

# Students' Perceptions about English Language Teachers as an Affective Factor in English Learning<sup>1,2</sup>

Jairo Enrique Castañeda-Trujillo<sup>3</sup>, Shirley Cabrera-Cometa<sup>4</sup>, Kely Yohana Forero-Cano<sup>5</sup>,  
Sheila Vanessa Montilla-Mosquera<sup>6</sup>, Universidad Surcolombiana, Neiva, Huila, Colombia

## Abstract

This article focuses on a multiple-narrative case study conducted on 20 high school students from two schools in Neiva, Huila (Colombia). The study aimed to describe the affective factors present during students' learning of English. One of the most outstanding affective factors found was the role of the English language teacher in English learning. Narrative frameworks developed during some intervention sessions were used to collect participant data; these instruments contributed to constructing the students' narratives. The information collected determined that for the students, the teacher's role can affect the students positively, making them feel more motivated or engaged in learning or negatively, making them reject the English language and avoid learning. The article concluded that the teaching and management of emotions in the educational environment is a necessary tool for students' learning, so it should be required that teachers become more aware of it and include it in their professional development plans.

## Resumen

Este artículo se centra en un estudio de caso narrativo múltiple realizado con 20 estudiantes de secundaria de dos colegios de la ciudad de Neiva, Huila (Colombia). El estudio tuvo como objetivo describir los factores afectivos presentes durante su aprendizaje del inglés. Uno de los factores afectivos más destacados es el papel del profesor de inglés en el aprendizaje del inglés. Como instrumentos de recolección de datos de los participantes se utilizaron marcos narrativos desarrollados durante algunas sesiones de intervención, los cuales contribuyeron a la construcción de las narrativas de los estudiantes. La información recolectada determinó que, para los alumnos, el papel del profesor puede afectarles positivamente, haciendo que se sientan más motivados o comprometidos con el aprendizaje, o negativamente, haciendo que rechacen la lengua inglesa evitando el aprendizaje. Se concluye que la enseñanza y gestión de las emociones en el ámbito educativo se convierte en una herramienta necesaria para el aprendizaje de los alumnos, por lo que se requiere que los docentes tomen mayor conciencia de ello y lo incluyan en sus planes de desarrollo profesional.

## Introduction and Review of the Literature

Humans are a unique as each individual is characterized by different needs. In the school context, it is vital to emphasize that each student has characteristics that differentiate them from others and that these traits affect their learning individually. Daily events, students' relationships with the people around them, and their means of communication, not only through words, but also through imitation and approval seeking shape their emotional structure and define what, how much, and how they experience emotions. Thus, we can affirm that emotion is intimately involved in learning. After all, every act we perform stems from emotion (Arnold Morgan, 2006; Brown, 2014).

Contemporary studies within second language acquisition focus mainly on cognitive processes, leaving aside affective factors that can later become an obstacle in the learning process. These factors include motivation, self-esteem, anxiety, learning styles, and relationships between people in a group or class, which are as important as materials, techniques, and linguistic analysis (Arnold Morgan, 2006). Working in the affective domain means being aware of its impact on students, allowing us to understand how they think, feel, and act while English teachers teach the language.

The current investigation carried out with tenth-grade students in the city of Neiva, Huila, Colombia, examined set out to describe the affective factors present in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), with particular attention to the role of the teachers. This article explores how these learners relate factors such as motivation, attitude, self-esteem, and anxiety to their teachers' practices, personalities, and classroom relationships (Alsowat, 2016; Arnold Morgan, 2006). In doing so, it seeks to understand the teacher's place among the affective dimensions that shape the language learning experience.

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of the results of a research project called "Affective factors in English language Teaching" sponsored by Vicerectoría de Investigaciones y Proyección Social, Universidad Surcolombiana (Neiva, Colombia).

<sup>2</sup> This is a refereed article. Received: 2 May, 2023. Accepted: 9 November, 2023. Published: 4 September, 2026.

<sup>3</sup> [jairo.castaneda@usco.edu.co](mailto:jairo.castaneda@usco.edu.co), 0000-0002-3002-7947, Correspondent.

<sup>4</sup> [shcacoy@gmail.com](mailto:shcacoy@gmail.com), 0000-0002-6055-8394

<sup>5</sup> [forerokely20@gmail.com](mailto:forerokely20@gmail.com), 0000-0003-3925-5417

<sup>6</sup> [montillasv902@gmail.com](mailto:montillasv902@gmail.com), 0000-0001-5428-7981

This focus responds to a gap in the research. Affective factors in EFL have mostly been studied as isolated variables, especially anxiety and motivation, and largely through quantitative instruments (e.g., Alsowat, 2016; Balakrishnan et al., 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986). Far fewer studies approach them through learners' own accounts or center on how students perceive the teacher as an affective factor, and this is rarely documented in Colombian public secondary schools. Understanding how students narrate the teacher's influence matters because it can raise teachers' awareness of their affective role and form their professional development.

The study is therefore guided by one main question: How do tenth-grade students at two public schools in Neiva narrate the affective factors present in their EFL learning? and a more specific one: What role do they attribute to the teacher among factors such as motivation, attitude, self-esteem, and anxiety?

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Affective factors have been included in studies that account for their importance in foreign language learning processes such as writing (e.g., Kurniasih et al., 2022) and speaking (e.g., Hanifa, 2018). In addition, some authors have examined them more comprehensively, without discrimination of the skills involved, but emphasizing some of these factors, especially motivation. However, it is important to note that attitude, anxiety, and self-esteem have also been considered in those studies.

#### Motivation

According to Álvarez Martínez & Rojas Ochoa (2021) in an educational context, *motivation* is a positive behavior by which students assume to learn and continue to do so autonomously since they are interested in acquiring and developing specific skills, as is the case of learning a language. Likewise, it is one of the main aspects that affect language learning; that is, if students have no interest in directing their learning, they will not give the importance it requires since it is not in their life projects to acquire and develop a second language. Motivation is a psychological aspect closely related to the development of the human being. It is not characterized as a personal trait. Therefore, it varies from person to person and even in the same person at different times and situations.

People are motivated by both internal and external factors. Personality, self-concept, willingness to achieve something, and even the task that will be carried out usually determine whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation is dominant. Although teachers can use extrinsic motivation to stimulate others to acquire new skills or knowledge, the learning processes are more favored when they are born from internal stimuli (Mena Benet, 2013). For this reason, the development and change from the extrinsic to the intrinsic spectrum are necessary. That is why teachers must promote a motivating environment in their classes, helping students achieve autonomy in their tasks and offering a context or environment that facilitates interpersonal relationships. Motivation does not come alone; it must be accompanied by attitudes, another affective factor influencing language learning (Álvarez Martínez & Rojas Ochoa, 2021).

#### Attitude

In pedagogical contexts, Brown (2014) states that attitude is an underlying disposition to which other influences contribute to determining various behaviors; therefore, in teaching English, teachers must be attentive to the different positive and negative attitudes inherent to human beings. Thus, teachers should create strategies and use tools that allow them to generate positive attitudes in all students, involving them in the activities as much as possible and avoiding those monotonous activities that create bad attitudes towards the class, the language, and the teacher.

#### Anxiety

As opposed to attitude, anxiety is a negative emotion affecting learners' performance. Two of the most renowned references who have worked on anxiety in language learning have been MacIntyre (1999) and Horwitz et al. (1986). MacIntyre defined foreign language anxiety as "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused by learning or using a second language" (p.27). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety is a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning in the classroom that arises from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). Research studies concerning anxiety carried out in different contexts give us insights into the importance of this affective factor in language teaching.

For example, Gartman (2000) contrasted the conceptualization of anxiety in neurobiology and neurolinguistics. She highlighted that anxiety conditions are not simple to detect or diagnose. Therefore,

language teachers must exercise caution when interpreting such issues in their classrooms. Another study was developed by Mendez (2007) which used an alternative to quantitative scales to identify anxiety. The accounts collected in this study contributed to underscoring the value of qualitative data collection instruments in understanding anxiety in language teaching. Similarly, Aslan and Thompson's (2021) study showed how students' beliefs influence the levels of anxiety they experience while learning languages.

Alsowat (2016) found that anxiety levels are higher when developing communication skills such as speaking because they "require students' oral participation and pronunciation, but grammar and writing skills can be learned and studied without being involved in direct participation" (p. 211). Besides, his research found that the instructors' personalities and behaviors, teaching methods, and pedagogical practices were sources of classroom anxiety. Different authors have provided suggestions to be implemented in classrooms to reduce anxiety levels while learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Zia and Sulan (2015) mentioned that EFL teachers had to consider the needs of their students and design classes and materials that generate moderate levels of anxiety. Alsowat (2016) raised five important aspects to help EFL students overcome foreign language anxiety (FLA) in the classroom:

*First, instructors have to create a friendly atmosphere inside classrooms. They have to avoid negative behaviors and manners that enhance anxiety... Second, administrators and curriculum developers within English language departments must take their responsibilities in affording well-designed and modern syllabuses and textbooks that fulfill students' needs. Third, exams should facilitate learning instead of being sources of anxiety. Authentic evaluation should be taken into consideration since it assesses the levels of the required skills accurately, and it enhances the validity and reliability of exams. Fourth, there is a big demand for creating an effective learning environment that enables students to learn and practice the language in real-life situations. Finally, ... it is very important to encourage students and assist them to avoid foreign language anxiety, because higher levels of anxiety affect students' language proficiency negatively. (pp. 214-215)*

Those suggestions could ensure a safe environment where learners do not feel anxious and which promotes their self-esteem.

### Self-esteem

Self-esteem is an affective factor that refers to an individual's appreciation of themselves. It can vary from a negative to a positive view, depending on the value people place on their ideas and thoughts. It is said that children with low self-esteem are highly timid and unable to make decisions or express opinions because they always expect failure (Arnold Morgan, 2006). As teachers, dealing with students' self-esteem can be challenging since it is an individual process. Arnold Morgan asserted that English teachers play a vital role as mirrors through which learners discover their self-identity. Teachers are in a very powerful position to create conditions that benefit or harm learners' self-esteem. For example, as mentioned before, praise and complimentary expressions may provoke positive energy from our students, but can also enhance their self-esteem. On the other hand, being unkind or neglectful in feedback may adversely affect students' self-confidence and self-perception. As educators, we must be mindful of the impact of our words and actions on our students' self-esteem.

### **Methodology**

This research is situated within the qualitative paradigm, which focuses on individuals rather than outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It seeks to interpret subjective aspects derived from experiences to gain a broader understanding of the reality of research participants. In line with this, it was assumed that each experience triggers specific narratives that contribute to understanding the narrator's self, beliefs, and the phenomenon under study (Barkhuizen, 2016). Therefore, gathering narratives from the 20 students participating in this study was crucial to uncover their perceptions of their language teachers and their role in language learning.

Two out of 37 public schools were conveniently selected as separate cases for this research. These schools are located in different areas of Neiva. The first school, referred to as OLB (the name was abbreviated to protect the participant's identity), is in Comuna<sup>7</sup> 6, in the southern part of the city. The second school, AG, is located in Comuna 5, east of the city. Each school had an approximate population of 1,200 students, with each grade consisting of 35 to 40 students. However, due to time and resource constraints, only the 10th-grade students from each school participated in the project. The students in these grades were between 14 and 16 years old, primarily residing in neighborhoods near the schools, indicating that some come from

<sup>7</sup> *Comunas* are districts in Colombian cities.

middle or lower-social-status backgrounds. Ultimately, only ten students per group completed the activities proposed for gathering the narratives, as the research required additional effort from the participants.

Although the two schools shared the same pedagogical components and public status, guaranteeing adherence to municipal education plans, such as access to quality education and qualified teaching staff, they were different due to their particular contexts. Both schools also followed the Municipal Bilingualism Program "Neiva Speaks English," which aimed to improve the quality of education, particularly in English, from preschool to middle school (Alcaldía de Neiva, 2018). Consequently, despite their commonalities, the two schools could be considered separate cases, each with its own particularities and independent interpretations (Duff, 2008). Thus, this study incorporated elements of a multiple case study and utilized narratives to comprehend the central phenomenon guiding the research.

Data were collected using narrative frames (Barkhuizen, 2014) -written story templates consisting of blank spaces and incomplete phrases (see Appendix). Participants were required to fill in the blanks with their experiences and reflections to create coherent stories. Stories served as interpretations of experiences, with students attributing meaning to events in their lives or imagining scenarios through storytelling. These life stories revealed the subjectivities, dilemmas, concerns, and adversities faced by the students. Narrative research aided in understanding students' experiences firsthand and provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

As the researchers were not affiliated with the participating institutions, informed consent was obtained from the directors of the schools, following ethical principles. The consent form provided information about the research procedures and ethical considerations, which was also shared with the students and their parents. Only ten participants from each school (OLB and AG) were selected, ensuring that information could be collected and used without ethical issues.

Instructional design

The data collection took place through reflective workshops developed with the two groups of students because this activity was not part of the normal content of their classes. However, due to the worldwide Covid-19 emergency, this reflective workshop and the data collection had to be conducted virtually. To facilitate this, the researchers created a webpage using *Adobe Spark* (now *Adobe Express*) to share information with each participant. In total, three meetings were planned and are summarized in Table 1, outlining the workshop sessions.

| Meeting     | Objective                                                                                                                      | Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Data collected                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 (2 hours) | Engaging students with the theme of their learning experiences.<br>Familiarize students with the narrative frames' procedures. | Researchers met students virtually, and through a series of prompts, students were asked to share how they felt in their English classes concerning their classmates, teachers, and the classroom environment. Next, researchers guided the students through the narrative frames and how they worked.                           | The first narrative frame (image 1) contains stories about feelings towards the English class and their relationship with peers.                                                                                 |
| 2 (2 hours) | Having students reflect on their English learning process.                                                                     | Researchers explained the importance of past experiences and asked students to fill in the second narrative frame to explore past events about English learning.                                                                                                                                                                 | The second narrative frame (image 2) contains stories about past events related to learning English in class.                                                                                                    |
| 3 (2 hours) | Having students reflect on their English learning process.                                                                     | Researchers introduced the third narrative frame to explore students' present experiences, feelings, and impressions in English classes. The prompts included questions about interaction with others, relation with the teachers, feelings that emerge in different situations, and decisions they made during English classes. | The third narrative framework gives a broader vision of students' English process. It includes information about their present and current visions of their performance and others' performances during classes. |
| 4 (2 hours) | Having students understand their stories through a co-interpretation process.                                                  | Researchers give students the narrative forms using the three narrative frameworks and discuss with them the affective factors that appeared there and their effect on the English learning process.                                                                                                                             | The final narrative consolidates the three narrative frames, adding elements of students' interpretation.                                                                                                        |

Table 1: Plan for reflective workshops

All the information in these narrative frames was collected in Spanish since it was the students' mother tongue, and it guaranteed more fluidity and self-expression (See examples of the two frames used in

Appendixes 1 and 2), and then, they were translated verbatim. In all the sessions, researchers were willing to guide students with writing and answering questions related to the narrative frameworks.

### **Data analysis**

The data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach described by Barkhuizen et al. (2013). The first involved collecting narrative frames from all the participants and analyzing them individually to identify the affective factors present in the stories. After that, the narratives of Case 1 (OLB school) and those from Case 2 (AG school) were cross-analyzed to determine patterns out of the themes. Finally, the common themes in the different narrative frameworks were taken as thematic axes to establish relationships with the "role of the teacher" factor. This process ensured the reliability of the data since traceability between the stories was carried out to find joint axes that responded to the realities of the students.

### **Results**

For this research, two public schools from two different comunas of the city of Neiva were chosen: Case 1) OLB school, located in the south of the city, Comuna N. 6, and Case 2) AG school, located in the east of the city; Comuna N.5. Narrative frames were applied and analyzed in each case. The results obtained from the analysis aligned with the research objective, which focused on exploring the role of the teacher in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning process, using information extracted from the students' narrative frames. Through the eloquent narratives provided by the students, we uncover a symphony of interactions among these elements that orchestrate a conducive and enriching learning environment, profoundly influencing the students' language learning journey.

#### **Case 1. The role of the teacher at OLB school**

Through an exploration of narratives provided by OLB students, we highlight the pivotal influence that teachers' personalities, teaching approaches, teacher's relationships with students, and classroom dynamics wield in shaping students' language learning experiences and attitudes.

##### Teachers' personalities

The students' narratives indicated that teachers' personalities had a profound impact on their language learning journey. Some students had their first encounter with the English language during Primary school, where they interacted with teachers who possessed varying personality traits, as exemplified by Sergio's statement, "I started studying English when I was in elementary school, exactly, in first grade," and Eduardo's remark, "I started studying English when I was in elementary school." Sergio and Eduardo's experiences illustrate how students' first contacts with English in elementary school shaped their early attitudes. While some teachers left a positive impression, fostering a comfortable and supportive learning environment, others were more challenging to connect with.

Furthermore, some students highlighted that their first English teachers were not specialized in this subject, serving as the sole teacher for all primary school subjects. Sergio's recollection revealed, "We only had one teacher per grade, so she was the only one who taught us English and the other subjects." Such experiences influenced the students' perceptions of their teachers' abilities in effectively teaching English. The presence of a teacher with limited knowledge had the potential to influence their initial language learning experience; as described by Adrián, "his knowledge was not very deep because he did not know certain things."

Moreover, students expressed varied feelings about their teachers. Some teachers made students feel at ease, while others left them confused and frustrated. Camila, for instance, shared that she "felt disappointed about myself" due to her difficulties with word meanings, while Eduardo mentioned feeling confused during his initial contact with English.

##### Teaching approaches

The narratives emphasized the vital role of teaching approaches in shaping students' language learning experiences. Daniela's account highlighted this aspect, "I met a very strict teacher, although a good person," underlining the teacher's academic requirements during English classes. This finding suggested that a teacher's strictness does not necessarily hinder students' learning if the teacher can create an engaging and motivating learning environment.

Students also recognized that, over time, they managed to appropriate the subject and overcome challenges in understanding English. Some teachers adopted engaging and enjoyable teaching methods, as seen in Daniela's reflection, "during her English classes, I was motivated to learn because, even though the teacher



was demanding, for me, she explained in a fun way." This highlights the importance of employing effective teaching strategies that foster language acquisition and maintain students' motivation and interest in the subject matter. Another example was described by Julian when he said, "I remember my first English teacher. I remember she didn't allow us to make a mess in her class. She was a respectful teacher, and I could see it just for how she talked." The teacher's approach becomes relevant since students also differentiated teachers as individuals and professionals, appreciating the strategies implemented by teachers in their methodology. Lorena's statement exemplified this: "I also remember that my other English teachers made me feel good because they explained to us in a didactic way."

### Relationships with students

The analysis shed light on the crucial role of teacher-student relationships in the language learning process. Students' experiences of anxiety and discomfort in English classes were often linked to the attitudes and interactions of their teachers. Alejandra's account illustrated how a teacher's demanding attitude negatively affected her motivation and participation in class; she explained, "If we went out or wanted to ask her for a favor, we had to express it in English. I clearly remember that I chose not to ask questions at that time and wished they did not ask me."

Moreover, the narratives suggested that the teacher-student relationship also impacted students' anxiety levels when engaging in English learning. The academic demand of speaking only in English during class, as expressed by Daniela and Alejandra, contributed to feelings of nervousness and self-consciousness. These findings underscore the importance of establishing supportive and respectful teacher-student relationships to foster a positive learning environment.

### Classroom dynamics

The role of classroom dynamics in the English language learning process emerged as a crucial aspect of the students' narratives. Classmates' attitudes and interactions significantly influenced students' anxiety levels and class participation. Lorena's experience of feeling ashamed and afraid of being ridiculed by her peers when making mistakes highlighted the impact of the classroom environment on students' willingness to participate in language learning actively; she said, "If I am wrong, some of my classmates make fun of me." Additionally, students mentioned that the methodologies implemented by the teacher in the classroom are an essential factor for successful learning. Lorena states, "I also remember that my other English teachers made me feel good because they explained to us in a didactic way." The way teachers address target language difficulties can make students overcome certain problems with some previously seen topics.

Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment became essential to mitigate anxiety and encourage active participation. The narratives emphasized the importance of teachers taking measures to regulate scenarios where students felt anxious or ridiculed. Establishing coexistence agreements to promote respect and trust between teachers and students emerged as a key strategy to foster a positive classroom dynamic.

Additionally, the analysis indicated that effective teaching methodologies played a vital role in successful language learning. Teachers' ability to address target language difficulties and implement engaging strategies, as illustrated by Adrian's account, "...another topic that was complex for me, until a teacher explained it and I could understand it, was the verb to be," significantly facilitated students' comprehension and mastery of challenging topics.

## **Case 2. The role of the teacher at AG school**

The teacher's role as an affective factor in language education cannot be overstated. The narratives from Case 2 at OLB school reveal teacher impact on shaping their students' perceptions and experiences with English language learning. In this case, some salient themes are connected with the teachers' personality, teaching approach, classroom environment, and ability to foster emotional connections with their students.

### Teachers' personality

One of the most salient themes is the undeniable significance of a teacher's personality in making a positive and supportive learning atmosphere. As evidenced in Laura's fond recollection of her first English teacher, attributes such as being outgoing, friendly, kind, and understanding go beyond just being academic requirements. They become the foundation for building meaningful relationships with the students. When a teacher approaches their students as individuals rather than mere pupils, a magical connection is woven, as Lorena's experiences exemplified,

I remember my first English teacher because she was very outgoing, friendly, kind, and understanding. Her classes were funny and very practical. I could relate to her a lot since she understood me very well. During her English classes, I felt super happy, enthusiastic, and, above all, very participative because at the end of the classes, she used to award us class points.

This connection, in turn, nurtures trust, making students feel more comfortable and motivated to participate in class actively. Laura's sentiment resonates deeply, affirming the power of empathy and genuine interest in the students' well-being, fostering an environment where learning transcends the boundaries of a classroom and touches the hearts of those involved.

### Teaching approach

The teaching approach plays a significant role in students' engagement and enjoyment of the learning process. Lina's narrative sheds light on this importance as she warmly recalls her experience with a teacher during her early high school years. She said the teacher presented different topics each term, making it her favorite class. His meticulous planning of various activities provided substantial learning opportunities. The teacher firmly believed in the idea that the best way to learn is by having fun.

Perceiving teachers as guides rather than mere authority figures creates an optimal classroom environment for developing students' communicative and practical skills. This approach encourages autonomous learning through creative and engaging didactics. The notion that learning should be synonymous with enjoyment becomes evident in the students' experiences. When teachers prioritize incorporating fun and immersive activities, the language learning journey transcends the mundane and becomes a thrilling adventure. On the other hand, the students' accounts of strict teaching methods serve as a reminder of how such an oppressive approach can dampen the flame of curiosity and willingness to explore the vast linguistic landscape.

### Classroom environment

The profound impact of the classroom environment on students' attitudes toward learning is a noteworthy theme that emerges from the narratives. Mary's sentiment about her teacher's warmth and affection resonates profoundly, emphasizing the significance of cultivating a positive and supportive atmosphere. In such nurturing environments, students are encouraged to blossom, fostering their communicative and practical skills with confidence. The classroom transforms into a haven, nurturing self-expression and celebrating risks as stepping stones to progress. Conversely, the students' accounts of negative or authoritarian atmospheres serve as a reminder of how such settings can act as barriers, hindering students' self-assurance and active participation.

Mary's experience exemplifies the impact of teachers as not only guides but also motivating agents in the classroom. Her comfort and enjoyment during English classes, with the teacher making every effort to ensure that everyone had fun, highlight the importance of teachers' strategies to keep students engaged with the course content. "We played a lot, and I loved that," Mary exclaimed, indicating how creative and interactive approaches can foster a love for learning.

The narratives underline the influential role of the classroom environment and the teacher's efforts in creating an atmosphere where students thrive. Positive and supportive environments enhance students' confidence and practical skills and inspire active engagement and enjoyment in the learning process. Teachers' creativity and motivation are vital in shaping a conducive learning environment and nurturing students' growth and development.

### ***Emotional connection***

The final theme that emerges is the immeasurable importance of teachers building emotional connections with their students. Natalia's profound statement about her teacher's joyful and creative approach encapsulates the essence of a transformative connection. She shared her experience with teacher Jorge, who taught her for three years, and how his creative and joyful way of teaching made her fonder of English during the seventh grade. She said, "The important thing was to enjoy the class and know that English is not impossible to learn."

When teachers form strong emotional bonds with their students, they sow the seeds of trust and support. Such connections act as catalysts, propelling the students toward success despite the challenges that may lie ahead. The teacher becomes not just an educator but also a mentor and a guiding light through the intricacies of language learning. This emotional tie fosters a sense of security within the students, empowering them to embrace the language with an unwavering belief in their abilities. The emotional

connection Natalia experienced with teacher Jorge was the foundation for her increased fondness of English, illustrating the profound impact such bonds can have on students' language learning journey.

The narratives presented in Case 2 eloquently illustrate the multifaceted role of the language teacher as an affective factor. Through their personalities, teaching approaches, creation of classroom environments, and ability to forge emotional connections, teachers hold the power to profoundly shape their students' language learning journeys. Educators must foster an environment where individuality is celebrated, learning is synonymous with enjoyment, and emotional connections lay the foundation for lasting growth. The impact of the teacher as an affective factor is not confined to the borders of a classroom; it permeates the students' hearts and minds, leaving an indelible mark on their journey toward linguistic mastery.

## Discussion

The findings from both Case 1 and Case 2 support the importance of teachers' roles in shaping students' language learning experiences and attitudes. In the current study, the teachers' personalities, teaching approaches, relationships with students, and classroom dynamics emerged as key factors influencing their students' perceptions and attitudes toward learning English. These findings align with previous research on affective factors in language learning, which emphasized the significance of motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-esteem in the learning process (Álvarez Martínez & Rojas Ochoa, 2021; Aslan & Thompson, 2021; Balakrishnan et al., 2020; Gartman, 2000; Hanifa, 2018; Kurniasih et al., 2022).

In both cases, the teachers' personalities significantly influenced students' language learning journeys. Teachers who exhibited friendliness, kindness, and understanding fostered positive relationships with their students, creating a supportive and motivating learning environment. These findings support the notion that motivation is a crucial aspect of language learning, and teachers' personalities can play a vital role in fostering intrinsic motivation among students (Álvarez Martínez & Rojas Ochoa, 2021; Mena Benet, 2013). Conversely, teachers with negative or challenging personalities were associated with less positive learning experiences, highlighting the importance of cultivating positive emotional connections between teachers and students.

Teaching approaches also emerged as a key factor influencing students' language learning experiences. Teachers who adopted engaging and enjoyable teaching methods successfully maintained students' motivation and interest in the subject matter. This finding aligns with the idea that teaching methods prioritizing fun and active engagement can enhance students' enjoyment of the learning process, ultimately leading to more successful language learning outcomes (Brown, 2014). On the other hand, forceful teaching methods were associated with negative learning experiences and could reduce students' curiosity and willingness to explore the language further.

The role of classroom dynamics in the language learning process was evident in both cases. Positive classroom environments, where students felt supported and encouraged, facilitated their confidence and active participation. In contrast, negative or authoritarian classroom atmospheres hindered students' self-assurance and willingness to engage actively in learning. This finding reinforces previous research emphasizing the importance of establishing supportive and respectful teacher-student relationships to foster a positive learning environment (Aslan & Thompson, 2021; Balakrishnan et al., 2020).

Anxiety emerged as a significant affective factor in both cases. Students' experiences with anxiety were often linked to the attitudes and interactions of their teachers. This aligns with previous studies that have identified foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety in language learning can be influenced by various factors, including teachers' personalities, teaching methods, and classroom environments (Alsowat, 2016; Gartman, 2000). Thus, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment becomes crucial to mitigate anxiety and encourage active participation.

Self-esteem also played a role in students' language learning experiences. Teachers' actions and feedback can impact students' self-esteem positively or negatively. Praising and providing positive reinforcement can enhance students' self-confidence, while unkind or neglectful feedback may adversely affect students' self-perception (Arnold Morgan, 2006).

To create a positive and conducive learning environment, language teachers should develop positive teacher-student relationships, employ engaging and enjoyable teaching methods, and create supportive classroom dynamics. Moreover, they should be mindful of how their personalities and feedback impact students' motivation, attitudes, anxiety levels, and self-esteem. By prioritizing students' emotional well-



being and fostering positive affective factors, teachers can enhance language learning experiences and contribute to their students' overall success in language acquisition.

### Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This study set out to describe the affective factors present in tenth-grade students' learning of English as a foreign language, with particular attention to the role of the teacher. Using a multiple-narrative case study, we collected the accounts of 20 students at two public schools in Neiva, Colombia, through narrative frames developed across several intervention sessions, and we analyzed them thematically both within and across the two cases.

Four themes emerged consistently in both cases. Teachers' personalities shaped students' engagement, as warmth, kindness, and understanding invited participation while distant or harsh dispositions discouraged it. Teaching approaches mattered, since enjoyable, interactive methods sustained motivation whereas rigid or forceful ones narrowed students' willingness to explore the language. Teacher–student relationships affected how safe students felt, with supportive rapport building confidence and its absence undermining it. Classroom dynamics proved decisive, as respectful, encouraging environments fostered active participation while authoritarian ones heightened anxiety and lowered self-esteem.

Considering the results, several pedagogical implications emerged for language educators. Firstly, teachers should prioritize the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Fostering empathy, understanding, and approachability can create a safe and trusting environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and actively participating in language activities. Secondly, language teachers should adopt engaging and enjoyable teaching methods that spark students' curiosity and interest in the language. Integrating interactive and creative activities, such as games, role-plays, and multimedia resources, can enhance students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Thirdly, creating a positive and supportive classroom environment is essential to promote students' confidence and active participation. Teachers should establish a classroom culture that encourages respect, collaboration, and inclusivity.

Furthermore, language educators must be aware of how their personalities and feedback impact students' motivation, attitudes, anxiety levels, and self-esteem. Providing constructive feedback and positive reinforcement can foster a positive learning environment and promote a growth mindset. To effectively address language anxiety, teachers can implement strategies to create a relaxed and non-judgmental atmosphere. Encouraging students to take small risks in language use without fear of making mistakes can also help lessen anxiety.

Finally, this research highlights the significant impact of affective factors in language learning. By recognizing and harnessing the power of teachers as affective factors, language educators can create enriching and empowering language learning environments. By fostering positive emotional connections and promoting a positive learning atmosphere, teachers can enhance students' language learning experiences and contribute to their success in acquiring and mastering the English language. As language education evolves, understanding and addressing affective factors in language learning will remain crucial in nurturing competent and confident language learners.

### References

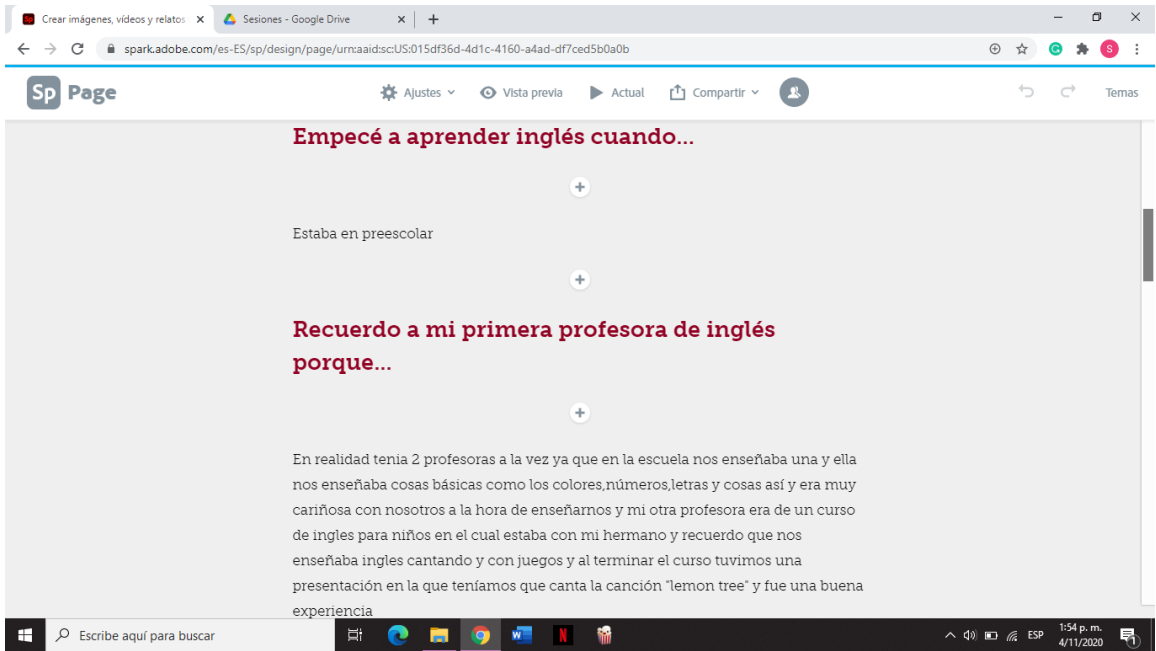
- Alcaldía de Neiva (2018). Diagnóstico sector educativo año 2018: Programa "Neiva la razón de todos con educación" [Educational sector diagnosis for 2018: "Neiva, education for everyone's sake" program.]. <https://www.alcaldianeiva.gov.co/NuestraAlcaldia/Dependencias/Documentos%20Sec%20educacin/DIAGNOSTICO%20SECTOR%20EDUCATIVO%20NEIVA%20A%202018.pdf>
- Alsowat, H. H. (2016). Foreign language anxiety in higher education: A practical framework for reducing FLA. *European Scientific Journal*, 12(7), 193-220. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n7p193>
- Álvarez Martínez, J. A., & Rojas Ochoa, J. d. J. (2021). La motivación en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en estudiantes universitarios de la ciudad de Medellín, Colombia [Motivation in English language learning at the university level in the city of Medellín, Colombia]. *Cuadernos de Educación y Desarrollo*, 13(4), 27-37. <https://doi.org/10.51896/atlanter/lfrt8532>
- Arnold Morgan, J. (2006). *Los factores afectivos en el aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera* [The affective factors in the learning of Spanish as a foreign language]. Centro Virtual Cervantes. [https://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca\\_ele/antologia\\_didactica/claves/arnold.htm](https://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/antologia_didactica/claves/arnold.htm)
- Aslan, E., & Thompson, A. S. (2021). The interplay between learner beliefs and foreign language anxiety: Insights from the Turkish EFL context. *Language Learning Journal* 49(2), 189-202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1540649>

- Balakrishnan, S., Abdullah, N. L., & Khoo, M. S. L. (2020). English language learning anxiety and its relationship with language achievement: A study on learners in a technical university. *Journal of Technical Education and Training*, 12(3), 161-170. <https://publisher.uthm.edu.my/ojs/index.php/JTET/article/view/3743>
- Barkhuizen, G. (2014). Revisiting narrative frames: An instrument for investigating language teaching and learning. *System*, 47, 12-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.09.014>
- Barkhuizen, G. (Ed.) (2016). *Reflections on language teacher identity research*. Taylor & Francis.
- Barkhuizen, G., Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2013). *Narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research*. Routledge.
- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson.
- Duff, P. (2008). Case study research in applied linguistics. Routledge.
- Gartman, G. (2000). Anxiety and foreign language learning. *MEXTESOL Journal* 24(2), 63-68. <https://www.mextesol.net/journal/public/files/49fe648bc54c56cc39bf5d7b62cd2a4b.pdf>
- Hanifa, R. (2018). Factors generating anxiety when learning EFL speaking skills. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 5(2), 230-239. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v5i2.10932>
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>
- Kurniasih, Mukminatien N., Affandi Arianto, M., Sari, R. N., Anggraini, M. P., & Umamah, A. (2022). Affective factors in online writing performance: Do they matter?. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 46(2). <https://doi.org/10.61871/mj.v46n2-14>
- MacIntyre, P. D. (1999). Language anxiety: A review of the research for language teachers. In D. J. Young (Ed.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning: A practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere* (pp. 24-41). McGraw-Hill.
- Mena Benet, T. (2013). Factores afectivos que inciden en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera: La motivación [Affective factors influencing foreign language learning: motivation] [Unpublished masters thesis]. Universidad de Oviedo. <http://hdl.handle.net/10651/18314>
- Mendez, E. (2007). A case study approach to identifying anxiety in foreign language learners: A qualitative alternative to the FLCAS anxiety scale. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 31(3), 69-86. [https://www.mextesol.net/journal/index.php?page=journal&id\\_article=1088](https://www.mextesol.net/journal/index.php?page=journal&id_article=1088)
- Merriam, S., & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Zia, Z., & Sulan, N. (2015). EFL learners' levels of classroom performance anxieties and their causes in classroom speaking activities in Afghanistan. *International Journal of English and Education*, 4(1), 239-249. <https://ijee.org/ijee/article/view/916/908>

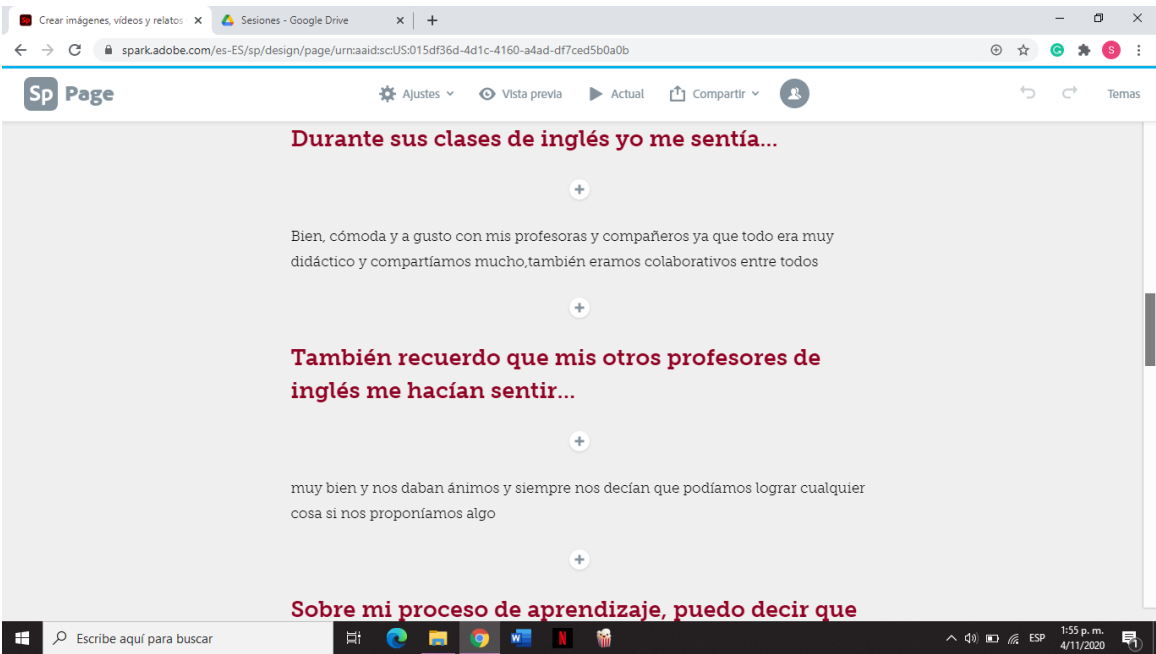
Appendix

Examples of the Narrative Frames

Narrative Frame 1



Narrative Frame 2



Castañeda-Trujillo, J. E., Cabrera-Cometa-S, Forero-Cano, K. Y., Montilla-Mosqueda, S. V. (2026). Students’ perceptions about English language teachers as an affective factor in English learning. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 50(1).