



Center for Open Access in Science

Open Journal for
Studies in Linguistics

2025 • Volume 8 • Number 2

<https://doi.org/10.32591/coas.ojssl.0802>

ISSN (Online) 2620-0678

OPEN JOURNAL FOR STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS (OJSL)

ISSN (Online) 2620-0678

www.centerprode.com/ojsl.html

ojsl@centerprode.com

Publisher:

Center for Open Access in Science (COAS)

Belgrade, SERBIA

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CONTENTS

- 21 Identity and Ideology: A Case Study of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) on the US-Mexico Border
Gonzalo Hugo Favela Camacho
- 33 Navigating Challenges and Enhancing Effectiveness: The First-Year Experience of Novice Teachers
Cinthya Castañeda Martinez
- 41 The Impact that Socioeconomical Factors Have in the English Learning Process: Guanajuato City
Sofia Guerrero Lara



Identity and Ideology: A Case Study of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) on the US-Mexico Border

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Received: 17 February 2025 ▪ Revised: 11 August 2025 ▪ Accepted: 25 December 2025

Abstract

With a global population of 7.8 billion (Worldometer, 2020), approximately 1.5 billion are English language learners (British Council, 2019), necessitating a substantial teaching workforce. Interestingly, out of the approximately 15 million English teachers worldwide, 80 percent are Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). Despite the high demand for English education, anti-NNEST ideologies persist, reinforcing that native speakers are inherently superior instructors, regardless of their pedagogical qualifications. This study, grounded in the LangCrit theoretical framework (Crump, 2014), employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the professional experiences, identities, and language ideologies of five NNESTs in a bilingual border community. Unlike most research around NNESTs, which focuses on non-English-dominant countries, this study takes place in the United States, specifically along the US-Mexico border. By exploring NNESTs' challenges, collaborations, and ideologies, the study provides valuable insights into their role in language education and challenges prevailing stereotypes.

Keywords: bilingual education, identities, language ideologies, Non-Native English Speakers Teachers (NNESTs), professional experiences.

1. Introduction

With 1.5 billion English learners worldwide (British Council, 2019), the demand for English teachers has grown significantly, with Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) comprising 80% of the global English teaching workforce. Despite their prevalence, NNESTs face persistent stereotypes that favor Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) as inherently superior instructors. Prior research has largely focused on NNESTs working in non-English-dominant countries (Elyas & Alghofaili, 2019; Putri, 2020; Rao & Chen, 2020), leaving a gap in understanding those teaching in English-dominant environments, particularly in the United States.

Although I use the terms NNEST and NEST throughout this study, I acknowledge that the distinction between being a Native English Speaker Teacher and a Non-Native English Speaker Teacher is highly problematic. Liceras et al. (2017) say that nativeness cannot be approached from an absolute point of view since no single definition can be provided for the concept of being a native speaker of a language. Non-native speakers of English are commonly referred to as those

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who have learned and/or acquired English as a Second or a Foreign Language (L2) after having acquired another first language or language. Saville-Troike and Barto (2017) remind us that a second language is commonly an official or societally predominant language desired for education, employment, and other elemental objectives. On the other hand, second languages are what minoritized people, often immigrants, learn and/or acquire in a society in which their first language(s) are not the powerful, dominant languages. In this research, a NNEST is defined as an English teacher whose first language or languages are not English. After acquiring and learning English, they have undergone training to teach it. Conversely, a NEST is an English teacher whose first language is English and who has been trained to teach it. As previously mentioned, defining the terms “native” and “non-native” is not a simple task. However, through the analysis of the literature review, this was the conclusion reached.

Given the large percentage of English learners (both English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language) worldwide and the fact that three of four English language teachers globally are NNESTs, this study seeks to understand the professional experiences of five NNESTs who work in a public university on the US-Mexico border, with a focus on their identities and language ideologies. Most studies have looked at NNESTs teaching in countries where English is not the dominant language. This case study looks at NNESTs in the United States in the specific context of the US-Mexico border on the US side. The primary participants were five NNESTs who teach in the two Borderlands University English language programs. I also interviewed the two program coordinators and one of the participants’ colleagues, a NEST. Using a qualitative case study methodology and a LangCrit theoretical framework (Crump, 2014) I have collected data using in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2019) and classroom observations (Emerson et al., (2011). Although I tried to obtain documents from the study participants, I was not able to do so.

2. Method

This research is a qualitative case study that aims to answer various questions about the professional experiences of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) working in a public university on the US-Mexico border. The study sought to explore their interactions with other faculty members (both NNESTs and native English-speaking teachers, or NESTs), their experiences with students, collaborations with NESTs, challenges in being recognized as effective teachers, and their professional identities as ESL instructors in a bilingual border community.

The method used in this research is a case study which involves a detailed examination of a specific case within its natural setting. It allows for flexibility in the data collection process, with a focus on obtaining an in-depth understanding through various techniques. In this study, data was collected from December 2022 to July 2023 using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and the collection of artifacts. Interviews were conducted with five NNESTs and program directors, as well as informal interviews with NESTs. The research adopted a life-history approach to interviewing, as suggested by Seidman (2019), conducting three separate interviews with each participant to explore their background, experiences, and reflections.

The total population for this study is the five ESOL teachers in the two English language programs from Borderlands University (pseudonym), located on the border between the United States and Mexico. Two of the non-native teachers are from the Practical English Language Program (PELP), and three are from the Teaching English Language Learners Program (TELLP). Rebecca, Claudia, and Sasha are from the TELP program, while Josie and Karen are from the PELP program. Each of them chose these names as pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Based on the research questions and the themes that emerged from the interviews and observations, I employ coding and thematic analysis to understand my data. As outlined by Saldaña (2021), a fundamental concept in qualitative analysis is the “code,” typically represented

as a word or concise phrase. Saldaña says just as a title encapsulates and conveys the primary content of a book, film, or poem, a code performs a similar function for individual pieces of data. The primary objective of qualitative coding lies in data condensation, a process distinct from reduction. This condensation paves the way for subsequent activities such as pattern identification, categorization, proposition development, theory construction, and other analytical procedures, all of which I did. In the realm of qualitative data analysis, a code essentially represents a researcher's crafted interpretation, simultaneously symbolizing and translating the data.

In this case study, I aim to address three primary questions regarding the professional experiences and identities of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) working in a public university on the US-Mexico border. The first research question explores the overall professional experiences of NNESTs in this unique context. The research second question delves into how NNESTs on the US-Mexico border perceive their professional identities, concerning the instruction of English as a Second Language. Lastly, the third research question focuses on the language ideologies of NNESTs in a bilingual border community. The sub-questions investigate their interactions with faculty members, and students, collaboration with Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs), and the challenges they encounter to be acknowledged as effective NNESTs. The questions to guide this study are as follows:

1. What are the professional experiences of NNESTs who work in a public university on the US-Mexico border?
2. How do NNESTs in a public university on the US-Mexico border understand their professional identities in relation to teaching English as a Second Language?
3. What are the Language Ideologies of NNESTs in a Bilingual Border Community?

Sub-questions:

- a. What have NNESTs' work and social interactions been like with other members of the faculty (i.e., other NNESTs and NESTs)?
- b. What have their interactions with students been like?
- c. Have they engaged in collaboration with NESTs? If so, how?
- d. What challenges have they faced in order to be recognized as effective NNESTs?

3. Findings

According to the participants, Rebecca was an international student who came to the United States to earn a bachelor's degree in English Creative Writing. When she began her master's studies in Spanish, the Language and Linguistics department offered her the chance to teach English as a Second Language class. She initially questioned why the department didn't offer her Spanish classes, given that Spanish was her native language and that she was studying for her master's in Spanish. However, her department chair offered to hire her as a teaching assistant and allowed her to teach an ESOL course. This marked the beginning of Rebecca's teaching journey.

In Sasha's case, her experience parallels Rebecca's to some extent. While pursuing her master's degree in Spanish, Sasha found herself in a similar situation. She was selected to be a teaching assistant (TA) for an English class. The focus of this class primarily revolved around

grammar, as well as academic writing in English. Sasha recalled that she was provided with five books for the courses, but there was no preparation or guidance available to her for this teaching role. In Claudia's case, she also began her teaching journey as a teaching assistant. Her university degrees were in psychology and applied linguistics, which made her transition to teaching English relatively smooth. Because Claudia was assigned to teach a specific English class and was provided with all the necessary materials for the course, her background in applied linguistics had prepared her to teach English. This was much like Josie and Karen, who are also specialists in teaching English. For them, the focus was on delivering the curriculum using the provided materials.

In the context of the PELP, there were no courses offered to train teachers. Instead, the program opted to hire subject-matter experts like Josie and Karen to deliver the content. The program coordinator supervises teachers, and Josie and Karen were experienced teachers, so they did not require training. However, orientation was provided, to ensure they understood the program's expectations and how to meet them.

In Josie's case, her education and command of three languages (i.e., French, English, and Spanish) likely made it easier for her to obtain employment. However, she recognized that despite these qualifications, her personality and her strong language ideologies have sometimes made it difficult for her to maintain long-term employment. This recognition underscores the importance of not only professional skills but also personal attributes in maintaining a successful career. She encouraged reflection on the delicate balance between paper qualifications and the more intangible qualities that contribute to compatibility and permanence in the workplace.

As I have pointed out, preparation and knowledge of the language have been crucial aspects for both Josie and Karen to develop professionally in this border community. Their commitment to perfecting these skills has not only prepared them for their profession but has also equipped them to function effectively in this border environment. However, it is essential to note that formalized teacher preparation on how to deliver the content effectively did not exist for them in this context. While both Josie and Karen brought their subject matter expertise and qualifications to the classroom, there were no specific training or courses dedicated to pedagogy or strategies for conveying the material. The focus primarily evolved around subject expertise and utilizing provided resources to ensure students received a comprehensive education in the respective courses.

In exploring this topic, it becomes evident that there are clear advantages associated with English proficiency, and it has indeed proven beneficial for teachers in terms of their professional development. However, a significant observation emerges, revealing a distinct lack or, at the very least, limited formalized training provided to these teachers.

Furthermore, Al-Hazmi (2003), highlights that the development of programs for English teachers extends beyond the mere implementation of standardized courses or training initiatives. Instead, a holistic approach is essential, which takes into consideration various critical factors. One such factor is a deep understanding of the specific needs and requirements of teachers in a particular region or context. This perspective is particularly pertinent along the US-Mexico border, where crafting a teacher preparation program tailored to the unique demands of this geographic and cultural setting becomes imperative.

Al-Hazmi also underscores the importance of evaluating and addressing the linguistic and professional competencies of teachers as a foundational step in designing effective programs. Essentially, this calls for a program that is not only responsive to the needs of educators but is also finely attuned to their skill sets and areas of improvement. While Al-Hazmi's suggestions shed light on the essential components of program development, they ultimately emphasize the evident and urgent necessity for comprehensive preparation programs for English teachers. This underscores the importance of tailored, context-specific initiatives that consider the multifaceted aspects of teacher preparation, to enhance the quality of English language education. While

English proficiency presents substantial advantages for teachers' professional growth, the absence of comprehensive teacher training is a critical issue. Addressing this lack could contribute to the enhancement of the overall educational experiences and outcomes for both teachers and students in this unique border community.

On the other hand, other themes that are equally important to consider are the emotions that teachers may grapple with. This topic serves as a segue into exploring the feelings, and emotions of these NNESTs in the context of their teaching. As I have discussed above, while English proficiency can indeed open doors and lead to professional growth, it can also be accompanied by a range of emotional hurdles. These challenges can be particularly pronounced among individuals for whom English is not their first language, as is the case for all study participants, Rebecca, Claudia, Sasha, Josie, and Karen. And it is important to remember that all of them navigate teaching English in a predominantly English-speaking environment, something that is not discussed in the scholarly literature.

4. Discussion

The majority of ESOL teachers at Borderlands University are Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). Existing literature on NNESTs often delves into their professional identities in regions such as the Middle East (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Razeq, 2017; Canagarajah, 2011; Hadla, 2013; Raza & Coombe, 2020), where English is considered a foreign language. In addition, other studies shed light on NNESTs in Southeast Asia (Inozu et al., 2007; Liu & Zhang, 2007; Mermelstein, 2015), where teachers may face challenges, as there is a strong preference for NESTs. In my study, conducted on the US side of the US-Mexico border, where English is the dominant language, being a NNEST did not seem to pose problems for the participants. My study looked at NNESTs' professional identities and ideologies in a bilingual community within the United States, which is something that had not been done previously.

In this research, all participants acknowledged that the phenomenon of translanguaging is a part of their daily life on the border, and two participants employed translanguaging pedagogies in their classrooms. Also, another thing that makes this research stand out is its concentrated attention on teachers, addressing a crucial gap in understanding their identities and ideologies. Most of the research on NNESTs focuses on the perspectives of students whose teachers are NNESTs (Aslan & Thompson, 2017; Liu & Zhang, 2007; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014; Zhang, 2016). In contrast, this study delves into the firsthand experiences of teachers, in an attempt to understand their professional journeys. In doing so, it not only enriches the TESOL literature but also paves the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the situations in which NNESTs find themselves.

Throughout this study, the designations NNEST and NEST did not hold significant relevance for the participants. Josie expressed that she was not clear about what her native language was, nor was she clear on the usefulness of the terms NNEST and NEST. Similarly, Rebecca, Claudia, and Sasha questioned what I meant by these terms, and whether they were categorized as NNESTs, solely because English was not their first language. They saw these terms as unimportant. Karen never employed the term NNEST about herself, either. A focus on grammar and writing emerged as particularly crucial components in the TELLP, given its emphasis on college preparation. This led to a lessened emphasis on the oral aspects of language use. However, according to Melissa, the coordinator, all of the TELLP faculty possessed excellent English skills in both productive and receptive skills. Giselle, who coordinated the PELP, also noted that Karen and Josie had high-level productive and receptive skills in English, as well.

4.1 Language and Whiteness on the US-Mexico Border

According to Crump (2014), LangCrit theory matters because Whiteness is associated with being a NEST, even though there are many “native speakers” of English who are people of color. An important finding of this study is that this association between English and Whiteness is rejected in the US-Mexico border community, specifically by the five participants, as they did not connect Whiteness with being a Native English speaker. It is important to note that neither their program coordinators nor their students seemed to connect English and Whiteness. Moreover, except for Josie, most of the participants did not feel discriminated against as NNESTs, a finding that differs from existing literature. That literature highlights discrimination against NNESTs (Hadla, 2013; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Lippi-Green, 1994; Sembiente et al., 2020). Also, the participants did not discuss any complaints from students regarding their oral English proficiency. This observation stands in contrast to extensive literature that often discusses challenges in this area. But in general, no evidence of discrimination against participants was found at Borderlands University. However, I did run into issues in terms of building rapport with study participants, and this may have impacted their willingness to share these experiences with me. They may also have been concerned about their program coordinators reading my study, and consequently, have chosen not to talk about experiences with discrimination.

4.2 Language ideologies that prevail among NNESTs on the US-Mexico border

This study unveils a diverse range of language ideologies among NNESTs on the US-Mexico border. These ideologies are shaped by factors such as the academic training, and professional, and personal experiences of each NNEST. Additionally, this study identifies translanguaging as an ideology that was employed by two of the five participants.

Conducting this study in the United States, at a university situated on the US-Mexico border, in the heart of a bilingual community where English and Spanish are the primary languages, and exploring the ideologies and identities of NNESTs, revealed language ideologies that include the standard language ideology as well as the translanguaging ideology. Stereotypes that link English proficiency to race were challenged by this study (Goldstein, 1987; Macswan, 2020; Maum, 2002; Shuck, 2006), underscoring the fact that while this association is prevalent throughout the United States, it may be less so on the border. Furthermore, the concept of standard or perfect English was rejected by all study participants, especially in the realm of pronunciation.

Indeed, the belief that NNESTs need “perfect” English was not an ideology shared by any of the study participants. LangCrit (2014) is concerned with understanding the power dynamics of linguistic resources and spaces, exploring how individuals use language, the values associated with language, and the potential identities that emerge from the interplay of power and language in specific contexts. Two of the study participants expressed their belief in and use of the translanguaging ideology and pedagogy in their ESOL classrooms. However, for the other three participants in this study, utilizing Spanish, the student’s first language, in an English learning environment was something they saw as negatively impacting the language acquisition process of students studying a target language.

However, Sasha, Rebecca, and Claudia all used translanguaging in their interactions with each other, using this approach to language in their meetings and faculty discussions in the TELLP group. In the PELP, Karen shared the belief in an English-only approach to ESOL teaching, perhaps in part, because her languages are English and Arabic, and Arabic is not widely used on the US-Mexico border. However, it is significant that the other two participants, Sasha and Rebecca, both of whom are Spanish speakers, actively rejected the translanguaging ideology.

While the program director for the TELLP, where Sasha and Rebecca work, embraced this ideology, they did not. Interestingly, while the program director for the PELP did not believe in the translanguaging ideology, Josie used this approach, taking a risk with her position within the program.

Nevertheless, the prevalence of translanguaging along the US-Mexico border constitutes an important linguistic phenomenon that is common in bilingual communities (Araujo et al., 2023). It is noteworthy that while translanguaging pedagogy is increasingly employed in bilingual education contexts (O. García & Wei, 2015; Ofelia García & Wei, 2014; Hillman et al., 2019), there is limited research demonstrating its application in ESOL contexts within the United States. Therefore, it becomes imperative to align with the assertion of Tian et al. (2020), that the use of translanguaging in ESOL/EFL education can foster linguistic diversity, while also serving to challenge prejudices and promote more inclusive and socially just educational practices.

In the unique context of the US-Mexico border, two of the participants, those with the highest educational attainment, believed in the translanguaging ideology, and they both viewed it as a valuable pedagogical strategy that enables students to develop their language skills without unnecessary limitations. LangCrit scholars, Sembiente et al. (2020) argue that racism as an integral part of everyday society in the United States. They make clear that where social constructions are fluid, local languages connect with society at large. This approach underscores the racialization of language use. Within the context of Borderlands University, seemed not to be the case, as most participants did not report instances of discrimination based on physical appearance or language.

The one exception was Josie, who talked about encountering instances of discrimination. She attributed these negative experiences to her French accent, her attire, which she perceived as less formal than the standards expected of a teacher, and her friendly approach to students in class. Interestingly, Josie was the only participant who hailed from Western Europe. She would be considered the Whitest of all the study participants. That is, the other participants are from Mexico and Saudi Arabia, and while they identify as White, they may be seen by others as Brown. While the participants expressed to me that they felt neither privileged nor disadvantaged because of their “native language” in this context, they all acknowledged the persistence of these ideas in the larger society.

4.3 Identity construction among NNESTs teaching in a bilingual community in the United States

Examining the situation at Borderlands University, I found that participants' experiences significantly influenced their perspectives on their roles as English teachers. Each participant displayed a unique teaching style, that had evolved with their academic training and teaching experiences. Rebecca, Sasha, and Karen employed a Classic Method, likely attributed to their generation and educational backgrounds. This approach is characterized by being teacher-centered, with the teacher exerting greater control over instruction and student dynamics. In contrast, Claudia and Josie adopted a more interactive, student-centered approach, incorporating the Communicative Language Teaching Approach. Their approaches may have also been influenced by their generation and their educational backgrounds. Tian et al. (2020), whose scholarship looks at translanguaging in TESOL, found that using labels such as L1/L2, EFL/ESL, and NNEST/NEST are insufficient, as they do not describe individuals' complex linguistic profiles and environments. They think these terms are too simple to describe the different ways people use and learn languages.

Also, Tian et al. (2020), point out that when people learn another language, it doesn't always mean they are accepting the cultural ideas that come with that language. Sometimes, they

learn the language to understand those ideologies better and even challenge them. For that reason, Tian et al. (2020) propose using a translanguaging approach in the TESOL field to enhance individuals' language skills, flexibility, and identities. Translanguaging, chosen for its rich theoretical and practical insights, including its impact on policies and assessments, is seen as a promising way to reshape traditional views of language, challenge native speakers' dominance in the field, and to break down monolingual approaches in TESOL instruction and assessment.

This aligns with what happens at Borderland University, where the use of translanguaging happens throughout the university, and in some ESOL classes. Even though three of the participants did not use translanguaging pedagogy in their classes, they acknowledged the reality of this phenomenon on the US-Mexico border, and two of them used it in faculty meetings.

In contrast to previous studies (Mahboob, 2005, 2010; Motlaq & Elyas, 2017; Nabilla & Sutrisno, 2023), I have found in this study that the environment at Borderlands University, and on the US-Mexico border, may be different from other contexts where NESTs are seen as superior to NNESTs. The five participants at Borderlands University can grow professionally, whether it is through programs like TELLP and PELP, or other avenues within Borderlands University. Participants were not hindered from pursuing continuous professional development.

Accurately characterizing each participant's teaching approach proved challenging, due to individualized styles shaped by academic training and professional experiences. Attempts to categorize these teaching styles based on general TESOL approaches underscored the diverse nature of teaching methods, which are influenced by individual teachers, as well as the needs of students, and the specific, bilingual context of the US-Mexico border region.

The five study participants acknowledged the need to adapt to student's learning styles, particularly about the integration of technology. While some found it easier to incorporate technology into their teaching methods, others, despite facing difficulties, made concerted efforts to embrace technology integration. I speculated about the role of generational status in shaping technology integration into the classroom, although this may be more individual.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of five NNESTs working in a public university on the U.S.-Mexico border, with a specific focus on their identities and language ideologies. The study unveils a diverse range of language ideologies among NNESTs on the US-Mexico border, challenging prevailing beliefs favoring the monolingual ideology as well as standard, or "perfect" English. Examining identity construction among NNESTs in a bilingual community, this study highlights the multifaceted influences of personal backgrounds and social, cultural, and linguistic factors on their identity construction.

The limitations stemmed from challenges in participant recruitment, defensive interactions, restricted access to materials and observations, and a lack of professional development opportunities for participants in both programs. These limitations emphasize the need for more time in relationship-building, trust establishment, and addressing the gap in professional development. While future research could explore how the level of education and academic training influences NNESTs' teaching approaches, a more diverse participant pool, including different genders, sexual orientations, and racial and ethnic backgrounds, would provide valuable insights into the intersectionality among NNESTs.

This study emphasized the prevalence of translanguaging in the bilingual context of Borderlands University. Acknowledging the presence of translanguaging in this context, even if not universally adopted, contributes to a greater understanding of diverse teaching approaches among NNESTs. In conclusion, this research, situated within the LangCrit theoretical framework,

significantly contributed to the TESOL literature by offering insights into language ideologies and identity construction among NNESTs in a unique bilingual context. The study recognizes its limitations, highlighting the need for further research diversity and professional development opportunities.

5.1 Implications of this study for educational practice

Implications of this study for educational practice throughout this research, an analysis of the literature on translanguaging was undertaken (Hillman et al. 2019; García and Wei, 2015). It was concluded that translanguaging involves understanding the language-mixing practices of bilingual individuals in bilingual communities. It encompasses the utilization of all languages in one's repertoire, blending them at various levels (e.g., word, phrase, sentence) for communication. Translanguaging approaches languages in the mind not as distinct codes activated and deactivated in different circumstances, such as in code-switching, but rather as part of a complete linguistic repertoire (Garcia, 2009). Sasha proposed embracing and taking pride in bilingualism, as long as one's accent does not hinder effective communication. In the context of the TELLP, the primary focus tended to be on honing skills related to reading and academic writing.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the true essence and pride of bilingualism go beyond mere linguistic proficiency. Bilingualism, in this context, is not merely about the ability to communicate effectively in two languages but extends to a profound engagement with reading and writing academic content in both languages. In the context of Borderlands University, a bilingual environment where both English and Spanish are widely used, translanguaging is a prevalent practice in the study participants' daily lives, and it significantly impacted some classroom dynamics and interactions. Notably, Claudia and Josie used translanguaging practices in their classes. This is significant, as at the United States-Mexico border, translanguaging emerges as a prevailing phenomenon, underscoring its importance in the linguistic landscape. This approach serves to empower both students and teachers, facilitating a transformation in power dynamics, emphasizing the creation of meaning, and fostering the development of identity. Moreover, this finding underscored that engaging in discussions about the various options for using translanguaging is crucial.

This open dialogue contributes to a greater understanding and respect for diverse ways of life among students and the broader, border community. Although Rebecca, Sasha and Karen did not use translanguaging in class, they acknowledged that the phenomenon of translanguaging is present in this context, and Sasha discussed the beauty of accents in English, as they signal bilingualism.

5.2 Implications of this study for future research on NNESTs in TESOL

According to Tian et al. (2020), the TESOL field persists in promoting the teaching and learning of English with a deeply ingrained monolingual bias in communities with marginalized languages. To counteract this trend, Tian et al. (2020) use a translanguaging lens to dismantle the notion of English as a monolithic entity, challenge the pervasive ideology of the "native speaker," and move away from an exclusive focus on "English only" as a pedagogical orientation.

The findings of this research align with Tian et al.'s (2020) assertions, as it was not observed that standardized or "perfect" English was promoted among the teachers to their students. Despite three of the participants not utilizing translanguaging in their classrooms, one of them expressed great pride in her bilingualism. She argued that the accent someone has when

speaking English should merely signify their bilingualism, and it should be celebrated. Within this US-Mexico border context, the use of translanguaging did not pose any issues among the participants, and it even facilitated effective communication in faculty meetings, because Sasha, Rebecca, and Claudia using translanguaging in that setting.

In conclusion, this research, situated within the LangCrit theoretical framework, significantly contributed to the TESOL literature by offering insights into language ideologies and identity construction among NNESTs in a unique bilingual context. The study recognizes its limitations, highlighting the need for further research diversity and professional development opportunities. The implications for future research and educational practice underscore the importance of recognizing and embracing translanguaging as a valuable pedagogical strategy in the US-Mexico border region.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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Navigating Challenges and Enhancing Effectiveness: The First-Year Experience of Novice Teachers

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Received: 1 June 2025 ▪ Revised: 11 August 2025 ▪ Accepted: 31 December 2025

Abstract

The transition from student to teacher represents a transformative period filled with both opportunities and challenges. This study examines the early teaching experiences of novice educators as they navigate their first year in the profession. A qualitative case study design was employed to gather data through semi-structured interviews with new English teachers in Guanajuato City. Participants shared their reflections on the realities, this revealed that novice teachers often struggle to establish their teaching identity. Additionally, the study found that while some mentoring and guidance were available, they often lacked consistency and did not address the teachers' individual needs. The study highlights the need for more structured and responsive support systems that align with novice teachers' experiences and challenges. By understanding the complexities of this transitional period, stakeholders in education can design interventions that not only support teachers but also positively impact the learning experiences of their students.

Keywords: novice teachers, first-year experience, mentoring, teacher development, challenges.

1. Introduction

The first year of teaching is a critical stage in a novice teacher's professional journey. It is a time marked by new responsibilities, complex classroom dynamics, and the challenge of translating theoretical knowledge into practical strategies. For many novice teachers, this period can be both exciting and overwhelming as they begin to develop their teaching identity. Understanding these early experiences is essential, as they shape how teachers adapt to the demands of the profession. The first year is often characterized by numerous challenges. Many new teachers struggle with issues, which can affect their confidence and ability to deliver effective instruction. At the same time, the types of support novice teachers receive can significantly influence how they respond to these challenges.

This study explores the experiences of novice teachers by focusing on the challenges they encounter and the support that helps them in their growth by examining teachers' reflections on their initial years. Using semi-structured interviews, this study provides an in-depth look at the realities of novice teachers' experiences and aims to inform strategies that enhance their confidence, and long-term success in the classroom.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Development of teacher identity*

Teacher identity refers to how teachers see themselves in their roles as educators. For novice teachers, building a strong identity is essential because it guides their actions in the classroom and supports their professional growth. Pennington and Richards (2016) explain that teacher identity is shaped by three main areas: personal, contextual, and professional. Personal factors include the teacher's background, personality, and how they connect with students. Contextual factors involve the environment in which they teach, such as school culture, student needs, and expectations from colleagues or administrators. Professional factors refer to their beliefs about teaching, their subject knowledge, and the teaching methods they use.

For novice teachers, these factors can sometimes create confusion and lead to self-doubt. Some new teachers may feel pressure to imitate others or change their style to fit in, which can affect their confidence and classroom performance. Understanding teacher identity is crucial because it influences how confident and effective a teacher becomes. During their first year, many teachers are still discovering what kind of educator they want to be. Supporting novice teachers as they develop their identity is essential for building strong and reflective professionals who can continue to grow in their careers.

Understanding how teacher identity evolves during the first year of teaching is crucial for this research, as it provides insight into the internal processes that influence a novice teacher's ability to navigate challenges and become an effective educator. By exploring how identity development affects classroom actions, this study can offer recommendations for supporting a teacher in building a positive and resilient sense of self in their professional role.

2.2 *Classroom challenges faced by novice teachers*

Starting a teaching BA is a mix of excitement and difficulty. Many novice teachers encounter several challenges that can make their first year stressful and overwhelming. These challenges can impact their confidence, classroom performance, and overall professional growth. Sözen (2018) highlights that novice teachers often feel unprepared to control the class. This lack of experience makes it difficult for them to teach effectively and stay motivated. Additionally, new teachers sometimes feel isolated due to a lack of sufficient support from their colleagues.

Another significant challenge relates to professional development. Many beginner teachers struggle to improve their teaching skills because they lack proper guidance and resources (Makoa & Segalo, 2021). This demonstrates that novice teachers often feel lost when planning lessons or trying to adapt to classroom realities. Septiani et al. (2019) point out that the gap between what teachers learn in training and what they face in a real classroom can be quite wide, making it harder for novice teachers to apply their knowledge in practice. The first year of teaching is therefore filled with obstacles that can make teachers feel anxious and unsure about handling classroom situations. Addressing these challenges is an important first step in supporting novice teachers to succeed in their careers.

Examining the challenges novice teachers face is critical to understand why some teachers struggle to apply their training effectively in the classroom. By identifying these obstacles, this research can provide valuable insights into the kinds of support and interventions that can make a positive difference in the first-year experience, ultimately enhancing teachers' confidence and classroom performance.

2.3 Professional development

Poom-Valickis (2014) points out that novice teachers experience a variety of difficulties during their induction year and that continuous support is crucial for helping them become confident professionals. Professional development is an essential part of becoming an effective teacher. Poom-Valickis emphasizes that beginning teachers benefit most when schools provide opportunities to reflect and constructive feedback. This reflection process helps teachers understand classroom dynamics better and develop stronger teaching strategies.

Septiani et al. (2019) also emphasize that the gap between teacher training and real-world teaching challenges makes it harder for novice teachers to apply what they have learned. Professional development is an important part of this research because it is one of the main tools that can improve a novice teacher's effectiveness.

Focusing on professional development allows this research to explore how ongoing training, reflection, and feedback can empower novice teachers to navigate the complexities of their new roles. Investigating the effectiveness of these professional development opportunities can reveal what works best in helping teachers build confidence and improve their practice.

2.4 Support systems, programs, and mentorship

Gholam (2018, p. 3) argues that a mentor is an experienced teacher who supports a novice teacher during their early experiences in the classroom. In other words, a mentor shares knowledge gained over the years and provides guidance and advice to help educators handle issues that may arise. Mentoring plays a critical role in teacher development, which is why programs are designed to address and mitigate problems that new teachers encounter. When a novice teacher participates in such programs, they learn through their experiences and gain insights that help them grow professionally.

Cook (2012, as cited in, Gholam, 2018, p. 4) explains that the overall goal of teacher mentoring is to foster a relationship of ongoing support, collaboration, and the development of knowledge and skills that translate into improved teaching strategies. Part of this study is to know what influence the mentoring programs that the participants received during their preparation have had and how they have contributed to their effectiveness. It aims to identify what additional strategies these programs should implement to help develop better-prepared teachers.

Exploring the role of mentorship and support programs in this research highlights how structures guidance and collaboration can help novice teachers transition into their roles more successfully. By understanding how mentoring impacts teachers' confidence and classroom performance, this study can inform practices that enhance the overall experience and effectiveness of first-year teachers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative approach

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by novice teachers during their first year of teaching and to identify strategies that could enhance their effectiveness, as indicated in the literature review. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and perspectives.

Creswell (2012, as cited in, Gholam, 2018, p. 5), explains that qualitative research can lead to information that allows individuals or groups to learn about a phenomenon or an issue. Qualitative research often focuses on how people can have a variety of perspectives on a specific

situation. For this study, this approach is valuable in capturing the diverse insights of novice teachers as they navigate their first year, revealing both the challenges they face and the strategies they use to enhance their effectiveness.

This research aims to gather qualitative data from novice teachers' experiences to identify common themes and support systems that can help improve their transition into the teaching profession.

According to Hartley (2004, p. 323), a case study is particularly suited to research questions that require a detailed understanding of social or organizational processes because of the rich data collected in context. It is therefore a qualitative research method that allows me to explore complex issues in detail to understand their impact on teachers' development. Hartley (2004) highlights several key instruments for data collection in case studies, such as interviews, observations, documents, and surveys. In the interviews, participants provide detailed insights. A semi-structured interview format will help keep the project focused and manageable.

3.2 Context

This research was conducted face-to-face with the participation of young adults from different cities in the state of Guanajuato. All of them are studying to become English teachers at a university in Guanajuato where they have received previous preparation to become teachers. They are in their last year of university and have recently started to work as teachers.

As mentioned in previous sections, three teachers who are currently working in Guanajuato City will participate in this research. The EFL teachers work with elementary school children and also teenagers in different public schools. Their age range of the participants is between 21 and 30 years old, none of them have taught any kind of classes before, so this would be their first year working as teachers. All have similar English levels, ranging from B2 to C1.

The participants were informed about the main objective of the research where they were explained general aspects of the dynamics that will be used to collect data. They were given a letter of consent with the description of the study, which contained a statement about their voluntary participation, specifying that they could leave the project at any time without repercussions. Their identity protection was also described, clarifying that their personal data will be kept confidential and that a pseudonym will be used to protect their identity. Furthermore, the experiences they share in the interviews or focus groups will be analyzed and used only for educational purposes.

3.3 Instruments

Semi-structured interviews are mostly based on open-ended questions that prompt participants to develop their thoughts and ideas in depth, expressing their perspectives (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 100). Since the research project is aimed at getting to know and understand the experiences of teachers in a teaching context, the initial instrument proposed and the one that seems to be adequate to obtain information are the semi-structured interviews. This instrument allowed me to set the order according to the needs of the interview, as well as add questions to those already established to complement the data. The semi-structured interviews were conducted on an individual basis.

According to Longhurst (2003, p. 145), the focus groups keep the group on the topic but otherwise non-directive, allowing the group to explore the subject from as many angles as they please. Therefore, the focus groups were also included as an additional tool to reinforce and obtain

additional data, as it allows them to cover the desired topics but mainly provides flexibility in their answers.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

The information was collected face-to-face interviews, where an interview was scheduled with each of the participants in a private setting. Then, a focus group was held with the three participants where they were given the opportunity to talk freely about their experiences, during the conversation notes were taken on what was most relevant to the study. The findings from the semi-structured interviews and the data collected from the focus groups were verified and also analyzed. The thematic analysis method was employed in this process, it is usually used in qualitative research. It allowed us to analyze previously collected information and also to identify common ideas across the interviews (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016, p. 33).

Thematic analysis was carried out by carefully reading the interview transcripts to identify initial patterns and codes. These codes were then organized into broader themes that represented the recurring concepts and issues raised by participants, ensuring that each theme reflected the teachers' voices and experiences.

The themes obtained from this approach will be presented in the following section.

4. Results and discussion (data analysis)

The first year of teaching is crucial, as it has a major impact on a teacher's future performance. After analyzing the participants' responses from the data collected, key themes emerged as the challenges experienced in the classroom as well as the support received in the process of becoming a teacher.

4.1 Theme 1: Anxiety and self-doubt

A significant theme was the anxiety and self-doubt that novice teachers experienced. Participant 1 described feeling constantly anxious and unprepared, often perceiving judgment from students:

"A lot of anxiety, I always felt unprepared, and felt a ton of judgment from the students."

This anxiety seemed to stem from a lack of experience and a fear of not meeting students' expectations. Participant 2 highlighted difficulties in maintaining students' attention and engagement:

"I often struggled to maintain students' attention, especially when they seemed disinterested or disengaged."

This indicates that novice teachers often feel pressure to keep their classes dynamic and interesting, and any perceived disinterest from students can amplify feelings of inadequacy. Participant 3 also shared that the challenges led to a decline in enthusiasm and an increase in stress:

"Yes, I started to dislike giving classes and felt a tremendous amount of pressure. It did not feel like the start I would have wished for."

Overall, the data reveal that novice teachers' self-doubt is deeply tied to both internal expectations and external classroom realities. The fear of being judged by students, coupled with the uncertainty about instructional effectiveness, often leads to a sense of isolation and frustration.

These feelings can undermine motivation and hinder the development of a positive professional identity.

4.2 Theme 2: Classroom management and preparation

Another key theme involved the challenge of classroom management and lesson preparation. Participant 1 highlighted the difficulty of developing engaging materials while feeling underprepared:

“Support material development, or having the material to only give classes and not worry about making the material and wonder if it was good or not.”

Participant 2 described being overwhelmed by administrative tasks, which limited time for lesson planning:

“I often felt overwhelmed by the administrative tasks and the sheer amount of paperwork required, which left me with less time to focus on improving my teaching practice.”

Participant 3 also reported feeling unsure about whether their materials met the students’ needs:

“I constantly felt like I was improvising, and I was not sure if what I prepared was really what the students needed.”

These experiences reveal that novice teachers often feel poorly equipped to handle both the content and administrative demands of their roles, which can affect their confidence and sense of effectiveness.

4.3 Theme 3: Support systems

While participants mentioned some forms of support, their responses suggested that these support systems were often insufficient or not fully aligned with their needs. Participant 1 described being assigned a mentor but indicated that the guidance provided was limited:

“Fortunately, I had a mentor teacher assigned to me during my first year, she guided me through lesson planning, classroom management, and even small administrative tasks.”

Although this mentorship was helpful in some areas, it lacked the depth and consistency needed to make a significant impact on their teaching effectiveness. Participant 2 noted that changing from teaching adult to young students helped them adapt, but this was more a self-change rather than a structured support system:

“What helped was transferring from giving classes to adults to young students.”

This highlights that participants often had to find ways to adjust, rather than receiving support from their institutions. Participant 3 emphasized perseverance and learning from mistakes as their main sources of growth, pointing to the absence of structured guidance:

“I knew I had to persevere and make mistakes to learn and improve. Analyze and investigate areas of improvement.”

This demonstrates that personal resilience and commitment to continuous learning are key factors that help teachers overcome early setbacks. Support systems provided not only technical guidance but also emotional and social support. The analysis underscores that the first year is a time of intense learning, where all experiences contribute to shaping the early teaching experience.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the challenges faced by novice teachers during their first year in the profession and the impact of mentoring support on their development. The results indicate that new teachers often struggle with classroom management, emotional stress, and the transition into a professional teaching environment. These difficulties can lead to decreased confidence, lower job satisfaction, and reduced teaching effectiveness.

Based on these findings, institutions should emphasize structured mentoring programs and training initiatives to support novice teachers. To facilitate teachers' transition, schools can establish comprehensive peer support systems where experienced educators guide newcomers. Educators should have access to ready-to-use teaching sources to help them feel more prepared. By implementing these strategies, institutions can foster a supportive professional culture to enhance new teachers' confidence and success in their roles.

However, this study has certain limitations. Time was an important factor in the development of the research, so it was conducted with a limited number of participants. The sample size may not fully represent all teaching environments and administrative support. Future research should explore the long-term effects of mentoring and analyze how different types of support impact teacher retention and student learning outcomes.

Supporting novice teachers is crucial for building a strong and effective education system. By providing proper training, schools can help new teachers overcome early challenges and gain confidence in their roles. These solutions not only make teaching more manageable but also improve student learning. If we address these issues now, we can create a more supportive and sustainable environment for future educators.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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The Impact that Socioeconomical Factors Have in the English Learning Process: Guanajuato City

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Received: 1 June 2025 ▪ Revised: 11 August 2025 ▪ Accepted: 31 December 2025

Abstract

This study explores the impact of socioeconomic factors on English language learning among students in Guanajuato, Mexico. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with students from both public and private schools, the research examines how elements such as parental education, access to educational resources, personal motivation, and language exposure influence learners' perceptions and outcomes. Findings reveal that while access to books and technology is important, it is the consistent use, practical application, and support systems that ultimately determine the effectiveness of language learning. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds report greater confidence, fluency, and motivation, often due to increased exposure to English through travel, media, and supportive learning environments. In contrast, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face additional challenges not only in terms of material access but also in receiving guidance and practice opportunities. The study concludes that addressing these structural disparities is crucial for fostering equitable and effective language education.

Keywords: Exposure, motivation, parental involvement, resources, socioeconomic status (SES).

“When basic physiological and safety needs are unmet, the cognitive engagement necessary for learning is hindered. Maslow's hierarchy reminds us that learners must first feel secure and supported before they can reach their full potential in academic pursuits, including language acquisition.”

(Maslow, 1943)

1. Introduction

English has established itself as a global language with strong influence across educational, professional, and social contexts. In countries like Mexico, English proficiency is often associated with access to better job opportunities, academic advancement, and international communication. Perhaps, learning English has become a significant educational goal. However, the ability to acquire a second language is not determined only by individual effort; it is shaped by social and economic contexts. Besides, socioeconomic status (SES) emerges as a fundamental determinant of students' access to learning opportunities, motivation, and educational outcomes. The importance of this study lies in its exploration of how socioeconomic background affects students' engagement with the English learning process. In Mexico, disparities in SES are reflected in the educational system, particularly in the divide between public and private schools. This

divide results in unequal access to educational resources, technological tools, and supportive learning environments. By examining these differences in the specific context of Guanajuato, this study aims to discover how does socioeconomic factors affect the English learning process.

The objective of this research is to analyze how socioeconomic factors influence English learning in terms of motivation, access to resources, frequency of practice, and perception of language fluency. The study also aims to compare the experiences of students from different SES backgrounds particularly between public and private school attendees to identify the structural advantages or barriers they encounter. In addition, it investigates the role of parental involvement and educational support in shaping students' attitudes and confidence toward learning English.

This study builds on existing literature that consistently highlights the impact of SES on academic achievement and language learning. According to the American Psychological Association (2020), SES is a multidimensional construct involving income, education, and occupation, all of which significantly influence educational access and outcomes. Empirical studies from various countries have shown that students from higher SES backgrounds tend to have more positive attitudes toward English learning (Akram & Ghani, 2011), greater access to private tutoring and multimedia resources (Vonkova et al., 2023), and increased exposure to authentic language contexts, including travel and cultural exchange (Gayton, 2010). These advantages not only improve language acquisition but also foster intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Theoretical models also help contextualize these findings. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) provides a psychological framework suggesting that individuals must satisfy basic physiological and safety needs before they can focus on higher-order goals like learning and self-actualization. In educational settings, students from low-SES backgrounds often experience chronic stress, food insecurity, and unstable home environments all of which may limit their cognitive and emotional availability for language learning. Harris (2023) reinforces this argument by emphasizing that food and home stability are foundational for success in academic disciplines, including second language acquisition. By linking these theoretical and empirical perspectives to the lived experiences of students in Guanajuato, this study offers an analysis of how socioeconomic inequalities translate into educational disparities in English language learning.

2. Literature review

The connection between socioeconomic factors and language acquisition has long been a topic of interest for educational researchers. Understanding this relationship is key to addressing issues in English learning outcomes. This section explores how basic human needs and social conditions impact students' ability and motivation to acquire a new language.

One influential theoretical framework in this regard is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which suggests that human motivation follows a five-tier structure where individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before advancing to higher ones (Maslow, 1943). When applied to education, and specifically language learning, Maslow's model highlights critical barriers faced by students. At the base are physiological needs such as food and shelter; Students may struggle to focus on academic tasks like English learning. Besides, safety needs refer to the importance of a stable home and school environment. Students living under financial insecurity often experience chronic stress, which directly impacts their ability to learn. The third level, social needs, highlights the value of supportive relationships in sustaining motivation, although socioeconomic challenges often restrict students' social opportunities. In addition, when students lack the necessary resources, their self-esteem and confidence can suffer, which can lower their belief in their ability to succeed academically. As a result, reaching their full potential the stage of self-actualization

becomes much harder if their basic needs aren't addressed first. In this way, Maslow's theory illustrates how basic human needs reinforce not only general well-being but also academic progression, making it essential to consider these factors in English language education. Adding empirical support, Harris (2023) emphasized that home stability and food security is fundamental to achieve success in multiple disciplines, including language learning. His findings highlight that addressing basic needs must be a priority to guarantee educational development, particularly among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.1 The influence of socioeconomic factors on language learning opportunities and strategies

Building upon this premise, it becomes necessary to examine socioeconomic status (SES) as a central factor of educational opportunities and outcomes. Defined as a composite measure of income, education, and occupation (American Psychological Association, 2020), SES shapes students' lived experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

Research consistently shows that SES plays an important role in English language learning. Muhammad Akram and Mamuna Ghani's study among Pakistani intermediate students found that those from higher SES backgrounds generally have more motivation and more positive attitudes toward English acquisition. This can largely be attributed to more parental involvement, better access to educational resources, and reduced anxiety in the learning environment. In contrast, students from low-SES backgrounds often lacked both the material and emotional support necessary to grow academically. These findings highlight how SES not only impacts access to resources but also influences students' openness to learning and confidence in language learning.

This relationship between SES and language learning motivation has also been observed internationally. For example, Vonkova, Papajoanu, and Moore (2023) demonstrated that students from higher SES backgrounds in Czech lower secondary schools benefited from greater institutional support and extracurricular exposure to English, such as private tutoring and travel experiences. These immersive opportunities improve their motivation and language acquisition, revealing the significant advantage provided by wealthier social backgrounds.

Similarly, Gayton (2010) mentioned the importance of real-life exposure in language learning. His study found that students who traveled abroad, an opportunity more available to high-SES families, showed greater motivation and saw English as a practical, usable skill. By contrast, lower-SES students often lacked access to authentic English contexts, making language learning seem irrelevant or distant. Gayton's suggestion to simulate immersion through online exchanges or multimedia projects offers a practical strategy to help bridge this gap and bring real-world English experiences closer to disadvantaged students.

Complementary findings by Lee and Lee (2018) reveal that higher-SES students tend to use more learning strategies, benefiting from increased exposure to English-speaking environments and technology. In comparison, lower-SES students often depend more heavily on social learning strategies and require targeted institutional support to foster independent, effective study habits.

Beyond motivation and strategies, the influence of SES extends directly to learning outcomes. Mirza (2001) found a significant effect of socioeconomic status on English academic performance, highlighting how lack of materials creates additional educational barriers. Supporting this, Mattheoudakis and Alexiou (2009) noted that students from higher SES backgrounds had access to opportunities essential for accelerating the learning process, while lower-SES students faced consistent resource-related challenges (Akhtar & Niazi, 2011).

Recent research continues to reinforce this trajectory. Hui and Chen (2025) demonstrated that English learning motivation acts as a bridge between SES and pragmatic language awareness, a skill critical for fluency but often underdeveloped in students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their findings suggest that motivation not only improves learning but also reflects broader social differences, supporting the idea that socioeconomic status has a deep and lasting impact on a person's educational path.

In conclusion, the body of research consistently points to socioeconomic status as a key structural factor influencing language learning opportunities, motivation, strategies, and outcomes. Understanding this influence is essential for educators to design better strategies for the students and help them to achieve the goal of English learning.

3. Methodology

This article aims to answer the question: How do socioeconomic factors affect the English learning process? following with this question a comparative approach was used in order to analyze the impact of socioeconomic factors on English language learning among students from both public and private schools in the city of Guanajuato. In comparing these groups, this study aims to highlight potential differences and challenges faced by students from various socioeconomic backgrounds and the impact that this has in their English learning process.

4. Context and participants

Participants in this study include students from Guanajuato, the age range goes from 19 to 30 years old in either public or private schools. Participants include both female and male profiles. Participants were selected to represent a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, parental education, and access to educational resources. Public school participants represent students from lower SES backgrounds, while private school participants represent students from higher SES backgrounds.

This allows the researcher to make a comparison of the factors and what effects these have on the English learning process. The representatives of higher SES backgrounds did all of their basic education on private schools, while the representatives of lower socioeconomic backgrounds did all their basic education in public institutions.

5. Instrument application

A main data collection was used, this was interviews. This method is appropriate for collecting both quantitative data on access to resources and parental support, as well as qualitative perspectives of the students. The selection of semi-structured interviews as the primary qualitative data collection method is based on their ability to capture in-depth insights into students' attitudes, motivations, and challenges in learning English. Different from structured interviews, which follow a more rigid set of questions, semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in exploring the key research topics.

6. Advantages of semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide several benefits for educational research. First, they facilitate open and meaningful dialogue, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and express their opinions. Additionally, this allows researchers to ask follow-up questions that clarify responses, allowing deeper insights. Finally, this method provides the

opportunity to the researcher to cover topics that may emerge and perhaps enrich the investigation.

7. Design and implementation of the instrument

The interview was carefully designed to align with the objectives that the research has. The questions were structured to address the following key areas:

- Students' perceptions of their English proficiency.
- Motivations for learning English.
- Challenges faced in the learning process.
- Influence of external factors such as parental involvement and exposure to English outside the classroom.

To promote comprehension and response accuracy, the questions were formulated in simple and clear language, avoiding complex terminology.

8. Ethics

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research. They have their acceptance to participate in and share their experiences with the researcher. They also allowed the use of their data for the article, this data will be use only with academic purposes. In line with ethical research guidelines, participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time or to request anonymity if they wished (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants have the will to abandon the investigation anytime or to require staying anonymous if they decide to.

The instruments created were applied to seven participants in total from both context public and private schools. The analysis of the results will be presented below.

9. Data analysis

This section presents an analysis of the data obtained, focusing on the influence of socioeconomic factors, access to resources, motivation, and their impact on students' perception of English learning and language fluency. The data was obtained through interviews and organized into emerging themes, supported by extracts from the information provided by the participants of the research.

10. Socioeconomic factors and perception of English learning

Socioeconomic background and parental education play a crucial role in shaping students, language learning experiences, not only by influencing access to resources but also by affecting their perception of English learning. While access to books and technology can provide an advantage, the level of parental involvement and overall socioeconomic environment determine how these resources are utilized and perceived by students. Carlos Helier Ramírez Orozco, for example, shared that his *"parents had university degrees, providing him with access to English books and technology."* However, he also noted *"limited parental involvement in his English learning process."* This suggests that while a higher level of parental education may facilitate access to resources, it does not necessarily translate into engagement in the language learning journey. The presence of educational tools may not be

enough if students lack guidance, motivation, or structured opportunities for practice. Similarly, Joanny Lizbeth Guzmán Mora, whose “*parents completed secondary education*,” had access to similar resources but “*received no direct support with English homework*.” Even when students have similar access to resources, not having help from their parents can make them see learning English differently. They might feel less motivated or confident about improving. This shows that socioeconomic factors affect more than just having material. They also influence how students feel about their ability to learn and stay engaged with the language. These findings align with research indicating that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often benefit from bigger exposure to English through parental influence, even when direct involvement is not present. However, students from less privileged backgrounds may face additional barriers, not necessarily about the lack of resources but because of reduced academic support and less structured learning opportunities at home.

11. Access to resources and their utilization

Access to educational resources such as books and technology does not always translate into effective learning. The lack of use of these resources could have an impact on the students’ progress. To have effective progress the frequent use of the available resources and strategies is fundamental. Socioeconomic factors influence not just access but also the frequency and quality of resource utilization, which in turn impacts English proficiency. As Renata Garcia de Alba and Ana Karen González Morales both reported having access to English books, technology, and educational internet services. However, their frequency of use varied significantly. Renata reported using technology for English learning only “*1–2 times a week*,” while Ana Utilizes these tools “*almost daily*.” This distinction highlights the importance of not only having resources but also the consistency and effectiveness of their use in language acquisition. Moreover, these differences in usage reflect broader structural disparities. Students like Ana, who use resources daily, often benefit from supportive environments that reinforce learning habits such as scheduled study time, parental encouragement, or institutional emphasis on technology integration. Conversely, students like Renata may face limitations such as shared devices, lack of internet connectivity at home, or competing responsibilities that reduce their ability to engage with learning tools consistently.

The socioeconomic background, personal motivation, and learning environments play a role in shaping students’ engagement with available tools. Even when students have access to books and technology, factors like time constraints, lack of guidance, or priorities may limit their ability to make full use of these resources.

12. Motivation and perceived importance of English

Motivation plays a crucial role in the process of learning a new language, this motivation is often shaped by their socioeconomic context, influencing both their reasons for learning and their perceived importance of the language. By analyzing participants’ responses, two prominent types of motivation emerged: instrumental and integrative motivation. Ana Karen González Morales highlighted “*career advancement and higher education requirements*” as her primary motivators. This instrumental motivation aligns with Gardner’s (1985) theory, which views language learning as a tool for achieving practical benefits. Her perception of English as a means to access better job opportunities and academic growth demonstrates how economic aspirations shape her motivation. Additionally, this goal-oriented approach often related to intrinsic motivation, as the participant becomes dedicated in finding effective strategies for her own learning, supported by the resources she can access. On the other hand, Joanny Lizbeth Guzmán Mora and Carlos Helier Ramírez Orozco emphasized

opportunities for “*travel and cultural engagement*.” Their integrative motivation shows a real desire to use English to connect with other cultures, leading to more lasting and stronger efforts to learn the language. This intrinsic motivation not only improves their engagement with the language but also makes the learning process more satisfying and meaningful. The socioeconomic background of these students likely plays a key role in shaping their motivational orientation. Students with more financial resources may have a bigger exposure to international travel and cultural exchange, therefore, creating integrative motivation. In contrast, those from more limited economic circumstances may prioritize instrumental goals, perceiving English proficiency as a necessity for economic mobility. These differing motivations also influence the strategies students adopt and the resources they can access, affecting their language learning outcomes.

13. Fluency, confidence, and self-efficacy

Despite access to resources, many participants reported a lack of practice opportunities essential for developing fluency. This suggests that while material resources are available for them, socioeconomic factors still shape the effectiveness of language acquisition. As Melanie Duran and Carlos Helier Ramírez Orozco pointed out, they “*lacked the practice opportunities necessary to build fluency in the target language*.” Their experiences reflect the gap between access and application, reinforcing the idea students need to be exposed to real life use of the language as much as possible in order to achieve fluency.

Similarly, confidence in language use appears to be influenced by the availability of practical engagement. Joanny Lizbeth Guzmán Mora, who “*used technology more frequently*,” reported higher confidence in her English skills. However, she still emphasized a “*need for more practical language application*,” highlighting that technological access does not guarantee proficiency. This aligns with research indicating that confidence in second language acquisition depends more on how often and how well you practice, rather than just having learning tools. While having access to resources is fundamental on the learning process, the absence of opportunities for real-world application can interfere with students’ perception of their own capabilities. This suggests that besides economic factors, the environment plays a critical role in shaping learners’ ability to develop fluency and confidence in English. The analysis reveals that socioeconomic background, access to resources, motivation, and opportunities for practice collectively shape students’ experiences and perceptions of English learning. While resources and parental education provide a foundation, consistent use, motivation, and practical application are crucial for developing language proficiency and confidence.

14. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how socioeconomic factors influence the English learning process among students in Guanajuato. The research question explored the extent to which financial background, access to resources, and motivation shape students’ learning experiences and perceptions of language acquisition. The findings suggest that while access to books and technology plays a role in language learning, the students’ socioeconomic background also have an impact on their motivation, confidence, and overall engagement with the language.

The study has shown that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have more exposure to English, even when direct parental involvement is limited. However, students from lower-income backgrounds may face challenges not necessarily due to a lack of resources but because of limited academic support and learning opportunities at home. Besides, motivation is key factor, with students demonstrating both instrumental and integrative orientations depending on their personal goals and economic circumstances.

One of the key findings of the study is that while students may have access to resources, the frequency and effectiveness of their utilization vary significantly. Those who actively use technological tools and reading materials tend to develop stronger language skills, while others may struggle due to a lack of guidance or practice opportunities. Besides, the study has found that fluency and self-efficacy in English are strongly linked to real-world application, emphasizing the need for environments that foster practical language use.

These findings have several important implications for educational practice and policy. First, they highlight the need for targeted interventions in low-SES communities that go beyond merely providing access to resources. Schools and educational institutions should create structured environments that support consistent and meaningful use of technology and reading materials. This might include after-school English programs, workshops for parents on how to support language learning at home, and school initiatives that simulate real-world English use through conversation clubs, multimedia projects, or language exchange programs. Furthermore, understanding students' motivational orientations can help educators with their instruction. Those with instrumental motivation may benefit from career-focused language activities, while integrative learners might thrive in culturally rich and communicative environments. Addressing these motivational differences can lead to more personalized and effective teaching strategies.

Finally, Policymakers must consider not only what students have, but also how their social environment, home stability, and emotional support systems influence learning outcomes. Interventions should therefore adopt a holistic approach that supports students both academically and emotionally.

The study also presented limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and data collection was based mainly on interviews, which may introduce bias in participants' self-reported experiences. Future research could expand on these findings by including bigger participant groups and examining the impact of external interventions.

In conclusion, while material resources are essential, they do not guarantee language learning success. Socioeconomic background influences motivation, confidence, and the ability to engage effectively with the language. By addressing these factors, educational institutions can create more friendly learning environments that support students from diverse backgrounds in achieving language proficiency.

I hope that this study provides a comprehensive perspective on the multiple challenges that students face throughout the English learning process. Moreover, I aspire for this research to contribute to the academic field by serving as a valuable foundation for future studies, encouraging further exploration of the impact of socioeconomic factors on language acquisition and the development of effective educational strategies.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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