

The Challenge of the English language in Colombian Public Education: An Exploratory Research

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Abstract

Title: The Challenge of the English language in Colombian Public Education: An Exploratory Research.¹

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Keywords: *English, public education, motivation, student perception, teaching methodology, sociocultural factors.*

Description:

This research analyzes the perceptions of eleventh grade students in two public institutions in Bucaramanga, Colombia, about the importance of learning English. Using a mixed approach and an exploratory research design, a survey was applied to 70 students to explore the motivational, pedagogical and sociocultural factors that influence their assessment of the language. The results reveal a paradox: while 95% of students recognize the instrumental usefulness of English for their professional and academic future, this assessment does not translate into intrinsic motivation, sustained practice or high self-efficacy. It was identified that the teaching methodology, predominantly grammatical and repetitive, communicative anxiety and limited exposure to contexts of real use of the language act as main barriers. The study concludes that it is imperative to move towards communicative approaches, critically integrate youth digital culture and create emotionally safe environments to close the gap between the abstract recognition of the usefulness of English and the concrete learning experience.

¹Degree work.

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Resumen

Título: El Desafío del Inglés en la Educación Pública Colombiana: Un Estudio Exploratorio.³

Authors: Miguel Andrés Calderón Silva, Cristian Fernando Colmenares Jiménez⁴

Palabras clave: *Inglés, Educación Pública, Motivación, Percepción Estudiantil, Metodología De Enseñanza, Factores Socioculturales.*

Descripción:

Esta investigación analiza las percepciones de estudiantes de undécimo grado en dos instituciones públicas de Bucaramanga, Colombia, sobre la importancia del aprendizaje del inglés. Mediante un enfoque mixto y un diseño de estudio de caso, se aplicó una encuesta a 70 estudiantes para explorar los factores motivacionales, pedagógicos y socioculturales que influyen en su valoración del idioma. Los resultados revelan una paradoja: mientras el 95% de los estudiantes reconoce la utilidad instrumental del inglés para su futuro profesional y académico, esta valoración no se traduce en motivación intrínseca, práctica sostenida o alta autoeficacia. Se identificó que la metodología de enseñanza, predominantemente gramatical y repetitiva, la ansiedad comunicativa y la limitada exposición a contextos de uso real del idioma actúan como principales barreras. El estudio concluye que es imperativo transitar hacia enfoques comunicativos, integrar críticamente la cultura digital juvenil y crear ambientes emocionalmente seguros para cerrar la brecha entre el reconocimiento abstracto de la utilidad del inglés y la experiencia concreta de aprendizaje.

³Trabajo de grado.

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Introduction

The globalized world increasingly demands multilingual proficiency, positioning English as a crucial language for academic, professional, and personal advancement. In Colombia, the national curriculum emphasizes the development of English language skills throughout the educational trajectory. However, anecdotal observations by two pre-service teachers during their practicum in two distinct public secondary schools in Bucaramanga suggest a concerning trend: eleventh-grade students appear to attribute less importance to English compared to other academic subjects. This observation is supported by the need analysis conducted within the aforementioned institutions and existing research within the Colombian educational context (Calderón & Martínez, 2024).

These initial insights point towards a potential disconnection between the recognized global importance of English and its perceived value among senior secondary school students in this specific context. Understanding the underlying reasons for this perceived lack of importance is crucial for developing effective pedagogical strategies and policy interventions aimed at fostering greater engagement and motivation in English language learning. This research proposal outlines a qualitative study designed to explore the perspectives of eleventh-grade students to identify the causes contributing to this phenomenon.

Statement of the problem

Despite the acknowledged global relevance of English and its integration within the Colombian national curriculum, a discernible disparity exists between its objective importance and the subjective value assigned to it by eleventh-grade students in at least two public secondary schools in Bucaramanga. This observation, stemming from the direct experiences of pre-service teachers during their practical training and supported by preliminary institutional needs assessments and broader research, indicates that these students may prioritize other academic subjects over English. This perceived lack of importance can negatively impact student motivation, engagement, and ultimately, their acquisition of English language skills, and potentially hinder their future academic and professional opportunities.

Without a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to this phenomenon, efforts to enhance English language education at the secondary level may be less effective. Therefore, this research aims at exploring the perspectives of eleventh-grade students to identify the underlying causes that lead them to not consider English as important as other subjects in their academic lives. This concern leads us to the following research question: What are the perceptions of eleventh-grade students in two Colombian public secondary schools regarding the importance of English language learning?

1. Objectives

1.1 General Objective

To identify the underlying causes contributing to the perceived lack of importance of English language learning among eleventh-grade students in two Colombian public secondary schools.

1.2 Specific objectives

- A) To explore eleventh-grade students' perceptions of the relevance of English language skills for their current academic pursuits and future aspirations.
- B) To investigate the factors within the learning environment (e.g., teaching methodologies, curriculum content, assessment practices) that may influence eleventh-grade students' perceptions of the importance of English.
- C) To identify the socio-cultural factors (e.g., parental influence, peer attitudes, community perspectives) that may shape eleventh-grade students' views on the significance of English language learning.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

The concept of motivation has been central to understanding success and persistence in second language acquisition (SLA). Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model offers one of the most influential frameworks for analyzing the psychological and social dimensions influencing language learning. According to Gardner, motivation to learn a second language (L2) is not merely an internal drive but a multifaceted construct shaped by attitudes toward the language, the learning context, and the broader sociocultural environment (Gardner, 2020). In his model, motivation encompasses three key components: integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, and motivation itself (effort, desire, and positive affect).

Integrativeness refers to a learner's willingness to identify with the target language community and adopt elements of its culture. In the Colombian public-school context, students' exposure to authentic English-speaking communities is minimal, and their cultural connection to English-speaking societies may be abstract or mediated through popular media (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). Consequently, the absence of direct cultural relevance or personal identification may hinder the development of integrative motivation. This disconnect contributes to the perception that English is a foreign, academic subject rather than a living means of communication and opportunity.

Attitudes toward the learning situation including perceptions of teachers, teaching methods, classroom atmosphere, and institutional support are also crucial. Research in Colombian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms (Arias & Guapacha, 2021; Calderón & Martínez, 2024) indicates that overcrowded classes, limited resources, and grammar-centered instruction frequently undermine learners' positive attitudes. When lessons lack communicative purpose or relevance to students' lives, learners' engagement and enthusiasm tend to diminish. Moreover, English teachers in public schools often face systemic challenges such as insufficient training, low salaries, and lack of access to updated materials, all of which can influence their teaching performance and, consequently, students' attitudes.

Finally, Gardner highlights motivation proper, which combines the learner's effort, persistence, and emotional investment. When Colombian students perceive English as disconnected from their immediate realities or from tangible rewards such as higher academic success or employability, their motivational drive weakens (Gardner, 2020). Thus, Gardner's model helps to explain how both affective and contextual variables from cultural disconnection to inadequate teaching environments shape the low perceived importance of English among eleventh-grade students in Colombian public schools.

2.2 The L2 Motivational Self System

Building upon Gardner's work, Dörnyei (2009) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System, a framework that emphasizes the role of self-concept and personal identity in sustaining motivation for second language learning. The model integrates three components: the Ideal L2 Self, the

Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience (VanPatten & Williams, 2014). This approach is particularly relevant in contexts such as Colombia, where societal attitudes and educational conditions shape how learners envision themselves as future English users.

The Ideal L2 Self represents the aspirational image of oneself as a competent speaker of the target language. Motivation arises when learners can vividly imagine themselves communicating fluently, studying abroad, or pursuing careers that require English proficiency. In the Colombian public education context, however, many students struggle to project such an identity due to limited exposure to authentic communicative situations and scarce opportunities to use English outside the classroom (Gass et al., 2020). The socioeconomic stratification that characterizes Colombian society also reinforces unequal access to language-related experiences. Students from privileged backgrounds may attend bilingual institutions, travel abroad, or consume English-language media, whereas those from low-income areas—such as many public-school students—encounter English primarily as a school subject with little real-life utility. This structural inequity weakens the development of an Ideal L2 Self.

The Ought-to L2 Self, in contrast, refers to external pressures and expectations, such as family, institutional, or societal obligations. In many Colombian families, especially in rural or low-income communities, English is not perceived as an immediate necessity for success. Parents may encourage their children to focus on subjects that lead directly to passing national exams or obtaining technical employment, rather than investing effort in a language perceived as distant from their daily lives (Brown & Lee, 2025). The lack of collective emphasis on English as a valued skill reduces the sense of external accountability that sustains motivation in other contexts.

Finally, the L2 Learning Experience encompasses the learner's immediate environment, including classroom interactions, peer relations, and curricular content. Students' perceptions of monotonous classes, irrelevant topics, or minimal communicative practice can directly erode their interest. Dörnyei's model thus highlights the interaction between personal identity and contextual realities: when students fail to imagine English as part of their future selves and when their learning experiences fail to support that vision, motivation deteriorates. This system offers a valuable lens through which to interpret why Colombian students often perceive English as a marginal subject rather than a tool for self-advancement and global participation.

2.3 Perceived Value and Utility

To further understand students' perceptions of English, the Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et al., 1983) provides a complementary psychological perspective. This theory posits that a learner's motivation and engagement depend on two main factors: their expectancy for success (the belief that they can succeed at a task) and the value they assign to that task (Mitchell et al., 2019). The value component is multidimensional, including attainment value (personal importance), intrinsic value (enjoyment), utility value (usefulness for future goals), and cost (perceived effort or anxiety).

In the context of Colombian public education, students' expectancies for success in English are often low due to years of limited exposure and inadequate instruction. When learners

repeatedly experience failure or frustration such as struggling with pronunciation or grammar they internalize the belief that they “are not good at English.” This low self-efficacy translates into avoidance behaviors, such as reduced participation, minimal study effort, or even resistance toward English classes (Ellis, 2015).

Regarding perceived value, English often lacks utility value in students’ immediate environments. For many eleventh graders in Bucaramanga, local employment opportunities rarely demand English proficiency, and university admission does not always depend on it. Consequently, English is not viewed as a pressing requirement for success, unlike mathematics or Spanish, which are directly linked to national examinations. Attainment value may also be minimal, as societal and familial discourses rarely frame English mastery as a personal achievement. Without significant intrinsic value the enjoyment of learning for its own sake students’ engagement relies heavily on external motivation, which tends to be fragile and temporary (Cook, 2016).

Additionally, the cost of learning English time, cognitive effort, and the anxiety of public speaking may outweigh perceived benefits. In under-resourced schools, these challenges are magnified by the absence of technological tools, interactive materials, or extracurricular reinforcement. Thus, from an expectancy-value perspective, students’ perceptions of English as unimportant stem from low expectancy beliefs, weak utility value, and high perceived cost. Understanding this dynamic is essential for designing interventions that make English more relevant and achievable for learners in the Colombian context.

2.4 Sociocultural Perspectives on Language Learning

While motivational and psychological theories shed light on individual factors, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasizes the social dimension of learning. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development and knowledge acquisition occur through social interaction and mediation by more knowledgeable others (MKOs). Learning, therefore, is not an isolated process but a socially situated activity shaped by cultural norms, values, and tools. Applied to language learning, this perspective highlights that learners internalize linguistic knowledge through participation in meaningful social practices rather than through mechanical instruction alone.

In the Colombian context, the acquisition of English is deeply influenced by sociocultural conditions. Many public-school students inhabit communities where English is virtually absent from daily interactions. Unlike bilingual environments where exposure to the L2 is frequent, these learners lack authentic communicative opportunities and MKOs who can model proficient English use (Dewaele & Li, 2020). The English teacher often becomes the sole linguistic and cultural mediator. However, due to large class sizes, limited contact hours, and systemic constraints, teachers may not be able to provide the individualized scaffolding necessary for meaningful language development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance.

Furthermore, collective attitudes toward English are shaped by socioeconomic realities and historical inequalities. For many Colombian families, English represents a symbol of elitism or foreign dominance rather than empowerment. This cultural ambivalence can result in passive or resistant attitudes toward the language, diminishing learners' motivation. Conversely, for those who associate English with mobility, technology, and access to global culture, the motivation may be stronger (Long, 2017). Thus, sociocultural theory underscores that language learning cannot be separated from the broader social discourse surrounding it.

Recognizing these sociocultural dynamics is crucial for interpreting why eleventh-grade students perceive English as less important than other subjects. Their attitudes are not merely individual preferences but reflections of community values, socioeconomic limitations, and institutional practices. Effective pedagogical interventions, therefore, must transcend classroom methods and engage with the broader social ecology of English learning in Colombia—empowering families, communities, and schools to view English as a collective cultural and economic resource.

3. Literature Review

The teaching and learning of English in Colombian public education has been the subject of sustained scholarly scrutiny over the past two decades, revealing deep-rooted challenges that extend across pedagogical, institutional, and policy levels. Across the literature, researchers have consistently demonstrated how ambitious national bilingualism policies have collided with

structural inequities, limited teacher preparation, and low student motivation, resulting in outcomes that fall short of the intended goal of producing a bilingual citizenry. The works of Contreras Avendaño et al. (2024), Correa and González (2016), Del Toro et al. (2019), Clavijo (2016), Gómez Sará (2017), Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada-Sánchez (2016), and de Mejía (2009) collectively construct a multifaceted picture of English language education in Colombia—one characterized by well-intentioned policy visions but hindered by systemic disconnection between policy and practice.

Together, these studies provide crucial insights for understanding the current investigation, which explores eleventh-grade students' perceptions of the importance of English learning in Colombian public schools. Early analyses of national policy frameworks, such as those by Correa and González (2016) and Gómez Sará (2017), reveal how the Colombian government's attempts to institutionalize English as a foreign language are deeply intertwined with global discourses of competitiveness and modernization. Correa and González (2016) offer a comprehensive review of several key initiatives, including the National Program of Bilingualism (2004–2019), Colombia Very Well (2015–2025), and Bilingual Colombia (2014–2018). Each of these programs was launched with the aspiration of improving students' English proficiency to meet international standards, particularly the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

However, the authors demonstrate that these policies were implemented in a top-down manner that often disregarded local realities, particularly in public primary schools. Teachers, many of whom lacked sufficient English proficiency and pedagogical training, were expected to

meet ambitious goals without the resources or institutional support required to do so. These limitations, combined with an increasing workload and scarce classroom materials, created a mismatch between policy expectations and achievable classroom outcomes.

Gómez Sará (2017) further contextualizes these challenges by critically analyzing the ideological underpinnings of Colombian bilingualism policies. Her review identifies how national discourse has consistently equated bilingualism with English–Spanish proficiency, thereby erasing Colombia’s multilingual heritage and reinforcing English as a symbol of socioeconomic advancement. By adopting the CEFR without adapting it to local contexts, policymakers implicitly positioned English not as a communicative tool for inclusion but as a gatekeeping mechanism tied to globalized labor markets. The study also underscores the market-driven orientation of bilingual policies, which prioritize measurable outcomes and standardized testing over culturally responsive pedagogies. Furthermore, Gómez Sará (2017) notes that teacher perspectives have historically been excluded from policy development, leading to a profound disconnect between macro-level objectives and micro-level realities. This exclusionary approach has created a cycle in which teachers are simultaneously held accountable for policy outcomes and denied meaningful participation in shaping those policies.

The historical evolution of these policy frameworks is further illuminated by Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada-Sánchez (2016), who examine the shifting definitions of bilingualism in Colombia’s foreign language education policy. Tracing developments over several decades, their analysis demonstrates how the dominance of English has mirrored global trends in language

education, reflecting the association between English proficiency and socioeconomic mobility. Yet, the authors caution that this instrumentalist view of English has often marginalized other linguistic identities and exacerbated educational inequalities. They argue that policy shifts have tended to oscillate between ambitious goals and inconsistent implementation, producing a “policy-practice gap” that has yet to be bridged. Importantly, Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada-Sánchez (2016) stress the importance of situating English language education within a broader sociocultural and historical framework, rather than treating it solely as a technical issue of language instruction. Their insights provide an essential foundation for understanding why students in Colombian public schools might perceive English as disconnected from their lived experiences.

While policy analyses provide a macro-level perspective, several studies explore the micro-level realities of English teaching and learning in public schools, exposing how these policies manifest—or fail to manifest—in classroom practice. Contreras Avendaño et al. (2024) offer a compelling case study of tenth-grade students in a public school, which sheds light on the motivational and pedagogical challenges that hinder English language development. Their findings reveal that students exhibit significant disinterest in learning English, often viewing it as irrelevant to their immediate academic or professional goals. The study attributes this disinterest to several interconnected factors: a lack of autonomous learning habits, an overreliance on memorization and translation exercises, and an instructional focus on receptive skills (reading and listening) at the expense of productive skills (speaking and writing). The predominance of teacher-centered methodologies limits opportunities for meaningful communication and fails to connect English learning with students’ social realities. Consequently, learners often perceive English as a purely academic requirement rather than as a valuable skill for personal and professional growth.

This disconnection between students' perceptions and the instrumental goals of policy frameworks is reinforced by the material and institutional constraints that characterize public schools. Contreras Avendaño et al. (2024) describe how large class sizes, limited instructional hours, and inadequate facilities severely restrict teachers' ability to implement communicative or task-based approaches. These conditions foster an environment in which mechanical learning strategies such as rote memorization become the norm. Moreover, socioeconomic disparities compound these issues, as students from lower-income backgrounds often lack access to private tutoring, extracurricular exposure, or technological resources that could supplement their language learning. The study calls for the creation of more dynamic and participatory learning environments, supported by collaboration among teachers, school administrators, and families. This holistic approach is posited as essential for increasing student motivation and engagement in English learning.

A complementary perspective is provided by Del Toro et al. (2019), who examine the broader sociocultural and educational factors that contribute to low English proficiency, with particular emphasis on reading comprehension. Their analysis situates Colombian English education within the global dominance of English as a lingua franca, underscoring the paradox that, despite widespread exposure to English-language media and technology, students' proficiency remains limited. The authors note that reading comprehension is especially weak in public schools, reflecting an educational system that prioritizes grammar and vocabulary drills over critical engagement with authentic texts.

The study highlights a crucial gap in empirical research on English reading comprehension at the school level, suggesting that this neglect has contributed to the persistence of low literacy in English. Furthermore, Del Toro et al. (2019) emphasize that language instruction in Colombia has often been framed as a technical process rather than a communicative and cultural one, thereby overlooking the sociocultural dimensions of language use. Their findings underscore the need for pedagogical strategies that connect English learning to students' everyday realities and cultural identities.

The issue of teacher preparation emerges as a central concern across multiple studies. Clavijo (2016) offers a critical assessment of English teaching in elementary schools, revealing how systemic flaws in teacher education undermine the effectiveness of bilingual policies. She argues that most teacher preparation programs in Colombia remain anchored in traditional, transmission-based models that emphasize linguistic theory and grammar instruction rather than critical and contextualized pedagogical practice.

As a result, many graduates enter the profession unprepared to navigate the diverse cultural and socioeconomic realities of public-school classrooms. The situation is exacerbated by the government's practice of assigning generalist elementary teachers who are not certified in English to teach the language at early levels. This decision, Clavijo (2016) contends, reflects an administrative rather than pedagogical rationale, one that treats English as a set of vocabulary lists to be memorized rather than a communicative practice. Such measures not only compromise the

quality of instruction but also place teachers in ethically and professionally precarious positions, as they are expected to teach a subject in which they lack formal expertise.

Clavijo (2016) further critiques the national standards for foreign language learning, which remain narrowly focused on grammatical competence and fail to connect language education to students lived experiences and civic identities. In contrast, she advocates for pedagogical models grounded in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which promote the integration of language and disciplinary content through creative, multimodal, and socially relevant projects. Citing examples of CLIL-based approaches that enhance both linguistic and civic competencies, Clavijo (2016) calls for comprehensive reforms in teacher education and professional development. Such reforms would enable educators to design learning experiences that cultivate critical citizenship and intercultural awareness, rather than treating English as a decontextualized academic exercise. Her critique underscores the need to reconsider how language policies intersect with teacher preparation, classroom practice, and students' socio-affective engagement.

This concern with early education is echoed by de Mejía (2009), whose analysis of the National Bilingual Programme exposes the structural imbalance in resource allocation between primary and secondary education. Despite the program's stated goal of promoting English learning from early grades, the majority of investments have been concentrated in high schools and universities. As a result, primary school teachers who play a crucial role in shaping students' initial attitudes toward English receive limited professional development opportunities and lack institutional support. De Mejía (2009) argues that this neglect undermines the long-term

sustainability of bilingual education, as weak foundations in early schooling make it difficult for students to achieve higher levels of proficiency later on. The article concludes with a call to value the voices of elementary teachers in policy-making processes, recognizing their expertise and experience as vital for contextualizing bilingual education within local realities. Her insights reveal that students' disengagement in higher grades may partially stem from early experiences of inadequate or uninspired English instruction.

The cumulative findings of these studies suggest that the challenges of English language teaching in Colombian public education are both systemic and multidimensional. Structural inequities such as insufficient funding, large class sizes, and uneven teacher qualifications interact with ideological and pedagogical issues to perpetuate low proficiency and motivation. Students' disinterest in English, as observed by Contreras Avendaño et al. (2024), is not merely a reflection of individual apathy but a symptom of broader systemic failures. Policies that treat English as an economic instrument rather than a communicative bridge have contributed to the perception that English learning is detached from local identities and practical relevance. Teachers, positioned at the intersection of policy and practice, often struggle to reconcile these conflicting expectations while working under precarious conditions.

Moreover, the literature collectively emphasizes the need for contextualized, participatory, and culturally responsive pedagogies. Clavijo (2016) and de Mejía (2009) advocate for approaches that view learners as social agents capable of using English to express their identities and engage critically with the world. Similarly, Correa and González (2016) highlight the importance of

teacher empowerment and professional development as preconditions for successful policy implementation. Del Toro et al. (2019) expand this argument by underscoring the role of literacy in bridging the gap between global communication demands and local educational realities. Across these studies, there is a shared recognition that student motivation and achievement cannot be improved solely through curricular reform or standardized testing; instead, they require the creation of educational environments that foster autonomy, curiosity, and a sense of purpose in learning English.

These contributions, several key themes emerge. First, there exists a persistent disjunction between policy rhetoric and classroom realities, driven by the centralization of decision-making and the lack of teacher agency. Second, English teaching in Colombia continues to suffer from insufficient investment in teacher education and early language instruction, which limits students' exposure to quality English learning experiences. Third, the sociocultural positioning of English as an elite marker rather than an inclusive communicative resource reinforces patterns of inequality and discourages motivation among students from marginalized backgrounds. Finally, there is a growing scholarly consensus that sustainable improvement in English proficiency requires collaborative engagement among policymakers, educators, families, and communities, aimed at redefining English not as a foreign imposition but as a shared means of participation in global and local discourses.

Taken together, the literature reviewed here provides a robust foundation for understanding the context of the present study. It reveals that eleventh-grade students' low valuation of English

is embedded in a broader ecology of educational challenges, policy misalignments, and sociocultural attitudes. Addressing this issue, therefore, demands not only pedagogical innovation but also a critical rethinking of how English is conceptualized and positioned within Colombia's educational landscape. The collective message from these scholars is clear: meaningful progress in bilingual education requires policies that listen to teachers, pedagogies that engage students as active participants, and learning environments that connect English to the realities, aspirations, and identities of Colombian youth.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Approach

This study adopted a mixed-method research approach with a predominantly quantitative orientation complemented by qualitative elements. The use of a survey questionnaire as the main data collection tool allowed for the combination of numerical data with open-ended responses, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions, attitudes, and motivations toward English language learning.

The quantitative component provided measurable insights into general trends such as the frequency of English use, perceived usefulness, and classroom engagement while the qualitative component offered deeper perspectives through students' written comments. This methodological approach was particularly suitable for the study's objectives, as it allowed the researchers to identify not only patterns and tendencies across the population but also the underlying reasons and

meanings that explain those patterns within the educational and sociocultural context of Colombian public schools.

4.2 Research Design

An exploratory research design will be employed, focusing on two distinct public secondary schools being Institución Educativa Técnico Dámaso Zapata and Institución Educativa Maiporé respectively. The reason why these two public secondary schools were chosen is that the two pre-service teachers can easily conduct any sort of investigation since a close relative of one of them attends Institución Educativa Maiporé and, the other pre-service teacher implemented the mandatory teaching practicum in Institución Educativa Técnico Dámaso Zapata. This design will allow for a comparative analysis of the students' perceptions across different institutional contexts, potentially revealing similarities and differences in the factors influencing their views.

4.3 Sample

The sample will consist of approximately 70 eleventh-grade students from the two selected public schools. Participants will be selected using convenience sampling which focuses on selecting participants who are easily accessible and readily available to the researcher. We decided to use this sample method as it will be easier for us to work with the students as they don't need to have specific characteristics which would reduce our field of investigation and data collection.

4.3.1 Schools

As stated before, the two public institutions that were selected are Institución Educativa Técnico Dámaso Zapata and Institución Educativa Maiporé. Both are in the city of Bucaramanga. The former is in a neighborhood called “La Universidad” since it is close to renowned university Universidad Industrial de Santander, the university the two pre-service teachers go to. The latter is in a neighborhood called Kennedy in the north of the city. Both schools foster between 2500 and 4000 students respectively from elementary through secondary level suggesting that there is a strong socioeconomic and demographic diversity.

4.4 Data Collection Instruments:

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire designed to gather quantitative and qualitative information from eleventh-grade students regarding their perceptions of English language learning. The survey included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, allowing researchers to identify general trends as well as to explore individual perspectives in greater depth. According to Goodfellow (2023), with the right design, survey research can generalize from a sample to a broader population

The questionnaire addressed aspects such as students’ personal interest in English, perceived usefulness of the language, attitudes toward classroom methodologies, motivational factors, and socio-cultural influences. This instrument was chosen because it allows for the collection of data from a relatively large sample in a structured yet flexible manner, facilitating statistical analysis while also capturing students’ opinions and suggestions in their own words.

4.5 Information Analysis Method

Given that the primary data collection instrument in this study was a survey questionnaire, the analysis process combined descriptive statistical analysis for the closed-ended questions and thematic categorization for the open-ended responses. This mixed analytical approach allowed the researchers to obtain both quantitative trends and qualitative insights regarding students' perceptions of English language learning.

For the quantitative component, descriptive statistics were applied to summarize and interpret the frequency and percentage of responses in each category. This method provided a clear overview of the general tendencies among participants, such as their levels of motivation, attitudes toward English classes, and the perceived usefulness of the language. The results were organized into tables to facilitate comparison across variables and to highlight dominant patterns in the students' answers.

For the qualitative component, responses to open-ended questions were analyzed through a simplified version of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved reading and coding students' written comments to identify recurring ideas, such as preferred learning strategies, sources of motivation, or perceived barriers to learning English. The process included three main steps: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading, (2) generation of initial

codes to classify common concepts, and (3) identification and interpretation of broader themes that reflected the students' collective perspectives.

This dual analysis method was particularly appropriate for this research because it integrates numerical clarity with interpretative depth, allowing the data to reveal both what students think (through percentages and frequencies) and why they hold those perceptions (through thematic interpretation). By combining quantitative and qualitative insights, the analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' attitudes toward English language learning in the Colombian public-school context.

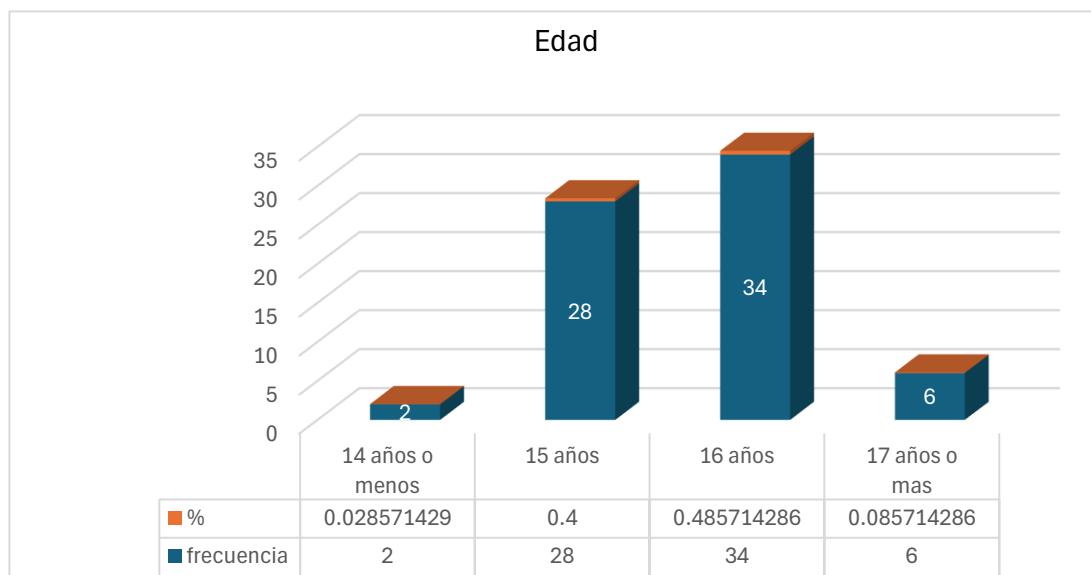
5. Results and Analysis

5.1 Demographic Information

The participating group is mostly between 15 and 16 years old, with 89% concentrated in this age range. Only 9% are over 17 years old, and 3% are 14 or younger. This distribution is consistent with the expected age for eleventh grade students in Colombian public institutions, suggesting a homogeneous group in terms of cognitive development and academic maturity.

Figure 1

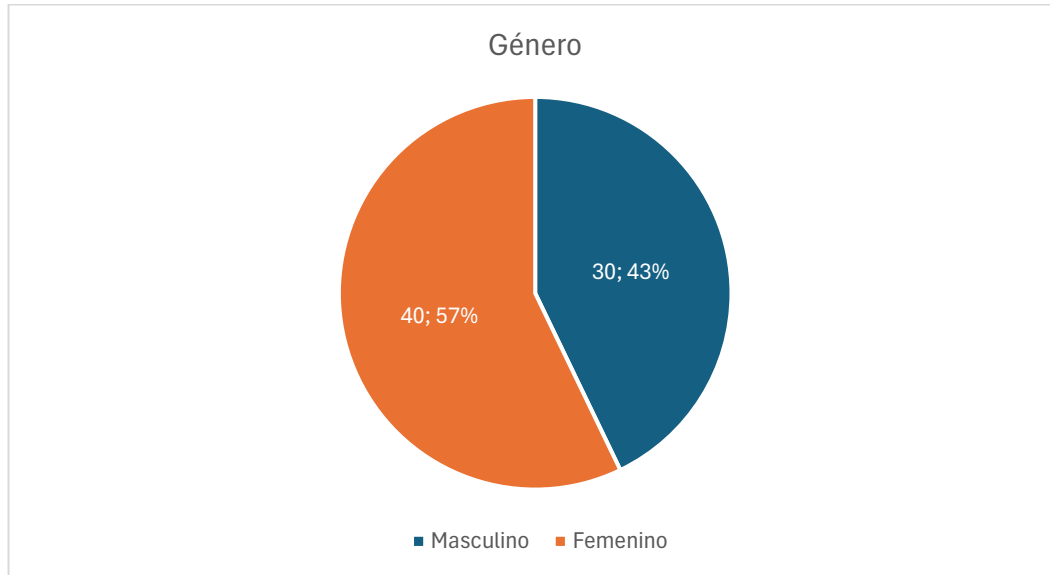
Demographic information: Age of the participants



From a pedagogical perspective, this age homogeneity is relevant because interest and attitude towards learning a foreign language vary significantly with age. At 15 and 16 years of age, young people often face the transition to higher education or the world of work, stages in which extrinsic motivations (such as study or employment opportunities) become more important. Therefore, the perception of English as a tool for the future may be in the process of consolidation, but still mediated by emotional, social and school context factors. In addition, the fact that a minority (9%) is over 17 years of age could indicate repetition or interruptions in the school trajectory, common phenomena in public education. These cases may reflect greater challenges in language learning, due to previous experiences of academic frustration or lack of continuity in teaching.

Figure 2

Demographic information: Gender of the participants



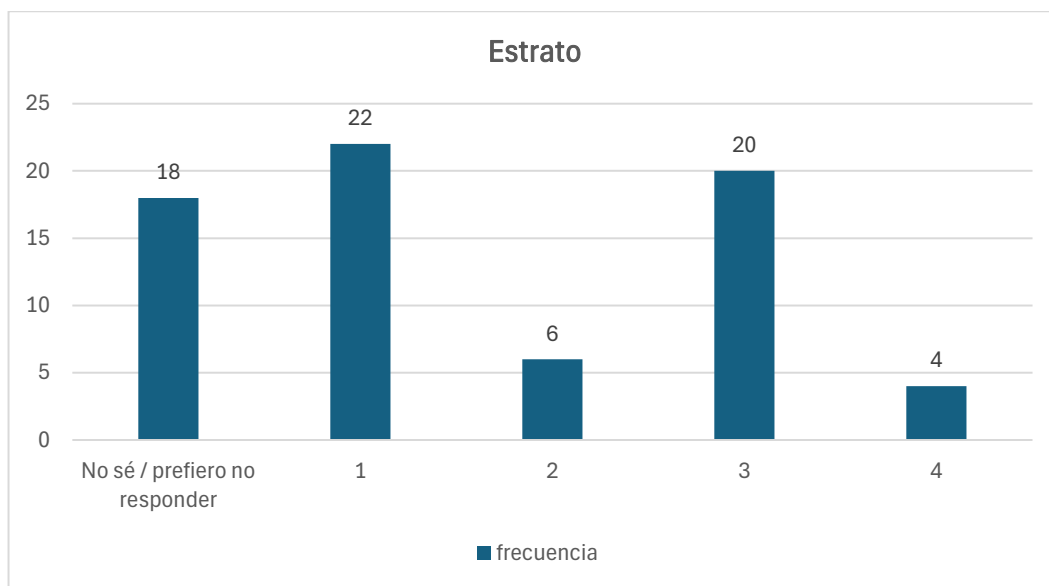
The group is made up mostly of women (57%) and to a lesser extent of men (43%). Although the difference is not drastic, it is relevant to note that gender composition can influence patterns of motivation and participation in class. Various studies on language learning (Oxford, 1993; Dörnyei, 2001) point out that female students tend to show greater affective disposition and commitment towards language learning, while men tend to show more instrumental interest, related to the use of English for technology or entertainment.

In the Colombian context, this difference could imply that women have a more positive attitude towards academic English activities, although they could also experience greater communicative anxiety in oral contexts. On the other hand, male students could be more exposed

to the language through video games or networks, but with less school involvement. This combination of factors generates a diversity of experiences within the classroom that must be considered when designing inclusive and equitable teaching strategies. Therefore, although gender difference does not determine linguistic success, it does reflect cultural patterns of socialization that affect attitudes towards learning. Recognizing these differences could help teachers implement varied activities that respond to both expressive and instrumental motivations.

Figure 3

Demographic information: Social stratum of the participants



As for the social stratum, the results show that 40% of the students belong to strata 1 and 2, that is, low-income sectors, while 29% are located in stratum 3 and only 6% in stratum 4. None belong to stratum 5, and 26% preferred not to answer. This confirms that the participating

institutions mainly serve a population of popular and lower-middle sectors, characteristic of the public system of Bucaramanga. Socioeconomic status has a direct impact on English learning, as it determines access to complementary educational resources (internet, academies, trips, exchanges) and cultural exposure to the language.

In this case, students from lower strata face greater technological and economic limitations, which restricts their contact with real contexts of English use outside the classroom. Likewise, differences in stratum can affect the perception of the usefulness of English. For some students, language can be seen as distant knowledge or not very applicable to their immediate environment. However, others associate it with social mobility and access to better opportunities, which generates significant instrumental motivation. In any case, the results suggest the need for public schools to compensate for these inequalities in access, promoting inclusive and equitable pedagogical strategies.

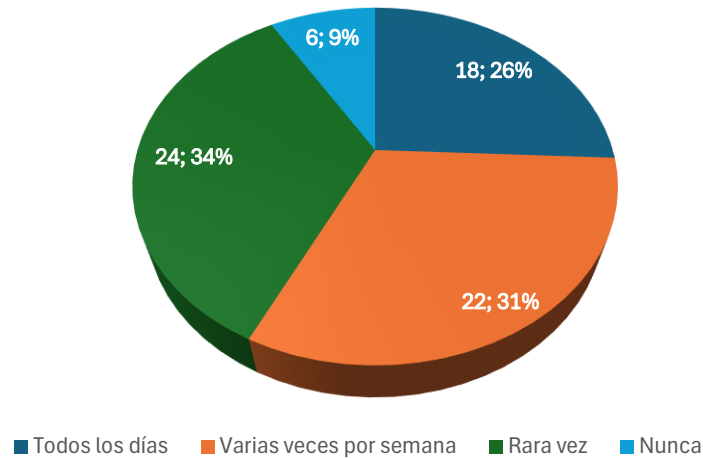
5.2 Students' perceptions of the relevance of English to their current studies and future aspirations

The first objective seeks to understand how students perceive the usefulness and importance of English in their daily, academic and professional lives. To do this, the answers to the questions related to the practice of the language outside the classroom, the emotions they experience when using it, and the situations in which they would like to apply it are analyzed.

Figure 4

Frequency of practice outside of school

¿Con qué frecuencia practicas inglés fuera del colegio (música, series, videojuegos, redes sociales, etc.)?



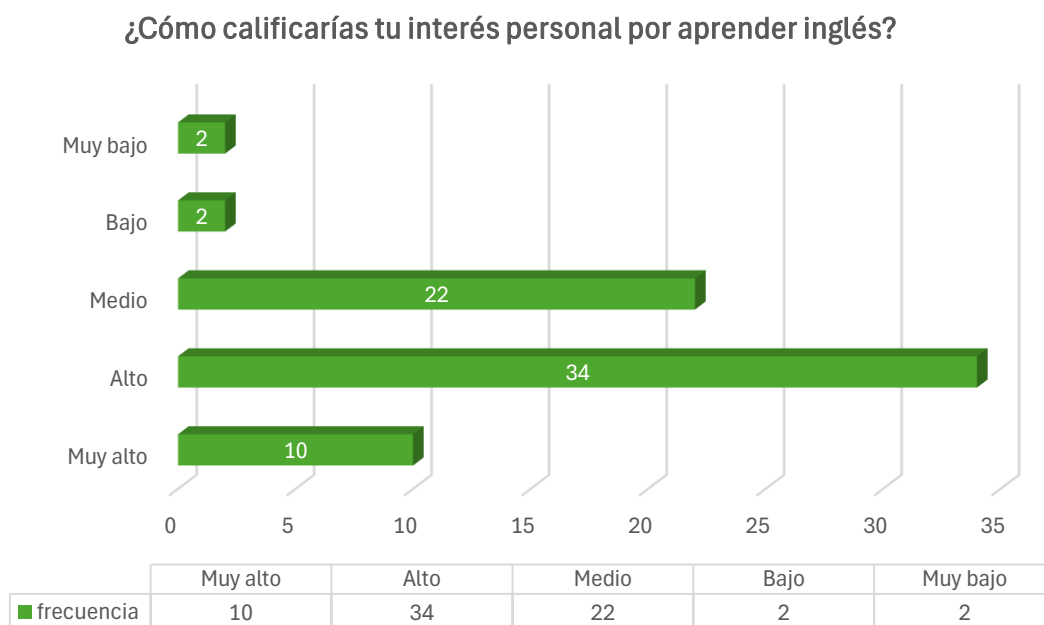
The analysis shows that, although a relevant proportion of students (57%) say they practice English every day or several times a week, there are still 43% who do it rarely or never. This data reveals a significant division in informal exposure to the language, which could be related to personal interests, access to technological resources or the family environment. In Colombian educational contexts, it is common for the practice of English to be limited to the classroom, without extending to everyday life.

However, the fact that more than half of those surveyed claim to use English outside of school (whether in music, series or video games) suggests a growing media exposure, although possibly not intentional or pedagogically guided. This coincides with what Calderón and Martínez (2024) point out, who argue that spontaneous contact with English through digital means does not

guarantee the effective acquisition of the language if it is not integrated into a reflective practice. Therefore, although there is a valuable potential for autonomous and contextualized learning, it does not seem to be fully exploited in school dynamics.

Figure 5

Personal interest in learning English



In addition, 63% of students expressed a high or very high interest in learning English, which indicates a generally positive attitude towards the foreign language. This finding is encouraging, as it suggests that young people recognize the value of language as part of their training and personal development. However, 31% expressed medium interest and 6% rated it as

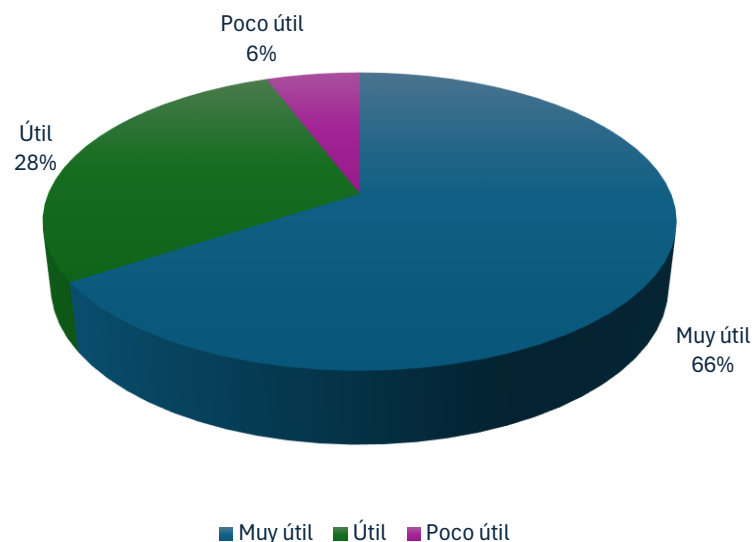
low or very low, which shows that there are still segments of the group that are unable to connect emotionally with the subject.

This disparity can be explained by the contextual conditions of the Colombian public education system, where limited resources, lack of real contact with native speakers, and traditional teaching reduce intrinsic motivation. The results show that, although interest exists, it depends to a large extent on the way English is presented in the classroom: if classes are perceived as repetitive or insignificant, motivation tends to decrease. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen pedagogical strategies based on autonomy, interaction and the relationship with the student's real life.

Figure 6

Perceived usefulness of English

¿Qué tan útil consideras el inglés para tu vida personal o profesional en Colombia?

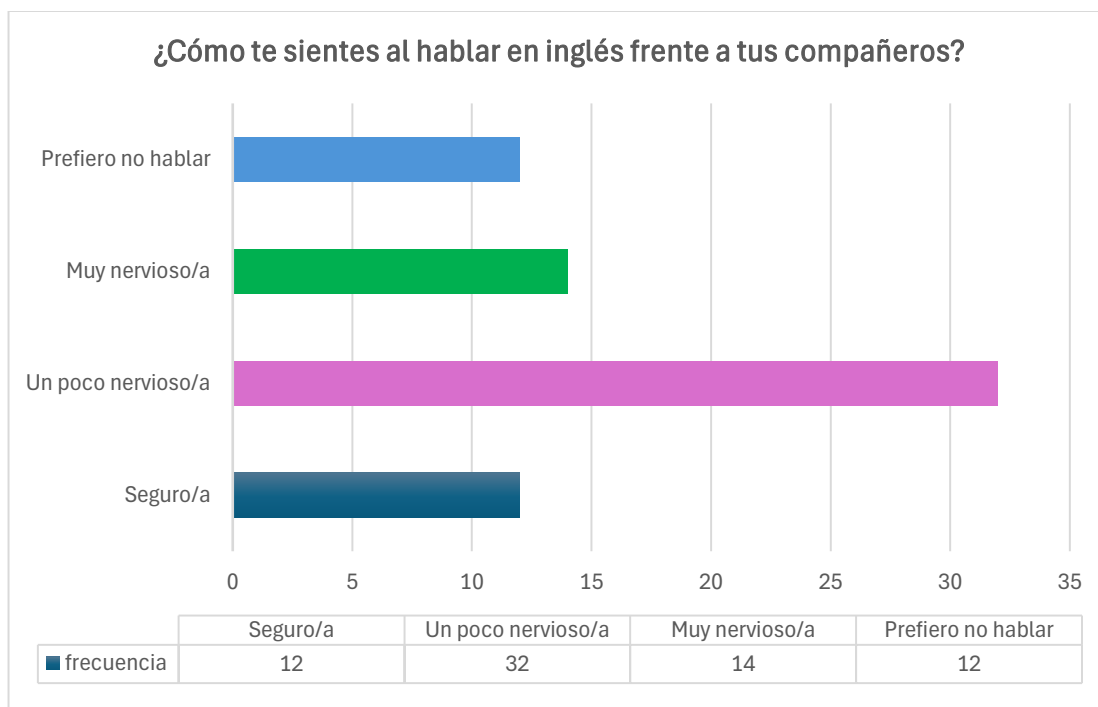


On the other hand, the results show that 95% of respondents consider English to be "very useful" or "useful" for their personal or professional lives. This assessment confirms the strong presence of English as a symbol of progress and opportunity within the youth imagination. In Colombia, language is associated with access to higher education, better jobs, and international mobility, reinforcing its instrumental rather than cultural character.

However, this recognition does not always translate into active or sustained practice. Many students value English for its future benefits but perceive it as knowledge distant from their immediate reality. Consequently, although they understand its importance, not everyone develops study habits or strategies to improve it outside the classroom. This phenomenon is common in contexts where English is taught from a grammatical and uncommunicative approach, which makes it difficult for young people to perceive its practical applicability in everyday life.

Figure 7

Emotions when speaking in English



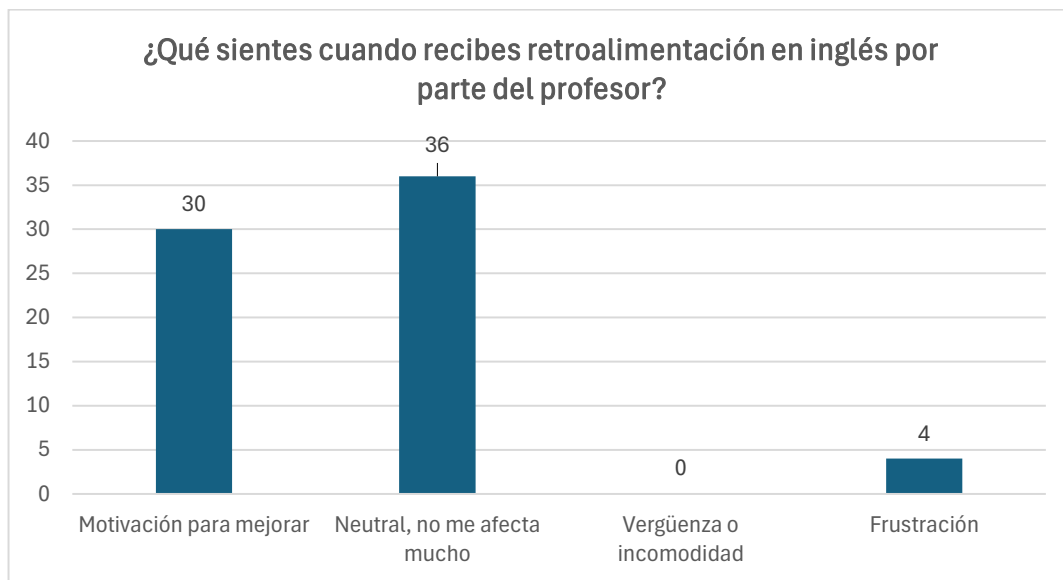
The results show that the majority of students (66%) express nervousness or insecurity when speaking English in front of their classmates. Only 17% feel safe doing so. This finding reflects low communicative self-confidence, which is frequently associated with methodologies focused on correction and not on functional communication. The literature on language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) has shown that fear of making mistakes and peer judgment is determining factors that inhibit oral participation.

In this case, the data suggest that students recognize the importance of English, but do not feel emotionally prepared to use it in social situations, which directly affects their motivation and willingness to learn. This lack of security can be interpreted as a reflection of the traditional approach still predominant in English classes in Colombian public schools, where learning is

oriented more towards grammar and translation than towards oral production and communicative interaction.

Figure 8

Reactions to teacher feedback



43% of students perceive teacher feedback as a source of motivation, while 51% express indifference. It is striking that none of them associates feedback with embarrassment or discomfort, which could be interpreted positively as a relatively respectful classroom environment. However, the high percentage of neutrality indicates that feedback is not being leveraged as a meaningful learning tool. This could be due to the fact that students do not understand the formative purpose of the teacher's comments or perceive them as part of an evaluation routine with no impact on their

personal progress. Consequently, although the emotional relationship with the teacher is not negative, it does seem to lack dynamism and transformative motivation.

Figure 9

Situations where you would like to use English



79% of students selected the "all of the above" option, indicating that they recognize the integral importance of English for various areas: academic, professional, cultural, and social. Although some answered specifically "travel" (14%) or "entertainment" (7%), the vast majority perceive language as a versatile tool with multiple benefits. This result seems to contrast with the initial hypothesis of the study, which suggested a low valuation of English.

However, the most appropriate interpretation is that students do value English, but they are unable to connect that assessment with their current school experience. In other words, they recognize the usefulness of the language, but they do not perceive that the classes they receive are really contributing to the development of these skills. This highlights a mismatch between extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation: interest in English exists, but it does not translate into engagement with classes due to the lack of connection between school content and students' personal interests.

5.3 Factors in the learning environment that influence the perception of the importance of English

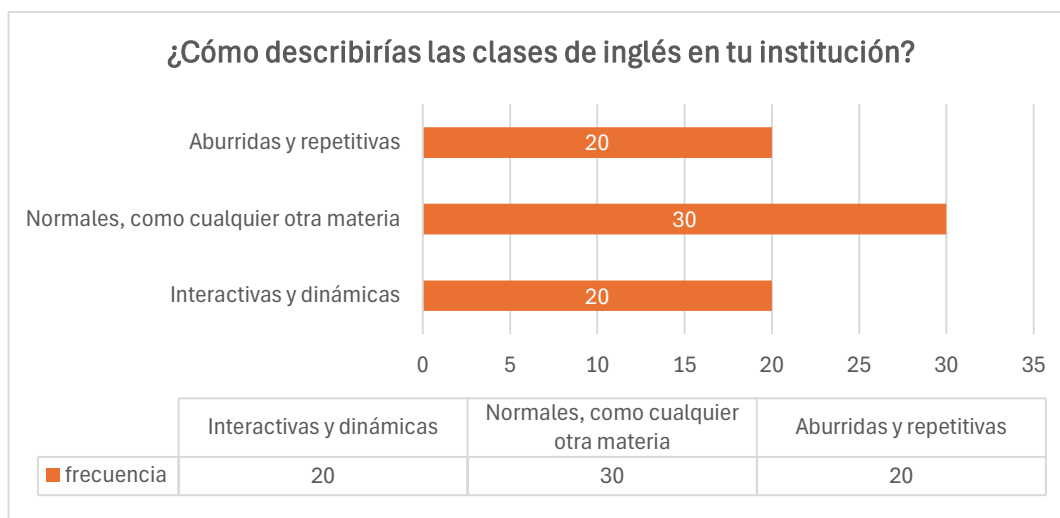
This second objective seeks to examine the internal factors of the educational process, teaching methodology, type of activities, teacher-student relationship and classroom dynamics that affect how students perceive the usefulness and relevance of English. The results in this area allow us to understand the extent to which current pedagogical practices promote or limit students' motivation and commitment to language learning.

43% of students perceive English classes as "normal, like any other subject", while 29% consider them "interactive and dynamic" and another 29% "boring and repetitive". This balance between positive and negative perceptions shows that the process of teaching English does not yet manage to clearly differentiate itself from other traditional subjects, despite the fact that language learning requires communicative and experiential strategies.

The fact that almost a third consider classes boring indicates that there is a lack of methodological innovation in some contexts. The teaching of English is still, in many cases, focused on the memorization of grammatical structures, which limits the active participation of the student. To reverse this perception, it is necessary to promote an approach focused on communication, on the resolution of real tasks and on the use of digital tools that connect the language with the daily lives of students.

Figure 10

Description of English classes

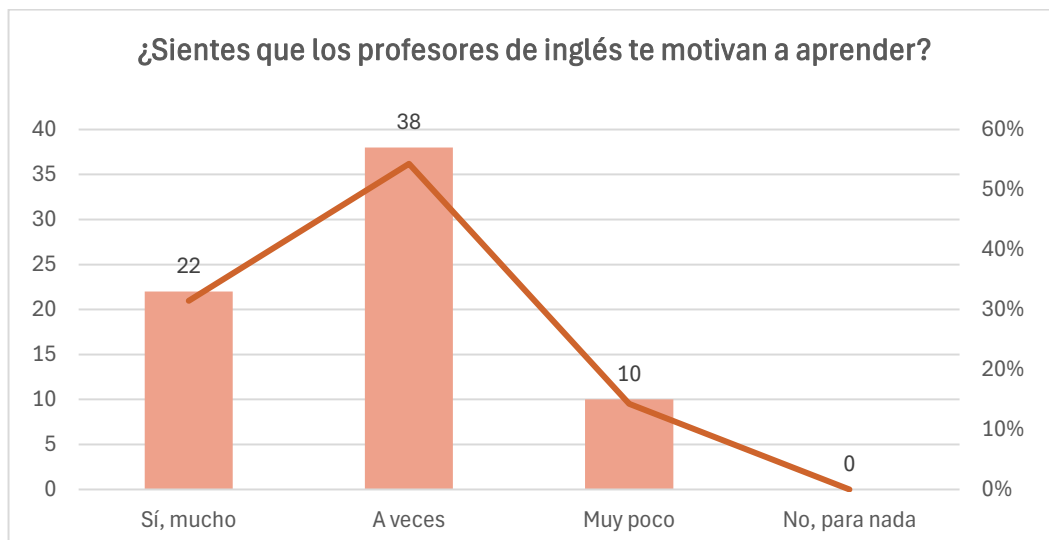


Similarly, another result to consider is that more than half of the students (54%) consider that their teachers motivate them "sometimes", while 31% feel that they do "a lot". Only 14% perceive little motivation. These data suggest that the teacher plays a moderate motivating role:

although most recognize their effort, they do not always succeed in inspiring a sustained commitment to the language.

Figure 11

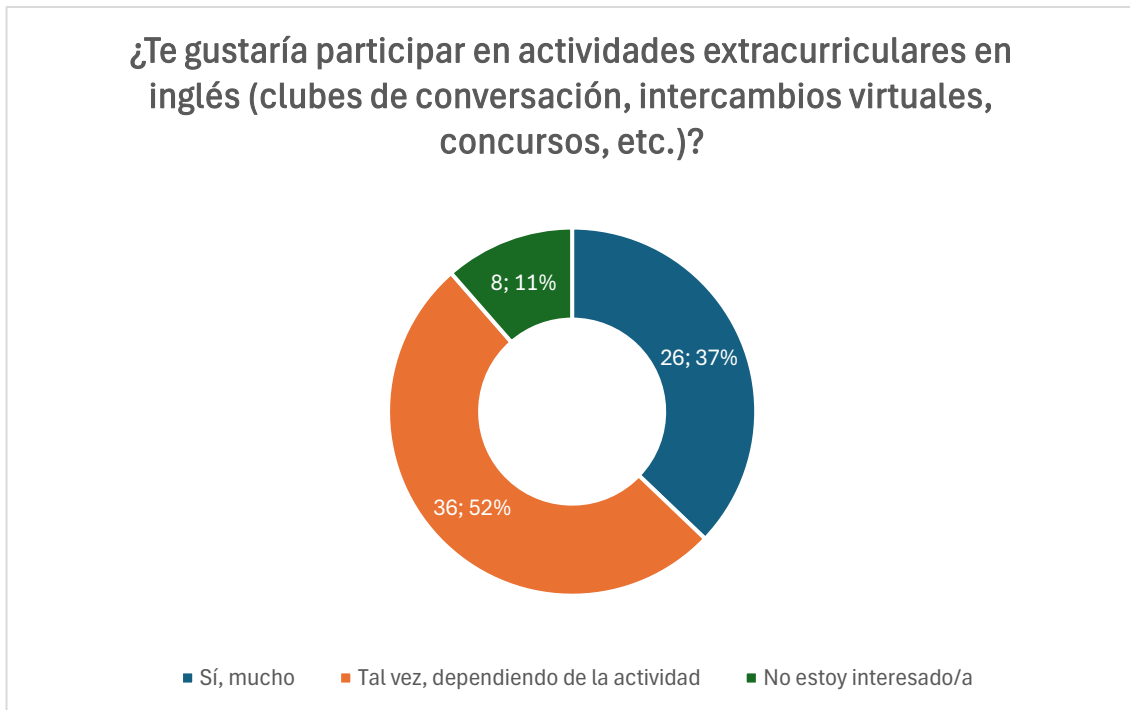
Teacher motivation



In this sense, teacher motivation should not be limited to the transmission of content, but to the construction of an emotionally safe and stimulating environment. Students who feel heard, valued, and supported tend to participate more actively and reduce their communicative anxiety. Therefore, pedagogical training must include socio-affective strategies that strengthen the bond between teacher and student, especially in public contexts where material conditions may be limited.

Figure 12

Desire to participate in extracurricular activities



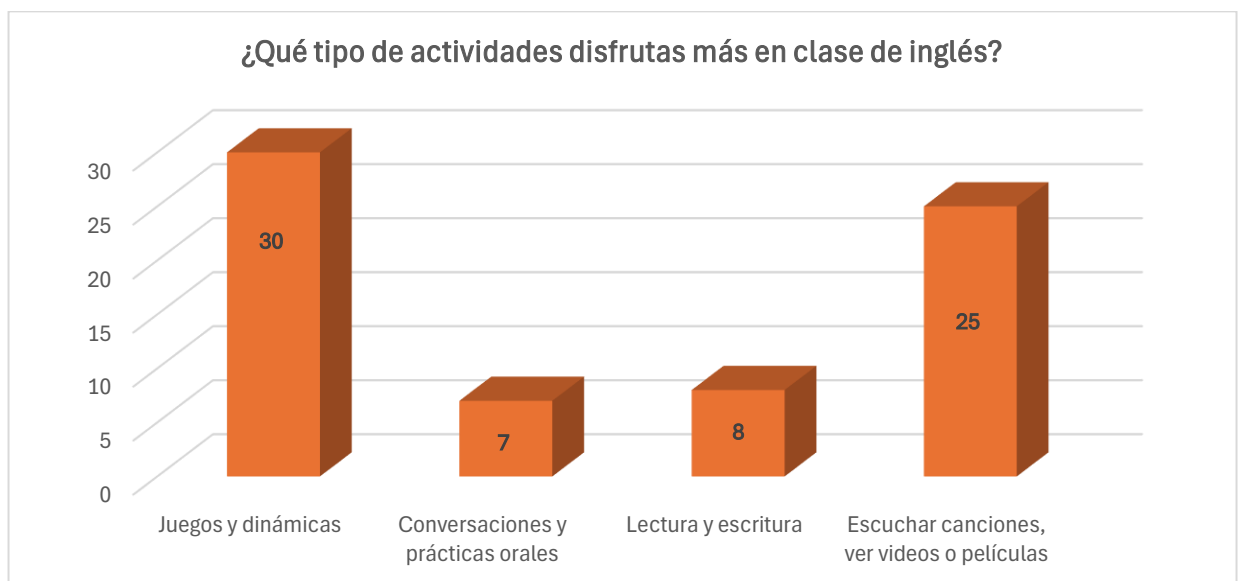
The results show a generally positive trend towards participation in complementary learning spaces: 88% of students express total or partial willingness to participate in extracurricular activities in English. This data is extremely relevant, as it shows a latent interest that could be used by educational institutions to strengthen the link between formal learning and practical experiences. The willingness to participate "depending on the activity" (51%) suggests that

students value dynamic, playful or experiential learning environments, but that the nature of the activity should be engaging and meaningful to them.

In other words, it is not enough to offer more spaces in English; These must be aligned with the cultural and technological interests of young people, for example, conversation clubs around video games, cinema, music or social networks. Empirical evidence suggests that situational motivation (Dörnyei, 2001) increases when students perceive a personal and contextual purpose in activities. Hence, the results indicate the need to design pedagogical strategies closer to the reality of young people, encouraging voluntary participation and experiential learning.

Figure 13

Favorite activities in class

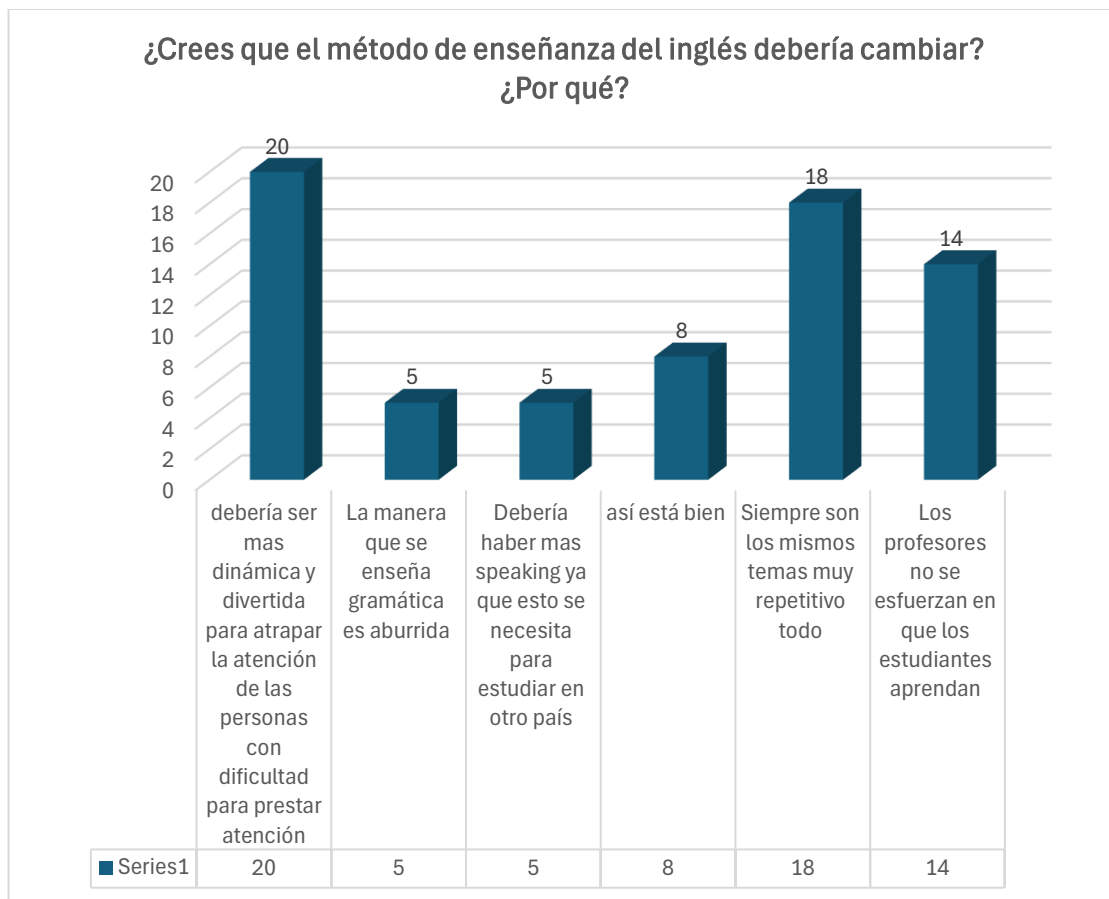


The data reveal a strong preference for recreational and audiovisual activities: 43% enjoy games and dynamics, and 36% prefer to listen to music or watch videos. In contrast, oral practices, reading and writing have significantly lower percentages. None of the students showed a liking for grammar exercises, which shows a resistance to traditional and repetitive methods. This information suggests that the motivational component of learning English is closely linked to the interactive and experiential nature of the class.

When activities involve movement, creativity, or emotional connection, students feel more engaged. On the other hand, when the tasks focus on the repetition or memorization of grammatical structures, interest decreases significantly. From a pedagogical point of view, this result indicates the need to rethink methodological strategies, incorporating communicative and active approaches (Communicative Language Teaching, CLT) or even task-based approaches (Task-Based Learning). These models, by prioritizing meaningful communication over formal correction, favor participation and reduce the linguistic anxiety observed in the first objective.

Figure 14

Perception of the current teaching method and suggestions for change

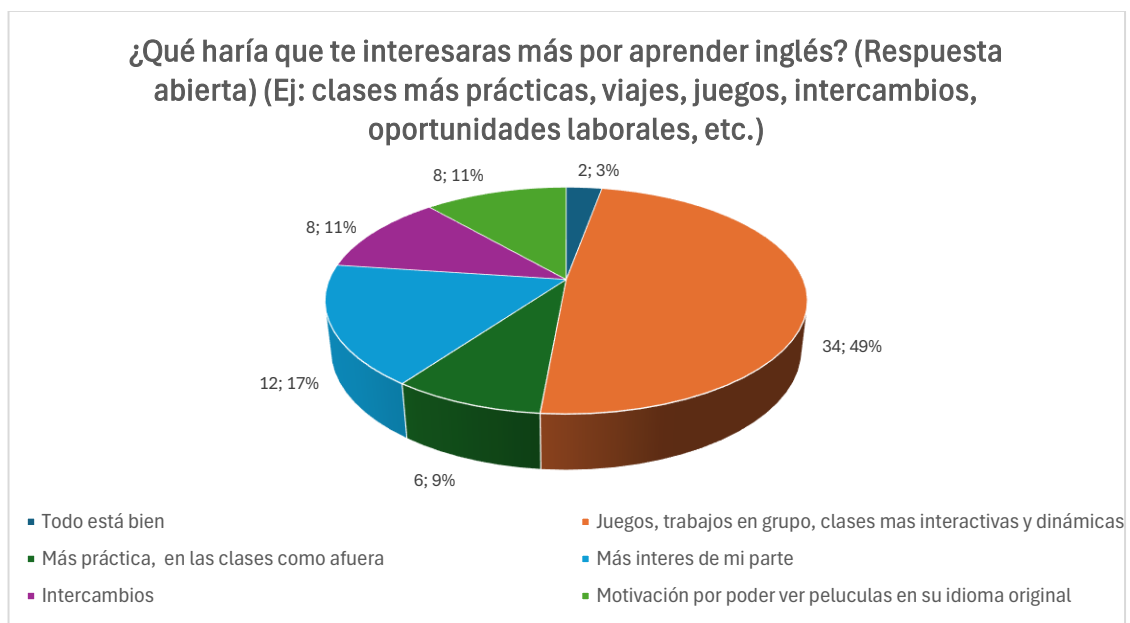


Regarding current teaching methods, most students (62%) express some type of dissatisfaction with the current methodology, either due to its monotony, lack of dynamism or scarce oral practice. Only 11% consider that the classes are fine as they are developed. The fact that 29% request more dynamic classes and 26% criticize thematic repetitiveness reinforces the perception of rigid teaching, focused on the textbook and grammar, without connection to the student's interests.

In addition, 20% explicitly mention the lack of teaching effort, which could reflect a gap in the pedagogical relationship or in the teacher's perception of commitment. These results show an urgent need for methodological renewal. Students seem to demand more experiential learning, based on interaction and creativity. They also suggest that the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning should be strengthened, promoting two-way communication and a more participatory environment.

Figure 15

Elements that would increase your interest in learning English



Regarding the elements that would make learning English more attractive, 49% of students highlight the need for more dynamic and interactive classes, which coincides with the previous findings. Overall, more than 60% propose active strategies (games, practice, exchanges) as the main motivator of motivation. These data corroborate the hypothesis that low interest does not come from a lack of appreciation of the language, but from a lack of motivation generated by unattractive methodologies.

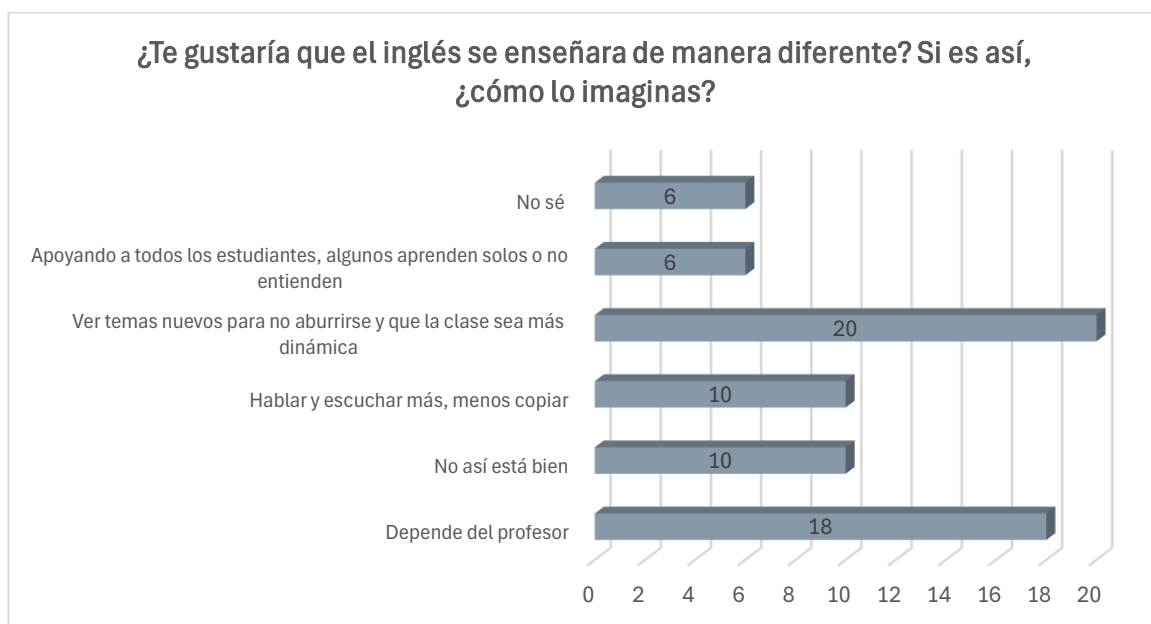
The recurrence of the desire for "more practice" also reveals a lack of real communicative spaces within the classroom, which hinders the development of oral competence and confidence. In summary, this set of results suggests that students demand more meaningful, participatory, and experiential teaching, in which English is perceived as a means of expression and not just as a compulsory subject.

5.4 Sociocultural factors that influence the perception of English

The third objective seeks to understand how factors outside the classroom such as personal experiences, the social environment, peer and family attitudes, and youth culture shape students' perceptions of English. Learning English does not take place in an educational vacuum; it is profoundly conditioned by sociocultural factors that shape students' expectations, attitudes, and possibilities. In Colombian contexts, where access to bilingual environments is limited, the perception of English depends to a large extent on how the social environment, the family, the media, and youth culture value it or not as a tool for progress. The results obtained in relation to these factors are analyzed below.

Figure 16

Preferences on how English should be taught



29% of students propose more dynamic classes with new content, while 26% consider that success depends on the teacher. Only 14% maintain that the classes are fine as they are. This result reflects an implicit recognition of the crucial role of the teacher as a motivational and cultural mediator. Likewise, the responses show that students identify monotony and lack of innovation as key factors of demotivation.

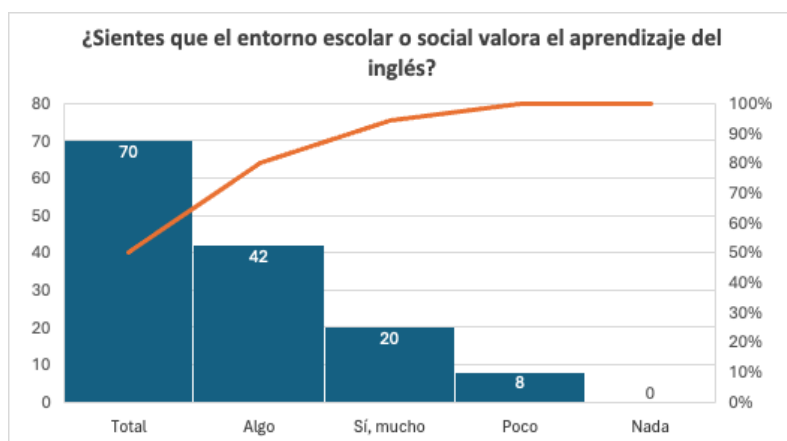
This result suggests that school culture is not adequately responding to the expectations of a generation exposed to constant technological stimuli. The insistence on the need to "speak and

listen more" highlights a socio-cultural desire for authentic communication, possibly influenced by the presence of English in social media, music and global media. This external contact generates curiosity and exposure, but the school fails to channel it into effective language competence.

The majority of students (60%) consider that their school and social environment values learning English "somewhat", while 29% perceive a high rating and 11% a low rating. This intermediate balance indicates that, although language is recognized as important, it is not yet perceived as a priority or an essential component of daily life within the educational and family environment.

Figure 17

Assessment of the environment for learning English



In many cases, young people associate English with a school subject rather than a tool for personal or professional development. This reflects the need for the educational institution,

together with the community, to reinforce the symbolic and functional value of English, promoting spaces where its real usefulness is evidenced, for example, in academic fairs, technological projects, and bilingual cultural activities. When relating this to results already analysed, almost half of the students (46%) feel "a little nervous" when speaking English in front of their classmates, while 20% experience high levels of nervousness and 17% prefer not to speak. Only 17% feel really safe. These data reflect the presence of communicative anxiety, a phenomenon widely documented in foreign language teaching, which can limit oral participation and the development of communicative competence.

The causes of this nervousness can be diverse: fear of error, lack of practice, little positive feedback or little culture of respect in the classroom. Therefore, teachers must create a safe emotional environment, where mistakes are seen as a learning opportunity. Implementing group and cooperative activities, in which the emphasis is on communication rather than correction, can help reduce anxiety and strengthen student confidence.

The analysis of sociocultural factors shows that students recognize the importance of English, but their environment does not yet offer the necessary conditions to maintain sustained motivation. Although there is cultural exposure to the language through music, cinema or the internet, this does not always translate into real opportunities for use or practice. Communicative anxiety, neutrality in the face of feedback, and the lack of connection between learning English and professional goals reflect a structural and cultural challenge: English is symbolically valued but not fully integrated into everyday life. The school, therefore, must act as a bridge between the

local context and the global world, promoting learning that is meaningful, emotionally safe and culturally relevant.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The primary objective of this study was to analyze the perceptions of eleventh-grade students in public institutions in Bucaramanga regarding the importance of learning English, examining the motivational, pedagogical, and sociocultural factors that shape these perceptions. The results obtained, analyzed in light of the theoretical framework and literature review, reveal a complex paradox: while an overwhelming majority of students (95%) recognize the instrumental utility of English for their personal and professional future, this valuation does not consistently translate into intrinsic motivation, sustained practice outside the classroom, or high self-efficacy in using the language. This dissociation between the abstract recognition of utility and the concrete learning experience constitutes the core of the discussion, which will be articulated around the motivational, pedagogical, and sociocultural dimensions, integrating the theoretical frameworks of Gardner, Dörnyei, Eccles, and Vygotsky.

From the perspective of Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et al., 1983), the results are eloquent. The high utility value assigned to English is undeniable; students associate it with travel, higher education, better jobs, and access to global culture (79% selected "all of the above" in the desired use situations). This finding aligns with the policy analyses of Gómez Sará (2017) and Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada-Sánchez (2016), who note how national discourse has successfully linked bilingualism with competitiveness and social mobility. However, the expectancy for success

is notably low. Sixty-six percent of students report feeling nervous or insecure when speaking English in class, and only 17% feel confident. This low self-efficacy, also documented by Ellis (2015), acts as a powerful disincentive. Students perceive the emotional and cognitive cost of learning English (the anxiety, the effort) as high, while their expectations of successfully achieving it are low. Consequently, despite valuing the goal, many do not fully commit to the process, explaining the gap between the 63% who report high personal interest and the 43% who rarely or never practice the language outside the classroom.

Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model provides an additional lens to understand this paradox. The integrativeness component appears weakly developed. For these students, English-speaking communities are abstract entities, distant from their immediate reality in Bucaramanga. Their exposure to English is mostly mediated (music, series), which, while generating cultural recognition, does not necessarily foster a deep desire to integrate into a specific community, as anticipated by Saville-Troike and Barto (2016). On the other hand, attitudes towards the learning situation are ambivalent. A significant 29% describe classes as "boring and repetitive" and another 43% as "normal, like any other subject." This perception of monotony and lack of communicative relevance, widely documented in the Colombian literature by Arias & Guapacha (2021) and Contreras Avendaño et al. (2024), erodes motivation. When the classroom experience focuses on grammar and memorization, rather than meaningful communication, it weakens the effort, desire, and positive affect that Gardner identifies as central to motivation itself.

Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System offers perhaps the most powerful explanation. The results suggest that these students' Ideal L2 Self is diffuse and lacks energizing power. Although they recognize the utility of English, they find it difficult to project themselves as competent and confident users of the language. Socioeconomic conditions, such as the predominant social stratum (40% in strata 1 and 2), limit access to experiences that could nurture this ideal self, such as cultural exchanges or private bilingual education, reinforcing the inequalities pointed out by Gass et al. (2020). The Ought-to L2 Self, meanwhile, seems to be based more on a generic societal mandate ("it's important to know English") than on direct and constant family or social pressure. The fact that 60% consider their environment to value English only "somewhat" indicates that this mandate is not strong enough to sustain motivation on its own. Finally, the L2 Learning Experience emerges as the critical factor. The overwhelming preference for playful and audiovisual activities (79% in total) over grammatical exercises (0%) and the explicit request for more dynamic methods (49%) and oral interaction (evidenced in the suggestions for change) demonstrate that the current methodology is not aligned with what Dörnyei identifies as a key generator of motivation. When the classroom experience is perceived as irrelevant or demotivating, it undermines both the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to L2 Self.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory illuminates the findings related to classroom dynamics. The high level of communicative anxiety (66% feel nervous) indicates that the classroom is not functioning effectively as a community of practice where students feel safe to take risks and engage in meaningful interactions. The fear of error and negative evaluation by peers creates an affective barrier that inhibits participation within the Zone of Proximal Development

(ZPD). For learning to occur, students need the mediation of More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), primarily the teacher, in a supportive environment.

The results on teacher feedback are revealing while 43% find it motivating, a significant 51% are indifferent. This suggests that, in many cases, feedback is not fulfilling its function as effective scaffolding. It may be focused on correcting errors in isolation, rather than on building meaning and the gradual improvement of communicative competence, as more current approaches would advocate. The teacher, often facing systemic challenges such as overcrowded classes and limited resources (Clavijo, 2016; Calderón & Martínez, 2024), may be forced to

adopt the role of a knowledge transmitter rather than a facilitator of social interactions that mediate learning.

The lack of opportunities for authentic and meaningful oral practice is, therefore, both a pedagogical and a sociocultural failure. The classroom is not replicating, not even in a simulated way, the social contexts in which language is used naturally. This creates a disconnect between "school English" (grammatical, formal) and "real-life English" (communicative, contextual) that students intuit through the media and desire to use. The willingness of 88% to participate in extracurricular activities reinforces this idea: students are seeking alternative social spaces where the language can be used for a genuine purpose, beyond the constraints of the formal curriculum.

Learning English does not occur in a vacuum, and factors external to the classroom exert a powerful influence. The fact that only 29% of students perceive their school and social environment as valuing English learning "a lot" is crucial. This perception of moderate or low environmental support reflects what Brown & Lee (2025) identify as a lack of meaningful external pressure (Ought-to L2 Self). In contexts where English is not perceived as an immediate necessity for survival or local success, such as in communities with strong local economies or limited access to globalized industries, instrumental motivation wanes.

However, it is important to nuance this apparent environmental indifference. Exposure to English through popular and digital culture is, in fact, massive. The out-of-class practice reported (57% do it daily or several times a week) is most likely mediated by the consumption of music, video games, and series on digital platforms. This generates a form of media integrativeness (Dewaele & Li, 2020) that, while different from the desire to integrate into a specific community, constitutes a highly potent motivational entry point. The challenge, as Del Toro et al. (2019) point out, is that this exposure is mostly passive and receptive. The school is not capitalizing on this spontaneous cultural interest to turn it into an active and reflective practice. The gap between the consumption of English-language content and the inability to produce it orally in class is a testament to this missed opportunity.

The socioeconomic composition of the sample (predominance of strata 1, 2, and 3) also contextualizes these findings. Limitations in economic resources translate into unequal access to tools that could supplement learning, such as private tutoring, specialized software, or stable

internet connections for quality educational content. This widens the expectancy-for-success gap, as students from more privileged contexts have external scaffolding that public school students lack, perpetuating the historical inequalities analyzed by Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada-Sánchez (2016).

In light of the preceding discussion, the following main conclusions can be drawn: The perception of the importance of English among eleventh-grade students is predominantly instrumental and abstract, but it is not internalized as an intrinsic motivation or as self-efficacy. Students value English for its future benefits, but this valuation fails to translate into a sustained commitment to learning due to low expectancy for success, an unmotivating classroom experience, and widespread communicative anxiety.

The main bottleneck for motivation lies in the teaching methodology and the learning experience in the classroom. The persistence of a grammatical-translation approach, repetitive and teacher-centered, documented in the literature and confirmed by student perceptions, is incompatible with the needs of a digital generation and the principles of modern motivational frameworks. The lack of meaningful, dynamic, and playful communicative practices prevents the development of the Ideal L2 Self and weakens the motivation generated by direct experience.

The sociocultural and socioeconomic context acts as an amplifier of motivational and pedagogical difficulties. Limited exposure to English-speaking communities, the perception that English has marginal utility in the immediate environment, and inequalities in access to complementary resources create an environment that does not sufficiently support student

motivation. Communicative anxiety is, in part, a symptom of a social environment that does not normalize error as part of learning.

There is latent and untapped motivational potential, linked to youth and digital culture. The high willingness to participate in extracurricular activities and the preference for interactive and media-based activities indicate that students are eager for an approach to English that is relevant to their interests and lifestyles. The school has the opportunity to act as a bridge between this digital Anglophone world and the development of formal communicative competencies.

To transform the motivational paradox into a virtuous cycle of learning, the following implications are proposed, aimed at different levels of the educational system:

- ***Transition towards Communicative and Task-Based Approaches:*** It is imperative to replace grammar-focused teaching with methodologies that prioritize meaningful communication. Task-Based Learning (TBL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) can contextualize learning, connecting it with problems or themes of interest to students (technology, environment, art, sports), thereby increasing utility value and positive experience.
- ***Critical Integration of Digital and Popular Culture:*** Teachers must systematically and pedagogically incorporate the resources students already consume (social media, memes, video games, music, YouTubers). This not only increases intrinsic motivation but also develops digital critical competence.

- ***Creation of Emotionally Safe Environments:*** It is essential to implement strategies to reduce language anxiety. This includes fostering a culture where error is seen as a learning opportunity, using scaffolding techniques that ensure gradual success, and promoting collaborative work where the communicative load is shared.
- ***Continuous Training in Active Methodologies and Affective Classroom Management:*** Professional development programs must go beyond linguistic proficiency and focus on training teachers in the aforementioned methodologies, as well as strategies for building resilience and confidence in their students.
- ***Strengthening the Teacher's Role as Mediator and Motivator:*** Teachers must be empowered to transcend their role as evaluators and become facilitators who inspire, model, and provide formative feedback that students perceive as relevant and motivating (reducing the 51% indifference).
- ***Promotion of Extracurricular and Relative Immersion Spaces:*** Educational institutions should promote conversation clubs, film forums, Anglophone cultural weeks, and contests that leverage the 88% willingness of students. These activities are vital for strengthening the Ideal L2 Self and providing authentic use experiences.
- ***Review of Assessment Frameworks:*** Assessment policies must align with communicative approaches, valuing fluency and communicative effectiveness over grammatical accuracy in initial and intermediate stages, so as not to penalize communication attempts.

The challenge does not lie in convincing students that English is important they already know this but in radically transforming the way it is taught and experienced inside and outside the classroom. The final conclusion is that the perception of the importance of English among Colombian public education students is a fragile potential that, under current pedagogical and sociocultural conditions, fails to crystallize into solid and operative motivation. Reversing this situation requires a concerted effort that reconciles the global aspirations of young people with locally meaningful, socially mediated, and emotionally intelligent teaching practices. Only then can the gap between the discourse of bilingualism as a national project and the reality lived in the classrooms be closed.

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