process. This resulted in interestingly different co-teaching practices, even within the same group, enriching the experience for all participants. This diversity of pedagogical stances reflects what Murillo (2007) describes as the richness and complexity of collaborative work, where different professional identities interact and negotiate practices. Finally, each Colombian teacher was supported weekly by an assistant, who could work with up to three different teachers at the same time. This arrangement led to variations in planning, implementation, and feedback approaches.

### **Planning Stage**

Colombian teachers and ETAs jointly agreed on the classroom activities to be implemented, with a general priority on developing oral communication skills. Moreover, while all four language skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) were present, there was a marked emphasis on oral production. In that sense, teachers selected the topics to be covered, while ETAs had autonomy to design activities, materials, and resources. However, planning experiences varied greatly, revealing a lack of standardization in the process:

A2: “There were some professors that I worked with last semester and this semester. We planned things together and created rubrics together. That was nice because we could divide the work. Moreover, I learned a lot from how they organized classes and adapted materials” (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

A4: "It depended a lot on the professor. Some would send me a message the day before, like: 'Hey, let's do a game tomorrow', and others would meet every week to plan more deeply. So, it varied a lot" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

These differences shaped working pathways. Some assistants felt free to bring up ideas, while others valued the agreed-upon instructions that came from a structured, joint planning process. Also, when planning was organized and agreed in advance, it enhanced coherence between the assistant's contributions and the overall class development, fostering effective synergy among teachers, assistants, and students.

This evolving planning approach can be viewed through Jara's (2018) perspective on collaborative ethics, where valuing each professional's voice and reaching negotiated agreements enhances the co-teaching relationship. Furthermore, Correa and Wilches (2011) emphasize the importance of teacher training as context-based and conversational, which is apparent in the mutual learning shaped as a result of these planning spaces.

### **Implementation Stage**

During this stage, ETAs implemented their planning activities. Colombian teachers remained in the classroom but typically adopted an observer role to avoid undermining the assistant's authority. However, their teachers' presence became crucial during the interactive process, especially when misunderstandings arose due to cultural or linguistic differences between the assistants and students.

A1: "They would sometimes rephrase what I was trying to say when I got stuck, or students would turn to them and they'd help explain things culturally or linguistically" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

Thus, although the teacher's role was initially neutral, they often acted as cultural mediators or facilitators of comprehension in practice. These spontaneous interactions revealed how co-teaching also implied steady cultural negotiations to contribute actively to real communication practices. This aligns with Byram's (1997) idea of intercultural

competence, as teachers and ETAs needed to manage linguistic and cultural differences to enable shared understanding.

### **Closing Stage**

This stage was intended to include feedback sessions in which Colombian teachers would provide formative comments to the ETAs. While these exchanges highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement, not all of the feedback was perceived positively by the assistants.

A1: "I didn't always agree with the feedback. Sometimes it felt more like personal opinion than something constructive. But I appreciated having the space to talk about it."

Even with some occasional tensions, the ETAs appreciated the chance to share their perspectives. Instead of a one-way assessment, this moment frequently transformed into an opportunity for intercultural exchange and contemplation, allowing for the sharing of issues related to class growth, student abilities, and various contextual elements. In many cases, feedback sessions evolved into opportunities for mutual learning.

This bidirectional dynamic reinforces Murillo and Krichesky's (2015) notion of shared leadership and feedback as essential tools for professional reflection and transformation. However, it should be highlighted that the ETAs argued that not all the educators they worked with provided feedback, so it was a point to take into consideration for improvement. The lack of feedback from certain educators opposes the principles of collaborative professionalism outlined by Murillo (2007), which highlight ongoing dialogue and critical reflection as essential to educational collaborations.

## **3. Reconstruction of the Lived Process (Core of the Systematization)**

### **Collaborative Planning**

Planning was a crucial part of this experience. The assistants pointed out that collaborative planning enhances and maintains teaching

processes throughout the course because students see co-teaching as a synergistic partnership between teacher and assistant rather than separate activities led by native and non-native speakers. In other words, collaborative planning offers structure, coherence, and order, helping students view both figures in the classroom as a unified teaching team dedicated to a common goal. This aligns with Murillo and Krichesky (2015), who highlight that collaborative work requires an organized framework that supports the shared development of pedagogical knowledge. It also mirrors a distributed leadership approach, where each participant feels involved in the process rather than secondary.

However, when planning was not carried out collaboratively, difficulties emerged during implementation, and the co-teaching model often became unclear or even compromised. This can be explained in Murillo's (2007) terms as "institutional resistance" to collaborative change, in which isolated practices or a lack of coordination undermines the transformative potential of models such as co-teaching. This issue was noted by the ETAs in response to question 8 of the survey: "When do you find the time to plan together?". Their answers indicated that the most common means of coordinating planning were email, WhatsApp, or brief conversations after class.

A5: "It was really helpful when we could plan together. Sometimes, the professors already had a structure, and I could bring ideas for activities. Other times, I had to improvise because I didn't know the plan until I arrived" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

According to the aforementioned, having the opportunity to contribute ideas to the lesson is undoubtedly beneficial; however, the lack of collaborative planning often leads to improvisation. While improvisation might work effectively sometimes, it can also impact negatively on the educational process in terms of planning, designing and performing. This indicates that, when following a model such as co-teaching, which entails a well-defined process, planning cannot be a random action plan. Instead, it should be purposefully incorporated into all phases of the process to ensure that the model operates efficiently and produces reliable results. Moreover, planning jointly between

individuals from different cultural contexts presented both a challenge and a rich opportunity for intercultural exchange, a point that will be further explored below.

### ***Shared Roles in the Classroom***

Establishing clear roles within the co-teaching model was key to achieving a coherent and coordinated process. Clear role distribution helped students understand the scope of action of both the teacher and the assistant, enabling them to acknowledge and respect each figure's contribution to the class.

A2: "Some professors gave me space to lead parts of the class, and I appreciated that. I could do warm-ups, run activities, and help during group work" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

Therefore, when assistants were allowed to lead portions of the class, they exercised autonomy to implement activities previously designed in collaboration with the lead teacher. This freedom to guide certain pedagogical moments without intervention or interruption from the primary instructor fostered a sense of positive empowerment. Regarding this, Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011) noted that the active participation of stakeholders in educational processes promotes professional empowerment, particularly when pedagogical autonomy is respected within a collaborative framework. This allowed the assistant to explore intercultural aspects through more personal interactions with students, which, in turn, contributed to the development of their professional identity within a foreign teaching context.

However, when assistants worked with multiple teachers, the dynamics changed considerably. Communication between the teacher and the assistant was not always strong or clear, which negatively impacted both the planning and execution phases and limited the assistant's role.

A3: "Other times I just stood there, and the professor would do everything. I didn't know how to insert myself without interrupting" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

In such cases, assistants were aware that formal leadership rested with the teacher, who was ultimately responsible for the academic and administrative aspects of the course. As a result, they adopted a respectful stance toward that leadership but also recognized the importance of their meaningful participation in the classroom. This was supported by responses to question 10 of the survey, in which participants agreed that "students learn better in co-taught classes rather than classes taught by just one professor". This aligns with Murillo and Krichesky's (2015) assertion that teamwork not only strengthens the teachers' role but also positively impacts learning by providing diverse perspectives, styles, and forms of interaction.

This category highlights that working within a co-teaching framework requires both clearly defined roles and ongoing, open communication. Establishing roles, opportunities for participation, and levels of independence in advance is essential for students to perceive the experience as genuinely collaborative, with both teacher and assistant working together toward a shared educational goal. This aligns with Liu (2008), who stated that each term implies a different way of implementing the methodology and that team teaching values everyone's contribution while granting equal status to all participants.

### ***Assessment and Formative Participation***

In terms of assessment, the responsibility for grading students rested with the lead educator. This was not a unilateral decision, but rather a requirement shaped by the administrative policies of the university and the regulations of the Fulbright Program, which state that (ETAs) are not permitted to assess students.

Nevertheless, even when the ETAs were not directly responsible for grading students, they did not exclude them from the broader evaluation process. Collaborative strategies were developed, especially for activities such as oral presentations or spoken reports, in which ETAs acted as attentive listeners and provided feedback on students' language use.

A4: "We created rubrics together, and I liked that. It helped me understand what students were being assessed on" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

In that sense, ETAs did not simply follow the educators' criteria, because they actively contributed to the co-construction of rubrics when the communication between educators and assistants was solid. This practice of co-constructing evaluation reflects what Murillo (2007) defines as participatory processes, in which evaluation is not limited to a technical exercise but becomes a dialogic and horizontal experience. It underscores that co-teaching is a deeply collaborative process extending beyond planning and delivery, as Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011) argued that educational collaboration involves relationships that engage all dimensions of teaching, including evaluative practices. However, assessment also requires consistent communication and shared responsibility across the different stages of the educational experience, even when certain functions, such as assessment, may have some restrictions.

A2: "I didn't participate much in grading, but I gave oral feedback after presentations or during speaking activities" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

Therefore, although ETAs were not involved in quantitative grading, their oral feedback after productive speaking activities was highly appreciated by the educators and often used to inform evaluative decisions. This category reveals that, even in contexts where regulations from both the university and the Fulbright Program limit specific responsibilities, such as grading, it is still possible to foster meaningful participation by ETAs in that regard. Within a co-teaching model, evaluation does not merely have to be a unilateral process; it can imply co-constructed experience through dialogue actions, acknowledging the ETA's contributions as an important part of the assessment process.

### **Feedback to ETAs**

Regarding the feedback ETAs received about their own performance, this was identified as an area with room for improvement. According to

their responses, many felt they did not receive as much feedback as they preferred during their co-teaching experience. Some even expressed that their voices were not always heard (question 10 in the survey).

A5: "I think having more feedback would be really helpful. I've had great feedback in the past, like when a professor told me: 'You interact well with the students and move around the classroom' -that was useful" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

In other words, ETAs found the feedback they received helpful, particularly when it addressed their classroom performance. Moreover, they expressed a willingness to receive comments that would help them improve their role in the teaching process. One of the ETAs stated:

A2: "I've only asked the professors who I'm most comfortable with to give me feedback, and there's only three of them, but that feedback has been really good" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

Feedback plays a crucial role in helping ETAs understand how educators perceive them, validate their classroom actions, and identify both strengths and areas for improvement. Assertive and timely feedback enhances classroom practices and enables ETAs to provide a more effective pedagogical experience, as it supports them in navigating real-world teaching dynamics. Therefore, since they were sharing a teaching experience without being certified teachers, feedback served as a way to understand the progress of their work.

This category suggests that feedback mechanisms should be implemented more systematically and consistently. In some cases, ETAs had to request feedback themselves, indicating that it was not always offered spontaneously or institutionally. Nevertheless, when feedback was provided, it was highly valued. In that sense, ETAs viewed feedback as a bilateral process, something they not only give to students but also expect to receive from the educators they work with.



### **Connection with Students**

The strengthening of the bond between ETAs and students was an evolving process that developed over the course of the experience. In scenarios such as classroom interactions, pedagogical activities, and extracurricular spaces like conversation clubs, meaningful and reciprocal emotional connections emerged and deepened over time through authentic and engaging communication. This reflects Murillo and Hernández-Castilla's (2011) affirmation that building genuine bonds with students is a prerequisite for meaningful learning.

"I feel like the students who came to the conversation clubs or talked to me outside class improved a lot in their language" (question 10 of the survey).

A1: "Working with students has been the best part of the job. I really enjoy teaching. I smile more, laugh more. It's energizing" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

Moreover, it became evident in class that students genuinely enjoyed the spaces they shared with the ETAs. Although there were initial tensions resulting from cultural differences, ages, and personalities, both groups gradually overcame these challenges. Regarding this, the adaptation process involved mutual understanding, cultural negotiation, and the establishment of agreements that addressed social, cultural, and personal aspects within the interaction.

A3: "At the beginning, the age difference was challenging, but now I feel more comfortable managing inappropriate requests or setting boundaries" (Excerpt, Interview, 2019).

One of the key results of this phase was the improvement of intercultural competence, as Murillo and Krichesky (2015) stated that education is a space for intercultural and democratic encounters, where differences are negotiated and valued as opportunities for collective growth. There, students showed a strong interest in understanding the ETAs' culture, positively influencing their English learning by merging language and

culture as connected components. At the same time, the ETAs joined the educational community, enhancing their understanding of Colombian culture and engaging in the intercultural negotiation process that builds relationships among them.

This category indicates that emotional and cultural connections between ETAs and students enhance teaching experience while also fostering learning and cross-cultural awareness. Although tensions may arise in the early phases, they are typically resolved through a shared understanding and cross-cultural dialogue. Both sides should be opened so that the process can be done properly.

### **Deep Reflection**

From the ETAs' perspectives, the co-teaching experience was both enriching and complex. Their journey was shaped by multiple contextual factors, including the Colombian teachers' pedagogical styles, their willingness to collaborate, the presence or absence of clear peer communication, and the opportunities to build meaningful connections with students.

While there was broad agreement on the value of co-planning as a space for learning and co-construction, tensions also emerged. Planning was not always consistent or participatory, and when it lacked clarity or joint preparation, moments of disconnect arose that affected the ETAs' role in the classroom. One of the main challenges identified was time management: ETAs reported planning well in advance, whereas some teachers tended to plan with little lead time. This underscores that effective collaboration is not automatic; it requires dialogue, mutual recognition, and a shared vision of teaching as a relational and horizontal process (Murillo & Krichesky, 2015).

Another persistent tension concerned the exercise of classroom roles. While some ETAs enjoyed autonomy and authority, others experienced limitations due to the absence of clear agreements on the scope and boundaries of each participant's role. In this regard, although co-

teaching is collaborative by nature, its implementation takes place within institutional contexts shaped by hierarchies, regulations, and cultural dynamics (Friend & Cook, 2010).

Regarding assessment, although ETAs were not authorized to assign formal grades, they found opportunities to contribute to formative processes, particularly in developing students' oral skills. However, a boundary often persisted between what was institutionally permitted and what was practically plausible. While some educators appreciated their role as evaluative collaborators, this contribution was not always fully utilized. This reflects a tension between institutional and Fulbright Program regulations and classroom realities, highlighting the need to clarify that ETAs can participate in assessment processes given their active involvement throughout the teaching-learning process.

Feedback was another area that yielded significant learning. While some ETAs received constructive comments, many reported a lack of systematic feedback. In several cases, they had to request it themselves, revealing a limited feedback culture that could otherwise enhance teaching practices. This lack of structured feedback may hinder professional growth and limit ongoing improvement, especially when there are no clear and effective channels for communicating both strengths and areas for development.

Ultimately, the connection with students proved to be one of the most significant aspects of the experience. Beyond anecdotal interactions, emotional bonds allowed ETAs to gain deeper insights into the educational environment, Colombian cultural codes, and students' emotional expressions. Affectivity served as a cultural bridge, fostering mutual understanding and reinterpreting educational practices. However, this bond also faced challenges, such as initial misunderstandings, generational tensions, and moments of discomfort due to certain cultural expressions. Overcoming these challenges required processes of recognizing the other, mutual adaptation, and cultural negotiation, in line with the principles of critical intercultural competence (Byram, 1997).

Taken together, these categories show that co-teaching is not merely a set of techniques or a method but rather a contextualized practice shaped by human relationships, institutional tensions, and mutual learning. This supports the assertion that both teachers take on different responsibilities while working collaboratively toward the same goal (Liu, 2008). Thus, ETAs did not only teach English; they also learned to navigate different educational settings, decode cultural expressions, negotiate their place in the classroom, and construct shared meanings.

The systematization of experiences leads to the understanding of situations critically and reflectively, in which several situations are interpreted to reconstruct history and the factors that influence those organized events. In this project about Co-teaching, the following stages were considered: 1. Point of departure: experience. 2. Designing a systematization plan 3. Reconstructing the lived process 4. Deep reflections and 5. Points of arrival. Thus, the information was collected acknowledging the process of Co-teaching the ETAs were thorough to evidence the whole and systematic panorama.

## **Points of Arrival**

### **Learnings**

One of the main learnings from the co-teaching experience is that this kind of model requires previous agreements, clearly defined roles, and time for planning together. Listening to and validating the ETAs' voices are fundamental, as their contributions as active agents enhance the model to function effectively. Following a structured process of planning, implementation, and closure in collaboration ensures a coherent and consistent experience, avoiding ambiguities in roles and responsibilities.

It was also evident that clear, direct, and formative feedback strengthens ETAs' pedagogical experiences. Regarding this, participants indicated that this type of feedback should be delivered personally and promptly, as involving third parties can create misunderstandings and tensions.

Therefore, disagreements and suggestions, when addressed openly among those directly involved, enhance the experience and promote continuous improvement.

In that sense, the development of interculturality requires adaptation, negotiation, steady communication, and a commitment to mutual care ethics. Although tensions often arise during the initial stages of teaching, they can be overcome through mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate. Moreover, co-teaching experience highlights the importance of growing intercultural competencies, especially when cultures share mutual experiences while dialoguing to reach common goals.

### **Recommendations**

- Establish formal and regular planning sessions between teachers and ETAs. For the co-teaching model to have a positive impact, planning must be anticipatory and systematic, and agreed upon by both parties.
- Foster constructive and bidirectional feedback. ETAs also need space to share their perspectives on an educational process in which they are active participants. In other words, creating safe spaces for mutual feedback between teachers and ETAs would strengthen the quality of collaborative work.}
- Support ETAs in their cultural and pedagogical integration from the beginning of the semester. Early support is crucial for making their experience valuable for both them and the students, as it helps them adjust to local educational and cultural settings.
- Recognize the value of the emotional bond with students as a driver of learning. Although ETAs participate as assistants, they are also in the process of learning how to teach. Developing affective relationships with their students can motivate them to create more engaged and meaningful teaching practices, making their experience a valuable contribution to their growth both personally and professionally.

## Conclusions and Implications

Co-teaching is an educational model that involves two teachers working together in different learning settings. This process entails planning, implementation, and assessment from both participants. Currently, there are six models of co-teaching: One Teaches, One Observes; Station Teaching; Parallel Teaching; Alternative Teaching; Teaming; and One Teaches, One Assists.

For a co-teaching process to be significant, it is essential to explore the different models that can be applied in the classroom. The chosen model must adapt to the needs of the context, not the other way around. That is why the success of co-teaching implementation depends on several factors, including selecting the model that best fits the specific educational environment. Therefore, it should be approached as a systematic and well-planned process, developed through each phase of implementation.

However, before adapting it as a teaching experience, it is recommended to conduct prior intercultural preparation that establishes clear boundaries, such as planning time, building strong communication channels, defining each participant's roles, and respecting them throughout the process. Communication between both parties should be direct and without intermediaries, and all agreements must be honored to avoid potential tensions.

Similarly, co-teaching requires dialogue, active listening, and negotiation skills. While educators may be considered the leaders, assistants play a vital complementary role in this teaching process. Therefore, reaching clear agreements is a key factor when ensuring a successful experience.

To conclude, the systematization of this co-teaching experience contributes to language didactics, as these kinds of narrative experiences shared from the lens of ETAs provide valuable insights into

how processes can be conducted to make them work properly. A co-teaching experience goes beyond collaborative work; it implies steady communication, cultural negotiations, and acknowledging the other side and voice within the process. These educational approaches are built up in each class, and it is a way to go from theory to praxis in a reliable way.

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## Chapter V

# The social imaginaries of the English language and its academic-professional component

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## Introduction

The economic, political, social, and cultural development of society is considered to depend mainly on the teaching of foreign languages<sup>1</sup> (FL), as it is said that its mastery can be a determining factor in the decrease of poverty (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011) and economic growth and social exchange (Bonilla, 2010; Angulo et al., 2012; Barro, 1991).

In Colombia, the Ministry of National Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]) established the National Bilingualism Program (Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo [PNB]) in 2004. The main objective of the PNB was to improve the communicative competence of English as a FL at all educational levels across the country. This state policy focuses on a predominant type of bilingualism: Spanish-English (Mejía, 2006). As a result, the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC) established various legal guidelines that include obtaining a "B1-Vantage" level (Agreement 073, 2009) based on the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CEFR). At the time, this document also formed the basis for the PNB.

The problem presented to the undergraduate student academic community at UPTC concerns their perception of English language policies, their professional training, and the actual demands of the job market. It implies that students' perceptions of the English language teaching and learning process may differ substantially from the expectations set out by the state, the UPTC and the demands of the labor market. The way in which policies shape students' behaviors and academic progress is closely related to power dynamics that generate social punishments if students fail to acquire the language that social institutions promote.

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1 MEN understands a foreign language as a language that is not spoken in the immediate and local environment, since everyday social conditions do not require its permanent use for communication.

In light of the above, the objective of this article is to present the results of a study that aimed to identify the existing relationships between the students' social imaginaries of English in their professional academic training and the meanings about this language presented in UPTC, MEN and CEFR policies issued between 2000 and 2020<sup>2</sup>.

The situation described is understood through what Castoriadis (1983) refers to as social imaginary meanings. These meanings are fundamental because they influence how individuals perceive reality. In other words, they represent how a social group, both collectively and individually, interprets concepts such as life and death (Cristiano, 2009). Castoriadis (1983) emphasizes that this meaning is inherently social as it exists within society itself. As explained by Cristiano, "there is nothing that grounds the social outside or beyond the social itself" (2009, p. 16).

This article is structured into three sections: the first outlines the theoretical framework, the second describes the methodology, and the third presents the results and conclusions.

## Theoretical References

This study adopted Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of the 'imaginary institution of society' due to its close relationship with the social sanctions imposed by social institutions. The word 'imaginary' regularly denotes falsehood or something that does not correspond to reality; the wife says to her husband, "it is not what you imagine," or the psychologist says to his patient, "the enemies are a product of your imagination." In these events, the imaginary is understood as something invented or as a slippage of meaning, in which a part of reality is articulated in conjunction with an image in the mind. However, the connotation of the imaginary is somewhat different for Castoriadis (1983) because,

2 The aforementioned research is entitled "Social imaginaries: meanings about the English language and its professional academic component", Geological Engineering, UPTC, and was developed to obtain the degree of Master in Education-Research of the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia.

for him, the imaginary is the "capacity of creation that allows to order and somehow give existence to the real" (Cristiano, 2009, p. 19). The imaginary would then be the innate capacity of the human being to create images that sustain the reality constructed by social subjects. Thus, the author affirms that: "the imaginary must use the symbolic (...) to pass from the virtual to anything else, it presupposes the imaginary capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than what it is" (Castoriadis, 1983, p.134).

Therefore, to understand the imaginary meanings to which Castoriadis (1988) refers, it is necessary to recognize that they shape the construction of reality as it is accessible to the subjects of each historical society (Cristiano, 2009). Despite this, Castoriadis makes an effort to situate imaginaries more effectively within the social realm, particularly in two ways: as both the foundation of and the generator of reality.

Castoriadis refers to "instituted reality" as the fixed meanings embedded in institutions that appear to be solidified and relatively stable. However, it is said that this is only relatively so, as the dynamism and self-creation of the social cosmos mean that it is in continuous movement and transformation. Likewise, "instituted reality" refers to the process by which meanings become institutionalized and recognized by society as rules, norms, or social sanctions (Cristiano, 2009).

Castoriadis (1988) distinguishes between instituted imaginary meanings and secondary meanings. In the first case, the author refers to them as "nuclear identities", which means that in the center of every social group, there is a core significance that enables secondary ones. An example that Castoriadis (1988) uses is the explanation of God as a central identity in Western societies, where secondary meanings, such as the ordering of a sacred life, the fulfillment of commandments, and the division between the divine and the mundane, are the result of an ordering of the social cosmos. Castoriadis provides another example in the form of capitalism, where the economy is understood as a central social imaginary. This means that it enables the organization of its outputs as forces of production and surplus value (Cristiano, 2009).

On the other hand, in order to understand the meanings of social imaginaries as an instituting reality, the author refers to it as the cracking of the *social magma* throughout history. Namely, Castoriadis (2011) understands history not as a Hegelian or Marxist scheme with an order to maintain, a route to follow, a plan devised by man, abstract reasoning, or the attainment of explanations, but rather as a dynamic being in itself, continuously creating and reconstituting order. In this way, history is "the constitution of an order that cannot seek its precedent or antecedent anywhere, not even in its already traveled stages" (Castoriadis, 2011, p.140).

While the intent of this piece is not to delve deeply into the concept of social magma, it cannot be totally overlooked, as the author uses it as a metaphor from the field of geology to explain the dynamism and continuous nature of social transformation. In short, magma is a material (whether liquid or semi-liquid) beneath the surface that appears when there is volcanic activity. In the context of social imaginaries, magma constitutes "a hidden dynamic dimension, open, fluid and incandescent like volcanic magma" (Cristiano, 2009, p. 62). This metaphor illuminates the idea that the social is a continuous flow of creation and destruction, of crystallization and rupture, and of the emergence of new forms, orders, and social norms (Castoriadis, 2005).

Thus, for the author, the concepts of magma and history form a fundamental axis of creative mastery that enables individuals, groups, and social classes to generate new social realities. Castoriadis (1988) clarifies that the instituting is not limited to an individual level (i.e., the constitution of an order) but also occurs through the collective, as it is the force that creates the social cosmos, thereby driving transformation within the social realm. This explains why Castoriadis rejects the social as a conjunctive-identitarian logic, since the essence of the social is the anonymous force of creation itself.

At the same time that Castoriadis (1988) explains imaginary meanings within the instituting and instituted, he also does so through the positioning of the social in the psyche and in praxis. In this sense, it is



worth remembering that Castoriadis was also a psychoanalyst. Thus he seeks the relationship of the social with the subject through three stages: 1) the psyche as an ontological dimension of being that cannot be reduced to the collective ontological reality, 2) the psyche as raw material from which institutions and social meanings are formed, and 3) the psyche as a social substratum that remains irreducible to, and never fully controlled by, the institution.

The psyche as an ontological reality not reducible to the anonymous collective explains that, although the psyche needs the social, it is not strictly reduced to it, nor to biological life; this is how “the psyche requires the social and the social requires the psyche” (Cristiano, 2009, p. 25)—viewing the psyche as raw material highlights the idea that, within the subject, the interweaving of socially acquired content always preserves an element that is individual and unconscious. This element appears in the form of a disease, as Castoriadis (1988) refers to it as the ‘Social Institution’.

In this sense, the psyche serves as the virtual medium of the social, yet it is also a force that seeks to alter the established order. The psyche as a social substratum that institutions never dominate reflects the amalgam that Castoriadis establishes in front of what he calls reflexive and deliberative subjectivity. These concepts are nothing more than the human capacity to become aware of their relationship with the institution, altering the established order and creating new realities that are relatively deliberate and conscious. The conditions of the institution are never fully or voluntarily realized, since the individuals themselves embody the institution (Cristiano, 2009).

Finally, what Castoriadis refers to as praxis is the most political and revolutionary aspect of his theory, as it is oriented towards the transformation of institutions as a collectivity that questions, reflects, and reorders. This attempt raises the following question: Do we need a theory like Marxism to effect revolution and to change society structurally? Castoriadis’ answer is no, as for him, there are two ways in which praxis is separated from the notion of “theory-practice.” The

first consists in understanding that knowledge does not precede action, but that the two are constitutive of one another (Cristiano, 2009). In other words, "praxis itself constantly gives rise to new knowledge, because it makes the world speak in a singular and universal language" (Castoriadis, 1983, p. 130). This means that what constitutes the subject in his or her thinking and knowledge is indisputably directed towards an action. However, it is essential to note that this initial understanding of the world is grounded in practical interests; in other words, action may be preconditioned by the aim of making exploitation or the extraction of surplus value more efficient.

The second aspect is that action may precede knowledge in such a way that the subjects, by acting, give meaning to the world. Castoriadis states (1988) that theory cannot be unifying and totalizing in its explanation of the world, because praxis continually challenges theory; in this sense, neither dominates nor controls the other. The interest in praxis in the study carried out at UPTC was to understand that praxis transforms the world and, as it transforms it, simultaneously produces knowledge about the world (Cristiano, 2009). In summary, the instituted is the social reality established by the whole (relationship of constituent elements), the instituting is the creative force, both individual and collective of society, and the psyche is the way of existence of the instituted. It is the most provocative force of social change, and praxis refers to a deliberate action taken to effect transformation.

To conclude, social imaginary meanings depend on the symbolic and historical elements that underpin its theoretical conformation. In this study, these elements served as foundational axes to analyze the social chaos surrounding English language teaching at UPTC. Thus, the social imaginary is understood as the driving force that enables the subject to appropriate and contribute to institutions in order to operate (Castoriadis, 1983).

This relationship is structured by the order that the institution confers on the symbolic, since the social is constructed based on the sanctioned agreements. Consequently, the boundaries of the symbolic are not

restricted exclusively to rational logic but are also shaped by historical processes (Castoriadis, 1988).

## Method

Based on Castoriadis' (1983) conceptual explanation, a methodological procedure is required for the characterization of social institutions based on UPTC, MEN and CEFER policies related to the teaching and learning of the English language. In the same line of thought, Castoriadis' proposal aims to understand the meaningful and symbolic aspects of the historical-social axis to explain the existing imaginaries in relation to the English language among those directly involved in this research process. These categories are intended to answer the question: What are the relationships between the social imaginaries that students have of English in their academic and professional training and the meanings of this language present in policies?

This study was developed within a socio-critical approach, which understands research as "a cultural, material and social production, since it is impossible to investigate without our bodies without some relations and without some cultural reservoirs" (Cristancho, 2017 p. 204). This perspective aligns closely with Castoriadis' (1983) view of historical processes as continuous and ongoing acts of creation in which "in all the activities we carry out (...), within this historical process, we create ourselves and produce our societies" (Williams, 2000 as cited in Cristancho, 2017, p. 205). In this sense, research is conceived as a historical process that, rather than seeking to dominate and control the object of study, aims to emancipate the subjects involved and critically reconfigure the world (Cristancho, 2017).

Therefore, within the socio-critical approach, knowledge is understood as a social form of creation, through which research reveals the political and historical dimensions of sociocultural processes. In this framework, epistemological inquiry is directed towards self-criticism and empowerment (Cristancho, 2017).

In conclusion, this socio-critical approach is consistent with Castoriadis' theoretical proposal (1983), since power relations and heterogeneity in society must respond to issues of historical constructions, recovery of the collective psyche, state claims, political agreements, and recognition of symbolic and meaningful networks in society.

## **Population**

Participants in this study included UPTC students who form a chapter of the European Association of Geoscientists & Engineers (EAGE) in Geological Engineering (GE). This academic group is a private non-profit European student association that is autonomous and governed under Colombian and international laws. EAGE serves to promote specific branches of geoscience in the oil, gas, mining, environmental, and civil engineering industries. This organization aims to promote internationalization activities, where students play a crucial role in building local and international academic communities, demonstrating their interest in the future of the industry (EAGE Student Chapter, 2016). The participants in the study included 10 students between the ages of 17 and 24, who were in their fourth to ninth semester of the GE program at the Sogamoso campus of UPTC.

## **Phases of the Investigation**

The study was conducted in three phases. The first phase involved a literature review on social imaginaries in education, with a particular focus on the teaching of English. A compilation of the official documents produced from 2000 to 2020 by the CEFR, MEN, and UPTC was also carried out. The most relevant sources were selected, and the data were organized using the Atlas Ti Software (version 8.3.0). A document was then prepared, which identified and analyzed the social meanings that each institution has of the English language.

The second phase began with the creation of a semi-structured interview template, based on the criteria established by various authors (Sáez et al., 2012; Pintos, 1995, 2004). The expert judgment technique was also

employed, involving three nationally recognized experts from diverse fields within higher education. A pilot test was conducted to ensure that the instrument effectively captured the symbolic relationships between students' imaginaries about the English language and their learning-related behaviors. Informed consent was also obtained from all participants.

The third phase corresponded to the comparison, analysis, and interpretation of the differences between the social imaginaries that participants had about English and the social imaginary meanings of this language as presented in the policies of the CEFR, MEN, and UPTC. The most significant relationships were categorized between students' symbolic constructions and the imaginary meanings embedded in the political agreements, in line with the theoretical perspective of the imaginaries developed by Castoriadis (1983).

In this research process some ethical considerations were taken into account. Written informed consent was requested due to the ethical responsibility as a researcher, which implies the non-disclosure of the research results on a personal basis. The right to integrity, privacy, and intimacy of the research participants must not be affected. Ethical considerations are mainly framed in confidentiality when collecting data, as well as the inappropriate use of the results.

Ethical considerations mainly relate to confidentiality when collecting data and the inappropriate use of results. In the same way, there was an informed consent of the organization of the project, the exercise is legalized through a document that certifies the conscious and voluntary authorization of the students, expressing their desire to participate in the research and the use of the information collected. In accordance with Law 1090 of 2006, it is guaranteed that the names of the participants will not appear in any report, presentation, or academic publication of this research.

## Results

This section presents the results obtained through the characterization of the social meanings of the English language as presented in CEFR, MEN, and UPTC policies, and the identification of the symbolic relationships between the social imaginaries that students hold about English and their behavior in relation to learning. First, Saber Pro tests were reviewed to verify if students achieved the "B1-Vantage" level of English at UPTC Sogamoso, Boyacá. Saber Pro is a mandatory state-level higher education exam taken by all students who have completed at least 75% of the credits for their corresponding academic program.

The results show that the average English level remained stagnant at A1 from 2012 to 2017, with the GE program recording the lowest scores (ICFES, 2017). Apart from reviewing the state exam, a preliminary analysis was conducted using a survey applied to 82 students of the Sogamoso branch to understand the perceptions that students have towards the English classes provided at UPTC. Table 1 presents statistics that gauge the importance of learning the language.

**Table 1.** How important is the learning of English compared to other subjects in your academic curriculum?

| Importancia | % | %   | %    | %    | %    | %    |
|-------------|---|-----|------|------|------|------|
| 0           | 2 |     |      |      |      |      |
| 1           |   | 2,4 |      |      |      |      |
| 2           |   |     | 13,5 |      |      |      |
| 3           |   |     |      | 34,1 |      |      |
| 4           |   |     |      |      | 35,4 |      |
| 5           |   |     |      |      |      | 13,4 |

**Source:** data collected by the author on October 18, 2019.

It was found that only 13.50% of the students surveyed consider English to be an important subject or more important than the other subjects

they must take in their curriculum. Consequently, it can be concluded that students may dedicate less time to English classes than to other subjects.

Table 2 presents the functionality that students perceive as benefits of their English classes in terms of professional employability and the requirements that govern the relationship between obtaining a professional degree and the importance of the English class.

**Table 2.** What do you think English is proper for?

|                  | %    | %   | %     | %     | %     |
|------------------|------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| Viajar           | 6,11 |     |       |       |       |
| Globalización    |      | 7,3 |       |       |       |
| Requisito        |      |     | 23,17 |       |       |
| Información      |      |     |       | 25,60 |       |
| Posición Laboral |      |     |       |       | 37,80 |

**Source:** Consequently, it can be concluded that students may dedicate more time to English classes than to other subjects but in reality it does not happen because of curriculum structure

It was found that 37.80% of survey participants consider English to be the gateway to successfully gaining employment in Colombia. However, the rest of the population is split between the other options, with English being the main requirement for obtaining their professional degree. In the past, UPTC policies have implemented various measures regarding English requirements.

These include requiring students to take a proficiency test in order to continue to the seventh semester (Agreement 050, 2008), students bearing a cost if they did not attend 80% of English classes (Resolution 11, 2013), and mandating more than four levels as a degree requirement (Agreement 005, 2017). These initial findings led to a working hypothesis that the coercive forces of power, framed within political agreements, govern the teaching of English and how society generates and sanctions

agreements as valid; this is related to what Castoriadis (1983) refers to as social imaginary meanings.

Based on these findings, the European policy CEFR (2002) was analyzed in terms of how it operates as a heterogeneous force of power within the administrative regulations by the MEN and UPTC. In other words, the way this policy was organized and regulated in Europe served as a model for doing the same in Latin American countries, where English has a direct impact on the Gross Domestic Product (Portafolio, 2015). One of the most used arguments in the policies of these institutions is that English proficiency influences the average income per individual; therefore, it seeks to position the English language as a central imaginary that turns this language into an instrument of control and domination.

It was found that the social meanings of English within political agreements are constituted through sanctioned agreements as social pacts (Castoriadis, 1988). There is evidence of this, particularly at UPTC, where policies have been implemented, including fines for absence from class, exams required to progress to the seventh semester, and requirements to obtain a bachelor's degree. At the internal level of the academic institution, the teaching and learning of English is within the coercive system of power. This system aims to foster a focused and centralized social imaginary, where the English language contributes to processes of internationalization and academic mobility, which are often underutilized, as most of UPTC's international alliances are with Spanish-speaking countries (Agreement 015, 2016).

The relationship established through internationalization and mobility policies constantly resorts to processes of globalization, perceiving such phenomena as the cause and provocateur for which students must learn English. In this sense, the meanings that the policies confer on the English language are those of organizing education around the pursuit of a better quality of life, which is necessarily related to the mastery of the English language. It is also clear that this meaning is closely related to the concept of the "American dream."



It was also found that there is a tendency in the policies to assume that the country's economic stagnation, in large part, is because the levels of English language proficiency are not as expected. Therefore, the investment of foreign companies (multinationals) is hindered. There is a clear policy intention to establish that the better the command of English, the greater the investment of economic capital in the country. At this point, attention is focused on analyzing how the subordination of the education system to the economic system is naturalized. In this sense, it is clear that the objective of the State and its policies involving the teaching of English is to improve the quality of the labor force of professionals through the learning and teaching of English.

It is also crucial to establish that the needs of the economic system and its requirements for training bilingual professionals form a central social imaginary that orders social sanctions, from the individual psyche to the collective. By focusing on the economic needs and the prospect of a better future as the driving force for learning English, the subject and social group that shape policies and their social meanings through the English language already have a predetermined way of thinking.

Substantially, it is the incessant and unattainable search for purchasing power in the access to goods and services that are acquired with a specific sum of money. This idea may seem harmless within the economic system proposed by the policies of the English language; however, it does not cease to comply with state intentions and the search to position Colombia in the globalized world.

It was also found that the meanings of subordination embedded in the policies are so deeply internalized that it seems natural to assume that foreign language proficiency goals established in the CEFR should also apply to the Colombian MEN. The adoption by MEN (2007) of the CEFR (2002) in terms of its English standards for secondary education and UPTC in its Agreements 073 and 005 is nothing more than a search for the homogenization of education with international standards and the annihilation of the recognition of minority languages in Colombia.

The intention to equalize or compare a professional with English communicative skills in Colombia with one from Europe or the United States is often driven by the need for certification to secure better salaries or the possibility of emigrating to another English-speaking country.

Similarly, it is important to note that this work is certified by international standardized tests, which are designed to support the immigration visa application process. In other words, the levels of foreign language proficiency expressed in A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 according to the CEFR (2002) may be nothing more than a form of migratory control or a way of restricting those who could be part of the globalized world and those who could not; that is, those who could have a better quality of life and those who could not.

It was also found that the social meanings of policies regarding the relationship between the mother tongue and a foreign language tend to create not only economic inequalities but also gender and geopolitical ones. Economic imposition through the forced learning of English has displaced more than 65 indigenous, Creole, and gypsy languages in Colombia. The importance of these languages does not have a positive impact on the globalized economy, and as a result, the future of these languages is often relegated and left behind. In this way, the identification of the subject/student with their culture is broken, and subsequently, education in foreign languages takes precedence over education in native languages.

In identifying the symbolic relationships between the social imaginaries that students have about English and their behavior in relation to learning, it was found that students position the English class as a space of academic flexibility, sanction, and inequality. It appears that students have internalized the dominance and hegemony of the so-called world powers, particularly the United States, through their drive to work for large multinational corporations in the country.

Regarding the first point, the students of the EAGE chapter recognize that the internal system of UPTC has led to students positioning English

class as a space where there is a lack of diversity methodologically or conceptually. This means that there is a constant repetition proposed by MEN (2006) using the Basic Standards of Competences in Foreign Languages, delimitating the actions of teachers between basic and higher education. However, it should be noted that UPTC aligned its standards with the CEFR (2002), which requires students to demonstrate a B1+ level of English proficiency as stated in Agreement 073 (2009). This constitutes a semantic inaccuracy, since B1 corresponds to the *Threshold* level described by Trim (1980), while *Vantage* refers to the higher B2 level. Therefore, UPTC's policy should explicitly state B1-Threshold, not B1-Vantage, in accordance with the CEFR (2002).

Regarding the second point, it was found that the policies have generated a particular behavior in relation to the learning of English. One of these behaviors is reflected in the economic sanction, as students who did not pass the subject and also did not attend 80% of the classes were required to pay a cost equivalent to one extension course (Resolution 11, 2013). Another behavior is established due to the academic sanction, as a student who did not pass the English levels could not enroll in the seventh semester of the academic program they were taking (Agreement 050, 2008). Another academic sanction consists of understanding the English class as a degree requirement (Agreement 073, 2009; Agreement 005, 2017).

Along the same lines, it is the system of economic and academic sanctions that has led the English class to be perceived as an obligation that UPTC must accept through the MEN, as well as the asymmetrical forces that the labor market exerts on higher education. That is to say, the state's need for the formation of a professional who is communicatively competent in English forces the power relations between educational institutions and their actors. What has been exposed so far suggests that there are no minimum academic guarantees to ensure that a student achieves level B1+ in their professional training. Disturbingly, it is noted that the most severe consequence is exclusion from the workforce.

It was also found that the inequality between the private and public sectors in education is evident among proficient English students,

who typically arrive at university with this proficiency. In this way, the social imaginaries that students have created regarding English language learning depend on their historical process and social-academic contact; that is, while students who graduate from private schools understand in their reality the usefulness of this language, it appears that for public school students, the functionality of the English language is transferred to the field of requirements and sanctions. This does not mean that the students stop perceiving English as a symbol of advancement for a better future; on the contrary, this seems to assure them that the knowledge of the English language brings them closer to the professional profile needed by multinationals and the quality of life they expect to have after their professional training.

It was also found that within the symbolic relationships among the students' social imaginaries about English, the primary force that motivates them to learn the English language is the economic pressure exerted by rich countries on poor countries. This type of asymmetry is linked to the fact that the state with the most power is the state that imposes everything from the linguistic system to regulations and economic gains. It is in this sense that it is essential to understand that the way students behave towards learning English is expressed in terms of subjugation and coloniality.

The subjugation that students experience in their symbolic networks is related to the masked investment in the type of aid that the United States provides to Colombia. Student subjects assure us once again that American companies are not going to take the trouble to learn Spanish. On the contrary, it is future employees who must submit to the company's imposed system. Now, these types of relationships that students establish aim to perceive the English language as the only means by which the reality of the "American dream" is feasible. However, this "dream" is increasingly distant, as students recognize that they are not learning this language sufficiently in their academic or professional training process.

On the other hand, the relationship that students establish with coloniality is of great importance, as it links the nation's own identity

to its multilingual reservoir. For students, national identity is closely tied to the improvement of English, even though they recognize that Colombia has many more languages spoken. However, this idea does not resonate sufficiently with the idea of a better future, as indigenous communities are often not recognized in their own territory. Thus, the force that falls on indigenous languages has more to do with the territorial spaces inhabited by these communities, since they are a source of exploitation of natural resources for the multinationals in which the students wish to work. In that sense, the students recognize that it would be beneficial to learn an indigenous language, but primarily for negotiations with these communities, as some of them do not speak Spanish and, therefore, even less English. Thus, it can be said that the hegemonic forces that establish some states over others become naturalized in such a way that the territories themselves become colonized by their own inhabitants.

Thus, the English language is not only a social imaginary of a better future for students, but also the way in which that reality is dreamed and imagined, closely related to what Castoriadis (1983) recognizes as the alienation of reality. In this sense, it can be said that the function established by the policies analyzed with regard to English language teaching constitutes an imaginary core that places the economy and academic development at the center of the student's daily life, allowing the student to generate secondary social meanings such as believing that better language skills lead to better job offers, better English skills lead to higher economic gains, higher English skills lead to more traveling around the world, more international training, and opportunities to see the world. However, these secondary imaginary meanings are only symbolic vehicles of the language, since the given reality always places students under the social sanction of exclusion and punishment in the academic professional training and the job market.

Therefore, the imaginary relationships that students establish through learning English in their everyday academic life are somewhat distant from the way in which they can access the benefits that this brings, since reality creates gaps between the opportunity to work in a

multinational company and the very act of passing the class. In this sense, the distance from the established imaginary punitive structure places students at a disadvantage in terms of their own cultural identification and professional development.

Finally, this work has contributed to the creation of the Linguistic Policy of UPTC, Agreement 076 de 2025, where the analysis of the agreements and resolutions has served as a guide for drafting a document that will certainly contribute to improving English language teaching as an integral part of students' professional training. In the same way, more foreign and native languages should be integrated into this institution's academic spectrum. Similarly, it is hoped that the contributions presented here will continue to serve in the collective policy implementation of such a document.

## Conclusions

It can be affirmed in general terms, based on the demonstrations of the previous sections, that the existing relationships between the social imaginaries that the students have of English regarding their academic-professional training and the meanings of said language for the political agreements analyzed diverge and converge in terms of state purposes and concrete realities imagined by the students. The imaginary meanings of English in political agreements are constructed through the discourse of improving the quality of life, which does not align with the imaginaries that students have of this language. Firstly, the social imaginaries that students identify regarding the English language reflect the hegemony of some wealthy states over poorer states, where teaching and learning are often reliant on the obligatory nature and social sanction. Secondly, the meanings drawn from the policies utilize the English language as a means to facilitate obtaining a better job, acquiring greater knowledge in the disciplinary area, and traveling abroad. However, this meaning does not align with the imaginaries evidenced by the students, as for them, the English language functions as a means of division between those who can access the benefits of knowing English and those who cannot.

In the same way, the social imaginaries that students have of English in their academic-professional training demand the inclusion of the teaching-learning of a Colombian native language as a means of cultural identification, since the meanings for the policies, particularly of the UPTC and the MEN, hardly recognize another language as a means of interaction and local and international communication apart from English. In this sense, it should be noted that the students' social imaginaries are not directed towards the usefulness that these minority languages would have within the economic system, as they do not generate any monetary gain; however, they could strengthen national identity.

The social meanings of English within policies legitimize asymmetric power relations through the discourse of globalization, making it easier to homogenize communications and negotiations by using a standard language. Therefore, the imaginaries that students have of English are shaped by the perception of "third world" countries as inferior to "first world" countries. Particularly, students mention that it is easier for a Colombian to learn English than for an American to learn Spanish. Thus, the relationship between the meanings of the political agreements and the students' imaginaries coincides in terms of geopolitical segmentation and social division.

Finally, the meanings of English in the policies are subordinated to the structural purposes of each Colombian government and to geopolitical structures, which generate a continuous change in terms of purposes and methodologies, and are directly related to the students' imaginaries regarding the continuous requirements for graduation and passivity in terms of English language teaching models from basic education to higher education.

In this sense, this research allows for the problematization of the imaginaries in question in order to configure conditions of possibility to, on the one hand, establish public and institutional policies that recognize language as a phenomenon of great complexity in which what is at stake is not only to adapt to a geopolitical order but to strengthen the communicative capacity of the members of societies; on the other hand, to recognize the pluricultural and plurilingual nature of the country and in the world and the possibilities that it opens to approach peoples and cultures with languages different from the mother tongue.



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## Chapter VI

# Supporting mental health in the university: a shared commitment through foreign language learning

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## Introduction

Students of different levels of foreign language in the section manifested affectations related to mental well-being, mainly at the level of stress, anxiety, and depression throughout the learning process at the university, which affects their academic performance by hindering their concentration, memory, analytical capacity, generation of new ideas and other skills necessary for their performance in the academic field. Through some foreign language classes that have been offered since 2023, a problem has been identified related to the lack of knowledge of causes, consequences, symptoms, types or classes, treatments or processes to cope with these mental health conditions, disorders or diseases, and how these mental health conditions affect their performance in class, their motivation, interest, concentration, and therefore their periodic and overall results. This micro-curricular design for foreign language responds to the need to expand highly relevant knowledge for the university community, enabling the use of specialized vocabulary in a foreign language, applied to specific content.

Based on the fact that mental health is a fundamental pillar in human life, which positively or negatively affects one's holistic development, and recognizing that individuals are continuously exposed to problematic situations involving emotional, affective, and sentimental aspects, the development of activities that contribute to the awareness and understanding of mental health becomes essential within academic processes, as these provide a suitable environment for learning as a contribution of the shared commitment.

Since emotional well-being is of significant importance in the educational environment, and considering the manifestations of students on their levels of stress, anxiety and depression throughout the learning process at the university, as well as its impact on its manifestations of affectation in their academic performance, a micro-

curricular design has been proposed that addresses issues related to mental health, which is transversal, and where the foreign language serves as a medium for learning these contents.

It should be clarified that the work carried out in this field of mental health takes a purely academic approach. This is because it involves the study, analysis and interpretation of related content, the production of ideas, and individual reflections on situations in daily life and real experiences, all of which are applied through the use of a foreign language.

It responds to the identified need to create micro-curricular designs enriched with meaningful content that can be systematically integrated into instructional sessions. Furthermore, the experiences gathered during face-to-face sessions support the idea of including mental health as a central theme in the institution's academic reform framework, and of considering its relevance and impact in all educational contexts throughout students' lives.

Bruna et al. (2024), in their mental health intervention study, underscores that mental health among university students has become a topic of growing interest and concern. Their findings point to a high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and psychological disorders within this population—issues that were notably intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In line with these findings, Cuenca et al. (2020) observe that female students show greater vulnerability to the development of various mental health disorders compared to their male counterparts. They emphasize the need for timely monitoring and the implementation of targeted mental health promotion and prevention programs to enhance the human potential of university adolescents.

From a more structural and institutional perspective, Ortiz et al. (2023) argue that the social participation of educational agents should be central to the development of mental health strategies. They advocate

for a participatory methodology that engages the academic community and fosters consistency between discourse and practice. Their study highlights that mental well-being is directly linked to improved academic and psychosocial conditions.

Furthermore, Cova et al. (2007) have found that university students often face challenges that negatively impact their well-being and hinder a proper adaptation. Their research estimates the magnitude of these mental health issues in a representative sample of undergraduate students and underscores the urgent need for comprehensive support systems within higher education institutions.

Taken together, these studies reveal a consistent concern across the academic world: mental health is a fundamental pillar in the well-being and success of university students. Despite differences in focus, methodology, or regional context, the literature agrees on the importance of integrating mental health as a core component of educational policy and curriculum design. This reinforces the call for academic institutions to adopt proactive approaches that go beyond reactive support, fostering a holistic and preventive culture around mental health.

In addition, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, cited, by Yang, 2021, p.2) claim: "Language learning is known as a complex process that requires different cognitive and linguistic skills and competencies to successfully occur. When it is combined with psychology, emotions, and communication skills, this complexity is multiplied in human beings." This statement means that students can learn from any content about any knowledge by using the language. Still, their emotions, feelings, sensations, and thoughts are also immersed in this complex learning process, so they become complementary and are linked.

Likewise, Yang (2021), as part of his studies about psychology, has been working on a theory which involves CDST; he claims that "Although the theory about Complexity Dynamic System Theory (CDST) seems technical, complicated, and with logistic problems, its application to

L2 education is advantageous in that it can increase the awareness of L2 teachers, students, materials developers, and researchers" (p.5) This means that teachers can improve their CDST-related methods and achieve better results with their students, who can also consider this theory relevant to their learning process. This undoubtedly highlights the benefits for foreign language teachers in their classes.

On the other hand, Greenier et al. (2021, p.4) say: "Another variable within positive psychology that helps L2 teachers and students to function more effectively in the classroom ecology is emotion regulation." This means that the advantage of teachers considering students' emotions as part of the process is noticeable, especially when teaching and learning happen among human beings who feel and think, and where knowledge can be built within a very comfortable environment.

Wang (2021) highlights that ESL/EFL teachers' well-being should be reinforced in terms of emotions and personal nature as part of their professional performance. It means that not only students but also teachers should feel emotionally strong or motivated to work, given that mental health is an integral part of human existence.

According to Pishghadam, 2019, (as cited in Greenier et al., 2021 p.5) as cited in Yang, "Effective language teaching is not just a matter of conveying content and pedagogical knowledge and using all novel teaching methods and techniques." This statement emphasizes the importance of additional elements in the teaching process, beyond those directly related to teaching. These elements include mood, thought and emotion.

Xie and Derakhshan (2021) State that the teaching process is also endowed with emotions, and that language teachers, as human beings, must continuously communicate and interact with their students. Their moods therefore intervene in their performance and can positively or negatively affect the learning environment. This is not an exception at university level; in fact, aspects such as social interaction are included in professors' evaluations, and can be among the most positive or negative points that students mention at the end of each semester. They



claim that some professors have extensive knowledge of their subject and experience of working at the institution, but unfortunately their behavior is aggressive, defensive and rude, particularly when students question grades or ask for additional explanations.

About mental health in the university context, Herrera (2022) indicates that 'Instituciones de Educación Superior IES' are one of those contexts in which a significant number of individuals tend to move, so they must have adequate guidelines for the care of mental health, mainly in terms of informing and training their educational community about the importance of mental health.

Therefore, it is assumed that mental health is a general concern within the educational community and should be considered a fundamental issue in the comprehensive training of the entire university community. Teachers are not exempt from this reality. As direct participants in the university context, we are not immune to the worrying situation of stress, anxiety, or any other condition that students in our classes may experience at any time.

Likewise, Herrera (2022), in his applied research at universities in our country, says that "it is considered appropriate to suggest to this type of 'IES' the creation and implementation of strategies that allow for adequate dissemination of the terms researched" (p. 95). This means that there are no exclusions based on the type or nature of the university; on the contrary, there are no distinctions of social status or economic condition that interfere with emotional problems affecting members of a community. Therefore, it is the duty of teachers to be prepared to deal with situations of this nature at some point in the teaching process, as an action linked to the teaching profession, as the author Herrera (2022) himself emphasizes:

The importance of researching the topic to gain a better understanding and grasp of the associated terms, and gradually acquire tools for listening, accompanying, assisting, and helping both individuals and those who act as caregivers or are part of their interaction contexts (p. 95)

However, according to UNICEF (2022), students' academic performance is linked to contextual and situational factors that accompany their stages of life, as shown below:

The socioeconomic context and personal circumstances of students significantly influence their educational performance. Factors such as poverty, family structure, quality of teaching, and access to academic resources are key determinants that can facilitate or hinder the learning process.

On the other hand, Murcia and Restrepo (2024) state that "mental health and socio-emotional factors are critical elements that significantly influence students' learning and academic performance" (p. 3).

This is why educators must be aware to this reality, in which our students may find themselves facing emotional challenges that directly affect their attitude and, therefore, their ability to carry out the activities proposed throughout the semester as part of the academic training process that occupies most of our time. Often, these relevant aspects of human life are not even considered.

These studies, conducted by Murcia and Restrepo (2024) and based on previous research in Colombian university contexts, produced the following results:

The importance of socio-emotional factors in the acquisition of educational skills; students' ability to manage stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions is crucial to their academic success. These findings are aligned with previous studies that have shown how mental health and emotional well-being are essential for academic performance. (p. 5)

Similarly, Ruiz and Pérez (2019) discuss the impact of school stress on student performance. They indicate that academic stress is a key factor in students' learning outcomes. Their findings suggest that high levels of academic stress can hinder students' ability to learn and perform effectively. Those experiencing significant stress face considerable challenges in developing essential skills. This highlights the importance of implementing effective stress management strategies in an educational context.

Therefore, it can be concluded that if students below the university level experience stress due to their academic responsibilities, this effect is even more pronounced in our study population. These students face an overwhelming number of daily tasks that demand greater dedication and energy, resulting in increased attention and concentration requirements. As teachers, we may sometimes overlook this intensity or justify it by recalling our own undergraduate workloads.

On the other hand, Valencia and Rodríguez (2024), based on the results obtained in their research, state that

One of the main findings was the urgency of acknowledging Socio Affective Strategies in any learning process. Such is the case of the benefits of motivation in the context, the importance of being compassionate teachers, the acknowledgement from previous experiences, and the relevance of promoting positive self-talk, among others. The implementation of any strategy to assist and manage students' emotional domains should be reflected in the teacher's practices.

According to Valencia and Rodríguez (2024), teachers can adapt these strategies to their classes to motivate students to learn and be resilient. In English classes, for example, it seems to be a good option for professors who sometimes seek for tactics to guarantee students start and stay in classes from the beginning to the end of the semester, considering this subject is not mandatory at the university yet. It is worth noting that additional studies on mental health have been conducted within university communities around the world.

Considering that Sogamoso campus has various academic programs coexisting within the branch campus, and in response to a need emerging from the university academic context—where a diverse student population converges, representing different social backgrounds, personalities, communities, customs, and educational experiences—the idea arises to design a foreign language syllabus that is transversal to all areas of knowledge and contributes meaningfully to the holistic development of the participants.

Thus, beginning with levels III, IV, and V, a pilot test was launched in the first semester of 2023, marking the start of a new phase in foreign language instruction—where the language serves as a means rather than an end in itself.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

Over the years, a considerable number of studies related to social and emotional learning have been successfully implemented. Although these studies have had an impact on education worldwide, they have mainly focused on the US context. In Colombia, Ministerio de Educación is beginning to recognize the importance of including emotions as part of the Colombian educational system and the school curriculum, as well as in processes, reflections, standards, and policies (Buitrago & Herrera, 2019).

In primary and secondary education, the school system is being consolidated to strengthen cross-curricular and socio-emotional skills as part of citizenship skills and educational quality (MEN, 2019), which shows that the institution responsible for regulating the education system in our country has indeed given these issues the importance they deserve, resulting in a positive impact on the acceptance and adoption of strategies that educational establishments increasingly consider with greater prominence and give significant value to, for the strengthening of healthy and positive coexistence among students, teachers and all other participants in the institution.

Currently, schools are implementing action plans to reinforce values between parents and children through parenting schools. These plans involve carrying out enjoyable and dynamic activities in an atmosphere of trust and harmony. The activities focus on managing emotions, feelings, perceptions and care, which form part of a parent's emotional responsibility towards their children. The plans also involve training parents to apply values to their interactions with their children. In the

studies conducted by Murcia and Restrepo (2024), which build on prior research in Colombian university contexts, the results highlight the following points:

Socio-emotional factors play a significant role in acquiring educational skills. Students' ability to manage stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions is crucial for their academic success. These findings align with earlier studies that demonstrate the importance of mental health and emotional well-being in enhancing academic performance. (p. 5)

It highlights the importance of managing the emotions and stressful situations that students face daily, due to work overload, exam preparation, project presentations, attendance at workshops and laboratories, and fieldwork, as well as many other academic tasks, which they often have to complete while feeling hungry, sleepy or tired, and while dealing with emotional, sentimental or family issues.

At the university, the Welfare Department is responsible for organizing integration activities that bring together students and teachers to participate in musical, sporting, and cultural events such as dances, plays, art exhibitions, singing competitions, mindfulness and suicide prevention workshops, and discussions, among others. These activities promote free expression and encourage students to engage in attractive activities as academic alternatives.

On the other hand, Herrera and Buitrago (2014) argue that personal and professional development, cultivating a love of knowledge and a passion for teaching, assertive communication, creativity and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, among others, are important in the context of teaching. This is why teaching staff are encouraged to undertake complementary training.

Finally, it is important to remember that emotions are integral to human mental health and significantly impact the learning process in terms of performance, concentration, interest and mood. These factors then modulate and regulate thoughts, thereby positively or negatively affecting students' academic performance.

## **Task-Based Learning as a Methodology in Mental Health Content**

According to Nunan (2004, p. 10):

The active involvement of the learner is therefore central to the approach, and a rubric that conveniently captures the active, experiential nature of the process is 'learning by doing'. In this, it contrasts with a 'transmission' approach to education in which the learner acquires knowledge passively from the teacher.

Based on the previously discussed theoretical framework, this methodology is applied to curricular activities related to mental health carried out during the semesters between 2023 and 2025, with students from levels III, IV, and V of English courses, corresponding to various academic programs at the Sogamoso branch of the faculty. Students engage in their learning process through real and experiential approaches, supported by strategies that foster reflection, analysis, and critical reading. This includes the development of real case studies and the practical application of content to everyday life, in alignment with the topics suggested for these language proficiency levels. In addition, Casquero (2004) indicates that the characteristics of this type of task are as follows:

- a) They are meaning-focused rather than form-focused;
- b) they actively engage all students in both oral and written comprehension and production;
- c) they aim to replicate authentic oral and written communication processes;
- d) they have clearly defined language learning objectives, a structured format, and a sequencing designed to facilitate the learning process; and
- e) they must be assessable in terms of both their instrumental value (the communicative aspect of language) and their procedural value (as tools within the learning process).

The idea of learning a foreign language over time becomes a latent need rather than an option in a globalized world, a digital age and a changing environment. This learning has therefore become a conscious process that people can applied to diverse contents. People also use it as a means for learning, analysis and reflection. It is so closely linked to foreign language for particular purposes that teaching and learning it cannot be separated.

### **Socio-Affective Strategies as Relevant Foundations for Mental Health Contents in the Classroom**

The socio-affective strategies that are most suitable for the context of the article involve social interactions and the management of emotions, and facilitate learning. Examples of these strategies in action include cooperation among students, anxiety management and seeking help.

In this regard, Horwitz (cited by Prada & León, 2021) states that "Anxious students may avoid studying and, in some cases, skip class entirely in an effort to alleviate their anxiety" (p. 240). Some of the students who participated in the various groups under study expressed anxiety, having experienced depression and stress of various degrees, and even attempted suicide as a result of many serious reasons that had affected their mental health. Although at the beginning they considered the study of these topics inconvenient, they finally recognized that it was pertinent and adequate to know much more about these subjects, which ultimately contributed to their personal growth and, of course, aided managing their particular situations through the clarity these topics provided in their daily lives. These strategies aim to foster group work, manage anxiety, encourage risk-taking, promote mutual support, and create study opportunities to enhance English language learning as a foreign language. Both affective and social strategies contribute indirectly to the learning process. They are fundamental to each individual's humanity, shaping their feelings, emotions, and thoughts. In the case of topics related to mental health, the involvement of these topics begins from the moment of introduction to the contents. It is emphasized that, from the outset of our training as teachers, we must

recognize that each of us is a unique individual with particular needs, concerns, afflictions and psychological conditions that can have a positive or negative impact on learning.

Some of the students expressed their conditions of anxiety, having been in depression and stress of varying levels, and even attempted suicide because of many serious reasons that had affected their mental health. Although at the beginning they considered the study of these issues as inconvenient, they finally recognized that it was pertinent and appropriate to know much more about these topics that ultimately contributed to their personal growth and of course contributed to the management of their particular situations from the clarity of these issues adopted in their daily lives.

### **The Learning of Values in the Context of the University**

Values are a fundamental part of people's lives, as form an integral part of human development. In education, they cannot be overlooked as they influence the norms and behavioral patterns that shape students' attitudes in the classroom. That is why, when teaching a foreign language, it is considered important to involve students in the process, thus reinforcing the fundamental basis that is part of each individual's experience at university.

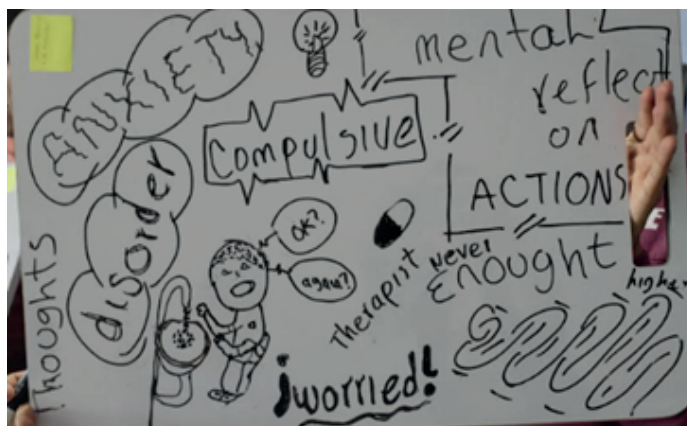
Molina et al. (2008, p.47) state that:

It is necessary to view the university as the generator of the human potential needed for the transformation and development of society. The great demand and diversification currently present in higher education are due to the awareness of the importance of this type of education for the development of humanity in spheres of life, which makes institutions have a strong commitment to creating programs that stimulate creativity and problem-solving.



## Methodology

**Figure 1.** Drawing in Class



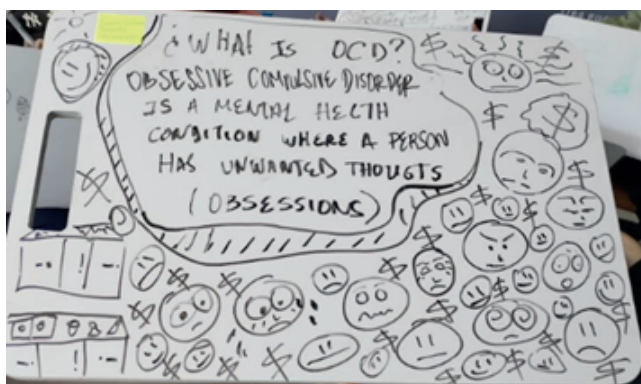
This article is the result of the implementation of pedagogical processes based on mental health content, developed as part of an initiative that aims to innovate and revitalize language teaching processes for students at the Sogamoso branch, which have been implemented between 2023 and 2025. These processes involve students from various academic programs at the Faculty who are taking English courses, in this case, those who are enrolled in levels III, IV, and V.

Therefore, this article is based on research that presents data obtained directly from social reality. In this case, the data is from the implementation of a programmatic content, which is why, according to Ríos-Saldaña et al. (2023), "Field research is essential to improving our understanding of how human impacts on biological systems can be recognized, mitigated, or avoided." Additionally, it constitutes non-experimental research, as it only observes reality as it is, and therefore it would be unethical to manipulate variables.

As mentioned by Guevara et al. (2020), descriptive research focuses on identifying the characteristics of the population being studied. The data collection method is observation, followed by a process of data analysis and interpretation.

Likewise, quantitative and qualitative observations are made with the understanding that data focusing on numbers and values are collected objectively, such as age, number of students per semester by gender, and age of participants according to the level of foreign language they were studying.

**Figure 2.** Drawing in Class



Similarly, characteristics of the elements to be investigated are measured as the researcher becomes an observer participant, since they are immersed in the classes, propose topics, activities, exercises, and guide the learning processes, but at the same time only identify what happened with the development of these, while the students are working on their assignments.

Finally, surveys are used as a feedback tool to improve teaching practices for the implementation of teaching strategies and as input for this article, where the importance and relevance of work on these issues is highlighted, which, according to their own statements, needs to be reinforced and given more attention within the university context.

Population Profile

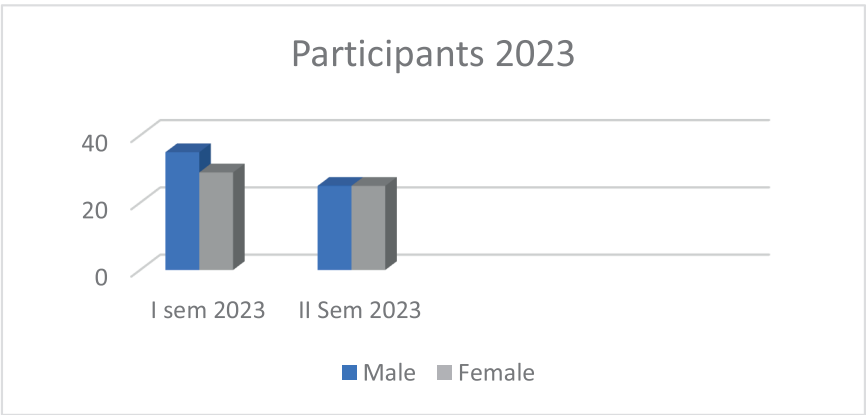
The population involved in implementing this proposal consists primarily of undergraduate students enrolled in Levels III, IV, and V of the English language program at the Sogamoso branch campus. These students belong to various academic programs and represent a diverse and dynamic group in terms of age, gender, and geographical origin.

Most participants are between 18 and 25 years old, which matches the typical age range of university students in early to mid-stages of their studies.

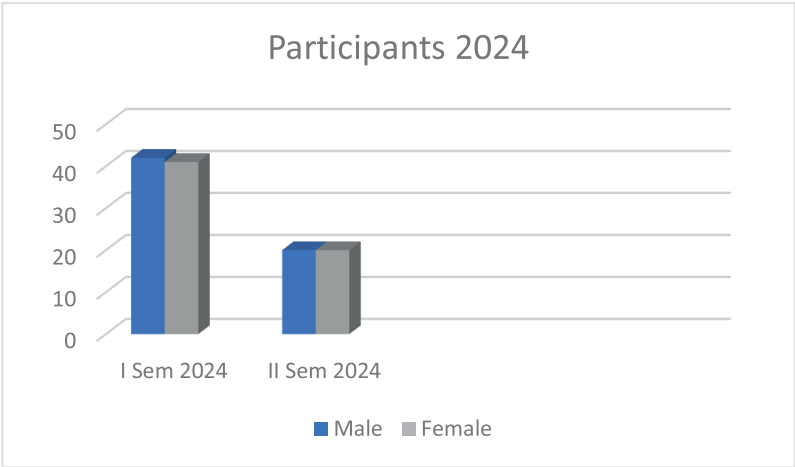
Regarding gender, there is a fairly balanced distribution, with a slight predominance of female students, reflecting broader demographic trends observed in higher education enrollment within the region.

Regarding the place of origin, the student body includes individuals from municipalities within Boyacá as well as from neighboring departments such as Santander and Cundinamarca. This diversity contributes to a rich intercultural environment, bringing different perspectives and experiences to the discussions and activities surrounding mental health issues.

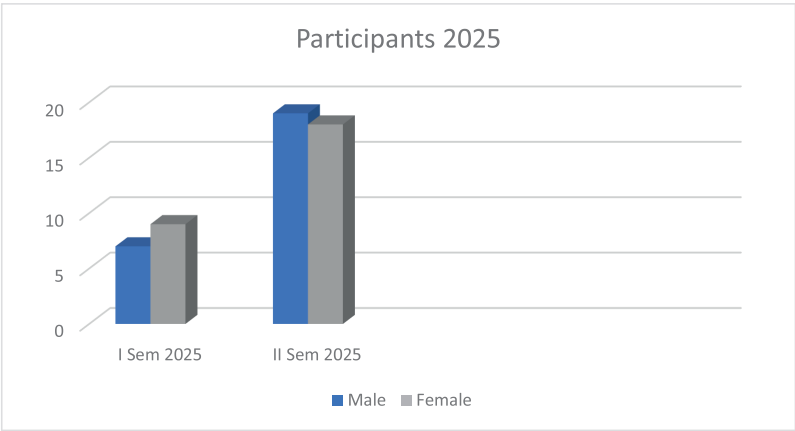
Figure 3. Participants' Mental Health Campaign I and II Semesters 2023



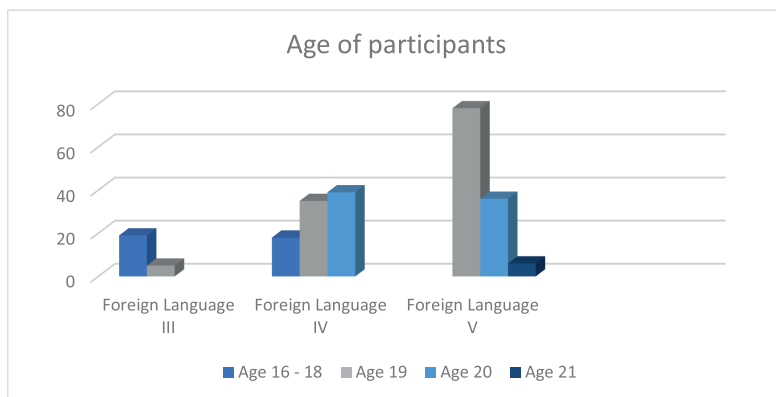
**Figure 4.** Participants’ Mental Health Campaign I and II Semesters 2024



**Figure 5.** Participants’ Mental Health Campaign I and II Semesters 2025



According to Figure 6, the participants involved in this study were undergraduate students between the ages of 16 and 21, enrolled in levels III, IV, and V of the English program at the Sogamoso branch. Their age range aligns with the developmental stage in which critical engagement with mental health topics is particularly relevant.

**Figure 6.** Participants' age in levels III, IV, and V of English

### Academic Background of the Participants

The participants belonged to various academic programs offered by the Sogamoso branch of the faculty. These included Mining Engineering, Electronic Engineering, Systems Engineering, Geological Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Public Accounting, Business Administration, and International Finance and Trade. This diversity of academic programs insight the learning process, so that these students are allowed interdisciplinary perspectives based on themes related to mental health content.

### Implementation of the Proposal

During the first semester of 2023, and in accordance with the assigned academic workload, work began with Level V student groups through the implementation of topics like those listed below. At the end of the semester, a feedback process was done through a co-evaluation activity. This left a space for brainstorming that led to conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses, the relevance of the content, and the methodology used—particularly the strategies and techniques applied.

In the second semester of 2023, based on the new academic planning, the implementation expanded to include both Level V and Level IV.

The content for Level IV was designed and applied, and a continuous feedback process was done, involving activities focused on analysis, reflection, and ongoing discussion. These were framed in relation to students’ everyday life experiences, enriching the learning process.

In 2024, Levels III, IV, and V were assigned, and a pilot test with Level III was launched. Despite the class being developed at a less favorable time, the reception was highly positive, with strong student participation. At the end of the semester, students provided feedback in the form of concluding reflections. Their input was thoughtful, engaging, and positive regarding both the content and strategies used. Nonetheless, they suggested incorporating more activities outside the classroom to enrich the learning experience.

Below is Table 1, which presents the contents covered in Levels III, IV, and V, along with the associated themes.

**Table 1.** Designed contents for English levels III, IV, and V

| LEVEL     | TOPICS                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Level III | Emotions<br>Forgiveness<br>Gratitude<br>Communication<br>Perfectionism<br>Grief<br>Anger management<br>Relaxation                         |
| Level IV  | Self-love, esteem, acceptance<br>Acceptance and commitment<br>Values<br>Empathy<br>Happiness<br>Emotional Intelligence<br>Procrastination |

| LEVEL   | TOPICS                                                                                                                       |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Level V | Mental Health<br>Mindfulness<br>Love Languages<br>Boundaries<br>Suicide Prevention<br>Stress<br>Depression<br>Anxiety<br>OCD |

Discussion

Results Interpretation

*University Well-being and Regional Partnerships for Mental Health*

In response to the needs and interests expressed by students regarding mental health support at the branch campus, the University’s Student Well-being Unit established a partnership. This collaboration enabled professionals from the unit to deliver workshops and talks to students enrolled at the levels where these topics are addressed.

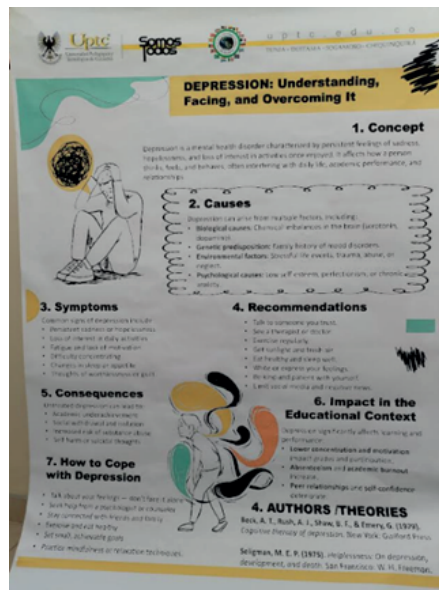
Within this framework, the unit coordinator developed a proposal in which several psychology professionals actively participated in selected sessions each semester. These experts led discussions on topics such as gender respect, abuse, and various types and degrees of violence—issues of great relevance to the student population.

Following these interventions, students expressed appreciation and empathy for the topics addressed, recognizing their practical value and direct applicability to their personal lives. Nevertheless, students also claimed the need to expand and achieve a deeper engagement with mental health. Additionally, they pointed out the shortage of qualified professionals available to meet the growing mental health needs of the entire university community at the branch campus.

**Figure 7.** Advert-Mental Health Campaign

Furthermore, during the second semester of 2024, the municipal government organized an event titled "Panel de Expertos Respira – Salud Mental en debate." This forum provided a platform for various mental health professionals to share insights within the educational context. The event was held at the university and was directed at both educators from different institutions and university students, further reinforcing the commitment to promoting mental health awareness within the academic environment.

## Mental Health Campaign at the University and in High School

**Figure 8.** Mental Health Campaign Poster



Throughout the semesters 2023-I and II, and 2024-I and II, the mental health campaign was put into practice. As part of this initiative, students were required to design a poster summarizing the key information from their work; create an interactive activity to provide feedback to participants; and produce a souvenir to serve as a long-term reminder of the content presented.

In the first semester of 2025, the campaign was taken beyond the university setting, reaching a new audience. Students from ninth and tenth grade at a bilingual high school participated in the activity and interacted directly with Level IV English students, who presented their topics effectively and engaged the school community in meaningful dialogue.

In the second semester of 2025, the Mental Health Campaign was also developed at another bilingual high school from Sogamoso, where students from seventh, eighth and ninth grades participated from the activities done by the students of V level of Foreign Language, and felt satisfied, happy and curious to take part on it, by means of the assertive communication in the same English language.

At the end of the activity, a co-evaluation process was conducted to identify perceived strengths and weaknesses of implementing the campaign in a non-university context. The conclusions highlighted the value of applying these topics within educational settings where the challenges addressed closely mirror the students' everyday experiences. The positive impact of the mental health campaign was acknowledged, along with the enthusiastic reception and high level of interest shown by the participants.

**Figure 9.** Mental Health Campaign Souvenir



Below are some of the perceptions that students express at the end of the semester, based on the question: What is your perception of the Mental Health Campaign that takes place at the end of the semester?

Student 1: "The topic of mental health should be as important as any other subject. As students, we are exposed to various social, family, and economic situations, and it would be very good to continue implementing strategies to help us deal with complex issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, self-esteem, etc."

Student 2: "I think it's a very good awareness campaign and it helps to learn and teach others about these issues that are rarely supported and neglected in Colombian society and educational institutions."

Student 3: "It would be good if these tactics were implemented more often and more intensively, because often they are left up in the air or the advice always ends up being cliché, but we bring this to reality and it doesn't always work."

Student 4: "The focus on mental health was interesting."

Student 5: "A methodology I had never seen before, very interesting and quite innovative. I liked the way English was taught, as it gave us useful tools to regulate many of the emotions I experience on a daily basis."

Student 6: "In general, the pedagogical approach is considered effective, motivating, and consistent with the needs of the training process, as it is conducive to learning by combining clear explanations, practical activities, and the use of digital tools that facilitate understanding."

Student 7: "I like it regardless of where it takes place. It's about sending

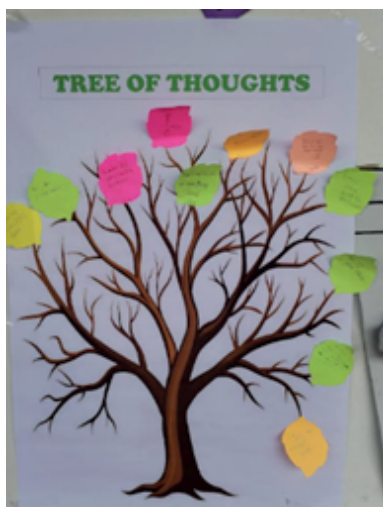
the message that mental health is a sensitive issue and that it's important to treat it and not leave it aside."

Student 8: "I feel that it is very important because it is a relevant and necessary strategy for promoting students' emotional well-being during a period of high academic demand. Its implementation raises awareness of the importance of self-care, reduces stress levels, and strengthens the early identification of emotional difficulties."

Additionally, the experience reaffirmed the importance of these activities that demand both a solid understanding of the subject matter and effective language skills. Mastery of the English language was essential to reach clear communication and ensure greater success in the development of the campaign.

### Challenges and Complexities

**Figure 10.** Activity in the Mental Health Campaign



Students of all proficiency levels generally showed a willingness to participate in each session. However, some exercises proved particularly challenging as they covered sensitive and controversial topics. These issues often led to student resistance, with some opting not to participate or failing to complete the tasks fully. Based on this point,

it is relevant to revisit the words of Del Valle (2023): "The educational process transcends the mere transfer of knowledge and skills, focusing instead on comprehensive education and viewing the student as a subject rather than an object in their academic pursuit." This supports the significance of teaching with a humanitarian purpose, where the student becomes the focus for the teacher not only at the cognitive level, but also from an emotional perspective.

**Figure 11.** Souvenir - Mental Health Campaign



Although the subjects addressed during the semester were relevant and of broad social interest, a few students expressed discomfort at the end of the course, noting that the content did not align directly with the specific objectives of their academic programs. Notwithstanding the above, it is worth highlighting what Del Valle (2023) claims: "From the beginning of our biological development, we are emotional beings, which leads us to the need to understand the role of emotional education in the development of the new human being, a free being, and the urgency of its inclusion at the university level." This means that, although this topic is not directly related to the curriculum of the training programs to which students belong, it is indeed relevant to address mental health content linked to the emotional states of individuals, which are inherent to the human being.

Many of the activities required the application of critical thinking, personal reflection, and the formulation of original ideas. These demands required linguistic competence to ensure coherent grammatical construction, as well as a solid understanding of the course content. This sometimes hindered students' ability to produce meaningful responses effectively. In this regard, and echoing the words of Polanía et al. (2022), "the components of cooperative learning that strengthen critical thinking are social and humanistic in nature, leading students to recognize themselves in others through interaction," which supports the work being done within classroom to address mental health content, which serves as a reference for this article.

On multiple occasions, oral expression activities sparked controversy, leading to debates that required careful moderation to prevent interpersonal conflicts stemming from divergent viewpoints and ideologies. In this regard, the argument presented by Romero (2025, p.3) related to controversy strategies that enable students to improve their communication skills provides important foundations that are relevant to this article and are therefore taken up as support for the current argument: "Communicative self-efficacy is a crucial concept in the field of psychological science and communication, this skill is important, both on an individual level and in professional practice, because it influences the way we interact with others and express our ideas and emotions." These types of activities prepare students for the challenges they will face as citizens and professionals in various communities and work environments in the future.

A considerable number of tasks were designed around oral communication strategies, which, while pedagogically valuable, triggered varying degrees of anxiety among students. This emotional response often ran counter to the intended objective of fostering open, constructive discussions around mental health. Notwithstanding the above, there are arguments in favor of using oral expression in the classroom, considering that communicative self-efficacy influences not only interaction among students and the expression of their ideas and emotions, but also the construction of satisfying interpersonal relationships (Romero, 2025).

Jiménez and Hernández (2022) emphasize that mental health programs should be established within the university environment to help students manage their emotions and cope with stressors. This support can enhance their academic performance and overall well-being (p. 95). Based on this perspective, we advocate for the university wellness unit to expand its mental health initiatives to reduce stress within the campus community. Additionally, it is essential to raise awareness among faculty members about the importance of understanding mental health issues and equipping themselves with basic knowledge to address the challenges that affect us all.

Murcia and Restrepo (2024) emphasize that incorporating neuro-pedagogical principles into the curriculum can help tailor teaching strategies to meet individual students' needs, thereby enhancing their skill acquisition. Furthermore, implementing cross-curricular projects that focus on developing social-emotional skills can equip students with the essential tools to manage their emotions and improve their academic performance.

It is reasonable to believe that teachers trained in pedagogical principles can propose ideas similar to those outlined in this article, which focuses on mental health. This initiative has been applied periodically over several semesters and is supported by foreign professionals in the field. The work is closely linked to language teachers during class sessions, incorporating specialized readings, analysis, and careful study of relevant content. Ongoing research processes conducted each semester further explore this content from the perspective of foreign languages. Although mental health is not a traditionally covered topic in this field, it nonetheless offers significant contributions to colleagues and, most importantly, students. These contributions are directly linked to language teachers in class sessions, specialized readings, analysis, and careful study of content related to this topic. There is also ongoing research carried out each semester to address this content from the perspective of foreign languages. Although this is not a subject that directly corresponds to this field, it does generate significant contributions to colleagues and, above all, to students.

Even though mental health campaigns were generally well-received and seen as relevant within the university context, the implementation process encountered logistical challenges. The activities tended to be lengthy and monotonous, which ultimately diminished engagement and enthusiasm from both students and the instructor. Despite this situation, a positive change was noted that impacted the community of students responsible for socializing the latest campaign, where clearly the context, environment, and target population varied substantially. the attitude of the university students was such that their content was able to be socialized calmly and positively, considering that special attention was paid to their explanations by their interlocutors and the activities proposed by the presenters were willing to be carried out. It can be deduced from this that university students feel more comfortable and enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge and impacting new communities when they are able to implement this strategy in spaces other than the university and when they have interlocutors dedicated solely to paying special attention to these presentations.

## Conclusions

Mental well-being cannot be separated from learning, as feelings, thoughts and emotions are an inherent part of human existence, and learning requires a connection between the mind and body. In the educational context, mental well-being must be considered a relevant subject within the curriculum.

Emotions belong to humans, and in the learning process, they can hinder, obstruct, facilitate, or enhance. Therefore, each person's mood affects their concentration and attention, which in turn is related to academic performance because it is through thought that new knowledge is constructed.

Professors who have broader knowledge and more extensive cognitive training are also positively or negatively affected emotionally by contextual circumstances. It is therefore important to consider their mental health within the university environment. The welfare department from the branch should implement more mental health workshops, allowing the whole community to benefit.

Studying these issues is insightful because it allows for the strengthening of interpersonal relationships. It involves more than a basic recognition of their abilities and skills; it includes an understanding of them as human beings who have feelings and emotions that affect positively or negatively their behavior and academic performance.

Working on these topics opens doors to explore partnerships both within the university and with external institutions that support workshops, activities, or talks to strengthen the mental health of our entire faculty community. The students have taken the first step by approaching high school students, who have appreciated this opportunity to learn about self-love, self-esteem, empathy, emotional intelligence, happiness, values and other relevant topics which enrich the human being.



Through work in this field of mental health, some of the problems, conditions, disorders, or illnesses that students have and that in many cases are unknown to others were identified. These issues affect their concentration and performance, therefore hindering their learning in subjects, which sometimes results in the subjects being disapproved at the end of the semester.

The students were mostly surprised and pleased that topics related to mental health were being addressed, to the point that they questioned why only the foreign language course was dealing with such important issues for the entire university community, given that this is a matter of great relevance to the community of this branch.

Being able to teach such an interesting and relevant topic for the participants' lives turns the foreign language into a means to an end. Addressing themes related to mental health, while challenging for students in terms of vocabulary management, also became a strength that they described as positive and relevant to learning a foreign language.

Foreign language teaching, being very flexible, facilitates learning multiple subjects, including specialized ones, which is why, in this research, it produced results that impacted the lives of the participants, what becomes satisfactory for the professor as a guide of this learning processes.

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## Chapter VII

# Learning strategies for the strengthening of communication skills in Spanish learners

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## Introduction

The teaching of foreign languages in the People's Republic of China has been historically very complex due to the country's political, economic, and social events. According to Martínez and Lee (2010), it was only after 1978, when political and economic liberalization took place, that there was also "an educational liberalization at all curricular levels: methodology, content, and objectives" (p. 5). After this, many languages, including Spanish, began to be incorporated into the Chinese educational system. It is currently taught in many universities and students choose to learn it because of the opportunities it will provide them in the workplace and in cultural spheres. Furthermore, *strengthening* political, economic, and diplomatic relations with the Spanish-speaking world requires, and will require, professionals who are competent in Spanish and capable of communicating effectively to be part of the global and labor field that is being built in this nation. Zhai and Jin (2024) also mention the importance of this language and the increasing interest in it during the last decade, due to socio-economic policies of the country.

There are different studies related to teaching and learning Spanish as a foreign language. Sanabria (2023) developed a qualitative study at the Hebei International Studies University. Her study aimed at analyzing the cultural contents and language that are included in the learning materials. The findings revealed that, although there are a lot of technical vocabulary words in the textbooks, it is necessary to connect it with real communication situations. An interesting fact that can be concluded from this study is the need to include communicative activities in the Spanish classroom.

Another study that explains the general principles of teaching and learning Spanish in China is Zhang's (2024). His study shows that interest in learning Spanish has increased; however, the resources and

number of teachers are not enough to accomplish the goals. It also explains that students in China need more communication activities in the classroom to develop their fluency. In addition, the study shows that different teaching strategies must be implemented, as the grammar-oriented approach has been prevalent in universities for a long time. The study concludes that there are challenges and opportunities in the field of Spanish as a foreign language in China, and that it is expected to have more resources to strengthen the learning and teaching of Spanish in the Chinese educational system.

One study related to oral skills in language students in China was carried out by Corderi and García (2022). Their study was experimental research that considered the performative language teaching approach. With one group, they included different strategies like picture description, monologue, and improvised speaking. With the second group, they developed the regular lessons using the textbook that was part of the course. The findings showed that students in the group that was taught using different activities developed greater fluency, comprehension and oral production skills.

In the context of this study, at Hebei University of Foreign Studies in Shijiazhuang, China, it was identified that students had poor Spanish language proficiency. This was evident when listening to the students' interactions in class. Moreover, in informal talks with students, they also said that it is difficult for them to express their ideas verbally. Many of them choose to study Spanish with the goal of entering the business world and finding good job opportunities, which makes it challenging. Because of this, the university seeks to develop the skills necessary for its graduates to be competitive in the various career fields available in the country. It should also be noted that the students' conversational level is a concern for the institution, and this would be the first time that a project related to learning strategies has been developed. Therefore, this study is innovative and seeks to fulfill the university's objective of developing learners' oral skills. It is worth mentioning that this university, as well as the other ones in China, have had a path notably marked by the traditional education in schools, especially in the teaching of languages (Xiaoxu et al., 2022).



Another issue related to the identified problem is that students are not familiar with language learning strategies (LLS), which are very necessary to learn and practice the target language. LLS are essential for learners' success, as they enable learners to become more independent and autonomous. Learners who use LLS also demonstrate more positive learning outcomes and enjoy a high level of self-efficacy (Allwright, 1990; Oxford, 2003). Studies such as the one by Ramón and Cáceres (2019) show that learners use various strategies in their learning process, particularly metacognitive strategies, which are responsible for regulating the learning process and which characterize the adult learner. Similarly, it indicates that "students value learning through interaction with others, developing their communication skills" (p. 19).

Now then, since this topic has been scarcely explored in the Chinese context and given the growing popularity of Spanish language teaching in the country, the main objective of this project is to describe how learning strategies can be used to strengthen oral skills in the classroom. The specific objective of this study is to determine the importance of helping students to become aware of their own learning, and to encourage them to use different types of strategies in their learning and interaction processes. This could help learners to overcome communication barriers, remember and use vocabulary more easily and create appropriate environments for interaction and communication. In order to guide the project, the questions that is stated is: What is the role of language learning strategies instruction in the development of communication skills in Spanish learners at Hebei University of Foreign Studies, China?

In the following paragraphs, the reader will find some theoretical considerations that underpin this project. These considerations define language learning strategies, their classification and a brief definition of communication skills, as well as teaching Spanish as a foreign language. Besides, a description of the methodology is included in which aspects like the context, instruments for data collection, and other relevant ones are mentioned. The findings are presented in two categories with some examples taken from the students' artifacts,

teacher's field notes and transcripts of conversations. Finally, some insights are presented in the section of discussion and the conclusions about the implementation of this study.

## **Theoretical Considerations: Learning strategies**

The first theoretical construct to consider is Language Learning Strategies, which are defined as "conscious thoughts and actions that students take to achieve a learning goal" (Chamot, 2004, p. 14); therefore, they are actions that learners perform when they have a clear understanding of their goals and their learning style. Zare (2012) defines them as "special ways of processing information to improve comprehension or retention of information" (p. 163). Likewise, Cohen (1990) states that learning strategies are processes "consciously selected by students (...) to improve the learning or use of a second or foreign language through the storage, retention, retrieval, and application of information about that language" (p. 4). These definitions consider the learning processes, student decision-making, thinking and information processing, processes that are particular to each student since, as Dumford et al. (2016) state, "there are a variety of methods that students can use when they are studying and learning, and these self-regulated behaviors contribute to student success in a variety of ways" (p. 72).

### **Classification of Learning Strategies**

Learning strategies have been classified into different groups according to studies by different authors; their classification "helps link them to a variety of cognitive processing phases during language learning, but also helps create instructional frameworks" (Zare, 2012 p. 164). This author also summarizes the taxonomies of different authors such as O'Malley's (1985), Rubin's (1987), Sterns (1992), all of them with similar characteristics and some differences related to the names and functions that each strategy plays; however, for the purposes of this project, the taxonomy proposed by Oxford (1990) will be considered.

This taxonomy is the most inclusive, since there are aspects of the language learning process that are included by Oxford and that may not appear in the other studies and approaches (Zare, 2012). Oxford (1990) classifies learning strategies into two main groups: direct and indirect. The former are related to the language learning process and "require mental processing of the language" (Oxford 1990, p. 37). These are divided into memorization strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensatory strategies. On the other hand, indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Oxford (1990) clarifies that these strategies can provide indirect support to language learning using different resources such as focusing, organizing, evaluating, seeking opportunities, and reducing anxiety. This study focuses on direct strategies, since a subgroup of them has more to do with communicative skills and the use of vocabulary for language practice, receiving and sending messages, and using the language despite communication failures (Oxford, 1990).

### **Communication Skills**

A first vision about communicative competences is Manaj's (2015), who emphasizes the importance of developing listening and speaking skills. The author highlights the importance of mastering the four skills since there is a strong relation among them. On the other hand, Adsuara (2014) mentions that "good personal, professional, and social relations are the result of good oral competence" (p. 1). He also mentions that due to the demands of today's society, teaching and improving oral communication is "imperative."

People are considered competent in a language when they can "put into practice skills, procedures and strategies in order to understand and use linguistic elements appropriately in a given context" (Adsuara, 2014, p. 4). These contexts can be formal or informal, but ultimately, they require an individual to demonstrate knowledge of, and mastery over, the elements that constitute. The Common Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) states that communicative competence requires the speaker to have knowledge and mastery

of three clearly differentiated dimensions, namely: the linguistic components, which include knowledge of the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical systems and the formal aspects of the language. The sociolinguistic component, related to "the sociocultural conditions of language use" (p. 8); and the pragmatic one that refers to the "functional use of linguistic resources" (p. 8), which gives the speaker the ability to identify the cultural aspects that, together with the coherence and cohesion that are also part of this dimension, will allow him to carry out an effective communication process.

### **Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language**

In the book "El mundo estudia español " (The World Studies Spanish) by the Ministry of Education and Teacher Training of the Government of Spain (2018), the various efforts that have been made to recognize the importance of the Spanish language in the world at a general level are mentioned, since this language is recognized as the second most important language by native speakers in the world. It is mentioned that in countries and areas such as the United States, Brazil, Europe and Asian, the number of Spanish students is increasing due to different political, economic, migratory circumstances, or simply due to the interest in the language, culture, films, and people of the Spanish-speaking world that is part of it. Of course, China, the country where this study is carried out, is mentioned in this case.

According to the official document of the Ministry of Education of Spain (2018), "between 2017 and 2018, it is estimated that there were more than 40,000 Spanish students in China at all levels of formal education," that is, from primary to university levels. As it is evident, Spanish language learning in this country is in a growth phase with significant potential for expansion and strengthening, as people perceive Spanish as a means of conducting business, boosting tourism, and other activities.

## Methodology

This project follows a *qualitative research paradigm*, as it aims to describe the behaviors or actions of a group of individuals in their context, in this case the educational context in the process of learning, practicing and strengthening their skills in a foreign language (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Since this is a qualitative study, no hypothesis was stated to be proved or discarded. On the contrary, as stated by Dörnyei (2007), we are open to analyze "opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals (...) and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 38).

The principles of the *descriptive case study approach* are followed, as this allows for a "detailed description of specific individuals in their learning context" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 171). Case studies enable the analysis of a specific group or institution with a clear and defined objective (Dörnyei, 2007). For the case of this study, the main objective is to describe the role of language learning strategies instruction in the development of communication skills in Spanish learners at Hebei University of Foreign Studies, China.

With regard to research ethics, it is important to mention that the real names of the students were not used; instead, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. This was done to respect their privacy and anonymity. Students were also asked to sign a consent form to confirm that their participation was voluntary and that it would not affect their grades if they chose not to take part in the project.

## Context

The University of Foreign Studies is located in Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei Province, about three hours from Beijing, the nation's capital. The university welcomes approximately 20,000 students from different regions of China, especially rural areas. Approximately 71 foreign languages are taught by professors from around the world, including Colombia, Cuba, Hungary, Sweden, Brazil, Portugal, Egypt, and others. Students must study for four years and complete a thesis

upon completion to qualify for a degree. There are various majors, such as music, medicine, and business administration, but the most notable programs are those related to languages, as this is the university that offers instruction in more languages than any other in the region.

## **Population**

The students who participated in this study are third-year Spanish students who have also received instruction in Portuguese and English. Their average age is between 19 and 22 years old. The group is predominantly female. The students do not have a high level of conversational Spanish; however, they study complex topics related to the historical and cultural landscape of Spain and Latin America. The students' motivations for learning Spanish are related to culture, movies, learning about the Spanish-speaking world, and job opportunities.

## **Instruments**

### **Questionnaires**

Two questionnaires were administered, one at the beginning of the process following Oxford's SILL model (1990), to determine the learning strategies students used and their frequency. A survey, with open questions, was conducted at the end to determine students' perceptions of the experience.

### **Observation and Field Notes**

Mason (1996), as cited in Mackey and Gass (2005), suggests that observation techniques can help to perceive the "dimensions of context, interactions, relationships, actions, events, etc." (p. 60). Field notes were taken to record everything that occurred in the classroom, which helped to determine the role of learning strategies in the communication process.

### **Audio Recording**

This enabled presentations and interactions made by students in class to be recorded and analyzed to establish the use of learning strategies.

## Procedure

This study was developed in the following stages: 1) exploration; 2) design and implementation; 3) data collection; and 4) data analysis. In the exploration phase, the characteristics of the context were observed and described. To this end, discussions were held with the Dean of the Faculty of the Language Department at the University. Interactions were also conducted with students in class, and their language proficiency was observed. It was possible to determine and delimit the problem to be addressed, namely, the improvement of communication skills through learning strategies. A fundamental part of this stage was the implementation of an initial survey adapted from version 7.0 (ESL/EFL), designed by Oxford (1990). This questionnaire was applied in English, a language that students are slightly more fluent compared to Spanish, in order to avoid barriers when reading the questions. Its objective was to verify the knowledge and frequency of use of learning strategies in the Spanish classroom.

In the design and implementation phase, learning activities and the use of learning strategies were proposed. Students received theoretical and practical training in these strategies during class. This was done taking into account the topics covered in the students' curriculum. After this, in the data collection phase, the activities were implemented, and data was simultaneously collected using the aforementioned instruments. In the data analysis phase, the interactions between students and the teacher during oral activities were analyzed. The use of strategies by learners was identified and triangulated with data from surveys and notes taken by the researcher. This process ultimately led to the results, conclusions, and discussion.

## Findings

This case study describes the role that learning strategies play in the communication skills of a group of Spanish students at Hebei University, China. The results show a varied use of strategies during oral activities, which positively affected the learners' communication processes. These strategies were determined based on the most common patterns found and grouped into two categories: 1) overcoming communication barriers and 2) images as support for oral production. Below, excerpts from conversations are analyzed as examples of communicative situations, as well as sections of the final survey and the researcher's notes.

To clarify for the reader some of the conventions used in the transcripts, the following is a list of the most commonly used ones found in the transcripts analyzed:

Long pause (---); short pause (...); laughter (☺); phrase or word not understood (--?); the student speaks in Chinese (CH); that's what the student said (*italics*).

### Overcoming Communication Barriers

This category demonstrates how students used different strategies to overcome some of the barriers or challenges they encountered in the communication process. In the following transcript, the professor asks the students various questions about their opinions on a topic they had just presented. While their presentation was prepared and studied in advance, the professor's questions were not, and they seek to encourage students' spontaneous production and check their level of understanding of the topics.

Transcript # 5 (p.6)

Professor: What is the most important thing that happened in that period for Spain?



Ana: Oh, the whole city ... Spanish citizens over eighteen have the right to participate in elections because in China it's also important. Um ... because... ah... the Chinese when... when they're oh...

eighteen years old oh... no... uh... we don't elect the party ... party ah,... yes party... political party is the... we don't elect a present....

Teacher: a president.

Frida: Hmm ... president... for oh... for (CH) (---) For participation oh... in... (CH) oh... the people's congress. Mmm ... that's why... that's why... (CH) is the most important.

In this transcript, the professor asks a question to encourage the students to talk more about the topic, but from their own perspective and to discuss what they consider to be the most important aspects of the period they have just presented. Ana gives a very interesting answer in which the sentence construction processes are evident. With some hesitation but with precision, she expresses her idea of the importance of citizens being granted the right to vote. While this is a critical position on the issue, it also demonstrates her ability to adjust or approximate the message she wants to convey. This is part of the learning and communication strategies. Although her fluency is not the best, and she makes short pauses, the message is delivered successfully. On the other hand, Frida, a student, also expresses her opinion, albeit with slightly longer pauses and more complex sentence structures. However, what she wants to express is understandable. In this case, Frida uses an additional strategy to accommodate her ideas: code-switching into her native language. After using her native language, it can be observed that she continued with her sentence until she finished the idea she wanted to express. This strategy of switching languages during presentations was very common among this group of students.

#### Transcript #7

Professor: OK. And Blanca... What's better for you? That's another question. That's another question: what's better for you? Having a king or having elections?

Blanca: Juan Carlos, huh...

Professor: What's better? Having a king or people being able to vote and

choose. What's better? Blanca: What's better?

Belinda and Blanca: This one! This one! Blanca: This is the best.

Teacher: Why?

Blanca: (☺) Oh, I like Juan Carlos. (☺) (Laughter from classmates and the teacher) Teacher: Who is Juan Carlos? Why do you like Juan Carlos?

Blanca: Huh?

Professor: Why? Why do you prefer this system?

Blanca: (CH) Handsome (☺) Very handsome (☺)

Teacher: Him? Juan Carlos, yes? Do you think he's handsome? Blanca: Yes. (☺) (CH)

Teacher: Okay. We're done. Thank you.

On this occasion, a group of three students was describing the transition from a monarchical to a democratic government in Spain. The teacher, aiming to generate discussion and interaction with the students, asks the question: "What is better for you? Having a king or having elections?" Blanca repeats the question with the intention of rectifying it and giving herself some time to think, then she mentions a name, Juan Carlos. The teacher repeats the question, ignoring Blanca's response. Blanca reiterates her response. This is where the teacher grasps the message they are trying to convey, amidst the laughter of her classmates: Blanca says she likes Juan Carlos. The teacher, to corroborate the information, asks why; she again, amid laughter and whispers in her native language, says in Spanish, "Bonito" (handsome), "Very beautiful." It is not clear to what extent the students understood the teacher's question. What is clear is that the students used the vocabulary they knew to make themselves understood and to express ideas that were difficult for them at that moment.

Compensation strategies include different situations in which speakers either avoid communication completely or partially or adjust or approximate the message for the other person. In this case, we can see a combination of these two strategies. Blanca, without many linguistic resources, successfully answers her teacher's question with a sentence in which she expresses her like and opinion about a figure from Spanish

history. Although it was not a very eloquent response, it satisfied the teacher, who ended the discussion with an "OK. We're done. Thank you."

In the professor's notes we can read the following section about this experience and in particular about this group of students:

"This group of students is especially shy. They are girls who work together and who, apparently, lack confidence when it comes to speaking. They express this by laughing, speaking Chinese, whispering, looking around when asked a question, thinking, gesturing while thinking of an answer and, especially, laughing when they don't know something." (Teacher's notes #4).

The way this group expresses itself is very interesting, since, without being fully aware of it, its members use various learning strategies, which in this case are related to indirect strategies, specifically affective strategies, whereby students reduce their anxiety through laughter. Although they are not very fluent when speaking, they take risks and rely on their relaxed way of experiencing communication. These strategies are very important because, in the long or short term, they can acquire the confidence they need to express their ideas more fluently and effectively.

The results described in this section are similar to those found in a study conducted by Salam et al. (2020) who explored the strategies and learning styles of successful learners and found that in the communication process they use compensation strategies, specifically when speaking they perform linguistic code switching (*code switching*) or phrases to adjust or approximate the message. As observed in the previous example, Chinese students often use their mother tongue in the process of communication.

### **Images as Support in Oral Production**

This category showcases how students can support their communication process by using memory strategies and designing their own images.

## Transcript #10

Ana: (CH) ... ah... ah ... like Spain has a constitutional monarchy and a par... lia ... r... parliamentary democ... racy. Oh... like king and parliament.

Teacher: Uh-huh ... there is a king and a parliament.

Ana: Ah... yes.

Teacher: What does this image mean? Ana: oh... parliament.

Professor: Parliament. Ah, yes, those are the... the chairs.

Ana: due, the chairs and umm ... (☺) present ... ah... present ... president. And oh... and then this...tutes and autonomy and compe ... tencies and the laws and reg ... reg... regulations of each state. Autonomous state ca ... will change a little on the basis of the constitution.

Professor: Yes, on the basis.

Ana: Yes. Just like in China, there are autonomous regions like Tibet and Xinjiang. Teacher: Are they autonomous?

Anita: Ah, yes.

Teacher: And are they different? Ana: mmm, yes.

Teacher: In what ways are they different?

Ana: Oh... they have... their own... their own laws and... and... mmm... eh economically they have a lot... to help... to help you.

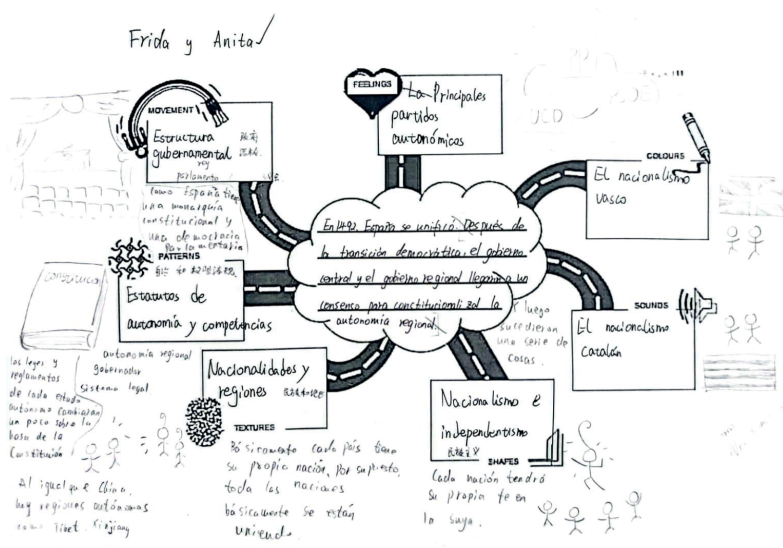
Teacher: Help?

Ana: Help. Ah...

In this conversation, we see student Ana giving a presentation about the types of government in Spain at a specific time in its history. She mentions the existence of a king and a parliament. During her presentation, the professor asks her some questions about the graphics she is using (see Figure 1). The student uses drawings to represent the parliament, the president, and the statutes, laws, and regulations of each state. Although she lacks fluency in describing what her drawings represent, she manages to do so clearly and concisely. This is a clear example of how, through the memory strategies the students used, they were able to recall important aspects of Spanish history and mention them in their report. Furthermore, by following the conversation, the

student was able to establish a relationship between the autonomous states of Spain and the autonomous states of her own country, resulting in a significant gain in her relationship and communication skills. This also demonstrates a strong understanding of the topic, allowing her to speak and comment on her own country. Although the grammar used is not the best, the student was able to interact naturally in the target language.

**Figure 1.** Photo of the graphic representation made by students using a Google template



Further evidence that the use of memory strategies helped students to understand texts, organize their ideas, and improve their oral skills was provided by the comments written in the final survey, specifically in question 3, which asked them to indicate the strategy that had helped them most improve their learning and oral skills in Spanish. Their responses read:

"Using images. This way I can better understand what I need. I can better remember what the teacher says." (John)

"I think it's the use of images, which are very intuitive and can help us understand the history of Spain" (Isabel)

"Mind maps, using images and keywords. It's easier to remember because you can speak words and images." (Natalia)

These responses clearly demonstrate the positive impact of using images in both the learning and communication processes. A lack of vocabulary is often one of the factors that limits students' oral production; however, students said that using images made it easier for them to remember what they needed to say, which improved their oral skills.

## Discussion

The first point to note about this study is that the research question was answered and the stated objectives were accomplished. The findings section presented the roles that language learning strategies play in strengthening students' communication skills. This demonstrates that an appropriate research method was followed and that the activities had a positive impact in the students' learning process. Language learning strategies proved to be a remarkable tool to enhance students' skills and help them become more aware of their possibilities when learning a language.

The goal of any foreign language education process is to support and guide students in developing the skills they need to communicate and express their ideas, interests and tastes, and to become proficient in the language they are learning. Any effort made is very important; however, it must be recognized that if we help students understand their own learning processes and find their own ways of learning, the educational experience will be more beneficial for them in the long run. In this sense, teachers must play a role as guides.

Alnufaie (2022) states that nearly all studies related to LLS instruction are successful and have a positive impact on students' performance. Therefore, providing instruction in learning strategies enables students to recognize a variety of learning opportunities and access different resources. The more aware students are of their own learning process,

the more tools they will find to answer their questions and overcome the challenges they encounter. In this case, learning strategies proved to be very useful in the process of organizing, retaining, and recalling information in the communicative situations presented in the classroom. The results highlight the most relevant and recurring aspects of the experience relating to compensation and memory strategies. However, it is important to recognize that students do not use strategies in isolation; rather, there may use multiple strategies simultaneously in the learning process. This aspect could be explored in future research studies.

Many students are not aware of their abilities or their own learning strategies; here is where the teacher plays a fundamental role; as Morales et al. (2020) express, teachers "need...to transform their educational practices to adapt them to the models required by the institution in which they work, and to their personal criteria as they see fit to improve teaching" (p. 533). Thus, teachers can become guides that adjust processes and planning in order to provide guidance to students on how to discover and use learning strategies and become more successful learners. This idea is supported by González-Peiteado and Pino-Juste (2016) who state that the "teacher must create the appropriate conditions to make the postulates of an active teaching style a reality, taking into account both the uniqueness and diversity of the students" (p. 1178).

## Conclusions

This study showed that students most frequently used compensatory strategies to overcome communication limitations. It was observed that students seek to adjust or approximate the message when they did not fully understand a question, use their native language as a strategy to remember the words they need in the target language, or divert the topic when they did not understand a specific question. Despite a lack of fluency, grammatical errors, or understanding of the questions asked during communicative activities, students effectively maintained a bridge of communication. These strategies are of great help to learners who want to succeed in their communicative experiences. "(...) they can contribute to successful conversations and also to good exam results" (Liangqiu & Zhengqiu, 2019).

The importance of memory strategies was evident, as they enabled students to familiarize themselves with vocabulary and phrases related to the discussion topics, helping them to express their ideas more fluently and accurately. This aspect is related to a study conducted by Wael et al. (2018) at the University of Muhammadiyah Sorong, who concluded that one of the strategies most frequently used by students in their oral performance was memory strategies. This study shows that students use images and "visual connections in their learning" (p. 70). This demonstrates the fundamental role that these strategies play in learning and oral production.

This study reaffirms the importance of considering instruction in learning strategies in language teaching settings, as it has been shown that students can better organize their ideas if they use appropriate strategies to better recall information. This helps them to perform better in oral activities by resolving problems such as a lack of vocabulary or a lack of understanding of the topics studied. Teng (2023) states that when learning problems are diagnosed and undertaken through language learning strategies, the linguistic gaps are bridged. This is



something necessary in the context of language learning teaching, as we seek to strengthen the learning and teaching processes. This author also stated LLS can give us a lot of ideas on how to develop specific tasks or strengthen a specific aspect of the language.

This study also showed that students used indirect strategies, such as affective and metacognitive strategies, which positively impacted their learning and interaction during the experience and development of the communicative exercises. In their conversations, it was evident that they maintained a very relaxed attitude through laughter, as oral exercises are often tense and stressful moments for them. It is worth exploring these aspects of indirect strategies in more depth in future research and uncovering the role they play in communication and learning processes.

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The IMCLE research group is linked to the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC), Sogamoso Campus. IMCLE was established in 2017 to create an academic hub focused on teaching and learning foreign languages, language acquisition, and understanding cultural insights. Currently, IMCLE is recognized and classified in the C category by “Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología” in Colombia, focusing on four main areas: Bilingualism and Bilingual Education, Education and Pedagogy of Language Sciences, Language, Society, and Culture, and Digital Technologies Applied to Language Teaching. Throughout this book, IMCLE research members reaffirm their commitment to generating relevant knowledge, strengthening research cooperation networks, and the continuous improvement of language teaching practices in Colombia and beyond its borders.



**F**reeing Language Education presents seven chapters on investigative language teaching and learning insights that rethink the purpose of higher education in foreign languages in an intercultural complex world. Chapter one addresses interculturality as a process of internal transformation in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, while Chapter two proposes a criterion for an intercultural curriculum beyond superficial views of diversity. Chapter three explores the development of EFL public speaking skills as part of personal, academic, and professional development. Chapter four analyzes the practice of co-teaching between foreign assistants and Colombian teachers, emphasizing steady communication, cultural negotiations, and acknowledging the other side and voice within the process. Chapter five examines English as a social construct in Higher education, reveling its tensions between empowering and domination. Chapter six introduces the integration of mental health into foreign language teaching practice, innovating by linking emotional well-being and learning. Finally, chapter seven broadens the perspective to the Chinese context, where strategies for learning Spanish are explored, and the global relevance of intercultural education is highlighted. **Interculturality, Communication, and Professional Rise** are three main key fields addressed in this book, providing pathways to transform Language Teaching and inviting educational actors to contribute to more participatory, flexible, and human-inclusive language curricula.



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